

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A FOUNDATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMACY IN THE NEW POST-COVID-19 REALITY

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Abstract. In this contribution we argue that cross-cultural competence (CCC or 3C) is being an indispensable proficiency in professional work of diplomats worldwide despite any changes that happened in professional interaction due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. It is also suggested that deglobalizing processes significantly strengthened by COVID-19 have made the necessity for specialists professionally involved in international relations to acquire cross-cultural competence even greater than before. The current global situation shows that deglobalization — slowing down of globalization in all spheres of life — is a new reality and it is important to adjust to it as soon as possible. Cross-cultural com-

petence is defined here as a complex of theoretical knowledge and key practical skills enabling to efficiently and successfully communicate with the representatives of different cultures and religious traditions as well as to feel psychologically comfortable in a foreign environment. A reduced number of personal business interactions lead to the urge for their higher efficiency that is supposed to be reflected in a better understanding of the interlocutor's motivations, stands and reactions. At the same time cultural specifics remains the main factor shaping human communication whether it is conducted offline or online. Today as the tendency to conduct online conferences and meetings increases, we witness an increased need to learn to understand the attitudes of our virtual interlocutors, who are coming from various national cultures and traditions. In the course of online meetings, the necessity to correctly decipher their body language, for example, has decreased — one can hardly see a full figure on the PC screen. And consequently, verbal communication started to prevail over non-verbal one increasing the demand for proper interpretation of words, phrases, tone, mimics and gestures that are still very widely used during virtual communication. The next step would be using the most relevant arguments and approaches to deliver one's own position and/or opinion. To successfully apply both mechanisms — of receiving messages and replying to them — during communication of people from different national cultures it would require the knowledge of cultural specifics that is provided by cross-cultural competence courses, training, seminars, or any other educational programmes. Programmes in cross-cultural competence are supposed to include at least

three following components: 1) regional studies, 2) axiological orientations, 3) models and norms of behavior, while *axiological orientations* are seen as the most important one. Finally, the conclusion is made about a serious need to include cross-cultural competence programmes into the training of diplomats-to-be at the early stages of their professional education. At the same time, it is highly recommended for professional upgrade of the already serving diplomats worldwide. The methodological approach used in the present research combines content analysis of the post-COVID publications by the leading international experts in the diplomatic field as well as acting diplomats with the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) elaborated by the prominent American sociologist Milton Bennet. The latter is a six-level scheme, according to which it is possible to figure the level of person's skillfulness in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: cross-cultural competence, globalization, deglobalization, consumerism, diplomacy, COVID-19, pandemic, communication

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Исследовательская статья

МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ КАК ОСНОВА ДИПЛОМАТИИ В ПОСТКОВИДНОЙ РЕАЛЬНОСТИ

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Аннотация. Межкультурные компетенции являются незаменимым навыком в работе дипломатов во всем мире, несмотря на любые изменения, произошедшие в профессиональном взаимодействии в связи с пандемией COVID-19. Выдвинута гипотеза, что процессы деглобализации, значительно усиленные COVID-19, требуют повышения межкультурных компетенций специалистов-международников. Актуальная ситуация в мире показывает, что деглобализация — замедление глобализации во всех сферах жизни — это новая реальность, и важно как можно скорее приспособиться к ней. Методологический подход, используемый в настоящем исследовании, сочетает контент-анализ тематических «пандемийных» публикаций ведущих международных экспертов в дипломатической сфере, а также действующих дипломатов, с Моделью развития межкультурной чувствительности (DMIS), разработанной выдающимся американским социологом Милтоном Беннетом. Межкультурные компетенции трактуются автором как комплекс теоретических знаний и ключевых практических навыков, позволяющих эффективно и успешно общаться с представителями различных культур и религиозных традиций, а также чувствовать себя психологически комфортно в чужой среде. Сокращение числа личных деловых контактов приводит к стремлению к повышению их эффективности, что должно отражаться в лучшем понимании мотиваций, позиций и реакций собеседника. В то же время культурная специфика остаётся главным фактором, формирующим человеческое общение, независимо от того, ведётся ли оно офлайн или онлайн. Сегодня, когда усиливается тенденция к проведению онлайн-конференций и встреч, мы становимся свидетелями растущей потребности научиться понимать отношение наших виртуальных собеседников, выходцев из различных национальных культур и традиций. В ходе онлайн-встреч, например, уменьшилась

необходимость правильно расшифровывать язык их тела — на экране ПК едва ли можно увидеть фигуру собеседника целиком. И, следовательно, вербальная коммуникация начала преобладать над невербальной, увеличивая потребность в правильной интерпретации слов, фраз, тона, мимики и жестов, которые всё ещё очень широко используются во время виртуального общения. Следующим шагом будет использование наиболее релевантных аргументов и подходов для изложения собственной позиции и/или мнения. Для успешного применения коммуникационных навыков с обратной связью между людьми из разных национальных культур потребуются знание культурных особенностей, которое обеспечивается курсами межкультурных компетенций, тренингами, семинарами или любыми другими образовательными программами. Предполагается, что программы по межкультурным компетенциям должны включать, по крайней мере, три следующих компонента: 1) региональные исследования, 2) аксиологические ориентации, 3) модели и нормы поведения, при этом «аксиологические ориентации» рассматриваются как первостепенные. Наконец, делается вывод о серьёзной необходимости включения программ по межкультурным компетенциям в подготовку будущих дипломатов на ранних этапах их профессионального образования. В то же время, это настоятельно рекомендуется для повышения квалификации уже работающих дипломатов по всему миру.

Ключевые слова: межкультурные компетенции, глобализация, деглобализация, консьюмеризм, дипломатия, COVID-19, пандемия, коммуникация

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The events of the last several years have clearly demonstrated that once popular assumption of globalization proudly marching around the globe and swiping cultural differences is no longer relevant. Since 2015 a new tendency of *deglobalization*, which is defined as the slow-down or reverse globalization¹, could have been spotted in all major spheres of life — from economy to politics to culture. The overview of such aspects of globalization as economic, cultural, and political is necessary for shedding light on the current global situation, in which diplomatic professionals are serving today.

Economic globalization processes that had been speedily unrolling around the world at the end of the 20th — beginning of the 21st centuries and seemed unstoppable started seeing a gradual decline that made experts introduce a new term instead — *slowbalization*,

which referred to the obvious slowing down of global economy². At the same time another notion appeared — regionalization — aiming to describe withdrawal from the global economic network and shifting one's economic interests to nearby regions by intensifying economic activity inside the existing and newly formed regional alliances.

Pandemic of COVID-19 has dramatically deepened deglobalization tendencies as once increasing interdependence of world economies was minimized. The pandemic resulted in an unprecedented disintegration of the world economy making both business and consumers alike think and spend more locally³.

Another significant aspect of globalization is a cultural one, explained by Encyclopedia Britannica as a phenomenon by which the experience of everyday life, as influenced by the diffusion of commodities and ideas, reflects

¹ Deglobalization // Oxford Reference. — URL: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199599868.001.0001/acref-9780199599868-e-365>

² Slowbalisation. The steam has gone out of globalization // The Economist. — 2019. — 24 jan. — URL: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/01/24/the-steam-has-gone-out-of-globalisation>

³ Deglobalization after covid-19 // Enterprise. — 2020. — 28 dec. — URL: <https://enterprise.press/stories/2020/12/28/degloblization-after-covid-19-28278/>

the standardization of cultural expressions around the world. Propelled by the efficiency or appeal of wireless communications, electronic commerce, popular culture, and international travel, globalization was seen as a trend toward homogeneity that will eventually make human experience everywhere essentially the same. This appears, however, to be an overstatement of the phenomenon⁴.

Being one of the most debatable issues in the intellectual sphere the development of cultural globalization seems to continue due to Internet connection, which implies virtual transmission of ideas, attitudes, meanings, and cultural products across borders that has become both quick and irreversible. At the same time, the termination of a wide-scale tourism flows and encouragement of local tourism in many countries instead seems to bring certain balance into the cultural globalization processes.

In fact, at the heart of cultural globalization lies westernization that is manifested in globalization of food, entertainment, fashion, cinema, music, sports, literature, media, lifestyle, and others, and is promoted by the highly efficient mechanism of consumerism. The latter was named by Niall Ferguson among the six main *killer apps* of the Western Civilization that made the West dominate the rest for at least five centuries [Ferguson, 2011: 196].

The consumerist lifestyle for many years has been offering various nations around the globe identical sets of western-designed products, services, and information. Almost all communities worldwide have made consumption one of their major occupations; precisely what Jean Baudrillard described as a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance constituted by the multiplication of objects, services, and material goods; a system that needed people as workers, as savers, but above all needed them as consumers [Baudrillard, 1998: 25, 83].

Despite 2020 self-isolation brought by COVID-19, people around the world continued to be intensely influenced by advertising, both direct and indirect, as well as all sorts of psychological manipulation aimed at making them choose consumption as a preferable behavior strategy.

Global consumerism in the past decades reached its climax: millions of humans developed a severe psychological dependence on consumption — oniomania or compulsive buying disorder (CBD) described by psychiatrists Emil Kraepelin and Eugen Bleuler as early as at the beginning of the 21st century. Later this phenomenon acquired the name of buying-shopping disorder (BSD) that is considered a behavioral addiction that is characterized by poorly controlled spending of money for consumer goods in unnecessary quantities, beyond budget and without necessarily utilizing them for their intended purposes [Muller, Claes, Kyrios, 2021]. But the increase of interest in these symptoms in 1990s coincides with consumerism going global: clinical studies of three different groups of patients showed that similar consumption-related disorders were observed across cultures — in the USA, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, and Brazil [Black, 2007: 14-18]. Interestingly, COVID-19 pandemic did not stop consumption cycles, but its various aspects were reshaped through different contexts and needs⁵.

Indeed, in countries located on different continents thousands of miles away from each other same strategies are being realized to stimulate endless consumption of the same goods: restaurants belonging to the same networks operate in almost all world countries; cars, clothes, food, cosmetics, and household products of the same brands are sold across the globe. Enough to mention that only ten western corporations manufacture and/or control the vast majority of consumer products in the world⁶. The same hypermarket

⁴ Watson. J.L. Cultural globalization // Britannica. — URL: <https://www.britannica.com/science/cultural-globalization>

⁵ Roy R. The Role of Culture in a Global Crisis // Ipsos Views. — 2020. — July. — URL: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-07/role-of-culture-in-global-crisis-2020-ipsos.pdf>

⁶ Taylor K. These 10 Companies Control Everything You Buy // Independent. — 2017. — 31 May. — URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/extras/these-10-companies-control-everything-you-buy-a7765461.html>

chains function globally (where goods are displayed in a very similar way). People from different cultures watch the same commercials predominantly of the western origin, eat the same popcorn in identical cinemas, listen to the same music, and share the same news on a limited number of social media platforms — mainly Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok⁷. The latest US presidential elections became world's top news issue making people from very different countries passionately follow up the voting as well as further calculation and race results.

By the end of the 20th century such state of affairs has created an illusion that in the near future humanity would become homogeneous and Marx' famous *social being determines consciousness* would acquire yet another proof. Scholars were alarmed by the perspective of the unification of local cultures and their leveling off, because the expanding world market required unification.

Yet stimulated by globalization and later with pandemic lockdown a reverse trend has emerged — local cultures switched on self-preservation mechanisms: self-identification programs based on ethnic, religious, and cultural characteristics were activated. The matter of either group or individual identity has become more important than some fifty years ago. For a more precise description of the pre-pandemic situation in the world another term would have been more suitable — *glocalization*, which implies the simultaneous existence of two opposite trends: globalization and localization. Indeed, the paradox of globalization had to do with the concept of universality and particularization: on the one hand, globalization was driving the world community to move towards a one-world system; on the other hand, the unique culture of people and nations has led to exclusivism [Manshur, Husni, 2020].

COVID-19 pandemic has increased these tendencies globally. This situation allows to assert that in the near future neither cultural unification nor standardization would be taking place, while communication between representatives of various cultures (both offline and online) with their unique culturally shaped characteristics would remain intense.

Another aspect of globalization — political globalization — experienced a significant blow from the COVID-19 pandemic and is attempting to adjust to the new isolation trends. The unprecedented challenges resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic put the mechanisms of contemporary international system to real test; a situation in which the principle of cooperation and solidarity must be entrenched to meet such challenges⁸. Today it is becoming obvious that coronavirus has presided over global geopolitical deterioration accelerating the ongoing, negative trend toward a more polarized and fragmented world⁹ making skepticism of global engagement grow¹⁰. Enough to mention the symbol of successful and solid modern integration — the European Union (once seen as a unified socio-political body), which demonstrated unprecedented levels of defragmentation as almost all its member states (with the exception of Sweden) chose to close borders and introduce lockdown even in regard to their European neighbours. In less than a month self-preservation strategy won over the European unification that took decades to build.

Moreover, interaction of world leaders, politicians, and representatives of governmental institutions witnessed a shift from traditional meetings in person to online conference calls. Important bilateral and multilateral engagements went virtual including such significant events as the annual World Bank Spring Meetings, the G-7, and G-20 summits

⁷ The 7 Top Social Media Sites You Need to Care About in 2020 // Adobe Spark. — URL: <https://spark.adobe.com/make/learn/top-social-media-sites/>

⁸ Shoukry S. Assessing the Repercussions of COVID-19 Pandemic on World Order // Coronavirus Pandemic Crisis (COVID-19). The Domestic, Regional and International Repercussions. The Egyptian Council of Foreign Affairs, Cairo, 2020.

⁹ Vimont P. Diplomacy During the Quarantine: An Opportunity for More Agile Craftsmanship // Carnegie Europe. — 2020. — 2 sep. — URL: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/09/02/diplomacy-during-quarantine-opportunity-for-more-agile-craftsmanship-pub-82559>

¹⁰ Labott E. Redefining Diplomacy in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic // The Meridian Center for Diplomatic Engagement. — 2020. — URL: <https://www.meridian.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Redefining-Diplomacy-Report-v3.pdf>

as well as the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. Naturally, working conditions of professional diplomats all over the world also had to change drastically: after the lockdown had been introduced embassies moved swiftly toward virtual operations, forcing them to conduct diplomatic interactions with host governments, their counterparts, and the public via digital platforms¹¹. As the usual way of conducting negotiations ceased to exist, diplomats had to get accustomed to online communication. But using online platforms is not always helpful, sometimes even dangerous: according to ambassador Xavier Sticker, diplomats must be careful about discussing sensitive topics over the phone or videoconference. Besides, the pace of certain negotiations slowed down due to digital way of interaction: ambassador Alessandro Azzoni said the reason for the slow pace was that diplomats were pushed into taking a more official stance in videoconferences, where the room for maneuver that existed during informal face-to-face meetings was simply not there¹².

Meanwhile the role and influence of embassies, consulates and other state representations in foreign countries have greatly increased: while state officials could no longer travel all over the world to carry out meetings with their foreign counterparts, the task of collecting and analyzing information, reaching agreements and handling negotiations largely shifted now to the diplomatic missions. The representative role of the resident ambassador changed to less of an envoy who acts on behalf of the executive to one who predominantly stands in for the executive (demonstrating the power, prestige, and influence of the sending state)¹³.

Some experts see benefits in digitalization of international diplomacy, which include cut of travel costs, cut of hosting events cost, availability of much more time for different tasks (that were previously spent on travels),

a lesser reliance on paper traffic and management issues that could free diplomats for more important tasks.

But not everyone shares optimism regarding the new technological shift in diplomatic work: permanent representative of the US to NATO Ambassador Kay Bailey is sure that one simply could not do complex diplomacy over the phone or Zoom; Saudi Ambassador to the USA Reema bin Bandar al-Saud believed such great dependence on the Internet might lead to the emergence of a new definition of poverty — if you were tech poor and disconnected that would hold your nation back today¹⁴.

Still the majority of practicing diplomats agree that personal communication is being an indispensable part of their profession. However, even if the restrictions caused by the pandemic remained, the diplomatic work would acquire at least a hybrid form with online and offline practices combined.

Clearly, the work of diplomats implies permanent and direct interaction with the representatives of other cultures. Apart from regular contacts with their counterparts, diplomatic service refers to the public opinion of the countries, which are the subjects of the political will of their home-state [Глаголев, 2011: 120].

At the same time, diplomatic success depends on efficient communication, because the main tools of diplomacy are meetings, negotiations and consultations, no matter if they are held online or offline. Diplomacy deals with culturally diverse groups by means of interactions and negotiations. The negotiation style of each participant is formed by one's own cultural *program* [Bolewski, 2008: 146].

This context makes one wonder whether there existed one common diplomatic culture characteristic of all members of the diplomatic engagement. According to Professor of International Law Ambassador Wilfried Bolewski, it was possible to witness a number

¹¹ IBID

¹² Leichtenstein S. How COVID-19 Has Transformed Multilateral Diplomacy // World Politics Review. — 2020. — 1 jun. — URL: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28801/how-covid-19-has-transformed-multilateral-diplomacy>

¹³ Robertson J. Diplomacy after COVID: No Looking Back // The Interpreter. — 2020. — 21 Oct. — URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/diplomacy-after-covid-no-looking-back>

¹⁴ Labott E. Redefining Diplomacy in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic // The Meridian Center for Diplomatic Engagement, 2020.

of similarities in diplomatic profession. Such similarities in their turn created a common corporate spirit because diplomats acquired similar professional education and training, they had identical social rules, which included certain restrictions, politeness, tolerance, patience, empathy, and mutual trust. Besides, they have a similar professional experience. Moreover, they were going through analogous procedures, followed the same regulations and demonstrated similar behavior. All these factors presuppose the existence of a unified diplomatic culture.

Such a culture can be defined as accumulated communicative and representative norms, rules and institutions elaborated in order to improve relations and avoid wars between political bodies, who recognize each other and carry out mutual interaction. Yet, despite all these similarities, there exists a solid layer of cultural differences, which hardly make it possible to speak about a unified diplomatic culture. After all, diplomats are individuals shaped by their national or local cultures — a factor defined by the prominent Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede as mind programming [Bolewski, 2008: 150]. By national or local culture we mean behavioral norms, ideas, expectations, and values shared by the people of one nation or local community (usually limited to one country), and these parameters tend to seriously vary from one culture to another.

In this new (post-) pandemic reality, reduced numbers of offline personal business interactions inevitably lead to the requirement to increase its efficiency ensuring a better understanding of the interlocutor's motivations and reactions.

Moreover, as the trend to carry out online meetings increases, the ability to decipher the approaches of partners and colleagues from different cultures becomes more imperative. During online conferences, the role of body language inevitably diminishes as we cannot always see it, but consequently the need to correctly understand and interpret words, tone and mimics of the speaker increases. At

the same time, the most relevant arguments and approaches need to be used in order to deliver one's own position and/or opinion in a right way. To apply both mechanisms successfully — receiving messages and replying to them — during online communication participants from different national cultures need the knowledge of cultural specifics that is provided by cross-cultural competence courses, training, seminars, or any other education programmes.

Naturally, COVID-19 pandemic made some people question the relevance of cross-cultural competence in diplomatic practices as long as most meetings moved online and virtual communication substituted good old offline eye-to-eye contacts. But today after surviving a year with constant online-meetings empirical observations show that cultural specifics remain the main factor shaping human communication whether it is conducted offline or online.

By cross-cultural competence (CCC or 3C) we understand a set of theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for successful and efficient communication with the representatives of different world cultures and religious traditions. It is also highly recommended for psychological comfort while staying in a foreign environment. Relevant definitions of the term imply: the ability to quickly understand and efficiently act in a culture that is different from our own [Culhane, Reid, Crepeau, McDonald, 2012: 30]; the ability to establish a particular perceptual condition that enables communication competence to be exercised¹⁵.

Being a multidisciplinary field, cross-cultural competence is based on the research from various human sciences, including ethnology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural, political, and religious studies, sociology, geography, history, philology, psychology, cognitive science and neuroscience [Ardila, 2020]. Here are just a few examples: the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in linguistics, according to which native languages influence or even shape a per-

¹⁵ Bennet M.J. Constructivist approach to intercultural communication // International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication. — Wiley, 2017. — URL: <https://www.idrinstitute.org/resources/constructivist-approach-intercultural-communication/>

son's mind (linguistic relativism and linguistic determinism theories) that is seen today as highly relevant [Deutscher, 2011]; cognitive experiments and research conducted by Richard Nisbett showing that people from different cultures perceive reality differently [Nisbett, 2003]; philosophical hypothesis of different types of logic proposed by the director of the Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences Dr. Andrey Smirnov, according to which people in different cultures use different types of logical thinking [Смирнов, 2019; Смирнов, Солондаев, 2019].

The primary tool to evaluate one's proficiency in cross-cultural communication could be the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) elaborated by the prominent American scholar Milton Bennet. It consists of the following six stages or levels of cross-cultural sensitivity and helps define the level of one's cross-cultural competence [Bennet, 2013]:

1. Denial

Denial of cultural differences. At this stage, a person believes that people of all cultures are similar. He usually lacks interest or has a hostile attitude towards cross-cultural communication. Such attitude can result in dehumanizing *the other*: it is believed that a behavior different from one's own is a sign of low intellect or personality defect.

2. Defense

A person tries to defend oneself from another culture seeing it as a threat. Stereotypical way of thinking. Dividing people into *us* and *them*, where the former are always good and right and the latter — are bad and wrong.

Other cultures are held responsible for the problems of one's own society.

3. Minimization

Guidelines and worldview of one's own culture are considered universal. It is believed that main principles and convictions have no borders and are equally shared by all cultures.

4. Acceptance

One's culture is perceived as one of many different, but equal worldviews. Acceptance does not imply full consent. A person has respect and curiosity towards another culture, but still cannot adapt one's own behavior to different cultural norms.

5. Adaptation

Developing a correct alternative behavior in a foreign environment. Adaptation includes cross-cultural empathy, ability to get into *the other's* shoes, to see the world through different cultural lens. It is a high level of cross-cultural competence.

6. Integration

Ability to switch between cultures easily and naturally. This ability helps build cross-cultural bridges and interactions.

Being an important skill in today's different spheres of social life *Integration* level is especially important for specialists involved in international communication. Diplomats in their turn should be preferably reaching the *Acceptance* level.

In many countries, the following illusory approach to diplomatic service still exists: it is believed that the main idea behind professional diplomatic performance must be concentration on commonality of different national cultures and reliance on universal human strategies. According to this questionable assumption, this strategy is assumed to be the only way to reach common decisions and compromises. However, at present the impressive field of cross-cultural research clearly demonstrates that the priority should be granted to acknowledging cultural differences, elaborating one's own cultural awareness, learning about specifics of other cultures, and developing mechanisms to deeply understand representatives of different cultures and religions traditions. Facing the challenges of an increasingly complex world, the question of interdependency between diplomatic processes and cultural variations becomes relevant [Bolewski, 2008: 145].

Thus, the utmost importance and relevance of early inclusion of cross-cultural competence programmes into professional training of diplomats-to-be as well as into professional development training for diplomats already serving at the ministries of foreign affairs worldwide must be emphasized.

Programmes in cross-cultural competence are supposed to include at least three components: 1) regional studies, 2) models and norms of behavior, 3) axiological orientations; the latter is seen as the most important one.

In this context regional studies imply studying not merely a geographical discipline (as it used to be initially understood), but as a combined study of particular countries, their nature, geography, economy, social arrangement, history and other spheres, i.e., that includes fundamental background knowledge about a country or a region.

Learning about models and norms of behavior in other cultures includes knowledge of etiquette, protocol, traditions, rituals, norms as well as socially acceptable and tabooed behavioral patterns. Non-verbal communication means such as tone, body language, mimics and gesticulation are being a part of it. Without knowledge of these features one would fall into the illusion of understanding certain behavior of representatives of other cultures, but in reality, the meaning of non-verbal messages would remain hidden. The significance of this communicative component can be hardly overestimated as many cultures use non-verbal language no less than verbal one. A decade ago, the question of including non-verbal communication means into the foreign language learning programmes had been under consideration in the USA [Gergersen, 2007]. For example, a gesture with pinched fingers up has a different meaning in three countries: *Wait!* in Egypt, *Wonderful!* in Greece and *What do you mean?* in Italy. Not knowing non-verbal language might reduce the communication quality at best and lead to wrong conclusions at worst. However, for a profoundly successful cross-cultural communication it would not be enough to learn a set of behavioral practices accepted in a foreign culture; as it would be one of the first and the simplest steps in cross-cultural competence. Further on studying of axiological orientations must follow.

The third component of cross-cultural competence, axiological orientations, has to do with the fundamentals of any national culture consisting of values, beliefs, convictions, prejudices, fears, dreams, stereotypes, feelings, and generalizations that are prevalent in a society. Without learning axiological foundations of a culture, communication with its representatives would remain poor or even inadequate. Consequently, learning about axiological specifics, which include the deepest concepts, doctrines and guidelines shaped by the value

system of each particular culture should be viewed as a crucial aspect of cross-cultural competence.

When considering the present situation with cross-cultural competence among Russian diplomats one would notice that they gain solid knowledge in the field of countries and regional studies — disciplines that have a long and rich teaching tradition in Russia. As for such aspect as models and norms of behavior accepted in a particular cultural environment Russian diplomats possess a certain idea of it though in most cases this idea derives from empirical experience acquired during their service abroad. In other words, this aspect is learnt rather accidentally by trial and error. As for axiological orientations in various national cultures, this aspect still remains beyond professional education of the Russian foreign ministry staff.

The results of research in cross-cultural field should become an indispensable part of professional qualification for specialists in international relations. According to US diplomat, sociologist and anthropologist Glen Fischer, today new skills were necessary for diplomats, because learning foreign languages and facts about other countries were no longer enough. He expressed regret that this profession ignored and continued to remain ignorant of what he called a psycho-cultural dimension of international affairs. People working in global projects must possess cross-cultural competence, they should be able to communicate, sympathize and understand mentality as well as psycho-cultural dimensions of their foreign colleagues [Kealey, MacDonald, Vulpe, 2004: 439].

Enough to mention the example of democracy as it is seen in different cultural environments. A widely shared view suggests that people who express support for democracy in nondemocratic regimes understand democracy perfectly well as a liberal alternative to their authoritarian home regimes. This concept implies that basic democratic freedoms constitute a universal value across all cultures. However, the new research based on the data from the World Value Survey shows that such an approach totally ignores the results of a decades-long study of cultural values across nations. No doubt, people around the world value free-

doms, but only to some extent and the priority they give to liberal advantages might strongly differ depending on the existential conditions under which their culture evolved [Kruse, Ravlik, Welzel, 2019].

It is high time we realize that individuals are socialized into their cultural system, i.e. they learn appropriate cultural norms, beliefs and attitudes from their parents and elders so culture is passed on from generation to generation [Fischer, 2018: 17].

In present-day Russia, interest toward cross-cultural competence and its practical introduction is just beginning, while educational programmes developed specially for future

diplomats are currently at the implementation stage.

Proceeding from our analysis, it is possible to conclude that COVID-19 pandemic has increased the necessity to introduce cross-cultural competence into the educational programmes of the future diplomats and into the courses aiming to increase professional proficiency among acting diplomats both in Russia and abroad. This approach would help conducting successful and efficient meetings and negotiations, reach compromises and achieve understanding, establish trustworthy business and personal relations with the representatives of various world cultures.

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