South Africa's Bilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy as a Soft Power Tool of Attraction: Successes and Challenges

Natalie Leibrandt-Loxton
SARChI Chair on African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy
Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg

Abstract

The South African Parliament has since 1994 actively participated in formal, informal, and ad hoc bilateral parliamentary diplomacy. Through the analysis of this form of diplomacy, this article explores practical examples of Parliament's bilateral international participation to ascertain the impact thereof on the state's soft power capacity. Joseph Nye (2008; 2011)'s soft power tool of attraction is used as the theoretical lens through which these examples are assessed. Supplementary insights from parliamentary officials and confidential interviews with selected Members of Parliament who consistently participate internationally enriched the analysis. The article presents evidence of parliament's soft power of attraction among foreign legislative and executive actors, but also identifies challenges that hinder strategic soft power successes. As South Africa's bilateral parliamentary diplomacy continues to evolve, these findings provide insights on the role of Parliament as an international actor, as well as the need for the strategic positioning of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy within the state's overall diplomatic practice for policymakers and foreign policy stakeholders to consider.

Keywords: South Africa; parliament; bilateral relations;parliamentary diplomacy; soft power

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of South Africa's first democratic parliament in 1994, Parliament has hosted various foreign dignitaries, including prominent figures such as: Robert Mugabe (former President of Zimbabwe) in 1994, Queen Elizabeth II (the United Kingdom) in 1995, Bill Clinton (former President of

the USA) and Fidel Castro (former President of Cuba) in 1998, and Hu Jintao (former Vice President of the People's Republic of China) in 1999 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2001). This trend continued between the second (1999 – 2004) and the fifth (2014 – 2019) democratic parliaments with Parliament hosting numerous foreign legislatures and dignitaries based on formal, informal or ad hoc bilateral relations. Parliamentary delegations from South Africa also embarked on a number of such international bilateral engagements, echoing the broader international practice of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy between states through various forms of dialogue on shared challenges (Beetham 2006; Hamilton 2012; Jančić 2015).

Available research attributes the ongoing interest from other legislatures to establish relations with Parliament to South Africa's soft power of attraction following its democratic transformation from apartheid, as well as Parliament's well-reputed parliamentary processes and procedures (Masters and Nganje 2017). These international engagements – manifestations of Parliament's attraction – present the state with the soft power opportunities to promote South Africa's democratic achievements and political ideals, as well as to use its own soft power credentials as an actor in its international relations (Masters 2015). While this link between parliamentary diplomacy and soft power has been indicated, an analysis of how Parliament's bilateral relations has practically impacted South Africa's soft power capacity has yet to be undertaken. Understanding this soft power potential of bilateral diplomacy will assist policymakers to develop the necessary strategic approach to it as part of the state's diplomatic machinery.

By considering bilateral parliamentary diplomacy as a soft power tool, the question this article aims to answer is: How has Parliament practically impacted South Africa's soft power capacity through eliciting positive attraction? Nye's (2008; 2011) soft power tool of eliciting positive attraction was used as the analytical lens through which examples of Parliament's bilateral activities were considered in a qualitative analysis of available parliamentary and secondary sources. The analysis was supported by insights from parliamentary officials and confidential interviews with six selected MPs that have consistently and authoritatively participated in Parliament's international relations. These MPs were identified as part of the limited number of legislators that consistently participate internationally through different platforms.

2. Bilateral parliamentary diplomacy and soft power

Contributions on the involvement of parliaments in international relations attribute it to the branched nature of the state, viewing it as disaggregated (Slaughter 2004) and composite of many "competing bureaucracies, individuals, and groups" (Viotti and Kauppi 1999:490). Slaughter (2004) regards the increasing trends in national government institutions collaborating with their foreign peers as proof of this disaggregation. This includes executive officials engaging with policy making beyond their borders; the judiciary collaborating with their international counterparts to resolve cases that transcend national borders; and parliamentarians collaborating with their foreign peers on legislative and oversight best practices on a range of issues (Slaughter 2004). Beyond peer collaboration, Martin (2000) views partnership between parliaments and their executive counterparts as necessary in the state's international relations, especially in terms of undertaking credible commitments with other states. Such credibility is crucial for a state's soft power as an outcome as well as a resource (Hayden 2012).

Nye (2011:21) defines soft power as "the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes". The existing literature on South Africa's soft power appreciates the state's various soft power resources of attraction, including its democratic values and ideals; charismatic leaders that led its transition into democracy; its internationally acclaimed constitution and Bill of Rights; its high regard for international law, norms and institutions; commitment to multilateralism; willingness to sacrifice short-term national interests in favour of the collective good; as well as its liberal foreign economic policies (Chiroro 2012; Isike and Ogunnubi, 2017; Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike, 2015; Sidiropoulos 2014; Smith 2012; Van der Westhuizen 2016). Available research has also provided useful insights into which state and non-state actors should form part of South Africa's soft power machinery (Isike and Ogunnubi 2017), although contributions that consider Parliament as an international relations actor and instrument of soft power is limited (Ahmed 2009; Masters and Nganje 2017; Masters 2015). Moreover, the state's international relations policy framework by way of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Planning Commission 2011) and foreign policy White Paper Building a Better World: The

Diplomacy of Ubuntu (Republic of South Africa 2012) does not discuss such a role for Parliament. Yet it is these soft power resources of attraction that has seen legislatures from around the world pursuing relations with Parliament through bilateral parliamentary diplomacy (Masters and Nganje 2017). This indicates a disjuncture between policy and practice as Parliament continues to follow an active bilateral relations programme, despite bilateral parliamentary diplomacy not being formally advanced as an instrument of soft power in policy documents and Parliament not being regarded as an actor or agent in the state's international relations policy framework. This contribution considers an 'agent' as any individual or group whose actions affects its environment, and 'agency' as the agent's capacity to do so (Adler-Nissen, 2016; Kelly, 2014). In this light, the ensuing analysis assesses Parliament's agency in South Africa's international relations through considering how its actions in eliciting positive attraction through bilateral parliamentary diplomacy have contributed to South Africa's soft power capacity.

Actors can elicit positive attraction in two ways; firstly, through achieving domestic success in policies and culture, which then appear attractive to another state and, secondly, through circulating norms that have been successfully applied in their state, which may seem appropriate for the goals of another state (Rothman 2011). State actors such as parliaments are in a unique position to elicit positive attraction for the state. This is due to the sovereignty that the state enjoys, through what Brown (2012:1898) regards as "a claim to the location of ultimate authority, to a socially recognised right to rule." It is this sovereignty that allows state representatives such as parliaments to speak on behalf of the state, which non-state actors are not able to do (Brown 2012).

Bilateral parliamentary diplomacy presents MPs with opportunities to elicit positive attraction for the state through promoting its policies, laws and culture. It also enables parliaments to promote their political and administrative parliamentary processes and procedures from which other parliaments may want to learn. Such exchanges broadly occur at both informal and formal levels, while there are some instances of ad hoc exchanges that are not linked to either of these. Formal bilateral cooperation, sometimes referred to as twinning agreements (Surtees 2014), can include collaboration in all areas of parliamentary activity, including plenary support, committee support, law drafting techniques, financial administration, and information technology (Araujo 2013). Informal bilateral

parliamentary diplomacy generally entails exchanges between friendship groups, which aim to promote cooperation between countries and the parliaments concerned (Beetham 2006; Belarusian Telegraph Agency 2017; Parliament of New Zealand n.d.). These may pave the way to formal bilateral relations (De Croo 2006). Bilateral exchanges at ad hoc level include official visits in pursuit of possible bilateral partnerships, exchanges at committee level where MPs can share knowledge and experiences on common challenges, or the sharing of technical expertise through staff exchanges (Beetham 2006). Significantly, they may also include bilateral exchanges between members of the legislative and executive branches (Embassy of the Russian Federation in South Africa 2016). These vehicles of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy all showcase the increasing soft power of attraction that parliaments are experiencing.

Parliament's international relations policy, the Policy Perspectives and Operational Guidelines for Parliament's Involvement and Engagement in International Relations (2006b) (henceforth Policy Perspectives) provides for it to participate in bilateral engagements through activities that qualify as eliciting positive attraction. These include creating friendship groups to exchange views and knowledge; strengthening ties with other parliaments to improve perceptions about South Africa; and promoting South Africa's culture and civilisation among other parliaments (Masters 2015). It is Parliament's practical experiences and soft power impact in this regard that will now be considered.

3. The Nature of South Africa's Bilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy

South Africa's foreign policy White Paper (Republic of South Africa 2012) articulates strengthening bilateral social, political and economic relations as one of the state's core foreign policy priorities (the others being prioritising the SADC region and the African continent, South-South cooperation, consolidating relations with the North, and promoting global equity and social justice). This is underpinned by the rationale that "strong bilateral relations enhance the strength of South Africa's international positions and influence in multilateral organisations and groupings" (Republic of South Africa 2012:21). In line with its prioritisation of Africa, the White Paper maintains that South Africa's bilateral relations with other African states remain key to its foreign relations through engaging in various sustainable partnerships for development. As per its

constitutional mandate of executive oversight, Parliament is responsible for the scrutiny of South Africa's bilateral relations to ensure they are in line with the state's foreign policy positions. With Parliament's own approach to international relations guided by the foreign policy White Paper (Republic of South Africa 2012), these priorities in bilateral relations should be included in the strategic thinking for bilateral parliamentary diplomacy.

Parliament engages bilaterally to promote South Africa's foreign policy that is underpinned by democratic values and ideals, the protection of human rights, gender justice, and upholding international law and justice. It also regards its bilateral relations as strategic in advancing South Africa's domestic priorities of access to health, education, decent employment, and the fight against crime (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: International Relations and Protocol Division (IRPD) 2013). Between the first and the fifth democratic parliaments, Parliament pursued these through establishing formal relations with six partner legislatures (summarised in Table 1) and engaging in various ad hoc bilateral exchanges with fellow African states and beyond. Personal communication with a senior parliamentary official confirmed that no friendship groups were established during this time.

Table 1: The South African Parliament's formally established bilateral relations from the First to the end of the Fifth Democratic Parliament

STATE / REGION	NAME OF AGREEMENT	HOUSE(S) OF RSA PARLIAMENT	DATE OF SIGNATURE	AREAS OF COOPERATION	FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY
People's Republic of China	Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Regular Exchange Mechanism between the National Assembly (NA) of the Republic of South Africa and the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China	NA	25 September 2006	• Exchanging views on bilateral relations and issues of regional and international concern; • Promoting and arranging high level exchange visits; • Organising exchange visits, study tours, seminars, etc. between special committees, friendships groups and working bodies of the NA and the NPC; • Support and consultation at their meetings and international conferences; • Exchanging publications on democracy, legislative issues, etc. to increase mutual understanding and share experiences; • Updating each other on progress regarding the implementation of existing agreements between the South African and Chinese governments.	Commitment to South-South cooperation

Belarus	Arrangement on Cooperation between the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the Council of the Republic NA of the Republic of Belarus	NCOP	19 June 2007	• Mainstreaming their bilateral relations through establishing permanent ties between parliamentary committees and MPs of the NCOP and the Councils of the Republic NA of the Republic of Belarus, including the Secretariats of both chambers; • Exchanging knowledge through study tours; • Exchanging knowledge and consultation on issues of mutual interest at international meetings; • Conducting regular meetings within the IPU and other IPIs while considering issues of mutual interest to be included in the agenda of IPIs.	Commitment to South-South cooperation
European Union	Joint Declaration On the further strengthening of Inter-parliamentary relations and political dialogue Between the Delegations of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the European Parliament	NA and NCOP	7 February 2008	• Exchanging visits to share knowledge and experiences; • Enhancing consultation and coordination on national, regional and international affairs; • Establishing a consultative forum for both Parties to meet and exchange views on areas of cooperation as per the Trade Development Co-operation Agreement and the Mogôbagôba Dialogue; • Improved engagement by subject-specific parliamentary committees; • Establishing mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the SA-EU Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan; and Issuing joint declarations on agreed areas of cooperation.	Consolidating relations with the North

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Senate of the DRC and the NCOP of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa	NCOP	18 November 2009	• Establishing permanent ties between committees and MPs of the NCOP and the Senate Members of the Congo, as well as the secretariats of both chambers; • Exchanging information for study purposes; • Conducting consultations and exchange information on issues of mutual interest; • Conducting regular meetings within the IPU and other IPIs, so support each other in considering issues of mutual interest to be included in the agendas of IPIs.	Primacy of the African continent and the SADC
Mozambique	Cooperation Protocol between the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique and the National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa	NA	10 September 2013	• Exchanging experience and knowledge on parliamentary activities through technical missions, amongst others; • Establishing parliamentary friendship groups; • Regularly exchanging views and coordinating positions on international issues, especially related to SADC and Africa	Primacy of the African continent and the SADC
Russian Federation	Memorandum on Cooperation between the NCOP of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation	NCOP	1 December 2014	• Facilitating the speedy entry into force of international treaties between South Africa and Russia; • Exchanging visits to promote closer interaction between parliamentary committees and MPs; • Exchanging information on legislation, parliamentary procedures and documents of mutual interest; • Promoting consultations and, where possible, taking agreed-upon positions in various IPIs; • Contributing to the creation of a parliamentary component of the BRICS; • Broadening of inter-regional ties between South Africa and Russia.	Commitment to South-South cooperation

(**Source:** Author's own compilation, using Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2006a, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014)

Table 1 summarises Parliament's six bilateral agreements and juxtaposes them to the state's foreign policy priorities. It reveals the agreements' similarities in terms of the opportunities they avail to elicit positive attraction among legislative partners, including exchanging views, knowledge, and experiences through various means. Table 1 also reveals their conclusion to be in line with South Africa's foreign policy priorities, even though there remains an absence of a specific parliamentary guiding policy on bilateral relations. This lack of policy is a significant factor when considering the few agreements concluded since 1994 and the interest from other parliaments to do so (including France, Portugal, Poland, and others), as ascertained through email communication with a parliamentary official on 13 November 2017. Nevertheless, each agreement concluded resonates with South Africa's priority areas of foreign cooperation – the agreements with China and Russia (fellow BRICS partners), as well as Belarus in favour of South-South cooperation; the ones with DRC and Mozambique in line with the prioritisation of SADC and Africa; and the agreement with the EU in line with the priority of consolidating relations with the North. Significantly, it is clear that Parliament has not prioritised Africa in its formal bilateral relations, despite South Africa's NDP (National Planning Commission 2011), the foreign policy White Paper (Republic of South Africa 2012), as well as Parliament's Policy Perspectives (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2006b) explicitly affording SADC and Africa that priority.

4. Parliament eliciting positive attraction: successes and challenges

Considering Parliament's successes and challenges in eliciting positive attraction revealed five themes; (a) its attractiveness to other parliaments to establish bilateral relations; (b) the agency it is afforded through formal bilateral agreements; (c) recognition as an actor among foreign representatives of the executive; (d) its approach in concluding formal bilateral agreements; and (e) MPs perceptions about Parliament's bilateral relations

4.1 Relations initiated by other parliaments

Email correspondence from a parliamentary official on 13 November 2017 report that none of Parliament's six formal bilateral agreements, as summarised in Table 1, were initiated by the South African Parliament. This interest of other countries, notably the state's strategic partners, to deepen their partnership with South Africa through bilateral parliamentary diplomacy thus indicates positive soft power of attraction by Parliament. These partners recognise Parliament as an important actor within their broader inter-governmental cooperation with South Africa, to the extent of formally adding a parliamentary dimension to the existing partnerships.

Similarly, while Parliament had not established any friendship groups between the first and the fifth democratic parliaments, it had received numerous requests to do so from countries such as France, Angola, Portugal, Poland (Masters and Nganje 2017). This is significant, especially since the formal bilateral agreement with Mozambique – an African partner – provides for the establishment of one (Masters and Nganje 2017; Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2013). Parliament's reluctance to establish friendship groups remains unclear, indicating some challenges in harnessing this power of attraction towards deepening relations. The lack of a parliamentary guiding policy on bilateral relations may be a key factor, which the Parliamentary Group on International Relations (PGIR) – the committee responsible for the strategic management of Parliament's international participation – noted required development (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2006b; PGIR 2017) .

Parliament's active ad hoc bilateral engagements also reflects its attractiveness. In 2012, for instance, Parliament received official visits by Presiding Officers of other parliaments, including the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, the Vice Speaker of the Palestine Legislative Council, as well as the Speaker of the Japanese House of Representatives (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: IRPD 2013). Examples of other ad hoc engagements include exchanges with parliamentary counterparts from countries like Poland, The Republic of Korea, and Iran. These were largely based on these countries' economic cooperation with South Africa, and exploring the role of parliaments in this respect. The two reciprocal visits between the Ninth Senate of the Polish Parliament and the NCOP, for instance, focused on cooperation in the agricultural sector

and the need for parliaments to oversee the implementation of international cooperation agreements. The Republic of Korea has expressed interest in establishing a parliamentary friendship group, regular bilateral exchanges, as well as assisting South Africa in its marine and shipping industries towards job creation and economic growth (Lukani 2016). These examples suggest that Parliament is regarded as an important actor in South Africa's international relations, as illustrated by these foreign parliaments' keen interest to collaborate with Parliament within the remit of existing inter-governmental cooperation. While it may be too soon to gauge any soft power outcomes from these initial engagements, evidence of positive soft power outcomes for the state on sensitive issues such as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, as well as South Africa's national priorities of access to health, education, decent employment and the fight against crime through these particular meetings is limited.

Finally, Parliament attracted study tours and staff attachments during the 2012 to 2013 reporting year, demonstrating its soft power of attraction as an important partner to learn from. Some examples include a study visit by the Parliament of Kenya's Committee on Members' Welfare and Facilities in April 2012 to exchange views and learn from South Africa on how Parliament handles the welfare of its MPs and staff, as well as its staff structure and policy on promotion. In February 2013, the Commission on Sport and Tourism of the Parliament of Brazil visited Parliament, specifically the Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, to share experiences and ascertain the role that South African MPs played when South Africa hosted the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) in February 2013 also hosted the Committee on Public Accounts of the German Bundestag to share experiences relating to their oversight roles and, during the same month, also received a visit from Senators from the USA's Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: IRPD 2013).

Parliament's attractive administrative and legislative processes saw it receiving 12 staff attachments during the 2012 to 2013 reporting period. These included Parliament's Budget Office hosting officials from the Afghanistan Ministry of Finance to learn about South Africa's parliamentary budgeting processes, particularly in terms of budgetary oversight. Other examples of staff attachments include Parliament's Language Services section hosting Hansard Officials from the Parliament of Botswana in February 2013, as well as the Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) Division hosting five officials of the National Council of the Parliament of Namibia for a benchmarking exercise (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: IRPD 2013).

4.2 Agency through formal bilateral agreements

Parliament's formal bilateral agreements with China, Russia and the EU echo South Africa's broader strategic partnerships and cooperation with these countries. These agreements therefore include additional areas of cooperation that are linked to the focus areas of the partnerships, thereby affording Parliament agency within these partnerships. The agreement with China includes updating each other on the implementation of existing agreements between the South African and Chinese governments, while the agreement with Russia facilitates the speedy entry into force of international treaties between the two states. In terms of the EU, the agreement with the EP provides for consultation and exchange of views regarding the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) between South Africa and the EU, the Mogôbagôba Dialogue, as well as establishing mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the SA-EU Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2006b; 2008).

These provisions not only deepen the existing cooperation between South Africa and its strategic partners, but also afford Parliament and its legislative counterparts agency through an oversight role – regarded by (Jančić 2015:335) as one of the key goals of "international parliamentary actorness". Therefore, the soft power potential for the partnering states is significant as, through parliamentary diplomacy, delegations are empowered to elicit positive attraction on issues of strategic interest to their states within the purviews of the existing partnerships. All three agreements contain provisions that provide opportunities to elicit positive attraction, notably through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. In practice however, evidence of any soft power impact for Parliament through using these avenues is limited, despite the parties having remained dedicated to meeting on a regular basis. Nevertheless, these consistent interactions are indicative of the level of attraction that has been maintained between the partners and their continued desire to collaborate. Due to the limited information available on most bilateral engagements prior to 2014, the following examples of

the agreements' practical implementation and impact are more recent.

In the case of China, a delegation from South Africa under former NA Speaker Ms Baleka Mbete, MP, met with parliamentary counterparts in Beijing under the leadership of Mr Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in April 2015. This was the third meeting since the conclusion of the regular exchange mechanism between the NPC and South Africa's NA, and discussions focused on the two parliaments' role in pursuing strong political ties, mutually beneficial trade and economic partnership, excellent people-to-people relations and cooperation on international issues (Tralac Trade Law Centre 2015). A few months later, on the sidelines of the BRICS parliamentary meetings in Moscow in June 2015, the two parliaments engaged on how to utilise the existing relations between the South African and Chinese governments to implement their executives' consensus to escalate the bilateral relationship into a new type of China-Africa strategic partnership. Mr Zhang emphasised that the envisioned strategic partnership would serve as "a model for cooperation between large developing countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China 2015). Parliament's soft power of attraction is thus evident in its relations with China, reflecting the parties' commitment to people-to-people relations discussed above. While these exchanges provided opportunities for Parliament to elicit attraction on issues of interest to South Africa in terms of promoting South Africa's constitutional values with this less democratic partner, evidence to this effect is limited.

Evidence of exchanges between Parliament and its Russian partner legislature includes the then Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Ms Thandi Modise, MP, meeting the Presiding Officers of the Russian Parliament on the sidelines of the 137th IPU Parliamentary Assembly in October 2017. The partners reiterated their reciprocal support for the other's country, appreciated the IPU hosting the BRICS Women's Forum to further popularise gender equality and racial integration among legislatures, and further appreciated the scrapping of visa requirements between the two countries (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2017). These engagements with Russia showcase some elements of how Parliament strived to promote South Africa's constitutional values among its Russian counterparts although, as in the case with China, evidence of any soft power impact in this regard is also limited.

Parliament's relations with the EU were already active prior to the conclusion

of the SA-EU strategic partnership in 2006. Relations started just after 1994 with alternate exchanges between the EP and the South African Parliament, after the EP created a dedicated Delegation for Relations with South Africa. Following the conclusion of the strategic partnership between the South African Government and the EU, regular exchanges continued due to the EU's regard for South Africa as an "anchor for the region" and "a key player on the Continent" (European Parliament n.d.). Relations have been further enhanced between the two partners through the conclusion of the SADC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (SADC-EPA) in 2016, which aims to promote trade between African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and EU countries towards sustainable development and poverty reduction (European Commission 2017). The EU foresees the relationship with South Africa, particularly Parliament, evolving to the point where a dedicated parliamentary committee of some sort will be established to oversee South African-EU relations in the same way as other portfolio or select committees function (European Parliament n.d.). This is indicative of Parliament's soft power attractiveness to the EU although, at the time of writing, the committee had yet to be established. Nevertheless, dialogue between Parliament and the sixth EP (2004 – 2009) included issues such as conflict areas and peace-keeping operations in Africa; HIV/AIDS; the political and economic developments in Zimbabwe; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and EPAs and their implications for regional integration (European Parliament n.d.). As in the cases with China and Russia, evidence of soft power successes for Parliament is limited, although the topics that had been discussed is reflective of opportunities for Parliament to raise issues of interest for South Africa, notably in terms of peace and security matters on the African content, and the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe.

The agreement between the NCOP and Belarus promotes bilateral South-South cooperation between the two legislatures although, unlike the other agreements concluded with non-African legislatures, it is not based on or linked to a broader government-to-government strategic partnership or cooperation agreement. Nevertheless, its areas of parliament-to-parliament cooperation are similar, including the opportunities to eliciting positive attraction through knowledge sharing. Evidence points to bilateral parliamentary exchanges having been limited to the Speaker of the NA visiting Belarus in October 2006, followed by the Chairperson of the NCOP visiting in June 2007. An official visit to Parliament from Belarus was conducted by the Chairman of the House

of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus in April 2008. These all occurred around the time the formal bilateral agreement between the two parliaments was signed in September 2007 (Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa n.d.). However, no other bilateral meetings between Parliament and its counterpart from Belarus could be confirmed. This indicates limited soft power capacity for Parliament to follow through on decisions after the establishment of relations based on positive attraction.

4.3 Recognition as an actor among foreign executive representatives

Foreign executive representatives' (including ministers and ambassadors) regard for Parliament as an actor in South Africa's international relations is evident in numerous examples, indicating Parliament's soft power of attraction beyond the scope of legislatures. Parliament regularly receives courtesy calls from accredited Ambassadors or High Commissioners to introduce themselves as the envoy of their state, or to raise specific issues of interest with Parliament. Examples of such visits between 2012 and 2013 included the Ambassadors of Azerbaijan, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Portugal, Sweden, France and Hungary who were received by either the Speaker of NA or the Chairperson of the NCOP (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: IRPD 2013).

Other examples showcase engagements with foreign executive representatives of the state's strategic partners. In September 2017, for instance, the NCOP Chairperson, Ms Thandi Modise, met with Russia's Foreign Minister Mr Sergey Lavrov where they reaffirmed the importance of active inter-parliamentary relations at both bilateral and BRICS levels. These office bearers reflected on their common views on global and regional issues such as the fight against international terrorism, the situation in Syria and the rest of the Middle East and the settlement of crises in Africa (Embassy of the Russian Federation in South Africa 2016). In November 2017, Ms Modise also met with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, Mr Ling Songtiang, at Parliament during a courtesy call meeting to further engage on the successful launch of the South Africa-China High Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism launched in April that year. The meeting agreed on how the People-to-People Exchange Mechanism further added to the already existing strategic relations between

the two countries and created an opportunity for non-government entities (including academia, business and civil society) to interact more frequently through organised structures (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2017).

4.4 Parliament's approach in concluding formal bilateral agreements

Parliament's formal bilateral agreements contain similarities in terms of their areas of cooperation, although discrepancies in their modalities are revealed when considering the signatory Houses they were concluded with. The bilateral agreement with China was concluded with the NA specifically, the one with Russia with the NCOP only, while the one with the EU involves both Houses of Parliament. The agreements with DRC and Belarus were concluded with the NCOP, and the one with Mozambique with the NA. In total therefore, of the six bilateral agreements concluded by the end of the Fifth Democratic Parliament, two involved the NA only; three involved the NCOP only; and only one of the six involved both Houses of Parliament. Parliament concluding agreements with one House not only limits its capacity to fully harness their provisions, but also its implementation of its constitutional mandate to oversee executive action that applies to both the NA and the NCOP (in Sections 42(3), 55(2), 56 and 69 of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996)). In turn, these challenges also limit Parliament's capacity to elicit positive attraction as bilateral engagements with these strategic partners are facilitated by MPs of one House only. This practice by Parliament presents some soft power limitations to the state's soft power capacity.

4.5 MPs perceptions about Parliament's bilateral relations

Insights gained from six confidentially interviewed MPs point to varying perceptions of Parliament's bilateral relations in practice. They all agreed that Parliament and MPs have much to gain from bilateral parliament-to-parliament relations, particularly in terms of learning and exchanging experiences with their counterparts. These assist them in improving in the execution of their domestic duties. Two MPs, by virtue of their membership in the parliamentary committees overseeing the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), agreed to knowing more about Parliament's bilateral agreements as

these are tabled before their committees for consideration. One other MP also indicated knowledge of all bilateral engagements, although this is due to her senior position in Parliament's political hierarchy. She submitted that the fifth democratic parliament failed to prioritise bilateral partnerships, attributing this to the busy parliamentary programme (Leibrandt-Loxton 2018).

On the other hand, two other MPs – neither serving on international relations oversight committees or holding senior political positions at Parliament – both observed that they did not know much about Parliament's bilateral relations. One was of the view that Parliament prioritises its multilateral relations as it has more to gain at that level, while the other felt that Parliament prioritises bilateral relations over multilateral relations when he considers the activities he had observed under the bilateral agreements with Russia and the EU in particular. The final MP also observed that MPs generally are not well aware of Parliament's bilateral engagements. She submitted that decisions related to bilateral cooperation were taken without debate and also observed that only MPs that were directly involved in bilateral affairs had knowledge thereof. She attributes the latter to the lack of adequate support structures and challenges in the processing of information within Parliament (Leibrandt-Loxton 2018).

These insights suggest that the majority of MPs' may not be well informed of Parliament's bilateral agreements and activities due to most of them not serving on the parliamentary committees dealing with international relations or being directly involved in bilateral activities. Their lack of information and limited exposure to meeting outcomes reduces the potential soft power impact of bilateral diplomacy as information that parliamentary delegations may be exposed to may not feed adequately into the work of relevant parliamentary committees and vice versa. The implications for soft power are significant, as these challenges limit parliamentary delegations' ability to strategically elicit positive attraction in bilateral settings in pursuit of South Africa's foreign policy priorities.

5. Conclusion

Through considering South Africa's bilateral parliamentary diplomacy as a soft power tool of attraction, this contribution set out to gauge how Parliament's bilateral relations have practically impacted South Africa's soft power capacity.

The analysis provides evidence of Parliament's soft power of attraction, thus demonstrating the potential of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy as a soft power resource of the state. Three factors were found as indicative of Parliament's soft power of attraction: Parliament's attractiveness to other parliaments to establish bilateral relations; the agency it is afforded through formal bilateral agreements; and Parliament's recognition as an actor among foreign representatives of the executive. On the contrary, the analysis also revealed challenges that have obstructed Parliament's soft power impact, resulting in soft power losses for the state. These are: Parliament not optimally utilising bilateral parliamentary diplomacy to deepen relations after initial discussions; limited evidence of Parliament successfully promoting South Africa's constitutional values; disparate approaches to the conclusion of formal agreements, which limits Parliament's capacity to fully capitalise on their provisions; and MPs' limited awareness about Parliament's bilateral relations.

These findings therefore provide practical and theoretical considerations for state policymakers and foreign policy stakeholders as South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy continues to evolve, notably in terms of the perceptions of Parliament's role as an actor in international relations, the strategic application of parliamentary diplomacy towards achieving the state's interests, and the necessary collaboration between the legislative and executive branches for this to succeed.

Despite being limited by the unavailability of many delegation reports on bilateral relations, particularly during the early years of Parliament's international participation, personal communication with parliamentary officials and MPs, as well as more recent delegation reports and articles published in Parliament's InSession magazine assisted with the analysis. As South Africa's bilateral parliamentary diplomacy continues to develop, Parliament's soft power beyond eliciting positive attraction should be explored, particularly its ability to shape the agenda on issues of interest of the state. The impact of South Africa's bilateral parliamentary diplomacy within the context of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy should also be explored, particularly in relation to whether and to what extent its bilateral partnerships have resulted into any soft power gains at that level.

References

Adler-Nissen, R (2016), "Diplomatic Agency", in Constantinou, C, P. Kerr and P Sharp, (eds), The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp 92-103.

Ahmed, K (2009), "The role of parliament in South Africa's foreign policy development process: lessons from the United States' Congress", South African Journal of International Affairs, Vol 16, No 3, pp 291–310.

Araujo, J (2013), "Bilateral co-operation between Parliaments in different continents: the case of East Timor", Constitutional & Parliamentary Information, Vol 205, pp 59-64.

Beetham, D (2006), "Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: A Guide to Good Practice". (Available at: http://archive.ipu.org/dem-e/guide.htm, accessed 20 June 2019.)

Belarusian Telegraph Agency (2017), "Belarus, Switzerland set up informal parliamentary group of friendship". (Available at: http://eng.belta.by/politics/view/belarus-switzerland-set-up-informal-parliamentary-group-of-friendship-107581-2017/, accessed 8 February 2018.)

Brown, W (2012), "A Question of Agency: Africa in international politics", Third World Quarterly, Vol 33, No 10, pp 1889–1908.

Chiroro, B (2012), "South Africa: Optimising the Currency of Soft Power in the International Arena". (Available at: http://www.ai.org.za/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/No-79.-Optimising-the-currency-of-soft-power-in-the-international-Arena.pdf, accessed 17 August 2016.)

De Croo, H (2006), "Bridge-building through Parliamentary Diplomacy". (Available at: http://www.riigikogu.ee/paceconference2006, accessed 4 September 2015.)

Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa (n.d.), "Political Dialogue with the Republic of South Africa". (Available at: http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/political/belarus_rsa/, accessed 6 December 2017.)

Embassy of the Russian Federation in South Africa (2016), "Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Chairperson of the South African Parliament's National Council of Provinces Thandi Modise". (Available at: https://www.russianembassy.org.za/index.php/russian-sa-relations/highlights-

of-russian-sa-relations/309-press-release-on-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-s-meeting-with-chairperson-of-the-south-african-parliament-s-national-council-of-provinces-thandi-modis, accessed 5 December 2017.)

European Commission, (2017), "Economic partnerships". (Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/economic-partnerships/., accessed 7 December 2017.)

European Parliament (n.d.), "History: The Delegation for South Africa (D-ZA)". (Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/d-za/about/history, accessed 5 December 2017.)

Hamilton, G (2012), "Parliamentary diplomacy: diplomacy with a democratic mandate". (Available at: http://www.asgp.co/sites/default/files/documents//TNMHGPUMPZTHTVFVERGVKHIYNVVCNM.doc, accessed 16 March 2016.)

Hayden, C (2012), The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Isike, C and O Ogunnubi (2017), "South Africa's foreign policy aspirations and the National Development Plan (NDP 2030): the role of soft power", Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Vol 35, No 3, pp 284–302.

Jančić, D (2015), "Transatlantic Regulatory Interdependence, Law and Governance: The Evolving Roles of the EU and US Legislatures", Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies, Vol 17, No 1, pp 334–359.

Kelly, R (2014), Agency Change: Diplomatic Action Beyond the State. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Leibrandt-Loxton, N (2018) "South Africa's Parliamentary Diplomacy 1994 – 2014: Developing International Agency as a Soft Power Tool". PhD Supervised, University of Johannesburg.

Lukani, M (2016), "Welcome to the Korean delegation", InSession, Vol 16, No 2, pp 32–33. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Martin, L (2000), Democratic Commitments. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Masters, L (2015), "South Africa's Emerging Parliamentary Diplomacy and Soft Power", Strategic Review for Southern Africa, Vol 37, No 2, pp 74–93.

Masters, L and F Nganje (2017), "South Africa's Parliamentary Diplomacy and the 'African Agenda'", in Stavridis, S and D Jančić (eds), Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance. Leiden: Brill | Nijhoff.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China (2015), "China's top legislator eyes stronger parliamentary cooperation with South Africa". (Available at: http://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx/zzjw/t1271918.htm, accessed 17 March 2015.)

National Planning Commission (2011), "National Development Plan 2030. Our future - make it work". (Available at: http://www.poa.gov.za/news/Documents/NPC%20National%20Development%20Plan%20Vision%202030%20-lo-res.pdf, accessed 19 May 2017.)

Nye, J (2008), "Foreword" in Watanabe, Y and D McConnell (eds), Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States. London: Routledge.

Nye, J (2011), The Future of Power. New York: Public Affairs.

Ogunnubi, O and U Okeke-Uzodike (2015), "South Africa's foreign policy and the strategy of soft power", South African Journal of International Affairs, Vol 11, No 1, pp 23–41.

Parliament of New Zealand (n.d.), "FAQ's – Global Connections, a Better Parliament: The New Zealand Parliament's Draft Inter-Parliamentary Relations Strategy, 2015-2019". (Available at: https://www.parliament.nz/media/2094/faq.pdf, accessed 8 February 2018.)

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2001), Parliament: The First Five Years of Democracy in South Africa: 1994 - 1999. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2006a), "Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Regular Exchange Mechanisms between the National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa and the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2006b), "Policy Perspectives and Operational Guidelines for Parliament's Involvement and Engagement in International Relations". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2007), "Arrangement on Co-operation Between the National Council of Provinces of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the Council of the Republic National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2008), "Joint Declaration on the further strengthening of Inter-parliamentary relations and political dialogue Between the Delegations of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the European Parliament". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2009), "Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation between the Senate of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the National Council of Provinces of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2013), "Cooperation Protocol between the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique and the National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2014), "Memorandum on Cooperation between the National Council of Provinces of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2017), "Relationship between South Africa and China must help create Job Opportunities - Thandi Modise". (Available at: https://www.parliament.gov.za/news/relationship-between-south-africa-and-china-must-help-create-job-opportunities-thandi-modise, accessed 19 March 2018)

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa: IRPD (2013), "Annual Report of Parliamentary International Relations 2012 - 2013". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

PGIR (2017), "Draft minutes of proceedings (29 August 2017)". Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.

Republic of South Africa (1996), "Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996", Government Gazette, No 17678. Cape Town: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa (2012), "Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu". Pretoria: Government Printer.

Rothman, S (2011), "Revising the soft power concept: what are the means and mechanisms of soft power?", Journal of Political Power, Vol 4, No 1, pp 49–64.

Sidiropoulos, E (2014), "South Africa's Emerging Soft Power", Current History, May, pp 197–202.

Slaughter, A (2004), A New World Order. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Smith, K (2012), "Soft Power: The essence of South Africa's foreign policy" in Landsberg, C and J van Wyk (eds), South African Foreign Policy Review, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, pp 68–83.

Surtees, C (2014) "Co-ordination of Assistance and Support to other Parliaments". (Available at: www.asgp.co/sites/default/files/Surtees%20EN.docx, accessed 20 May 2016).

Tralac Trade Law Centre (2015), "China, South Africa chart direction for stronger legislative ties". (Available at: https://www.tralac.org/news/article/7253-china-south-africa-chart-direction-for-stronger-legislative-ties.html, accessed 3 December 2017.)

Van der Westhuizen, J (2016), "South Africa's soft power conundrum: how to win friends and influence people in Africa", Journal of Political Power, Vol 9, No 3, pp 449–465.

Viotti, P and M Kauppi (1999), International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond. 3rd edition. New York: Allyn and Bacon.