

# The Development, (Non) Institutionalisation, and (Lost) Opportunities of Slovenian Environmental Diplomacy in the Last 25 Years

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## Abstract

*The article analyses the development of environmental diplomacy in Slovenia since 1991, when the country declared independence. The objective is to present the structural changes (and the lack thereof) in the development of Slovenian environmental diplomacy – from its blueprints (made in the first years of independence) to a more structural approach towards environmental diplomacy, and its regression. With respect to the development and regression of Slovenian environmental diplomacy, the article confirms the thesis that the formulation of Slovenian foreign policy is influenced by two factors: the role of the agent (i.e. the foreign minister and his or her interests) and the external variables, coming from a supranational or international environment.*

## KEY WORDS:

*environment, environmental diplomacy, environmental awareness, Slovenia, external variables*

## Introduction

Different studies conducted over the last decades have shown that present and future generations will need to deal with environmental challenges that pay no regard to borders (UNDP 1994), such as drastic (and unprecedented) population growth, consumption and the use of arable land and other natural resources, climate change, water supply, air and water pollution, etc. The result has been that many actors in the international community have started to think about the possible solutions to stop the degradation of the environment (Benedick 1999) and establish a model for enhanced but sustainable development and growth, leveraging economic welfare and environmental sustainability (Keohane and Martin 1995). These processes and activities are often named in the literature as environmental diplomacy (Suskind and Ali 2015).

Taking into consideration the evolution of environmental diplomacy and the developments in the international community in the field of environmental protection after 1972, one would expect a country with such diverse environmental characteristics as Slovenia to be active in the establishment of international norms in the development of environmental diplomacy.

This article aims to explore the following two research theses:

*R1: Since Slovenia became independent, it has not developed a systemic/systematic approach to environmental diplomacy.*

*R2: All activities of Slovenia in the field of environmental diplomacy have only been a result of exogenous variables (external factors or personal preferences), to which Slovenia merely reacted.*

The two research theses are interrelated. While the first one deals with the issue of a structural approach in foreign policy, developed progressively through different phases, the second thesis investigates the activeness of a country in establishing its main foreign policy priorities and in its use of the main diplomatic tools.

The article focuses on the 1991–2016 period for three reasons. First, Slovenia declared independence in 1991 and this is when it started developing its own foreign policy. Second, the 1992 Rio conference enhanced the processes of shaping international environmental diplomacy, which have become a tool for establishing the normative power of states (Zupančič 2010). Third, Slovenia entered a strong economic recession in 2011, calling for strict austerity measures for which economic prosperity became the *raison d'être*. Environmental diplomacy became a second- or third-rate issue and this had not changed to date.

The analysis in this article is based on qualitative methodology. The framework of the analysis relies on primary and secondary sources, which are complemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders of Slovenian environmental diplomacy from decision-making bodies (i.e. national/state authorities), non-governmental/civil-society organisations active in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development, and from academia.<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted in 2011, 2012, and 2014, with a small revision in 2015. The extent of the interviews varied, but they all lasted around half an hour and covered the main issues related to the evolution of Slovenian environmental diplomacy.

The article consists of five interconnected parts. The introduction is followed by the first section, in which the concept of environmental diplomacy is presented. This is followed by an outline of the gradual institutionalisation and defragmentation of environmental diplomacy in Slovenia. The third section of the article opens the debate on the positioning of environmental diplomacy within Slovenian foreign policy, which together with the discussion and conclusion presents certain points for debate and future research concerning the role of environmental diplomacy in the context of the formulation of Slovenian foreign policy.

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1 Since the interviewees asked to remain anonymous, their names will not be disclosed. However, the following general information about the interviewees should be presented for the sake of scientific correctness. Interviewees A, B, C, D and G are individuals working for state authorities. Interviewee E works for an NGO, while Interviewee F comes from academia. Interviewee E was selected as a proponent of cooperation between the state and civil society, while Interviewee F is the most prominent Slovenian scholar in the field of environmental protection and preservation.

## Environmental diplomacy: a conceptual framework

Already the first global UN conference on the environment (United Nations Conference on Human Environment) in Stockholm in 1972<sup>2</sup> raised awareness that environmental degradation can cause a serious environmental crisis.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development<sup>4</sup> in Rio de Janeiro (known as the Earth Summit) that 180 states' commissioned special envoys met to coordinate, oversee and truly institutionalise negotiations and discussions on global environmental issues (Benedick 1999: 5; Schechter 2005: 29). Institutionalisation continued as world leaders gradually recognised that multilateral fora on environmental issues could help overcome contradictory positions (Bell 2013), make commitments more credible, and establish focal points for coordination (Keohane and Martin 1995: 44). This is considered the conception of the phenomenon called environmental diplomacy (Susskind and Ali 2015; Death 2011; Broadhurst and Ledgerwood 1998).

Defining environmental diplomacy is not an easy task. First, the concepts of environment and diplomacy are vague and can be attributed to different issues and activities. Second, environmental diplomacy is a recent phenomenon that is still evolving (see Susskind and Ali 2015; Carroll 1988a, 1988b). As such, it lacks established conceptualisations and robustness (Susskind and Ali 2015). All these open issues lead to the fact that the definition of environmental diplomacy ranges from an *etatist* (where the main actor is the state) to an inclusive one (where all civil society, state, and business actors are encompassed) (Susskind and Ali 2015; Brenton 1994). The proposed definitions therefore differ in extent (how many actors are included in the establishment of environmental diplomacy) and in structure (the agents that influence the development of environmental diplomacy). In most cases, the definitions used are a

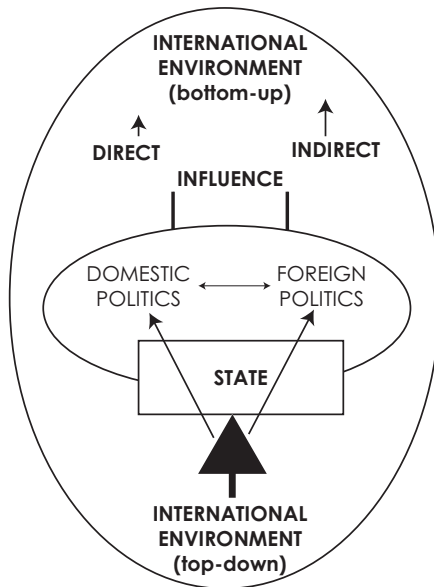
- 2 The Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm on June 16, 1972, was a product of hard work and negotiations among academia, governments and non-governmental organisations. For more, see Nilsson (2003).
- 3 The breaking point in the discussion on environmental pollution was the U Thant Report (Man and His Environment), published in 1969. For more, see Schechter (2005).
- 4 The ground for organising the 1992 Earth Summit was set in the 1987 Brundtland Report. The Brundtland Commission was established by resolution A/RES/38/161, while the report of the Commission became part of A/RES/42/187. For more, see Oppenheimer (2013).

combination of the above-mentioned characteristics. Thus, environmental diplomacy can be understood as a foreign policy means for a country to pursue national foreign policy goals (Crnčec 2012: 55ff), or it can be perceived more broadly, as proposed by Vidmar (2007), as a multilateral activity where, apart from states, the primary actors are UN organisations and specialised agencies (Susskind and Ali 2015), NGOs and interested individuals (Jazbec 2009), trying to find a coordinated response to global environmental issues.

Parallel to the definitions based on agents/actors, it is possible to define environmental diplomacy by focusing on the substance of the concept of environmental diplomacy. Carroll (1988a, 1988b) thus explains that the gist of environmental diplomacy is presented by attempt(s) to resolve cross-border environmental issues in such a way that the solutions would satisfy the relevant governments. French (1998) believes that the characteristics of environmental diplomacy are complex links between foreign and domestic policy (Death 2011) as well as North-South conflicts, while the UNEP (2014) defines environmental diplomacy as a combination of tools and approaches, which through addressing joint environmental and natural resources helps disputing parties to create opportunities for cooperation, confidence building, and conflict transformation. A bridge between the two approaches to defining environmental diplomacy is proposed by Benedick (1999: 5), and Weinber (1998: 25ff), who focus on processes within which environmental diplomacy is established. They claim that environmental diplomacy 'emerged as an integral component of international relations in the post-Cold War era' and that 'it encompasses negotiations that take place while preparing the conferences (mostly under UN), and finalising of declarations, protocols and treaties that were agreed on at the conclusion of these international events' (Weinbet, *op. cit.*). An elaboration of the Benedick and Weinber approach is made by Chasek (2001), emphasising that environmental diplomacy is a process that is conducted in six stages: (a) precipitants stage: where an environmental issue is identified by the international community, (b) issue definition stage: where government delegates and/or scientists work together to define the nature of the problem and prepare for negotiations, (c) statements of initial positions: where state-specific positions on the problem are presented, (d) drafting/formula-building stage: where delegates begin drawing consensus/solutions to problems at hand, (e) final bargaining/

details stage: where governments agree or disagree on the most contentious details of an argument, (f) ratification/implementation stage: where agreements are (usually) adopted and implemented by the parties. Chasek (2001), therefore, defines environmental diplomacy as a two-fold activity, where two processes take place: one within a particular state/country and the other between the state and the international community (with two directions, i.e. bottom-up and top-down).

Figure 1: The processes influencing the formation of environmental diplomacy

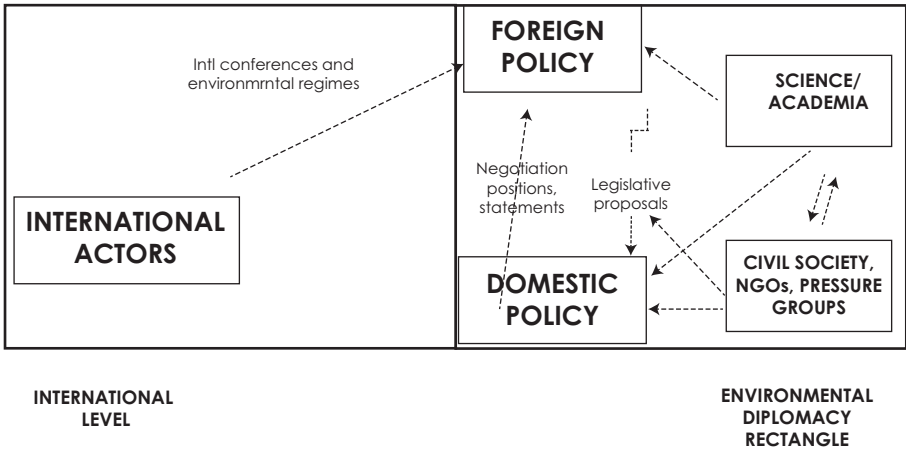


Source: Elaborated on the basis of Udovič (2009: 101).

Since our aim is to analyse the development of Slovenian environmental diplomacy as a foreign policy tool the discussion will be limited only to two processes (shown in Figure 1): the *internal process*, which is developed within a country and involves different stake-holders (academia, political decision makers, and civil society), and the *external top-down process*, starting from the international community (as a new international norm; see Zupančič 2010) and influencing the priorities and activities of individual states (see Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>

5 A similar approach was adopted by Halvorsen (2006: 152), who analysed the role of civil society (one of the corners of our rectangle) in establishing environmental diplomacy.

Figure 2: The structural relationships in performing environmental diplomacy



Source: Own elaboration.

The formulation of environmental diplomacy depends on both levels, i.e. on the environmental diplomacy rectangle and on the international-level activities. While the environmental diplomacy rectangle can – through the collaboration of civil society, academia and decision makers – influence the development of environmental diplomacy directly, the international community exerts its influence indirectly, mostly by providing supportive conditions for the development of environmental diplomacy.

All this shows that there are three reasons why it is quite difficult to conceptualise and operationalise the definition of environmental diplomacy. First, there are many agents and actors that influence the development of environmental diplomacy. Second, numerous processes within the domestic rectangle and in the international community exert influence on the formulation of environmental diplomacy. Third, there are different approaches to understanding environmental diplomacy. Is environmental diplomacy a result (and therefore a passive/dependent variable)<sup>6</sup> or a constitutive process (and therefore an active/independent variable)? These open questions limit the possibilities of conceptualising environmental diplomacy into a single, broad but concise and simple definition. Therefore, based on all the arguments about environmental

6 This approach is adopted from Weinber's (1998) definition, which focuses on the process of negotiations as a constitutive part of environmental diplomacy.

diplomacy, and deriving particularly from Figures 1 and 2, we decided to conceptualise our definition of environmental diplomacy as *all activities performed in coordination between academia, civil society, and government that lead to positions on environmental protection that are later presented and supported in international negotiations*. This definition is not focused on the result, but rather on the process in which the arguments of all stakeholders are debated and evolve. Therefore, all three parties are relevant in formulating the decisions that should be taken in the international arena; however, only the choices of the political decision makers are binding, while the other two parties have a more consultative role.

## **The environmental diplomacy rectangle – from ad hoc attempts through gradual institutionalisation to its dissolution: 1991–2016**

In first years of Slovenia's independence, cooperation among government bodies, academia, and NGOs was poor and only took place on an *ad hoc* basis. In most cases, the relevant stakeholders met prior to important environmental meetings, but there was a lack of strategic cooperation among them (Interviewees D and E). Although all the actors involved knew that environmental issues would not be addressed comprehensively without strengthening the collaboration, it took almost four years to start the process of institutionalising the environmental policy rectangle. The first step towards greater cooperation within the domestic rectangle was made in 1995 with the establishment of the Regional Centre for Environment Ljubljana.<sup>7</sup> The role of the Centre was to provide a platform where government and NGO structures as well as other (area-specific) target groups would be brought together. Its task was to ensure democratic dialogue and participation of the public when taking important environmental decisions (RECS 2014). Since the Centre was the first actor in Slovenia to deal with environmental issues seriously, it is sometimes perceived as the first 'non-governmental institution' that

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<sup>7</sup> The Regional Centre for Environment Ljubljana was an office of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, based in Budapest, Hungary.



enhanced the development of Slovenian environmental diplomacy. This was especially so because in the first stages the Centre also helped in the preparation of national strategies/positions that would later be presented at high-level meetings (Interviewee C).

However, the growing complexity of environmental issues and requirements from the international community called for greater institutionalisation of the domestic decision-making process. As a result, the Slovenian Committee for Climate Change (SCCC) was established in September 1997 as the first attempt to institutionalise the domestic environmental policy rectangle (OG 59/1997). The newly established SCCC was tasked with the cooperation and harmonisation of activities and the preparation of national climate policies, the implementation of the goals set at the Rio Convention, preparation of the proposals and guidelines for *Conference of the Parties (COP)* and *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* meetings, preparation of the national reports foreseen in the Rio Convention, and the monitoring of the programmes introduced by the Convention. Furthermore, the SCCC had to draw up opinions on initiatives for protecting the environment and prepare annual reports on the performance of climate-related policies in Slovenia. The SCCC was organised at a high political level, composed mostly of ministers, state secretaries or appointed delegates from each ministry. Apart from representatives of the government, this body also comprised two representatives of environmental NGOs, a representative of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and a representative of the Chamber of Commerce. Some actors in the political and non-political sphere were critical of the decision to institutionalise the domestic rectangle, as it was initially believed that such a move would only be costly and would bring no added value (Interviewee D, OG 59/1997). But even though the SCCC did not meet regularly, it should be noted that its establishment is regarded as a cornerstone for future institutional development of environmental diplomacy in Slovenia.

The SCCC was the central platform of the Slovenian environmental diplomacy rectangle for a decade, until it was replaced in 2007 by a working group on the environment (bringing together academia, NGOs, government officials, and relevant experts) (Interviewees A and E; Urh 2008: 53–54). This shift was not due to a desire to change the structure of

how decisions in the environmental diplomacy rectangle were adopted, but because in 2007 Slovenia was, on the one hand, already preparing its European Union Presidency priorities (EU2008. SI 2008) and, on the other hand, it had to formulate its own positions for the Bali meeting in December of that year.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the formation of the working group was more or less a result of exogenous and not endogenous variables. However, even with the working group, the basic idea behind the cooperation within the environmental diplomacy rectangle had not moved from the *ad hoc* basis.

An important leap towards greater institutionalisation of the environmental diplomacy rectangle was made in 2009 when the Borut Pahor Government established the Government Office for Climate Change (GOCC) (Interviewees D and E, OG 49/2009). According to the decree establishing the GOCC, the Office was intended to (i) serve as a forum for debates on sustainable development and environmental issues, (ii) enhance the shift towards a low-carbon society, (iii) set priorities to guide the government in adapting programmes to alleviate the effects of climate change and propose laws or other instruments targeted at the effects of climate change, and (iv) to harmonise different opinions and prepare strategies for international negotiations. The idea behind the establishment of the GOCC was to split environmental diplomacy between two bodies – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the GOCC – sharing the duties and responsibilities in developing and conducting environmental diplomacy. While the MFA was entitled to promote environmental diplomacy abroad, the GOCC was to serve as a forum (and coordinating body) among state decision makers, academia, and NGOs (*ibid.*).

Already when it was set up, but especially in 2010 and 2011 when the economic crisis hit Slovenia hard, there was some criticism that the GOCC should be abolished and merged with one of the ministries, since this would bring notable savings to the state administration. Taking into account that the GOCC was a small institution, the savings would not be as high as expected. But the sword of the austerity measures of the new government that formed in February 2012 abolished the GOCC; its tasks were transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (OG 21/2012) and divided into two sectors: the *Sector for environment* and the

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8 A particularly important issue regarding the Bali meeting was the Roadmap for reducing carbon emissions after 2012 (Urh, 2008). This could not be done without the cooperation of different civil society stakeholders.

*Sector for climate change, NGOs, education and book-keeping*. Even though these two sectors officially covered the same tasks as the GOCC, the abolishment of the GOCC was a step back in the development of a single framework in the field of environmental diplomacy in Slovenia. In 2013 the Government reform merged the two sectors and after that point the *Sector for climate change, NGOs, education and book-keeping* has been in charge of environmental issues. According to the interviewees, the shutdown of the GOCC was a step backward in the development of the environmental diplomacy rectangle, because the activities were diverged and fragmented, while they also noted a regression in the cooperation of different parts of civil society (Interviewees D and E).

In July 2014, Slovenia held its second early election in five years. The parties that established the government drafted a coalition agreement, which did little with respect to the environmental diplomacy rectangle. According to the coalition agreement, the only shift in terms of the environment was the re-establishment of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, which was merged into other ministries in 2012.

## **Institutionalisation of environmental diplomacy in the context of Slovenia's foreign policy: 1991–2016**

In 1989, when the world was slowly turning from bipolar to multipolar, Berchtesgaden hosted the first Alpine conference on the level of environment ministers. There, Slovenia represented Yugoslavia, not only because it was not yet independent (Warsinsky 2011), but also because Alpine issues were – considering its geographical position – mostly Slovenia's concern (and the central authorities in Belgrade were therefore not interested in them). The result of the conference was the draft of the Convention on the Protection of the Alps, which Slovenia ratified in 1995 (OG 19/1995). The Alpine Convention was – in the history of Slovenia – the first step towards the inclusion of the environment as an aspect of foreign policy, because it (a) indicates that Slovenia took an interest in environmental protection even before declaring independence, (b)

portrays Slovenia as an important and equal partner when discussing issues in the region, and because (c) the fact that Slovenia has chaired the Alpine Conference more often than any other party (three out of eleven meetings: 1996, 1998, 2011) confirms the relevance of environmental issues for Slovenia (at least on a symbolical level) (Interviewee C).

Two weeks after Slovenia joined the UN, the biggest (and most decisive) environmental conference, known as the Earth Summit, started in Rio de Janeiro. Although Slovenia was a newcomer to the international arena, it sent a small delegation from the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning to Rio. The argument for participation was that Slovenia should be actively present in the world debates regarding the environment and sustainable development (Interviewees A and B).

At environmental conferences during the 90s, Slovenia was represented mostly by small delegations of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, sometimes reduced to one person – the head negotiator Andrej Kranjc (Interviewees C, D and E). However, an important step occurred in 2002, when the FOCUS Association for Sustainable Development was established, serving from then on as a platform for all NGOs dealing with issues of environment and climate change (i.e. Cipra, Umanotera and Greenpeace).<sup>9</sup> FOCUS has actively participated in the preparation of policies and strategies for COP meetings and has been an important instrument for outsourcing data regarding environmental issues. FOCUS is therefore also considered as an important part of the Slovenian domestic environmental diplomacy rectangle (FOCUS 2014).

Since December 2005 (Montreal COP 11), the still acting president of FOCUS, Barbara Kvac, has served as a key member of Slovenian delegations to various international environmental conferences. This development can be highlighted from two perspectives: On a positive note, the Slovenian government could be praised for giving a chance to experts in NGOs to step up and serve as professional state-assigned negotiators with equal status to official envoys. On the other hand, the need for NGO members to represent the state's position perfectly illustrates the problem of a lack of knowledgeable government staff able to serve as official environmental diplomats in a variety of high-level environmental debates (Interviewees C and D).

<sup>9</sup> FOCUS is a platform and coordinator of all NGOs and civil society associations that deal with sustainable development, environmental issues, and climate change.

During its 2008 EU Presidency, Slovenia hosted a Green Diplomacy Network meeting where states debated the idea of inclusion of environmental issues, particularly climate change, in the context of the European political agenda, and drafted a demarche on biodiversity addressed to over 30 countries, providing well-structured and useful input for EU negotiators prior to COP9 (EEAS 2014). During the 6 months, Slovenia found itself being the axis mundi of EU and global environmental debates.<sup>10</sup> During this time, experts and members of NGOs participated in key events, presenting statistics, findings, developments,<sup>11</sup> and other important input (Urh 2008: 53).

In September 2008, a regular general election was held in Slovenia, after which Samuel Žbogar was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. One of the first moves in his term was to establish a Global Challenges Department (established in 2009), tasked with finding acceptable long-term solutions for issues such as environmental preservation and sustainable development, a comprehensive approach to water-related issues in international relations, and to thoroughly include environmental issues in the work of Slovenian diplomats (MFA 2011). Soon after, the MFA organised a meeting of accredited ambassadors in Slovenia on the topic of *Green Diplomacy*, where Žbogar urged for closer cooperation regarding climate changes on a state, regional and international level. At the same meeting, a Green Group Initiative was presented, based on an idea to select six states – comparable in size to Slovenia<sup>12</sup> and located in different regions around the world – that would be interested in promoting the idea of green diplomacy (MFA 2014).

Words became facts in September 2010, when the foreign ministers of Cape Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, New Zealand, Slovenia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates<sup>13</sup> met for the first time to discuss water-

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10 We noticed from the answers obtained from the interviewees that there is a dilemma whether the development after the Presidency period was a follow-up or, as Interviewee C believes, a step following the political trend in the EU to institutionalise the area of global challenges within the state's MFA.

11 Interviewee F remembers the period of the Presidency as the time when coordination and talks among various actors on issues of environmental diplomacy were at their highest level.

12 According to Interviewees A and B, these states also either have been or wished to become important players in environmental diplomacy in their regions.

13 According to Interviewees A and B, the states were carefully selected after the Slovenian MFA had compiled their environmental profiles. The countries invited to the Green Group Initiative were recognised as regional leaders on issues of climate change, water, energy, and earth science and were comparable in size to Slovenia.

related issues.<sup>14</sup> The state envoys echoed the need for establishing *water diplomacy*, which would help place water-related issues on the international agenda (MFA 2011). Subsequent activities of the Green Group Initiative included drafting a common statement on climate change (ahead of the Cancun conference in 2010) and publishing an article on climate change, outlining their position on climate change-related issues and the green economy (days before the 2011 Durban conference). The shared belief that the group should not be transitory led to its reorganisation. Instead of meetings at the level of ministers, the talks and negotiations were conducted among state representatives with the UN.<sup>15</sup> Three years later, it is possible to say that even though the Green Group was recognised as an important initiative, it was Žbogar's personal project. This is why it ran out of steam after he left the office (Interviewees A, B and C).

## Environmental diplomacy as an opportunity for Slovenian foreign policy?

The economic crisis that hit Slovenia in 2008 had dire consequences for the Slovenian economy. In 2006 and 2007, Slovenia had a GDP growth of over 4%, while in 2009 it faced a decline of 8%. Even though the GDP levelled off in 2010 and 2011, Slovenia again saw a decline in GDP in 2012 and 2013. However in 2014 and 2015 Slovenia started a slow recovery, but it will take at least five years to reach the pre-crisis level of economic development.

The unstable economic situation was echoed by political turmoil, resulting in a political crisis from June to September 2011 and an early election in December 2011. In February 2012, a new government was formed, but it only stayed in power one year. In March 2013, a new coalition was formed within the same parliament, and a new government was sworn

14 The topic was chosen because some of the states in the Green Group were either facing overabundance or lack of water.

15 However, some critics, like Interviewee F, say that the ministers were replaced by envoys because the new structure of the Ministry (after Žbogar had left the office) was not 'as devoted to environmental issues as it should be'.

in in April 2013. However, only a year later (in 2014) Slovenia held its next early election, the second since the declaration of independence.

Although the political instability brought many challenges in the national and international arena, the changes in domestic (and partially also in foreign) policy offered an ideal opportunity for Slovenia's environmental diplomacy, which could be developed in three directions: (a) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (b) with the established connection between environmental and commercial diplomacy, and (c) on the EU level, using the available resources and programmes to enhance cooperation within the domestic rectangle and form coherent positions regarding environmental issues on the EU level. Even though some steps have been made, far too little has been done to be able say that environmental diplomacy has become part of Slovenian foreign policy.

With respect to the first direction, it should be noted that in 2011 the MFA appointed<sup>16</sup> five environmental attachés to Slovenian embassies around the world – Beijing, Buenos Aires, Skopje, Copenhagen, and London, and later on also Prague and Paris (Interviewees A and B; Pongrac and Udovič 2013). The attachés were tasked with integrating environmental projects and events into the work of the embassies in their resident states. They also had to prepare the ground for possible cooperation with Slovenia in the environmental field and draw up environmental profiles of accredited states. What did this mean in practice? While some attachés initially stayed in the primary framework of their tasks and sought dialogue on environmental topics with NGOs, civil society, and politicians in accredited states, others ventured into the field of economic diplomacy and searched, for example, for opportunities to sell Slovenia's water purification technology (Interviewee A).

Second, since commercial diplomacy became the focus of Slovenian foreign policy after 2009, Slovenia should be able to position itself as a niche player in the field of environmental-commercial diplomacy, meaning that Slovenian economic attachés would also cover the environmental field. There is one example of such synergy – the Slovenian embassy in Prague,

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<sup>16</sup> As Interviewee B points out, these were not real appointments of new attachés, but rather the already appointed diplomats had to cover the field of the environment. This could be regarded as a potential problem – environmental attachés are now often not experts in the environmental field, but politicians, lawyers or economists employed by the MFA. Experts, who are not employed at the Slovenian MFA cannot become official environmental attachés.

where the role of the environmental and economic attaché is entrusted to a single diplomat.<sup>17</sup> Such an approach could also be employed in other diplomatic representations, but there is a question whether Slovenian companies would be able to cope with such challenges.

Third, Slovenia, as a member of the EU, is obliged to follow EU legislation. Along with duties, this also offers numerous opportunities, which Slovenia could use for promulgation in the field of environmental diplomacy (Interviewee B). One such example is the EU2020 Strategy, followed by the Smart Specialisation Strategy, where Slovenia has stated that one of its focuses in the next six years would be on environmentally and socially responsible investments.

On the other hand, it is true that 'foreign policy begins at home' (Haass 2013), which means that work should also be done within the environmental diplomacy rectangle. Here, we should point to the important role of NGOs (in our case FOCUS) and academia, which can, in various modes, exert influence on the political decision makers. We think that in the last two decades the NGO sector and academia have been too passive and have mainly been reactive rather than proactive. In this manner, they have 'accepted the invitation' of government bodies when it was necessary, but they have missed the opportunities to become a voice in the desert and persuade politicians/governments to adopt their priorities.

Finally, Slovenia, as a small country, can use its foreign policy as a tool for raising its international visibility and improving its position in international relations. In times when we are witnessing dramatic natural disasters, the preservation of the global environment is becoming increasingly important. Slovenia could ride this wave if it decided to do so. However, this decision should be adopted within the environmental diplomacy rectangle and by the consent of all civil society stakeholders.

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17 Interviewee B claims that eco-friendly ventures and companies are already the primary focus of environmental attachés.



## Discussion and conclusion

The article analysed the development of Slovenian environmental diplomacy from two perspectives: the domestic environmental diplomacy rectangle and the (non)institutionalisation of environmental diplomacy within foreign policy priorities. The main findings of the analysis can be summarised by three facts. First, environmental protection is still a marginal issue in Slovenia. This is why, in the over 20 years of its independence, Slovenia has not established a stable and focused body (that would also include civil society and academia), capable of preparing statements and strategies regarding environmental protection. Second, none of the processes in the domestic environmental diplomacy rectangle were planned strategically, but rather resulted from exogenous variables – coming from the external (e.g. EU presidency, Bali conference) or internal environment (the appointment of Samuel Žbogar as minister). Here, it should be stressed that the (non)inclusion of civil society stakeholders partly results from the fact that the civil society in Slovenia is less developed compared to other (similar) countries. And, on the other hand, administrative culture<sup>18</sup> in Slovenia is quite state-centred and therefore rarely adopts civil society actors as partners. Third, the last two decades have also shown that environmental diplomacy is not perceived as an important activity within foreign policy, and political decision makers opted for it only when the external conditions required action in this respect. The explanation for this can be found in the complex logic of establishing foreign policy priorities and in the clear division of work areas between ministries, which is an obstacle in addressing interdisciplinary issues. In the case of Slovenia, poor collaboration among sectors (poor administration culture) results in multidisciplinary problems not being addressed holistically but only partially. Thus, instead of making a cross-sector body, as was the case with the GOCC, political decision makers often prefer to choose the relevant body among existing ones. The result of particularism is that, instead of *people adapting to the problem*, in Slovenia *the problems are adapted to the people*.

18 However, as noted by Heyd (2010: 90–91), the governance/administrative culture is strongly determined by the national culture, i.e. the attitudes of citizens towards the environment.

All in all, we can conclude that, since the environment is not a central issue in the Slovenian public and political processes, environmental diplomacy is understood to be irrelevant. This means that environmental diplomacy is developed only when triggered by external variables or through the top-down political process. One such attempt was the declaration of foreign policy proposed in 2010, which declared in its *Preamble* that 'Slovenia has an environment-friendly foreign policy' and that 'its foreign policy tends to reinforce sustainable development'. Moreover, it stated when listing challenges that 'Slovenia is devoted to supporting environmental protection', and in the part on multilateral activities it said that 'Slovenia fosters environmental diplomacy at the EU level and supports the activities in international organisations/fora to develop environmental diplomacy'. But because the drafted declaration remained in the drawer,<sup>19</sup> Slovenia missed five years, during which only some minor steps were taken in the field of environmental diplomacy. In July 2015 Slovenia adopted a new foreign policy declaration; however, only a few lines in it are dedicated to environmental issues. In fact, it seems that environmental diplomacy was a sort of fad, limited to Žbogar's term in office.<sup>20</sup>

Slovenia is now at a crossroads. The on-going financial crisis is diminishing and it seems that better times are appearing on the horizon. However, the current economic crisis should not only be seen as a pitfall, but also as a guidebook what should have been done differently. Here, environmental diplomacy and its practice offer much potential, both in connection with commercial and economic diplomacy as well as in relation to cultural diplomacy. Regardless of the choice, Slovenia may become an important actor in environmental diplomacy in the years to come. The only things needed are a strategy and a working plan. But first, political decision makers need to understand that environmental diplomacy in today's reality is not a choice, it is an opportunity. Whether Slovenia will be able to shift its perspective in such a way will become evident in the coming years.

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19 In one public event the Minister of Foreign Affairs Žbogar explained that he was 'not happy with the proposed draft' (notes of the author 2011). However, a year later the government changed and the draft declaration was forgotten.

20 One might argue that reactive behaviour is part of the Slovenian national character. For more on the role of culture in governance, see Heyd (2010).

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