

The Demands of Diplomacy: The Role of Career and Honorary Consuls

by Euripides L. Evriviades

It is a distinct honor, both professionally and personally, to be here today as a speaker at the 2005 conference of the Consular Corps College. I would like to focus on a topic of particular significance today: the demands of modern diplomacy and the specific role of career and honorary consuls. Naturally, I will also be making references to the experience of my own country.

First, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Dean of the Consular Corps College, Italian Vice Consul Ed Fanucchi, to Vice Dean Gayle Anderson, who also serves as the Chief of Protocol, Diplomatic Relations and International Trade for the State of Nevada and to Catherine Hansen, the Chief of Protocol, for their kind invitation and hard work in organizing this conference. I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge my own friend and colleague, Dr. Takey Crist, the Honorary Consul of Cyprus, who is based in Jacksonville, and who is going above and beyond the call of duty to do a very fine job for Cyprus. Let me also thank Elaine Marshall, the Secretary of State of North Carolina, for her kind introduction. I would like to thank Mayor McCrory for being here and Mr. Almeida, Vice President of Duke Power for his generosity in making this event possible.

I have been looking forward for quite some time to being here today. It gives me a wonderful excuse to leave Washington and experience the America beyond the beltway. But I must admit that I am somewhat humbled by such an impressive group of diplomatic professionals gathered here today.

Since joining the diplomatic service of my country in 1976, I have treasured the opportunity to serve in New York, Germany, the USSR/Russia, Libya, Israel, the Netherlands, and now in Washington, as we work toward closer relations with the United States. Having lived and worked as a diplomat in this wonderful country, as well as having received most of my education here, I have developed a great fondness for the American people; for their warmth, hospitality, generosity, openness to diversity, and the incomparable natural splendor of this nation, from sea to shining sea.

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Yet my diplomatic experience has also taught me the specific importance of career and honorary consuls, especially in light of the increasing demands of diplomacy in this age of terrorism, conflict and globalization. The vital role of the consul is all the more important as diplomacy is far too often relegated to a secondary effort in today's troubled world. Ironically, the need for diplomacy and discourse has never been as apparent, nor as imperative, as it is today.

But what is diplomacy? There have been a number of definitions of diplomacy and diplomats, some of them humorous, others academic. A diplomat has been described as one "who thinks twice before saying nothing." Henry Wotton, an English poet and diplomat in the mid 1600s wrote, "an Ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country." Peter Ustinov, the well-known British actor said that, "a diplomat these days is nothing more than a head waiter who is allowed to sit down occasionally." Another definition says, "when a diplomat says 'yes', he means 'perhaps'. When he says 'perhaps' he means 'no'. When he says 'no', he is no diplomat." My favorite, which describes exactly how I feel these days is, "an Ambassador is like a swan, poised and graceful above water, but underneath, pedaling like hell."

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Seriously, diplomacy by definition is an art, a practice, and a skill. It is also so much more. Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of foreign relations. It also requires a thorough knowledge of both the country the diplomat is serving, and the country the diplomat is serving in. However, a fine balance is required as too much diplomacy with not enough knowledge may be dangerous, and too much knowledge with too little diplomacy may be disastrous.

One of the most pressing demands on the diplomat is the imperative to keep pace with the dynamics of change. Just as the world around us is changing rapidly in scale and scope, so too is diplomacy. Some of the more profound developments in diplomacy stem from such global change. These changes range from an increase in the importance of civil society to a decrease in the dominance of nation states in diplomacy.

Modern diplomacy goes far beyond the confines of relations between states and between governments; it increasingly involves and incorporates the citizen. No longer is the citizen merely a spectator, as the recent events in Georgia, Ukraine, Lebanon and now Kyrgyzstan, have shown. As the wonders of globalization have forged new and more rapid networks of global communication and interaction, diplomacy must also adapt and adopt new ways to manage the speed and amount of information. Thus, while the avenues for diplomacy have widened, the vehicles for diplomacy must keep pace as well.

As a diplomat, I will be one of the first to admit that diplomacy is not for the timid or the weak. The sheer toll and tax on the diplomat is both physically and spiritually daunting. Yet intellectually, the reward is immense, and the reward is also a personal one. My own philosophy is best reflected in the wisdom inherent in Bosnian scholar and diplomat Drazen Pehar's definition of diplomacy as "primarily words that prevent us from reaching for our swords."

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THE ROLE OF THE CONSUL

Consuls have been with us since antiquity, preceding by many centuries the establishment of diplomatic missions. The institution originated in classical Greece and extended to the period of 500 BC / BCE. The need to have information or intelligence about the policies and public opinion of city-states was as vital in ancient Greece as it is for all of us today. Given the non-existence of data banks or foreign ministries, knowledge was personalized and time limited. What the Greeks did on a grand scale and in lieu of establishing diplomatic ministries was appoint consuls or *proxenoi*, as they were called.

The *proxenoi* were almost always well known, politically involved citizens of the city-state in which they resided. In 374, Polydamas, who was the Spartan *proxenos* in Thessaly, described his duties as transmitting useful information to the state that had appointed him as consul. Other famous consuls included Callias, who was the Spartan consul in Athens. Punishment or even death was sometimes the price paid by other *proxenoi* in other Greek city-states—a misfortune that luckily never occurs to consuls today. The *proxenoi* were the forerunners of the resident ambassador created in Italy during the late fifteenth century.

One of the interesting aspects of the definition of consul was his role in the Roman Empire. At that time the consul was a bridge or link between the governing and the governed. This unique historical role of public service to a community of citizens is consistent throughout the development of consular history and is reflected in the modern role of the consul and the honorary consul.

The modern term consul is derived from the Latin "consulere," meaning "to advise or to attend." It was no accident that the great novelist Graham Greene chose to name his work on political chaos and moral responsibility, "The Honorary Consul." Just as Greene was driven by personal complexities and drawn to the political "wild

and remote,” the honorary consul seeks to simplify the complex, often serving in various locations as our outposts and sentinels of public diplomacy.

The honorary consul also serves as a vital link and liaison between the government’s embassy and its citizens living abroad. But the honorary consul is no mere civil servant; he or she is actually a “civilian servant.” The honorary consul is called upon to help citizens with a number of problems, including legal assistance, immigration help and even medical aid, while always helping to promote trade and investment. In this way, the honorary consul is our “first responder” in times of crisis, helping citizens in distress and, in some instances, aiding citizens in despair. In this role, the honorary consul is also the human face of the government, endowed with a human touch that is the most important element of diplomacy. And this is more so in the case of my small country, since we rely almost exclusively on the work performed internationally by our honorary consuls. Currently our honorary consulates number 119, almost three times the number of diplomatic missions we maintain abroad.

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In the United States, we maintain fifteen honorary consulates in such diverse places as Chicago, Phoenix, Atlanta, New Orleans, San Francisco, Boston, Washington state, Houston and, of course, Jacksonville, North Carolina. Given the prominent role the honorary consuls play in representing Cyprus abroad and because of our European Union accession and the responsibilities that come with it, we have a relatively strict set of criteria for the selection of the individual who will be entrusted with the duties of the honorary consul. A major criterion relates to character. The honorary consul should be someone who has demonstrated a high level of integrity, sound judgment, initiative and zeal. He or she must also be socially well connected and financially sound. As far as I am concerned, the Cyprus government gets the best financial value from its honorary consuls because they cost the Cypriot taxpayer next to nothing.

Thus, we rely heavily on the work of our honorary consuls. We depend on their role as our “sentinels.” They are our true outposts of public diplomacy. By the sheer weight of demography and the burden of geography, the consul is the key to building the bridges and bonds of friendship between nations and peoples.

The task of the consul is obviously daunting. It requires constant attention to developments ranging from issues of international trade and investment to the political and economic, and it includes the cultural and the social. It is no easy task.

The cultural element of the mission is also essential. Cultural awareness and appreciation is an essential prerequisite to promoting greater understanding between and among peoples. This is especially important in the face of mounting intolerance and insularity.

Despite such an impressive range of responsibilities, I must also stress that often the honorary consul does not receive enough honor for this role. However, I repeat that the commitment and dedication of the consul is driven by a personal sense of service, not by the pursuit of profit. The satisfaction is personal and professional, as the consul bolsters bilateral relations.

In this way, the work of the consul and the honorary consul of today follows what I call a basic set of the “ABCs of diplomacy.” These “ABCs of diplomacy” include advocacy, belief, and communication: advocacy in representing the interests of the country; belief in the ideals of service; and communication in articulating policy.

THE EXERCISE OF “SOFT POWER”

In response to the challenges and complexities of international relations today, diplomacy has also assumed a much deeper mission. There is also a set of more sophisticated tools available today. This is evident in what Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye terms “soft power.” In this context, Nye defines soft power as “the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” This concept of “soft power” applies most fittingly to the skill and craft of the consul, whose representation of his or her country rests on the attraction and appeal of the very ideals and principles of diplomacy, rather than on the force of threat or on the threat of force.

Although the academic community has only recently recognized this concept, the cultural, political and social aspects of this so-called “soft power” have long served as the tools of our trade. In practice, Nye holds that the exercise of such soft power is based on the premise that “seduction is always more effective than coercion.” From my perspective, representing the small island nation of Cyprus, which has a troubled history, this is particularly significant. Having taken a course with Professor Nye during my studies at the Kennedy School of Government, I can assure you that he is no “softie”. He is very much a pragmatist.

THE RELEVANCE OF CYPRUS

Specifically, the diplomatic history of Cyprus is a rather special one. It is a special history of persuasion over coercion, of cooperation over conflict and of upholding the rule of law. For example, as a new member of the European Union, Cyprus is pursuing a very active role in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, a multilateral initiative between the European Union and a number of key Mediterranean states. This EU partnership comprises a truly diverse set of states, including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Our part in this Partnership centers on serving as a bridge between the EU and the Mediterranean. Exploiting our unique geography as a “crossroads” of culture and civilization, Cyprus strives to bring Europe closer to the region and forge a new atmosphere of cooperation over conflict, stressing security over instability.

Through this partnership, we are seeking to establish a common Euro-Mediterranean area of peace based on a common sharing of fundamental principles. These unifying principles include respect for human rights and democracy, endowed with a political and security dimension, as well as a commitment to the overall creation of an area of shared prosperity through a free-trade area between the EU and its Mediterranean partners. An integral component in this Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is dialogue, and it is the process of dialogue and debate that enhances this effort and emboldens our commitment to peace and security.

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The Cypriot example of diplomacy is also a special one for another reason. Cyprus is, in fact, a divided island still plagued by the legacy of the Turkish invasion of 1974. This is particularly troubling for me personally and professionally. After all I have been working for reconciliation, understanding and a solution to our problem for almost thirty years now. This past July, we sadly commemorated the 30th anniversary of the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey. We remember all those who lost their lives during this tragic period. We remember the refugees, the missing and all those whose lives are still affected by the actions of this aggression of more than three decades ago.

But at the same time, we cannot live in the past and we should certainly not be prisoners of it. Let us not dwell on the history of the past, but instead let us dwell on shaping what will be the history of the future. We must move forward. It is very much like driving a car toward a specific destination. Although we occasionally glimpse at the rear view mirror in order to get a sense of what is behind us, we continue driving forward toward our destination, never fully taking our eyes off the road.

Just as responsible drivers must refrain from constantly looking at their rear view mirrors, so must we. If we are totally focused on the past, we will never reach our destination, and we will most certainly crash. As the driver of the car, we must look forward to our destination, and, of course, our desired destination is the reunification of our country. In that same spirit, we ask our friends around the world to join us in a renewed pursuit of a fair, workable and lasting settlement.

Let me close with some new signs of promise, not peril. Last May, Cyprus entered the European Union (EU) in what can be seen as the single most important strategic development since our country's independence in 1960. This is the beginning of a new era for Cyprus and its entire people. We are proud to be full and integral members of this great and growing European family. EU membership promises economic improvement, enhanced world stature, greater challenges and opportunities, and above all, it offers security and stability. While our entry into the EU marked a

joyous graduation for our country and for our people, it was tempered by the reality that we were forced to enter as a divided country.

As a member of the EU, Cyprus stands as a strong supporter of European values, policies, and the rule of law, while at the same time it strives for stronger transatlantic ties with the United States. We see this path as one of the most important journeys toward resolving the world's litany of conflicts and challenges.

As this is a journey shared by each of us here today, I remain firm in my belief that through the power of diplomacy, all of us—diplomat, consul and honorary consul alike—can succeed in forging a new period of promise and prosperity.



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