

SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A FACTOR OF DISRUPTION IN THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study will focus on diplomatic political communication in Spain through social networks. It will also be studied how diplomatic communication through social networks is manifested in the official accounts of Spanish embassies in other countries. In this sense, some cases of small diplomatic crises produced by social network accounts managed by Spanish diplomats in embassies abroad will be studied. The research will study how diplomatic communication through social networks could break the principle of hierarchy that governs classic diplomatic communication. How this can produce cases of misinformation or divergent political positions. Likewise, it will be studied the case of how diplomatic political communication through social networks can serve to position political parties in the case of a coalition government.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is qualitative, using the techniques of the study cases and participant observation since the author has been member of the Spanish parliament. There are two different study cases.

3. HYPOTHESIS

The hypotheses raised in this study are the following:

- **H1.** The social networks tend to be a new form of formal diplomatic communication that in some cases could replace the classic channels of diplomacy.
- **H2:** The diplomatic communication on social networks could weak the principle of hierarchy while facilitating quick responses without intermediaries.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Digital Diplomacy

The first problem we face when we want to explain the meaning of digital diplomacy is to discern between the multiple concepts with which we can refer to the process of digitalization of diplomacy and its exercise. In fact, the important thing is to understand which is the effect of the digitization process on diplomacy and its practice and execution. This is why we can come across concepts such as e-diplomacy, digital diplomacy, online diplomacy, cyberdiplomacy, metadiplomacy and some authors use them analogously to digital diplomacy. In this case, the most relevant thing is to understand, therefore, that what we want to study is the process of transformation of diplomacy through digital tools and that we can use all the concepts mentioned above as good descriptors of digital diplomacy. So do, the best way is going back to basics. “The Article 3 of the Vienna Convention (1961) includes the following functions of a diplomatic mission: represent, protect, nego-tiate, inform, and develop friendly, economic, cultural and scientific relations between states¹”. The principles of digital diplomacy can be applied to all of them, which means using new information and commu-nication technologies to achieve the objectives of diplomacy. According to Westcott² the Internet of Things has modified international relations in three fundamental aspects, such as the increase in interlocutors, the immediate and openness of information processes, and the acceleration and profitability of traditional diplomatic services. Digitalization has affected the four areas of diplomacy: to the audiences of diplomacy; to the institutions of diplomacy, the diplomats and to the diplomatic practices³. Furthermore, the digital transformation of diplomacy hap-pens in three main areas:

¹ Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 48.

² Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 48.

³ Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 48.

- All the changes produced in the environment in which diplomacy is developed, that is to say, new types of conflicts, the new redistribution of power considering new digital sources and influences.
- The new topics that have emerged after the changes produced by digitalizations, so do, e-commerce, regulation of artificial intelligence, ethics and privacy.
- The new tools developed and used by diplomatic organizations, diplomats and governments: big data, social networks, online conferences.

Considering all of that, the leadership and the role of the ministries of foreign affairs is crucial in order to implement an effective digital diplomacy strategy. In the case of Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry, the bet is clear as this statement done on its website shows:

*“In the field of foreign action, social networks are not a means of optional use but an unavoidable and indispensable tool for communication. Digital diplomacy is therefore not an alternative or complementary way of carrying out diplomatic work. Digital communication is already an inherent part of it and, against this background, social networks constitute the most immediate and significant instrument. They are also a decisive lever in the fields of public diplomacy, strategic communication and in the fight against disinformation.”*⁴

In digital diplomacy, the way of processing and understanding information has been transformed, not only because technology and tools have improved, but also because as the more information we offer to citizens the more increases the credibility of the organization, fixing communication frameworks that allow to introduce topics on the agenda and increase the global impact of any messages⁵.

Social networks are used to broadcast messages or topics to influence the supranational environment, but they can also help to collect information of foreign public opinion, to monitor any fixed or new ideas or even to start public interaction and conversation with its audiences through virtual channels. This is why states have developed and added to their traditional diplomatic representations a huge variety of new information channels, educational or cultural programs⁶.

As Salvador and Ramirez point⁷, regarding these digital work initiatives on e-government and citizen's participation, states have realized that they had to teach and train on digital skills to its diplomats and civ-

⁴ <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/PoliticaExterior/Paginas/DiplomaciaPublicaDigital.aspx> (accessed 29/12/2023)

⁵ Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 48.

⁶ Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 49.

⁷ Miguel SALVADOR and Olga RAMÍREZ (2016), p. 3.

il servants or even collaborate with private companies. Moreover, the presence on social networks of official entities without an appropriate strategy, without adapting to each platform or without creating its own content, can be counterproductive because it can reveal its strategic deficiencies and less credibility. Public administrations should develop a decision-making process on the strategic management of their digital tools, such as the audiences to which they are addressed; the positioning that is going to be adopted, the platforms where there is going to be a presence or who will oversee its maintenance and updating⁸.

4.2. Digital Diplomacy in Spain

Responding to the challenge of public diplomacy and digitalization, Spain developed the Foreign Action Strategy 2015-2018. That was an important boost given to communication, specially being transparent about the Spanish foreign action and promoting the values and interests that could position Spain as an advanced country. In fact, the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEC) reflects a clear will to incorporate digital diplomacy in all its actions. All the Spanish Embassies and Consulates all over the world have a profile on at least one social network. This presence in the social networks has been structured around 28 hubs or focal points and with certain embassies acting as facilitators and promoters towards the offices in their surrounding area. They also appear in the Social Network Atlas⁹ prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEC). Following the data offered for MAEC on its website the “number of profiles of the Representations and Consulates has increased from 50 in 2014 to more than 300 in 2022. Currently, all Embassies, the ten Permanent Representations and three quarters of the Consulates have profiles on social networks.”¹⁰

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation’s (MAEC) website (2018), the objectives they pursue with their web and social media activity are the following:

- *“Attention to Spaniards residing or transiting outside our borders, taking advantage of social networks to reach everyone in emergency or difficult situations.*
- *Improving the public explanation of our foreign offices and the ministry about their daily tasks, functions, and assignments.*

⁸ Andrea CASTRO (2019), p. 52.

⁹ <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/Comunicacion/Paginas/RRSS.aspx> accessed 02/01/2024)

¹⁰ <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/PoliticaExterior/Paginas/DiplomaciaPublicaDigital.aspx> (accessed 02/01/2024)

- *Bringing foreign policy closer to citizens, explaining our priorities, and disseminating our positions on international issues.*
- *The promotion of general knowledge about Spain in other countries. Promote the economic and social progress of our country and better mutual knowledge through closer and plural communication.”*

In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has rules of use for the social networks of the entity and representations abroad, but they are focused on users and not on account managers.

There is one project that should be considered as a singular tool of public and digital diplomacy: “Marca España”. The project was created in 2012 by Mariano Rajoy’s Government and it was rebranded in 2018 with Pedro Sanchez new government and called “España Global”¹¹. This project has applied social networks to its strategy, achieving a significant change in the attitude towards the use of digitalization in the diplomatic affairs. Spanish Government and its administration have assumed that social networks are an excellent tool that could contribute to open government through the promotion of transparency and citizen participation.

The ancient Marca España Project has crystallized into a series of basic recommendations that cover both public diplomacy and the management of the country brand. So do, the digital aspect, especially spreading information about Spain abroad, was significant. During the first approach of the project, it was suggested¹²:

- create a body within the State administration.
- Set up a permanent working group or independent task force to advise.
- Constitute a permanent observatory of the external image of Spain.
- Establish an alert and communication service to detect and address image crisis situations in a country.
- Enhance the commercial aspect, and therefore, the Brand Spain name, since studies on the external image of Spain reveal that it was the aspect that needs to be improved the most.
- Coordinate the actions of public and private institutions that today create the image of Spain.
- Develop strategic lines of positioning and communication of the Spain brand.

¹¹ https://www.elespanol.com/espana/politica/20210922/adios-marca-espana-albares-reordena-exteriores-margallo/613939262_0.html (accessed 02/01/2024)

¹² Javier NOYA (2003), p. 1.

- Segment audiences and markets to which the above messages should be directed.
- Give greater weight in the foreign service to training in public diplomacy issues.
- Launch a public relations and lobbying program abroad to serve the interests of Spain.
- Reinforce and coordinate external cultural action, given the enormous asset, until now underused, that the Spanish language and culture represent.
- Promote good image practices and the figure of the ambassadors of the Spain brand.

In July 2021, José Manuel Albares was appointed new Foreign Minister, who suppressed the body on the 17th of that month. After its suppression, the minister directly assumed the functions. Regarding the functions of promoting the external image of Spain, the functions were distributed between its cabinet and general secretaries.

4.3. THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF WIDESPREAD COMMUNICATION IN SPANISH POLITICS

Social networks became part of political communication in Spain after being precursors in social movements that often-questioned institutional politics. Social and political contestation phenomena such as 15-M in Spain or the Arab Springs called for mobilization and channeled information through social networks¹³ Social networks are at the origin of the mobilizations of social movements and around the Spanish electoral campaigns of 2015 and 2016, their use was detected in the field of political communication and their entry into the forms of mass communication of the elected officials themselves. Thus, in just over five years, the social networks of the moment (essentially Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) go from being essential elements of articulation of social protest movements and configuration of a citizen counterpower to being instruments initially used by the exponents of the so-called “new politics”¹⁴ in the 2015 and 2016 elections to forms of mass communication of politics and institutions. The emergence of social networks makes it possible for activists in the first phase and institutional politics in a second phase to produce and disseminate their own content and become communicative actors with a wide margin of autonomy. This new reality allows self-mediation processes to be

¹³ Andreu CASERO-RIPOLLÉS (2015), p. 542.

¹⁴ Manuel CASTELLS (2009), p. 50.

put into practice to put their own themes and frames into the political conversation¹⁵. The new dynamic allows us to expand the margins of political representation and redefine it, making individualities emerge beyond their framework in their respective political affiliations.

Political communication through social networks has given rise to a new type of political leadership that does not reject direct contact or interaction with the entire population¹⁶. The new forms of horizontal communication (without hierarchies and decentralized) allow interaction between sender and receiver who can alternate their roles. The new forms of interaction between citizens, politicians and institutions have created the figure of the “reader-author”¹⁷, as an expression of an active reader who at the same time participates in the narrative process. Email chains and SMS were the first instruments of political communication through the Internet and mobile phones. It is worth remembering here the fundamental role that first generation mobile phones and SMS (Short Message Service) played after the terrorist attacks at the Atocha train station in Madrid on March 11, 2004. From the first hours following the attack, the Government maintained that the terrorist group ETA was the author of the deadliest attacks that Spain has ever experienced. As the hours and days passed, the official version of the Government weakened, and information emerged that highlighted the possible responsibility in some form of the “radical terrorist Islamism” that broke into Western societies after the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the United States.

Spain held elections to the Cortes Generales on March 14, 2004, and experienced the communicative condensation allowed by the incipient forms of mass communication through SMS (which had a maximum length of 160 characters). On the evening of March 13, the messages “We want to know the truth” and the calls before the headquarters of the Popular Party in Madrid, at that time the governing party in Spain, went viral. Without a doubt, the terrorist attacks, the Government’s attempt to maintain an official version that weakened with the passing of the hours and days and institutional communication that did not consider the mutation and communication acceleration represented by the Internet and mobile telephony, modulated electoral behavior and impact on the electoral results of the elections to the Spanish Parliament. In the political context of 2004, the instruments of innovative communication were limited to blogs (still conceived as a form of opinion column or transmission of information without the coverage of a publishing company), social networks that at that time were classified as such as Facebook and Twitter, microblogging

¹⁵ Bart CAMMAERTS (2012), p. 122.

¹⁶ David CALDEVILLA (2009), p. 38.

¹⁷ Isidro MORENO (2001), p. 109.

that were publications on Twitter and videos through the YouTube channel¹⁸. It can be considered that the viral effect of SMS and phone calls in the hours and days after the attack of March 11 were a form of unique political activism experienced under the pressure of searching for true and truthful information a few hours away. Knowing whether the Government was lying or not was very relevant information for the vast majority of voters¹⁹.

The Cortes General elections of December 2015 experienced for the first time a relevant use of social networks in the electoral campaign. The result of the elections did not allow for a successful investiture of a candidate for President of the Government and led to the repetition of the elections in June 2016. In this new electoral event, social networks were also used in a relevant way. In both calls, the most used networks were Twitter (in a phase of clear emergency) and Instagram (in a still incipient but innovative phase). Two new political parties entered the Cortes Generales in the 2015 and 2016 elections: Podemos and Ciudadanos and deployed innovative communication techniques during the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns²⁰.

Podemos represented a disruptive political offer from the traditional political parties in the sphere of the Spanish left. Podemos experienced a boom in the first months of 2014. In February 2014 the constituent assembly was held, in March the party was registered with the Ministry of the Interior and in May of the same year in the elections to the European Parliament it obtained 7'98% of the votes (1,253,837 votes) and five seats. Podemos attempted, with some success, to collect the social protest of the 15-M Movement, also called the "Indignados Movement" and which took shape from the citizen demonstration of May 15, 2011 where irritation over the economic crisis was expressed. The movement claimed a more representative democracy beyond the classic party system and the classic forms of representative democracy²¹.

Ciudadanos burst into the Spanish political arena with force as a liberal party openly belligerent to the independence process that was being experienced in Catalonia. Its electorate identified voting for Ciudadanos as a way to support the territorial unity of Spain and to express sympathy for the parties that opposed Catalan independence proposals in addition to the liberal ideological component²².

The entry of both parties into Congreso de los Diputados accelerated political communication through social networks in parliament and

¹⁸ Tim O'REILLY (2007), p. 28.

¹⁹ Alberto SANZ and Ana SÁNCHEZ-SIERRA (2005), p. 19.

²⁰ María Jesús CARDETE, Javier DE ESTEBAN and Arta ANTONOVICA (2020), p. 63.

²¹ Lluís ORRIOLS and Guillermo CORDERO (2016), p. 483.

²² Juan RODRIGUEZ-TERUEL and Astrid BARRIO (2016), p. 598.

the government. A new generation of politicians supported by social networks introduced disruptive elements into parliamentary dynamics. Podemos requested, ultimately without success, that the negotiations for a possible investiture of the Socialist Party candidate could be broadcast live by streaming while Ciudadanos introduced the communication of its most routine activities through Twitter and Instagram. Ciudadanos was the first party to hire a photographer to produce images that its MPs constantly uploaded on social networks, especially Instagram. The message that accompanied the photos was minimal, the aim was to create a brand and a “style of life and doing politics” that differed from classic politics.

Over time, all parties joined the instruments of political communication that the classic parties at some point came to criticize as forms of “superficial politics”²³. On the following years that effected not only the parliamentary arena but also the governments sphere.

5. STUDY CASES

This section highlights two case studies that illustrate some of the new realities and challenges posed by digital diplomacy:

- Study case 1: Case of disavowal of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Arancha Sánchez Laya to a Secretary of State of the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 through Twitter (now X network) as a new way of establishing the official position in the Government’s foreign policy without use the classic channels of the Diplomatic Information Office (OID).
- Study case 2: Management of the account of the Spanish Embassy in Moscow to present a new position of the Government using an old tweet from the Cooperation Agency. Secondary tweet deleted. Thread of reactions creating a story based on a manipulated statement. The question of who supervises the fixing of the position of messages on the networks, hierarchy and network society.

5.1. Study Case 1: Polisario Front and disavowal by the minister of foreign affairs

Right at the beginning of the new government, there was a clash between the two partners caused by divergent positions on the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Republic. The deputy minister of social rights, Nacho Álvarez, who belongs to Unidas Podemos, received Suilma Hay Emhamed Salem in his official office on February 21,

²³ Guillem SUAU-GOMILLA and Carles PONT-SORRIBAS (2019), p. 1129.

2020, and disseminated the meeting through social networks, presenting it as a meeting with the Saharawi minister of social affairs and women's rights. The message was spread by the official account of the deputy minister's office. The Moroccan minister of foreign affairs, Naser Buriti, contacted his Spanish counterpart, Arancha González Laya and filed a formal complaint. Spain does not recognize the Saharawi Arab Republic. The result was a crystal-clear disavowal tweet from the Spanish minister of foreign affairs: "Call from my Moroccan counterpart about an interview by the deputy minister of social rights with a representative of the Polisario Front. I have clarified that the articles published do not reflect the Government's position. Spain's position on Western Sahara has not changed, it is State policy and Spain does not recognize the SADR²⁴".

It is probably also the first time that a divergence has been resolved through the social network. The deputy minister's tweets were deleted. The Moroccan press charged with harshness against the Spanish government.

5.1.1. *Frame*

Podemos ran in the December 2015 parliamentary elections, its first elections to the Spanish Parliament, with a program that is impossible to recognize in the 2019 coalition agreements, just four years later. Rejection of the presence of US military forces at the Morón and Rota military bases²⁵; frontal opposition to the Free Trade Agreement between Spain and the United States²⁶; support for the exercise of self-determination in Western Sahara and granting of Spanish nationality to Sahrawis residing in Spain; unilateral recognition of the State of Palestine; citizen consultation (referendum) to send the Spanish army on international missions; the right to vote for "stable" foreign residents and closure of immigration detention centers, officially called Foreigners Internment Centers. In addition to other points that moved its program away from the social democratic agenda, which had been long used in government. In the repeat of the elections in June 2016 the program did not change. In the party's parliamentary activity of the 2016-2019 term of office, we can find

²⁴ Tweet from Minister of Foreign Affairs Arancha González Laya, (@aranchaGlezLaya) on February 23, 2020, at 9.32 am.

²⁵ "We consider that the existence of US bases in Spain and participation in the anti-missile shield schemes affect our sovereignty and pose a risk to our national security.", free translation of Unidas Podemos 2015 electoral program, measure 326.

²⁶ "The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Treaty (TTIP) is a threat to our sovereignty, our democracy, our economy and the welfare state because it views social and environmental regulations as obstacles to trade." free translation of Unidas Podemos 2015 electoral program, measure 322.

several parliamentary initiatives and votes in line with its electoral program.

From the comparative study of the complete electoral program of 2015, to which only a development annex was added in 2019²⁷, and the coalition government program between socialist party and Unidas Podemos (2019-2023), we can conclude that Podemos and subsequently Unidas Podemos has renounced the main and hottest points of its foreign policy. However, this does not mean that tensions are not projected into the future of government action.

5.1.2. *Consequences of the clash and effects of the use of social networks to define the Government's position.*

Since the clash of positions between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Social Affairs, on February 21, 2020, it was not questioned again that the direction of foreign policy was in the sphere of the ministries led by the socialist party. The socialist voices of the Government recalled that foreign policy is a competence singularly attributed to the president of the government by the Foreign Service Law of 2014, Article 6, section 3 of the law establishes that:

“It is the responsibility of the President of the Government to direct the action of the Government and coordinate the functions of its members and, in particular, to determine the Foreign Policy guidelines and ensure their compliance, in the development of the State Foreign Action”²⁸.

²⁷ In the two parliamentary elections in 2019 Podemos decided to change the name and the electoral branch from Podemos to Unidas Podemos.

²⁸ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2014-3248> (accessed 02/01/2024).

FIGURE 1. TWEETS FROM STUDY CASE 1 (ACCESSED 02/01/2024)



5.2. Study Case 2. The use of an old tweet to establish an alleged new position of the Spanish Government on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the account of the Spanish Embassy in Moscow and its subsequent deletion.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been one of the longest in the history of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. An enclave of an ethnic Armenian majority population within the Republic of Azerbaijan became a “frozen conflict” that found an unexpected and rapid outcome in September 2023 when Azerbaijan recovered the territorial integrity of its State in the so-called “third Karabakh war.”

Heydar Aliyev became deputy prime minister of the Soviet Union in 1982, becoming the highest-ranking Azerbaijani politician to rise to Soviet power. In 1985 he supported Mikhail Gorbachev to access the position of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Supreme Soviet and thus the new leader of the Soviet Union. But their disagreements over the policy of openness and reforms promoted by the new leader led to Aliyev’s expulsion in 1987 from his high-power responsibilities in Moscow. Gorbachev held a grudge against the highest-ranking person who questioned his policies. Gorbachev, surrounded in his Cabinet by senior Armenian leaders, did nothing to prevent the entry of Armenian Soviet Republic in the neighboring Azerbaijan Soviet Republic to try to gain control of the territories populated by an Armenian minority. At the same time, the Azerbaijanis remembered that many of their ancestors had been born in what today makes up the

Republic of Armenia. The ethnic conflict was served. All of this turned into a structural conflict with the war between the two countries until the signing of an armistice in 1994 that stopped the war with the result of 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan controlled by the Armenian army. Specifically, the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh area but also of seven administrative zones inhabited only by Azeris but which Armenia reserved as a “security zone.”

In that occupation, Armenia had the support of the army of the Soviet Union at first and of the Russian Federation in the culmination of the occupation. The wars caused population displacements. After the 1994 armistice, nearly one million Azerbaijanis had been expelled from their homes and displaced into refugee camps near the country’s capital, Baku. Azerbaijan was isolated, without international support and with the inertia of the old enmity between Gorbachev and Heydar Aliyev. On September 12, 2022, the third confrontation began, which lasted less than 48 hours. The self-proclaimed independent republic of Artsakh announced its self-dissolution and Azerbaijan regained control of its entire territory in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

Some countries such as France or some States of the United States have incorporated the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a relevant element of their foreign policy identity because the number of diaspora Armenians living in these countries is relevant.

This is not the case of Spain, which has never paid special attention to the conflicts in the South Caucasus area. A good sign of this is that Spain does not have an embassy in any of the three capitals of the three countries in the area: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Despite this, the Karabakh conflict has had a certain impact on the Spanish foreign policy debate. On the one hand, the Catalan and Basque independence parties present in the Spanish Parliament have shown sympathy for the self-proclaimed secessionist Republic of Artsakh. The Basque independentists have been especially active, including Euskal Herria Bildu deputy Jon Iñarritu, who has visited the self-proclaimed secessionist republic several times and has broadcast information and propaganda favorable to the Armenian side using social networks. Added to them is the support that influential sectors of the Spanish Partido Popular (the member party of the European Popular Party and a leading conservative party in the Spanish political scene) have shown to the cause of Armenia and its territorial claims over Azerbaijan. This can only be explained by the weight of the Catholic lobby within the party. In the eyes of a certain Western conservative interpretation, support for Armenia has been presented as support for an old Christian nation against the Islamic countries that surround it: Turkey, Azerbaijan and Iran. The Popular Party, which has among one of its most notable hallmarks the

defense of the territorial integrity of Spain and the criticism of the parliamentary pacts of the Socialist Party with pro-independence parties, paradoxically in this case forms an almost perfect tandem of interests with the political parties. independentists. This led to the unprecedented situation in the current democratic period in Spain, the rejection by the Congress of Deputies of an International Treaty on the Exchange of Information between Spain and Azerbaijan. The rejection vote took place in the plenary session on November 3, 2022. It is the first and only time in the current democratic period that an international agreement is rejected by the Congress of Deputies. This was possible due to the sum of the votes of the right (PP and Vox) with the pro-independence parties and the abstention of the coalition government partner Unidas Podemos. Only the Socialist Party and Ciudadanos parliamentary group voted in favor of the agreement²⁹.

5.2.1. *The expression of the Government's position regarding the tensions of September 2023 through the Twitter account of the Spanish Embassy in Moscow*

Given the climate of overheating of the historical conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in September 2022 there was the displacement of ethnic Armenians who lived in the Azerbaijani area of Karabakh and who decided to move to Armenia through the Lachin corridor that connected the two territories. The Twitter social network account (today after three decades) in which it presented as a new initiative the reproduction of a text from a tweet from May 13, 2023 with the following text: "The AECID_es activates its Humanitarian Action together with @Acontraelhambre to assist 1000 people who have been displaced in Armenia by the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. In total, about 250 families will receive financial aid and psychosocial support."

This same text was published in Armenian and attached, both in its Spanish version and in its Armenian version, a tweet from May 13, 2023 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the same text.

²⁹ The result of the vote in the plenary session of Congress was 174 votes against and 132 votes in favor, so the international Treaty was rejected by Congress and was sent to the Senate for eventual ratification and subsequent activation of an arbitration mechanism between the two Chambers in case of dissent regarding International Treaties.

FIGURE 2. TWEETS FROM STUDY CASE 2



All of this led to some serious diplomatic controversies and a demonstration of support from Spain for certain positions, either in writing or through emoticons or images. Upon detailed study of the tweet, the following manifestations of diplomatic controversy were detected:

- To refer to a conflict over the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, which Spain recognizes and has supported in the three resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the tweet uses the flags of Armenia, an emoticon in the shape of two hands that They fit together, and the flag of Spain. This suggests that Spain incorporating the Armenian flag into a conflict over a territory of Azerbaijan's sovereignty recognizes Armenia's claims over Upper Karabakh.
- The tweet of May 13, 2023, from the account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and which is reproduced in the tweet of September 14, 2023 from the account of the Spanish Embassy in Moscow is illustrated by an image that is the flag independence movement of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artaj with several holes on the flag representing a burst of gunshots. This second "diplomatic" gesture, if possible, is even more unfriendly and outside of any logic of diplomatic language. To make a very simple and unforced parallel, it would be the same as an official account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of an allied country having published a message about Spain illustrated with a shot-up Catalan or Basque independence flag.

In this situation it is worth asking a couple of questions:

- Do the content managers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' social media messages have knowledge of diplomacy and international relations? Could there be intention in making a tweet referring to the Karabakh area (territory of Azerbaijan according to the international borders recognized by Spain) with the flags of Armenia and Spain and an emoticon of hands clasped between them? Can the Ministry of Foreign Affairs be aware that a shot-down pro-independence flag of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artaj was published on its official account, which even with the support of Armenia has never been recognized by any country, not even Armenia?
- Who is responsible for the written and graphic content of the tweets from the Ministry's accounts and the accounts of its Embassies? Is there diplomatic supervision of the management of graphic content (images and emoticons)?

In the case of the tweet studied, two relevant inquiries should be noted:

The Tweet of May 13, 2023, with the flag of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artaj was deleted from the official Twitter account and after the complaint from the Azerbaijani Embassy in Spain.

The management of the content of the tweet of September 14, 2023 with the account of the Spanish Embassy in Moscow was produced from Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan, where a Spanish diplomat was expelled from Moscow – in reciprocity to the expulsion of Russian diplomats from Spain by the sanctions that Spain imposed on Russia for the war of invasion of Ukraine) - deals with relations with the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Armenia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The sympathies of these diplomats for the Armenian cause are known. He expresses on social networks his sympathies for conservative positions in Spain, whose parties have historically supported Armenia due to its Christian roots.

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain there is a Diplomatic Information Office (OID), renowned for its care in using the appropriate and fair words at all times in its official notes. It seems evident that there is a large gap between the forms of diplomatic communication of the OID and the new forms of communication of Spanish digital diplomacy.

6. CONCLUSIONS

After all the information processed here are some of the conclusions reached out:

1. Social networks have become a new form of formal diplomatic communication that in some cases replace the classic channels of diplomacy. The case of the discrepancy in foreign policy between the Socialist Party and the partner Unidas Podemos on Western Sahara was settled on February 21, 2020 when the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed in the same tweet the Spanish position of Spanish diplomacy on the Western Sahara at the request of its Moroccan counterpart and the disavowal of a secretary of state of the Ministry of Social Rights who had received a representative of the Polisario Front with the treatment of “Minister”.
2. Diplomatic communication on social networks weakens the principle of hierarchy while facilitating quick responses without intermediaries. The plurality of actors that can become involved in digital diplomatic communication requires an extra coordination effort.
3. In the definition of the contents of diplomatic messages through social networks, an important gap has been detected between the formal message that is to be conveyed and the production of the message through communicative icons such as emoticons or illustrations of accompaniment that can distort or contradict the substantial message.

Regarding the hypothesis we could conclude that the validation of both H1 and H2 is possible. Regarding H1, which was about whether social networks tend to be a new form of formal diplomatic communication that in some cases could replace the classic channels of diplomacy, we could validate it considering the two cases of study.

Considering H2, we can prove that the diplomatic communication on social networks could weak the principle of hierarchy while facilitating quick responses without intermediaries. The case of the discrepancy in foreign policy between the Socialist Party and the partner Unidas Podemos on Western Sahara was settled on February 21, 2020 is a great example.

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