Central and Eastern European Public Diplomacy

A Transitional Perspective on National Reputation Management

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Introduction

Public diplomacy theory and practice have been dominated by American, Canadian, and British experiences. Western public diplomacy traditionally targeted regions of conflicts, closed systems with significant information deficiencies behind enemy lines. The evolution and practice of public diplomacy were significantly shaped and contextualized by the Cold War and the political environment in which Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries were on the receiving end of Western public diplomacy for decades. Scholars and Cold War public diplomacy practitioners are cautious of attributing the fall of communism entirely to the success of American and Western European public diplomacy, but it is without doubt that radio broadcasting (such as the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, or Radio Liberty), cultural and educational exchange programmes, and other public diplomacy tools were nails in communism’s coffin. After the fall of the Berlin Wall traditional public diplomacy has gradually been fading away in Central and Eastern Europe and was replaced by economic assistance, knowledge, and skills transfer to facilitate political and economic transition.

The very notion and “invention” of Eastern Europe dates back to the Enlightenment period when East and West were created by Western European philosophers and other intellectuals. Since the Enlightenment Western Europe and Eastern Europe have existed as complementary concepts defining each other by opposition and adjacency. This conceptual division became a physical one with the descent of the Iron Curtain resulting in ideological polarization too. During the Cold War CEE countries had little space and opportunity to promote themselves and their interests beyond the Iron Curtain where the mental picture was that of a homogeneous “block” of communist countries. The Iron Curtain sealed off a culturally diverse and colorful territory, which was homogeneous only in the ideological sense.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall the CEE countries seized the opportunity to invent themselves, rather than being invented by others. Since 1989, 29 countries have emerged out of the eight former communist countries in Eastern Europe and have engaged in positioning themselves on to the geographical and mental map of Europe and the entire world as democratic, politically stable countries with emerging and promising market economies. Various responses and alternatives have been used in a rather unsystematic way to promote political and economic interest abroad: nation branding, image projection, reputation management, public diplomacy, or
country promotion have been utilized to develop and communicate identities that would result in positive “country images.”

This chapter focuses on those Eastern European countries that are members of the European Union (EU); however, references are made to other countries of the region which are at earlier stages of their political and economic transitions. Special attention is devoted to Poland, Hungary, and Estonia since the author of this chapter was living in these countries and speaks their languages to different extents.

Public diplomacy so far remains in the realm of international relations, especially within diplomacy. Diplomats’ and diplomacy’s monopoly on public diplomacy is, however, seriously challenged by other disciplines and practitioners such as international communication, branding, or international public relations. This chapter views public diplomacy as an interdisciplinary area of study, which can draw upon a variety of disciplines to develop concepts and practices. Besides the traditional approaches to and conceptualization of public diplomacy as a foreign policy tool or as international communication, new approaches include the theorization of public diplomacy as branding or as public relations. The conceptual framework for this chapter is international public relations, defined as “the planned and organized effort of a company, institution or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations.”

Public diplomacy, together with country branding, are conceptualized as pillars of national reputation management.

The Challenges and Special Characteristics of Central European Public Diplomacy

Making impressions and competing for attention and influence have been important for CEE countries, the majority of which are relatively small in size. Limited financial and human resources to promote identities, policies, and interests abroad can seriously restrict the conduct of public diplomacy, especially if sponsored entirely from central budget. As a consequence, Eastern European public diplomacy efforts focus on well-defined countries of geopolitical and geographical positions and importance. These states need to be creative to make their voice heard and try to identify “niches” in foreign policy orientations.

CEE countries have little coverage in the Western media and had little success in influencing the European policy and media agendas before EU accession. Getting positive media coverage presents a further challenge, as coverage is usually linked to political crises (the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2005), national elections, catastrophes (the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994; the collapse of an exhibition center’s roof in the Polish town of Katowice in 2006), anniversaries (50th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution), or unique events (NATO summit in Latvia in 2006; the death of Pope John Paul II and Poland’s mourning). When these countries hold the rotating EU presidency, they will get significantly more media attention which will also raise the country’s international profile.

Western public and cultural diplomacy is often rooted in those countries’ imperial and colonial past, as both concepts have been significant in exerting influence after decolonization. Central European countries did not have colonies, but due to being the subject of many European treaties and pacts during their turbulent histories, the borders of many Eastern European countries do not follow the ethnic and linguistic borders of a nation; therefore it is of crucial importance to distinguish between a “nation” and a “state” in the Eastern European context. This distinction is often ignored or the terms are used interchangeably by many Western European scholars. About three million Hungarians are scattered in seven countries around Hungary, while half a million Poles live in Belarus, 150,000 in Ukraine, and 240,000 in Lithuania. These people have lived in these territories for centuries and are not migrant
minorities (such as the Russians living in the Baltic states due to forced Sovietization during the Communist Soviet era). CEE governments have always considered cultivating relationships with these communities living in neighboring countries as a primary foreign policy goal. Preserving their language and culture, supporting and protecting the rights of these people are important goals of Eastern European public diplomacy. Romania, for example, does not maintain universities in Hungarian language despite the fact that some 1.5 million Hungarians live in Transylvania. It is the Hungarian government that funds a university in Romania where different programmes and degrees are taught in Hungarian. How minorities in Romania or Belarus are treated is not simply a domestic affair issue for the Romanian or Belarus governments, but becomes a foreign affairs issue for the Hungarian or Polish governments. During the decades of communism millions of dissidents left Central and Eastern Europe and started new lives in Western Europe or in the USA. The Polish community in the USA is an estimated 10 million people and about a million Hungarians live in the USA. These communities and expatriates are also important targets and means of Central European public diplomacy.

Small nations can also join efforts and cooperate closely in order to achieve common foreign policy or economic goals and to speak “with a single voice.” The Visegrád Group was formulated by Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1991 to facilitate the countries’ transition and to achieve EU and NATO membership and represent their interests jointly. The organization has played an important role in facilitating discussions about a Central European identity and enhancing this regional identity. Another example of regional co-operation is the Baltic Sea Region initiative, which is an economic rather than a political co-operation with the aim of increasing economic development, including investment attracting and export promotion. Public diplomacy for intergovernmental organizations, such as the Visegrád Group, the European Union, ASEAN, or the UN, has so far received little attention, and these organizations will need to engage in more strategic public diplomacy when promoting supranational interests on a global scale.

A further challenge is the languages of the region as they do not belong to the most popular languages learnt by foreigners; therefore any attempts to influence foreign audiences through language can have rather limited impact, unlike American, British, or Canadian public diplomacy activities, which can heavily rely on English, as the most widely studied second language. There are attempts, however to promote language learning. These include the Polish Radio, grouped together with Deutsche Welle and Radio France Internationale, that launched a new interactive initiative in 2007 to promote Polish, German, and French language study among young audiences.

After the fall of communism, Eastern European countries underwent radical economic and political changes. The transition from central planning to a market economy and from an authoritarian, one-party system to a pluralistic and democratic society presented huge challenges to the countries. The transition involved a systematic identity and image transformation as well and public diplomacy has played a significant role in this process. The functions of public diplomacy in transitional countries are as follows:

- **To distance the country from the old economic and/or political system, which existed before the transition.** Public diplomacy together with country branding have been the primary tools of distancing these countries from communism and the negative connotations evoked by “Eastern Europe,” which often meant backwardness, despair, something poor or inferior. During the Cold War Eastern Europe and communism became synonyms and have been used interchangeably; therefore many countries in transition have consciously defined and position themselves as Central European countries. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had to make further efforts to get rid of the burdens of and associations with the Soviet Union.
while Slovenia, Croatia, or the newly independent Montenegro consciously distance themselves from Yugoslavia or even the Balkans. Estonia has positioned itself in international relations as “the only post-communist Nordic country.”

- To position the country as a reliable and eligible “candidate” of the new system that the transition is aiming for, or that of the international community. The aim is to portray the country as a credible and trustworthy partner in international relations.

- To change negative or false stereotypes or reinforce some positive stereotypes associated with the country and its people.

- Countries in transition rely on the moral, financial, and political support of more developed regions or nations, called “center nations,” such as the Western European countries. The less developed or transitional countries are often situated on the “periphery” or “semi-periphery.” In their orientation the transitional countries are moving from the periphery towards the center position and the function of public diplomacy is to support and justify this “move” and demonstrate that these countries are worthy of the center nations’ support. The primary target of periphery countries’ public diplomacy campaigns are nations situated in the center and those of geopolitical importance.

- To position the country as the center of the region or as a regional leader. The periphery countries are competing with each other to become the center and/or the leader of the region/periphery. Competition for the political, financial, commercial, logistical, tourist, or cultural center positions has been strong among Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Following NATO and EU membership in 2004, Lithuania expressed its new foreign policy vision to become the regional leader and “to become an active country, visible in the world and influential in the region.” An interesting expression of the country’s ambitions and visibility was when on the eve of EU accession Lithuania became the “brightest” country in Europe. Citizens were asked to light every possible source of light and direct them towards the sky at a particular time to be captured by a satellite to show the world how bright Lithuania was. Poland also expressed its ambitions to become a regional leader both economically and politically.

- Public diplomacy can also facilitate (re-)defining and (re-)constructing national identities as identity is also changing during transition. The countries and their peoples often faced the questions of “who are we?” and “how do we want to be seen by others?” Countries in transition or peripheries are often defined by center nations who also construct periphery nations’ and their peoples’ images. Creating “Euro conform” identity was of crucial importance for most countries aiming for EU membership. “Europeness” and “Returning to Europe” have been central themes for each country that joined the European Union.

The Institutionalization of Reputation Management

Institutionalizations meant that special governmental organizations, departments, or positions were created to research and evaluate existing country images in the different target countries; to develop communication policies, strategies, and tactics to promote political and economic interests abroad; and to coordinate efforts of different organizations. In Poland, for example, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, as well as a the Polish Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Polish Brand, the Polish Institutes, and the Mickiewicz Institute have all been involved in promoting Poland, sometimes communicating different and uncoordinated messages about the country.

In 1998, the Hungarian government set up the Country Image Centre to manage Hungary’s reputation abroad. The Centre’s aim was “to develop a concept for the new image of the country and to build this new image both inside and outside the country.” The Latvian
Institute was also established in 1998 by the government “to help the globalised world community better understand Latvia today by providing essential and useful information on all aspects of Latvia’s history, culture and society.” The Czech Centres’ main mission is “to develop a good name and positive image of the Czech Republic abroad, to actively promote the Czech Republic’s interest and to exercise public diplomacy in line with the state’s foreign policy priorities.”

Poland was the first country in the region to set up a public diplomacy department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which initiated several public diplomacy programs and campaigns in the early years of 2000. The very term “public diplomacy” has been consciously used in Poland where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Department of Public Diplomacy. The Department is in charge of promotion of the Republic of Poland abroad and elaborates appropriate strategies serving that end; encourages contacts with various social groups in foreign countries, focusing on opinion-forming circles; and is responsible for creating a positive image of Poland abroad.

In many Central European countries the newly elected governments have erased the efforts of the previous government resulting in discontinuity of reputation management. Soon after, however, the new government also “realizes” that there is an “image problem” abroad and tries to set up (new) institutions and develop strategies to deal with them. As a result “reputation management” has been shifted around among different ministries and governmental departments. Hungary’s Country Image Centre was heavily criticized by the opposition and seen as the “propaganda machine of the government” both within and outside the country. Despite the relevance and necessity of an organization as such, it was abolished once a new government was formed in 2002. It is—and probably will always be—easy to discredit any of the institutions and organizations involved in reputation management as propagandists. Involving communication practitioners from a range of backgrounds and adopting strategic approaches, based on ethical two-way communication and with the consent of the domestic public can legitimize the existence of such organizations and their practices.

International Public Relations: The Framework

Public Relations Defined

The conceptual framework for describing and analyzing reputation management for countries is international public relations. Public relations (PR) is often misunderstood and misinterpreted by international relations, international communication, marketing, or branding scholars as well as practitioners who often use the term as a synonym for hype, deception, lies, or propaganda. The British Institute of Public Relations defines PR as “the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.” Its aim is to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization (government or country) and the publics on whom its success or failure depends. Public relations is about building and maintaining long-term relationships and trust with key stakeholders and publics in order to create mutual understanding.

Nessmann summarized the following aims and functions of public relations:

- creating trust, comprehension, and sympathy;
- arousing attention, interest, and needs;
- creating and cultivating communication and relationships;
- creating mutual understanding and agreement;
- articulating, representing, and adjusting interests;
- influencing public opinion;

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• resolving conflicts; and
• creating consensus.

It is not difficult to see how these concepts are core to any public diplomacy aims and strategies. Adopting a public relations approach to public diplomacy can:

• contribute to the growing body of knowledge of public diplomacy;
• position public diplomacy as a strategic function and activity since public diplomacy activities often remain tactical and situational in many countries;
• provide guidelines on how best to conduct ethical public diplomacy through two-way symmetrical communication, as well as develop and maintain relationships between a government and foreign publics;
• help develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between a government and foreign publics, emphasizing relationship building over “creating and promoting a positive image” as the ultimate public diplomacy goal;
• help research, plan, and implement strategic public diplomacy campaigns;
• contribute to identifying and formulating specific and measurable public diplomacy objectives since national public diplomacy objectives often remain vague, elusive and unspecific;
• contribute to identifying, prioritizing, and segmenting publics and stakeholders, which are core concepts to both public relations and public diplomacy;
• provide a conceptual framework and guidelines to evaluate public diplomacy since assessing the impact and effects of public diplomacy programs remains under-researched and often neglected;
• anticipate, identify, and analyze domestic as well as international “issues” that have consequences on a country’s reputation. Depending on the nature of these issues, proactive or reactive strategies can be developed to strategically address them.

International public relations consultancies are often engaged in public diplomacy campaigns on behalf of governments to promote a country’s economic and political interests abroad. Central and Eastern European governments have often used the services of PR consultants and agencies, which offer strategic advice, media relations, media monitoring, public affairs, lobbying, events management, online PR, issues and crises management as part of public diplomacy campaigns.

In public diplomacy theory and practice image and image management are recurrent terms. Image management for countries is not a new phenomenon, nations throughout the world have long engaged in image cultivation. The role of images of nations has been widely discussed in a variety of disciplines including history, international relations, diplomacy, literature, social psychology, sociology, communication studies, marketing, and public relations. It is only recently that these disciplines have started to cross-fertilize, testing the boundaries and the validity of each discipline, often encroaching upon each other’s territory. The concept of image in these areas has been used in a plethora of contexts but often without appropriate conceptualization and operationalization.

Public diplomacy, international relations, and branding scholars and practitioners tend to attribute too much importance to image and usually make the assumption that there is a single and uniform “image.” Creating and promoting “a positive image” of a country remains the ultimate—albeit immeasurable and intangible—goal of public diplomacy. As James Grunig, a recognized public relations scholar, argued, image is an overused term in marketing, branding and public relations—and one can add international relations and public diplomacy as well—and it is often used as a synonym for concepts such as message, reputation, perception, credibility, attitude, or relationship, disguising these more precise concepts. Image can also be
interpreted as the opposite of reality, and image management can easily boil down to impression management.

Instead of a positive image it is more appropriate to identify positive reputation as the overall goal of international public relations for countries. Reputation must be earned while images can be created, manipulated, and they do not always reflect or represent reality. Depending on the subject of communication, Figure 25.1 and Table 25.1 summarize the several specializations of national reputation management, including aims, actors, and some examples from Central and Eastern Europe:

![Figure 25.1](image_url)

These specializations of national reputation management are not distinct but interact, influence, and reinforce each other. Countries can engage in these specializations to different extents and the emphasis may also vary. What is crucial, however, is the strategic approach to and the coordination of branding, cultural and public diplomacy to achieve synergy. A crisis in one dimension can have consequences on other dimensions and can result in the further escalation of the crisis. A country can be more successful in one of the above dimensions but rather poor at others. Croatia is a good example: it has been a very popular tourism destination but has been unsuccessful in public diplomacy.

The media are vital tools in each specialization, however, their role may vary. In the case of destination and country branding, print and electronic media carry sponsored advertisements and spots about a country, but the media are not the sole channel and tool of communication. Government-sponsored country advertisements to attract investors or raise the profile of the country in national and international print publications are on the increase, together with country advertising spots in electronic media, such as BBC World, Deutsche Welle, or CNN. Poland’s Prime Minister, Lach Kaczynski for example, featured in a high profile advertising campaign in 2007 “to raise the international profile and image of Poland.” Leading European publications, such as the *Financial Times* or *The Economist* often publish country reports or special supplements.
on countries, reviewing the current political and economic state of the country. Governments of the specific country usually sponsor advertisements in these sections.

In perception management the media is the main tool and field where perceptions are “managed.” In public diplomacy the following factors influence the role of media. First, with the exception of some major powers and some rogue states, public interest in other nations’ foreign policy is of little interest. Second, media ownership can have a bearing on representing other countries and their foreign policies. In Central and Eastern Europe many media outlets are owned by foreign (Western) companies and the media are often politicized, openly supporting...

### Table 25.1. The Specializations of Reputation Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Actors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td><strong>Destination branding</strong></td>
<td>Attract visitors; boost tourism</td>
<td>Croatia—“The Mediterranean As It Once Was,” Latvia—“The land that sings” Hungary—“Talent for Entertaining”</td>
<td>National and regional tourist boards, travel agencies; marketing and branding agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic policy</td>
<td><strong>Country (nation) branding</strong></td>
<td>To create a “country brand” which will sell products abroad as well as advance commercial interests abroad; to attract investors; to gain competitive advantage; export development; to advance “country-of-origin” effect</td>
<td>Estonia—“Positively Transforming” Poland—“Creative Tension” Czech Republic—“Czech*Idea” Hungary—“Talent for . . .”</td>
<td>Ministry of Economics, investment promotion and export agencies; trade boards, chambers of commerce, multinational organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (heritage, language, arts, films, etc.)</td>
<td><strong>Cultural relations (Cultural diplomacy)</strong></td>
<td>Promote culture, language learning; educational exchange, create a favorable opinion about a country; to change negative or false stereotypes; to create mutual understanding between cultures</td>
<td>Polish Year in Sweden; “Czech Music 2004;” “Czech Seasons;” Eurovision Song Contest; 50th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution; “Magyar Magic” in the UK; exhibitions; international film festivals</td>
<td>Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cultural Institutions, embassies’ cultural attachés, cultural and media organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign policy and external relations</td>
<td><strong>Public diplomacy</strong></td>
<td>To create a receptive environment for foreign policy goals; to advance these goals; to get countries to change their policies towards others; raising international profile of countries, their politicians, governments.</td>
<td>Becoming EU, NATO members; supporting or opposing the war in Iraq; to promote democratization</td>
<td>Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, media outlets broadcasting abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and foreign unethical policies, and actions; images</td>
<td><strong>Perception management</strong></td>
<td>To create images that are not aligned with reality; to create and promote negative images; to discredit regimes, countries, governments; create crises situations</td>
<td>Russia’s efforts to discredit the Baltic states; Russia’s efforts to manipulate ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states; Romanian government’s campaigns; Albania’s image campaign</td>
<td>Ministries of Defense, government, foreign governments, secret agencies</td>
</tr>
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political parties and interests. There are several examples when political parties use the international arena for domestic issues and take home affairs abroad in the hope that international media attention and pressure will result in change of government policies. The Hungarian opposition have often used this “reversed public diplomacy” to alter domestic as well as foreign policies.

Politicians often use the foreign mass media to mobilize foreign public support for their country’s policies. Former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski published several articles in British quality newspapers about Poland and its aspirations for EU membership to generate more support for EU enlargement among British citizens. These attempts can be classified as media diplomacy under the auspice of public diplomacy, though traditionally media diplomacy referred to conflict resolutions.

**Destination and Country (Nation) Branding**

The two specializations of national reputation management are destination and country branding. Applying the concepts of branding to places, such as cities, regions, or countries does not have a long tradition and place branding is still an emerging field. Nation branding, however, has become a powerful metaphor as well as reality during the last decade or so, resulting in heated debates whether it is possible or feasible to brand countries in the first place. As Wally Olins, a British branding expert argues, companies and countries are becoming more like each other: “As countries are developing their ‘national brands’ to compete for investment, trade and tourism, mega-merged global companies are using nation-building techniques to achieve internal cohesion across culture.”

Destination branding has been used in a plethora of contexts without clear conceptualization and is therefore not always appropriately understood and interpreted.

The tools of marketing and branding have long been used in domestic political communication to raise awareness of or increase support for—or sometimes to discredit—political ideas, parties, or politicians; however, these concepts and strategies have made their way into the international political communication arena only recently. During the late 1990s and 2000s domestic governmental and public sector communication in many countries were strongly influenced by branding and marketing, an approach which has slowly been penetrating into international governmental communication.

The aim of destination branding is to attract visitors and boost tourism while country branding promotes economic and commercial interests at home and abroad. Country brands have both intangible and tangible elements, such as the products or services of the particular country. The more specific aims of country branding are to create or advance the “country-of-origin” effect, to promote exports (outward direction), or attract investors or a skilled workforce (inward direction). Country brands can serve as a sort of umbrella under which further sub-brands can be developed. Many Central European countries have become successful destination brands, attracting tourists from Western Europe and all over the world. Poland and Estonia were the first countries to go further and develop coherent country brands. Poland has made several uncoordinated efforts to promote the country abroad between 1998 and 2004 until British branding “guru” Wally Olins and his company, Saaffron arrived to rescue the initiative and coordinate the branding process in 2004. Commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saaffron developed a country brand for Poland with the core theme “Creative Tension.” The government’s involvement was also significant in Estonia’s country brand (“Positively transforming”) launched in 2001. It is interesting to note that change and contrast between past and present, paradox of characteristics in the country and its people have been a common theme of country branding in the region, reinforcing the intellectual invention and framing of Eastern
Europe. The majority of Central European countries are engaged in some kind of nation branding activity with different degree of success, however.

In Poland it was suggested that another brand be used in country branding in 2005: “Solidarity,” a well known Polish political brand. The initiative to use it as an overall brand for Poland met some criticism as this brand could be seen as outdated, lacking dynamism, and very abstract. Poland’s example demonstrates, however, that a country brand can consist of different brands, such as a destination brand, an export brand, an investment brand, and a political brand, which can be all different rather than having a central, all-encompassing country brand.

In 1999, four Hungarian companies founded the Hungaricum Club with the aim of creating a stylish “calling card” for Hungary. The founders aimed at contributing more to Hungary’s image by their own means and through their joint appearance and at “furthing Hungary’s progress towards membership of the European Union, while retaining their traditional identities as Hungarian brands.” Members of the club put together a boxed set called “A Taste of Hungary” featuring selected samples of their products, Herend Porcelain, Pick Salami, Tokaj Aszu Wines, Zwack Unicum liqueur, and the Halas sewn lace, all linked to traditional dining.

There are different and sometimes inconsistent views on the relationship between nation branding and public diplomacy. One of the reasons for the inconsistency is that both nation branding and public diplomacy are ubiquitous terms, which have been poorly conceptualized. Place Branding, a British journal, was launched in 2004 as a “quarterly review of branding, marketing and public diplomacy for national, regional and civic development.” Managing editor Simon Anholt initially viewed diplomacy as a subset of nation branding. To incorporate the growing field of public diplomacy as a discipline, in 2007 the journal changed its name (rebranded itself) to Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, inviting international relations scholars onto its editorial board. This journal has become the prime source of advocating and advancing a branding approach to public diplomacy.

Applying the concepts of branding and marketing to foreign policy has been a recent phenomenon demonstrating both the encroachment of different disciplines and the “commercialization” of foreign policy and public diplomacy. Foreign policy advisors and government officials (e.g. Charlotte Beers) as well as International Relations scholars jumped on the “brandwagon,” adopting the view that foreign policy can also be the subject of branding. Branding practitioners, on the other hand, have become foreign policy specialists and advisors. A branding-driven foreign policy approach created business opportunities for British branding gurus Simon Anholt and Wally Olins, and agencies such as Interbrand, that rushed to Eastern Europe to sell their expertise to CEE governments, and ministries of foreign affairs often presented branding as the “panacea” of communicating with foreign audiences. This British nation branding “know-how” was present in the Estonian, Polish, Latvian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, and Lithuanian nation branding campaigns, while Hungary used its own resources. Outsourcing foreign policy and public diplomacy to external (foreign) agencies in a nation branding format can have several drawbacks, however. Eastern European government officials had high expectations from nation branding but quickly became disillusioned when it did not produce the desired short-term results and expectations or the final invoice was presented.

In conceptualizing national reputation management, both country branding and public diplomacy are important elements, which should complement rather than replace each other. Branding is relevant when there is a choice to be made by the “consumers” whose choice can be influenced by a strong brand name and brand value. When choosing a holiday destination or deciding where to invest, the options are endless. However, the foreign policy of a country is unique; there are certain policy goals but these are not competing with each other for the attention of foreign publics. Branding is very much image-driven, with the aim of creating positive country images. Branding is foremost one-way communication where the communicator has control over the message, which tends to be simple and concise and leaves little space for...
dialogue and interactions. A branding-driven approach can also dilute the essence of public diplomacy as the diplomacy component fades away. Branding targets mass audiences in the target nation—who are largely passive—while public diplomacy targets well-defined publics such as the cultural or political elites, opinion formers and leaders, those interested in foreign news or policy. Sproule’s view is more relevant to branding than public diplomacy: “Mass audiences respond to conclusions, not reasons; to slogans, not complexities; to images, not ideas, to pleasing, attractive personages, not expertise or intellect; and to facts created through suasion, not suasion based on facts.”

Attributing too much importance to brand names (country names) and (brand) images has led so far that Lithuania is considering changing its name in English to something easier to pronounce as an attempt “to raise the country’s profile.” The Polish government made significant efforts to dissociate Poland’s name from the concentration camps as the international media have often referred to the “Polish concentration camps” when speaking of the former Nazi death camps in the south of Poland. In 2006, the governments efforts bore fruits as UNESCO agreed to rename the camps as “The Former Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp Auschwitz Birkenau.” Romania is also struggling with its name as it includes “Roma” which evokes images of Roma gypsies rather than those of the “eternal city.”

Cultural Diplomacy and Relations

Cultural diplomacy has always been one of the pillars of foreign policy in many Central European countries. Cultural diplomacy is closely related to the government of a country and to achieving foreign policy goals as it seeks “to present a favourable image so that diplomatic operations, as a whole, are facilitated.” Culture in this sense serves as an instrument of achieving foreign policy goals and thus is politicized. Cultural relations are concerned with promoting cultural “products” such as literature, films, TV, and radio programs, arts, science, music as well as languages abroad. The ultimate goal is to make foreign publics familiar with a nation, its people, culture, and language, and to create a favorable opinion about the country through its culture. While cultural diplomacy tends to be a one-sided activity, cultural relations aim at achieving “understanding and cooperation between national societies for their mutual benefits.” Cultural relations is the best way to change negative or false stereotypes as they have deeper impact and carry more credibility than other forms of reputation management.

The Magyar Kulturális Intézet, the Instytut Polski, the Eesti Instituut, or the Latvijas Institūts are the leading institutions of cultural promotions for Hungary, Poland, Estonia, and Latvia respectively. The Estonian Institute’s main goal is “to spread information about Estonian society, culture and education both at home and abroad; to introduce Estonian culture to other countries and to promote cultural communication between Estonia and other countries; and to support the teaching of Estonian language and culture-related subjects in the universities abroad.” These institutions are closely linked and dependent on funding from the governments or ministries of culture unlike the Western European counterparts, such as the British Council or the Goethe Institut, which have more independence and are not associated with the governments. CEE cultural institutions are located in “strategic countries” only: lack of funding prevents these countries from setting up cultural institutions in too many countries. Table 25.2 summarizes the leading cultural institutions of those Eastern European countries that are members of the European Union.

Educational exchange programs are crucial factors in building cultural relations. Western European students rarely choose Central and Eastern European countries for study or to do a degree there and these countries can never compete with the English-speaking countries’ universities where foreigners are flooding to study. This is partly due to the fact that CEE countries
offer only limited courses and degree programs in English and/or German and the language barrier prevents many foreign students from pursuing their studies in the region. African and Asian students, however, often choose Central European countries, whose education standards and affordable degree programs are well known all over the world.

The European Capital of Culture has been an initiative by the European Commission since 1985 which presents a chance for cities and regions to showcase their cultural lives and cultural developments. In 2000, Krakow and Prague were the first cities from Central Europe designated together with seven other Western European cities as Capitals of Culture. Given the symbolic importance and the positive impact of the “European Capital of Culture” event, from 2009 each year a country from CEE can also designate a city besides the “old” member states, Lithuania being the first together with Austria.

One of the most efficient and best-known ways of reputation management is the Eurovision Song Contest where millions across Europe tune into the singing contest. In 2005, Ukraine hosted the event and seized the opportunity to communicate the values, hopes, and visions of the country to a Europe-wide audience. When Estonia won the song contest in 2001 and hosted Eurovision in 2002, the country used it to kick off the “Branding Estonia” initiative and showed the 166 million viewers how the country had transformed from a Soviet Republic to an EU and NATO contender. In 2007, Serbia won the competition together with the right to organize the event in 2008. Serbia used the song contest as a public diplomacy tool to showcase the country’s “European values.” The old member states—especially the UK—may attribute little significance to Eurovision but it has meant a great deal for many Central and Eastern European nations to express themselves and boost their confidence. As The Economist magazine commented: “The biggest single lesson of Eurovision is that Europe’s centre of gravity is moving east.”

Hosting international sports events is another important tool of reputation management for countries. Poland and Ukraine will host the European football championships in 2012.

### Public Diplomacy

The next pillar of reputation management is public diplomacy, which can be defined as foreign policy’s communication dimension. Influencing foreign public opinion to achieve national goals and advancing and protecting national interest have always been of key importance for any nation. Before outlining public diplomacy in the Eastern European context, it is worth reviewing some changes and trends in public diplomacy. Earlier definitions of public diplomacy evolved around strategies of promotion and persuasion and were closely related to self-interest and impression management. Public diplomacy was defined as “direct communication with foreign
peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and ultimately, that of their governments.”

As for the content of public diplomacy, it described activities, directed abroad in the fields of information, education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens. This definition also demonstrates that for many American writers cultural diplomacy forms a part of public diplomacy. Analysing the past and current definitions and practice of public diplomacy, the following changes can be observed. The objectives of earlier definitions of public diplomacy were two-fold: to influence the “general” public of the target nation and by doing so to get them to pressure their own government to change foreign or domestic policy. These definitions well represent the international political environment—the Cold War—in which public diplomacy was contextualized, making the assumptions that public opinion can actually influence foreign policy. Recent definitions of and approaches to public diplomacy hardly make any reference to the target countries’ governments; influencing the public opinion to create a receptive environment for foreign policy goals and promote national interests have become the ultimate goal. Traditionally public diplomacy was closely linked to conflicts and tensions between countries. Frederick positioned public diplomacy as one of the means of low intensity conflict resolution. According to this approach, public diplomacy is not practised in peaceful relations but in certain degree of conflict in order to “convey positive American values to foreigners, to create a climate of opinion in which American policies can be successfully formulated, executed and accepted.” This still might be true for American public diplomacy—which in many respects remains traditional—but certainly not for Central European countries, for which public diplomacy can flourish only in peaceful conditions.

The objectives of public diplomacy have shifted from a behavioural dimension—to get citizens to do something—towards an attitudinal objective, such as supporting—or at least not opposing—another country’s foreign policy goals. Another change is the move towards understanding and dialogue replacing the monologue and promotional nature of earlier definitions and strategies. During the Cold War, public diplomacy was concerned with achieving change in the target countries’ political environment while 21st-century public diplomacy embraces and supports economical goals too. The expansion of target audiences is also a characteristic of 21st-century public diplomacy, as the support of the domestic audiences for foreign policy actions has also become crucial, especially with the emergence of “intermestic” affairs when international and domestic affairs merge and encroach in each other.

Table 25.3 further compares traditional public diplomacy and 21st-century public diplomacy, however, it is important to acknowledge that many states’ public diplomacy still follows the traditional model. The European Union’s emerging public diplomacy is another example of the 21st-century PD.

While branding is not necessarily linked to the government, cultural and public diplomacy—together with perception management—are the most closely linked to the government of the particular country. Direct or indirect government involvement, support and control are core to many public diplomacy definitions and programmes, albeit the government is not always the “official face” of public diplomacy campaigns as the role of non-state actors in public diplomacy is also on the increase. The extent to which the government is visible and recognisable as the sponsor, initiator or source of communication may vary from campaign to campaign. The government’s role in communicating with foreign publics is crucial as foreign policy priorities can change with the change of government and public diplomacy can easily boil down to promoting a government (and its foreign policy) abroad rather than promoting the country and its interests.

For the Central European countries the most important foreign policy goal right after the collapse of communism was accession to the European Union and joining NATO. Public diplomacy was utilised to induce more support for membership among EU citizens as well as to counteract the negative stereotypes and prejudices that the countries were associated with.
During the 1990s the precise date of accession was not set, the date was floated by the EU. Initially, enlargement was subject to public referendums in some of the old member states. In the end, however, the Accession Treaty was ratified by the national parliament of each member state and by referendums in the accession states.\textsuperscript{45}

Support for a candidate country’s membership in the EU has always been of critical importance. Former European Enlargement Commissioner, Günter Verheugen called for developing and launching an enlargement communication strategy that would facilitate dialogue between future and present citizens. Eurobarometer, which monitors EU citizens’ opinions on a variety of issues, clearly demonstrated that there had been serious gaps in the acceptance of certain candidate countries by the citizens of many member states. France, Germany and Spain were among the top countries that opposed Poland’s membership. In 2000, the Council of Ministers in Poland adopted the “Framework Programme of Foreign Promotion of the Republic of Poland’s Accession to the European Union.” This document outlined the strategies and tactics for the years 2000–2002 as the date of accession was first set by 2002. To further promote Poland in the member states and to achieve the ratification of the Accession Treaty a second programme was drawn up in 2002 with the title: “Programme of Promoting Poland in the Member Countries of the European Union during the Ratification of the Accession Treaty.” Image building and promotion are identified in both programmes as overall goals, gaining membership support and credibility being the more specific—and certainly more measurable—objectives. These programmes aimed at the “general public” as well as the members of the parliaments who would, in the end, ratify the Accession Treaty. The program included The Polish Year in Spain (2002), in Austria (2002–2003), Sweden (2003) and the Polish Cultural Season in France 2004.\textsuperscript{46}

Central and Eastern European countries have often concentrated on their past rather than on their future in their public diplomacy efforts. Politicians often portrayed these countries as victims of the Soviet era that needed aid and support. Past or future orientation can have a significant bearing on the acceptance and credibility of these countries and their rhetoric. Contemplating the past or looking into the future is demonstrated by two Baltic countries’ attitudes. As a Latvian journalist observed: when an Estonian diplomat goes to a conference, he says: “We

Table 25.3. Traditional and 21st Century Public Diplomacy Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional public diplomacy</th>
<th>21st-century public diplomacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Conflict, tensions between states</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td>To achieve political change in target countries by changing target audiences’ behaviour</td>
<td>Political and economic interest promotion to create receptive environment and positive reputation of the country abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Persuasion, Managing publics</td>
<td>Building and maintaining relationships Engaging with publics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction of communication</strong></td>
<td>One way communication (monologue)</td>
<td>Two-way communication (dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td>Very little, if any</td>
<td>PD based on scientific research where feedback is also important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Message context</strong></td>
<td>Ideologies, Interests</td>
<td>Ideas, Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target audiences (publics)</strong></td>
<td>“General” public of the target nation; sender and receivers of messages</td>
<td>Segmented, well-defined publics + domestic publics; Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Channels</strong></td>
<td>Traditional mass media</td>
<td>Old and new media; often personalized via networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>Sponsored by government</td>
<td>Public and private partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have an idea.” When a Latvian diplomat goes to the same conference, he says: “We have a problem.”

A country’s prime minister, its president and the minister of foreign affairs are the main figures who represent a country in foreign relations. They are the “official faces” of a country and their communication and actions generate foreign media coverage. They can boost as well as damage a country’s reputation. The Kaczynski twins’ actions and ideas often dominated the international headlines in 2006, influencing Poland’s reputation abroad. Hungary’s socialist prime minister, communist-turned-billionaire Ferenc Gyurcsány made the international headlines a few times during 2005 and 2006. He praised the Hungarian national soccer team’s performance in a friendly game against Saudi Arabia in February 2005: “I think that there were very many terrorists also among the Saudi soccer players, and our sons fought with death-defying bravery against these terrorists, so a draw away from home is a fantastic result.” This quote received worldwide publicity and damaged not only Gyurcsány’s reputation but that of Hungary among Arab states too. The Saudi ambassador left Hungary, whose government was begging him to return to Hungary and had to apologise. In a leaked tape in 2006 Gyurcsány admitted that he and his socialist government “lied in the morning, and lied in the evening” for years which generated worldwide publicity again. Controversial remarks by politicians can also cast the spotlight on a country although this would follow the “there is no such thing as bad publicity” approach, which can be risky.

A country’s support of another nation’s foreign policy goals and interests may also have implications for public diplomacy. Poland’s strong support of the war in Iraq and her pro-American stance in foreign policy had significant bearings on Polish public diplomacy. Poland’s willingness to send troops to Iraq must have impressed the Americans and NATO officials but certainly did not achieve the same outcome within European countries. 13 Eastern European head of states supported the US-led war in Iraq in 2003 by signing the “Letter of Eight” and the “Vilnius Statement.” The strong support of the war from CEE countries prompted German professor of philosophy, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida to publish a manifesto invoking the notion of a “core Europe” (including France, Germany, Benelux states and Italy) distinct from those countries that supported the war: both the UK and those Central European countries, which are members of the EU. They argued that “only the core European nations are ready to endow the EU with certain qualities of a state” and they should be the “locomotive” of the Union. Fawn attributed Central European states’ support of the Iraq War to American soft power; however, it could also be interpreted as an impression management exercise to impress the US government and to earn credits. Foreign policy decisions indeed can be subject to impression management: policy-makers can assess the symbolic value of an action or decision as well as the impression it could have and decide to pursue a policy or action or not.

Poland’s mediating role in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine went down very well in the European Union. Poland could have built on and relied on an old value: Solidarity, something which the country is still associated with. So far, however, it remains a missed foreign policy opportunity and none of the democratically elected governments have used “Solidarity” to promote Poland’s image “as a country that strives for respect of human rights all over the world.” In other terms, Solidarity could be a “niche” for Polish foreign policy and public diplomacy.

After the collapse of the Iron Curtain the European Union replaced US influence in the region. The European Union’s soft power has served as a “magnet” for CEE countries wanting to join the EU. The co-operation between Central European countries and the pre-enlargement European Union is a good example of symmetrical public diplomacy, which aims at creating mutual understanding and is based on dialogue. In symmetrical public diplomacy each party has an equal chance to influence policy outcomes, which are mutually beneficial to all, and each party is willing to alter its policies, positions or behaviour accordingly.
Following EU and NATO accessions some CEE countries have been searching for new directions and priorities in their foreign policy orientations as well as trying to find their place and role in the enlarged European Union. Partnership and co-operation have been central concepts in Central European countries’ foreign policy visions and public diplomacy strategies. In 2005, the Estonian Foreign Ministry’s defined its new vision as “achieving and ensuring democracy, stability, security, and prosperity in Europe and elsewhere in the world” and becoming a “dependable and credible partner in both the EU and NATO, in other international organisations, and in bilateral relations.” Central European countries have accumulated valuable experiences in nation building as well as “know-how” of economic and political transformation that could be beneficial to other nations, which are at an earlier stage of their transition. After becoming EU members Central European countries therefore started to look east again with the aim of promoting democracy in the former Soviet Union countries and in Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Georgia.

International conferences and congresses are also important public diplomacy tools, especially if the topic is public diplomacy itself. The Diplomatic Academy of the Croatian Ministry for Foreign Affairs has organised four international conferences on Public Diplomacy and gained important “know-how” about PD theory and practice.51

The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs runs a quiz every year on its website with the aim of “introducing Estonia to citizens of other countries.” A Pakistani girl who was born in the medical tent of the Estonian rescue team in the earthquake that hit Pakistan in 2005 was named “Estonia.” This was widely covered by the local and international media and demonstrated that small countries can also achieve serious results by deeds that speak louder than words.

The majority of Central European countries maintain up-to-date country websites, which often serve as a “one-stop shop” on general information on the specific country and serve as an important public diplomacy tool. The web addresses bear the countries’ English names (e.g., http://www.poland.pl, http://www.czech.cz; http://www.slovenia.si) and are operated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Czech website), by the government (Slovenian, Slovakian or the Hungarian website), by the institute responsible for country promotion (Latvian website), by the National Tourist Board (Croatian website) or other institutions.

International Broadcasting

International broadcasting is an integral part of both cultural and public diplomacy. Browne identified the following functions of international broadcasting: an instrument of foreign policy, a mirror of society, a symbolic presence, a converter and sustainer, a coercer and intimidator, an educator, an entertainer and a seller of goods and services.53 The majority of central European governments fund international broadcasting although these stations rarely broadcast 24/7 in all the major languages and often rely on other than government funds as well. Table 25.4 summarizes the radio and TV stations sponsored fully or partly from the central budget which aim at foreign audiences. The websites of some stations also serve as a news portal providing news about the particular country in several languages.

While many of these media outlets aim at minorities living around the countries, expatriates or diasporas, some of them are involved in “democracy promotion.” In March 2004, a Spanish language programme was launched by Radio Prague, intended for listeners mostly in Cuba but in Latin-American countries too with the aim of providing information about the Czech Republic’s experience of transition. In 2006, the Polish government set up Radio Racja (Radio Right) to broadcast news into neighbouring Belarus with the aim of weakening the state monopoly over information in Belarus and to promote democracy. TV Belsat is the “brainchild” of Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, a Polish broadcaster and journalist, who was expelled from
Belarus several times and has been actively involved in setting up and running the station. The television station’s aim is to broadcast independent news, cultural and musical programmes in Belarusian four hours daily since there is no Belarusian language broadcasting in the country but only in the Russian language, closely controlled and censored by the Belarus authorities. The station went on air in 2007 on the International Human Rights Day (10 December). The Polish state funds TV Belsat with €4.47 million and Lithuania also contributes to its funding. The station hopes to receive assistance from the US, Czech Republic and the EU as well.

Perception Management

The final pillar of the reputation pantheon is perception management, where manipulating perceptions is more important than reality and messages do not necessarily reflect the truth; replacing the factual by the representational is the essence of this dimension. The aim can be to discredit countries or regimes, to create “negative images” of other countries or governments (in some Eastern European countries the process is incorrectly called “black public relations”), to create crisis situations, or “sell” and justify unethical policies or wars internationally.

Fortunately, the number of examples in Central Europe is rather limited. In 2000, Romania employed a German PR agency to downplay the damage of the second biggest disaster in the region after Chernobyl. Cyanide leaked from a gold mine in Romania into the river Tisza in Hungary where tens of thousands of fish and other forms of wildlife were killed, flora and fauna completely destroyed and drinking-water supplies poisoned. The campaign aimed at

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Table 25.4. International Broadcasting in Central and Eastern Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>International broadcasting</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Website address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Radio Bulgaria</td>
<td>Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish, Serbian, Greek, Albanian and Turkish</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bnr.bg">http://www.bnr.bg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Radio Prague</td>
<td>English, German, Spanish, Russian, French, Czech</td>
<td><a href="http://www.radio.cz/english">http://www.radio.cz/english</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Budapest Radio*</td>
<td>English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Italian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Radio Polonia</td>
<td>Polish, English, German, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Hebrew</td>
<td><a href="http://www.polskieradio.pl/zagranica">http://www.polskieradio.pl/zagranica</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radio Racza</td>
<td>Belarusian</td>
<td><a href="http://www.radioracija.pl/">http://www.radioracija.pl/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TV Polonia</td>
<td>Polish with English subtitles</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tvp.pl/tvppolonia">http://www.tvp.pl/tvppolonia</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TV Belarus</td>
<td>Belarusian and Russian</td>
<td><a href="http://www.belstat.eu">http://www.belstat.eu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Radio Romania International</td>
<td>Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Serbian, Spanish, Russian and Ukrainian, Romanian</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rrri.ro">http://www.rrri.ro</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These foreign language services were abolished in July 2007 due to lack of resources.
downplaying the effects of the catastrophe and at discrediting the Hungarian government by stating that it had exaggerated the damage. The Romanian government also banned the shooting of a film about Romanian gypsies as it shed a very negative light on the country before its accession to the EU. The negative publicity about the ban resulted in more harm to the country and its government.

Albania’s government commissioned an international consultancy in 2005 to change the country’s image as a backward corrupt state and to replace with an investor-friendly image of Albania. With daily electricity cuts and lack of infrastructure, however, a campaign can only be an example of perception management.

Russia provides endless examples of perception management. The Russian government and the Russian president have engaged in several “image” campaigns soon after the government’s or Putin’s image has suffered. Putin used an international PR agency in preparation for the presidential elections in 2000 when an international media and advocacy campaign was developed to explain policies on the war in Chechnya and his approaches to economic and social reforms to Western opinion leaders. In 2006 the Kremlin decided to engage in another international media campaign in the UK, USA and China to ‘correct the negative and outdated stereotypes about Russia’ and to give the country’s image a makeover ahead of the G8 summit with the help of an American public relations agency. The Western media’s portrayal of Russia is still often dominated by stereotypes and prejudices, and largely focuses on negative issues.

Russia’s negative image further deteriorated in 2006 with the assassination of Anna Politovskaya, a critic of the president and the government and with the poisoning of the former Russian spy, Alexander Litvinenko. A former KGB agent was named as the prime suspect for the murder and Britain made several unsuccessful attempts to extradite him. As retaliation Russian authorities forced the British Council to close two of its offices in Russia in January 2008: a clear attack on the cultural and public diplomacy front rather than using traditional diplomacy. David Miliband, the British Foreign Secretary’s response, was pertinent. He said that Russian actions against the British Council were “a stain on its reputation” while a British diplomat “branded” the attack as “punching a librarian.” Any campaigns to improve Russia’s image in the West following these events and atrocities could only be classified as perception management.

Russia has very negative (in some cases even hostile) images among many Eastern European countries and has so far failed to address its negative reputation in its former sphere of influence. Moscow has attempted several times to discredit the Baltic states and to put them in a bad light about the role they have played in the Russian-EU relationship. Russia has been reluctant to acknowledge the independence of these states and heavily criticised their accession to NATO and EU and also refused to apologise to the Baltic States for annexing them to the Soviet Union and for the communist repressions. Russia also tried to make the most of the large Russian-speaking minorities often manipulating them to its advantage.

The Estonian government’s decision to remove a Soviet war monument from the center of Tallinn to a military cemetery in 2007 provoked rioting in Tallinn by local Russians. As revenge, a massive campaign against Estonia and its government was launched. Russia’s deputy prime minister called on Russians to boycott Estonian goods and service as a punishment and encouraged Russians not to go to Estonia for holiday. The Estonian embassy in Moscow came under a blockade, followed by a cyber-attack where Estonian governmental, media, financial and telecommunication web-sites were attacked, defaced or replaced by Russian propaganda materials. Russia also intensified its propaganda machine to portray Estonia in a negative light. This bullying resulted in Russia’s poor image further deteriorating in the European Union.

Besides the ad hoc perception management campaigns, the Russian government has recently started to be more consistent and pay more attention to its public diplomacy efforts. In 2005, a monthly English-language magazine Russia Profile was launched followed by Russia Today, a
24-hour, English-language TV station to provide “first-hand news” about Russia with an annual budget of $30 million. Voice of Russia broadcasts in 33 languages to a worldwide radio audience and there are Russian Cultural Centres in 62 countries. The National Information Centre was set up in January 2008 to provide “open” media information and help the work of foreign journalists based in Moscow. For maintaining stability in Russia and the region, TIME magazine chose President Putin as the Person of the Year 2007 which boosted his image.

According to Tsygankov, contrary to the popular image of Russia as an aggressive and imperialistic states, Russian foreign policy is driven by domestic priorities, including economic growth and stability and soft power, as well as addressing security threats rather than Russia being a threat to the West. As a part of its soft power, for example, the government is keen to promote the Russian language as the regional lingua franca. As Tsygankov notes, a serious obstacle to mutual understanding between the West and Russia is the Western nations’ attitudes toward non-Western countries, which are not viewed as equal partners.

By definition public diplomacy involves a country’s government. Any campaigns and initiatives that address foreign public opinion and originate from the Russian government will not be credible in the West. In this sense Russian and American public diplomacy efforts have much in common: they both try to persuade foreign publics that their government’s (foreign) policies and actions are legitimate and justified. Instead of changing their policies, they try to change the perceptions of foreign publics. Both the US and Russian governments are puzzled and surprised why their countries have such negative images worldwide.

**Mistakes of Reputation Management**

The challenges and experiences of Central European countries’ reputation management include valuable “lessons” that can be useful to small and medium-sized states as well as to countries in political and/or economic transition.

- **Lack of co-ordination among the pillars of reputation management** (destination and country branding, public and cultural diplomacy). There is no synergy and collaboration among these functions or one of them is overemphasized over the others.
- **No strategic co-ordination among the institutions and actors involved in country promotion.** This could result in uncoordinated messages and the lack of consistency.
- **There is a danger of mixing the subject and the specialisation of reputation management.** The failed attempt of Branding America in the Arab world, co-ordinated by Charlotte Beers, the branding expert, well demonstrates what happens when foreign policy becomes the subject of branding. A branding-driven approach to public diplomacy can be risky and counterproductive. This substitution game can result in the loss of credibility. Reality and image should always correspond otherwise the messages are not credible and can only further harm the country’s already negative reputation.
- **Reputation management is politicised and it becomes the victim of domestic politics,** especially when there is no agreement among the different political parties about how or by whom the country’s reputation should be managed abroad. Many Central European countries’ branding initiatives came to a halt with the change of government and lack of continuity has prevented the evolution and development of strong and coherent nation brands.
- **This can also lead to the lack of continuity in and strategic approach to reputation management.** Another barrier to continuity is the high turnover of staff and professionals as many of those who developed or worked in public diplomacy or branding at the beginning have moved on.
National reputation management or governmental reputation management? If there is no consensus among political parties about the need and implementation of country promotion, the opposition can easily discredit any governmental initiatives as propagandist. In August 2006 the Polish government appointed a Plenipotentiary to safeguard and promote the image of Poland abroad. The newly appointed Polish Plenipotentiary was quick to dismiss any charges of propaganda. His appointment followed a satirical article published by a left-wing German newspaper about Polish President Lech Kaczyński. The article described him as a “potato” and criticized him for his scepticism toward Germany. In response, the President demanded an apology from Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government, which refused to interfere. The German media has dubbed the dispute “the potato war.”

Lack of financial and human resources, which is a common problem in each CEE country but innovative and creative approaches to reputation management can save money.

Lack of transparency and lack of evaluation. National reputation management is often financed from the central budget. That is why it should be clearly explained how the money is spent and the whole project should be transparent. Evaluation during and after any campaigns is also of crucial importance.

Short-term effects and thinking rather than long-term. Some elements of reputation management are more visible and easier to measure (e.g. tourists, foreign students) but reputation building can easily take decades and is a slow process. Public diplomacy campaigns may be short term as well as long term. Governments, especially before national elections, can use results of reputation management as justification for their own success and to impress voters. In this case the government strives for short-term and visible impacts from branding and public diplomacy campaigns.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the evolution of reputation management in Central Europe, a transitional region which has accumulated two decades of experience. Destination and country branding, cultural and public diplomacy together with perception management were conceptualized as the specializations of international public relations. In the Central European context public diplomacy is conceptualized as foreign policy’s communication dimension which contributes to establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between a governmental organization and foreign publics. As the foreign policy goals of many European Union countries are converging and foreign policy cooperation is on the increase at the EU level, public diplomacy will have a more crucial role for a member state in communicating with other countries and peoples.

In 1994, a few years into the political and economic transition, Wolff argued that although the iron curtain is gone, its shadow persists. With the growing professionalization of reputation management, and with the fruitful cooperation among Central European countries, this shadow is slowly fading away.

Notes


2 The BBC World Service, for example, ceased broadcasting in Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Hungarian, Kazakh, Polish, Slovak, and Slovene in 2005/06 due to reprioritization, eliminating decades of
broadcasting in these languages. The British Council is to close its information centers and libraries in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Slovakia in 2008 to reallocate resources to the Middle East.


7. Slovenia is the first country from Eastern Europe to run the EU for a six-month period from January 2008, followed by the Czech Republic from January 2009.

8. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO in 1999, followed by the three Baltic States, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria in 2004.

9. Hungary will introduce English as a compulsory foreign language at secondary schools from 2010.


11. This is applicable to any country and region in transition, not only Eastern Europe.


15. Although the Polish version of the website calls the department “Department of Promotion” and only the English version of the website uses the term “Public Diplomacy.”


22. The public relations literature refers to this process as “issues management.”


25. An example of this is a conference, devoted to images in International Relations (Chong, A. and Valencic, J. (1999). *The Image, the State and International Relations*. Proceedings from the conference on 24 June 1999 at the London School of Economics and Political Science. EFPU Working Papers No.2001/2.) but branding, image, public relations, advertising, and public diplomacy are used interchangeably without clear conceptualization.


28. See, for example, the *Financial Times*’ special country reports on Hungary (December 12, 2005), Bulgaria (July 12, 2006), Croatia (October 30, 2006), Slovenia (December 13, 2006), Poland (20 December 2006), Romania (2 March 2007); or The Economist’s survey on Poland, May 13, 2006. 312
31 Ibid.
33 Branding scholars and practitioners often refer to “nation branding” instead of state or country branding, using nation and state as synonyms.
34 van Ham, op. cit.
40 As quoted in The Economist, May 14, 2005, 46.
42 Ibid.
44 C. Kegley and E. Wittkopf, World Politics: Trend and Transformation (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999).
51 http://www.mwpei.hr/MVP.asp?pcpid=1765
52 http://quiz.mfa.ee/default.asp
54 Personal interview with Mrs. Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, Wroclaw, Poland, May 24, 2007.
55 Details of the award winning public relations campaign are available at http://www.prweekus.com/
56 The Russian minority is made up 29% of the Latvian population, 26% of the Estonian population and 8% of the Lithuanians.