
KARINA PAULINA MARCZUK

The dynamics of 'First-Lady public diplomacy'

[k.marczuk@uw.edu.pl] (University of Warsaw)

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Abstract

This paper was prompted by the growing interest in the role and impact first ladies have on how contemporary states achieve their foreign policy goals through diplomatic means. Specifically, the paper's purpose is to examine whether and how first ladies are involved in the public diplomacy of their states. The literature on this subject is limited, and this paper therefore aims to fill that gap. The argument is that the traditional role of the first lady has evolved – from one outside of any political-oriented activity to one that increasingly involves diplomatic activities, including promoting the respective countries overseas. The main research questions are whether and how any first ladies are involved in public diplomacy activities, and, if so, what are the main areas and directions in which they are involved, and what is the extent of their action? To answer these questions, the paper presents an exploratory, longitudinal single case study about the role and activities of the present First Lady of Poland, Agata Kornhauser-Duda, during the first term of President Andrzej Duda from August 2015 to August 2020. The intention is to both deconstruct and construct a pattern of what we might call 'first-lady public diplomacy'.

Keywords: 'First-Lady public diplomacy', First-Lady diplomacy, First Lady, Poland, Public diplomacy

1 Introduction

On August 2020, Andrzej Duda was sworn in for a second term of office as President of Poland. He took the oath in the company of his wife, Agata Kornhauser-Duda (hereinafter AKD), who had already been Poland's first lady during her husband's first term from August 2015 to August 2020. The result of the 2020 elections and the beginning of the new term of the president provoked commentators to evaluate the previous five years of the first lady's activities as well. She was criticised for her restrained attitude regarding domestic policy, and even referred to as the 'silent first lady' for her reticence to comment on ongoing political events. There was an idea, however, to award her an official salary to reimburse her for her work as first lady (which did not happen). The end of the first Duda term and the begin-

ning of the second term, as well as these various opinions, provoked the author to consider the role of first ladies in diplomacy, and – more specifically – in public diplomacy; that is, their input in relation to promoting their countries internationally, based on a case study of the First Lady of Poland.

AKD is the sixth first lady of Poland to hold this position after the transition. Before her, they included Barbara Jaruzelska, wife of the first president of the reborn Poland, General Wojciech Jaruzelski (1989–1990), followed by Danuta Wałęsa (1990–1995), Jolanta Kwaśniewska (1995–2005, two terms of office), Maria Kaczyńska (2005–2010), and Anna Komorowska (2010–2015). But it was Danuta Wałęsa, wife of President Lech Wałęsa, who for the first time was labelled First Lady of Poland following the American tradition of naming the wives of US presidents. Danuta Wałęsa, however, was not involved in the political activity of her presidential spouse. An interesting note about her activity abroad is that before she became first lady she took a trip to Norway in 1983 to receive the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Lech Wałęsa (who decided to not leave Poland fearing that he would not be able return to the country). The next first lady, Jolanta Kwaśniewska, wife of President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, was much more present publicly and moreover initiated and then maintained mutual relations between the wives of monarchical and non-monarchical heads of state. In September 1999, Jolanta Kwaśniewska invited a group of queens and first ladies to Warsaw to participate in the conference 'Keep Children Smiling' which she had organised. Also, at the end of her husband's term of office, she was considered a potential presidential candidate (which did not happen). During Kwaśniewski's terms of office Poland applied to become a Member State of first the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and next the European Union. This led, *inter alia*, to the enhancement of international cooperation, and subsequently Jolanta Kwaśniewska accompanied the president on his trips abroad. Eventually, Maria Kaczyńska and Anna Komorowska maintained the presence of the first lady in the public space. All of them, however, remained aloof from the political activities of their presidential spouses.

The former first ladies and the present First Lady AKD obviously were (are) wives of politicians connected with various political parties that represented different political options throughout the modern political history of Poland. During the last thirty years, the role and the tasks of the first ladies have thus evolved. Previously, the latter mainly involved ceremonial functions such as accompanying the presidential spouse during various visits abroad ('classic' involvement in foreign policy practice). Next, the first ladies became more 'independent' – for instance, they managed to determine, focus on, and next support the 'leitmotif' of the first lady's term. In the case of AKD, the latter is education, as is elaborated below. After 1989, along with the reopening of Poland to international partners as well as the re-establishment (or establishment) of diplomatic relations with other states, the presidents were increasingly involved in foreign activity, in which their wives took part, too. This rapid change was particularly evident in the case of Jolanta Kwaśniewska, as mentioned above. The activities of first ladies are intrinsically connected with their presidential spouses' political work. Regarding the analysed case study, the present President Andrzej Duda, who during the presidential election was supported by the right-oriented Law and Justice party, advocated for mutual Polish-American cooperation since a pro-Atlantic foreign policy was of significance for that party. The first lady of the US occupies a strong position in comparison to other first ladies, and it was perhaps the development of bilateral contacts between the

two states during the first term of office of Duda, among other reasons, that led to AKD's role becoming accentuated. This resulted, as already mentioned, in an (unsuccessful) idea to award her a salary.

Research on first-lady diplomacy is developed in Western states, particularly in the US. It concerns the activities of the spouses of heads of state who play a specific role in foreign affairs. Recently, however, there have been more studies on the contribution of the present First Lady of China to international affairs (Zhang, 2017; Hartig, 2016; Ling & Berkowitz, 2018), although studies on American first ladies continue to predominate (Sferrazza, 1990; Eksterowicz & Paynter, 2006; Hastedt & Eksterowicz, 2006; Kotlowski, 2016; Natalie, 2018). The question of European and particularly Central and Eastern European first ladies has not been explored in the scholarly literature. The term 'first lady' is an unofficial title for the female spouse of a non-monarchical head of state. It was first used by the American press in the nineteenth century in reference to Martha Washington, the wife of the first American president. However, their active involvement in diplomacy dates back only as far as the time of Rosalynn Carter; previously, the activity of presidents' wives was limited to ceremonial or ritual functions such as their inclusion in photographs or accompanying their husbands (Smith, 1997).

Obviously, first ladies do not attract as much public attention as their husbands, and reports about them usually focus on their image, background, daily activities, charitable activities, children, etc. Diplomatic activities fall within the remit of their husbands. Yet, in their own way, first ladies undoubtedly act in the diplomatic realm, too. This is mainly evident when one analyses their activities during foreign visits, which they may make either together with their husband or alone, or when they host foreign guests and delegations. This area of their engagement can be called 'first-lady diplomacy' and, as Keith V. Erickson and Stephanie Thomson (2012) have discovered, their efforts in this field involve nine objective diplomatic roles: manager of presidential credibility, escort, aesthete, surrogate, manager of international relations, goodwill ambassador, cultural ambassador, manager of social issues, and social activist.

The subject of this paper is limited to one particular dimension of first ladies' activities – namely, public diplomacy. The international academic literature contains numerous explanations and studies about what public diplomacy is and what it means (e.g. Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005; Gilboa, 2008; Cull, 2008; Pamment, 2013 and numerous others; this is addressed in the next section of the paper). Scholars underline the significance of enhancing and promoting a state's image in the international forum in order to build that state's brand and increase its position, and the exercise of soft power to achieve diplomatic ends. For this reason, the potential input of first ladies to public diplomacy is an important means of achieving those aims. This is essential in the case of medium-sized states such as Poland that have to use every available opportunity to make their presence felt internationally. Enhancing Poland's visibility abroad is therefore one of the three main aims of Polish foreign policy; the other two are security and economic growth. According to the document *Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021*, 'Poland's brand is thus a key aspect of its foreign policy strategy [...]' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, n.d.). This is why public diplomacy is included among the main areas of foreign policy for building up the Polish brand and image overseas. Officially, the government defines public diplomacy as encompassing '[...] strategic, coordination and enforcement activities that seek to make the case and elicit support for

Poland's *raison d'état* and foreign policy by shaping public attitudes and public opinion abroad' (*Public diplomacy*, n.d.). This stance is in line with the 1961 *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* that catalogues diplomatic functions, enumerating among them 'promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations' (Article 3e). The promotional function of diplomacy is thereby seen as an intrinsic and a leading component of Polish foreign policy aimed at, among others goals, enhancing Poland's visibility abroad through economic, cultural and scientific cooperation (economic, cultural and science diplomacy). This view is also developed in the Polish academic literature on public diplomacy (Ociepka, 2017; Marczuk, 2019a; Surmacz, 2015; Umińska-Woroniecka, 2013; Ziętek, 2010).

The paper includes a case study of the Polish First Lady AKD during the first term of her husband (2015–2020) that examines her involvement in certain promotional activities abroad. A problem-oriented approach has been adopted to show what main issues the first lady concentrated on and what type of activities she undertook. This subject was not chosen arbitrarily. First, the question of European, and more specifically Central and Eastern European first ladies' diplomatic activity has not yet been analysed, while this topic undoubtedly deserves to be researched. Second, there are almost no studies on the role of first ladies in public diplomacy – with the exception of one on the Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan's involvement in enhancing China's image abroad (Wang, 2018). Third, the author hopes that a term proposed in this study – namely, 'first-lady public diplomacy' – will come into use. Last, the case study was chosen for its longitudinality (five years, the first term of the president), and considering Poland's foreign-policy priority of implementing public diplomacy (using every possible means of promoting the state in international relations). Particularly helpful was the fact that there are numerous, readily available reports on AKD's activities (which is not the case with other first ladies apart from Brigitte Macron of France).

The traditional role of first ladies has evolved. The main argument is that, from originally being uninvolved in foreign policy and policy in general but rather focused mainly on ceremonial functions, first ladies have gradually become involved in what can be called 'first-lady public diplomacy' (that is, the promotion of a given country in the international forum) in a specific way. The main research questions were: 1) Are any first ladies involved in public diplomacy activities, and if so, 2) what are the main areas and directions of public diplomacy in which they are involved? and, 3) what is the international coverage of their actions? To find the answers to these questions, the author examined First Lady AKD's involvement in foreign affairs – that is, the intensity and type of her activities (i.e. visits abroad and hosting foreign guests and delegations), and the areas and directions of international cooperation in which AKD has been involved, taking into consideration her potential involvement in public diplomacy. The representation of the first lady in the media was also analysed; that is, the coverage of activities of an international character, and the target audience. To do this, the author identified and next researched those events which provoked the media to broadcast AKD's activity. This particularly happened in relation to the Polish-American bilateral relations during the first of Duda's terms of office. Therefore, AKD's representation in leading American media was researched.

The purpose of the paper is therefore to approach the term 'first-lady public diplomacy' and to examine whether and if so how first ladies are involved in public diplomacy activities or the campaigns their states run overseas. This is based on the findings that emerged from the case study of the First Lady of Poland.

2 Setting the context: identifying 'first-lady public diplomacy'

The idea of 'first-lady public diplomacy' arises at the crossroads of two concepts: first-lady diplomacy, and public diplomacy. Although the lives of first ladies and their public involvement have attracted the interest of scholars, in particular in the case of the first ladies of the US, the 'study of the first lady is a relatively new area of research' (Wertheimer, 2015, p. 8). Yet the scholarly literature does offer a definition of what 'first-lady diplomacy' means. In this study, the author follows the definition of first-lady diplomacy coined by Keith V. Erickson and Stephanie Thomson (2012): 'the performance abroad of an international relations role'. The word 'performance' is understood by scholars 'as an action displayed or acted out before witnesses (speeches, interviews, photo opportunities, etc.)' (Erickson & Thomson, 2012, p. 241). Such public activity performed abroad by first ladies mostly takes place during foreign visits they pay alone or when accompanying their husbands. This, however, should be complemented by first ladies' in-country activities, which mainly involve maintaining and enhancing international relations and cooperation through, for example, hosting international delegations or guests at home, which can be therefore labelled *intermestic* activity (a term coined by Bayless Manning, 1972). Such moments when first ladies are visible externally – on occasions of international contact – are crucial moments that can be used to perform one of the roles of a first lady that Erickson and Thomson describe – manager of international relations. External visibility enables a first lady to not only successfully represent her country but also to 'spread the word' about it; to take part in building up its image and brand, thereby promoting the respective state internationally. This also entails dealing with media, a skill that some first ladies already have or aspire to acquire (Caroli, 2003). Research on the coverage of first ladies by the media has been popular among American and Chinese scholars, who have looked at the presence of US first ladies (e.g. Shoop, 2010) and the Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan's presence in the media; in the latter case, 'the number of papers with "first lady" as the key word has tripled in Chinese academic journals since 2013' (Zhang, 2017, p. 34). The media, however, mainly focus on the 'classic' roles first ladies play (host and escort) rather than what they do (Scharrer & Bissell, 2000).

These above-mentioned first ladies' activities encourage the researcher to examine their potential public diplomacy involvement. Public diplomacy is an ambiguous, complex and multidisciplinary concept that is interpreted by various scholars in numerous ways depending on the historical context and political situation and many other determinants. For two decades, scholars have also debated new public diplomacy; that is, public diplomacy associated with new technologies and social media (Vickers, 2004; Hall, 2012) and the impact of these on the evolution of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is typically combined with propaganda, international cultural relations, public relations, nation branding, soft power, national reputation, communication, and persuasion (Gilboa, 2006). Public diplomacy is conducted within a foreign policy frame, and as such is primarily associated with a given country's soft power (Hayden, 2017). Following Joseph Nye's definition of soft power, this concept refers to attracting other nations, and the aim is for a given nation to attain the results it desires without coercion (2008). In these terms, public diplomacy is therefore a prime tool of a state's soft power (Melissen, 2005). First ladies can be 'used' to promote their state's soft power within the framework of the foreign-policy strategy that has been adopted using public diplomacy channels and in ways particularly available to them. What is more, by doing so they can lay the groundwork for the 'classic' diplomacy (Castells, 2008) their presidential spouses perform.

For the purposes of the present research, the author applied the explanation of public diplomacy proposed by Eytan Gilboa as the most complex, universal, and adequate for researching the chosen case study. Namely, for Gilboa public diplomacy means action whereby 'state and nonstate actors use the media and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies' (2008, p. 58). What does this mean in the case of first ladies? First, when they pay visits abroad, first ladies are usually present in the (national or international) media, especially when they accompany their husbands during official events. In particular, this is visible during ceremonial or traditional duties such as photo ops, and so on. These are the moments when they attract the attention of the public, and some of them use such opportunities to represent their country using various communication strategies (Burns, 2020). For instance, this can be done by wearing the national costume or outfits inspired by their culture (e.g. Peng Liyuan), or outfits made in their country to promote its own fashion industry (e.g. Brigitte Macron), when this is perceived as an element of the country's brand.

Second, during foreign visits, including when they accompany their husbands, their itineraries are usually organised separately. There may be opportunities, for example, for a first lady to arrange meetings with people who in the future can advocate for the first lady's country, such as young people in schools; or to visit places of particular historical or political significance for their country (such as memorial sites). Such activities, however, do not attract as much media attention as those of the first type (that is, official events when the first lady 'escorts' the president). When they follow their own separate programme, public opinion is informed mainly through social media maintained by the given first lady's office. This provides a first lady with an opportunity to develop their desired narrative using this channel of communication (Paul & Perreault, 2018).

Third, when a first lady hosts foreign guests and delegations, or the wives, husbands or partners of other heads of state, she has an opportunity to communicate her country's narrative directly to them. Again, this often has the potential for increasing mutual cooperation between their countries concerning historical issues, cultural heritage, folk art, etc. For instance, when in 2018 the former First Lady of Ethiopia Meaza Abraham met AKD in Warsaw, the two paid a visit to the headquarters of the Polish folklore music ensemble Mazowsze (Mazovia), one of the most renowned such groups in the world, to enjoy traditional Polish songs and dances performed in national costume. As the First Lady of Ethiopia is a former model and interested in fashion, the visit to Mazowsze's dressing rooms seemed to be a good means of communicating Polish traditions in an attractive way.

These three realms of activity form first-lady public diplomacy. For the purpose of this paper, the author understands first-lady public diplomacy as activities undertaken by first ladies through international contacts, both overseas and at home, aimed at promoting their state and enhancing their brand and image by means that are specific to the position they hold. The particular position of first ladies enables them to do certain things their husbands cannot. Of course, what they can do is limited by their 'wife-only' role, but the contributions they make are often underestimated.

In addition, the particular position of a first lady can also empower a feminist dimension of diplomacy (feminist foreign policy) in countries that incorporate this approach into their foreign policy. Feminist diplomacy (i.e. feminist foreign policy) is a concept mainly developed in the Nordic states such as Sweden, and for instance in France (where the first lady enjoys quite a 'powerful' position). For France, the concept means advancing gender equality

at the international level, and achieving this through 'soft diplomacy, cultural, educational and development cooperation actions' (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018, p. 13). Public diplomacy is thereby understood as a key and complex instrument of foreign policy for advancing the core aim of gender equality and the empowerment of women overseas. First ladies can support women-oriented activities and initiatives within their own country and internationally, one example being First Lady Brigitte Macron, who addresses women's issues in her activities. In this sense, the French first lady seems to be a 'component' of the feminist-oriented dimension of the foreign policy of France.

Despite the fact that a feminist-oriented foreign policy is pursued by some countries, in others the participation of women in diplomacy is still considered a peripheral issue (Meyer & Prügl, 1999; Caglar et al., 2013). Although some recent studies have highlighted the role of women in diplomacy (Cassidy, 2017; Aggestam & Towns, 2018), most are focused on exercising feminist foreign policy, and do not address the involvement of women in states' overall public diplomacy aimed at promoting their countries abroad and enhancing their brand using 'girl power'.

First ladies can be involved in diplomatic activities aimed at promoting and supporting women. This may happen, to some extent, even if a given country does not (officially) pursue a feminist foreign policy. First ladies maintain contact with 'diplomatic wives', as Cynthia Enloe (1990) called the spouses of diplomats, in particular the wives of ambassadors, and also women ambassadors. For instance, first ladies organise meetings with 'diplomatic wives' and women ambassadors, or take part with them in events such as charity fundraisers, etc. They participate in women-oriented international initiatives such as conferences or congresses, and can be special guests or the patrons of such events. When travelling abroad, they have an opportunity to maintain contact with other first ladies or female officials and to meet women from other countries, which enables them to undertake public diplomacy activities that address women.

3 Methodology

This research uses an exploratory, longitudinal single case study. The academic literature offers a number of definitions and approaches to case studies. Among them, three definitions are the most commonly used: those of Robert E. Stake (1995), Robert Yin (2018), and Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell (2015). The most workable stance is presented by Stake, who points to 'the complexity of a single case', whereby a case study, according to his definition, 'is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (1995, p. xi). Thus, Stake focuses most on the content (the case) than on how to conduct the research. In contrast, Yin (2018) was more concerned about the process of case study research, and identified a set of steps that lead to research results. Merriam and Tisdell emphasise that 'a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system' (2015, p. 37). But Bent Flyvbjerg (2011) again underlined that a case study is a profound analysis of an individual element.

The author followed the approach proposed by Stake, also taking account of Flyvbjerg's position, since the aim was to conduct an in-depth investigation of the case study in order to identify a set of regularities and causes in relation to the activities of first ladies in the field of public diplomacy. As well as content analysis of primary sources in Polish that

included reports and photographs (qualitative analysis), the research included, inter alia, data concerning the frequency of the Polish first lady's activities (quantitative analysis), mainly of visits she made alone or together with the president, and events for foreign guests and delegations that she hosted. Initially, the author found a few hundred sources of various types, a number of which addressed the domestic activities of the first lady. It was then necessary to select the most relevant of these materials and eliminate those that were not pertinent. Eventually, the author arrived at a final data set containing 181 sources (including photographs), all of which concerned AKD paying foreign visits or hosting foreign guests and delegations. Six annual reports summarising each year of her work, which contained quantitative data, were also examined. All the documents the author used were accessed online – they are available on the official website of the President of Poland (<https://www.president.pl/en/>), which includes a section devoted to the activities of the first lady. The reports that were used cover the whole of Duda's first term (August 2015 – August 2020), and the data set was collected in mid-2020.

Additionally, the author applied a qualitative approach based on an analysis of the first lady's international activities. To do so, the author first identified the events in which AKD took part, and which were reported on in (foreign) media. The research showed that this particularly concerned bilateral Polish–American relations. Therefore, the online archives of the leading American communication channels such as CNN and news agencies such as Bloomberg, among others, were explored using the keyword 'Agata Duda' and, similarly, the online archives of the main American newspapers (by circulation). Content concerning AKD was found in the resources of CNN and Bloomberg, as well as in *USA Today* and the *Chicago Tribune*. In addition, the US edition of *Newsweek* was examined. The research was limited to these sources due to the existence of plenty of other communication channels; second, because of the widespread coverage they provide; and third, their leading position among other media. What is more, the author also examined the main Polish newspapers that contain reports on the bi- and multilateral relations of Poland – namely: *Gazeta Wyborcza* (a daily), *Rzeczpospolita* (another daily) and *Polityka* (a weekly paper) (Marczuk et al., 2021). Although all of them reported on AKD they were mainly focused on her in-country activities. For the purpose of this study the articles published by *Polityka* were considered relevant. All sources were accessed online via the digital archives of these newspapers.

4 Results

4.1 Dynamics and types of activity

The research began with an examination of the set of data; that is, reports (including photo accounts) of AKD's foreign visits, and her hosting of foreign guests and delegations at home. The analysis covered the period from August 2015 to August 2020. The number of materials from each year is shown in Figure 1; it can be seen that the largest number of sources are from 2018, the middle of President Duda's term of office; these comprised 25 per cent of the total, followed by those for 2017 (almost 24.5 per cent), 2019 (about 21.3 per cent), 2016 (18 per cent), 2015 (9 per cent) and last, 2020 (only about 2 per cent). This sharp decline in 2020 can be explained by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which precluded any international

activities for about two months (see Figure 2). The peak of AKD's activity – that is, the years 2017–2019 (totalling almost 71 per cent of materials) – is linked with the middle of the presidential term when politicians are most active, including in the realm of foreign policy. The beginning phase of the presidency (in this case, 2015–2016), in contrast, is characterised by less intense involvement in foreign visits; in this period presidents usually focus more on domestic affairs or defining their foreign agenda for the coming years.

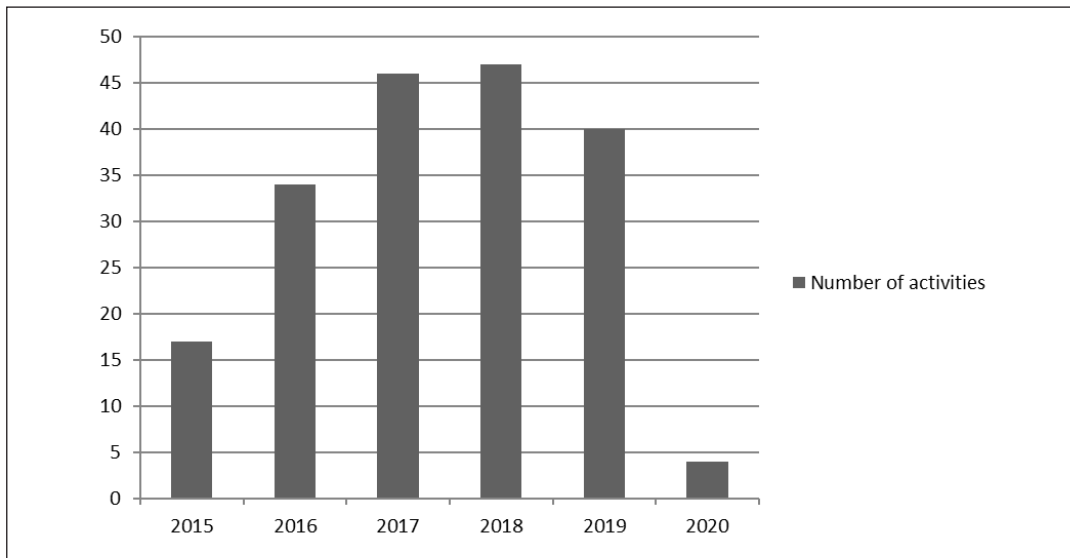


Figure 1 Number of activities of the First Lady per year, 2015–2020

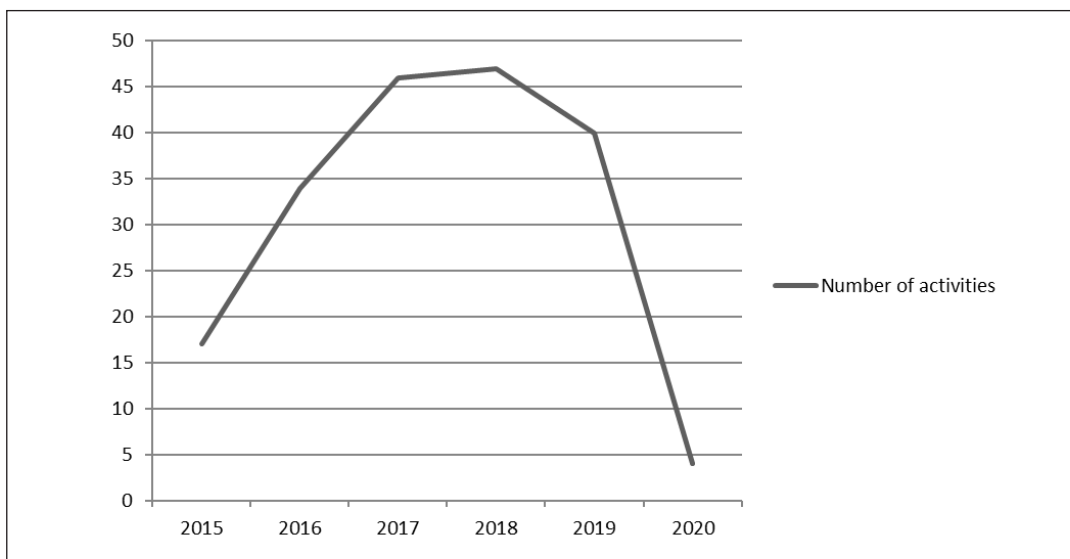


Figure 2 Intensity of activities of the First Lady, 2015–2020

Next, to study the frequency of AKD's activities the author compared the data on AKD's foreign and in-country visits. Between August 2015 and August 2020, AKD participated in a total of 592 in-country and foreign visits. These activities included 526 in-country visits, 258 without and 268 with the president. The first lady made 66 trips abroad, seven without and 59 with the president. The percentage distribution of the first lady's in-country and foreign activities during the period of analysis is shown in Figure 3. In total, about 89 per cent of visits involving the first lady took place in Poland, and about 11 per cent abroad. Among the in-country visits, AKD was involved in 49 per cent without and 51 per cent with the president; internationally, those figures are about 11 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively, as shown in Figure 4. The number of in-country visits was much greater than the number of international visits; this is related to the domestic duties of the president and the overriding role of domestic policy. Interestingly, however, the number of in-country visits of the first lady that she hosted alone is almost equal to the number she undertook together with the president. In contrast, there is vast disproportion in the case of foreign visits, when AKD predominantly accompanied her husband, playing the role of 'escort'.

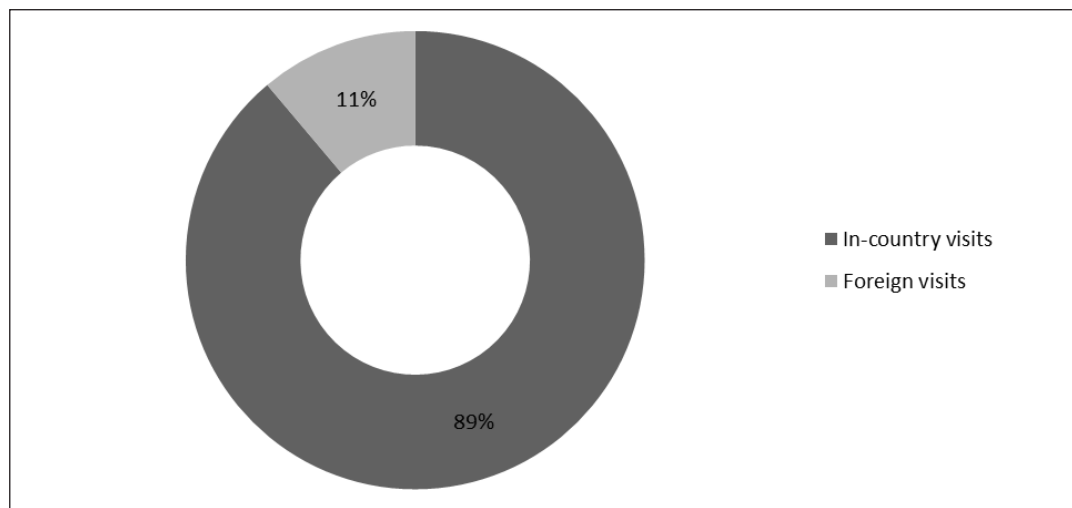


Figure 3 In-country and foreign visits of the First Lady, 2015–2020

Subsequently, the author searched through the documents for quantitative data and analysed the frequency of all types of AKD's activities year by year, both in-country and internationally. This included the various activities that were reported in the documents, not only in-country and foreign visits, but other activities in Poland as well: German language lessons given (AKD is a former German teacher), patronage, writing letters, attending various types of meetings at the Presidential Palace, meeting groups visiting the Presidential Palace, and supporting charitable initiatives. The first lady hosted foreign guests 37 times at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. She initiated and attended events organised at the Presidential Palace – in total, she took part in 333 of these, attending 143 of them together with the president. Table 1 shows the number of all types of these activities of the first lady in detail.

AKD acted alone in domestic affairs more often than she attended international events, and her in-country duties were more varied, which attests to the formally 'undefined' nature of the role of first ladies internationally. At home, they are more active.

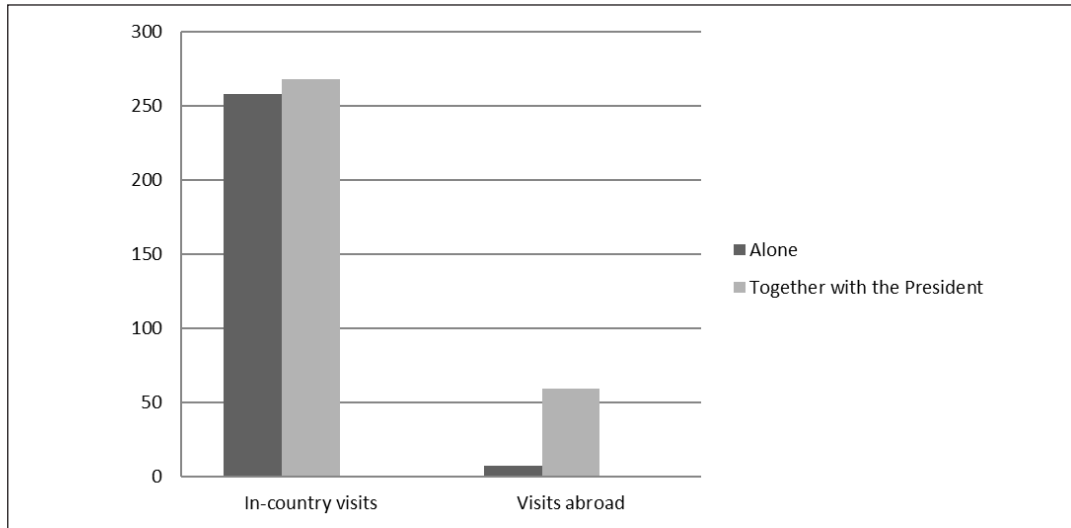


Figure 4 In-country and international visits of First Lady with or without the President, 2015–2020

Table 1 Number of all types of activity of the First Lady, 2015–2020

	15–16	16–17	17–18	18–19	19–20	Total
In-country visits*	c. 46	c. 54	50	89	287	526
Visits abroad**	14	14	14	12	12	66
German language lessons given	37	18	33	45	n/d	133(?)
Patronage	76	75	76 (+11)***	62 (+9)****	n/d	309(?)
Letters	437	81	37	37	n/d	592(?)
Meetings at the Presidential Palace	43	42	93	49	249	476
Foreign delegations hosted	16		4	10	7	37
Meeting with groups visiting the Presidential Palace	52		52	34	n/d	118(?)
Support for charitable initiatives	49		41	49	n/d	139(?)

* Alone and with the president

** Alone and with the president

*** Together with long-term patronage

**** Together with long-term patronage

Note: Figures are approximate due to incomplete data.

The international activities of the first lady mainly consisted of paying visits abroad (64 per cent) and receiving international guests at the Presidential Palace (36 per cent). The frequency of hosting foreign guests and delegations is shown in Figure 5. Comparing the data from Figures 2 and 5, one can state that in the years when AKD was most active abroad (making international visits), she was less occupied hosting foreign guests, particularly in 2017–2018 (only four delegations hosted). In contrast, the first lady hosted foreign delegations more often near the beginning and the end of the presidential term. As mentioned above, she either acted alone or accompanied her husband. In total, the international activities she engaged in accounted for about 11 per cent of her work; the rest of the time she accompanied the president.

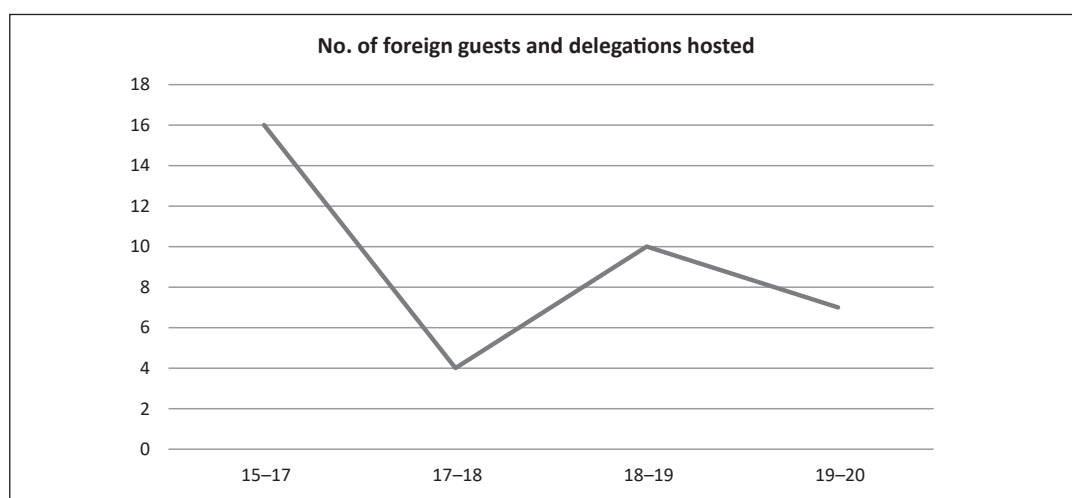


Figure 5 Hosting of foreign guests and delegations, 2015–2020

4.2 Areas and directions of cooperation

The results previously obtained provoked the author to identify the main areas and directions of international cooperation, as well as to investigate the most frequent topics of the first lady's visits abroad. First, taking AKD's background into consideration – that is, her education and profession (a German teacher) – it is not surprising that she was active at promoting and supporting education, particularly teaching children and youth foreign languages, including teaching the Polish language as a foreign language abroad. In her travels she visited schools where Polish is taught or Polish traditions are cultivated. An example of this is a visit to Vietnam in 2017, where she met with Vietnamese students of a high school named after Marie Skłodowska-Curie, and talked with them about their country and Poland.

Second, another area of the first lady's activity is linked with the first type – she has been actively involved in relations with the Polish diaspora abroad (known as *Polonia*). Specifically, she has emphasised the importance of education and of promoting the Polish language not only among *Polonia*, but also among foreigners interested in Poland. For instance, during the first ever visit of the Polish president to Australia in 2018, AKD met with students and teachers at the Polish school in Canberra.

Third, AKD has emphasised the historical dimension of Polish foreign policy. For instance, she has organised meetings at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw with the families of Polish citizens who played notable roles during World War II. During foreign visits she also visited such people, or memorial sites of significance for Poland; this happened, for instance, during a visit to Ukraine in 2019.

A fourth important area of her activity has been maintaining contact with the spouses of foreign heads of state (the majority of whom are women), mainly by accompanying them during official visits to Poland (made alone or together with their spouses), involving official meetings with President Duda. AKD has used such occasions to show her foreign guests Polish culture, folklore, music, history, etc., and to promote friendly relations. For instance, in 2017 she and the First Lady of Germany, Elke Bündenbender, visited the Polish-German Willy Brandt School in Warsaw to present to students their diplomas in German language studies.

The first lady is also involved in maintaining relations with members of the diplomatic corps in Poland, and their spouses. This entails staying in touch with ambassadors' spouses. An example of this type of activity is AKD's support for the Spouses of Heads of Mission (Warsaw) Association, and her personal involvement in a charity bazaar the association organises at the end of every year. Along with the president, she also takes part in annual meetings with the diplomatic corps at the Presidential Palace. Last, she has been involved in charitable activities abroad, thus promoting Polish foreign aid.

Regarding the 'geographical' directions of the first lady's cooperation with international partners, it is worth noting that, again, her background has played an important role. She maintained close relations with the spouse of the President of Germany, and supported the German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO), an international organisation established by Poland and the reunited Germany in 1991 to promote friendly, mutual relations between the young generations of the two states. In her involvement with the Polish diaspora, she has attended meetings with its members in countries where Poles are numerous, either for historical reasons or because of recent emigration (mainly of an economic nature). This particularly concerns Poland's neighbourhood to the east (Ukraine), as well as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. AKD has also maintained close relations with the spouses of the heads of state of the Visegrad Group, a group of countries in Central and Eastern Europe that includes, apart from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. This is linked to Poland's current foreign policy of developing contacts with its neighbours and partners in the region.

4.3 Coverage of international activities

The research described here provoked the author to consider the coverage of the first lady's activities of an international character, as well as point out the target foreign audiences. Regarding international coverage, this is particularly evident when one analyses the content of media; that is, AKD's representation in (foreign) media regarding her international activities.

During President Duda's term of office, the most important international activities, among others, were his trips to the USA in the company of the First Lady AKD, and hosting US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at home. The 2017 trip of Trump to Warsaw was commented on by media, including leading American media including CNN

and Bloomberg, as well the leading US newspapers by circulation. On this occasion, First Lady ADK was also noticed by foreign media. In 2017, the US presidential couple visited Poland ahead of their trip to the G20 Summit in Germany. For instance, First Lady Melania Trump's trip was reported on by CNN, including photo material about the visit of the two first ladies, Trump and Kornhauser-Duda, to the Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw, in a photo account of the US first lady's activities. However, AKD was particularly present in American media due to one notable photo op – when the two presidents, Donald Trump and Andrzej Duda, and the two First Ladies shook hands with each other. *Newsweek* (the US edition) next reported that AKD did not shake Donald Trump's hand, publishing an article entitled 'Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange' (Riotta, 2017). This did not happen (in fact, the First Ladies AKD and Melania Trump first shook hands, and then AKD shook the hand of Donald Trump) and *Newsweek* subsequently corrected the news. But this moment was also noticed by Bloomberg and the leading American press titles, including *USA Today* and the *Chicago Tribune*, and the photo or a brief clip of the meeting quickly went viral on the internet, although the truth of the report was denied.

This event was commented on by the Polish press, too, such as the weekly *Polityka*, and a diplomatic protocol expert who was interviewed explained that the error had probably occurred by accident. On this occasion *Polityka* also commented on AKD's outfit and compared it with that of Melania Trump.

The event attracted public interest in AKD, including in foreign press, although the perceived slight was unintentional. The first lady does not attend press conferences or other engage in similar forms of activity where she has a chance to be noticed by (foreign) media. Reports on her activity are publicised mainly through social media (for instance, on AKD's official Instagram account) and on the Polish President's official website. Contacts with other first ladies or hosting foreign guests at home also provide an opportunity to enhance her media representation via publicising news about her activity on social media accounts, or by foreign media services, like in the case of Melania Trump on CNN. Activities undertaken abroad by AKD are commented on by the Polish media, such as *Polityka*, although the Polish press is rather focused on her activity in-country.

Regarding the targeted audience abroad, the first lady seems to concentrate on making personal contact than appearing in the mass media. Visiting various places abroad she had an opportunity to meet a great number of people and personally communicate to them the desired narrative. In line with her background, her 'presidential leitmotif' (education), and ongoing foreign policy aims, the former were mainly students, youth, Poles who live abroad, etc. She did not emphasise any particular contact with media representatives. Thereby, her activities in this regard can be seen as complementary to the official activities of the president, who attracts more attention from the mass media, and consequently public awareness.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Without a doubt, in the majority of modern states first ladies work and act both domestically and internationally. Their work, like that of 'diplomatic wives', often goes unnoticed – and is unpaid. Polish public opinion is not enthusiastic about awarding the first lady a salary. A public opinion survey clearly showed that many Poles do not want the Polish first

lady to be paid (49 per cent) while only 40 per cent were in favour of this, and 11 per cent were undecided (CBOS, 2019). This suggests that the public remains unaware of the first lady's role and duties – in an earlier survey conducted in the mid-1990s, shortly after the democratic transformation in Poland, when asked about the duties of the former president's spouse, respondents answered that there were three main ones: first, social and charitable activities (43 per cent); second, accompanying her husband (28 per cent) (the role of escort) (Erickson & Thomson, 2012); and third, taking care of home, child, and family (25 per cent) (CBOS, 1996).

In contrast, according to recent research on the participation of Polish women in foreign policy, both domestically (employed at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereinafter MoFA) and abroad (posted on diplomatic missions), Poland – in comparison with other European countries – ranks relatively highly in terms of representation by and the involvement and competences of women. Although the report is focused on female diplomats and experts employed at MoFA, and does not address the role of the first lady in international relations, it does provide interesting data about the situation of women in Polish diplomacy. For instance, 20 per cent of those employed in the Polish foreign service are women managing diplomatic missions, while 23 per cent of those who work for the MoFA in managerial positions are women (Łada & Druciarek, 2019). Women employed in the foreign service have become more numerous. For instance, in 2018 of all Polish missions abroad 40 per cent of the diplomatic staff were women, while at MoFA the number of women employed was almost equal to the number of men – 49 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively (Marczuk, 2019b). This leads to the observation that the increasing number of women involved in conducting foreign policy may lead to a more decisive role for the first lady in diplomacy, including in public diplomacy.

Although the international activity of first ladies is not predominant – they pay a lot of attention to their in-country duties – they undoubtedly are engaged in diplomacy and public diplomacy, too. When doing so, they – to use a term applied by Robert Putnam (1988) – 'reverberate' in international fora when they visit other states or meet with their counterparts at home. This 'reverberation' overseas encompasses promoting their state, furthering ongoing foreign policy narratives, transmitting their country's culture, history and achievements, and much more, and is made possible by the special position the first lady occupies – outside of policy, but involved with it. This position also enables first ladies to attract the attention of (foreign) media, such as – in the researched case – CNN and Bloomberg, or the top newspapers (*USA Today* or *Chicago Tribune*), so they can attract public interest too. In this way, first ladies do perform public diplomacy.

However, the media representation of first ladies is of a limited character due to the special position they occupy. Media attention is particularly focused on presidential spouses, and first ladies are usually only in the spotlight when it comes to other issues, such as their outfits or image. Also, they can attract the attention of the media when attending official events and accompany presidents, such as in the case of AKD's handshake photo op (although in this case it was unintentional). Thereby, first ladies' media representation is restricted and, when it happens, concerns issues excluded from the ongoing policy agenda. This leads to the observation that their media coverage is complementary to coverage of presidents and involves other channels of communication (such as social media). Thereby, their public diplomacy is of a special character, as it is rather addressed to specific audiences. In the case of AKD, the latter are mainly students or young people connected to her special interest in education, particularly language education.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research. First, there are two areas of activity of first ladies that have an international impact, and which can therefore be considered as enabling them to engage in public diplomacy. The first and foremost of these is official international visits (with the president). During these events, first ladies meet their counterparts and important female officials, and therefore have the opportunity to communicate the preferred narratives of their state and support foreign-policy aims, including building up their country's brand. In particular, this takes place in the case of international events such as summits, and bilateral and multilateral meetings. For instance, AKD met with both female and male spouses of heads of state on the occasion of the 73rd United Nations General Assembly session in New York in 2018 during an official meeting organised for all of them. The second area involves the official visits of international guests or delegations that first ladies host, during which they can communicate their country's values and encourage their guests to feel positive about the host state. These two types constitute the main instruments first ladies use to engage in public diplomacy via personal relations in international contacts.

Second, other activities that enable first ladies to transmit messages about their country internationally include: 1) official international visits made by the first lady alone (on behalf of the president) to represent the state abroad; this mainly concerns issues of ceremony and protocol. Here, the example of AKD's visit to Japan in 2019 comes to mind. She visited Tokyo alone to represent Poland during the enthronement ceremony of the new Emperor of Japan, which gave her an opportunity to promote Polish-Japanese relations, since the visit took place during the centenary of Polish-Japanese diplomatic relations. Thereby, such international trips enable first ladies to engage in public diplomacy and enhance friendly relations, too; 2) meetings with other first ladies on various occasions (other than official meetings convened by their husbands). These may involve a first lady arriving in another country alone to take part in women-oriented conferences, charitable events, etc. Additionally, some first ladies, such as Brigitte Macron of France, organise meetings with other first ladies to address particular issues (in the case of Macron, this included meetings with the first ladies of some African states). During these events, first ladies can promote their countries. For instance, in 1999 the former First Lady of Poland, Jolanta Kwaśniewska, organised an international conference to which she invited other first ladies and queens, and gave them gifts of Polish cosmetics to promote the Polish cosmetics industry (Gieroń, 2012); 3) maintaining relations with women diplomats, particularly female ambassadors and 'diplomatic wives' (i.e. spouses of ambassadors). This also gives first ladies an opportunity to share with them the desired narrative about their countries; 4) charitable activities with an international dimension that they initiate and organise, patronise, or take part in – e.g. events organised by associations of the wives of diplomats in a given country (in the case of AKD, this included an annual charity bazaar). During such events, first ladies can, for instance, familiarise foreign participants with traditional Polish customs, cuisine, or, as in the case of the above-mentioned Jolanta Kwaśniewska – national products; 5) maintaining close relations with representatives of their own nations who live abroad, including women and girls, during international visits. Such events are also used to communicate with the diaspora to encourage them to participate in building up the country's brand in the state they now live in, thereby increasing the international impact of their country of origin.

Third, the activities undertaken by first ladies are rooted in their education and professional experience. During the first term of office of her husband, AKD showed her concern

for education, especially foreign-language education, as a German philologist and someone who used to work as a German teacher. Generally, the programmes of first ladies' foreign visits are based on their background, are 'neutral', and are often associated with charity – they visit schools, meet with children and youth, or visit other places that have some connection with their previous life experience. In this way, the first lady can reach an audience – although usually remaining out of the mass media – and be involved in 'people-to-people' activities that enable her to spread the desired narrative among them.

Fourth, the activities of first ladies during visits abroad are intrinsically linked with the overall foreign policy of their countries and their husbands' specific political aims. The Polish first lady has often attended meetings and made visits to places of historical significance to Poland located abroad, as this dimension of foreign policy is crucial for Poland. This mainly entailed visiting such places as museums of Polish history or attending meetings with descendants of Polish émigrés. It also encompassed the promotion of friendly relations with other states, including the active involvement of the Polish presidential couple in the Polish-Hungarian Friendship Day celebrations in Hungary in 2018 (the two countries have maintained good relations throughout their history). Such events can also be used to communicate information about Poland to foreign audiences, particularly in the context of historical narratives about Poland.

Last but not least, first ladies have to seize the opportunity when it comes to media coverage. Since they are not at the top of the media's agenda, they mainly attract media attention in two cases: due to the particular events in which they are involved, or their image. Their impact is thus of limited nature, provoking them to find other means of communicating their narratives. This is usually done through personal contacts or publicising news about their activities using internet channels. Thereby the attitude of first ladies approaches the understanding of public diplomacy that is adopted in this study – that is, using not only media but other means of communicating desired narratives to attract a foreign audience (Gilboa, 2008). This is in line with an observation of Erica Scharrer and Kim Bissel (2000) that media (here – mass media) tend to notice the traditional roles first ladies play in diplomacy rather than their activity. However, the latter have the potential to be engaged in public diplomacy through the specific ways in which they act. Their activity, thereby, can enhance the 'classic' diplomacy (Castells, 2008) undertaken by their presidential spouses.

The scope of this research is somewhat limited, first, due to the data that were used. Unfortunately, some of the quantitative data associated with the number of AKD's activities retrieved from reports were incomplete. Also, because the study concerns recent events, published reports tend to be of a general character.

The conclusions above confirm, first, that the traditional role of the first lady has evolved – from that of escort and engagement in diplomatic protocol duties (i.e., being uninvolved in diplomacy) to more active participation in diplomacy, including the promotion of their respective countries – thus public diplomacy activities. In this process, the female spouses of presidents are going beyond the traditional aesthetic role of the first lady (Ballif, 2001); first ladies now not only accompany their husbands but also engage in foreign policy activities aimed at enhancing their country's image. First ladies can take advantage of their unique position and of having an international audience to promote issues of concern to their country in an international forum.

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