

Communicating the Foreign Policy Strategy: on Instruments and Means of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

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Abstract. The worldwide practice demonstrates that foreign policy of the states is often directed by a some set of strategic priorities referred to as foreign policy strategy. By communicating this strategy, states declare their intentions and prime concerns, which both aid their internal policy integrity and international perception as a consistent actor. Modern technology and media enable states to conduct systematic outreach or at least sporadically cover of their foreign policy priorities. The purpose of the article is to characterize the problems of application of communication tools in the foreign policy process and determine their role in forming a positive image of Ukraine in the modern world. As the mission of providing of foreign policy is vested in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, its communication practices and tools are examined. The raised issue involves the consideration of modern aspects of diplomacy and communication relations, including the concepts of public diplomacy, as well as media and digital diplomacy. Their tools and practices have been embraced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in order to convey some strategic foreign policy directions and state-branding messages, as the well-rounded foreign policy strategy is absent in Ukraine.

1 The significance of communication of foreign policy priorities

1.1 The foreign policy strategy problem in Ukraine

The modern world is at the stage of fundamental transformations, where the leading states are rethinking their priorities and conceptual principles of interaction with others. The process of transition from a bipolar system of international relations to a multipolar one, in which the “poles” are also embedded in the system of global interdependence, is unfolding. The world is in constant search of a new security system architecture capable of overcoming the problems of terrorism, extremism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Dynamic changes and civilizational shifts across the globe and the profound transformations of international relations have made the world less stable and less predictable. These changes affected Ukraine as well as its role and position among other nations.

For a long time, Ukraine has been shaping its foreign policy priorities, based on the need to respond to external factors and threats, rather than pursuing its own long-term goals and opportunities. The country went through a period of “multivectorism” as a strategy for maneuvering in the conflicts between the West and Russia, and a period of declarative course towards

European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which was not marked by any real steps towards implementation. The Ukrainian establishment could not come to a systematic and comprehensive definition of Ukraine’s priorities in foreign policy. Given the complexity of relations between the world’s leading actors, foreign policy strategy is one of the tools to adapt to the new setup and position the state in the modern international environment, as it includes the state’s vision of the future, defining methods to achieve this vision and dealing with global trends and challenges of the international community. In addition, it is important to give a signal to the world community about the direction of its movement by communicating its foreign policy strategy.

Given the political instability in Ukraine, involvement in one of the largest current armed conflicts in Europe, the question of defining and communicating Ukraine’s foreign policy strategy is more acute than ever. Conceptualization of the state’s foreign orientation involves determining ways to ensure the goals set for the state, the mechanism of control and decision-making, ways of cooperation with other states, good governance aimed at the population, position on various issues of world politics. An equally important aspect is the coordination of activities at the international level with state policy in other areas, in which Ukraine often fails.

The foreign policy strategy in theoretical framework is consistent with the concept of grand strategy as a set of practices aimed at achieving national goals. The concept is often used in three distinct meanings: 1) in

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reference to deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals; 2) to define an organizing principle that is consciously held and used by individuals to guide their decisions; 3) to refer to a pattern in state behavior [1]. But it should be mentioned, that such differentiation is an analytical tool rather than an actual divide of the meaning as each provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of the quite broad concept of grand strategy.

The modern understanding of grand has been largely formulated in the works of Paul M. Kennedy, John Lewis Gaddis, Charles Hill, Michael Howard and others. In particular, according to Paul M. Kennedy, “the crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests” [2]. John Lewis Gaddis determines the grand strategy as “calculated relationship of means to large ends”. According to the scholar, it’s about how one uses whatever one has to get to wherever it is one wants to go [3].

The grand strategy in fact includes the state’s vision of itself in the future, awareness of its many goals and limited resources to achieve them, taking into account the global balance of power and finding the state’s place in it. Therefore, the grand strategy is an important context and prerequisite for the formation of the state’s foreign policy strategy.

In Ukraine, the main principles and directions of foreign policy at the legislative level are articulated quite abstractly in several laws (On the principles of domestic and foreign policy, On national security etc.), and strategic documents (Information Security Doctrine, National Security Strategy of Ukraine). There is no single and comprehensive document yet, however, some laws prescribe a number of doctrines, the development of which is currently underway, including the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine [4].

Although the state’s strategy in international relations may be perceived by monitoring the total amount of government action and not being officially announced, the world practice shows that communicating a strategical views and goals is an important tool for establishing internal dialogue with society and interaction with foreign states. The direction of foreign policy should be clear to both domestic society and foreign partners. A clear definition of the vision of state’s position in the network of world relations contributes to the establishment of mutual understanding, the growth of mutual trust with other states, as well as the strengthening of national identity. When state is communicating about its priorities in foreign policy, it proves the consistency of its policies and effectiveness in achieving national interests in the face of new opportunities and threats of the modern world.

US foreign policy, although not defined in a separate document, is still reflected in the Joint Strategic Plan [5]. In the Russian Federation, a strategic document, the Concept of Foreign Policy, which is approved by

presidential decree, is prepared and constantly updated. In Latvia, strategic plans are an important part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ annual reports on implemented and planned activities. Poland adopts a Foreign Policy Strategy, which is tied to the period of the government’s work and is constantly reviewed [6]. The Strategy of Actions for five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 is in force in Uzbekistan today [7].

Official documentation of strategic foreign policy priorities is optional, and many states do not have such documents. What matters is not so much the document as clearly formulated foreign policy goals that affect the consistency, initiative of the state in the international arena, its readiness for crises and the emergence of new opportunities.

In view of this, the issue of coverage and explanation of the principles and main directions of Ukraine’s foreign policy acquires special significance as an important part of its strategic communications and diplomatic activities.

1.2 Diplomacy and its ties to communication

For a long time, diplomacy remained a matter of a narrow circle of people and was a rather secret affair. However, the revolutionary changes that have taken place in the spheres of politics, international relations and mass communication have led to the creation of new conditions for the functioning of diplomacy. The development of new communication technologies enabled the media to cover almost all important events around the world, and the spread of the Internet has made the transmission and dissemination of information to large audiences instant. As the main source of information for the public, the media has greatly contributed to changing the nature and sources of power and influence, both domestically and internationally [8]. Contrary to realists’ beliefs, “soft power” has entered the international arena in full force, based not on military and economic power, but on the ability to achieve desired results through effective communication and the functioning of institutional instruments [9].

Certainly, such paradigm shifts could not occur only due to the development of the communication sphere. They have been reinforced by relevant transformations in politics and international relations, in particular the process of democratization in many societies, so we can agree with Eytan Gilboa’s statement about the interdependence and convergence of changes in politics and communication. The increasingly obvious relationship between these areas became the subject for research, including those in the realm of international relations. Thus, attempts to reflect the influence of the media on the sphere of diplomacy, resulted in coining the new terms: the world saw the concepts of “CNN-effect”, “Teledemocracy”, “media diplomacy”, “teleplomacy”, “real-time diplomacy” and others. The development of digital technologies, the transition of mass communications to online mode and the digitalization-related changes in the communication

practices of diplomatic missions have brought the concept of “digital diplomacy” into scientific use [10].

A significant part of literature on political communication is devoted to comprehension of the media impact on the practice of foreign policy making and diplomacy. One of the most elaborate analyses is presented by Eytan Gilboa, who distinguishes three models of uses of the media as a major instrument of foreign policy and international negotiations. In Gilboa’s study they are: public diplomacy, media, and media-broker diplomacy.

Within the model of public diplomacy, the researcher considers the media as one of the channels of communication among other means (cultural and scientific exchanges; participation in festivals and exhibitions; building and maintaining cultural centers; teaching a language etc.) [11] Today, public diplomacy is an integral and effective mechanism of foreign policy and national security of the world’s leading states, as well as international organizations and institutions.

Public diplomacy is defined as “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented” [12]. In other words, it refers to the process of communicating of the government with a foreign audience aimed at conveying the government’s understanding of its ideas and ideals, institutions and culture, as well as national goals and current policies. Traditional public diplomacy covers a wide range of activities of policymakers in order to gain public support for their policies, promoting national interests and cultivating their own values abroad. The media and their information capabilities are, of course, part of its arsenal, but they are also accompanied by specially organized meetings, speeches, visits, support for certain groups or organizations abroad, i.e. all public aspects of foreign policy.

Today, the scientific literature insists on the formation of a “new public diplomacy”, the emergence of which is explained by the updating of diplomatic practices in response to social change. Modern public diplomacy is conceptually based on two main characteristics: 1) multi-actor approach, i.e. the recognition of various actors in international relations, above and below national governments both within the country and abroad; 2) the formation of relations between these actors at different levels through dialogue and networking [13].

The second model of media-diplomacy interaction by Eytan Gilboa, media diplomacy, embraces “officials’ uses the media to communicate with state and nonstate actors, to build confidence and advance negotiations, and to mobilize public support for agreements” [11]. Media diplomacy activities include current and specially organized media events, press conferences, interviews, information leaks, as well as the use of media resources for creation of a favorable atmosphere for negotiations or setting the necessary tone for interstate cooperation.

According to Yoel Cohen “media diplomacy includes all those aspects of public diplomacy where the media are involved as well as others not associated with public diplomacy including the sending of signals by

governments through the media, and the use of the media as a source of information” [14].

Eytan Gilboa called the third model “media-broker diplomacy”, where journalists serve as temporary mediators in international negotiations. In contrast to media diplomacy, in this model, journalists are tasked with initiating and conducting significant diplomatic moves, negotiating terms and conditions [11].

2 MFA mastering the new diplomacy instruments

According to both the world practice and domestic legislation, the task of formation and implementation of the state policy in the area of external affairs as well as information support is vested (not exclusively) in the government authority responsible for the nation’s foreign policy – in Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

When reviewing the communication policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, we should note that public diplomacy has long been out of the attention of the ministry. According to experts, it is only in 2015 when Ukraine began to master this new direction of foreign policy. Over the last five years, there has been an institutionalization of this trend and it acquired a systemic character [15]. The Department of Public Diplomacy was established under the MFA, which was later transformed into the Department of Communications and Public Diplomacy. At this time, the active work of the Ukrainian Institute affiliated with the MFA was also initiated and launched. The mission of the institution is “to strengthen Ukraine’s international standing through the means of cultural diplomacy” [16].

Probably, it is the initial stage of formation of public diplomacy that determines rather vague understanding of the tasks assigned to it, as the strategies of public diplomacy (as well as the strategies of individual projects and institutions) have not yet been adopted. Therefore, the main tasks of this direction of foreign policy are the promotion of interests in the world information space and the creation of the brand “Ukraine”.

One of the means that can be attributed to public diplomacy is the communication of the “Ukraine NOW” brand, which is carried out by the joint efforts of Ukrainian ministries and departments. In addition, the formation of a positive image of Ukraine among foreign audiences is the main task of the launched site “ukraine.ua”.

These and other projects, as well as most information campaigns initiated by the MFA on social networks, show that Ukraine is taking steps in what is sometimes called “selfie diplomacy” as part of nation branding practiced in social media. According to researchers, an attempt to proactively manage and promote the country’s image through digital diplomacy channels can be effective in tackling stereotypes [17]. By publishing attractive content, the MFA and other government bodies try to emphasize Ukraine’s cultural heritage, its traditions and modern and vibrant present, instead of a

picture of an underdeveloped country where armed conflict is taking place.

In recent years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has demonstrated its readiness and efforts to master new instruments of diplomacy, including digital diplomacy. Diplomats and officials began to use social media to interact with the public, to create new projects based on collaboration and co-creation with different audiences.

Digital diplomacy is often regarded as a component of public diplomacy, given that the former provides an opportunity to communicate and engage a wide variety of audiences. The emergence of the concept of digital diplomacy was provoked by the need to reflect the role of information technology, including the Internet and social media, in the implementation of foreign policy. This term still has no conventional definition, and is often used interchangeably with terms such as “e-diplomacy”, “cyber diplomacy”, “virtual diplomacy”, “social diplomacy” etc.

According to one of the most common definitions, digital diplomacy is “the use of the Web, ICTs, and social media tools to engage in diplomatic activities and carry out foreign policy objectives” [18]. By definition, digital diplomacy is carried out through digital platforms and tools - websites, blogs, social networks and more. Facebook and Twitter are especially popular with politicians and officials, and attachment to these platforms has given rise to the new terms Facebook diplomacy and Twiplomacy.

There are two main stages in the development of digital diplomacy: Diplomacy 1.0, which means the early stages of a very limited use of information technology (mostly for the presentation of information on websites and information exchange via e-mail); Diplomacy 2.0 means the stage of use of interactive platforms, user-generated content, social networks, etc. by diplomatic missions.

Yet, taking up the digital communication tools entails the need to accept the individual and collective loss of control of public messaging and audiences, given the instant dissemination of knowledge that the Internet has brought with it [19].

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has official accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn with appropriate content variations. Official messages and relevant information are usually published in the former two, which are recognized in most countries as important channels for the expression of official information.

Moreover, the Twitter account of the MFA is in English, which is due to the low popularity of the social network among Ukrainians and the focus on foreign audiences, including foreign media. In addition to expressing an official position on certain issues, which according to the Twitter message format should be quite short and distilled, the MFA account serves as a platform for retweets of personal posts of Ukrainian and foreign officials on Ukraine’s foreign policy and its place in international relations. This reveals to some extent the personification of Twitter diplomacy, and the interaction between the countries here takes quite specific forms of

personal contacts, negotiations and their subjective assessments by the leaders of the countries, foreign ministers, officials, etc. Along with the fact that diplomacy has always been a matter in which the personal qualities of negotiators weigh a lot, we can also mention another modern reason for this move. Social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, make it possible to involve large audiences in a dialogue in which one of the parties must be a specific individual, rather than the collective image of the country or agency on whose behalf the dialogue is conducted.

Another aspect of digital diplomacy is worth mentioning, namely its far-reaching impact when speaking about audiences. In conditions of globalization and widespread use of information technology, the line between domestic and foreign audiences is increasingly blurred. On the one hand, it facilitates the communication process - instead of two “fronts” of communication (internal and external) there is a single platform with a unified position, and on the other hand, it puts forward the requirements of tailoring universal messages understandable to different audiences. Therefore, an important component of the MFA’s communication policy, which can be described as “internal digital diplomacy”, cannot be ignored. As a result, the Ukrainian public is an equally important consumer of information and a stakeholder for the Foreign Ministry. Digital diplomacy in this case can be used to perform several functions: the study of public opinion on the foreign policy course and international relations of the country; explaining the problems and challenges facing the country, as well as alternative ways to solve them; cultivating public support for the chosen foreign policy course, etc [10].

The digital channels are used to implement main direction of public diplomacy of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. The prominent direction is countering anti-Ukrainian propaganda and combat stereotypes about Ukraine and its citizens among foreign audiences. Increasing Ukraine’s information presence in foreign media and social networks, which can be considered as part of national branding in digital space. This direction includes information campaigns initiated or supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: #CorrectUA, #WearVyshyvanka, #MyUkraineIs, #MadeInUA, #Fight4Truth, etc. Campaigns on the Second World War (#NeverAgain, #WeRememberTheFact), ones honoring the memory of the victims of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine are aimed at promotion of better understanding of the history of Ukraine by the international community and articulation of Ukrainian interpretation of important historical events. The platform for such campaigns was the information resources of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic missions of Ukraine, they also involved parliaments and governments of partner countries, representatives of governmental international organizations etc.

An important tool of communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in public space, and at the same time, one of the means of interaction with the media is its website, in particular the Press Center department. Speeches, statements, comments of the highest

diplomatic officials are published here, which express the official estimations of the ministry on this or that issue. As a rule, such messages are dedicated to the position of the ministry, current events or responses to them within the foreign policy implementation. Therefore, analyzing the content of the site, you can both track the strategic priorities of Ukraine by their implementation in the real steps taken to follow foreign policy course, and perceiving the conceptual bases and strategic priorities articulated in program statements and speeches.

Despite the fact that the site is available to the general public, its materials often enter the public information space through the Ukrainian and foreign media, which use them as a source of information in news reports or as an informational occasion. This gives grounds to talk about a two-stage process of dissemination of information, where the media act as an intermediate link between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the public.

An important element of the information content of the Foreign Ministry's website, as well as publications in online media that link to this content, is the publication of statements certifying the common positions of Ukraine and foreign partners on the process of peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbass, condemnation people in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, etc.

These materials were supported by information campaigns aimed at drawing the international community's attention to the problems of occupation of certain territories of Ukraine: #StopRussianAggression, #CrimeaIsUkraine, #FreeUkrainianPoliticalPrisoners. A new large-scale information campaign "Isolyatsia: must speak" was launched to reveal the facts of torture and inhumane activities in occupied Donetsk.

Despite the rather active practices in the field of public diplomacy, the communication activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine also has a number of shortcomings.

First of all, despite attempts to practice new approaches to communication, the core diplomatic practices remain unchanged. Analysis of the content of the Foreign Ministry's channels on social networks proves that the diplomatic craft has not become more open and transparent to general public. The information space includes traditional distilled materials, news releases, travel updates, latest statements, advisories. Often such items are not designed for active interaction with the audience, and work in the mode of "informing", not "communicating". That is to say, packaging has changed, but not messaging. Finally, given a rather conservative nature of the diplomatic profession, the established protocol and the significant consequences of mistakes, this point cannot be unequivocally attributed to "drawbacks".

Events in the international arena cannot always be planned in advance, and the ability to respond promptly and in a timely manner to challenges and crises in the information space is a prerequisite for the effective operation of modern diplomacy. The entry of external agencies into the online space for communications, along

with the benefits, also set certain requirements. Official accounts are constantly receiving the attention of the international community, which in the event of a crisis awaits instant clarification, reactions, responses to challenges, and delays in the high-speed world are seen as a failure. The same applies to the recently introduced project approach to addressing particular problems and tasks within the services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and affiliated institutions. However, in reality, a significant number of bureaucratic obstacles and the rigidity of work plans and procedures hinder the requirement of efficiency and adaptability in the work of these institutions as they do not allow some variability. For example, in 2019, during the internal political clashes in the United States, in which Ukraine was involved, the diplomatic services failed to react in time and direct unplanned efforts to restore Ukraine's image. Thus, the United States accounted for only 2% of the implemented projects of the Ukrainian Institute, which, in fact, is tasked with forming a favorable image of the state [20].

In the absence of a coherent and complete foreign policy strategy, as a "master plan" and main reference in the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the communication strategy of the ministry also seems somewhat inconsistent. In addition, when shaping the strategy, the traditional formation of the perception of Ukraine by foreign audiences through domestic political narratives should be taken into account.

3 Conclusions

Communication on foreign policy priorities is an important component of building Ukraine's image as a stable, predictable, trustworthy partner. Ukraine has not yet formulated a full-fledged foreign policy strategy as part of the "grand strategy" of the state, and only the first steps have been taken to define it - certain components of such a strategy have been identified and enshrined in law, such as principles of foreign policy, national security, etc., government plans with short-term goals and priorities are adopted, which, however, give some idea of Ukraine's further movement in the international arena. However, in the absence of an accomplished and well-rounded foreign policy strategy, communication policy is somewhat inconsistent and chaotic.

The main mission of implementing the foreign policy course, as well as articulating its priorities and forming a positive image of the state, is entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic corps of Ukraine, which nowadays are working under the conditions of paradigm shifts in diplomacy.

Advances in communication and technology have significantly changed the working conditions of diplomats and foreign ministries. Technological innovations have reduced the distance between the countries of the world and accelerated the speed of communication, which requires diplomats and leaders of countries to be increasingly efficient in foreign policy decisions. Media and new information technologies open opportunities for diplomats to communicate with a

global audience. Diplomats have the opportunity to convey political messages to huge audiences from around the world, instead of a rather narrow diplomatic corps. Diplomacy is becoming more open, and the form of political dialogue is being changed, with the mass media and social networks often acting as mediators.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' arsenal in communicating Ukraine's foreign policy strategy and shaping its image includes a wide range of information and communication tools that are commonly used in public and media diplomacy. One of the means of expanding the information and communication presence of Ukraine in world public opinion is the use of tools of modern digital diplomacy: the use of social media, networking, selfie diplomacy, information campaigns and more.

Significant use of social networks, which allow the use of user-generated content, interactive interaction with the audience, reaching the widest audiences, indicates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intends to implement a horizontal (interactive) model of communication. By using these tools, Ukrainian diplomats have the opportunity to spread more information to larger audiences with greater speed and efficiency. On the other hand, the immediacy and continuity of information flow on social networks require officials to react immediately to certain events, which can often draw reckless and ill-considered decisions or positions.

By resorting to a fairly wide range of means of public and media diplomacy, Ukraine is trying to combine two main approaches to this phenomenon. The first is based on the traditional perception of diplomacy as a hierarchical and mostly intergovernmental process, which is characterized by downward information flows and adherence to the theoretical foundations of strategic communications. The second approach is based on the consideration of foreign policy as one that is carried out through complex networks, and in which the public is not the object of information and communication influence, but a full partner in the diplomatic process. Without diminishing the importance of the first perspective, we can say that Ukraine is making efforts to adapt the second.

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