Public Diplomacy and the Republic of Cyprus: Potentials and Perils

Maria Tselepou
University of Cyprus

Abstract

This paper examines the history, practice, possibilities and problems associated with the use of public diplomacy in the Republic of Cyprus. First, I present the links among public diplomacy, soft power and competitive identity. In particular, I assert public diplomacy is a collaborative process between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and/or the citizens of a country as well as the international audience. This approach provides a better mutual understanding and re-brands a nation. Using Cyprus as a case study, I argue public diplomacy is an essential tool in the modern age, especially for small-sized states or places which experience economic and political crises and have few resources. Given Cyprus’ European identity, large diaspora compared to its size and celebrities of Cypriot origin, I posit small-sized states may benefit from the use of innovative practices of public diplomacy. However, they must be mindful of the potential dangers of such.
**Introduction**

The study of public diplomacy is a fast emerging field in the theory of international relations and foreign policy. As a practice, it is a continuous adoptive tool used by many states regardless of their size and strength. A large body of work has been written on the definition of public diplomacy. Despite the amount of research, scholars have not reached a common definition of the practice. A widely accepted definition is one presented by Nicholas Cull which defines public diplomacy as:

> the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications (Cull 2009a: 19).

Public diplomacy is connected with soft power. This term was coined by Nye (2004). According to Nye’s definition, soft power is the ability to influence the behaviour of other states to get the outcomes you want through a state’s culture and political values. Nye (2011: 21) extends the traditional definition to include ‘the ability to affect other through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction to obtain preferred outcomes’. Public diplomacy and soft power are also connected with the concept of nation branding or otherwise the competitive identity of Simon Anholt (2007). Nation branding refers to how a state is perceived by foreign countries and audiences. Public Diplomacy is a sub-category of the nation brand, promoting the political brand of a state.

I use Cyprus as a case study to emphasize the importance of public diplomacy of small-sized states. Additionally, I assert there is a need of de-Americanization of the study of public diplomacy, moving from the study of larger states to small states. However, there is no widely accepted definition of a small state and scholars disagree on what kind of criteria such as population, land area and income are most appropriate to characterize the small state. In any case, small states should be further studied as they are the majority in the system and due to importance of supranational organizations such as the UN and the EU. Another area in need of research is how the relationships among actors influence policies. Institutions and policies may be investigated not only as the outcome of great-power bargains, but also in terms of the actors' relations (Neumann and Gstohl 2004).

Cyprus, regardless of the criteria used, is considered a small-sized state in the Eastern Mediterranean at the crossroads of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. It has a population of about a million and limited economic resources. Moreover, it is a semi-occupied country as a result of the Turkish invasion in 1974. However, Cyprus remains a fully recognized state member of the UN and from 2004 has become member of the EU. In the following sections, I discuss the possibilities and dangers that may result if Cyprus engages further in public diplomacy. In his discussion, I
focus on the island’s European identity, the Greek-Cypriot diaspora and celebrities of Cypriot origin.

**The European Identity of Cyprus as a Tool of Public Diplomacy**

The main argument of the paper is the practice of public diplomacy by small states holds opportunities and dangers as evidenced by the Cyprus case. One opportunity stems from the country’s participation in the EU since 2004. The membership has strengthened Cyprus’ global image and reputation. If properly used, it may continue to enhance the state in the eyes of the international arena. Few studies published examine Cyprus’ position within a European public diplomacy context. Probably, due to its restricted strength, limited capabilities and lack of special groundwork, Cyprus risks of staying out of competition in terms of public diplomacy, within a European and a global context.

Cyprus repeatedly uses its European identity to demonstrate it is a force of stability and peace in its region. This is a point that almost all Cypriot statesmen underline in their public speeches (Famagusta Gazette 2014). However, for a successful public diplomacy words must be followed by actions. Otherwise, the state runs the risk of simply distributing information without building long-term relationships. (Cull 2009).

Cyprus uses traditional and modern means to present its European identity. The Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC), a semi-governmental service, broadcasts internationally in Greek, Turkish and English, via radio and satellite television. Targeted regions are the rest of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. CyBC contributes regularly to EuroNews and the CNN World report. As common practice for all EU member states, Cyprus has a dedicated information centre to promote the mobility of European students. The government administers a few scholarships, but these education opportunities are not widely promoted. Moreover, the country also lacks a dedicated cultural relations agency (Fiske de Gouvela and Plumridge 2005). This is the reason why Cyprus participates in the European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) with its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

In addition to traditional means of promotion, the Cyprus MFA holds pages on the most popular social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. These social media outlets are used to promote its European identity and image. However, there is very little interaction between the Cyprus MFA and its followers. Thus, Cyprus runs the risk of simply distributing information without building long-term relationships. (Cull 2009).
Cypriot Diaspora as an Instrument of Public Diplomacy

Diaspora is considered as an instrument of public diplomacy as it reaffirms the view of the people-to-people approach. Cyprus has experienced a large Greek-Cypriot diaspora. Its people are dispersed over the world: The US and Canada, Europe and especially the UK, Australia and Africa. According to unofficial estimates more than half of Cypriots live abroad (Paroikiaki 2014). The reach of the Greek-Cypriot diaspora is broader and deeper than that of the official diplomats as they are themselves the image of their country of origin abroad. However, as not all the expatriates speak and act alike, the state may be misrepresented.

The Greek-Cypriot diaspora is an untapped foreign policy resource for the Cypriot government in its policy formation. They are a resource due to their dual experience and balanced political critique. Consequently, the community’s knowledge and views could be used to improve the international relations of Cyprus through the promotion of its policies and interests. Many countries, including the US and China have realized the unique role of their expatriates and have engaged them with several initiatives (Trent 2012; Hongmei 2012; Ding 2014).

However, the Cyprus MFA implements an anachronistic practice of engagement of its diaspora movement through its Service for Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots. The division states it ‘ensures continuous and close contact with overseas Cypriots and the preservation of their cultural heritage and identity. The division helps the overseas Cypriots to maintain their links with Cyprus and assists them with any problems or needs that may arise’ (MFA 2014). In particular, it assists Cypriots worldwide, including assistance pertaining to education. To remain connected with the community, it organizes conferences and exhibitions on matters relating to overseas Cypriots and their links with Cyprus. Additionally, it supports the publication of a magazine entitled ‘Our Cyprus’ targeting overseas and repatriated Cypriots. The maintenance of Cypriot culture is an important focus. To facilitate the retention of their native culture, the division provides assistance to overseas Cypriot communities support for language programs, youth programs and visits to Cyprus. Cypriot entrepreneurs are encouraged to invest in Cyprus. Moreover, it encourages research regarding the history of the Cypriot diaspora. Lastly, it provides material about Cypriot history and culture to associations of overseas Cypriots (MFA 2014). However, the division does not mention the need to support the Cypriot diaspora to act as everyday diplomats and mediators. Thereby, improving the image of the country abroad and ultimately enhancing the island’s bilateral relations.

The conferences organised by have a similar agenda year to year. In these conferences the Service for Overseas and Repatriated Cypriots does not tap the potential of every Cypriot emigrant as everyday diplomat. If this perspective changes, we should not ignore the fact that problems might erupt from the democratic nature of the process, as it is neither easy nor legitimate to control the community. Besides, it is necessary to create new organizations to include the diaspora to facilitate the widening of the inter-state relations.
Celebrity Diplomats of Cypriot Origin in the Context of Public Diplomacy

Cypriot public diplomacy can be advanced through celebrity diplomats, a new type of transnational activists widely discussed by Cooper (2007). Surprisingly, several well-public figures and people originate from Cyprus: From the Goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite, in the ancient times, to President and Archbishop Makarios III, one of the most well-known Cypriots of the recent times. This paper highlights the role of new actors, using celebrities as potential diplomats. I argue the use of these highly-recognized people can help the island re-brand with very little fiscal expense. However, I acknowledge it may be difficult to recruit some people as they may be indifferent towards the promotion of their country’s political reputation. Even more hazardous, their ignorance of diplomatic behaviour may have deleterious effect on the state’s image.

Goddess of love in Greek mythology, Aphrodite, is the most well-known Cypriot figure of ancient times. The Cyprus Tourism Organisation uses the ancient Greek mythological figure in its tourism promotional campaigns. However, this detail could be further employed for the national brand of Cyprus. Aphrodite’s love could be linked with the values of cooperation, mutual respect and peaceful living which the island aspires to promote.

In the modern age, probably the most well-known person originating from Cyprus was President Makarios. For some, Makarios is considered a conventional diplomat but not for others because of his dual role. Makarios stature was larger than his role as a leader of a small-sized state. Many states of the Developing and Nonaligned World saw him as a leader of an anti-colonial movement and as a symbol of resistance towards the bipolar system of the Cold War. Moreover, it was because of Makarios personal views that Cyprus followed a nonalignment policy, even though the Guarantor Powers of Cyprus’ independence were NATO members (Λάμπρου 2004).

A series of documentaries presenting Makarios’ trips to countries of Latin America or Sub-Saharan Africa are portraying the first gestures of a Cypriot public diplomacy. The documentary of Makarios’ trip to Latin America in 1966 (Church of Cyprus) shows his visits to Panama, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Equator and Colombia. In Chile, President Makarios opened a dialogue with the wider public of San Diego as he advocated for the foundation of a primary school called ‘Republic of Cyprus’. This action led him to be viewed as a hero by the children and people of Chile. Later, Makarios visited the University of San Diego in an attempt to start a dialogue with young adults. The documentary depicts the crowd’s fervour the Cypriot leader. In one segment, people fought to obtain an autograph from him. Some years later, in 1971, when Makarios travelled to Sub-Saharan Africa, similar images were captured by another documentary. He was seen as a new Messiah; during this trip he baptized Christian Orthodox approximately 10.000 Africans (Church of Cyprus 1971).

The main question is whether Cyprus could benefit from the contemporary trend of celebrity diplomacy. In an era of economic and political crisis people often display an aversion for politics and politicians. In this context, the public sector could cooperate with the private sector and individuals to fill in the gaps. Cyprus could ask celebrities of Cypriot origin to promote its new image abroad and establish a dialogue with foreign audiences. A potential celebrity diplomat of Greek-Cypriot origin living and
working in London is Tonia Buxton. She is a cook, historian, author and presenter of the successful show ‘My Greek Kitchen’ broad-casted on the Discovery Channels, Real Time, Travel & Living and Home and Health and the British TLC. Additionally, Buxton has devoted a special series on the Cypriot cuisine, culture, history and customs entitled ‘My Cypriot Kitchen’ sponsored by the Cyprus Tourism Organization (2012-2013). Her potential as a celebrity diplomat is evident in a video co-produced with the British Company ‘Isis Media’ entitled ‘Cyprus: Warm Welcomes Guaranteed! Do not believe everything you hear’ (2013). Buxton’s video was an attempt to reshape Cyprus’ image abroad. Buxton wanted people not to ‘believe everything you hear. It’s still my Cyprus!’ as there was much negative publicity on Cyprus’ economic situation at that particular time. However, Cyprus’ government neglected Buxton’s initiative, either by ignorance or intentionally, and made no attempt to use her willingness to re-brand the island. Indeed, sometimes personal initiatives do not have the anticipated results and one should acknowledge the specific role of the professional diplomat. Yet, we should appreciate the possibilities emerging from the actions of celebrities as Buxton who can reach where conventional diplomats are unable.

Conclusion

Though this paper, I discussed the importance of public diplomacy for small-sized states such as Cyprus. I demonstrated the origins of public diplomacy in Cyprus go back in President’s Makarios era. Makarios was enthusiastically welcomed and positively perceived by the public in countries of the Developing World. Moreover, this study has focused on the European identity of Cyprus as a tool for public diplomacy. I conclude, despite the potentials emerging from the theoretical projection of the island’s participation in the EU, Cyprus is not participating in some initiatives. Consequently, the state runs the risk of staying out of competition in public diplomacy. Furthermore, the government uses an anachronistic approach towards the Greek-Cypriot Diaspora as an instrument of a successful public diplomacy. Officials ignore the potential role of the group and well-known Cypriots to act as mediators and everyday diplomats. Finally, I asserted the theory of celebrity diplomacy can and should be applied to Cyprus. Small states such as Cyprus should use these new actors to rebrand and promote its desired image internationally.

Bibliography


