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CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS¹

Erik Pajtinka*

ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy, as a set of activities, undertaken directly by or in collaboration with diplomatic authorities of a state, which are aimed at the promotion of foreign policy interests of this state in the realm of cultural policy primarily by means of fostering its cultural exchange with other (foreign) states, is an important part of diplomacy in our days. In practice, cultural diplomacy can include the following main activities: assisting cultural subjects in the dissemination of national culture and cultural identity, promoting dissemination of the national language of the sending state in the receiving state, promoting and explaining cultural values of the sending state in the receiving state, negotiating international treaties on cultural cooperation and, finally, supporting and keeping up contacts with expatriate communities in the receiving state. However, the structure, as well as the overall intensity of the cultural-diplomatic activities may vary, depending on the state and its foreign policy priorities and ambitions.

Key words: cultural diplomacy, diplomatic missions, diplomacy, cultural relations, cultural policy, public diplomacy

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is an integral part of diplomatic activities of almost all states in our days. Although this specific dimension of diplomacy is attached growing importance in last decades, it can be still considered the most underestimated area of diplomatic activities of states, particularly in comparison with economic or defence diplomacy. In practice, the underestimation of cultural diplomacy very often results from unclear or false ideas about the scope of its activities, according to which it is frequently associated with organising or

* PhDr. Erik Pajtinka, PhD. is an Assistant Lecturer, Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Kuzmányho 1, 974 01 Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic, erik.pajtinka@umb.sk.

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attending cultural events by diplomats, which is in fact only a small part of cultural-diplomatic activities.

The main objective of this study is to outline and analyse major functions or fields of activity of cultural diplomacy and, on that basis, to evaluate its overall importance in the process of foreign policy implementation in contemporary international relations practice.

The work is divided into several chapters. In the first part, evolution of cultural diplomacy in historical context is drafted. In the second chapter, attention is paid to definition of cultural diplomacy, while in the next (third) part some terms related to cultural diplomacy, specifically public diplomacy, cultural relations and cultural policy, are briefly explained. Finally, in the fourth chapter, the main practical functions or fields of activity within cultural diplomacy are outlined and analysed.

As to the literature, from among Slovak and Czech publications used as a source in this study, which are devoted to cultural diplomacy issues specifically, the monograph of Czech scholar **E. Tomalová** *Kulturní diplomacie. Francouzská zkušenost* [Cultural Diplomacy. A French Experience], and the study of Slovak scholar **M. Kurucz** *Kultúrna dimenzia diplomacie* [Cultural Dimension of Diplomacy] can be mentioned. However, in Slovak and Czech literature, cultural diplomacy, as well as diplomacy in general, is not a frequently studied subject and, therefore, mostly publications of foreign authors were used in this work.

1 History of cultural diplomacy

The very beginnings of cultural diplomacy as a specific instrument of foreign policy can be associated with the first attempts of states to implement the idea of purposeful use of culture in the interest of promoting foreign policy goals. In this sense, some signs of cultural diplomacy appeared already the activities of medieval Byzantine missionaries, for example, who "*deliberately disseminated not only [Christian] religious doctrine, but along with it, the [Byzantine] view of the world², its ideas, beliefs, and customs*" (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995, p.17.) in foreign countries, whereby they tried to strengthen the influence of the

² In this context, an important part of the Byzantine view of the world was the belief that Byzantine "Empire is the source of all spiritual and political authority" (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995, p.17.).

Byzantine Empire abroad³.

However, the origins of modern cultural diplomacy are likely to be associated with the establishment of the first specialised cultural-diplomatic institutions that began to appear at the end of the 19th Century. As the very first institution of this kind may be considered *Alliance Française* founded on the initiative of a French diplomat **P. Cambon** in Paris in 1883 that opened its first foreign branch, officially called *comité local*, a year later in Barcelona, Spain (Pancracio, 2007). It should be added that *Alliance Française*, whose activities have focused primarily on supporting the promotion of French language abroad⁴, has been legally a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and not a diplomatic body of state (although in practice its activities have been usually closely coordinated with and/or sponsored by the French Foreign Ministry).

Within diplomatic bodies of states the first specialised cultural-diplomatic institutions began to take shape during the first half of the 20th Century. During World War I the first diplomats, charged with fulfilling specific diplomatic functions in the field of cultural diplomacy - *cultural attachés* - started to be sent on diplomatic missions by France (Outrey, 1953). In the same period, a specialised department for cultural diplomacy was created within the structures of the French Foreign Ministry - the *Directorate General for Cultural Affairs* (Gura, 2006).

In the interwar period the specialised institutions of cultural diplomacy were established in several other countries too. For example, in the UK the *British Council* was founded on the initiative of the British diplomat Sir **R. Leeper** in 1934. The creation of this institution was motivated largely by the desire to foster British "*cultural propaganda*" to counteract German propaganda, particularly in the states of Latin America and the Middle East. Similar reasons led to the foundation of a specialised section for cultural diplomacy – *Division of Cultural Relations* – at the U. S. Department of State in 1938, which was prompted largely by the U. S. President **F. D. Roosevelt's** decision to coordinate and promote the development of cultural relations with Latin American countries to counterbalance growing influence of fascist ideology in

³ In this connection it is important to know that Byzantine missionaries generally carry out their activities under the auspices of the official authorities of the Byzantine Empire, sometimes even from the decision of the Byzantine ruler itself.

⁴ It should be mentioned in this connection that *Alliance Française* has been originally called *l'Association nationale pour la propagation de la langue française à l'étranger* (National agency for the dissemination of French language abroad).

the region (Sablosky, 2003). From 1940 onwards, the functions of the Division of Cultural Relations were supplemented by newly created *Office of Inter-American Affairs*, led by **N. Rockefeller**, whose activities were aimed mainly at the promotion of American culture in Latin America (Nye, 2004).

During the Cold War cultural diplomacy has acquired special significance as an important instrument of ideological struggle, since "*culture has become an integral part of the contest between two power blocs*" (Kurucz 2007, p. 64). Particularly the U.S. intensively developed their cultural-diplomatic activities, which was primarily designed to spread the values of democracy and freedom (as elements of American cultural identity) in the world. To this end, in 1953 the U.S. established a specialised government agency called *United States Information Agency (USIA)*, which coordinated most of the cultural-diplomatic activities of the U.S.

The end of the Cold War brought two opposing tendencies in the evolution of cultural diplomacy.

On one hand, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent democratisation of most post-socialist countries created favourable conditions for cultural penetration of "*Western countries*" in the space of the former Eastern bloc and, thereby, for the development of their cultural-diplomatic activities too. As an example in this regard can be mentioned France, that already "*in the early nineties (...) opened its cultural representations*" (Tomalová, 2008, p. 53) in many post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Czechoslovakia.

On the other hand, the collapse of the bipolar system brought about the end of the ideological confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S., which has resulted in a tendency to reduce cultural-diplomatic activities. In the U. S., for example, the absence of strong ideological opponent, which was during the Cold War the Soviet Union, led to a feeling of a kind of "*satisfaction*" in foreign policy that resulted in the weakening of motivation to spread the values of democracy and freedom abroad and, thereby, to implement cultural diplomacy. However, this changed after the terrorist attacks in the U. S. on 11 September 2001, which led to re-considering the importance of explaining cultural values in foreign countries (especially in states with Islamic culture) and, thereby, to rediscovering the value of cultural diplomacy.

2 Definition of cultural diplomacy

The meaning of the term cultural diplomacy cannot be properly understood without explaining the words culture and diplomacy, which form the basis of this term. In practice, the term *culture* is often associated only with art, literature and other “*visible*” components of culture. In the context of cultural diplomacy, however, culture should be regarded in its broader sense as “*the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs*” (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001). The term *diplomacy* has various meanings in the theory of international relations: it can be related to diplomatic or foreign service (as institution) or used as a synonym for foreign policy⁵. In the context of cultural diplomacy as defined in this article, the term diplomacy should be regarded in its third (and most common) sense: as an instrument for the implementation of foreign policy by peaceful means⁶.

The term cultural diplomacy itself has various definitions in contemporary diplomatic theory and practice. In fact, the great variety of definitions of cultural diplomacy reflects the efforts of many scholars and practitioners to highlight one or another aspect of this phenomenon, depending usually on the context of the issue discussed, as well as the actual practical needs. Of course, the definition of cultural diplomacy can often vary depending on its “*country of origin*” and its foreign policy priorities and interests, as well as its organisation of diplomatic service, in particular.

In literature, many definitions of cultural diplomacy emphasise the basic idea that cultural diplomacy – like commercial or defence diplomacy for instance – should be regarded as a specific but integral part of state foreign policy achievements. In this context, “*the nature*” of cultural diplomacy was aptly described by German diplomat **A. Enders**. As he pointed out in one of its

⁵ In practice, this is the case of many scholars and practitioners from the U. S. in particular.

⁶ In this sense, the term diplomacy is defined, for example, by J. Chazelle, who regards diplomacy as “the set of means and specific activities used by a state to serve its foreign policy” (Chazelle, 1962, p. 9) or by A. I. Vishinski and S. A. Lozevsky which see diplomacy as “the technical instrument for the implementation of foreign policy” (Vishinski and Lozevsky, 1950, p. 570). Similarly, for E. Satow diplomacy is “the conduct of business between states by peaceful means” (Satow, 1957, pp. 1-3), for K. Hamilton and R. Langhorne “the peaceful conduct of relations among political entities, their principals and accredited agents” (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995, p. 1) and for G. R. Berridge and A. James “the conduct of relations between sovereign states through the medium of officials home or abroad.” (Berridge and James, 2003, pp. 69-70).

observations, cultural diplomacy should be seen as *“the instrument that serves for political purposes”* and although it *“establishes its own objectives ... these are derived from the general foreign policy objectives”* (Enders, 2005, p. 176). In the same sense, the term cultural diplomacy is precisely defined by Czech author **V. Hubinger** for instance, who regards it as *“an important instrument of state foreign policy, associated with the presentation, promotion and positive image building of a state, by means of cultural activities”* (Hubinger 2006, p. 85). In a similar manner, the Slovak scholar and diplomat **M. Kurucz** for example defines cultural diplomacy as *“a specific activity oriented on exchange of cultural values, in line with the goals of foreign policy.”* (Kurucz, 2007, p. 62). Finally, another useful definition of cultural diplomacy was offered by British scholars **G. R. Berridge** and **A. James**, too, who regard cultural diplomacy as *“the promotion abroad of state’s cultural achievements”* (Berridge and James, 2003, p. 62).

In contrast, some other definitions of cultural diplomacy emphasise that its main objective is to promote mutual understanding among states rather than to pursue foreign policy interests. In this context, **M. C. Cummings** for instance defines cultural diplomacy as *“the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understandings”* (Cummings, 2003, p. 1). In fact, however, although cultural-diplomatic activities can often contribute to better mutual understanding among states in practice, their primary objective is to promote *“understanding”* for foreign policy interests of the state implementing cultural diplomacy. In other words, cultural diplomacy can be aimed at the promotion of mutual understanding among states, but this should not be regarded as its final goal, but only a means of realising its final objectives – foreign policy interests.

On the basis of the above mentioned notes and taking into account the topic of this paper, the following definition of cultural diplomacy seems to be both accurate and useful: cultural diplomacy is a set of activities, undertaken directly by or in collaboration with diplomatic authorities of a state, which are aimed at the promotion of foreign policy interests of this state in the realm of cultural policy primarily by means of fostering its cultural exchange with other (foreign) states.

3 Cultural diplomacy and related terms

To understand the term cultural diplomacy correctly, it is necessary to

explain briefly the meaning of several closely related but different terms such as *public diplomacy*, *cultural relations* and *cultural policy*.

3.1 Public diplomacy

The term public diplomacy can be generally understood as a set of activities undertaken or coordinated by diplomatic authorities of the (implementing) state, which are aimed at general public abroad and which are intended to influence public opinion in a foreign (target) state in line with foreign policy objectives of the implementing state.⁷

In practice, the majority of activities carried out within the framework of cultural diplomacy (as defined above) is usually focused on the public abroad and, therefore, can be regarded as part of public diplomacy, too⁸. However, cultural diplomacy cannot be equated with public diplomacy. One reason for this is the fact that not all activities falling within the scope of cultural diplomacy are carried out in relation to the public abroad and, therefore, cannot be seen as part of public diplomacy. For example, the negotiation of international treaties regulating cultural relations among states is undoubtedly an important part of cultural diplomacy. At the same time, it is carried out by diplomats of one state in relation to their counterparts (and not to the public) in the other state and, therefore, it can hardly be seen as a part of public diplomacy. Another reason why cultural diplomacy cannot be equated with public diplomacy is the fact that public diplomacy can include not only activities undertaken within the framework of cultural diplomacy, but within other fields of diplomacy, too. For example, public presentation undertaken by an economic attaché at the chamber of commerce of his/her host country that is aimed at investment or trade promotion is an integral part of economic diplomacy (because the economic interests of state are at stake here primarily) but, at the same time, can be undoubtedly regarded as part of public diplomacy (because of the public-oriented nature of this kind of activity).

3.2 Cultural relations

In the theory of international relations, the term “*(international) cultural relations*” usually refers to the whole complex of cross-border cultural

⁷ For this definition of public diplomacy see: Pajtinka, 2013, p. 146.

⁸ This is probably the main reason why the terms cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy are sometimes used interchangeably in practice.

interactions (or cultural exchange) among states⁹. In this sense, cultural relations encompass all cultural interactions existing between states, i.e. not just those that are regulated or managed by the state, but also those arising “spontaneously” (i.e. independently from the state and its foreign policy achievements)¹⁰.

The interconnection between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy lies in the fact that an important instrument of state for regulating its foreign cultural relations - or, more precisely, a certain part of them - is cultural diplomacy. In other words, cultural diplomacy regulates – in accordance with the foreign policy objectives of state undertaking cultural-diplomatic activities - a certain (usually very small) part of cultural relations among the states. For example, when cultural attaché - within the framework of his/her cultural diplomatic activities - promotes contacts among universities from his/her home country and the host state in an effort to support foreign engagement of domestic scholars (in accordance with its home state’s foreign policy achievements), he/she thereby initiates the establishment of specific (academic) type of cultural relations between the two states.

3.3 Cultural policy

Cultural policy – in the context of cultural diplomacy - can be regarded, as Š. Tittelbachová points out, as “*the political program of the government in the field of culture*” (Tittelbachová, 2011, s. 130). In other words, cultural policy is a set of specific principles, objectives and tasks of the government (of the state) in the field of promotion and development of culture. In this sense, cultural policy is one of state’s policies (alongside with security or economic policy, for instance) and - in terms of its content - reflects the specific national interests of a particular state.

Thus, the link between cultural policy and cultural diplomacy lies in the fact that cultural diplomacy is basically a tool for implementation of state’s cultural policy or, more precisely, state’s foreign cultural policy (i.e. specific part of cultural policy that is aimed at foreign countries).

⁹ See for example: Iryie, 2002, p. 249.

¹⁰ It is important to note that the vast majority of cultural interactions among states is usually formed independently from the state/government nowadays. As M. Kurucz points out in this connection, international cultural relations involve numerous interactions, initiated by and existing between „private“ actors, which follow their own (commercial, cultural or other) interests and act independently from the state (Kurucz, 2007, p. 65).

4 Cultural diplomacy in practice

In practice, the implementation of cultural diplomacy may involve various activities performed mostly by diplomatic bodies, but sometimes by other, non-diplomatic subjects¹¹ (acting in co-operation with the diplomatic bodies), too.

Certainly, one of the most important parts of these (cultural-diplomatic) activities is *assisting cultural subjects in the dissemination of national culture and cultural identity* of the sending state in the receiving state. This assistance may include, for example, providing logistical, technical, organisational and/or other kind of support to artists, relevant NGOs, cultural institutions, athletes and/or other relevant cultural subjects of the sending state during their action in the receiving state. The concrete form, as well as the extent of this support provided to cultural subjects within the framework of cultural diplomacy usually depends on the local conditions in the receiving state, as well as on the individual needs of the cultural subject concerned. For example, artists or other cultural subjects who perform their activities (concerts or exhibitions, for instance) in foreign countries with less developed “*cultural infrastructure*” are often quite heavily “*dependent*” on the assistance of their home state’s diplomatic mission. In such cases, the local diplomatic mission often provides cultural subjects of its sending state most of “*managerial*” work, including sometimes even the negotiation of organisational details of cultural events with local agencies (Enders, 2005, p. 173). In contrast, in some other cases the diplomatic mission or the head of diplomatic mission (usually the ambassador) “*only*” takes patronage over the cultural event of the cultural subject from its/his sending country¹² and/or provides representational premises of the diplomatic mission or the residence of the head of diplomatic mission to cultural subject for the purposes of organising the cultural event.

It is important to note that diplomatic missions usually actively participate also in the organisation of their own, mostly smaller, cultural events, such as concerts of classical music, exhibitions of artworks, etc., which are frequently held on the occasion of national days or significant national anniversaries, for

¹¹ Particularly Goethe Institut in the case of Germany, Alliance Française in the case of France, or British Council in the case of Great Britain can be mentioned as examples of such subjects.

¹² In practice, this kind of “assistance” of diplomatic mission to cultural subjects can be also very useful because cultural events which are organised under the patronage of the diplomatic mission (or the head of diplomatic mission) are usually considered more prestigious and as such have the potential to attract important persons of the host country which can make such events more “visible” for media and thereby for the broader public of the host country, too.

instance. Thus, the management of this kind of cultural events forms an important part of cultural-diplomatic activities in practice, too.

Another specific part of cultural-diplomatic activities is *promoting dissemination of the national language of the sending state in the receiving state*¹³. These activities may include assisting local educational or academic institutions of the receiving state in providing language training, e. g. helping them to ensure language teachers and/or teaching literature from the sending state or assisting libraries in the receiving state by providing books and other works in the national language of the sending state, as well as with organising public discussions with writers from the sending state.

Importantly, the significance of language promotion activities within cultural diplomacy may vary considerably in different countries. In diplomatic practice of some states, notably France, Germany and Spain¹⁴, for instance, the language promotion activities form a very important part of cultural diplomacy, or even of diplomacy as a whole¹⁵. In contrast, for many other countries, especially those, whose national language is not among the internationally spoken (world) languages¹⁶, the language promotion activities usually have rather symbolic importance and form only marginal part of their cultural-diplomatic activities.

Another specific set of cultural-diplomatic activities is *promoting and explaining cultural values of the sending state in the receiving state*. In practice, these activities usually may include active participation of diplomats on public debates, lectures (very often for students at universities in the receiving state,

¹³ In the process of foreign policy implementation, the dissemination of national language can serve several practical purposes. Primarily, knowledge of the language of a foreign state makes ideas and information which are disseminated by that foreign state more accessible for the people of another country. Besides, the dissemination of the national language may play an important role in the implementation of foreign policy interests in other fields, specifically in the economic area, for instance. In this connection, for example K. Lauk argues, that “companies pursue business easily in the markets of those foreign countries, where the language” of their home country “is widely spoken” (Lauk, 2002, p. 80).

¹⁴ For example, China also actively promotes the teaching of its national language in foreign countries in recent years within its cultural-diplomatic activities.

¹⁵ In the case of France, the language promotion can be considered even as a central part of its cultural-diplomatic activities. This results mainly from the fact that in the concept of French foreign policy the dissemination of (French) language is traditionally regarded as the best way of spreading national culture and thereby political influence of France in foreign countries. In other words, as the expert on French foreign policy R. Gura aptly notes, France sees its language as “a vector of its influence and its prestige in the world” (Gura, 2006, p. 56).

¹⁶ This is the case of the Slovak Republic, too.

for instance¹⁷), seminars or other similar events, where various questions and issues of culture (in the broadest sense of this term) are discussed. For diplomats, participation in such events is an excellent opportunity not only to inform the public in the host country about different aspects of their sending state's culture (and, thereby, make their sending country more "visible"), but – in some cases – also to explain some aspects of culture of their sending state (e. g. certain ideas, values or ideologies), whereby they can create favourable conditions for better understanding of political positions and interests of their sending state.

An important part of cultural-diplomatic work is also the *promotion of cooperation among cultural subjects from the sending state and the receiving state*. In practice, this can be carried out mostly by means of providing information to cultural subjects in one (sending) state on the possibilities of establishing contacts and cooperation with "parallel" cultural subjects in the second (receiving) state and vice versa (Berridge and James, 2003, p. 62). In some cases, however, cultural-diplomatic activities may include not only finding and providing relevant information, but even mediating initial communication and negotiation among the cultural subjects from the sending and the receiving state.

Undoubtedly, another important part of work of diplomats in the field of cultural diplomacy is the *negotiation of international treaties on cultural cooperation* among sending and receiving state. In practice, agreements regulating the rules of implementation of academic exchange programmes or conditions for granting scholarships to students from receiving state during their study in the sending state (and vice versa), as well as international treaties regulating conditions for mutual recognition of degrees among the two states all belong among international treaties covering cultural cooperation between states and, therefore, their negotiation is a part of the agenda of cultural diplomacy. In current practice states usually have a number of such

¹⁷ Indeed, university students can be a very "interesting" target group for diplomats implementing cultural- diplomatic activities. The main reason for that is the fact that foreign diplomats have through discussions with university students in the receiving state an excellent opportunity to address and, even more importantly, influence possible future intellectual leaders and social elite of the nation of the host country. Moreover, university students are usually young people who are generally more open and accessible to different views and therefore can be relatively easier influenced by ideas presented by foreign diplomats (within discussions or presentations).

international treaties among themselves¹⁸, which demonstrates the importance of this area of cultural-diplomatic work.

It should be noted that this part of cultural-diplomatic activities includes not only the negotiation of treaties itself, but also the preparation of proposals for negotiations (usually in cooperation with competent ministries and other relevant institutions in the sending state), as well as supervising implementation of the treaties in practice and, if needed, submission of proposals for changes or updates to competent authorities. At the same time, this part of cultural-diplomatic work includes also the monitoring of compliance of the international treaties by the receiving state and, if necessary, submission of requests for redress to the competent authorities of the state.

Finally, an important part of cultural-diplomatic work, especially in diplomatic practice of some states¹⁹, is the *supporting and keeping up of contacts with expatriate communities in the receiving state*. Typically, these activities may include organising cultural events for the members of the expatriate community (often on the occasion of national anniversaries) or attending such events, organised by local expatriate organisations or visiting expatriate associations and cultural facilities in the receiving state.

From the point of view of diplomats the maintenance of contacts with expatriates in the receiving state has not only symbolic significance, but often can serve practical purposes too. For example, expatriates can be a very useful (supplementary) source of information about the development in the receiving state for diplomats. In some cases, they can even help them to mediate contacts with influential politicians or businessmen in the receiving state.

Conclusions

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy plays an important role in the process of foreign policy implementation in our days. In practice, it can not only serve as a useful means for the implementation of state interests abroad in the field of cultural policy, but can also promote creation of favourable conditions for the effective achievement of foreign policy goals of the state in other areas of its foreign relations (such as the economic area, for instance). However, cultural

¹⁸ As K. Rana notes in this connection, international treaties "covering culture are often among the first to be signed between countries", as relations among them develop (Rana, 2007, p. 98).

¹⁹ In the region of Central Europe, notably Hungary can be mentioned as an example of such a country.

diplomacy, in terms of its functions, cannot be regarded as a replacement of other diplomatic methods, such as economic²⁰ or defence diplomacy²¹, for instance, which operate simultaneously and follow their own specific goals within the state foreign policy.

In practice, cultural diplomacy can include various activities, which composition may vary depending on the state implementing cultural diplomacy and its foreign policy goals and priorities in relation to a particular foreign (target) country. At the same time, the whole intensity of cultural-diplomatic activities of state can also vary, depending mainly on its foreign policy ambitions and, of course, resources available for cultural diplomacy.

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²⁰ The term *economic diplomacy* refers to a specific part of diplomacy that is focused on the (peaceful) implementation of foreign policy interests of state in the economic field.

²¹ The term *defence diplomacy* refers to a specific part of diplomacy that is focused on the (peaceful) implementation of foreign policy interests of state in the field of military and security relations, as well as in the areas of international cooperation of armed forces.

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