

Public Diplomacy:  
Improving Practice

Ashvin Gonesh and Jan Melissen

December 2005

NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
*CLINGENDAEL*

CIP-Data Koninklijke bibliotheek, The Hague

Gonesh, A. and Melissen J.

Public Diplomacy: Improving Practice / Ashvin Gonesh and Jan Melissen – The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations *Clingendael*.  
Clingendael Diplomacy Papers No. 5  
ISBN 90-5031-105-9



*Desk top publishing by Ellen Henskes*

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## Preface

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Foreign ministries (MFAs) are giving increasing weight to public diplomacy in the process of foreign policy-making. Senior management in most MFAs now hold the view that 'PD' is here to stay. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs is no exception: it has given priority to the development and modernization of its public diplomacy. As part of this effort, the Dutch MFA has joined forces with the Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme (CDSP) of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. One fruit of this collaboration is a best-practice manual on public diplomacy for Dutch overseas missions, which can be found in the appendix of this Clingendael Diplomacy Paper.

In the context of this ongoing collaboration, the Dutch MFA and Clingendael held an international experts' seminar on 17 and 18 November 2005. Conference participants included senior and mid-career diplomats working in the field of public diplomacy, as well as a small group of academics. Special attention was given to questions surrounding the public diplomacy experiences and needs of small and middle powers. Practitioners at the conference represented eleven countries: Austria; Belgium; Canada; Germany; Israel; Liechtenstein; Norway; Poland; Spain; Turkey; and, of course, the Netherlands. A small team of academics from Canada, Norway, Poland and the Netherlands also made an active contribution to the conference. Together, this group brought a great wealth and variety of public diplomacy experience to the conference. Discussions were wide-ranging and it was decided to hold them under the Chatham House Rule, hence this conference report gives the results of the conference discussions yet also

respects the conference's confidentiality. There is no reference to either individual participants' comments or the experience of specific countries.

I hope that, for diplomats, this study will contribute to a more comprehensive view of the importance of public diplomacy, and that it will turn out to be a source of inspiration for academics. Public diplomacy is part of wider changes in the practice of diplomacy, and it is certainly not the least of all the challenges presently facing practitioners across the world.

Jan Melissen  
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December 2005

# Introduction

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Diplomats traditionally have a twofold responsibility to provide information about their host country and to report timely and reliable information concerning developments in their home country. They operate in a worldwide network in which they exchange information and make decisions that can influence their country's image. However, in the past fifteen years the challenges facing foreign ministries have been further complicated by the fundamental changes that have occurred in the traditional structure of international relations. The end of the Cold War, the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the rapidly emerging Asian economies have fundamentally altered the overall power equation in the international system. These and other developments carry the risk of diminishing geopolitical and geostrategic significance of small and middle powers. An increasing number of governments have therefore made public diplomacy a number one priority in international relations. In practising public diplomacy, one must aim at information-based decision-making, providing domestic and foreign audiences with information, helping them to form opinions and eventually take decisions. It is more than formulating policy and rather about seizing opportunities and taking calculated risks in communication with target audiences. Seizing opportunities relates to all possible fields, including science and technology, industry and culture.

Defining public diplomacy is an academic exercise, although in the continuous exchange of knowledge and practice on public diplomacy and many of its facets, the common denominator appears to be that the national image abroad is put on the national political agenda and as such becomes a

political issue. Public diplomacy therefore carries the risk of being viewed as political pressure and even propaganda. We should recognize that propaganda has by no means been entirely stamped out and that perhaps when we look at states' international communication activities we could see them better on a continuum between propaganda and what could be called the new public diplomacy. The latter is more concerned with two-way communications, and in fact the key words in this age are 'engagement', 'dialogue' and 'mutuality'. Perhaps it would be even better to see the new public diplomacy not just as a stand-alone phenomenon but rather as an expression of broader patterns of change in diplomacy, in which diplomats are inevitably dealing with different governmental and non-governmental actors. It could even be suggested that public diplomacy is part of a wider phenomenon, which could be characterized as the 'societization' of diplomacy. If this is the case, there is a lot of work to do because diplomatic culture for many centuries has not been too attuned to working with others. That said, diplomats increasingly realize that they had better think more about the receiving end. Yet getting through to public audiences is becoming increasingly difficult, since these public groups are often hard to localize, they do not have clear agendas, and they do not play by certain rules, as actors in international relations tend to do.

Ministries of foreign affairs are increasingly practising public diplomacy. It is not hype, but a non-stop affair, in which they continuously have to question whether they should improve their public diplomacy structure, instruments and content. Traditional country promotion to a considerable extent consisted of brochures, movies, films and promoting certain symbols and characteristics. The characteristics of such promotional material are that it is not aimed at a special target group, it is wide-ranging, apolitical and is a good instrument to raise awareness about a country, which could help to enhance name recognition and visibility, but certainly does not send out a specific message. On the contrary, and unlike the American baseball cap, public diplomacy is not 'one-size fits all'. Public diplomacy serves many different purposes. The prime reason may be to boost economic performance, but it may be more for reasons of building national identity, to deal with short-term issues or support long-term aims in foreign policy. Some countries may want to shed typical images that are related to their past or see public diplomacy really as an adjunct to branding. The major strength of public diplomacy, however, is not so much in directly serving short-term foreign policy objectives, but rather in influencing the environment in which opinions are formed and where attitudes take shape. Public diplomacy is perhaps more effective, and more lasting, when it is related to broad national values and interests rather than serving short-term foreign policy objectives.

Nonetheless, one could argue that some MFAs at least are suffering from institutional handicaps, because public diplomacy emerges from the field of providing government information. But providing government information, which is by nature biased, is something fundamentally different than trying to forge (long-term) relationships with a critical audience on the other side.

Furthermore, the combined forces of globalization and the democratization of access to information are changing the environment in which public diplomacy operates, and diplomats are - dare one say it - not automatically at the centre of international affairs or sometimes even pushed to the periphery of international relationships.

One special quality of public diplomacy is its ability to go where traditional diplomacy cannot reach. With the practice of public diplomacy, one must always take into consideration that one is speaking with individuals. Whatever is communicated on the factual level, one must consider how this information could be interpreted on an emotional level. Conceivably, this is what makes public diplomacy very personal. Diplomats can represent their country well if they personally are so outgoing that they individually believe in what they are doing. Credibility in this case means that you have to live what you talk and if needed fall back on the expression of emotions. That is why the skills that are needed in public diplomacy are in many ways different from the analytical skills that are traditionally stressed in diplomacy.

Readers of this report should note that in the view of practitioners, public diplomacy in day-to-day operations is formulated and exercised on the basis of its general objective - that is, to serve a country's national interest and to result in an increase of influence, understanding and more support for their views. Otherwise, they argue, 'there is no sense in doing it'. The debate among academics and practitioners about whether or not public diplomacy is simply about propaganda, public relations, strategic communications or marketing management will not be dealt with here. Thus this report does not aim conceptually to divide public diplomacy and its related concepts, but rather seeks to enhance the understanding of a country's efforts in terms of public diplomacy, identifying risks and opportunities. Mentioned here are first and foremost practitioners' perceptions, attitudes and experiences *vis-à-vis* the exercise of public diplomacy. This may support ministries of foreign affairs to scrutinize how and when diplomats can and should communicate country-specific information to foreign and domestic audiences. Accordingly, what is addressed here is in what way public diplomacy can be used as a driver of country image. For diplomats in the field it may result in a more comprehensive view of the importance of their work as international relationship managers within the context of the practice of diplomacy.



# The New Public Diplomacy

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Pressures on governments that arise from public issues, plus the increasingly complex relationships that ministries of foreign affairs have with different actors, have in some cases led to the creation of specialized staff departments dealing with external and domestic publics. Whereas the former deal with international public diplomacy, the latter focus on the national aspects of public diplomacy, sometimes referred to as domestic public affairs. The emergence of the domestic public affairs' function is becoming a major innovation in the contemporary organization of MFAs, especially as the number of international issues is growing and becoming more complex and of greater importance to domestic audiences. As a result, public diplomacy - that which is performed abroad in the national interest - and public affairs - that which a foreign ministry does at home to influence its public - can be underpinned by three assumptions. First, government alone can no longer resolve the foreign policy problems of the twenty-first century. The civil sector plays its own part. Second, citizens yearn for greater government accountability and transparency. Third, foreign policy and domestic policy are increasingly intertwined. It becomes more difficult to define what is foreign and what is domestic. But how do we know what is and what is not public diplomacy in terms of activities? How do we differentiate between international public diplomacy and domestic public affairs? And, more important, should we set apart those two approaches?

### *Domestic Outreach*

One could start by suggesting that public diplomacy is a multi-stakeholder enterprise involving actors back home. It probably involves conduciveness and compatibility of non-state actors' actions and the foreign policy values and priorities of the state. Thus one can suggest that public diplomacy comprises all of the activities by state and non-state actors that contribute to the maintenance and promotion of a country's soft power.<sup>1</sup> If this is the case, the state tries to reach out to society and involves societal actors in promoting the country's soft power. Obviously, direct steering of societal actors at home is not possible in a democratic society. So what the state tries to do is to create image and value platforms that it can coordinate around with the non-state actors. It creates network relationships around particular images and value assets of societal actors. One could therefore suggest that public diplomacy comprises both a domestic dimension and a foreign dimension. However, in a situation where we have multiple actors interacting with international actors, the state seeks to create associations with non-state actors' values back home and subsequently increase its attractiveness back home. By acting as such, the state is able to increase its soft power abroad, which in turn enables the state to increase its attractiveness back home. This is a circular process that goes both ways, so that public diplomacy is conditioned by the attractiveness of the state back home and not only by its attractiveness abroad.

Public diplomacy may be regarded on a continuum - both short and long term. And in many ways three elements can be noticed: specific advocacy campaigns on specific issues, and that would be very short term; another short- to medium-term element is raising the profile; and a longer-term element comprises building long-term relationships. For each of these elements, practitioners recognize that they need tremendous engagement domestically and ought to involve domestic partners in trying to achieve any one of those strategies in terms of advocacy.

Public diplomacy was traditionally directed at foreign audiences, at capturing the minds of those abroad and consequently increasing the soft power of the state abroad. However, the new public diplomacy encompasses a more important role for domestic public affairs. It is becoming a necessary complement to the function of public diplomacy in modern international relations. They are actually two sides of the same coin: public diplomacy engages the world; and public affairs equips domestic audiences to understand the world and therefore to explain better one's country to the rest of the world.

Domestic outreach supports international public diplomacy in several ways. First of all, it expands a country's reach with key foreign publics by

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1) The idea behind soft power is that the power of attraction and seduction is always more effective than coercion.

supporting domestic policy capacity development. The second form of domestic outreach can be called institutionalized public dialogue, which encompasses efforts to build greater understanding on complex issues by performing an informed dialogue. Thirdly, domestic outreach also makes efforts to engage key segments of the population in public activity that supports foreign policy interest. And ultimately, one can use domestic public affairs' activities on international affairs to create a greater sense of pride and attachment to one's country and therefore strengthen national identity. Thus, a re-examination of foreign ministries in the twenty-first century means that they have to focus on key areas. Will foreign ministries be integrators or merely articulators of a country's views abroad? And more importantly, how can they mainstream public diplomacy so that it is not shunted away into the international cultural affairs bureau but rather is part and parcel of day-to-day foreign policy-making? Within this context it is important to question how a country can be projected domestically, and how this can be executed in a much more coordinated fashion.

There are several forms of domestic outreach. First, one could launch a citizens' diplomacy programme, which will enhance your domestic audience's experience, awareness and understanding of international issues. Presumably, if citizens are being related to in this way they will be more engaged and export their ideas abroad through their (in-)formal networks. So, the citizens' diplomacy programme can also be used to initiate networks. This comprises, for example, funding certain segments of the population to talk about international issues and encourage them to build networks with populations abroad and hopefully therefore again project their country's foreign policy interest. The question then arises of how to segment the population. When implementing public affairs' activities, some stress the importance of identifying and reaching out to attentive publics. These are the people that read newspapers and have a certain interest or background in economic and international affairs. Of course, there remain certain groups that will not be reached, and trying to reach them will not make any sense because they are just not interested. But the attentive public, the opinion leaders and future opinion leaders will eventually reach those not-interested audiences in times of crisis. In fact, you are in this way building an informed public that will understand the new answers and subtleties of your country's future foreign policy.

Another option is to establish a model political assemblies programme or to develop a foreign policy dialogue programme, again to promote informed dialogue among the domestic audience via, for example, the internet. In this way one can establish a national ongoing public dialogue on foreign policy. Periodically one can pick a theme and build a programme around it in order to create national dialogue on that specific issue. So in conclusion, public diplomacy and domestic outreach processes are also premised on strategic communication. In most foreign ministries, public diplomacy and domestic outreach are about finding the right architecture of public diplomacy

programmes and initiatives to support the national interest. They are about public administration and finding efficiencies and synergies. In addition, they deal with determining the appropriate government structures between MFAs and other actors. Thus, as foreign ministries are being forced to be more domestically oriented, they are becoming much more hybrid organizations.

### *Working Together*

Until recently a public diplomacy strategy was very much initiated *and* executed by ministries of foreign affairs. As we learned from domestic outreach, practitioners recognized that other actors also needed to be involved to be successful in public diplomacy. The involvement of players consists of line ministries, embassies, the business community, academic organizations, think tanks and non-governmental organizations. This is, however, not always easy, because all of these actors have their own agendas, their own loyalties and their own procedures. So the question is how to mobilize all of these actors to work with you? How can one organize this process and how can one stay in control? Does one need to stay in charge? But there are also questions with regard to cooperation between the embassies and ministries of foreign affairs. What should the role of a ministry of foreign affairs be in the development of a strategy? Who is responsible for what? On the one hand the embassies strive to be independent, and on the other hand they look to the ministry of foreign affairs and ask them for advice, guidelines and products. In an effort to support these representations in their day-to-day practice of public diplomacy, MFAs are wondering whether they need a global umbrella strategy for public diplomacy?

As several cases suggest, a global strategy does not seem likely, because every region has its specifics and one needs to adapt to a certain degree to the region with which one is dealing, otherwise the information that one attempts to get across will not reach the desired effects. The lack of customized and two-way communication often results in failure to establish some kind of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is important to give embassies some kind of guidelines or framework. This will not undermine their demanded ambition to adapt their strategy for regional purposes. In fact, these embassies do have quite a lot of expertise in regional fields and there must therefore be some kind of dialogue about how one implements a public diplomacy strategy and its different elements in various weaves. The question remains in what way the ministry of foreign affairs can enhance understanding and stimulation of public diplomacy among its diplomats.

First, embassies need to be clarified about what is understood by public diplomacy. The central goal in public diplomacy should be a country's image, yet it should be taken into consideration that image tends to be related to specific characteristics of one's country. It often seems difficult to get across aspects other than those main characteristics. This raises the question of whether or not it is important to get the other messages across. Although one

might think that certain decisions are solely based on strategic rationale, decision-making often integrates an emotional part and thus also takes other images into consideration. For example, people that are willing to invest in your country also count the cultural environment, the society's hospitality to foreign audiences, educational programmes for their employees, infrastructure and so on. It is therefore not only important to get across the economic data and 'hard' facts, but also to accentuate other fields and messages. Subsequently, a more comprehensive approach is necessary. The second step is to define what message one wants to get across. A successful public diplomacy strategy for small states would first of all be able to capture attention by having a few niche messages, which enables recognition and visibility. Those messages should not be too broad based and be embedded within globally attractive values, because that then enables the viability of a country's own activities internationally. It thus always helps to define principles and values and communicate a country's strength while recognizing its weaknesses. The third step is to be clear that public diplomacy is not only done by the ministry of foreign affairs alone and that it should not only be done by government officials, because a country's image abroad is defined by many other factors. The fourth step is therefore to reach out to important actors, all of the actors that actually communicate your country's image abroad, and try to establish some kind of permanent communication platform where one can exchange information. Furthermore, it is important to establish stronger contact between the communication side and the political side within the ministry of foreign affairs. Too often policy is formulated first and afterwards the question arises about how it can be sold abroad. Although this approach may sometimes work, it very often does not work. Already at the start of policy formulation one must be aware what the consequences will be, and how the perception of audiences abroad can be affected.

### *Embassies in Action*

Small and middle powers face particular challenges. One is that they want to be noticed - and in a positive way. Second, they generally have limited resources. Furthermore, 'small' countries have a relatively 'small' public diplomacy repertoire, and that makes things a lot more complicated. Small countries in particular need a lot of intelligence and ingenuity. If they have a small budget they will not be able to focus on the whole world, but need to focus on certain target countries. Often those are the countries that really matter to their country. Another option is to focus on certain themes. In any case, there is a central role for embassies and diplomats. They should become more active and the ministry of foreign affairs should provide them with information that is operational and that can be readily used. Embassies do not need extensive and detailed information on issues but more bulleted information with regard to the key messages. It is essential to simplify and move away from bureaucratic language and to try to illustrate things in

common people's language. In regard to domestic outreach, some ministries of foreign affairs send out all diplomats to high schools, universities, regional newspapers and regional television stations. They should describe what they are doing abroad and how they became a foreign service officer and what exactly they are doing in their country of accreditation, all with the aim of humanizing the civil servant. In this manner they indirectly try to define what message their country should sell abroad.

In their country of accreditation diplomats can undertake different actions. They could, for example, create visitors' programmes and invite journalists, academics and so-called multipliers of opinions to visit their country, and to take a closer look at whatever it is that interests them. The whole idea behind this is not to dictate what these opinion-makers should write and say, but to create a lively context in their minds, which supports a more nuanced view of that country's efforts in dealing with day-to-day issues and crises. A similar but perhaps more intensive strategy is to establish an exchange programme for journalists from the home and host countries, where the basis can be an intensive language course. This could create the effect where quite a few foreign journalists that report on their country extend their knowledge and network within their own countries. Through such a programme journalists gain access to first-hand information and this therefore helps to avoid the myths and garbled facts that sometimes appear in newspapers. It is also worthwhile to use special events, which can gain more publicity for a country, putting out one's message and also bringing people together to talk about shared issues. The public in general needs to put issues in perspective. As part of public diplomacy, one has to share dilemmas sincerely and not just make propaganda, because the latter will not work.

Working with non-governmental actors on specific issues could, of course, also be very effective. When one works with such actors, risks are inevitably being taken because one does not have total control of their initiatives. In fact, some of these non-governmental players have earned their reputation precisely from their independence of government or perhaps by criticizing government. However, if diplomats abroad decide to cooperate with such NGOs on a specific issue, they should try to limit their involvement in coordinating matters and, as much as possible, just provide them with information. Especially when a public diplomacy measure is exercised in cooperation with an NGO, it is vital to think of ways for how to use the press as a player at an early stage of cooperation. Well-intended collaborations could otherwise easily be portrayed as propaganda via non-state actors.

### *Diplomats at the Frontline*

As government officials, diplomats at all times must realize that in their communication they are normally assumed to be speaking for their country and are expected to have special knowledge about their country's activities. Under these circumstances, spoken words take on official meanings. As the

new public diplomacy comprises more engagement and dialogue with non-state actors, the media will more than ever seize the opportunity to challenge diplomats, asking penetrating or potentially embarrassing questions and expecting instant answers. In news interviews, the time available for responding to questions is often limited to a few seconds. Moreover, facial expressions, the tone of one's voice and body language can convey both positive and negative impressions.

Many foreign ministries send their diplomats to specific courses on media communication. Yet, although necessary, the new public diplomacy requires more than just basic communication skills. Modern diplomats must at first resist the temptation to see reporters and journalists as the enemy. As a diplomat it is necessary to accept rather than to decline invitations. 'Being there' must be a principle. In fact, diplomats should strive to build bridges with the media. They should resist avoiding the media and should not withdraw into a shell of silence, which tends to generate suspicion that the government has something to hide. Although obvious, diplomats should therefore explicitly be instructed to keep the long-term image of their country in mind. Just being open and honest can already be a successful media strategy. Since credibility is one of the key elements of public diplomacy, honesty is the best policy. Moreover, because the media will investigate to confirm all information that an official provides, it is crucial to double-check the facts.

The importance of developing a solid public diplomacy programme for diplomats cannot be emphasized enough, as countries that have experienced crises can attest. The problem is that the need for a strategic public diplomacy response cannot be anticipated; diplomats must therefore always be ready and trained for any possible problem. This is a daunting task for ministries of foreign affairs and diplomats. But it is a critical challenge, as governments seek to protect and project positive imagery around their nation. To conclude, it is worth remembering that public diplomacy - the establishment of (inter)national credibility - can take years to build and only minutes to destroy. And in terms of public policy, that is what makes public diplomacy unique, and here to stay.

#### *Internet and the Next Generation*

Because of the growing importance of the internet and its cost efficiency, it is vital to use broader communication within and between governments and other actors. What ministries of foreign affairs report (the content) and how they report it (the format) are integrally linked. When the format enables audiences to understand the content more easily, they use that content more effectively. The evolution of information formats has progressively made content more accessible, understandable and useful. The linkages between content and format have never been more crucial than now, when the internet is becoming the primary platform for communication. An increasing number

of ministries of foreign affairs already use the internet to publish and obtain information, to share it with others, and to analyse it. Professional users expect reported information to be high quality, quickly accessible and easy to use. Most importantly, they expect it to be trustworthy.

With regard to the question of how to target young people in foreign policy thinking, it is necessary to divide the issue in two dimensions: the foreign young audience that one wants to reach; and also the internal young audience. For the latter, one does not necessarily need internet applications, but the ministries can simply further develop outreach programmes in a decentralized way and basically set up contacts with different levels in the community. They can establish meetings with teachers and organizations, provide discussion materials and then encourage them to discuss issues in foreign policy dilemmas. They can also try to get in touch with the educational institutions that prepare material for curricula in the schools, because all schools undertake projects on country studies. In addition, and especially in the effort of targeting young foreign audiences, however, the internet proves to be very useful when using different languages and content for different groups. In some cases the number of languages into which a website was translated and customized to a specific audience exceeded ten. Although extremely labour intensive and costly, such an effort seems to pay off because the number of people visiting these websites increases by the day.

Perhaps even more interesting to note is the way that the internet is used in terms of e-consultation and the domestic audience. An important part of defining public diplomacy as a dialogue means that by definition there is actually feedback. The old public policy format was basically about information. The newer conception of public diplomacy assumes that the domestic audience has a say in foreign policy dialogue. This means that if one goes out and consults other actors, such as one's own civil society, their suggestions - if meaningful and respectful - must have the potential actually to change policy. In a small minority of countries, this feedback loop is now starting to be developed in terms of e-consultation, and is expected to contribute to higher involvement and interest by different actors in foreign policy thinking and decision-making.



## Issues and Crises

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### *Dealing with Issues*

Moral issues deal with the way in which a country tries to come to terms with certain ethical problems in its society, and the way it tries to find solutions to difficult questions. They are part of public issues that arise when the public's and media's expectations are not met. Government representatives, in this case ministries of foreign affairs, must at first frame the debate in terms of balancing the pros and cons and distinguish the factual from the not-factual information. They should try to set reasonable expectations, and find ways to create common ground for compromise. When an issue is not directly addressed, a group of people may organize formally and campaign for its point of view through pamphlets, newsletters, web pages and other forms of print and electronic communication. They may attract the media's attention, which will result in newspaper, television, or radio coverage, and thus the issue moves from one of citizen and media concern to one of political importance. In some cases advocacy groups may keep the issue alive by systematically documenting the negative aspects of an issue. This bears the danger that these issues start to overlap and interweave, creating a complex web of advocacy groups, coalitions, government policies and political manoeuvres, making it even harder to respond. Government officials must thus anticipate and respond to issues in a timely way.

The ministry of foreign affairs, together with its diplomats, is responsible for collecting, analysing and preparing social and political intelligence. Issues must be identified in time and trends must be forecast. Gathered information

can be communicated throughout the ministry, and it is essential that interests and ideas from the different areas of expertise within the ministry are coordinated. This coordination is vital to the development of sound positions on complex issues. In some cases action programmes are developed and executed at target foreign audiences. They often comprise various programmes, including a media programme for building regular interaction with the press. Sometimes a local community affairs' programme is used for strengthening contact with the local community, and often the diplomats' own lobbying operations must ensure that their country's voice is heard by the broader public. Of course, the identification and analysis of issues alone does not teach the ministries of foreign affairs what to do in terms of policy options. The latter involves creating choices. In order to guarantee public diplomacy's demand for credibility, policy decisions require complex judgements that incorporate ethical considerations, the country's name and image, and other non-quantifiable factors.

### *Responding to Crisis*

When a nation faces crises, diplomats are often forced to act on a difficult issue quickly and without perfect information. A crisis, by its nature, imposes heavy emotional pressure on people to make decisions under fire. One of the major challenges of handling crises effectively involves dealing with the media. Government officials respond in various ways. In some cases representatives steadfastly adhere to their plans, no matter how strong the opposition or pressure from the media. They argue that doing nothing may also be an option if an issue is not ripe for immediate action. This response strategy could be labelled as inactive. Sometimes governments choose a reactive response when only changing their ways if forced to do so by strong outside pressure. In other cases government officials attempt to move the players involved in the crisis to the country's advantage, in other words, they try to 'win the hearts and minds' via a proactive responsive approach. Last, but not least, some try to find ways to harmonize the country's goals and objectives with the changing needs, goals and expectations of the public and therefore employ an interactive responsive approach.

Media relations play a vital part when responding to crisis. The process by which governments respond to these unexpected events differs. In some cases a specially chosen task force is installed and devotes itself full time to coping with the problem and trying to find solutions. Sometimes a media-contact person is a key member of this group, and contingency plans are made beforehand on how media relations should be handled during an emergency period. In highly visible crises, an outside public relations firm may be called in to develop an ongoing plan for dealing with the media and for assurance that the government's view is included in media presentations. Throughout the executions of such a strategy, diplomats must realize that every single decision made by their government or taskforce is closely

scrutinized and subject to immediate assessment by the media and other actors involved. Therefore, as was noted earlier, modern diplomats should not only be trained in how to appear in front of a television camera, but how to deal with public diplomacy in times like these. The modern diplomat is advised to carry a make-up kit in his briefcase, not just secret letters.

## The Nationwide Approach

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Governments' growing efforts to create positive imagery around their nation often demand being quick, flexible and consistent in the messages that they send out abroad. Since consistency is an important element in communication, there must be some sort of coordination. In order to work towards more harmonization, a government can first of all build a professional communication network in the country and institutionalize this network in a foundation consisting of representatives from political, economic and cultural fields, who together engage in joint goal-setting and the implementation of an action plan to improve the nation's image. The development of their proactive international communication measures should be based on the identity and mentality of the domestic audience and should always meet the demands of continuity and consistency. Such a foundation can provide research on how a country is perceived abroad and how a country views itself. The latter refers to basic questions like 'who are we and how do we like to be perceived?' This 'soul searching' can result in one or more core messages on how a country wants to be perceived. Reasonably, the more actors that are involved in such a foundation, the more messages will be formulated, because all actors want to see their interest translated into a message.

The next step can be to make professional information material available. For example, one could produce different bilateral papers that are individualized and customized. At a certain point in the implementation of such a broad-based communications' programme, the question arises for small powers as to how to communicate key messages to the outside world.

Here a dilemma comes to mind: whether or not to engage in nation-branding aside from public diplomacy?

### *Branding or Not?*

Could we brand ourselves? Can a country be branded and, if so, how to go about it? Those are the questions that an increasing number of governments are tackling. The concept of the nation as a brand is debated among academics and practitioners, with a number pointing to the potential value inherent in managing and developing the national brand. Branding is an exercise in identity-building. It is something that goes beyond the government of the day and it certainly needs to be legitimate with the population. The idea behind a nation-brand is to create a distinguishing name and/or symbol that is intended to differentiate one country from another. The advocates of nation-branding argue that like any global multinational, a country could brand itself as well. They point out that similar to a company, a country exists and operates in a highly competitive environment. Both are dependent on resources and supportive behaviour and, more importantly, each must appeal to an audience. Therefore, to a great extent, the government's function can be compared to that of the general management of a company. The critics of nation-branding caution that few countries have been rebranded by outside experts. They argue that nation-branding is crucially about the articulation and projection of identity and hence, unlike public diplomacy, does not comprise relationship-building. Within this context one should note that the theoretical possibility of rebranding a country is indeed impossible without actual reforms in a country's economic, political and cultural environment and policy. Moreover, countries differ from companies in many ways. A country is not generally free to choose its internal audience. Therefore its messaging is different from that of a company and perhaps more important is that its identity can hardly be modified in a top-down approach. According to some observers, this raises fundamental questions about the management of branding in modern democracies that thrive on pluralism and diversity.

Several cases do, however, suggest that the creation of a nation-brand can be beneficial and support the long-term aims of public diplomacy, which are exercised in the national interest. A brand can act as a communicator of certain key messages and therefore increase a country's visibility. Although branding and public diplomacy can be set apart as two distinct approaches, in practice these two are not necessarily divided. On the contrary, increasing visibility on the international stage can give diplomatic representation a more comfortable starting point. Furthermore, one must realize that branding should not be seen in terms of rebranding. It is not about the construction of a new national identity, although the process to develop a brand inevitably results in 'soul searching'. In response to the increased media attention under which contemporary governments must operate, ministries feel not only the need to build relations and engage in dialogue via public diplomacy, but they

also feel the urge to deliver concrete imagery in the form of pictures, symbols, logos and messages to contradict negative images in the media. In this sense, nation-branding could well be seen as a counter attack in the ‘war with the media’, and therefore some argue that like public diplomacy, branding is not an option but a necessity. In support of the brand, it is important to be explicit in the image you want to portray about yourself. Sometimes these key messages are presented in bullet fashion and have a normative role, whereas in other cases the core messages are emotionally woven into some kind of story, the so-called ‘corporate story’.

#### *Writing a ‘Corporate Story’*

Just as an individual has a unique personality, so every country has a unique identity called national identity: the shared experiences, stories, beliefs and norms that characterize a nation and its citizens. Because image is merely the projection of identity, the first step is to make an effort to express a nation’s identity by writing down who the citizens of your country are and what they stand for: the so-called ‘corporate story’. It is a blend of ideas, customs and traditional practices, country values and shared meanings that help define an identity for everyone who lives in that society. A number of forces shape ‘corporate stories’ and distinguish them from one another. These are values, history, stories and legends, shared experiences and dilemmas. So, first of all, such a story deals with the values of important figures throughout a nation’s history. Second, a nation’s history itself also supports shaping the ‘corporate story’. The third component is the narratives and legends that almost every country has. And, last but not least, a ‘corporate story’ should take into account the shared experiences of a society, which often include dilemmas. A ‘corporate story’ should be realistic, is not necessarily based on the truth, but it should be truthful. Perhaps the most important element of the ‘corporate story’ is that the past, present and future are connected in a way that serves as an expression of what a nation’s societies have managed to achieve.

#### *Evaluating Public Diplomacy*

Although public diplomacy is an imperative approach for international and national policy-makers, there is no measuring standard by which to assess it. Public diplomacy is difficult to measure, although there is a need to assess ‘PD’. In many cases, the practical use of indicators as tools is constrained by the lack of data for adequate (relevant, reliable and valid) indicators. This fact is a result of both lack of in-depth knowledge about some objects of measurement and the difficulty of conveying accurate information on some aspects through indicators. In addition, the inability to evaluate public diplomacy is, first, that the majority of terms used are not, or not sufficiently, defined. Second, the question arises about ‘what’ to measure and over what period of time. Thus the units of measurement (activities) and the time-scale

(short, medium or long term) on which 'PD' takes place are often weakly or not at all defined. Evaluating public diplomacy requires decision-makers to consider multiple dimensions of 'PD' in an environment of uncertainty and with many (inter)national actors. Since public diplomacy is still not quantitatively measurable and it involves different players and activities, opinion polls are for now one of the very few ways to formulate systematically a base for quantifying the effect of public diplomacy policy. Public diplomacy evaluation still appears to be in its infancy.

## Conclusion: Building Public Trust

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The media industry's influence has increased significantly through the merger of old media industries - radio, television, books and newspapers - with new media - the internet, cable and wireless communication. With the media's growing power to affect public policy, governments must be more attentive to the various ways that the media can influence their image. How a country is portrayed in the media, how it handles a crisis covered by the media, and how it trains its employees to interact with the media are all critical elements of successful public diplomacy. Therefore, although public diplomacy has been conducted for many years, there is now a strategic approach to it. Ministries of foreign affairs have a strategic role, a facilitating role, an initiating role and perhaps even a mediating role, but 'PD' is not necessarily just about diplomats talking to ordinary people in other countries.

There is a need for more systematic use of the public arena. Diplomats are to engage actively with journalists, with academia and with politicians, and are not only to stick to government-to-government contacts. Of course these government-to-government contacts are important and remain important, but there is now much more to the diplomat's job. For embassy staff it is not always that easy - by nature diplomats tend to be less comfortable at confronting other people or actively promoting their issues outside government circles. There is a need for diplomats to become better at that. Effective public diplomacy sends a constant stream of information from government officials to other actors and keeps doors open for dialogue with domestic and foreign audiences. Public diplomacy should therefore comprise a mix of proactive and interactive responsiveness. Channels of



communication with the media should be established on a continuing basis, not just after a problem has arisen. Once this step has been taken, a country can view the media as a positive force that can help a country to communicate with the public. Some countries have learned these lessons the hard way.

For small and medium powers in particular, public diplomacy is less a question of resources and much more a question of courage to do things. Although money is important to make sure that you have the necessary information to gauge the effect of your policy, the cultural change of MFAs determines the success of public diplomacy. Perhaps one of the major challenges is to move away from ministries of foreign affairs as 'ministries of fear' and 'ministries of control'. They sometimes seem to be afraid of the outside world because of the increased media attention, which forces them to weigh their words carefully. In some cases this even results in saying nothing in order to avoid misunderstandings. In any case, MFAs sticking to the old ways will face one problem. Not among their peers, but among the wider public, diplomats often lack credibility, which is their most precious asset. Official messengers abroad certainly do not easily persuade people. Opinion-makers are hard to convince, but it is also fatal to underestimate ordinary people. Of course, the ministry of foreign affairs cannot be responsible on its own for the image that is portrayed abroad. Because the key element in public diplomacy is credibility and credibility is all about trust, it is necessary to become actively involved with other ministries, the business community and civil society in order to protect and enhance a country's image abroad. A sphere of trust among the domestic audience is required.

#### *Transparency, Accountability, Integrity*

The first element in the establishment of public trust is to stimulate a spirit of transparency. Governments have an obligation to provide information to foreign and domestic audiences to make decisions. For various reasons government officials are not always consistent in making available information that they know the public and the media wants. Too often, this failure is based on the mistaken belief that the usage of traditional diplomacy will smooth international relations and thus neutralize public opinion. In times of crisis, officials sometimes want to hide the real issues or simply not respond to them. These days, however, the public demands much higher levels of transparency, recognizing that transparency is necessary to make decisions, for example to invest in a country or rather just to visit as a tourist. The second element is to encourage a culture of accountability. Providing information is not enough. It must be accompanied by a firm commitment to accountability among government officials. This could strengthen the demanded credibility for the practice of successful public diplomacy. Commitment means taking responsibility, and this can only occur when an ethos exists that values and understands accountability. But even transparency and accountability are not enough to establish public trust. In

the end, both depend on people of integrity. Concepts, structures, processes, best practices and the most progressive use of technology cannot ensure transparency and accountability. This can only occur when individuals of integrity are trying to 'do the right thing', not what is expedient or even necessarily what is permissible. What matters in the end are people's actions, not simply their words. Doing the right thing cannot be compromised through actions that purport genuine engagement and dialogue with the public both abroad and at home, but that ultimately fall short of what is a necessary condition of the new public diplomacy. One final reminder: public diplomacy as the establishment of (trans)national credibility can take years to build and only minutes to destroy. This is one reason why public diplomacy is unique and will not go away.

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# Appendix

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## **Public diplomacy in practice**

A manual commissioned by the Information and Communication Department (DVL)  
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme (CDSP)  
Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This manual
- 1.2 What is public diplomacy?
- 1.3 Why is public diplomacy important?
- 1.4 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public diplomacy
  - Focus countries
  - Main themes

## **2 Public diplomacy in practice: setting to work**

- 2.1 Preparation: our strategy and basic principles
- 2.2 The process in five steps
- 2.3 The analysis
- 2.4 Setting goals and deciding on the message
- 2.5 Identifying target groups
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- 2.8 Model Public Diplomacy Strategy

## **3 Organisation and implementation of public diplomacy activities**

- 3.1 Activity plan
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- 3.3 Working with external organisations
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## **4 Overviews**

- 4.1 Tips and lessons learned
- 4.2 What types of support does the Ministry offer?
- 4.3 Where can I find factual information?
- 4.4 Further reading and links

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 This manual

This manual contains some practical guidelines on designing and carrying out a public diplomacy strategy at the missions. It includes a step-by-step plan, gives an overview of goals, target groups and instruments, and provides checklists, examples, tips and recommendations for further reading.

There is no ideal strategy for public diplomacy, because every mission is unique. Different themes, target groups and approaches are relevant in each country, and the budget for public diplomacy varies from mission to mission. This guide merely provides basic rules and building blocks, which each mission can use to suit its own situation.

## 1.2 What is public diplomacy?

Around the world, views on public diplomacy differ, and definitions vary. BZ defines public diplomacy as:

generating support for the aims of Dutch policy and fostering understanding for Dutch perspectives and standpoints among unofficial target groups in foreign countries. More generally, public diplomacy aims to present a realistic and favourable picture of the Netherlands in other countries.

“Unofficial” target groups are those outside national government, such as the media, opinion leaders, non-governmental organisations, academia, the business world and the general public. Like traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy has the ultimate goal of improving or strengthening bilateral relations.

Public diplomacy must always be credible and send a message based on the true situation in the Netherlands.

It includes more than big events and media appearances, and is not merely the responsibility of the press and cultural affairs section and the Head of Mission. Every member of staff should make public diplomacy a part of his or her work, by building up a large network of contacts outside the public sector, explaining Dutch values or policies as the opportunity arises and painting a favourable picture of the Netherlands. It is important for the press and cultural affairs section to involve the entire mission in designing and carrying out a strategy for public diplomacy and to have the support of the mission's top management in doing so.

### **1.3 Why is public diplomacy important?**

International politics is no longer shaped primarily by political leaders and a few top officials. Nor is diplomacy a closed world of diplomats and other government representatives. Members of the general public, through organisations and as individuals, are wielding more influence over international politics and transnational economic relations. There are countless examples, such as public attitudes in other countries towards Dutchbat's role in Srebrenica (negative) and the role of the Netherlands in Sudan's peace process (positive). A positive image of the Netherlands and a clear understanding of Dutch culture, society and policy aims will enhance the country's position in both political and economic relations.

### **1.4 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public diplomacy**

Public diplomacy has long been part of the missions' work. In 2003, however, the Ministry decided that this task had become important enough to merit a systematic, centralised approach. Since then, it has reserved funds for public diplomacy in its budget. Officials in The Hague are working on guidelines and resources for public diplomacy. An active policy on public diplomacy is still in development, but in the years ahead it will become a fully-fledged part of Dutch diplomatic efforts. Feedback from the missions is therefore indispensable.

The Ministry is developing a virtual "public diplomacy desk" (*PD-loket*) with reference materials on public diplomacy, including information on specific topics, PowerPoint presentations, model lectures etc. On the Ministry's intranet (BZ-net), under *Beleid/Publieksdiplomatie*, you will find a list of the information and reference materials. Some information may not be available in English.

#### *Focus countries*

The possibilities for public diplomacy are endless, but the resources (money and manpower) are limited, and so there are choices to be made. Clearly, public diplomacy is more important for the Netherlands in some countries than in others, or more likely to produce meaningful results. It is more important for people to have a clear understanding of Dutch agricultural policy in Europe than in Central Asia. It is more productive to explain our drugs policy in France than in Cyprus. To avoid spreading the human resources and budget for public diplomacy too thinly, the Ministry has designated focus countries (see the policy framework for public diplomacy, available

on BZ-net). These countries will have their own budgets for public diplomacy. The size of those budgets will depend on the mission's plans. Special attention will also be devoted to a number of countries with historical ties to the Netherlands, as well as major powers in present and future world politics.

This is not to say that public diplomacy in other countries is unimportant. The Ministry urges all the missions to develop a strategy and activities in this area. If you submit a project proposal, your mission may receive financial support for these activities. (For details, see the guidelines for public diplomacy project proposals, available on BZ-net.) There are also plenty of options for small missions; see section II.B.6 ('Options for small missions').

#### *Main themes*

Apart from focus countries, the Ministry has also selected a number of themes. It would be impossible to bring every interesting aspect of Dutch policy and society to the attention of a foreign public, and pointless to try. People everywhere are bombarded with information every day, and very little of it receives conscious consideration. A few simple, well-packaged messages that are regularly repeated will have a better chance of sticking in the minds of the public than a series of subtle, detailed messages about different facets of the Netherlands.

In 2005, the German missions in the US are focusing on one main theme in their public diplomacy: Germany is a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism.

The Ministry has selected the following main themes, presented here as core messages:

1. the Netherlands, open and progressive
2. the Netherlands, champion of peace, justice and sustainable development
3. the Netherlands, friend and foe of the sea.

Missions do not have to work with this list, but are requested to link their activities to these themes where possible, and of course to respond to current events. Clearly, the theme or themes selected will vary from country to country, and missions can add their own themes. More information about the above three themes is available from the public diplomacy desk.



## 2. Public diplomacy in practice: setting to work

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### 2.1 Preparation: our strategy and basic principles

Our public diplomacy activities should be embedded in a strategy stating what the mission plans to achieve in its host country. This strategy can serve as the basis for an activity plan. Large missions in focus countries may well have detailed strategies with a broad sweep; small missions may need no more than a few points of departure. Whether the strategy is two or twenty pages long, it should be the result of careful preparation and reflect the choices that a mission has made in the field of public diplomacy: what messages do we wish to send to what target groups, and by what means? What direction do we wish to take in the long run, and what do we choose to emphasise?

It takes time and effort to develop a public diplomacy strategy. The entire staff of a mission should be involved in the process. It is important to build support for the issues and specific messages highlighted in the strategy, because everyone at the mission will have to help spread them. What is more, the expertise and networks of individual staff members can be used in developing the strategy.

### 2.2 The process in five steps

The preparation process involves the following steps:

1. Analysing the bilateral relationship and conducting local studies of people's image and knowledge of the Netherlands.
2. Setting goals and crafting messages: what themes should we focus on, what is our most important message?
3. Identifying target groups: who are the main targets for each message?

4. Identifying instruments: what instruments will we use to reach the target groups?
5. What will we evaluate, and how?

These five steps form a first, general checklist. Not every mission will need to work through these steps in detail, and in some cases it may be better to reverse the order of steps 2 and 3, for instance. However, it is important to think carefully about all these issues.

### **2.3 The analysis**

There are two parts to this:

1. First, the mission should obtain a good picture of the bilateral relationship. How important is the country in question to the Netherlands, and what are the main features of the relationship?

In what areas is there cooperation?

Is the country a significant trading partner?

Are relations good or problematic?

What problems have there been?

Are there special ties, historical or otherwise?

2. The second part is more difficult: analysing people's image of the Netherlands. Clear insight into local ideas about the Netherlands (or the lack thereof) is a crucial step in designing an efficient, effective strategy. In some cases, it may be worthwhile to hire a local PR agency. Generally, however, the mission should conduct its own analysis, based on news items about the Netherlands, conversations with local contacts and, sometimes, research into image building commissioned by other bodies – the EU, for instance, or research institutions. For this activity, it is advisable to make use of the knowledge and experience of the entire staff, including local employees.

The analysis of the local situation should contain not only information about what people think of the Netherlands (image) but also the broader context of the bilateral relationship: what should country X know about the Netherlands, given the nature of our bilateral ties?

What image do we wish to have there? The ultimate aim of the strategy is to bridge the gap between the current image and the desired image.

### **2.4 Setting goals and deciding on the message**

The mission should then set goals on the basis of the analysis, and select appropriate messages.

#### *Goals*

- general familiarity with the Netherlands, because . . .
- more in-depth knowledge about the Netherlands, because . . .
- providing information about specific political, economic or cultural issues, because . .
- correcting a negative image
- encouraging individuals or groups to act in the Netherlands' interest, support Dutch policy, buy Dutch products or travel to the Netherlands.

For each goal, the mission should select specific topics and messages. Once a list of themes has been made, it is important to ask the following questions.

#### *Checklist*

- Is the message credible?
  - Does the message clearly set the Netherlands apart from other countries?
  - Is the theme/message suitable for presentation in the host country?
  - Can the message be presented in an appealing way, and is it likely to attract attention?
  - Is there already some interest in the Netherlands in the host country which the mission can use to its advantage? For instance, a Dutch sports personality like Guus Hiddink might be popular there, or certain Dutch products might enjoy strong name recognition.
  - Is the message compatible with the worldview of the target group? You can answer this question by listening to the target group and finding out what they think of the theme and of the Netherlands.
  - Is it possible to combine themes?
  - Which themes will have priority?
  - Which themes will be pursued actively, and which ones more passively?
- *Keep the message simple and clear*

## **2.5 Identifying target groups**

After coming up with appropriate messages, the mission should decide what the best target group would be for each topic. Target groups fall into the following categories: interest groups and NGOs;

the business world: employers' organisations and trade unions, and specific companies. Besides its obvious economic importance, the business world sometimes has a great deal of political influence;

educational institutions, think tanks and opinion leaders;

religious and social leaders;

promising young individuals, tomorrow's "influentials" (thinkers, journalists and politicians);

segments of the general public: regional, ethnic or religious groups, young people, farmers, consumers etc.,

the media: national and local, TV, radio and print. The media are both a target group and an instrument.

Within these categories, there are more choices to make. What universities or think tanks, what NGOs or civil society groups are interested in what we have to offer? What individuals are in the public eye? Will we focus on the capital or try to reach other parts of the country? Sometimes it is a better idea to plan lectures or other events in outlying areas, because it is easier to fill an auditorium there than in the capital, where you have to compete for the attention of an overstimulated public.

Some individuals and groups within the above categories are "multipliers of opinion" – an especially attractive target group, because they "multiply" the effect of

public diplomacy by passing the message on to their own audiences. Examples include teachers, opinion leaders and journalists.

#### *Tailoring form and content to a specific target group*

Once the target groups have been identified, the form and content of the message can be tailored to the specific audience.

#### *Checklist*

- What does the target group already know about the Netherlands and the specific topic?
  - What is their level of education?
  - What is the goal: more familiarity with the Netherlands, more information about it, or more understanding or active support for it?
- Is the target group well-defined and reasonably easy to reach?
- Is the target group (in theory) open to the message or information to be presented?
- Are the form and content of the message tailored to the nature of the target group and their current ideas (or lack thereof) about the Netherlands?
  - Can staff members put their networks to use?

NB: Give careful thought to the form of the message. In public diplomacy, the form is sometimes just as important as the content. It's not just what you say, but how you say it.

## **2.6 Selecting instruments**

Selecting instruments also requires a firm understanding of the local situation. Local staff can play an important role, but further research will sometimes be necessary. The available budget and human resources must also be taken into account. Instruments for public diplomacy can be divided into the following categories.

#### *The media*

Radio, television and print media are the most powerful instrument for public diplomacy, because they allow you to reach a wide public very quickly. That can yield outstanding results if things go well, but if the message is misunderstood the damage can be considerable. A sound understanding of the local media, and contacts within it, are crucial. Who is the audience for each newspaper, radio station and television programme? Which journalists are influential, professional and reliable?

It is also important for diplomats making a radio or TV appearance to have strong communication skills. It might also be a good idea for them to receive media training locally beforehand, since communication styles can vary enormously from country to country. Is a formal or informal style more usual, and what can you expect from the interviewer? Humour can break the ice, but only if local audiences understand and appreciate the jokes. Ask the Information and Communication Department's Press Division (DVL/PE) for information, advice or feedback on media appearances.

### *The Internet*

A mission's website is like a calling card for the Netherlands. If it is attractive, clearly organised and informative, it can give a broad public a good first impression and answer many of their questions. Tailor the contents of the website to the local users, as appropriate, and give information in the local language where possible. Of course, it is important to publicise the site properly. In publications, invitations and the like, point readers to the website if possible.

### *Publications*

Publications such as brochures, handbooks and magazines are becoming less important. Countries now tend to invest in an extensive website with good links, and sometimes in an e-newsletter, to which visitors to the website can subscribe for free. In less developed countries where computers are not widespread, print publications may still be a useful instrument.

### *Films, videos, CD-ROMs and DVDs*

Short films and videos/DVDs have much to recommend them as a means of presenting information. They can be shown on all sorts of occasions, and, of course, a picture is worth a thousand words. Try to move beyond promotional films; they may entertain the audience, but they are often seen as propaganda. Feature films and televised documentaries on specific topics often take a more provocative look at aspects of Dutch life, and they tend to be seen as reliable sources of information.

### *Projects and events*

The possibilities are endless: lectures, debates, parties, conferences, performances, special projects, seminar series or long-running campaigns. Large missions with sufficient budgets and human resources can develop their own initiatives, and smaller missions can take part in initiatives developed by others.

### *The mission and its staff*

Like the website, the mission building is a calling card. Visitors are impressed by public spaces that are clean, attractive and well-furnished, a friendly smile at the reception desk and a waiting area with interesting information about the Netherlands.

#### Checklist

- Will this instrument actually reach the target group?
- How much will it cost and does the expected result justify the costs?
- Are sufficient human resources available for the event?

## **2.7 Evaluation**

Although evaluation should be given the most thought when specific plans are being made, the strategy should also state how the mission intends to evaluate the activities. The nature and form of this evaluation are discussed below (section 3.5).

## 2.8 Model Public Diplomacy Strategy

### *Context*

Analysis of the bilateral relationship and the local image of the Netherlands

### *Goals*

In country X, the mission aims to achieve the following through public diplomacy:

- (e.g. solving problems X and Y/correcting misunderstandings)
- (e.g. raising investors' interest in the Netherlands or gaining better access to political forums/negotiations)
- (e.g. generating greater interest in the Netherlands in general because . . .)

### *The message*

The following themes/messages have been selected as means of achieving these goals. Each theme or message is accompanied by the relevant goal, and an explanation of why this is appropriate for the country in question. The mission also indicates whether a pro-active or defensive approach will be taken.

- (example: Dutch environmental technology; goal: making people better-informed about the Netherlands; dovetails with local interests; pro-active)
- (example: Dutch legislation on euthanasia; goal: deal with local misunderstandings and meet demand for information; defensive)

### *The public/target groups*

The mission has identified the following target groups:

- the target of message 1 will be group A. Group A was chosen because (e.g. it is one of the groups in which harmful misunderstandings about the Netherlands have arisen, and it is easy to reach with this message);
- the target of message 2 will be groups B and C. Group B was chosen because of the multiplier effect (for instance, because it consists of teachers). Group C was chosen because it is interested in this message.

### *Instruments*

The following instruments have been selected:

- Q and X, because they can reach group A and because the mission's network provides it with ready access to them;
- Y, despite its high cost, because it is highly effective and reaches a large audience;
- Z, because it provides an opportunity to package the message in an attractive way.

### *Evaluation*

This section states the means by which the mission intends to evaluate its public diplomacy activities.

### 3. Organisation and implementation of public diplomacy activities

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#### 3.1 Activity plan

The strategy merely indicates the general thrust of the mission's planned public diplomacy activities – the goals and basic outline. The mission's specific activities should be described in its activity plan. In most cases, this activity plan will dovetail with the mission's annual plan. The basic principles for developing specific activities are:

- the outline provided in the strategy;
- recent developments in the Netherlands and worldwide;
- special occasions (e.g. an anniversary of a historic event, a visit by members of the Royal House, Olympic Games, international crises);
- all sections should be involved both in designing and carrying out the activities;
- the budget;
- synergy among activities (planning two or three events a year around a central theme is preferable to organising many small-scale, ad hoc activities)

Developments in the Netherlands or worldwide may lead to new priorities and present new themes.

#### *Special occasions*

In 2002, the 400th anniversary of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was celebrated. Because many groups of South Africans strongly associate the VOC with colonialism and the embassy in Pretoria wanted to avoid negative publicity about the celebration, a South African professor was invited to write a paper informing the Dutch organisers of the VOC events and other relevant parties about the delicate and problematic aspects of celebrating this anniversary in South Africa. The result was that

the events there struck the right tone, and negative publicity was avoided. The paper is still used as background information for new embassy staff and other interested parties. In that same year, the embassy in Pretoria funded an exhibition and public debate in connection with the 350th anniversary of Cape Town.

### **3.2 Implementation**

#### *Draw up a careful and realistic plan*

Many missions report that in retrospect activities took more time, demanded more effort and often cost more money than anticipated. With that in mind, draw up a careful and realistic plan and reserve enough human resources. For large-scale events, it is useful to prepare a detailed “hour-by-hour” schedule and distribute it among all the participants.

#### *Make sure there is enough support within the embassy*

Usually, it is necessary for several, if not all sections of the mission to help prepare for the event. It is important for all the relevant sections to be involved in planning and preparations from an early stage. Staff members will be more motivated if they have had a say in the event than if they hear just two weeks in advance what is expected of them on the big day.

#### *Pay attention to details*

Even if the speaker is famous and his story is fascinating, the lecture will bomb if the sound system is defective. Details that are often seen as “secondary” and overlooked in the last-minute rush can make or break an event. Consider the accessibility of the location, the choice of date and the time of day – are there any other events at that time, or is it the start of a long weekend? Also consider the design of the invitations, the quality of the catering and so on. Factors like this can have a strong influence on the ultimate success of a gathering. Finally, consider the possibility of presenting attendees with a “typically Dutch” gift.

#### *Arrange for sufficient publicity*

It is important to arrange for sufficient publicity, especially for large-scale events. The mission’s website and other forms of internet publicity are a good start, but make sure that the information is also available in printed form and distributed well in advance.

#### *Budget and finances*

A realistic budget should be drawn up for each activity. Do not make your budget too tight; your true costs may be higher than expected. To supplement funds from the Ministry, the mission may also look for sponsors.



*Save all useful information in a database*

Make a habit of saving any useful information for future reference. That includes information about the location you almost selected (it might be the perfect place next time) or the organisation that could not participate (but might be available in the future). This will save you and your successors time and effort.

### **3.3 Working with external organisations**

It can be useful – and even necessary, when organising large-scale events – to work with external organisations such as companies, universities and think tanks. Not only can they act as sponsors, but they can also contribute their own networks and insights into the local situation. Select partners with a good reputation. When looking for partners, draw on the networks of the various sections and staff members at the mission. It is important to make clear, detailed, written agreements with external sponsors about who is responsible for funding what, and when. It is important to keep control over the event and not to lose sight of the original goal, especially if it was the mission that originally took the initiative. But this also applies in cases where the mission has agreed to participate in another organisation's initiative.

*Working with external and local organisations*

In 2004, the Consulate-General in Chicago organised a two-day symposium called “Sustainable Communities: Learning from the Dutch Experience” and an exhibition entitled “Two Centuries of Architecture in the Netherlands”.

Background:	Strong local interest in Dutch architecture, urban development, social housing, sustainable building and energy efficiency.
Goal:	Exchanging knowledge and experience in the above-mentioned areas.
Message:	The Netherlands is active and successful internationally in the areas of architecture, design, environmental technology and sustainability.
Target group:	Architects, urban planners, property developers, policymakers, scholars and organisations in the field of sustainability.
Participating organisations:	The organising committee comprised (in addition to the Consulate-General) the City of Chicago, the Illinois Institute of Technology, the Chicago Architecture Foundation, the Alphawood Foundation (which was also the biggest sponsor) and PPKS Architects Ltd.
Sources of funding:	Sponsoring, participants' fees and the Small Projects Programme (PKP), Embassy Cultural Projects Programme (PCAP) and Public-Private Partnerships Programme (PPP).
Outcome:	A successful, very high-profile initiative presenting the Netherlands as an innovative and forward-

looking society. The events also allowed the Consulate-General to forge strong new relationships in the sectors involved. Furthermore, the symposium led to a number of follow-up activities.

### **3.4 Public diplomacy following unforeseen events**

Unforeseen events, such as the murder of Theo van Gogh and the social unrest that followed in the Netherlands, demand a swift response on the mission's part. Information presented clearly and coherently and a well-worded message must be available very soon after. The information must be passed on to all members of staff, because diplomats are often asked about the latest news at receptions and meetings. The same information, though possibly in a different form, should also be posted on the website.

If the news provokes outrage or incomprehension in the host country or region, it may be advisable to take further steps and to explain the background and context. Missions can hold special meetings, as did the embassy in Madrid after the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, or they can spread their message through the local media, with guest editorials in the paper, for instance, or interviews on the radio and television. The news can also be discussed briefly at other, already scheduled events.

### **3.5 Evaluation and accountability**

#### *Evaluation and accountability*

Evaluation is always necessary, even though the effects of some measures are difficult to gauge. Small-scale activities can be evaluated in just a page or two. Large-scale events require lengthier reports.

Evaluation serves three purposes:

1. result measurement: it assesses the outcome of the activities relative to the original goals;
2. learning from experience: gaining insight into what went well and what went badly; making a list of areas for improvement and suggestions;
3. accounting for spending.

Evaluation reports should include the following sections:

- introduction describing the programme or activity and the goal
- factual account
- evaluation:
  - organisational matters
  - level of interest and appreciation shown by the target group
  - media attention received by the activities
- conclusion: was the goal achieved?
- lessons learned, list of areas for improvement and suggestions
- financial reporting.

### *Measuring results*

The ultimate impact of an activity is hard to measure, especially in the long term. Some aspects are measurable, however, and can often give a reasonable indication of the activity's effectiveness.

- How many people attended each event?
- How much media attention was there?
- Was there a lot of feedback following the activities?
- Were follow-up activities requested?

Short evaluation forms can be used for seminars and similar meetings.

### **3.6 Options for small missions**

Small missions have limited budgets and human resources, but that is no reason for them to forget about public diplomacy. Major annual events and other large-scale plans are not feasible, of course, but with a little creativity small missions can often achieve more than you might expect, and small-scale activities can have significant results. Once again, a strategy is called for, one which takes account of all the limitations of a small mission.

Consider the following strategies:

- supporting an existing local initiative;
- international cooperation, e.g. with other Benelux or EU missions;
- adopting or imitating elements of activities carried out by other Dutch missions;
- drawing on the Ministry's budget for one-off, large-scale projects;
- asking companies with local branches to act as sponsors and provide human resources;
- work placements.

### *Public diplomacy at small missions*

1. In 2004, the embassy in Athens organised an evening of debate on European issues to highlight the priorities of the Dutch EU Presidency. The participants came from the world of politics, academia and the media. The local press called it a "highly original" activity.

2. In February 2005, the President of Nicaragua was scheduled to lay the first stone for the new Dutch embassy building in Managua. In response to recent incidents in the Netherlands and Nicaragua, the embassy seized this occasion to organise a series of events on the theme of tolerance: a forum, a play about Anne Frank, a concert by a Dutch trumpet player and Nicaraguan groups, and a Dutch Film Week with films on the theme of tolerance. A number of responsibilities were assigned to an independent contractor, and there was close cooperation with local organisations.

## 4. Overviews

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### 4.1 Tips and lessons learned

- Keep your goals realistic and your message clear.
- Make sure the topic and message appeal to the intended target group.
- Do not propagandise. Don't make the message more positive than the reality; be frank about problems and the downside of Dutch policy. Enter into dialogue; take serious note of criticism from the target group, and present the activity as an opportunity for all parties to learn from each other.
- Consider the timing. Look for opportunities to send your chosen messages, and take advantage of chance events.
- See if you can learn from staff at other countries' missions in your host country or at Dutch missions in other countries who have organised similar events. Usually, they will be glad to share their experiences.
- At large-scale events:
  - Do not underestimate the time needed to prepare.
  - Do not make your budget too tight.
  - Get other sections of the mission involved from an early stage.
  - Make a detailed, step-by-step plan.
- Find out whether it is possible and advisable to work with external organisations.
- When working with external partners:
  - Make sure they have a good reputation.
  - Stay in control of the event.
  - Make detailed agreements about who will do what.
- Pay attention to details: make sure every part of the event is carefully managed.
- Make sure there is enough publicity.
- Invite the local media, if appropriate.

- Think about follow-up activities.
- Let DVL know what kind of support you need.

References: relevant literature, links, contact persons and other sources of information

#### **4.2 What types of support does the Ministry offer?**

##### *Information and practical support*

The public diplomacy desk offers two kinds of information:

- factual information on topics of current interest, including social issues: please contact Tessa Martens, ext. 4978;
- practical pointers.

The Information and Communication Department (DVL) can supply the following materials:

- films, DVDs, brochures
- teaching materials
- an annual promotional gift.

##### *Financial support*

For information about financial support and assessment criteria for public diplomacy activities, please contact Fred van Kuilenburg, ext. 5004.

##### *Visitors' Programme for "influentials"*

Information is available from the public diplomacy desk on the Ministry's intranet (*BZ-net*).

##### *General advice and feedback*

Please contact Sabine Lucassen, ext. 6606, with any questions about the right strategy and approach, for studies and evaluations, or with your own comments and suggestions.

#### **4.3 Where can I find factual information?**

- Newspaper websites:  
[www.nrc.nl](http://www.nrc.nl); [www.volkskrant.nl](http://www.volkskrant.nl); [www.telegraaf.nl](http://www.telegraaf.nl); [www.trouw.nl](http://www.trouw.nl);  
[http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algemeen\\_Dagblad](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algemeen_Dagblad)
- Websites of press agencies:  
 The Wereldomroep (the Dutch world service): <http://www2.rnw.nl/rnw/nl>; ANP  
 (the main Dutch press agency): [www.anp.nl](http://www.anp.nl);  
 NOS (the Dutch public news broadcaster): [www.nos.nl](http://www.nos.nl).

Where can I find photos, video footage and other publicity materials?

You can order a list of photos, video footage and other publicity materials from [www.bestelsite-vb.nl](http://www.bestelsite-vb.nl).

#### 4.4 Further reading and links

Many of the publications below are available only in Dutch. Indicative English translations of the titles have been provided.

##### *Websites*

- US Public Diplomacy Website:  
<http://www.publicdiplomacy.org>
- Foreign Policy Centre (UK):  
<http://fpc.org.uk/topics/public-diplomacy>
  - University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy:  
<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com>

##### *Books*

- Duijvestijn, H.H. et al., *Branding NL: Nederland als merk* (Brand NL: The Netherlands as a brand), The Hague: Stichting Maatschappij en Onderneming (SMO), 2004.
- Melissen, Jan, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005.
- Nye, J.S., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs Press, 2004.
- Leonard, Mark, *Public Diplomacy*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2002.

##### *Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme articles and papers*

- Batora, Jozef, "Public Diplomacy in Small and Medium-Sized States: Norway and Canada", Discussion Paper in Diplomacy No. 97, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, March 2005.
- Ham, Peter van, "Merk toch hoe sterk: hoe branding het politieke toneel verandert" ("How branding is changing the political scene"), *Internationale Spectator* 56/7-8 (July-August 2002).
- Ham, Peter van, "Branding European Power", *Place Branding* 1/2 (March 2005).
- d'Hooghe, Ingrid and Jan Melissen, "Publieksdiplomatie op herhaling. Pleidooi voor een nationale aanpak" ("Public diplomacy returns: the case for a national approach"), *Internationale Spectator*, 59/7-8 (July-August 2005).
- Melissen, Jan, "Nederlandse publieksdiplomatie op weg naar nieuw beleid" ("Dutch public diplomacy: towards a new approach"), *Internationale Spectator*, 57/4, April 2003.
- Melissen, Jan, "Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy", Clingendael Diplomacy Paper No. 2, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, May 2005.
- Potter, Evan H, "Canada and the New Public Diplomacy", Discussion Paper in Diplomacy No. 81, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, July 2002.

- Riordan, Shaun, “Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm?”, Discussion Paper in Diplomacy No. 95, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, November 2004.
- Schneider, Cynthia P., “Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy that Works”, Discussion Paper in Diplomacy No. 94, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, September 2004.

#### *Reports*

- Het Imago van Nederland in het Buitenland. Kwalitatief Onderzoek in opdracht van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2000). (The image of the Netherlands abroad: a qualitative study commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2000)).
- Publieksdiplomatie in beeld. BZ en de buitenlandse straat. (Focusing on public diplomacy: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the foreign street.) Clingendael pilot study commissioned by the International Information and Communication Division (DVL/VB) (2003).

Commissioned by: Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Information and Communication Department

Carried out by: Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme (CDSP)  
Netherlands Institute of International Relations  
“Clingendael”  
Prof. Jan Melissen and Ingrid d’Hooghe  
July 2005

# Clingendael Diplomacy Papers

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*UN Reform and NATO Transformation: The Missing Link*, by Dick A. Leurdijk, October 2005, 35 p. Price: € 11,50, ISBN 90 531 104 0

*Rethinking Track Two Diplomacy: The Middle East and South Asia*, by Dalia Dassa Kaye, June 2005, 31 p. Price: € 8,00, ISBN 90 5031 101 6

*Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy*, by Jan Melissen, May 2005, 30 p. Price: € 7,50 ISBN 90 5031 1098 2

*Power and legitimacy. The quest for order in a unipolar world*, by Alfred van Staden, April 2005, 55 p. Price: € 12,50 ISBN 90 5031 097 4