THE PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY REVISITED.
COMPLEMENTARY OR PARALLEL?

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Abstract. This article investigates the role of parliamentary diplomacy in contemporary international relations, its evolutionary path and the historic preconditions that led parliaments to act internationally. Special focus is given to the enduring scientific disputes over the nature of parliamentary diplomacy, whether it’s complementary to state diplomacy or parallel (independent) form of diplomatic activity. The author argues that parliamentary diplomacy in most cases might be viewed as complementary to traditional diplomacy, enhancing states’ international position and status.

Keywords: Parliament, parliamentary diplomacy, international parliamentary institutions, foreign affairs, international relations, state diplomacy, democratic deficit, international decision-making.

The phenomenal rise of parliament as a foreign and international actor has led to the dynamic growth of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the burgeoning of international parliamentary institutions around the world. The intensification of parliamentary contacts among national parliaments and the growing influence of parliamentary institutions in international decision-making paved the way for the emergence of parliamentary diplomacy. Thus, the aim of this paper is twofold: a.) to examine the role of parliamentary diplomacy, its major features, historic roots as well as its role in world politics; b.) to conduct an analysis on whether parliamentary diplomacy is complementary to traditional state diplomacy or the parallel form of diplomatic activity.

As a highest state institution parliament has experienced a long and uneven evolutionary path of progress. Historical records demonstrate the origins of earliest assemblies in many parts of the world which primarily engaged in consultative and deliberative activities. But it is only in 20th century that we began to witness the expansion of parliamentary authorities over foreign and international affairs. And nowadays, global inter-parliamentary cooperation has become an integral part of contemporary international relations. The unique rise of global parliamentary contacts made some scholars claim that we might be living to the “age of parliaments”, or even the “parliamentarisation of world politics”. Although, no one can dispute the increasing assertiveness of parliaments in foreign affairs, the main question here is the level of real influence that parliamentarians currently exert over global decision making.

Origins. Parliamentary involvement in foreign and international affairs started in certain key historical periods of the 20th century. The emergence Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1889 and the rapid rise of other parliamentary institutions enabled parliamentarians to advance their cause internationally and to participate in world affairs. Although, the initial wave of institutionalization of parliamentary movement took place at the beginning of the last century with the birth of such organizations like Nordic IPU, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the wars (world wars, civil wars, ethnic conflicts, economic hardship and etc.) had undermined the worldwide spread of the ideals of parliamentarism.

The years following the end of the Second World War had revitalized the expansion of liberal, democratic values on the one hand, and the consolidation of regional and global parliamentary activities on the other. Interestingly, it was the war-torn Europe that became an epicenter of the surge of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the mushrooming of international parliamentary institutions as a vanguard of parliamentary diplomacy in the continent and beyond. As fairly noted, the “federalist” movements appeared in Europe after the war aimed at creating common bonds between the countries of Europe, which would mitigate the return of nationalism and help prevent another war.

The end of the Cold War heralded to a new era for the development of international cooperation. Numerous non-state actors, businesses, NGO’s and global social and ecological movements have come to the fore to fill the so called “democratic deficit” in international decision making processes. According to a Swiss scholar, ‘creating parliamentary assemblies is only one option for improving the democratic accountability of international organizations. These institutions provide avenues for exercising certain degree of control over intergovernmental bodies if they are endowed with the necessary institutional and functional requirements.’

The post-Cold war years have witnessed the proliferation of international parliamentary institutions and assemblies being particularly active in foreign policy and international matters. To date, though less visible to public attention, parliamentarians have been calling for greater citizen participation in decision-making, promoting a kind of international system which has been marked with broad representativeness and accountability in dealing with global challenges as well as creating an environment in which peaceful international cooperation would be possible. British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (1990), Baltic Assembly (1991), Central American Parliament (1991), OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (1992), CIS Parliamentary Assembly (1992), Belarus-Russian Parliamentary Council (1997), Parliamentary Union of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (1999), Asian Parliamentary Association for Peace (1999) and etc. are cases in point. Correspondingly, parliamentary activity has become an indispensable part of international relations; it is widely viewed as a helpful instrument of foreign policy in negotiating better solutions and promoting mutual understanding.

According to German scholar, C. Kissling, over 100 informal or formal international parliamentary institutions can be reported today, not to mention all their subsidiary organizations. Thus, some scholars expressed a view that the endemic democratic deficit in international relations can be ‘remedied by strengthening regional and national parliaments’. And nowadays, parliamentarians are increasingly interested in promoting dialogue between conflicting parties, peaceful settlement of disputes, maintaining peace and stability, increasing public awareness about the climate change, environmental concerns and so on and so forth. While talking about conflict resolution, the former President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pottering noted that ‘as parliamentarians, we are all bound to the idea of pursuing dialogue in order to solve problems’.

**Parliamentary diplomacy. Complementary or parallel?**

The worldwide consolidation and institutionalization of parliamentary contacts as well as a variety of other factors have challenged the dominant position of states as sole actors of international system. The deepening of globalization of politics, economics, finance, business etc. as well as the increased blurring of national borders has led parliaments to engage in wide-range of international activities, commonly referred as parliamentary diplomacy. It should be noted that there is definitional challenges of what really consists of parliamentary diplomacy and the lack of solid theoretical analysis of this phenomenon. However, the scientific interest is undoubtedly increasing with the emergence of new researches and scholarly articles over the last years.

The rapid growth of inter-parliamentary contacts around the world has further strengthened the role of national parliaments not only as law-making internal state institution, but also as a key instrument of foreign policy and international relations. This phenomenon has generated a scientific dispute over the role of parliamentary diplomacy, whether it’s complementary to traditional state diplomacy or a parallel form of diplomatic activity. Traditionally many parliaments follow the official line in pursuing their foreign policy and international agenda while there are few that might act

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2 Kissling C. The Legal and Political Status of International Parliamentary Institutions. Published by Committee for a Democratic UN. Berlin, Germany-2011. p 10.
5 For example, the special 11th volume (2016) of the prominent The Hague Journal Diplomacy dedicated to the different aspects of Parliamentary Diplomacy and titled as “Parliamentary Diplomacy Uncovered: European and Global Perspectives” with various well-known parliamentary scholars contributing their knowledge and expertise on this matter. Apart from this, numerous other researches, including: Zlatko Sabic: Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance: The Role of International Parliamentary Institutions.//Parliamentary Affairs Vol.61. №2, 2008; Weisglas W.Frans, Boer de Gonnie: Parliamentary Diplomacy.//The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 2 (2007); Andres Malamud, Stelios Stavridis: Parliaments and Parliamentarians as International Actors. Ashgate Research Companion; Stelios Stavridis: Parliamentary Diplomacy: Any Lessons for Regional Parliaments?; Luis Maria de Puig: International parliamentarism: An Introduction to its History.//Parliaments, Estates and Representation; Daniel Fiott: On the Value of Parliamentary Diplomacy.//Madariaga Paper, Vol.4, №7 (Apr., 2011) and etc. are emerging to demonstrate the growing scientific interest on global inter-parliamentary cooperation.

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independently. The special issue of the Hague Journal of Diplomacy on Parliamentary diplomacy conducts a detailed analysis on parliamentary impact on foreign policy issues. As stated in this journal, traditionally, the international role of parliaments has been approached as a component of a given polity’s foreign policy and as an aspect of democratic legitimacy and executive accountability, but not as an instance of independent actorness\(^1\). German parliamentary scholar Dr. Horst Posdorf fairly noted that the enhancement of government foreign affairs with accompanying inter-parliamentary relations offers new horizons to show respect, to enrich external relations and to deepen contacts\(^2\).

Given the fact that many parliaments are actively involved in promoting and defending the national interests of the state abroad, in deepening bilateral and multilateral ties, in protecting the official position as well as political initiatives of the executive branch on certain issues of regional and global significance, the work of parliamentarians can indeed be regarded as complementary contribution enriching the diplomatic and political authority of a state. Nevertheless, the existence of some parliaments with rather independent political agenda in international stage should be noted, be it a national parliament or supranational parliamentary institution like European Parliament. Moreover, the evolving nature of inter-parliamentary cooperation may in time clarify the real essence and nature of the parliamentary diplomacy.
