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## **Politics of Representation: Symbolic action of diplomacy in Franco-German relations, 1871-1919**

Aiming at a cultural history of diplomacy, this paper focuses on the symbolic action of diplomacy in Franco-German relations. By illustrating the impact and performance of symbolic action in negotiation processes, it proposes an approach to analyze the transformation the old European “secret diplomacy” underwent starting at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a supposedly new open and democratic “conference diplomacy” after the First World War.

### ***Structural changes and politics of representation: The diplomatic method revised?***

In this era of rapid change and development, the conditions of foreign policy altered considerably. Communication, transport and technical revolutions, industrialization, growing international economic interdependence, beginning democratization and expanding bureaucratization of foreign services, the emergence of international organizations coexisting with national and nationalist movements – all these factors of “modernization” were not simply abstract terms of analytical description for diplomacy, but had a real impact on the diplomats’ world. The diplomatic methods, the conduct and procedures of diplomacy and its authority were as well subject to change as the internal culture of foreign services, the diplomats’ mentalities, perceptions, the modes and norms of diplomatic behaviour characterized by aristocratic styles (the diplomatic “*habitus*”), the diplomats’ esprit de corps and their shared values and ideas of public duty.

The most important official duty an ambassador felt obliged to fulfil was in fact his peace-keeping mission. This everyday task of the French and German ambassadors in Paris and Berlin induced generating and preserving the honour, dignity and legitimacy of their state and translating them into spatial and temporal relations by means of ceremonial representation. In the tense Franco-German relations between 1871 and 1933, a see-saw of war and peace, of confrontation and cooperation, the French ambassador in Berlin and his German counterpart in Paris had to make questions of war and peace negotiable and thus more predictable by the argumentative deployment of symbolic forms of diplomacy. The Ambassadors served as intermediaries between their countries, foreign services, their governments, and national public spheres and nations. At the same time, they were considered advisers and experts in matters of symbolic action: Ambassadors did not only stand for their monarchical or republican sovereign. Ambassadors also had to reflect and embody their countries’ foreign policy with the help of ceremonial, i.e. a cultural and culturally determined inventory of verbal expressions and gestures. These expressions and gestures constituted the devices of a successful political communication due to their capacity to reduce complexity and create means of identification. Thus, politics of representation and the visualization of diplomacy were the core business of an ambassador.

This concern for visualization on the part of the diplomatic actors is very concrete and palpable on the empirical level both in the files of the ambassadors’ political correspondence and the protocol files of the French Ministère des Affaires étrangères (Paris/Nantes) and of the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin). In the same way, contemporary

sources such as memoirs and correspondence, handbooks of diplomacy, newspapers etc. provide insight into the diplomats' efforts in search for an adequate politics of representation.

Even a modernized state and foreign policy were based and relied on this capacity to visualize. The era of representation persisted. Therefore, the reiterated demands of the bourgeois public sphere ("*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*") for more transparency and visibility of diplomacy made the transformation of covert into overt diplomacy a subject of debate and challenged the fundamentals of diplomacy. The justified criticism of the public yet proceeded on different underlying assumptions of how foreign policy and international public politics had to be lead.

Consequently, this paper wants to describe these underlying assumptions or "logic" of diplomatic action: After a glance at the principles of representation and diplomatic interaction, the paper will determine the mechanics of representation politics and finally proceed to examine the long-term effects of symbolic actions.

### **I. The basis of diplomatic interaction: Resuming diplomatic relations after 1870/71**

The first section focuses on the resumption of diplomatic relations between France and Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 as part of a long and difficult peace process. The war triggered a transition of the form of government in both the countries. While the German Empire was prepared and proclaimed in Versailles on enemy territory and in a way at the symbolic expense of the French nation, after Sedan, a provisional Third Republic emerged in France. France as a Republic lacked a stable civil order, a Republican polity and a coherent foreign representation. Politics of representation proved to be a particularly explosive area, given both the serious domestic struggles between monarchists and republicans concerning the form of the state, and the distanced attitude of monarchical-aristocratic European powers. The Third Republic found itself in a state of tension with diplomacy. The form of the state, the legitimacy and sovereignty of the French government and its representatives played in fact an important role in Bismarck's French policy. A close description of the accreditation of the new French ambassador in Berlin elucidates the patterns and approaches of protocol, of its traditional norms and its capacity to adapt to the political context.

### **II. Protocol in Action: Politics of Representation and its mechanics 1890-1895**

The second section will concentrate on the Franco-Russian rapprochement of the years 1890 to 1895, considered by contemporaries as a hinge and a key event for France's representation abroad and her reintegration into the existing diplomatic system. The visits of the Russian and the French squadrons to Kronstadt and Toulon, which accompanied Franco-Russian attempts to achieve an alliance, illustrate the mechanics of symbolic action in negotiation processes. The Franco-Russian encounters provide examples of a diplomatic dual-level strategy: After unofficial soundings, symbolic actions were used on official occasions in a targeted way as signals and served as an indicator of the state of bilateral relations. At the same time, the deployment of symbolic actions would open a new phase of negotiations on an advanced level, which made symbolic actions also a factor for the reorientation of power relations in the European system.

### **III. Asymmetries and long-term effects: 1914 & 1919**

After the declaration of war in 1914, the French Ambassador Jules Cambon was the only diplomat in Berlin forced to leave the country at gunpoint via Denmark, Scotland and London

- a diplomatic affront, an abuse of the established diplomatic practice and the usances of reciprocity. This symbolic asymmetry while entering the war in 1914 was reflected by the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1919 in the *Galerie des Glaces*. It hints at the symbolic burden in Franco-German relations after the First World War and underlines the necessity to discuss the principles of the visibility of diplomacy as well as the continuities and changes in politics of representation. Since the Inter-Allied Commission took recourse to the French archives and its records of protocol when diplomatic relations with Germany were to be resumed in 1920, France was to become the “motherland of protocol”. At the same time bilateral collective memories were now internationalized. Finally, Wilson’s Fourteen Points proclaimed that “diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view”, which was supposed to form the basis of the peace settlement and a guiding principle of the international community. More than ever diplomacy now felt the need to reconcile diplomacy and democracy as well as the “logic” of diplomatic action with the demands of this new conference diplomacy—a crucial und problem unresolved in the interwar period.

Referring to the concept of “figurative politics”, this study shall contribute to discern the structural transformation of diplomacy and of its “order of things.”