



**Journal of Politics and Development**

**ISSN 2632-4911**

**Volume 15   ■   Number 2   ■   Summer 2025**



# the rest: journal of politics and development

*Previously published as Journal of Global Analysis (JGA)*

## Editors-in-Chief:

**Ozgur TUFEKCI, Assoc. Prof.** | Karadeniz Technical University, Türkiye & CESRAN International

**Rahman DAG, Assoc. Prof.** | Marmara University, Türkiye & CESRAN International

## Associate Editors:

**Alessia CHIRIATTI, Dr.** | Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

**Marco MARSILI, Dr.** | Ca' Foscari University, Italy & CESRAN International

## Assistant Editors:

**Ekrem OK** | Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, Türkiye & CESRAN International

**Rabia BUYUKPINAR** | Zonguldak Bulent Ecevit University, Türkiye & CESRAN International

## Editorial Board

**Sener AKTURK, Prof.** | Koç University, Turkey

**Enrique ALBEROLA, Prof.** | Banco de España, Spain

**Mustafa AYDIN, Prof.** | Kadir Has University, Turkey

**Ian BACHE, Prof.** | University of Sheffield, UK

**Kee-Hong BAE, Prof.** | York University, Canada

**Mark BASSIN, Prof.** | Sodertorn University, Sweden

**Alexander BELLAMY, Prof.** | Uni. of Queensland, Australia

**Richard BELLAMY, Prof.** | Uni. College London, UK

**Andreas BIELER, Prof.** | University of Nottingham, UK

**Pinar BILGIN, Prof.** | Bilkent University, Turkey

**Ken BOOTH, Prof.** | Aberystwyth University, UK

**Stephen CHAN, Prof.** | SOAS, University of London, UK

**Nazli CHOUCRI, Prof.** | MIT, USA

**Judith CLIFTON, Prof.** | Universidad de Cantabria, Spain

**John M. DUNN, Prof.** | University of Cambridge, UK

**Kevin DUNN, Prof.** | Hobart and William Smith Colleges, USA

**Can ERBIL, Assoc. Prof.** | Boston College, USA

**Stephen Van EVERA, Prof.** | MIT, USA

**Marc FLEURBAEY, Prof.** | Princeton University, USA

**Bulent GOKAY, Prof.** | Keele University, UK

**Ayla GOL, Prof.** | York St John University, UK

**Stefano GUZZINI, Prof.** | Uppsala Universitet, Sweden

**David HELD, Prof.** | London Sch. of Economics, LSE, UK

**Tony HERON, Prof.** | University of York, UK

**Raymond HINNEBUSCH, Prof.** | Uni. of St Andrews, UK

**John M. HOBSON, Prof.** | University of Sheffield, UK

**Michael KENNY, Prof.** | University of Sheffield, UK

**Cécile LABORDE, Prof.** | University College London, UK

**Scott LUCAS, Prof.** | University of Birmingham, UK

**Kalypto NICOLAIDIS, Prof.** | University of Oxford, UK

**Ziya ONIS, Prof.** | Koc University, Turkey

**Alp OZERDEM, Prof.** | George Mason University, USA

**Danny QUAH, Prof.** | London School of Economics, UK

**José Gabriel PALMA, Prof.** | Cambridge University, UK

**Jenik RADON, Prof.** | Columbia University, USA

**Oliver RICHMOND, Prof.** | University of Manchester, UK

**Ibrahim SIRKECI, Prof.** | Regent's College London, UK

**Ian TAYLOR, Prof.** | University of St Andrews, UK

**Ali WATSON, Prof.** | University of St Andrews, UK

**Brian WHITE, Prof.** | University of Sheffield, UK

**Stefan WOLFF, Prof.** | University of Birmingham, UK

**Birol YESILADA, Prof.** | Portland State University, USA

**Hakan YILMAZKUDAY, Prof.** | Florida International University, USA

*The Rest: Journal of Politics and Development is published on behalf of the Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis (CESRAN) as an academic e-journal. The articles are brought into use via the website of the journal (<https://therestjournal.com/>). CESRAN and the Editors of The Rest: Journal of Politics and Development do not expect that readers of the review will sympathise with all the sentiments they find, for some of our writers will flatly disagree with others. It does not accept responsibility for the views expressed in any article, which appears in The Rest: Journal of Politics and Development.*

*\* The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

# the rest: journal of politics and development

*Previously published as Journal of Global Analysis (JGA)*

## INDEXING & ABSTRACTING

- Academic Index
- Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE)
- Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO)
- Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
- EBSCO Publishing Inc.
- EconLit
- EconPapers
- Genamics JournalSeek
- IDEAS
- Index Islamicus
- Infomine
- International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBR)
- International Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBZ)
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- International Relations and Security Network (ISN)
- Lancaster Index to Defence & International Security Literature
- Peace Palace Library
- Research Papers in Economics (RePEc)
- Social Sciences Information Space (SOCIONET)
- Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### RESEARCH ARTICLES

**152**

**India in a Changing Global Order: Geopolitical Challenges and Strategic Interests in the Indo-Myanmar Borderlands**

*By Manashi Parashar*

**163**

**The Evolution of Japan's Limited Sovereignty: From the Era of Unequal Treaties to the Japan-U.S. Alliance**

*By Yukio Sakurai*

**182**

**Liberty, Affect, and The Rise of Populism**

*By Colin Anthony Smith MacNairn*

**198**

**The Emergence of Hybrid Warfare and the Future of Global Security: A Comparative Study of Russian and NATO's Hybrid Infrastructure in Ukraine**

*By Shahzada Rahim Abbas*

**213**

**Implications of Military Aid on Global Arms Sales and Production**

*By Zekeri Momoh*

**225**

**A New Model for Measuring the Human Development Index: A Comparison of the Organisation of Turkic States and the EU**

*By Abdullah Zübeyr Şekerci*

**245**

**The Adaptation of Land Forces to the New Multipolar Order**

*By Ricardo J Vieira*

**259**

**Parliamentary Diplomacy and Ontological (In)Security in Small States**

*By Nádia Teresa dos Santos*

**276**

**Education and Africa's Structural Transformation: Human Capital, Partnerships, and the Case for a Pan-African Movement**

*By Pedro Silva Baptista*

**298**

**Revisiting Alexis de Tocqueville's Civil Society Concept from a Political-Economic Perspective**

*By Ali Erdem Başçoban*

**311**

**Overtourism: A Local and International Challenge to the Iberian Peninsula and Italy**

*By Maria Antónia Pires de Almeida*



International Think-tank [www.cesran.org](http://www.cesran.org)

Consultancy

Research Institute

CESRAN International is headquartered in the UK

CESRAN International is a member of the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI)

**CESRAN International** is a think-tank specialising on international relations in general, and global peace, conflict and development related issues and challenges.

The main business objective/function is that we provide expertise at an international level to a wide range of policy making actors such as national governments and international organisations. CESRAN with its provisions of academic and semi-academic publications, journals and a fully-functioning website has already become a focal point of expertise on strategic research and analysis with regards to global security and peace. The Centre is particularly unique in being able to bring together wide variety of expertise from different countries and academic disciplines.

The main activities that CESRAN undertakes are providing consultancy services and advice to public and private enterprises, organising international conferences and publishing academic material.

Some of CESRAN's current publications are:

- THE REST: Journal of Politics and Development (tri-annual, peer reviewed)  
[www.therestjournal.com](http://www.therestjournal.com)
- Novus Orbis: Journal of Politics and International Relations (biannual, peer reviewed)  
[www.dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/novusorbis](http://www.dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/novusorbis)
- Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (biannual, peer reviewed)
- Political Reflection Magazine (quarterly) [www.politicalreflectionmagazine.com](http://www.politicalreflectionmagazine.com) (2010–2023)
- CESRAN Paper Series
- CESRAN Policy Brief
- Turkey Focus Policy Brief

CESRAN International also organises an annual international conference since 2014. Until 2023 it was called as “International Conference on Eurasian Politics and Society (IEPAS)”. From 2023, it was renamed as “CESRAN: Annual Conference on International Studies”.

<https://cesranconference.org/>

- **Ranked among the top 150 International think tanks**

Parliamentary Diplomacy and  
Ontological (In)Security  
in Small States

the rest:  
journal of politics and development  
2025 | vol 15(2) | 259-275  
[www.therestjournal.com](http://www.therestjournal.com)

Nádia Teresa dos Santos  
Dr., Nova University of Lisbon  
a2022104076@campus.fcsh.unl.pt, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8068-7835>

KEYWORDS

Parliamentary Diplomacy,  
Ontological Insecurity,  
Small States,  
Portugal,  
International  
Parliamentary  
Organisations

Received June 08, 2025  
Revised July 14, 2025  
Accepted July 18, 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how parliamentary diplomacy, within international parliamentary organisations (IPOs), contributes to mitigating ontological insecurity in small states, focusing on the Portuguese case. It argues that IPOs function as institutional arenas for projecting narrative coherence, diplomatic predictability, and multilateral responsibility, especially during periods of domestic transition or geopolitical fragmentation. For small states, such participation offers mechanisms of symbolic compensation and externalised stability that reinforce international presence despite material constraints.

The research follows a qualitative, document-based methodology and analyses two illustrative cases: Portugal’s presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (2017–2019) and its current presidency of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (since 2024). These cases demonstrate how parliamentary diplomacy can serve as a tool for symbolic leadership and identity projection in both Mediterranean and Euro-Atlantic arenas.

Findings suggest that Portugal has used parliamentary diplomacy to enhance its international visibility and maintain a coherent external narrative grounded in normative values, democratic legitimacy, and multilateral engagement. IPOs thus emerge as effective platforms for small states to stabilise their identity, gain recognition, and assert agency in a fragmented global order.

Introduction

In an international environment marked by geopolitical fragmentation, normative contestation, and the erosion of multilateral institutions, the question of how small states sustain stable and recognised international identities has gained renewed academic relevance. For structurally constrained actors, foreign policy coherence is not only a matter of credibility, but also of ontological security, understood as the preservation of a continuous and socially validated sense of self in external relations (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006). This analytical lens foregrounds the symbolic dimensions of state behaviour, particularly salient when material capabilities are limited.

In this context, parliamentary diplomacy has emerged as an underexplored yet increasingly relevant dimension of small states’ external projection. While traditionally associated with democratic legitimisation and interparliamentary dialogue, it has evolved into a structured form of international engagement. Through the participation of national parliaments in international parliamentary

organisations (IPOs), such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), small states can engage in diplomatic routines that promote narrative coherence, symbolic recognition, and normative continuity beyond executive-driven foreign policy cycles.

Portugal offers a pertinent case study of this phenomenon. Its parliamentary diplomacy is institutionally structured, involving permanent delegations and cross-party engagement across multiple IPOs. In recent years, Portuguese parliamentarians have assumed high-profile leadership roles in these forums: the MP Pedro Roque led the PAM from 2017 to 2019, and the MP Marcos Perestrello became President of the NATO PA in 2024. These leadership roles have provided structured opportunities for Portugal to project an international identity rooted in predictability, moderation, and multilateralism.

For small states like Portugal, this mode of engagement enables more than diplomatic visibility. It offers institutional continuity during periods of political instability, supports consistent foreign policy narratives, and reinforces normative legitimacy through soft power mechanisms such as symbolic compensation and externalised stability (Browning and Joenniemi, 2017; Ingebritsen, 2006). These mechanisms help mitigate ontological insecurity by projecting a coherent and socially validated self-image onto the international stage.

This study investigates how IPOs can function as arenas of identity assertion for small states, using Portugal as a case study. The choice is analytically justified by three factors. First, Portugal has consistently positioned itself as a normatively committed actor in multilateral settings, promoting values such as democracy, human rights, and a rule-based international order (Silva, 2024). Second, its parliamentary diplomacy is both structurally embedded and politically cross-partisan, allowing for long-term engagement and reputational consistency (Fonseca and Vargas, 2019). Third, Portugal recently assumed the presidency of two strategically relevant IPOs, PAM (2017–2019) and NATO PA (since 2024), which enable a comparative analysis of parliamentary diplomacy across different geopolitical configurations.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in document analysis. Empirical sources include official reports, speeches, and political declarations from the Portuguese Parliament (*Assembleia da República*), PAM, and NATO PA, complemented by academic literature on ontological security, small states, and parliamentary diplomacy. The two case studies allow for a comparative reflection on the symbolic and institutional impact of parliamentary leadership in the Mediterranean and Euro-Atlantic regions.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework, combining the concepts of ontological (in)security, identity projection, and parliamentary diplomacy in small states. Section 3 outlines the methodology and case selection. Section 4 offers an empirical analysis of Portugal's presidencies of PAM and NATO PA, assessing their role in symbolic consolidation and identity stabilisation. Section 5 integrates the analytical discussion and presents the main conclusions regarding the strategic potential of parliamentary diplomacy in small states.

## **Theoretical Framework: Small States, Identity, and Parliamentary Diplomacy**

Understanding the role of parliamentary diplomacy in stabilising the identity of small states requires a theoretical foundation that integrates three interrelated dimensions: the concept of ontological insecurity, the projection strategies typically adopted by small states, and the role of IPOs in the symbolic consolidation of external identity (Kinnvall, 2004).



This framework is based on the premise that state behaviour in international relations extends beyond the pursuit of material interests, encompassing the preservation of a coherent identity narrative, an essential component of legitimacy and predictability in the international system.

Small states, marked by structural vulnerabilities and limited influence, tend to rely on symbolic and diplomatic mechanisms to compensate for material constraints. These include soft power, prestige diplomacy, and active engagement in multilateral networks (Browning, 2006; Thorhallsson, 2012). Parliamentary diplomacy fits within this repertoire, offering channels for institutional continuity, external visibility, and identity reinforcement through structured involvement in IPOs (Stavridis and Jancic, 2016; 2017).

This conceptual reflection unfolds across three axes. First, it examines ontological insecurity and its application to international relations, highlighting the importance of identity stability in state behaviour. Second, it explores projection strategies pursued by small states, particularly those with symbolic functions. Third, it analyses how parliamentary diplomacy contributes to enhancing small states' visibility, narrative coherence, and international legitimacy through IPO engagement.

### **Ontological (In)Security in International Relations**

Originating in existentialist psychology (Laing, 1960)<sup>1</sup>, Giddens (1991) adapted the concept of ontological insecurity to explain how individuals maintain a stable sense of self through routines and social continuity. This idea was later introduced into International Relations by Mitzen (2006), who argues that states, like individuals, require consistent interactions and stable narratives to preserve their identity. When disrupted by crises, shifting alignments or perception changes, this continuity may break down, generating ontological insecurity and undermining symbolic legitimacy.

Importantly, Mitzen (2006) shows that states may prioritise identity preservation over rational or material interests, sustaining relationships that serve to uphold a coherent self-image. Kinnvall (2004; 2017) adds that such insecurity intensifies in conditions of globalisation and societal change, prompting symbolic strategies such as nationalism or tradition reinvention. Ontological security thus depends not only on internal identity stability but also on external recognition and validation.

This framework helps explain why state behaviour cannot be reduced to material or security calculations alone. As Steele (2008) highlights, states often act to protect their self-narratives, sometimes against strategic logic. This is especially relevant for small states, whose limited material capacities heighten their vulnerability to identity erosion. Their ontological security increasingly hinges on projecting a stable, coherent, and externally respected identity.

In this context, small states invest in soft power strategies to secure symbolic recognition, including normative diplomacy, international visibility, and reliable institutional engagement (Ingebritsen, 2006). These strategies function as forms of symbolic compensation and externalised stability (Browning and Joenniemi, 2017), enabling small states to mitigate ontological insecurity despite structural constraints.

Parliamentary diplomacy contributes directly to this effort. By ensuring continuity, visibility, and representative legitimacy across political cycles, national parliaments can help stabilise the external identity of small states. Through regular participation in IPOs, they create institutional routines that

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronald D. Laing originally introduced the concept in *The Divided Self* (1960) to describe the experience of identity disintegration in individuals facing psychological vulnerability. Though later transposed to the social sciences, its original formulation remains a key reference in the genealogy of ontological security.



support the symbolic projection of reliability, moderation, and commitment, traits essential to ontological security in a fragmented international order.

### Small States and Projection Strategies

The external behaviour of small states is shaped by structural vulnerabilities. Lacking significant military capacity, economic weight, or systemic influence, they are often relegated to peripheral positions within the international system (Thorhallsson, 2012). In response, small states adopt alternative projection strategies that emphasise symbolic authority and normative legitimacy (Hey, 2003).

Their foreign policy relies heavily on discursive tools. Symbolic diplomacy, the use of narratives, values, and performance to secure recognition, is central to this approach. Small states frequently promote international law and universalist norms to position themselves as moral actors, compensating for their limited coercive power (Goetschel, 1998). This aligns with Nye's (2004) concept of soft power: the ability to influence through attraction rather than force. Accordingly, small states invest in credibility, institutional reliability, and principled diplomacy to enhance visibility and reinforce identity coherence (Ingebritsen, 2006).

In this context, reputation becomes a strategic asset. Scandinavian countries, for instance, have cultivated global images of peacefulness and commitment to human rights through sustained multilateral engagement (Donnelly, 2000; Ingebritsen, 2006). Many small states also function as norm entrepreneurs, promoting new standards in areas such as human rights, peacebuilding, or environmental governance (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Their perceived neutrality enhances credibility in multilateral settings (Neumann and Carvalho, 2015).

Portugal exemplifies these dynamics. Situated at the intersection of the Atlantic, Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Lusophone world, it has pursued a diplomacy grounded in moderation, dialogue, and multilateralism (Moreira, 2011). Its so-called "360-degree diplomacy" combines value-based engagement with institutional consistency, supported by active participation in organisations such as the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), and the United Nations (UN) (Tavares & Jesus, 2023). This projection is reinforced by symbolic milestones, including the appointments of António Guterres, Durão Barroso, and António Costa to high-level international positions<sup>2</sup>.

However, symbolic capital requires coherence and continuity, especially during moments of domestic transition or external uncertainty. In this regard, parliamentary diplomacy plays a key role in ensuring narrative stability and international credibility across political cycles. Portugal has thus attempted to transform structural constraints into strategic assets through symbolic legitimisation. Two interrelated concepts help explain this process: symbolic compensation, or the use of soft power to bolster recognition, and externalised stability, the projection of coherent identity abroad to offset internal volatility (Browning and Joenniemi, 2017; Gstöhl and Neumann, 2004). These mechanisms consolidate a stable diplomatic self-image and mitigate ontological insecurity.

Parliamentary diplomacy serves as a privileged channel for activating these dynamics. By providing continuity, reinforcing legitimacy, and reflecting cross-party consensus, it complements governmental diplomacy and contributes to a stable and recognisable international identity. The following section explores this dimension in greater detail.

---

<sup>2</sup> António Guterres has served as Secretary-General of the United Nations since 2017; José Manuel Durão Barroso was President of the European Commission from 2004 to 2014; and António Costa was appointed President of the European Council in 2024.

## Parliamentary Diplomacy as an Instrument of Identity Construction

Parliamentary diplomacy has become an increasingly prominent component of the international engagement strategies of national parliaments, particularly for small states whose limited material capabilities necessitate alternative forms of external projection. This form of diplomacy comprises the set of external activities undertaken by parliaments and their members with the specific aim of representing legislative institutions abroad, engaging with peer assemblies, and fostering interparliamentary cooperation. Unlike executive-led diplomacy, it emphasises transparency, pluralism, and representative legitimacy, projecting the multiplicity of domestic political voices into the international arena (Stavridis, 2019).

Stavridis and Jancic (2016) identify three core functions of parliamentary diplomacy that are especially relevant to small states. First, the representative function, through which parliaments project democratic and constitutional values, thereby reinforcing their legitimacy as autonomous actors in international affairs. Second, the deliberative function, materialised in participation in fora that promote intercultural dialogue and political debate on global issues, from environmental governance to conflict resolution. Third, the symbolic function, which ensures narrative and institutional continuity in external representation, regardless of internal political change.

In analytical terms, IPOs can be understood as arenas of identity work and normative contestation. Although formally interparliamentary, these bodies are increasingly embedded in the broader architecture of multilateral governance, enabling smaller states to gain visibility and legitimacy through structured participation. Forums such as the IPU, NATO PA, PACE, and PAM offer routinised environments where national parliaments, represented by permanent parliamentary delegations, can articulate positions, contribute to norm-setting, and assume leadership roles. These diplomatic routines generate symbolic capital and support the external projection of a coherent and recognisable national identity, an asset of value to structurally constrained actors whose international agency relies more on recognition and credibility than on material capabilities (Ingebritsen, 2006; Weisglas and Boer, 2007).

One of the distinctive features of parliamentary diplomacy is its relative independence from short-term executive fluctuations. Instead, it fosters a logic of continuity, cross-party engagement, and institutional stability (Stavridis et al., 2012). This quality is particularly valuable to small states, for whom international credibility often hinges on symbolic coherence and predictability. Within this context, the theory of ontological security offers a useful analytical lens, highlighting how routine-based, recognisable, and consistent parliamentary activity can contribute to the preservation of a stable external identity.

As such, parliamentary diplomacy functions as a complementary mechanism for addressing ontological insecurity. It enables small states to construct and perform narratives of reliability, moderation, and normative commitment through sustained engagement in IPOs. Practices such as permanent parliamentary representation, cross-party leadership roles, and active participation in multilateral missions contribute to the institutionalisation of diplomatic routines that help mitigate structural vulnerabilities. By maintaining consistent visibility and fostering symbolic legitimacy, these mechanisms reinforce the international presence of small states and stabilise their external identity (Weisglas and Boer, 2007).

Portugal exemplifies this dynamic. Its leadership of the PAM (2017–2019) and current presidency of the NATO PA (2024–2026) illustrate how parliamentary diplomacy can be mobilised as a strategic tool to reinforce identity coherence and normative projection. Both cases involve sustained institutional commitment across party lines, signalling continuity and reinforcing Portugal's external narrative as a responsible, predictable, and multilateral actor.

By ensuring institutional permanence, projecting democratic values, and facilitating international deliberation, parliamentary diplomacy reveals its strategic potential in strengthening small states' ontological security. The following section presents the methodological framework adopted to analyse the Portuguese case, detailing the case selection, empirical sources, and analytical procedures that underpin the study.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology to explore how parliamentary diplomacy contributes to the mitigation of ontological insecurity in small states, with particular focus on the Portuguese case. As Halperin and Heath (2020) argue, this approach is well-suited to examining symbolic and institutional phenomena that elude quantitative measurement. Della Porta and Keating (2008) likewise highlight the relevance of qualitative methods for analysing identity construction and processes of international recognition.

The research design combines document analysis with a case study strategy. Only publicly available institutional sources were used, including official records from the Portuguese Parliament, reports, resolutions, and interventions by Portuguese MPs in the main IPOs in which Portugal is represented. The source selection prioritised materials with descriptive and political value, such as plenary speeches, public statements, presidency reports, and outreach documents produced by Portuguese delegations. This empirical base is complemented by specialised literature on parliamentary diplomacy, small state foreign policy, and ontological security, ensuring alignment between theoretical insight and empirical data.

Two case studies were selected based on their geopolitical relevance, thematic diversity, and institutional visibility. The first concerns a Mediterranean parliamentary forum focused on political dialogue, migration, and human rights; the second involves a Euro-Atlantic assembly dedicated to collective security and coordination within NATO. In both settings, Portuguese parliamentarians have held high-profile leadership roles, providing a valuable lens through which to examine identity projection strategies (Assembleia da República, 2024a).

Comparing these cases allows for the testing of the central hypothesis in distinct multilateral environments. This empirical triangulation enhances interpretive robustness by assessing how parliamentary diplomacy contributes to narrative continuity and the consolidation of Portugal's international identity, as George (1979) notes. Strategically selected case studies deepen theoretical understanding of underexplored mechanisms, in this case, the intersection between parliamentary diplomacy and ontological security.

Some limitations must be acknowledged. The interpretive nature of the analysis entails subjectivity, despite source triangulation. Moreover, the literature on parliamentary diplomacy remains fragmented (Feldberg, 2019), particularly about small states and ontological security. No prior studies have been identified that integrate these three dimensions within a unified analytical framework, underscoring the exploratory and innovative character of this research. In addition, Portugal's presidency of the NATO PA was ongoing at the time of writing, which limits the ability to assess its full impact and calls for interpretive caution.

Nonetheless, the methodology is appropriate to the aims and scope of the study. The integration of institutional documentation with theoretical literature enables a coherent and in-depth examination of how parliamentary diplomacy may serve as a mechanism of symbolic stabilisation and external identity construction for small states, as illustrated by the Portuguese case.

## **International Parliamentary Organisations as Arenas of Identity Stabilisation: The Case of Portugal**

Over the past decades, IPOs have consolidated their relevance as platforms for political cooperation and international socialisation, particularly for small states (Stavridis and Jancic, 2016). Beyond their deliberative functions, IPOs play a significant symbolic role in shaping and reproducing member states' international identities, enabling them to project stability, normative coherence, and multilateral engagement. For structurally constrained actors, participation through parliamentary delegations provides access to symbolic compensation mechanisms that enhance external visibility, institutional legitimacy, and diplomatic reputation (Feldberg, 2019).

Parliamentary diplomacy, when pursued through sustained cross-party delegations, enables small states to uphold institutional continuity, preserve narrative stability, and maintain a consistent international presence. In the Portuguese case, regular participation in international parliamentary fora has reinforced the country's symbolic visibility and supported the articulation of normative commitments aligned with its foreign policy identity (Assembleia da República, 2024a).

This section applies ontological security theory to examine two emblematic instances of Portuguese parliamentary leadership: the presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (2017–2019), held by MP Pedro Roque, and the current presidency of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2024–2026), held by MP Marcos Perestrelo. These cases offer insight into how parliamentary diplomacy has contributed to the stabilisation of Portugal's external identity across distinct geopolitical arenas.

### **IPOs and Small States**

The mobilisation of symbolic instruments constitutes a particularly relevant strategy in the foreign policy repertoire of small states, whose capacity for international projection is structurally constrained. Rather than relying on material capabilities or coercive power, these actors invest in mechanisms of symbolic compensation that enhance their international visibility and support a coherent, credible identity narrative (Gstöhl and Neumann, 2004). Within this framework, the involvement of national parliaments in international affairs, and more specifically, their engagement in international parliamentary organisations (IPOs), emerges as a complementary avenue through which small states may strengthen their global presence. Although operationalised through parliamentary delegations, this engagement contributes to institutional predictability, narrative continuity, and the external affirmation of normative commitments, all of which are key to maintaining international legitimacy and mitigating ontological insecurity (Stavridis and Jancic, 2016).

In this context, the symbolic dimension of parliamentary diplomacy plays a significant role in constructing a stable and recognisable international profile. Continuous participation in IPOs, through presidencies, standing committees or bureaux, election observation missions, and thematic reports, enables the development of an institutional narrative that transcends government changes and electoral cycles (Sabic, 2008).

While national parliaments may be periodically dissolved, the architecture of IPOs and the rotation practices of parliamentary delegations, often grounded in cross-party representation, favour continuity. In addition, many MPs retain involvement in specific committees or interparliamentary networks across legislative terms, ensuring stable interpersonal and institutional ties with international counterparts. This resilience reinforces the external image of consistency and

moderation, traits that significantly enhance the diplomatic credibility of small states<sup>3</sup> (Stavridis and Jancic, 2017).

As Mitzen (2006) and Kinnvall (2004) argue, ontological security depends not only on physical survival but also on the preservation of a coherent and externally validated identity. Parliamentary diplomacy, by virtue of its pluralistic structure and institutional anchoring, provides a stabilising channel for states with limited geostrategic manoeuvrability. Moreover, parliamentarians, as directly elected representatives, enhance the legitimacy of the state's international actions, projecting democratic values and political continuity. This representative function strengthens the perception of small states as normatively committed actors whose international posture reflects democratic consensus (Weisglas and Boer, 2007).

Furthermore, IPOs provide platforms through which small states can function as promoters of universal values such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, and development cooperation. These bodies offer structured mechanisms for norm diffusion and agenda-setting that do not rely on material dominance, but rather on normative coherence and credible discourse (Ingebritsen, 2006). As norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), small states can accumulate symbolic capital and soft power, reinforce their moral authority and gain recognition within multilateral frameworks. Parliamentary diplomacy plays a critical role in this regard, allowing national legislatures to articulate and represent normative commitments in a transparent, cross-party, and institutionally embedded manner (Jaskiernia, 2022).

Another relevant dimension is the process of international socialisation that occurs within IPOs. Through regular engagement in multilateral parliamentary activities, MPs and delegations from small states become embedded in stable diplomatic networks, build interparliamentary trust, and internalise commonly recognised norms and standards. As Feldberg (2019) notes, IPOs function as institutionally discreet yet symbolically significant arenas for diplomatic socialisation and identity construction. For smaller actors, such platforms are particularly valuable, as they provide visibility and recognition without requiring proportional material capacity.

The Portuguese case offers a representative example of how these dynamics may be strategically mobilised. Since its democratic transition and the end of the *Estado Novo*<sup>4</sup> regime, Portugal has progressively strengthened its presence in IPOs. The Portuguese Parliament maintains active participation across a wide spectrum of international assemblies, including the IPU, NATO PA, PAM, PACE, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (PA-CPLP) (Fonseca and Vargas, 2019). This sustained involvement has helped establish the Portuguese Parliament as a normatively consistent and institutionally dependable actor, reinforcing the state's international identity as a cooperative, predictable, and diplomatically engaged small state (Amaral, 2004).

However, not all IPOs exhibit the same level of institutionalisation or impact. The PA-CPLP, for instance, illustrates Portugal's longstanding commitment to Lusophony, a central axis of its foreign

<sup>3</sup> The international reputation of small states is often built on symbolic attributes such as predictability, institutional stability, and normative coherence. These traits, combined with active participation in multilateral organisations and commitment to international rules, function as forms of reputational capital that make it possible to compensate for material limitations. Small states that cultivate an image as reliable and moderating actors, such as Portugal, Norway, or Costa Rica, are thus able to exert influence disproportionate to their physical or economic size (Cooper and Shaw, 2009; Ingebritsen, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The *Estado Novo* was the authoritarian regime in Portugal between 1933 and 1974, established by António de Oliveira Salazar. It was characterised by a one-party system, repression of civil liberties, censorship, and international isolation. Its fall on 25 April 1974 marked the beginning of the democratisation process and Portugal's active reintegration into multilateral institutions, including at the parliamentary level (Rosas, 2019).



policy since democratisation. Despite its symbolic significance as a space for interparliamentary dialogue among Portuguese-speaking countries, this assembly remains institutionally underdeveloped. The absence of a permanent technical secretariat, irregular meeting schedules, and limited follow-up mechanisms have constrained its capacity to function consistently. While the Portuguese Parliament exercises a form of tacit leadership in this forum, due to its historical positioning, accumulated diplomatic capital, and linguistic centrality, this influence remains asymmetrical and heavily dependent on the internal dynamics of each national parliament (Assembleia da República, 2024a). In contrast, Portugal's participation in more consolidated bodies such as NATO, PA and PAM has been more active and visible, including the assumption of presidencies, drafting of strategic reports, and promotion of cross-cutting initiatives. These cases reflect a more mature and structured exercise of parliamentary diplomacy.

The preceding analysis suggests that IPOs can function as arenas where small states cultivate ontological security through symbolic and institutional continuity. The next section explores how these mechanisms unfold in practice, drawing on Portugal's leadership in PAM and NATO PA as empirical illustrations.

### **Portugal's Presidency of PAM (2017–2019)**

Between 2017 and 2019, the presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) was held by Pedro Roque, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, and long-standing delegate to several international parliamentary organisations. This milestone in Portuguese parliamentary diplomacy reflected a deliberate effort to consolidate the country's role as a committed and credible actor in Mediterranean affairs (Portuguese Parliament, 2024a).

The Mediterranean occupies a principal place in Portuguese foreign policy, rooted in geographical and historical proximity and shaped by contemporary strategic imperatives. It is framed as an extended neighbourhood where multilateral cooperation, conflict prevention and intercultural dialogue are essential. This normative orientation is consistently reflected in the Portuguese Parliament's international activity, structured around principles such as effective multilateralism, human rights, and institutional dialogue (Roque, 2019).

Established in 2005, PAM succeeded the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Conferences on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. Its founding session was held in Amman in 2006. With members from Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf, and headquartered in Naples, PAM functions as an institutional platform for political dialogue and legislative cooperation. It holds observer status at the United Nations since 2009 and cooperates with a broad range of regional and international actors (PAM, 2023). In recent years, PAM has increasingly emerged as an instrument of parliamentary soft power, addressing cross-cutting challenges such as irregular migration, climate change, terrorism, and gender equality (Assembleia da República, 2024c).

Pedro Roque was elected President of PAM during the 11th Plenary Session, held in Porto in February 2017, a moment that highlighted Portugal's engagement with parliamentary multilateralism and was widely acknowledged by member delegations as a sign of political commitment and organisational competence (Assembleia da República, 2017). His election reflected both his institutional seniority and Portugal's sustained investment in Mediterranean diplomacy. His mandate coincided with a volatile regional context, marked by the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, increasing migratory flows, and shrinking diplomatic channels, which heightened the relevance of platforms such as PAM (Woertz and Lecha, 2022).

During this period, the Portuguese presidency sought to reinforce PAM's role as a forum for dialogue and mediation between the North and the South. It promoted key resolutions on irregular migration,

refugee rights and human trafficking, closely aligned with Portugal's normative agenda on human security (PAM, 2018a). Simultaneously, the presidency supported the creation of working groups on the blue economy, energy security and the prevention of violent extremism. These areas reflected Portugal's strategic priorities and projected its normative leadership within the Euro-Mediterranean space<sup>5</sup>. Notably, the 2018 Naples conference focused on marine ecosystem protection and coastal sustainability<sup>6</sup>, while energy debates during the 2019 Rabat session addressed regional interconnectivity and green transitions, including solar and hydrogen energy (PAM, 2018b).

Portugal also facilitated strategic dialogue with the Gulf, initiating negotiations for the accession of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to PAM. These talks, which extended through the Portuguese presidency, culminated in the full admission of both states during the 16th Plenary Session in Dubai in 2022, significantly expanding PAM's geopolitical scope (PAM, 2022). The Portuguese delegation played an instrumental role in aligning this enlargement with counter-terrorism efforts, including reinforced cooperation with the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism (UNOCT) and the creation of a regional hub in Doha (PAM, 2019b).

Another distinctive feature of Roque's mandate was the emphasis on gender diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. Portugal took an initiative-taking role in promoting women's rights within PAM, sponsoring resolutions on gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, and women's participation in peace and security processes. These efforts laid the groundwork for the future establishment of the PAM Women Parliamentarians Forum, officially founded in Lisbon in 2022 (Assembleia da República, 2024c). In parallel, the presidency supported initiatives focused on interfaith dialogue and the integration of migrant communities, reaffirming Portugal's commitment to inclusive and human-centric approaches to Mediterranean security (Roque, 2019; PAM, 2019b).

This multidimensional engagement was further reinforced by Portugal's positioning as a regional mediator rooted in principles of international law, intercultural understanding, and dialogue promotion. Drawing on its historical neutrality in the region and a reputation for diplomatic moderation, Portugal was able to function as a consensus-builder and trusted interlocutor in addressing contentious issues. During Roque's presidency, PAM expanded its informal role in preventive diplomacy, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Libyan crisis, and growing tensions linked to Sahel–Europe migration flows (PAM, 2019b).

Viewed through the lens of ontological security theory, the Portuguese presidency of PAM contributed to the stabilisation of Portugal's international identity as a norm promoter, credible mediator, and globally oriented small state. The visibility and consistency of its parliamentary diplomacy during this period enabled a coherent projection of national narratives, reinforcing self-perception and international recognition. While the external impact was significant, domestic awareness of these efforts remained low, revealing a persistent challenge in the internal legitimisation of parliamentary foreign policy.

Portugal's presidency of PAM exemplifies how small states can enhance their diplomatic agency through legislative institutions. It also underscores the potential of IPOs as complementary arenas

---

<sup>5</sup> The creation of these working groups reflected the strategic orientation of the Portuguese presidency to strengthen the technical and normative dimension of the PAM in areas in which Portugal has been a priority in multilateral forums, such as sustainable development, energy transition and human security (PAM, 2018b).

<sup>6</sup> In alignment with the UN Decade of Ocean Science, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution A/RES/72/73, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) aims to mobilise the scientific community, political decision-makers, the private sector and civil society to promote sustainable ocean governance based on scientific knowledge and innovation. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (UN, 2017) coordinates the Decade globally.



for the symbolic articulation of identity, where parliamentary actors contribute meaningfully to foreign policy through mediation, norm promotion and structured dialogue.

### **Portugal's Presidency of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (Since 2024)**

Founded in 1955, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) serves as an independent consultative body comprising legislators from all thirty-one member states, as well as associate and observer countries<sup>7</sup>. The presidency of the NATO PA is held for one-year terms, renewable upon election by the Annual Session. Although institutionally separate from NATO, the Assembly contributes to transatlantic cooperation by promoting dialogue among parliamentarians, reinforcing democratic oversight, and supporting the Alliance's strategic coherence (NATO PA, 2025b).

Portugal's assumption of the presidency of the NATO PA by MP Marcos Perestrello in November 2024 marked a renewed affirmation of Portuguese parliamentary diplomacy within the Euro-Atlantic sphere. As a founding member of NATO and long-time advocate of multilateral security, the country returned to a position of institutional leadership following the earlier presidency of MP José Lello in 2009 (NATO PA, 2010). This appointment reflects the credibility of the Portuguese Parliament as a trusted partner in the Alliance and the symbolic capital accumulated through sustained engagement in transatlantic parliamentary diplomacy (Assembleia da República, 2024b). Marcos Perestrello was re-elected for a second consecutive term, reflecting the Assembly's confidence in his leadership and Portugal's sustained commitment to transatlantic parliamentary diplomacy. His presidency also coincides with the 70th anniversary of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, marking a symbolic milestone in the history of parliamentary diplomacy within the Alliance (NATO PA, 2025b).

Before he was elected President, Perestrello held senior roles within the Assembly, including Vice-President (2022–2024), and served as rapporteur for resolutions on hybrid and cyber threats and on Southern flank security<sup>8</sup> (NATO PA, 2023). He was unanimously elected during the 69th Annual Session, held in Copenhagen in October 2024, at a critical juncture marked by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, the implementation of NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, and the intensification of hybrid threats across the Eastern flank<sup>9</sup> (NATO PA, 2022; 2024a).

Perestrello's presidency has emphasised democratic resilience, institutional transparency, and parliamentary engagement as key principles of transatlantic governance. In presenting the 2024 annual report, he identified five strategic priorities for 2025: continued support for Ukraine,

<sup>7</sup> NATO PA is made up of parliamentary delegations from the thirty-one member states of the Atlantic Alliance. It also includes associated states (such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina), as well as observer delegations from partner parliaments and international parliamentary organisations (NATO PA, 2025a).

<sup>8</sup> These parliamentary documents, namely, the report presented at the 2023 Spring Session on NATO's Resilience Against Hybrid and Cyber Threats and the 2022 opinion of the Defence and Security Committee on Security and Stability on the Southern Flank, are particularly significant as they illustrate the NATO PA's normative agency in emerging strategic domains. As rapporteur, the Portuguese MP played a direct role in shaping the organisation's political priorities, thereby reinforcing Portugal's position as a small state committed to cooperative security and democratic resilience within the Euro-Atlantic framework (NATO PA, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Since February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dominated the Euro-Atlantic security agenda, leading to a reaffirmation of NATO's significant role in collective defence. The Strategic Concept adopted by the Alliance in Madrid in 2022 emphasises enhanced deterrence and defence, resilience, and the projection of stability, with particular attention to the eastern flank. Hybrid threats include disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks and the instrumentalisation of migratory flows, requiring integrated responses from states and multilateral institutions (NATO PA, 2022).

enhanced deterrence and defence, protection of democratic values, development of partnerships, and responses to climate and technological risks (Perestrello, 2025). He also proposed the creation of a Democratic Resilience Centre, to be hosted at NATO headquarters in Brussels, aimed at countering hybrid threats, defending democratic institutions, and enhancing societal resilience (NATO PA, 2024b).

A particularly emblematic moment of the current presidency was Perestrello's address to the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine (Ukrainian Parliament) on 8 April 2025. Framed as a gesture of strategic solidarity, his speech reaffirmed NATO PA's commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and democratic aspirations and was widely disseminated across NATO and Ukrainian channels (Rada, 2025). This act of parliamentary diplomacy bolstered Portugal's visibility as a principled actor and reinforced the symbolic role of the NATO PA in projecting normative alignment among allies.

Further initiatives include the reinforcement of the Assembly's agenda on cybersecurity, democratic integrity, and the fight against disinformation. In April 2025, Perestrello led an official visit to North Macedonia, focusing on NATO's eastern deterrence posture and democratic oversight mechanisms. These efforts consolidated support for the proposed Resilience Centre and demonstrated Portugal's active engagement in shaping the Assembly's institutional responses to emerging security threats (NATO PA, 2025a).

This presidency reflects the continuity of Portugal's identity projection as a cooperative and normatively aligned small state. It confirms the ability of the Portuguese Parliament to contribute meaningfully to the strategic deliberations of the Alliance, even without significantly altering its military posture. The consistent defence of democratic principles, institutional predictability, and multilateralism further legitimates Portugal's role in transatlantic governance (Cooper and Shaw, 2009).

In geopolitical terms, this reinforces the Atlantic vector<sup>10</sup> as a foundational axis of Portuguese foreign policy, historically rooted in the country's accession to NATO in 1949 and reaffirmed through democratic transitions and parliamentary engagement (Amaral, 2024; Silva, 2020). Portugal's leading role within NATO PA exemplifies how small states can leverage parliamentary diplomacy as a form of soft balancing, exercising influence through legitimacy, expertise, and value-driven alignment.

While not directly altering NATO's strategic posture, the Portuguese Parliament contributes to its democratic legitimacy by presiding over an inter-parliamentary forum that holds governments accountable and fosters consensus (NATO PA, 2025b). Through Marcos Perestrello's leadership, the Portuguese presidency demonstrates how small states can use symbolic capital to enhance international visibility and reinforce ontological security. This engagement enables the stabilisation of Portugal's external identity as a dependable partner, democratic advocate, and committed transatlantic actor, values which resonate both within the Alliance and in the country's self-narrative (Browning, 2006; Neves and Duarte, 2013; Teixeira, 2011).

## Comparison of the Two Cases

The Portuguese presidencies of PAM and NATO PA represent two distinct, but complementary expressions of parliamentary diplomacy as exercised by a small state. While embedded in different

<sup>10</sup> The Atlantic vector has been one of the structuring pillars of Portuguese foreign policy since the post-World War II era, reflecting the centrality given to the transatlantic relationship with the United States and active participation in NATO. This axis has ensured not only Portugal's strategic insertion in the Euro-Atlantic space but also its diplomatic visibility as a small state committed to the international liberal order and collective security (Amaral, 2024).

strategic environments, PAM within a fragmented and post-colonial Mediterranean space, and NATO PA within a consolidated Euro-Atlantic security framework, both cases highlight the Portuguese Parliament's capacity to contribute to the stabilisation and projection of Portugal's international identity through multilateral engagement.

PAM's Mediterranean context requires intercultural mediation, norm entrepreneurship and flexible diplomacy in response to transversal challenges such as migration, extremism, and institutional fragility. Conversely, NATO PA demands strategic alignment, normative coherence, and visible commitment to collective defence. These contrasting logics frame Portugal's engagement with differentiated expectations, yet both presidencies reflect a coherent external narrative grounded in multilateralism, democratic legitimacy, and normative commitment.

Despite their divergent contexts, the presidencies of MP Pedro Roque and MP Marcos Perestrello share convergences in symbolic function and institutional impact. In both cases, the Portuguese Parliament mobilised its status as a sovereign, democratically elected body to articulate policy positions aligned with Portugal's diplomatic identity, namely, its predictability, moderation, and active support for the rules-based international order. The PAM presidency projected Portugal as a bridge-builder in the Mediterranean and a promoter of intercultural dialogue, while the NATO PA presidency reinforced its alignment with Euro-Atlantic strategic culture and its commitment to democratic resilience.



These experiences demonstrate how parliamentary diplomacy can serve as an effective tool of soft balancing, allowing small states to enhance their visibility and normative influence in multilateral fora without recourse to hard power (Paul, 2005). By engaging in structured dialogue, norm-setting and reputational projection, Portugal has offset material constraints through institutional presence and symbolic capital.

The discursive continuity observed across the two presidencies, centred on human security, democratic values, cooperative security, and inclusive governance, has contributed to the reproduction of a stable and internationally recognisable identity (Mitzen, 2006). Through repeated narratives and visible commitments, Portugal reinforces its ontological security as a small state that is normatively dependable, diplomatically active, and strategically coherent (Steele, 2008). In this sense, parliamentary diplomacy functions not merely as a complement to executive foreign policy but as a distinct institutional channel for the performance and recognition of state identity.

Moreover, the comparative analysis underlines the strategic potential of international parliamentary organisations for small states. Often overlooked in mainstream International Relations scholarship, these forums offer accessible platforms for political expression, multilateral legitimation, and norm diffusion. By linking domestic democratic representation with international presence, IPOs enable smaller actors to participate in multilateral consensus-building and value-based leadership, particularly relevant in an era of global fragmentation and normative contestation.

In Portugal's case, this trajectory reflects a progressively institutionalised form of parliamentary diplomacy, grounded in inclusive multilateralism and international responsibility. Through its presidencies of PAM and NATO PA, the Portuguese Parliament has contributed to reinforcing Portugal's international agency, not only as a participant in global governance but as an active promoter of democratic norms and strategic stability across diverse geopolitical arenas.

**Table 1: Comparative Functions of Portuguese Parliamentary Leadership in NATO PA and PAM**

NATO PA 	PAM 
Anchored in a transatlantic security alliance.	Embedded in a fragmented, multipolar regional space.
Emphasises strategic alignment, reliability, and defence coherence.	Focuses on dialogue, soft power, and regional stability.
Projects Portugal as a trustworthy NATO ally.	Positions Portugal as a bridge between Europe, North Africa, and Lusophony.
Reinforces ontological security through institutional continuity.	Reinforces ontological security through symbolic leadership.
Offers high-level visibility in Euro-Atlantic structures.	Enhances influence via norm entrepreneurship and intercultural mediation.

This structured engagement strengthens the performative dimension of Portugal's foreign policy, allowing for symbolic consolidation across its Mediterranean and Atlantic vectors. In both cases, the parliamentary channel has proven capable of reinforcing Portugal's self-perception and international recognition as a normative, responsible, and strategically anchored small state.

### **Conclusion: Parliamentary Diplomacy as Strategic Leverage for Small States**

This study has shown that IPOs function not only as deliberative assemblies but also as structured arenas for symbolic positioning and identity projection, especially for small states navigating an increasingly complex international environment. While lacking material capabilities, small states can enhance their international agency through sustained, strategic engagement in parliamentary diplomacy, grounded in multilateral legitimacy and normative coherence.

The analysis of Portugal's leadership in the PAM (2017–2019) and the NATO PA (since 2024) illustrates how parliamentary diplomacy enables small states to mitigate ontological insecurity through predictable, value-based performances on the global stage. In both cases, Portuguese parliamentarians acted not merely as representatives but as norm entrepreneurs, articulating stable foreign policy narratives embedded in democratic multilateralism, human rights, and peace promotion. Their leadership reinforced Portugal's external image as a cooperative, moderate, and normatively committed actor.

A central contribution of this research lies in identifying parliamentary diplomacy as a mechanism of identity stabilisation and reputational consolidation. Through cross-party continuity, report authorship, committee chairing, and participation in high-level missions, Portuguese MPs leveraged IPOs to reinforce symbolic credibility across legislative cycles. These practices were not isolated events but part of a routinised diplomatic repertoire that helped articulate a coherent and recognisable national identity.

While Portugal participates in several IPOs, this study focuses on PAM and NATO PA due to their strategic salience and the leadership roles assumed by Portuguese parliamentarians. These two cases illustrate how small states can construct a multi-layered diplomatic presence across distinct geopolitical arenas, namely, the Mediterranean and the Euro-Atlantic, while aligning their foreign

policy with liberal international norms. Such positioning enables structurally constrained actors to enhance their visibility, access multilateral agendas, and exercise normative agency beyond the confines of executive-led diplomacy.

However, the findings also reveal persistent structural limitations. Despite its external relevance, parliamentary diplomacy remains under-recognised at the domestic level, with limited visibility in public debate and marginal integration into foreign policy decision-making. This disjuncture between international impact and internal recognition continues to constrain its transformative potential.

This investigation contributes to three overlapping research fields: the agency of small states in world politics, the application of ontological security theory in foreign policy analysis, and the role of parliamentary diplomacy within global governance. It advances the argument that parliaments, when institutionally organised and politically mobilised, can function as strategic vectors of national identity, reputational capital, and norm projection.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the value of parliamentary diplomacy as a soft power instrument for small states. Enhancing interinstitutional coordination, investing in capacity-building for MPs, and improving the visibility and documentation of parliamentary diplomacy are essential steps to unlock its full potential. As the Portuguese case suggests, parliamentary diplomacy can complement executive strategies and, when pursued with narrative consistency and democratic coherence, serve as a strategic axis of foreign policy in a contested and norm-driven international order.

## References

- Amaral AA (2024) Portugal e o pendor atlântico da NATO. Observador. Available at: <https://observador.pt/opiniaio/portugal-e-o-pendor-atlantico-da-nato/> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- Amaral JBM (2004) Reflexões sobre o Parlamento português. Lisbon: Instituto Francisco Sá Carneiro.
- Assembleia da República (2017) Deputado Pedro Roque eleito presidente da Assembleia Parlamentar do Mediterrâneo. Available at: <https://www.parlamento.pt/Paginas/2017/fevereiro/Assembleia-Parlamentar-do-Mediterraneo.aspx> (accessed 11 May 2025).
- Assembleia da República (2024<sup>a</sup>) Portal da Assembleia da República: Relações internacionais. Available at: <https://www.parlamento.pt/RelacoesInternacionais/Paginas/default.aspx> (accessed 5 May 2025).
- Assembleia da República (2024b) Deputado Marcos Perestrello eleito presidente da Assembleia Parlamentar da NATO. Available at: <https://www.parlamento.pt/> (accessed 14 May 2025).
- Assembleia da República (2024c) Delegações permanentes – Assembleia Parlamentar do Mediterrâneo. Available at: <https://www.parlamento.pt/RelacoesInternacionais/DelegacoesPermanentes.aspx> (accessed 11 May 2025).
- Browning CS (2006) Small, smart and salient? Rethinking identity in the small states' literature. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19(4): 669–684.
- Browning CS and Joenniemi P (2017) Ontological security, self-articulation and the securitisation of identity. *Cooperation and Conflict* 52(1): 31–47.
- Carvalho B de and Neumann I (2015) *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*. London: Routledge.
- Cofelice A and Stavridis S (2017) Mapping the Proliferation of Parliamentary Actors in the Mediterranean: Facilitating or Hindering Cooperation? Rome: IAI Working Papers 17|21.



- Cooper AF and Shaw TM (2009) The diplomacies of small states at the start of the twenty-first century: how vulnerable? How resilient? In: Cooper AF and Shaw TM (eds) *The Diplomacies of Small States*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.1–18.
- Cravo T (2012) Security, development and the securitisation of development in Portuguese foreign aid. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25(1): 115–134.
- Cravo TA, Lopes PD and Roque S (2018) Portugal e a promoção da paz: uma análise crítica de percursos pós-coloniais. *ECES*. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/eces/3383> (accessed 11 May 2025).
- Della Porta D and Keating M (2008) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donnelly J (2000) *Realism and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Egeland J (1988) *Impotent Superpower – Potent Small State: Potentials and Limitations of Human Rights Objectives of the United States and Norway*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press.
- European Parliament (2024) Committee on security and defence. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/sede/home/highlights> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- Feldberg D (2019) *Parliamentary Diplomacy: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: McGill.
- Fernandes AJ (2008) *As relações internacionais e Portugal: da Europa do mundo ao mundo da Europa*. Lisbon: Preface.
- Finnemore M and Sikkink K (1998) International norm dynamics and political change. *International Organisation* 52(4): 887–917.
- Fonseca T and Vargas A (2019) *Como Funciona o Parlamento*. Lisbon: Assembleia da República.
- George AL (1979) Case studies and theory development: The method of structured, focused comparison. In: Caldwell D (ed), Alexander L. George: *A Pioneer in Political and Social Sciences*. London: Springer International Publishing, pp.191–214.
- Giddens A (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goetschel L (1998) The foreign and security policy interests of small states in today's Europe. In: Goetschel L (ed), *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp.13–31.
- Gstöhl G and Neumann IB (2004) *Lilliputians in Gulliver's World? Small States in International Relations*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.
- Halperin S and Heath O (2020) *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hey JA (2003) *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behaviour*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Ingebritsen C (2006) *Scandinavia in World Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jaskiernia J (2022) Parliamentary diplomacy: a new dimension of contemporary parliamentarism. *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia* 31(5): 86–101.
- Kinnvall C (2004) Globalisation and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security. *Political Psychology* 25(5): 741–767.
- Kinnvall K (2017) Feeling ontologically (in)secure: States, traumas and the governing of gendered space. *Cooperation and Conflict* 52(1): 90–108.
- Laing RD (1960) *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Lusa (2024) Portugal é o único país a alcançar presidência da Comissão Europeia, Conselho e ONU. *CNN Portugal*. Available at: <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/portugal/antonio-costa/portugal-e-o-unico-pais-a-alcancar-presidencia-da-comissao-europeia-conselho-e-onu/20240627/667dd5bed34ebf9bbb3f28b8> (accessed 17 July 2025).
- Mitzen J (2006) Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma. *European Journal of International Relations* 12(3): 341–370.
- Moreira A (2011) *A Circunstância do Estado Exíguo*. Lisbon: Diário de Bordo.

- NATO PA (2022) NATO 2022 strategic concept – Madrid summit 29 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- NATO PA (2023) Reports and resolutions – 2023 spring and annual sessions. Available at: <https://www.nato-pa.int> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- NATO PA (2024a) Election of Marcos Perestrello. Available at: <https://www.nato-pa.int> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- NATO PA (2024b) 2024 Annual Presidential Report. Available at: <https://www.nato-pa.int> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- NATO PA (2025b) About NATO PA. Available at: <https://www.nato-pa.int/about-us> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- PAM (2023) About PAM – overview and objectives. Available at: <https://www.pam.int> (accessed 11 May 2025).
- PAM (2024) Members. Available at: <https://pam.int/members/> (accessed 11 May 2025).
- Perestrello M (2025) 2025 address at Kyiv security forum. NATO PA. Available at: <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2025-address-marcos-perestrello-kyiv-security-forum> (accessed 12 May 2025).
- Roque P (2019) Discurso de encerramento da presidência portuguesa da APM. Interview.
- Roccu R and Voltolini B (2018) Framing and reframing the EU's engagement with the Mediterranean: examining the security-stability nexus before and after the Arab uprisings. *Mediterranean Politics* 23(1): 1–22.
- Sabic Z (2008) Building democratic and responsible global governance: the role of international parliamentary institutions. *Parliamentary Affairs* 61(2): 255–271.
- Stavridis S and Jancic D (2016) Parliamentary diplomacy unravelled: Theoretical perspectives and empirical research. *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 11(2–3): 117–140.
- Steele B (2008) *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*. London: Routledge.
- Wivel A and Gron CH (2021) Small states, ontological security and the politics of recognition. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34(2): 243–262.





**Journal of Politics and Development**

**ISSN 2632-4911**

**Volume 15   ■   Number 2   ■   Summer 2025**