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## "Public Diplomacy" and the Construction of Foreign Stereotypes in the Russian and British Press in the second half of the XIX century

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### Abstract

The periodical press in the second half of the XIX century turned into one of the most effective tools of "soft power" due to its ability to influence public opinion; the periodical press interpreted the events in favor of the state strategy in its foreign policy preferences.

The Russian press, in contrast to most European countries, continued to be significantly influenced by censorship, which, among other things, held back its number (the censors could not cope with a large number of publications). Newspapers and magazines were under the influence of the system of administrative penalties, in addition to liability to the court. Censorship strictly followed the principles of public diplomacy, taking care to preserve foreign policy priorities in the periodical press, not only in war, but also in peacetime. However, there are a number of Russian publications, which gave an objective assessment of what happened during the Balkan crisis, demonstrated the diversity of England's approaches to the events of 1876–1877.

The Russian press was able to solve the most important problem facing public diplomacy: to convey the understanding of the policy of their own state to the mass of their own and foreign readers, to influence decisions made in the highest circles.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, Russian and English periodicals, censorship, General Directorate of Press Affairs, public diplomacy, "soft power", Balkan crisis.

### 1. Introduction

In modern conditions, the study of the history of Russian foreign policy requires a comprehensive approach, which includes not only the analysis of intergovernmental relations as an accomplished fact, but also a study of the situation in which the country's position was formed in various issues of international interaction. In this regard, it becomes relevant to study various aspects of the political and social structure of a particular territory, its internal reserves in the development of industry and agriculture, and military potential.

Subjects that are not on the surface and are difficult to reproduce by the official documents that have been preserved occupy a special position in this approach. Such subjects of study include the political mentality of the ruling circles and the population, cultural level and national identity, social values and ideals that dominated at the time of implementation of the policy in the interstate sphere and are taken into account when making key decisions.

Periodicals can provide invaluable assistance in restoring these realities, preserving not only the concrete facts of the former life, but also a view that corresponded to reality at that time, on the system of arguments of contemporaries about various foreign policy issues of that time.

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It is possible to restore the mechanism of folding and functioning of the official line in foreign policy issues in the conditions of the existence of censorship, which controlled periodicals, through the definition of the motives on the basis of which the punishments for the publications made were determined.

The beginning of the use of one of the first types of mass media, the periodical press, as a tool of “public diplomacy” dates back to the second half of the XIX century.

## 2. Materials and methods

An acknowledged specialist in the field of public diplomacy – Nicholas J. Cull, who is the head of the master's program in the Faculty of Communications and Journalism at the University of South Carolina (USA), called the publication of the “London Diploma” in January 1856 as the earliest use of the term “public diplomacy”. This article criticized the position of Franklin Pierce, the 14th American President, in the context of aggravated relations between the United States and Britain.

In the material of the newspaper, this combination of words was used as a synonym for politeness. The author of the article emphasized: “American statesmen should keep in mind that if they need to make a certain impression on us, they should also set an example to their people. Such actions can be called examples of public diplomacy.” (Cull, 2006).

Modern society cannot do without the media, which are one of the most effective tools for applying “soft power” in foreign and domestic policy due to their ability to influence public opinion. M.M. Lebedeva, one of the leading domestic experts in this field, believes that “soft power” is characterized by the possibilities of the most diverse ways to achieve the goal: “unofficial channels for achieving the goal are represented by the activities of the media, universities, NGOs, etc.” (Lebedeva, 2017: 217). As applied to the second half of the XIX century, “the influence of the press, simultaneous and immediate on many thousands of minds, had unprecedented scales and could not be compared with anything else” (Aled, 1996: 98). Thus, the press of this period has already acted as an essential element of public diplomacy, capable of realizing the intended results without coercive pressure and threats.

Speaking of Russia of this time, it is necessary to bear in mind that the beginning of 1856 was marked by the withdrawal of Russia from the Crimean War (1853–1856), which ended with a severe defeat. There was a discussion of the ultimatum put forward by the coalition members as conditions for the signing of a peace treaty in January, that is, at the time of publication in the London newspaper of an article with the aforementioned notion “public diplomacy”. At that time, the Russian Empire did not yet have an adequate mechanism for transmitting certain views and moods, relaying ideas to society that were supported by the state in foreign policy. Public participation in the discussion of such problems was extremely limited.

The shameful defeat in the Crimean War was a serious pretext for the authorities to achieve the necessary compromise in relations between the state and society. The beginning of the new reign, among other things, was marked by an increase in the number of publications: 24 newspapers and magazines appeared in 1856–1857 (Bibliography of the Russian..., 1915: 127-167). The government of Alexander II preoccupied with the problem of state and legal regulation of the press, realizing that only through certain legislative changes, the establishment of clear principles in relations could solve the issue of using periodicals in the interests of future transformations, restoring the “external” image of the country to international isolation, getting rid of the prevailing stereotypes of the perception of Nikolaev Russia in the media of other states.

This, of course, was not about creating a free press, but the authorities already understood that newspapers and magazines are an important factor in influencing public self-consciousness, a conductor of prevailing moods that can be regulated with their help. In addressing foreign policy issues, the press was able to shift the interest of the reading public towards negative phenomena in other countries, to ensure the dominance of attention in relation to the states belonging to the Russian interest.

Speaking about the results achieved in these areas, it is enough to note that private press appeared less than ten years later in Russia, which were perceived abroad as official representatives of the authorities in domestic and foreign policy. This is primarily about the “Moskovskie vedomosti” of M.N. Katkov and the St. Petersburg newspaper “Golos” of A.A. Kraevsky.

In the final 15 years of its existence, Golos received 11 warnings from the Minister of the Interior with 3 suspensions for a total period of 6 months (Periodical Press, 2011), despite this, Golos acted as a steady guide for the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its leadership.

To date, the history of Russian foreign policy in the second half of the XIX century has not been considered in the light of public diplomacy techniques. The purpose of this article is to analyze the process of turning the press into an instrument of public policy, a reflection of its characteristics in peaceful conditions, as well as during the Balkan crisis, on the eve of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is a set of principles, methods, approaches and techniques included in the tools of modern historical and political science.

The presented work is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity. The principles of a systemic-historical approach allowed a comprehensive approach to the analysis of the events of the Balkan crisis, to identify the features necessary for uncovering the attitude of Russia and England to the problems of public diplomacy. The materials used in the article, in order to identify various facts and trends, were considered in a temporary context, taking into account the specific conditions of their creation.

The source base of the research is represented by official documents regulating the activities of censorship institutions of Russia and the content of publications in periodicals. The materials of the periodical press of the XIX century, as well as the documents of the Fund of the General Directorate for Press Affairs (F. 776), stored in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA, St. Petersburg) were important sources.

### 3. Discussion

At present, the appeal to the comprehension of the perception of the periodical press of the Russian-Turkish confrontation of 1877–1878 retains its research interest. This war was one of the most “ideologized”, and its causes, course and consequences largely depended on the factor of public opinion (Kochukov, 2011: 112). This thesis is fully confirmed by the participation of the media in covering the events.

Modern historical research is generally characterized by an active exchange between various social and human sciences, although the publications still dominate the view of the facts from the point of view of government policy.

Foreign authors considered the role of the press in the formation of a nation and a state. Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism” (Anderson, 1991) focuses on these issues. Aled Jones believes that “the simultaneous and immediate influence of the press on many thousands of minds had an unprecedented scale and could not be compared with anything more” (Jones, 1996: 98).

The topic of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878 and the Eastern crisis as a whole was examined in sufficient detail. However, there is still no full-scale work on the influence of the periodical press on the formation of public opinion in this period, especially the perception of military events by the population of both the warring and observing countries of the Russian-Turkish war is not shown. Finally, the events in question were not analyzed from the perspective of studying the problem of public diplomacy.

### 4. Results

In Russia, the problems of foreign policy, discussed in the periodical press on the basis of the law of April 6, 1865, were under the jurisdiction of the internal censorship bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, under which the Directorate General for Press Affairs was located. The head of the ministry issued warnings to periodicals, and permission to publish, suspend and even stop printing newspapers and magazines depended on him, and he also sent demands for legal proceedings “for misconduct of the press”.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this administrative scheme was not related to the opinions and views of certain authors or periodicals as a whole. Article 36 of the censorship statute stated: “Consideration and publication of articles and news of political content is the responsibility of the general censorship in all publications subject to review without any participation and responsibility for them of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (Shirkov, 1900: 15).

European diplomats were convinced that since there are no political freedoms in Russia, and the administration has unlimited rights, press statements on foreign policy issues come from the government. However, foreigners did not take into account the specifics of the Russian censorship legislation, which consisted in the fact that in cases of disagreeable for the government printed controversy, the General Directorate of Press Affairs often did not direct the opinions of the press, but simply eliminated the subjects of discussion, which should not have been exposed. To implement such a trend in the relationship between the press and the censorship department, changes were made to the current censorship charter.

All censorship Russian charters (1804, 1826, and 1828), from the moment they were enacted, were soon supplemented with a wide variety of administrative circulars, which significantly altered and even violated the basic law. In 1873, under the rule of the Minister of Internal Affairs, A.E. Timashev, Articles 140 and 156, included there as the highest approved opinion of the State Council on June 16, 1873, supplemented the charter of 1828.

Free from censorship restrictions, the Western European press could critically speak about many areas of Russian foreign policy. The Russian press was well aware of this, as it actively borrowed information from foreign publications, and was ready to get involved in controversy, but regularly encountered censorship restrictions of the 140th article.

It was intended for such cases, defined as “caused by the highest interests of the state” and allegedly applied only “in extremely rare circumstances”: Editors of publications withdrawn from prior censorship are notified through the General Directorate of Press Affairs, by order of the Minister of the Interior.” (Shirkov, 1900: 63–64).

Circulars from the General Directorate of Press Affairs were sent to the editors of publications with the participation of the city police officers, who issued them against receipt. There were also personal meetings with editors, pointedly polite addresses of the head of the General Directorate of Press Affairs for authoritative publications: “I beg the Editor, if he considers it necessary, to execute the order ...” (Lemke, 1905: 101).

In addition to the current circulars on the press, the censorship bodies regularly applied to determine the appropriateness of certain publications that ensured that the media did not interfere with the established balance of interstate relations.

Before the start of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, undisguised mistrust was the dominant principle in the policy of European states towards each other. Germany was suspicious of France, Austria looked at Italy with a prejudice, skepticism and mutual suspicion characterized relations between England and Russia. The uncertainty in the position of the foreign affairs agencies and officials predetermined the complexity of the functioning of the periodical press, which was lost in the assessments and prospects of the unfolding events.

Russian rulers did not have the same views on Russia's political moves. The brother of the emperor Konstantin Nikolaevich, the heir to the throne Alexander Alexandrovich, a well-known diplomat, the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, the future Interior Minister, Count N.P. Ignatiev, military minister D.A. Milyutin advocated active actions. Chancellor A.M. Gorchakov was a supporter of cautious politics, but in the end the first group gained the upper hand, which at the meetings of the beginning of October 1876 related to the events in the Balkans, insisted on an independent and active policy in the conditions of the expanding Eastern crisis.

In the face of such uncertainty, the Russian press received a unique opportunity to predict the development of the situation, and on this basis, an increase in reader interest. It can be said without exaggeration that among such interested readers there were also persons on whom the foreign policy of the country depended, the public diplomacy of the Russian press also had an impact on foreign partners and opponents.

At the same time, there was a change in the position of the government in relation to the press, which is quite eloquently indicated by the number of circulars issued. Since the adoption of the 140th article of the censorship charter, 8 circulars were prepared in 1873, 10 in 1874, 11 in 1875, 12 in 1876, that is, their number increased from year to year. However, in the year of the beginning of the war (1877), 6 circulars came out, which is two times less, and there were none at all in 1878. For comparison, 35 circulars were issued in the crisis year of 1881 ([Lemke, 1905: 102](#)).

The newspaper *Golos*, already named one of the largest at that time, did not in fact conceal its position and fully supported Chancellor A.M. Gorchakova, but most of the press were distinguished by the independence of their position in foreign policy issues. Even the conservative “*Grazhdanin*”, who was not distinguished by bold judgments, sneered at “*Golos*”:

The Russian press actively used the potential of public diplomacy for one more reason, which was discussed by the correspondent of the *Russkoye obozreniye* newspaper: “a cautious, even timid press, speaking of governors solely about awards and promotions, shows irrepressible zeal, courage and even freethinking about European orders and rulers” ([Russkoye obozreniye. 1877. No 3-4. 22 January](#)). Indeed, the acuteness of international issues was much less dangerous for the editorial offices of newspapers, compared with domestic problems affecting the interests of specific departments and people who can resist. Not only the metropolitan, but also the provincial press organs were actively involved in covering foreign policy issues and explaining government decisions, unwittingly turning into a means by which it became possible to influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments “in order to influence their foreign policy decisions” (What is Public Diplomacy?).

Despite opposition from the censorship department, the numerical growth of the press in Russia continued. European countries were still very far away, “900 different editions were printed” only in one Paris in 1869 ([Kelen, b. G.: 95](#)), however, “thirty-six newspapers were in the country in 1870, then fifty-one newspapers were printed in 1877” ([Esin, 1971: 36](#)). The events that preceded the Russian-Turkish war, the course of military operations, aroused particular reader interest. With the growing number of newspapers, and, consequently, of the reading public, the Russian press was involved in promoting national interests, explaining the position of the state in international politics.

The Constantinople Conference, which became one of the key points in the development of the Eastern crisis, was held from December 11 (23), 1876 to January 8 (20), 1877. In addition to representatives from Russia and England, delegates from Germany, France, Austria-Hungary and Italy, who put forward the goal of a speedy resolution of the conflict between the Slavic peoples and the Porte, participated in the conference. Ottoman Turkey undertook an unexpected move, announcing the proclamation of the constitution, allegedly guaranteeing the rights of the Christian population at the opening of the conference.

The demands of the European powers were rejected, but this did not mean that the Sultan was ready to openly confront all of Europe. The calculation was to connect the system of checks and balances, which was an integral part of European policy. The Balkan crisis revealed two main power centers: Russia and England, which were ready to support the world order, but not to allow each other to dominate. According to the author of the theory of “balance of power”, K. Waltz, the achievement of a balance between individual centers in the distribution of world influence is achieved in such mutual deterrence ([Waltz, 1993](#)).

On October 29, 1876, Alexander II declared that in the event of the failure of the Constantinople Conference, Russia was ready to act independently. The partial mobilization of the Russian army was declared ([Rybachenok, 1981: 175](#)). Russian newspaper of A.S. Suvorin “*Novoye Vremya*” clarified the position of England: the Turkish delegation at the conference “was convinced that Turkey could count on the support of England at a crucial moment, but Lord Salisbury did everything to eliminate this conviction, and Henry Eliot (*envoy in Constantinople, the second representative on conference from England*. – Auth.), <...> tried on the

contrary to strengthen it. The Turks were confused and did not know who to believe, and most importantly, they were wondering if England would come out in their defense" ([Novoye Vremya 1877. No. 308. January 6](#)).

In January 1877, against the background of these events, the Russian press formed a direction that served as a kind of public signal for the British side: if Russia and England joined their efforts in the current crisis situation, "they could overlook the rest of the world". *Novoye Vremya* argued that England was the strongest ally for Russia, and if the "amicable demarcation" of the interests of the two states was carried out, "British society could be inspired with confidence in Russia's policy" ([Novoye Vremya. 1877. No. 317. January 15](#)).

A publicist of the Petersburg newspaper "Birzhevye vedomosti" saw in the establishment of friendly relations with England the prospect of improving the political system of Russia, through borrowing the principles of freedom in politics and trade. England was declared "a representative of ideas and principles, the development of which leads to the improvement of the fate of mankind" ([Birzhevye vedomosti. 1877. No. 210. August 25](#)). The newspaper "Grazhdanin", distinguished by an accentuated patriotic orientation, recognized that, despite the politically hostile attitude of the British government towards Russia, the British did a lot "for the benefit of truth and light in the matter of the related peoples of the Balkan Peninsula" ([Grazhdanin. 1877. No. 14. 14th of April](#)).

The signal sent to the British by the Russian press reached the addressee, since there were arguments about the opinions of the Russians in the English press. Thus, the Daily News correspondent presented his readers with such considerations: "Some Russians spoke frankly how they hate England, that they don't want anything so much as to see the two countries fighting each other. Others, who had some respect for England, think that if these states joined forces, they might have ignored the rest of the world. Others fear England and view it as the master of the situation in the Balkans" ([Forbes, 1878: 231-232](#)).

However, as early as February 1877, the tone of Russian newspapers began to change, the European press also spoke in a belligerent manner. Literary critic P.V. Annenkov noticed in his letter from Europe, where he constantly lived, to the editor of the "Vestnik Evropy", M.M. Stasyulevich: "I have one consolation that Ilovaisky, Suvorin etc., sending declarations of war to Europe in their own name and from their offices exist here. You know that the Berlin newspapers threaten France to cross the Rhine if the French press writes unfair articles about Germany. I really like this kind of controversy by its decisive nature – I just don't know if Saratov or Hannover peasants and ordinary people will like it" ([Annenkov, 1912: 339](#)). However, despite the political discord, which was reflected in the pages of newspapers, Russia and England were generally recognized influential centers, on which the resolution of the Balkan crisis depended.

Meanwhile, relations between the two states developed in the direction of direct confrontation and the Peterburgskaya gazeta stated already in early May 1877: "If the war of Russia has not yet been declared, then only because England does not find another moment for this favorable" ([Peterburgskaya gazeta. 1877. No. 71. May 6](#)). The newspaper stated that it was time to put an end to the English perfidy and accused the Russian periodicals that they care more about "the interest of the English than about the Russians" ([Peterburgskaya gazeta. 1877. No. 71. May 6](#)).

By 1878, the direction of public diplomacy in the Russian press began to be replaced by propaganda. The key difference in these terms is not the desire for a reliable presentation of events that are beneficial for the state, but the presence of misinformation. Characteristic of this situation are the accusations of bad faith of the enemy's media. For example, *Novoye Vremya* said that the British press was discussing the problems of the unsuccessful mobilization of the Russian army, that supposedly "instead of powder there was coal powder in the cartridges, the troops were poorly trained and suffered from diseases" ([Novoye Vremya, 1878. No. 662. 1 January](#)).

Circulars of the General Directorate of Press Affairs at this point eloquently testified to a change in the government's course towards searching for allies in a possible future direct military confrontation with England, therefore articles against the tripartite alliance were declared "very undesirable in general" and especially against Austria-Hungary ([RGIA. F. 776. Op. 6. D. 310. L. 4](#)). Another circular forbade the admission of a "hostile tone" towards Germany and Austria ([RGIA. F. 776. Op. 6. D. 398. L. 16](#)).

Unfortunately, the scope of the article does not allow to highlight the course of further events related to the continuation of the Balkan crisis, the signing of the Berlin treatise of 1878 and the role of the periodical press in resolving foreign policy problems. However, further peculiarities of using public diplomacy by the press should be shown on one example already in peacetime, when the interests of the created temporary unions of states dominated human values, were put above the established traditional international relations.

In 1887, the Russian censor banned the publication of the article "From the Latest Polish Poetry" by I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay in St. Petersburg's "Izvestiya slavyanskogo blagotvoritel'nogo obshchestva", and then in the Moscow's "Russkoe delo". However, ten or so years later, in 1898, the same materials were allowed to be printed by the same preliminary censorship and the matter is not in the censors' self-infatuation and not in softening the censorship regime, but in changing the foreign policy situation and finding new allies by Russia.

In 1887, one of the editors of the News of the Slavic Charitable Society was the well-known historian, founder and first director of The Bestuzhev courses, Professor K.N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin. He appreciated the

article sent to the editor I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay as follows: “I am very grateful to Ivan Alexandrovich for his excellent article. If censorship allows, it will appear in the April book. (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1898: 5).

However, in May 1887, another member of the journal, P.G. Moravek told the author: “The misfortune befell your article – the censorship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs struck it out entirely, keeping the issue for more than a month. All efforts were unsuccessful. Quos dues perdere vult – dementat<sup>1</sup>. It would be nice to place it somewhere – at least in Sharapova in the Russkoe delo, where your article will be gladly taken” (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1898: 7).

After a long wait for publication in the Moscow magazine Russkoye Delo, a disappointing letter was also received from the editor S.F. Sharapova: “Your article is full of adventures. I was going to print it in No. 12/13, but I decided, in view of double prohibitions, to show confidentially to the censor. He took the article to read and read it during 1½ of the month that is, did not read it, but transmitted it confidentially to the Main Department of Press. It is clear what was the answer! Terribly annoying, but nothing can be done. They can do terrible harm” (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1898: 7-8).

To understand the reasons for the censorship decisions, it suffices to give a literal translation of one of the poems entitled “Sedan” in the article: “When France fell, there was a long roar. The defeat was hailed as a celebration; the banners of the Gauls, their virtues and merits are violated in the German mud. When the Prussian sword, while performing miracles, brought to the Lord a pious tribute of blood, progress and freedom, the human freedom of the peoples fell in the gorges of Sedan” (Boduena de Courtenay, 1898: 34).

I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay later admitted that the lines written by the Polish poet A. Krausgar “are partly unfair” to the Germans and too “extol” the merits of the French. At that time, the censorship department could not allow to “broadcast” such a position with respect to Germany, but the Franco-Russian alliance was created in 1891, a secret military convention was signed between Russia and France in 1892, a defense alliance was also signed (1893) and there were no obstacles to publication in 1898.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of the presented article is to show that public diplomacy and the media are very closely linked. Public diplomacy became possible with the advent and wide circulation of the periodical press. The increased popularity of newspapers and magazines allowed the authorities to convey to the general public information in the right perspective, but at the same time provided an effective mechanism for the influence of public opinion on its decisions.

The active participation of the press in covering the events, in their political assessment and in shaping public sentiment contributed to the development of views, assessments and judgments both at the level of mass and individual consciousness.

Considering the strained relations between the two Russia and Britain in the period under review, it should also be noted that in the context of the Balkan crisis, newspaper publications of both countries did not differ in their one-sided presentation of information and changed as events developed, but both sides regularly tried to present their own policies in favorable light. At the initial stage, the tone of Russian and English newspapers in relation to each other was fairly moderate, the possibilities of creating a union of the two states were being considered to resolve the crisis situation. As the conflict developed, newspaper editorial offices abandoned critical discussions and proceeded to actively manipulate public opinion, replacing public diplomacy propaganda, forming the necessary psychological atmosphere, offering a pre-prepared options for understanding events.

This material makes it possible to trace how Russia, under the conditions of resolving urgent foreign policy tasks, was forced to change its image, making it more understandable and convincing for its Western partners, and one of the main roles in this belonged to the Russian press. In the situation of the Balkan crisis, the Russian society widely declared itself, demonstrating the existence of an active political life and a broad public initiative in a country that did not receive support from the authorities inside the state, moved beyond its limits.

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<sup>1</sup> “If God wants to punish a person, he deprives him of his mind” - translated from Latin.

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