Byzantine Empire could particularly thank its active diplomacy for its millennial duration, as diplomacy was one of the main tools of the Byzantines to maintain and protect its territory. Byzantine art of diplomacy as such represented legacy of ancient Rome and its implementation was carried out in the spirit of Roman imperial traditions until the end of the Byzantine Empire. With a few exceptions (Sasanian Empire, Arab Caliphate) no other contemporary country could boast with a similar basis to enforce its influence. As in the present time, the diplomacy represented art to carry out negotiations between two parties mediated by authorized representatives also in the past, and these negotiations were intended to regulate relations between the parties. In the case of Byzantium, it was essentially about maintaining the premise that the supreme Christian ruler designated by God was the Byzantine emperor who should be for this reason the sole ruler of the whole Christian oikumene. If the real situation was too different from this ideal, another important task of the Byzantine diplomacy was to ensure peace and validity of this premise, at least on the Byzantine territory that actually was subject to the emperor residing in Constantinople.

Even though the Byzantines did not have any specifically designated and trained representatives to conduct negotiations as it is today, there were several high-ranking officials carrying out diplomacy as part of their duties, who belonged to the highly sophisticated administrative apparatus in the imperial capital. Diplomatic embassies were regularly sent to countries that were on almost the same level in the spirit of the Byzantine universalism, as well as to other partners. Regular contact was considered the basis for successful negotiations, which distinguished Byzantium from most of its neighbors who sent their own embassies ad hoc. Byzantine envoys travelled in all directions, especially to areas that were important for the protection of the Byzantine oikumene. One of these areas was the steppe north of the Black Sea, a place through which successive waves of nomadic peoples, starting with the Huns, have been coming to the Byzantine territories in the Balkans (and thus also in the direction of the capital of Constantinople) since the 4th century. For various reasons, it was the task of the Byzantine diplomacy to master these dangerous neighbors. Problematic aspects of maintaining diplomatic relations between Byzantium and the nomads are showed in detail in the case of the Pechenegs, who dominated the aforementioned area from the end of the 9th century to the first quarter of the 11th century, and due to their position they played a very important role as the Byzantine allies.

1 Moravesik (1976:151).
2 Smythe (1992: 305).
5 For the information overview of the migration of nomadic peoples since the arrival of the Pechenegs, see Golden (1987–1991: 41–54); Grousset (1965: 226–238).
Geographical distance

One of the factors which greatly complicated the maintaining of regular diplomatic contacts between the Byzantines and the Pechenegs was the great geographical area and the distance between their territories which, in addition, were not directly neighboring. In the 10th century, this area – called quite naturally *Patzinakia* by the Byzantines⁶ – spread from the mouth of the Danube to the Volga (or to the Don)⁷ and covered the steppe belt north of the Black Sea and the Azov Sea several hundred kilometers wide. It was intersected by the lower reaches of the Siret, Prut, Dniester, Bug, Dnieper, Donets and the Don rivers (from the west to the east).⁸ There were no land communications in the area and no bridges spanned over the reaches of the aforementioned rivers and their tributaries. In the summer, the Pecheneg steppe territory turned into an arid, hot and inhospitable area (with the exception of the territory on the banks of the numerous rivers), which was covered with deep snowdrifts in winter months.⁹ Even though the Byzantines had a good overview of the whole area and its neighboring states, or peoples,¹⁰ it still did not alleviate their difficulty in organizing contacts with these nomads, because in addition to the mentioned weather changes, it was necessary to cover a relatively long distance, too.

There were two ways for the Byzantine delegations to reach the Pechenegs. The first one was that the imperial envoy used the Byzantine port of Kherson in the Crimea,¹¹ which due to its location was directly neighboring with the Pecheneg territory, as the starting point of his journey and, therefore, the whole journey was considerably shorter.¹² The other way of travelling to the Pechenegs used the Byzantine capital Constantinople as the starting point, where the envoy boarded a warship, which then took him across the Black Sea to the mouth of one of the rivers flowing through *Patzinakia*.¹³ The ambassador and his entourage disembarked there and sent delegations to the Pechenegs, who in turn sent guides to meet him. Accompanied by the guides, he then headed inland to a place where negotiations were to take place.¹⁴ It is obvious that the latter was rather time consuming. The situation “streamlined” after 1018, when the Byzantines annexed the Bulgarian territory after the wars of the emperor Basileos II against the Bulgarians, and the northern Byzantine border again followed the course of the lower Danube.¹⁵ Since then the Byzantine Empire and *Patzinakia* were direct neighbors, which made the travelling considerably easier. Even greater geographical “rapprochement” occurred after the massive Pecheneg migration in the winter of 1046/47 to the south of the Danube. As a result of this migration, part of the Pechenegs settled down right in the territory of the Byzantine

---

⁷ Grousset (1965: 238).
⁸ Толочко (2003: 46).
¹¹ Besides the fact that Kherson was an important port and trade center, it also represented an invaluable center for the Byzantines for collecting information from neighboring areas of the north Black Sea area; Shepard (1992: 45); Malamut (1995: 112–113). There were several other such locations, e.g. Sugdaia (later Sudak) or Tmutorokan, but Kherson was by far the most important.
¹² De adm. imp. (1967: 54).
¹⁵ Stephenson (1999: 89).
province of Paradounavon (Paristrion). These Pechenegs were later granted a status of allies (symmachoi).16

Decentralized state organization

Another factor preventing effective implementation of the Byzantine diplomacy with the Pechenegs was the free, or decentralized political system of the Pecheneg society. The fundamental social and economic unit of any nomadic group is a nuclear family and its home and property in the form of a herd, which provides it with livelihood and all the basic needs.17 In terms of territory, it is an area where the family leads a nomadic way of life. All other higher units of a nomadic society (families, clans, tribes, etc.) simply represent only a sum of individual families, which usually connect largely due to joint political, economic, and military interests on the basis of blood kinship unions, whether real or imaginary established often ex post, to legitimize the existing political reality.18 The emergence of a charismatic leader/family/clan, who could ensure the survival and prosperity to all his followers and subjects thanks to the divine favor, or luck (qut) sent from heaven,19 was a very important, but not the only impetus for the establishment of higher social units in nomadic peoples (tribal unions and nomadic empires).20

The appearance of similar charismatic leaders led to the emergence of vast nomadic empires in the steppe in a relatively short time span. Since the empire of the Hsiung-nu (Asian Huns), these states were led by a ruler called kagan, whose importance is similar to the title emperor.21 States created this way were not very politically stable. As soon as the favorable conditions supporting the growth and existence of a nomadic empire ceased to exist (e.g. inflow of the spoils of war from the conquest campaigns, supply of the tribute, extinction of a charismatic clan, or inability of the descendants of the founder of the empire), centrifugal political forces started to dominate in such a state organization and the nomadic empire disintegrated as quickly as it emerged.22

The Pechenegs represented one of the branches of the West Turkish kaghanate which existed between 552 and 659, when it disintegrated.23 The imperial tradition then passed over to the Karluk tribal union, from which Bulgars and Khazars later separated. Both these nations then established their own steppe empires in the northern Black Sea area during the 7th century and acquired and used the title kagan for their paramount ruler, as well as the lower titles (yabgu, šad, čur/čor, tudun, tarqan, gyula, etc.).24 In the following century, also other nomadic ethnicities emerged, including the Pechenegs, who won hegemony at the end of the 9th century in the aforementioned area and thus replaced the Khazars. However, from a political point of view, they did not acquire the whole structure of the previous empires. Their grouping can be rather characterized as a tribal union.25 According to the testimony of

---

20 Lindner (1982: 700). In other words, it is the so-called sacred kingdom in the nomadic context.
the text *De administrando imperio* by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos from the mid-10th century, it was headed by the supreme ruler who did not use the title *kagan*.\textsuperscript{26} The whole of *Patzinakia* was divided into eight provinces (*themata*) led by chieftains/rulers/princes (*archontai*); each province consisted of five districts (*meroi*) led by lower chieftains (*elattonai archontai*).\textsuperscript{27} All chieftains\textsuperscript{28} were independent and conducted their own policies. The first four provinces west of the Dnieper River formed the right wing and the other four east of this river the left one.\textsuperscript{29} In addition to this relatively loose political structure, there probably also was an assembly of all free warriors (*komenton*).\textsuperscript{30}

It is not clear from the mentioned description of the Byzantine emperor, who uses contemporary Byzantine terms of the state administration to talk about a structure he is not very familiar with, whether the mentioned provinces were the seats of individual Pecheneg tribes and districts of lower social units, i.e. clans, or families. Yet, it is highly probable. It also seems that the report about the three most important provinces as the center of the political power in *Patzinakia* corresponds to the reality, as concentration of the Pecheneg settlements was confirmed by archeological finds in the basin of the Ros river (right tributary of the Dnieper) south of Kiev.\textsuperscript{31} In the first third of the 11th century, the Pechenegs lost their territory east of the Dnieper thanks to the pressure of the Uzes and the number of districts, or clans was reduced from 40 to 13,\textsuperscript{32} but they kept their supreme ruler (*archegos*) Tyrach and the individual chieftains retained their freedom in decision-making.\textsuperscript{33} The same principle also applies to the Pechenegs inhabiting the Byzantine area in the Balkans in the second half of the 11th century.

It is apparent that the loose structure of the Pecheneg tribal union had to be rather confusing for the Byzantines. There was no absolute ruler with whom they could negotiate and with whom they would be able to conclude agreements binding upon all the Pechenegs. On the contrary, agreements concluded with one of the Pecheneg chieftains were typically valid only for his immediate subjects, but were not binding upon other clans, or tribes because of their independence. The Byzantines then repeatedly found themselves in a situation when they virtually had to negotiate with each and every chieftain to reach desired agreement.\textsuperscript{34} Similar negotiations had practical limitations, whether in term of time or the number of available material resources.

**Cultural differences**

Besides these practical aspects, which made the activity of the Byzantine ambassadors among the Pechenegs more difficult, there were also significant cultural differences between the Byzantines and the nomads. Byzantine civilization was based on three

\textsuperscript{26} The title *kagan* is documented only in the later Arabic sources from the 13th century. Pritsak (1981a: 15); Golden (1990: 273).

\textsuperscript{27} *De adm. imp.* (1967: 166); Spinei (2003: 105).

\textsuperscript{28} They could also hold lower titles *čurgyula* adopted from the aforementioned Turkish kaganate, occasionally documented in historical sources. Golden (1987–1991: 53).

\textsuperscript{29} *De adm. imp.* (1967: 166–168); Golden (1990: 272–273); Spinei (2003: 105).

\textsuperscript{30} Scyl. (1979: 460); Васиљевскій (1872: 128); Pritsak (1981a: 16).

\textsuperscript{31} Pritsak (1981a: 16, 28).

\textsuperscript{32} Spinei (2003: 106).

\textsuperscript{33} Scyl. (1979: 455); Spinei (2003: 106).

\textsuperscript{34} For example, Emperor Issac I Komnenos managed to conclude peace in 1059 with almost all the Pecheneg leaders of the Paristrion, except for a chieftain named Selte. Scyl. con. (1968: 107).
main pillars – the first one consisted in the Christian religion, the second one in the Roman law and the third one in Greek classical knowledge and culture. The Byzantines also inherited Roman imperial ideology, which then lasted enshrouded in the Christian veil for the whole duration of the Byzantine Empire. Within this worldview, only the so-called just war (*dikaios polemos*) to protect the Roman (Byzantine) *oikoumene* and the Christian citizens living there was recognized as justifiable and also the Byzantine foreign policy conformed to it.\(^{35}\) The war was perceived as a necessary evil.\(^{36}\)

Nomadic peoples, including the Pechenegs, who were based on totally differing cultural traditions, perceived war as a natural part of life and did not see any significant difference between achieving various goals by means of peace or war.\(^{37}\) Although the Pechenegs knew and practiced the conclusion of peace agreements, their frequent breach did not bother them too much if there was possibility to obtain benefits, and therefore, the Pechenegs got the reputation among the Byzantines as dangerous and unpredictable oath-breakers.\(^{38}\) The surprise and indignation of Byzantine elites was often all the greater that the nomads let the Byzantines give them gifts for the conclusion of peace (they required the so-called tribute). Thus, besides their reputation of oath-breakers, the Pechenegs also gained the reputation of greedy people longing for material wealth.\(^{39}\)

**Different Pecheneg and Byzantine goals**

Different cultural approaches of the Byzantines and the nomads also resulted in their different political or power objectives. As any similar state, the Byzantine Empire sought to ensure the protection of its territory and vested interests. In the case of the Pechenegs, the Byzantines tried to ensure stability in the northern Black Sea area, which thus became a kind of a buffer zone between the Byzantine territories on the lower Danube and the strip of steppes east of the Volga. The control of this zone through befriended nomads was significant for several reasons. Peace with the Pechenegs concluded at the end of the 9th century ensured primarily direct security of the Byzantine border on the lower Danube. Another benefit of the alliance with these nomads was the fact that this pact had a deterrent effect on the neighboring countries and nations (Hungary, Bulgaria, Kievan Rus), for whom the attack on the Byzantine territories in the Balkans became a dangerous and risky act.\(^{40}\) In addition, the trade routes passing through this area became safer, which helped the Byzantine trade with the neighboring nations and states to thrive. And, last but not least, the strong hegemon represented by the Pechenegs on the western end of the Euro-Asian steppe created a barrier for other nomadic peoples settled further to the east when moving in the western direction.

It is very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to formulate the Pecheneg goals, since, as mentioned above, their fragmented and decentralized state organization more or less excluded any joint pursuit of a uniform policy. Nevertheless, it is evident that it was in the interest of the nomads to have control over the long-distance trade routes which passed through their area as well as over the trade centers which were located thereon.

---

\(^{35}\) Stouraitis (2009: 267ff.).

\(^{36}\) Stouraitis (2009: 207).


\(^{39}\) *De adm. imp.* (1967: 54); Malamut (1995: 114).

\(^{40}\) It is clearly documented in relevant passages of *De administrando imperio*. See: *De adm. imp.* (1967: 48–52, 57); Malamut (1995: 113).
The Pechenegs did not represent an exception. Peace relations in the steppe enabled them to benefit from the long-distance trade in the form of collected charges and duties, and they also gained access to goods which would not be accessible in the steppe under different circumstances (corn, precious metals, and various other types of luxury goods).

However, if there was a situation when it was easier for the Pechenegs to satisfy their need for unusual or inaccessible types of goods by war means, their support of peace would immediately end. All previous agreements ceased to apply and the Pechenegs attacked either by themselves or in connection with other attackers. This was the main reasons why the objectives of the Byzantines and the Pechenegs in the 10th and the 11th centuries ceased to coincide in some cases, leading to abrupt military clashes between the allies. Combined with threat of Byzantine weapons, Byzantine diplomacy always could prevent the worst to some extent, although during the 11th century the effectiveness of the Byzantine countermeasures gradually decreased. However, it was a result of the altered situation in the Euro-Asian steppe where mass movements of steppe peoples in the western direction started at the beginning of the 11th century. As a result, the Pechenegs were pushed to the Byzantine Balkans in 1046/47 and the Byzantines were forced to look for a new ally in this area. They found this ally at the end of the 11th century in the Cuman tribal union.

**Byzantine countermeasures – strategy in dealing with the nomads**

Byzantine diplomacy tried to address the above-mentioned troubles by a set of strategies and practices examined over centuries. The first measure was a regular (annual) sending of diplomatic delegations to the Pechenegs. Within these delegations, the Byzantine ambassadors could repeatedly gain information about the current situation in the northern Black Sea area; they also had opportunity to reward the “loyalty” of their clients among the nomads by luxurious material gifts. Another traditional measure included the organization of pompous receptions for nomadic chieftains connected with giving expensive gifts. Similar receptions also provided good opportunity for secret negotiations with particular Pecheneg chieftain(s). Considering the decentralized character of the Pecheneg society, the Byzantines mostly managed to crown their attempts with success. Upon completion of negotiations, the Byzantines secured themselves by taking hostages from circles

---

42 Muslim sources from the 10th century (Gardízí) mention great personal wealth of the Pecheneg chieftains, which was apparently from the mentioned levying of charges. Golden (1987–1991: 54).
50 Before the decisive battle against the Pechenegs during the winter of 1121/1122, John II Komnenos held a series of receptions for the Pecheneg leaders where he secretly tried to win some over. Cin. (1836: 7); Chon. (1975: 14). Several chieftains actually accepted his offers. Chon. (1975: 14).
51 An example of the failure may be secret messages to the Pecheneg chieftains in the summer of 1087, which did not reach this goal despite the intense efforts of Alexius I Komnenos. Alexias (2001: 205).
related to the Pecheneg elites, who were to guarantee the just concluded peace agreement.\(^{52}\) In some cases, also the Byzantines had to provide their own hostages.\(^{53}\) When the arsenal of these above-mentioned “purely” diplomatic measures did not provide any guarantee of successful achievement of their goal, the Byzantines liked to apply military intimidation of Pecheneg ambassadors by a thoroughly directed exhibition of military force.\(^{54}\) Negotiations with nomads were conducted along with the knowledge of the opponent’s weak points, which were gained by the Byzantine informers and spies. Only scarce direct evidence of their employment has survived, but it is clear that the Byzantines excelled in this technique.\(^{55}\) And finally, healthy skepticism and caution of Byzantine ambassadors and negotiators worked as a preventer at the negotiations with the Pechenegs, constantly requesting convincing assurance and evidence from the nomads of their amicable intentions in order to minimize the risk of breaching agreements on their part as much as possible.\(^{56}\)

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEMAe</td>
<td>Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFHB</td>
<td>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantiae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSFB</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantiae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODB</td>
<td>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>Révue des Etudes Byzantines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{52}\) *De adm. imp.* (1967: 54).

\(^{53}\) In 1087, the Byzantine envoy Synesios, who led peace negotiations with the Pechenegs, became their hostage. After concluding a contract, he had to stay in Paristrion and live with the nomads. *Alexias* (2001: 218–219).

\(^{54}\) In the summer of 1087, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos started to gather his troops in the city of Lardea where they camped, and provided them with additional training, while he demonstratively sent a Byzantine fleet squadron to the lower Danube to intimidate the Pechenegs in Paristrion. *Alexias* (2001: 205–206).

\(^{55}\) This fact is evidenced in a written report (apparently from spies) about the upcoming alliance of the Pechenegs and Bulgarian Krakras, which was received by a Byzantine strategos of Dristra Tzotzikos. On the basis of this report, he could act and prevent the alliance before it was formed. *Scyl.* (1979: 355–356).

\(^{56}\) Alexios Komnenos was cautious before the battle of Lebounion when he negotiated the alliance with the Cumans led by their supreme khans Togortag and Boniak. *Alexias* (2001: 243–244); Василяевская (1872: 280); Meško (2012: 212–214, 216).
**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Primary texts**


**Secondary texts**


