



HONORARY CONSULS

IMPLEMENTING A STRONG DIPLOMATIC NETWORK OF INFLUENCE AT NO-COST !

A professional study of consular instruments offers potentially new perspectives on the subject of diplomatic representation and the exercise of state sovereignty. In this vein, the use of honorary consuls for selected bilateral relationships provides fresh insights into the study of international relations and diplomacy, particularly for (1) small states or (2) states not enjoying sufficient financial resources to maintain a real diplomatic network (*both are called here "small states"*).

The IUHEI Crans Montana Institute explains here how a country can strategically use honorary consulates to extend its limited bilateral diplomatic relations given constrained resources, while enhancing both its brand and international relevance, strengthening its international economic relations and boosting foreign direct investment.

Unlike countries who use the honorary consuls only for traditional consular duties like visa issuance and citizen services, they can have a far-reaching public diplomacy, brand development, and educational role designed to increase knowledge about their own country in their respective countries. They can enhance its image as a foreign investment destination, create a more positive picture of its political, social and economic situation and serve as a sensitive foreign policy listening post.

Indeed Diplomacy is a costly undertaking for a small state. Just staffing embassies in twenty countries (really a minimum!) could make a serious dent in a population, not to mention the costs !

At the global level, the national constraints on most small states have been so severe that many are unable to represent their own interests directly at all. In addition some of them have started since 2020 to close some of their diplomatic missions to save money.

The logical goal is to find an economic method to extend diplomatic capabilities to the bilateral realm. A variety of options are relevant here.

1. The resident mission is the first and foremost customary channel for conducting relations between states. Although this may be true to a large extent in relations between the larger countries, it is not when diplomatic relations involve small states
2. While resident embassies are irreplaceable in their core functions and while a limited, but selective placement of resident missions remains invaluable to small states, they may have to look for alternatives given their constrained resources



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3. One method is simultaneous multiple representation. This is also called concurrent or cross-accreditation. When a government employs this technique, it accredits a single embassy or ambassador to two or more countries.

This is a common technique for maintaining a number of bilateral relationships without opening separate embassies for each relationship. This option has three variants :

1. an ambassador is simultaneously accredited in two or more countries in which the sending state maintains physical diplomatic missions.
2. both the ambassador and the embassy in a country are simultaneously accredited to two or more countries, where the sending state does not maintain a mission.
3. an ambassador, but not an embassy, is accredited to two or more countries. In such cases, the ambassador might head an embassy in a third country or might be in the foreign ministry of the home country. This is the 'roving ambassador' or special envoy concept. Here the mission head is resident in the home country but accredited to a number of states abroad.

Finally, a number consider consuls, specifically honorary ones, as an innovative solution to their representation. The use of honorary consuls is an outgrowth of the limitations faced by small states in international relations and foreign policy.

This latter approach is one of the most efficient ways in which small states can extend their international engagement. The distinction of functions between diplomatic and consular representatives is subject to some degree of overlap and the variable of practice.

It is often difficult to separate the purely commercial interests of a state from political or even strategic considerations. The consul's responsibility for promoting friendly relations between the peoples of the two states through various cultural activities thus also bears certain political implications since the consul is acting as spokesman and interpreter for his state's point of view.

These political and diplomatic dimensions of consular representation can be all the more important if there is no resident diplomatic mission and the consul is the lone state representative. In some cases, this larger responsibility has been recognized and consuls with the rank of consul-general are allowed to be established in the capital itself

Appointing honorary consuls efficiently expands the diplomatic network, broadens public diplomacy opportunities, increases presence at a no cost and with low risk, while providing a real return thanks the carefully selected honorary consuls.

Article 5 of the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations* does not present a final and complete functional description of consular duties, **and this allows states to include further consular tasks** beyond the classical ones of visa issuance and citizen services. A model can be shaped as an important mechanism within an overall public diplomacy, reputation management and branding strategy.



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Nation-branding and public diplomacy differ in scope. Branding particularly attracts countries with a weak international image. It is looked upon favorably in a number of transition countries and also among the small and 'invisible' nations. **The establishment of honorary consulates is the best and less expensive phase in a country's overall image and branding campaign.**

One can also go beyond pure brand-building by using honorary consuls for conducting public diplomacy. It involves activities in the fields of information, education, and culture with the aim of influencing a foreign government international relations.

In addition, consular outposts in strategic areas can facilitate international business interests. As an example, many European countries are expanding their consular presence due to trade opportunities. **Clearly by creating smaller, but more numerous consulates, any country can decentralize representation, while strengthening its presence and influence in important localities throughout the world by creating a direct honorary consular link into indigenous districts.**

Honorary consuls regionally focused are indeed sub-national 'ambassadors'.

Besides being innovative, such a model creates a potential tangent line with the study of para-diplomacy, since sub-state regions could also consider an honorary consul equivalent for their own representations with states or other regions.

This model presents only strengths :

- it expands coverage at no cost, offers greater penetration of regions within large and critical bilateral diplomatic relationships, and leverages local and regional networks with the right personnel selection
- it allows to embark VIP Businesses in every key region who will enjoy an official status and a prestigious visibility in their social and professional framework
- the lack of management capacity inside the Foreign ministry for overseeing large numbers of honorary consuls is easily compensated by existing Ambassadors, mainly multilateral who will share between them the monitoring of the honorary consuls.

The **IUHEI Crans Montana Institute** and its renowned Experts thanks to the experience and the 35 years of experience of the **Crans Montana Forum**, has the capacity to assist any government in

1. shaping a global strategy for implementing honorary consulates in the most interesting countries
2. drawing a strategic map of future honorary consulates districts
3. identifying and screening the candidates to be appointed
4. avoids any abuse linked to the selection and/or appointment of honorary consuls
5. shaping a global framework for monitoring the future Honorary Consuls
6. assist the professional ambassadors in organizing the work and the monitoring of the Honorary Consuls under their supervision