

# Defence diplomacy and international relations

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## Abstract

*Significant changes in international relations have occurred over the last 30 years. The fall of the Berlin Wall can be perceived as the start of a new era because nothing has been the same since. In a short period of time, large countries disintegrated, while defence and security challenges changed dramatically. Simultaneously, there was a shift in the role of military attachés, whose responsibilities underwent changes and who were included in defence and security cooperation on a higher level. Defence attachés now act as an important link in the cooperation among bilateral partners, members of alliances and organisations fostering cooperation and confidence-building measures. This paper discusses new approaches to defence diplomacy and underscores its importance in creating a secure environment. It also lays stress on the means of developing trust among partner countries. The aim of this paper is to showcase changes in the field of defence diplomacy as well as new forms and trends in international defence policy, along with the role which defence policy plays on the international stage in the development of international bilateral and multilateral trust and security.*

## Keywords

*diplomacy, defence diplomacy, attaché, defence diplomacy role*

## Introduction

Significant changes in international relations have occurred over the last 30 years. The fall of the Berlin Wall can be perceived as the start of a new era because nothing has been the same since. States disintegrated in a short period of time. Countries of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia fought for independence in their own ways. New relations, both bilateral and multilateral, began to emerge on the international stage. New realities on the international scene necessitated a new approach to international cooperation. States which had until recently belonged to opposing alliances became friends and allies practically overnight, connected by shared interests and security challenges. Modern times and the rapid pace of environmental change require an appropriate response. In international relations, the mode of communication and cooperation in the field of diplomacy is changing. Consequently, the working methods as well as the role and position of military diplomacy are evolving.

The aim of this paper is to showcase changes in the field of defence diplomacy as well as new forms and trends in international defence policy, along with the role which defence policy plays on the international stage in the development of international bilateral and multilateral trust and security.

Sources in Croatian concerned with the topic of defence diplomacy are scarce, therefore it is necessary to write about this issue and discuss it more extensively. Authors who have written on this topic include Bilandžić (1998), Ćutić (2010), Kos-Stanišić and Domjančić (2021) and Ogorec (2005) in Croatia, as well as Cheyre (2013), Cottey and Forster (2004) and Drab (2018) in other countries.

Official documents of ministries of defence in Croatia<sup>1</sup>, Denmark (Denmark. Danish Ministry of Defence, 2009) and Spain also address this topic and a document from the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Spain (Spain. Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2012) will be used as an illustration in

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<sup>1</sup> Curriculum for the defence diplomacy course at the Croatian Defence Academy (CDA). The course has been conducted at the CDA since 1994, and was given international character in 2007. It is attended by foreign participants and it has been conducted in English since 2010.

this paper. The Handbook on the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (European Union, 2013) will serve as an example for the defence diplomacy of an international organization. The definition, role and forms of defence diplomacy will be discussed in this paper in order to advance the trust and understanding among bilateral partners in the field of defence and security, as well as to enhance the multilateral action within the framework of international organizations.

### **The old role of defence diplomacy**

According to Ogorec (2009), the development of military diplomacy as well as the roles and tasks of military delegations have been reduced to various forms of intelligence activity over the last century. In fact, the Cold War defined the primacy of diplomatic intelligence on a global scale, which caused diplomatic intelligence to be perceived as synonymous with military diplomacy. Moreover, according to Bilandžić (1998),

*“although the possible order should be different, in practice it was so that the role of the military envoy as a kind of ‘link’ between the ministry of defence of their country and the ministry of defence of the receiving country came second to the role of the intelligence officer. Additionally, the military/defence representative was the adviser to the head of the diplomatic mission for military affairs. This order of priorities is clear in light of the mistrust that existed among allied countries, as well. The situation was such because alliances were temporary and only binding until a limited, agreed-upon objective had been attained. It was common for allies to change during the conflict.”<sup>2</sup>*

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2 Translated by author from the original source in the Croatian language.

## **“New” defence diplomacy**

Defence diplomacy has played an increasingly important role in recent times. According to Drab (2018), *defence diplomacy* is a new term that has arisen out of the need for a better description of the cooperation among states and international organizations following the end of the Cold War.

### ***Definition***

As each nation defines the term in accordance with its interests and the needs of its foreign security policy, no precise definition of defence diplomacy has yet been established. According to Drab (2018), “... the growing role of defence diplomacy, as a tool for the implementation of the state’s foreign policy, has resulted in the replacement of the previously frequently used term ‘military diplomacy’ as a term with an intrinsically limited meaning.” This is because the new strategy for global defence-military cooperation is significantly broader and more complex.

In his work on defence diplomacy, Drab (2018) quotes definitions from a variety of authors (Cottey and Forster, 2004; Dodd and Oakes, 1998; Seng Tan and Singh, 2012) as well as documents from defence ministries of Germany, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The conclusion of the author’s comparison and analysis is that defence diplomacy plays an important role in shaping and implementing security policy in many countries as a specialized instrument of their foreign policies. Furthermore, it has a permanent place in the system of cooperation between states and international organizations.

It can be said that defence diplomacy is becoming more complex and demanding. The aforementioned definitions of the term typically provide a general description and interpretation without delving into specifics. As a consequence, one can change the definition of the term and add to it as one sees fit. In our view, the definition from the Defence Diplomacy Plan by the Spanish Ministry of Defence provides a sufficient explanation and a clear framework for understanding the term *defence diplomacy*: “various international activities based mainly on dialogue and cooperation, carried

out bilaterally by the Ministry of Defence with allies, partners and other friendly countries in the promotion and achievement of defence policy goals in support of the national foreign policy” (Spain. Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2012)

### *The role of defence diplomacy*

During the 1990s, a new approach to military diplomacy developed. The role of the military envoy expanded and exceeded the scope of the role of a commissioned officer who monitored the situation in the armed forces of the receiving country. Increasingly, emphasis was placed on the cooperation with the ministry of defence of the receiving country and the policy level. The title *Defence Attaché* was accepted in a large number of countries and the main form of work in defence diplomacy came to combine diplomatic and military “tools”. Defence diplomacy activities today include:

- Provision of military advice and assistance to countries implementing reforms in the defence sector;
- Establishment of mixed civilian and military missions in conflict or post-conflict areas;
- Development of new arms control, disarmament, security, and confidence building measures; and Response to needs in conflict areas during or after conflict (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2007).

In its policy document on defence diplomacy, the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom interprets the role of defence diplomacy as follows: “[to provide forces to fulfil the various activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defence to deter hostilities, build and maintain confidence and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to preventing and resolving conflicts” (United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence, 2000). Cheyre (2013) also states that “defence diplomacy connects the implementation of foreign policy goals with the goals of the defence sector.”

Cotter and Forster's (2004) work discusses the negative effects of cooperation with authoritarian regimes in the defence domain: "Western governments give the impression of being hypocritical, negative attitudes towards "Western" or Euro-Atlantic democratic systems arise, and the objectives of Western defence diplomacy are at times contrasting and conflicting. Such mismatches can generate diverging approaches and influences, thus undermining the prospects for democratization of civil-military relations and contributing to the failure to bring about significant changes in civil-military relations".

As a result of the inconsistency in the efforts, Western countries are reluctant to engage troops in risky humanitarian interventions in which immediate national interests are not involved, even though they have the capacity to act in crises. (Cotter and Forster, 2004)

One example from the recent past is Afghanistan, where international military and diplomatic forces were present for two decades, trying to adapt the traditional ethnic and tribal lifestyle to the Western understanding of state organization. Ultimately, the military and diplomatic efforts of the international community resulted in the withdrawal from Afghanistan and handing the country over to the Taliban. As the intention of this work is not to analyse the success or failure of international civil and defence diplomacy in an isolated case, other experts and security analysts are called upon to consider the Afghanistan case and draw conclusions.

Defence diplomacy largely stems from the need of Western European countries and the USA to give aid to countries in conflict so as to stop hostilities and to provide assistance in the transition and creation of lasting peace in the post-conflict period. The United Kingdom was the first country to define defence diplomacy, mentioning the concept and referring to the role of the attaché in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. After the attacks on New York City on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the United Kingdom drew up a new Strategic Defence Review called *New Chapter*. The importance of defence diplomacy in responding to the causes of conflict and terrorism, as well as the benefits arising from its broad approach, is emphasized in the document. Through defence diplomacy, British defence envoys play an important role

in the country's counter-terrorism policy (United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence, 2000).

Shea (2005) finds that security cooperation and the war on terrorism have increased the strategic importance of military/defence envoys. Military envoys have provided enormous assistance to commanders of combat units as operators and reporters in the coordinated deployment of US armed forces in the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as in the training and equipping programme in Georgia. Still, military envoys have four main intermingling missions: advising their ambassador; representing their ministry of defence in the receiving country; reporting on the situation in the receiving country; and managing security cooperation programmes.

Ogorec (2009) states that forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation have developed over a long period, with defence envoys playing a significant role in the process. They are the key links in the bilateral cooperation in the fields of defence, security etc. In this sense, the tasks of defence envoys are close to those of civilian diplomats.

Military diplomacy supports civilian diplomacy by providing vital military and security information. Defence diplomacy is, therefore, developing alongside civilian diplomacy. This has been brought about by the increase in scope, type and quantity of activities that require specific knowledge which cannot be mastered through short briefings and courses. Activities in the field of defence diplomacy require engagement of high-ranking military personnel who have acquired the knowledge, skills and abilities of military professions, which are the key to the successful representation of one's armed.

In order to acquire diplomatic skills, officers of the armed forces undergo appropriate training aimed at comprehending the complexities of diplomatic efforts. Therefore, ministries of defence prepare officers before assigning them to duties of military and defence representatives in diplomatic missions. In his paper from the Diplomatic Forum, Čutić (2010) presented the defence diplomacy programme of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, aimed at preparing military and civilian personnel for new duties and challenges. The purpose of the programme is to educate civil servants

and officers of the armed forces from Croatia and other countries in topics related to international relations and diplomatic activities, with an emphasis on defence diplomacy.

It is important to emphasize that defence envoys are not the only military diplomats representing the armed forces of their country. Today, representatives of armed forces also include military personnel who in international organizations, headquarters and commands, participate in international missions and operations, participate in seminars, conferences and workshops, and train in military educational institutions of partner countries.

It can be concluded that almost all aspect of life in any country are intertwined with defence and security. The safety and security of one social activity is linked to the safety and security of other activities. This has led to the emergence of such concepts as economy security, information security, cybersecurity, energy security etc.

### *New trends in defence (military diplomacy)*

The challenges that arise every day in the field of defence and security require a flexible approach in planning and implementing activities. To illustrate the new approach to defence diplomacy, Ćutić's (2010) analysis and a document by the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Spain will be presented (Spain, Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2012).

Kos-Stanišić and Domjančić (2021) share the view intelligence activities had been a priority in military diplomacy until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the post-Cold War period, defence diplomacy has centred on emerging relations, partnerships and cooperation.

Ćutić (2010) recognizes the following forms of activity and cooperation in the field of defence:<sup>3</sup>

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3 Not all activities listed are exclusively connected with the duties of the defence envoy, but they are relevant in the defence envoy's role as the link which connects partners in the implementation of activities.



- High-level strategic security dialogues,
- Cooperation in non-traditional security areas,
- Regional defence and security cooperation,
- Military educational exchange programmes,
- Representation of several countries by one envoy,<sup>4</sup>
- Representation of one country by the defence envoy of an allied or partner country in some activities,
- Joint assistance actions,
- Cooperation by partner countries in assisting third countries through defence envoys,
- Employing specialists from partner countries for aid and consultation on a specific issue,
- Employing specialists from partner countries for assistance in security sector reform,
- Embedding military personnel,<sup>5</sup>
- Confidence and security measures (CSBM),
- Joint assistance in reconstruction of fallen states,
- Joint preparation and implementation of construction projects (facilities needed by the local population, such as schools, hospitals, bridges, roads, wells etc.),
- Military-industry cooperation,
- Purchase of weapons and equipment as well as development of new technologies,
- Joint exercises,

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4 This is, for example, the case with Nordic countries. Their relations and forms of cooperation in the military field are regulated by the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland, the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Norway, and the government of the Kingdom of Sweden concerning Nordic co-ordinated arrangement for military peace support (NORDCAPS), signed in Helsinki, Finland on November 5 2009.

5 Embedded personnel represent the armed forces of the countries where they are sent to work.

- Participation in missions and operations as well as military exercises with the aim of developing joint capabilities and compatibility,
- Construction of a military organization,
- Military Training Assistance Programme (MTAP).

By comparing the professional work of Ćutić (2010), similarities and in some parts identical forms of activity and cooperation in the field of defence diplomacy can be observed.

A reform of the defence sector includes the adjustment of the armed forces and thus its individual units. These units need to adapt to new tactical and operational activities suitable for new challenges, so that they are compatible with the armed forces of partner countries and speak the same “language” as they do when cooperating or participating in international missions and operations with them.

Other programmes are being developed as an added quality to cooperation and a measure of trust building among partners:

- Arms control: exchange of inspection teams that supervise and control weapon systems, assets and weapons,
- Navy ship visits: visit by a partner country navy ships, small-scale exercises by the navies, meetings with the representatives of local authorities and tours of the ships for civilians,
- Air shows: performance by air force display teams at civil-military events.

This overview of the forms and areas of defence cooperation is the result of Ćutić’s extensive experience as an officer of the armed forces in charge of military cooperation with bilateral partners and international organizations and as head of the Service for International Defence Cooperation of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia.

A similar approach and a similar list of tools and activities can be found in the Defence Diplomacy Plan by the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Spain. The document states: “to achieve its goals, defence diplomacy can use and combine different instruments, the relative importance of which depends on the goal achieved and the area of activity” (Spain. Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2012).

The document further details various instruments used in defence diplomacy: cooperation agreements, representation and exchange, official visits, high-level visits, visits of military ships and aircraft to seaports and military airfields respectively as well as visits to military units. In addition, security sector reform, strengthening the defence capabilities of armed forces, education and training, participation in military exercises, bilateral meetings and industrial-technological cooperation also occupy an important position in defence diplomacy (Spain. Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2012).

The abovementioned examples show that defence diplomacy comprises a wide range of activities which can be expanded in accordance with interests of a particular country. The national defence system of a country and the armed forces (as its component) are increasingly carrying out non-traditional tasks as a part of bilateral cooperation and through multilateral activities agreed within the framework of international defence organizations and alliances.

### *Common security and defence policy of the European Union*

So as to observe the instruments and forms of defence policy within international organizations, the European Union (EU) is taken as an example of an international organization with developed tools for international defence policy and defence diplomacy. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is an integral part of the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management. Reliant on civilian and military resources, the CSDP enables the Union to take a leading role in peacekeeping operations, conflict prevention and strengthening of international security.

*Handbook on CSDP* (European Union, 2013) helps acquire better understanding of the complex system that is the European security and defence policy. The purpose of the book, as stated in an introduction by Norbert Darabos<sup>6</sup>, is to introduce and train a larger number of people to work more efficiently within the CSDP.

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6 Federal Minister of Defence and Sports in the Republic of Austria at the time of the publication of the book

The chapter on the European External Action Service is an integral part of the handbook. This chapter establishes the position, role and political goals of this Service, which include the creation and maintenance of "... a safe, stable and prosperous European neighbourhood, closer relations with strategic partners, universal respect for human rights, expansion of democracy and the rule of law, policy of sustainable development and crisis management and conflict prevention." (European Union, 2013)

The policy objectives clearly state the priorities and the role of each individual actor, including civil and defence diplomacy. These objectives are highlighted as subchapters in Chapter 7 of *Handbook on CSDP* (European Union, 2013). The main priority is the cooperation with third countries and international organizations. The neighbourhood policy is directed towards the Union's close neighbours in the east and south, where the policy is adapted to each country. Other priorities are the EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, security sector reform, human rights and gender aspects. The overall aim is to increase prosperity, security and stability, with emphasis being placed on a stable and secure EU neighbourhood.

An important part of *Handbook on CSDP* (European Union, 2013) is Chapter 8, which is intended for training and education in the field of CSDP. For this purpose, the European Security and Defence College was established and the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers was launched. Cooperation with other educational institutions and initiatives is also being fostered.<sup>7</sup>

The CSDP demonstrates how serious and complex defence policy and diplomacy are. Whereas only military knowledge once sufficed for the position of a military envoy, contemporary complex and demanding international relations have necessitated specialist training for military diplomacy, which may lead to its development into a separate profession or military specialty,

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<sup>7</sup> European Security and Defence College (ESDC), <https://esdc.europa.eu/military-erasmus/> [Accessed 1st July 2022]

## *Structure and organization*

It is necessary to carry out appropriate activities in the preparation for and implementation of duties in defence diplomacy. Activities can be divided into two categories. One category refers to familiarizing officers with diplomatic duties through forms of preparation that differ from country to country. The second category refers to administrative and technical aspects of defence diplomacy.

Familiarizing officers with the duties of defence diplomacy is a process. Officers are used to performing standard military tasks in a rigid, hierarchical system. During the aforementioned process, they are acclimatized to working in a more flexible diplomatic environment, with different rules and regulations. Each country has its own approach to this process.

In the process, it is important to familiarize future national defence representatives with the hierarchy and hierarchical roles of two ministries in the host country: the Ministry of Defence, as the organization to which and officer belongs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the diplomatic organization to which the officer is conditionally assigned.

## **Conclusion**

In the last two decades, especially since the terrorist attack on New York City September 11 2001, and the beginning of the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, many countries have been looking for solutions that would allow them to maintain the necessary defence capabilities for national and international needs. For this purpose, they have employed defence envoys, who make first contact with the representatives of the partner countries, examining the possibilities and forms of cooperation. Over time, forms of cooperation have expanded and deepened. Cooperation between partners on a bilateral and multilateral level goes beyond the classic role of the military envoy, the defence envoy or the military adviser. It is predicted that bilateral and multilateral cooperation will continue its upward trajectory, in which forms of cooperation will intertwine and complement each other, thus building a

secure environment full of trust. Civil diplomacy will continue to diversify from defence and military diplomacy. These types of diplomacy will develop as parallel systems, but will still jointly build a safe environment for the life progress of the many national civil societies.

The role of defence diplomatic representatives is changing. Due to the changes in the security environment and financial restrictions, some countries such as Denmark, Belgium, Slovakia.. have reduced the number of defence representatives in their delegations and diplomatic missions or abolished military-defence diplomatic missions altogether. Instead, the military-diplomatic network is upheld by awarding co-accreditations to defence missions in the region of South east Europe. This is especially applicable in cases where both the sending country and the receiving country are members of the same international organization (e.g. the EU or NATO), but their ministries of defence and armed forces have no strong bilateral relations. On the other hand, emphasis is laid on the presence of military and diplomatic representatives in countries outside Euro-Atlantic organizations.

Optimal solutions for the role of defence diplomacy in the future are being sought. Bearing in mind the dynamics of events in international relations, different solutions are possible. What is clear is that the era of classic defence diplomacy (directed towards bilateral relations between the two systems of national defence) is over.

New challenges require a new approach to defence diplomacy, which increasingly requires specialist training and education, and even officers who will specialize in defence diplomacy. New developments point to a type of defence diplomacy best described as “bilateral for the sake of multilateralism”<sup>8</sup>: two partner countries join efforts to establish defence, provide assistance, transfer knowledge and act jointly towards third countries, regions or even continents.

This paper should serve as an initiative, motivation and challenge to other scientists and researchers, in Croatia and abroad, for the consideration and

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8 The term originally introduced by the author.

analysis of the framework, development and potential of defence diplomacy as a tool in the prevention and deterrence of possible future conflicts.

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## Obrambena diplomacija i međunarodni odnosi

### Sažetak

*U posljednjih 30 godina došlo je do važnih promjena u međunarodnim odnosima. Za početak nove ere može se uzeti pad Berlinskog zida jer od tada ništa više nije isto. U kratkom vremenskom razdoblju raspale su se velike zemlje. Obrambeni i sigurnosni izazovi dramatično su se promijenili. Usporedno s tim, promjene su uvjetovale znatnu promjenu uloge vojnih atašea, koji su dobili svoju novu ulogu i postali uključeni u višu razinu suradnje u području obrane i sigurnosti. Obrambeni atašei sada su važna karika u bilateralnoj suradnji među bilateralnim partnerima članstvom u međunarodnim organizacijama i organizacijama koje rade u korist suradnje i mjera izgradnje povjerenja i sigurnosti. Ovaj rad govori o novim pristupima obrambenoj diplomaciji i naglašava njezinu važnost u izgradnji sigurnog okruženja i načinu izgradnje povjerenja među partnerskim zemljama. Svrha je ovoga rada prikazati promjene u području obrambene diplomacije te nove oblike i trendove međunarodne obrambene politike i ulogu obrambene politike u međunarodnom okruženju u svrhu izgradnje i postizanja međunarodnog bilateralnog i multilateralnog povjerenja i sigurnosti.*

### Ključne riječi

*diplomacija, obrambena diplomacija, ataše, uloga obrambene diplomacije*