BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Intercultural Communication in Diplomacy and Diplomatic Training: A Closer Look at Intercultural Communication Competence of Slovak Diplomats

Bachelor Thesis

Bratislava, 2025 **Klára Klačanová**

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All the academic literature and other sources used are cited and referenced in the bibliography according to APA Format (7th Edition). As English is not my native tongue, the language and grammar proofreading of this thesis has been done with the help of the AI-powered Grammarly app. In terms of the empirical part of my research, I have also used an AI transcription tool TurboScribe. I honestly state that I have not used generative AI for any part of this bachelor thesis.

In Bratislava, March 13, 2025

Klára Klačanová

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Abstrakt

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Cieľom tejto práce je preskúmať, akým spôsobom slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati získavajú potrebné kompetencie v interkultúrnej komunikácii. Na základe akademickej literatúry je totižto možné tvrdiť, že interkultúrna komunikácia je dôležitou súčasťou diplomacie a jej úspešnosť môže byť v diplomatickom prostredí rozhodujúca. Pre diplomatov a diplomatky je preto kľúčové nadobudnúť kompetencie v interkultúrnej komunikácií, a to napríklad prostredníctvom diplomatického vzdelávania. Ako však získavajú tieto skúsenosti diplomati, ktorých tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie je limitovaný? Za účelom ozrejmenia tejto skutočnosti bolo vykonaných sedem polo-štruktúrovaných rozhovorov so slovenskými diplomatkami a diplomatmi. Výsledky ukazujú, že existujú minimálne tri hlavné spôsoby, ktorými si slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati čiastočne nahrádzajú limitovaný tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie – samovzdelávaním alebo individuálnou prípravou, prostredníctvom "*learning-by-doing*“, respektíve získavaním praktických skúseností, a nadobudnutím poznatkov od svojich skúsenejších kolegov. Vykonaný výskum teda objasňuje prácu slovenských diplomatiek a diplomatov. Táto bakalárska práca v jej širšej implikácii prispieva k lepšiemu pochopeniu diplomacií malých štátov a toho, ako môžu uspieť aj pri úplnej alebo čiastočnej absencii formálneho tréningu v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie.

Kľúčové slová: diplomacia, diplomatický tréning, inštitucionalizmus, interkultúrna komunikácia, interview, Slovensko

Abstract

Author: Klára Klačanová
Thesis Title: Intercultural Communication in Diplomacy and Diplomatic Training: A Closer Look at Intercultural Communication Competence of Slovak Diplomats
University: Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts
Thesis Advisor: Mgr. Clarissa do Nascimento Tabosa, PhD.
Head of the Defense Committee: prof. František Novosád, CSc.
Members of the Defense Committee: doc. Samuel Abrahám, PhD., prof. František Novosád, CSc., Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD., prof. Silvia Miháliková
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The aim of this thesis is to explore how Slovak diplomats acquire essential skills in intercultural communication. Based on the academic literature, it is possible to argue that intercultural communication is an important part of diplomacy, and its effectiveness can be decisive in a diplomatic environment. Therefore, it is crucial for diplomats to obtain intercultural communication competencies through diplomatic education. However, how are such skills acquired by diplomats, whose intercultural communication training might be limited? To clarify this matter, seven semi-structured interviews with Slovak diplomats were conducted. As the findings show, there are at least three main ways in which Slovak diplomats partially substitute limited intercultural communication training – by self-education or individual preparation, through *learning-by-doing* or acquiring practical experiences, and with gaining knowledge from their more experienced colleagues. The conducted research, therefore, enlightens on the work of Slovak diplomats. In wider implication, this bachelor thesis contributes to a better understanding of diplomacies of small states and how they might succeed even in the total, or partial, absence of formal training in the field of intercultural communication.

Keywords: diplomacy, diplomatic training, institutionalism, intercultural communication, interview, Slovakia

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Appx. – Appendix

EP – The European Parliament

EU – European Union

FSI – Foreign Service Institute

ICC – Intercultural Communication Competence

IIs – International Institutions

IOs – International Organizations

IR – International Relations

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OECD – The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN – The United Nations

UNITAR – United Nations Institute for Training and Research

US – The United States

Introduction

Intercultural communication is an inseparable part of the daily work of diplomats – there is no dispute about that. Frequent and crucial encounters with colleagues from different countries, of different cultures, are in the very nature of diplomacy. Whether in bilateral or multilateral settings, diplomats always find themselves between at least two cultures – the one of the sending country and the one of the receiving country. What is also in the essence of diplomacy is communication. And to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds or simply from different cultures essentially means to communicate interculturally.

Yet, however unsophisticated it sounds, intercultural communication is by no means inherently simple. To communicate effectively, properly, and unproblematically through different cultures with their respective values, meanings, perspectives, and contexts might get very complicated. Cultural misunderstandings, misinterpretations, faux pas, or even conflicts can worsen situations of communication and, eventually, their outcome. Even more in settings, such as the diplomatic one, where a multiplicity of cultures interacts, dialogues have to be structured carefully, and the smallest mistakes can make huge differences. For these reasons, diplomats basically need to be the "masters" of intercultural communication.

It would, therefore, make sense that the education of diplomats in this area will be granted the appropriate attention. Countries like the United States, for instance, invest great time, energy, and resources into the proper training of their diplomats in intercultural communication. Training centers, universities, and open courses worldwide are trying to offer (not only) diplomats the possibility to enhance their intercultural communication competencies before stepping into comprehensive and multi-layered intercultural encounters. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case in Slovak diplomacy – sufficient, structured training with a focus on intercultural communication is simply missing.

How is it then possible, that Slovak diplomats are successful in their foreign service? How can diplomacy of such a small state be well-known and well-respected abroad, if we are seemingly not training our diplomats properly? Can there be other ways, apart from the diplomatic training, how do the Slovak diplomats acquire essential skills in intercultural communication?

These were the questions that motivated the beginning of my research, which I aim to undertake in this thesis. Through sufficient literature review on intercultural communication and its place in diplomacy, as well as diplomatic training, I will establish the necessary theoretical background for my research. Focusing on the experiences and knowledge of active Slovak diplomats, I want to consequently gather essential qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with them. The thematic analysis of the findings should serve as a path to answer the research question of how Slovak diplomats acquire essential skills in intercultural communication.

My presumption, formulated in my hypothesis, is that Slovak diplomats do not receive formal training in intercultural communication structured by the Ministry of Slovak Affairs. However, they acquire skills in this area either through a) other forms of education, or b) self-education, or c) learning from mistakes, or d) by getting institutionalized (Jönsson & Hall, 2005) into diplomatic practices and following the recognized behavior in their surroundings. This hypothesis shall also be later tested by uncovering the personal experiences of Slovak diplomats with the help of the aforementioned interviews.

In regard to Slovak diplomacy, this study might serve as an accelerator for further expert research and followingly possible re-consideration of our diplomatic education. In the broader picture, this bachelor thesis could contribute to a better understanding of the diplomacies of particularly small states and how they might succeed even in the total (or partial) absence of intercultural communication training.

1. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is an inseparable part of the interconnected, interdependent, and globalized world, which has been gradually developing into its current shape. Just as the relations between people have been changing throughout time, intercultural communication and its study have been evolving correspondingly. Nowadays, there is no doubt of the significance and existence of intercultural communication study in contemporary academia. Due to its interdisciplinary range, "the study of intercultural communication is influenced by traditional disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 13). However, when it comes to its relevant academic origins, the academic discipline of anthropology is of principal importance.

1.1. Origins of Intercultural Communication

The origins of the study of intercultural communication are closely linked to the American anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall, whose valuable research and academic contribution entitled him "the father of the field of intercultural communication study" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 8). Hall not only first introduced the term *intercultural communication* in 1959 but also shifted the way this field was being studied. For instance, the central emphasis on interactions between people of different cultures, which persists until nowadays, was introduced by Hall. With his revolutionary approach, the study of culture was also extended to the area of communication, which progressively linked anthropological research to communication studies. Moreover, Hall advocated for micro-analysis in the study of intercultural communication and listed several components, such as the use of voice, time and space, or gestures, that should be looked at when understanding different cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

It still remains to mention Edward Hall's pioneering work at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the United States, which transformed the practical use of the study of intercultural communication in the diplomatic field. The American anthropologist is all above valued for developing training methods, which "are still applied to the intercultural communication training" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 8) nowadays. Looking at the context of Hall's work, Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) summarizes this development followingly: "Because intercultural

communication grew out of the need to apply abstract anthropological concepts to the practical world of foreign service diplomats, this early focus on training American diplomats led to the later, now standard use of intercultural communication training" (p. 262). Therefore, it should be noted, that Hall not only defined the origins and pillars of intercultural communication study but also laid the foundations of the training in this field.

In order to understand the term *intercultural communication* properly, it is first necessary to break it down into its core components. While the prefix "inter-" is generally "used to form adjectives meaning "between or among people, things, or places mentioned"" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), the concepts of *culture* and *communication* are not so easily and clearly definable. Thus, several definitions of these two concepts, their explanations, and their mutual position will be presented in the following paragraphs. This conceptual overview should also lead to a substantial definition of *intercultural communication*, which then enables us to elaborate on what this term practically encompasses.

Firstly, it should be noted that *culture* and *communication* are considered inseparable (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Jandt, 2018) and mutually influencing each other (Chen & Starosta, 1998). This means that treating these two concepts without referencing one to the other does not make sense, as well as it is essential to observe both even when looking for a change in only one of them. Chen & Starosta (1998), for instance, claim that the mutual influence of *communication* and *culture* produces "different behavioral patterns in different contexts" (p. 20). They explain that "culture not only conditions our perceptions of reality (…) [and] shapes our communication patterns, but communication in turn influences the structure of our culture" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 20). Therefore, this inseparability and interdependence of *culture* and *communication* should not be forgotten even when elaborating on *intercultural communication* as such.

Bennet (2013) defines *intercultural communication* as "the mutual creation of meaning across cultures" (para. 11), Chen & Starosta (1998) labels it as "communication among people of two or more cultures" (p. 30). Allwood (2023) comes even with a more sophisticated definition when claiming that *intercultural communication* is "the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control, between people with different cultural backgrounds" (p. 3). Although all these definitions are applicable and relevant, for the purpose of this thesis, *intercultural communication* will be understood as communication among people from different cultures or of diverse cultural backgrounds. This can range from one-on-one

encounters and dialogues between culturally diverse individuals to multicultural meetings, negotiations, or other occasions where communication to/among participants from numerous cultures is required. In all these scenarios, however, "we are destined to carry our cultural baggage" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 28) which can hinder communication processes through misinterpretations, misunderstandings, stereotyping, disagreements, and other difficulties. Thus, "we need to be aware of how our language and nonverbal communications might be understood by people whose frame of reference is different than ours" (Jandt, 2018, p. 17), as well as understand "the unique experience of others [in a non-evaluative way] as the key to coordinating meaning and action towards some common goal" (Bennet, 2013, para. 10). In this sense, an effective intercultural communication presupposes some essential skills.

1.2. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

"Above everything else, the diplomat is a communicator" (Bjola et al., 2018, p. 93), and he needs to be a very skillful and effective one in order not to (metaphorically) "kill" the process of diplomacy (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). Yet, diplomats are also usually culturally diverse and mere communication talents might not be sufficient in intercultural encounters. Thus, as Chen & Starosta (1998) argue, „only with mastery of intercultural communication competence can persons from different cultures communicate effectively and appropriately" (p. 253). While the concepts of effectiveness and appropriateness are connected to communication competence as such, Chen and Starosta also specify the *intercultural communication competence* (abbr. ICC). For them, ICC „can be conceived of as the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviors that recognize the interactants' multiple identities in a specific environment" (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 358f). Based on this definition, a person with intercultural communication competence is appropriate and effective in his communication, while he is non-judgmentally aware of the cultural diversity of the people he is interacting with, and also manages to deliver his intended message in the particular environment.

Moreover, Chen & Starosta also describe three perspectives of ICC, which each encompass several aspects crucial for a person regarded as competent in intercultural communication. Firstly, it is the affective perspective built on "self-concept, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental attitudes, and social relaxation" (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 362). The claim here stresses that individual's positive emotions enable sensitive and respectful communication in an

intercultural context. The second perspective – cognitive perspective – relates to personal thinking, understanding, and knowledge. This, according to Chen & Starosta (1996), consists of "self-awareness and cultural awareness" (p. 365), while the first one refers to knowledge of identity and the second one to understanding cultural variability. Both of these aspects are cornerstones of intercultural awareness – an ability crucial for competent intercultural communicators. Lastly, there is the behavioral perspective of ICC covering "how to act effectively in intercultural interactions" (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 367). As Chen & Starosta (1996) list it, "message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills" (p. 367) are the core components of communication skills/intercultural adroitness that enable effectiveness in intercultural interactions.

These three aforementioned perspectives together form intercultural communication competence as described by scholars such as Chen & Starosta, whose main fields of expertise are (intercultural) communication studies. In the next chapter, however, intercultural communication as well as the ICC in diplomacy particularly should be examined.

2. Intercultural Communication in Diplomacy

The essence of diplomacy lies in communication, or reversed, communication is an essential aspect of diplomacy (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). Negotiations, informal meetings, conflict resolutions, summits, or even official letters are only some instances, where communication plays a crucial role in the conduct of international relations and diplomacy. Whether verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, private or public - communication is the key tool for diplomats, inseparable from their everyday working life. Similarly integral to diplomacy is the contact of cultures. Therefore, this chapter focuses on intercultural communication in diplomacy, with its relevance, possible complications, but also its place in diplomatic training.

2.1. The Relevance and Conduct of Intercultural Communication in Diplomacy

With intercultural communication defined as communication among people from different cultures or of diverse cultural backgrounds, it might be obvious that it has its place in the conduct of diplomacy. On one side, there is the already mentioned notion of the communication process as crucial part of diplomacy. On the other hand, the culturally diverse people are in this sense representatives of particular countries, the diplomats, as well as the public. However, it has to be kept in mind that it is not the cultures that interact, but rather the people from different cultures that do. As Biletska et al. (2021) mention, diplomacy "deals with culturally diverse groups using interactions and negotiations" (p. 1667), but the style of these interactions/negotiations is formed by the individuals' cultural backgrounds. Culture and communication are related in diplomatic negotiations (Borcan, 2009), and as I will argue later, their success is to a great extent dependent on effective intercultural communication.

The pivotal figures of diplomacy are diplomats – as representatives and communicators of states and their national cultures in both bilateral and multilateral settings, it is *through* them "that cultures meet" (Borcan, 2009, p. 6). As any other people, diplomats carry with them their "cultural baggage", their behavior, thinking, values, but also communication/negotiation style are influenced by their culture. "By the very nature of their work, diplomats are required to interact with individuals of various cultural backgrounds" (Biletska et al., 2021, p. 1665), yet their cultural background(s) are also important to look at. First of all, diplomats find themselves at least between two cultures - the one that they are officially representing, the culture of their

sending state, as well as the other one, the culture of the receiving state. In this median state, they have to alter their communication style in such a way, that they are understood by both the authorities of their country of origin, as well as the authorities and society of the receiving state. If they mediate intercultural communication through these several channels successfully, they have the potential to become *cultural bridge-builders* (Hofstede, 2004).

Moreover, intercultural communication is also highly relevant to the private lives of diplomats appointed in foreign countries. Engaging in the new culture, as well as developing interpersonal (intercultural) relationships is beneficial for a smooth and successful adaptation process, which is regarded as necessary. This process varies in length and complexity from diplomat to diplomat, however, previous experiences with adaptation in preceding countries of appointment can be helpful (Borcan, 2009). Adaptation on a private level naturally advantages the adaptation on a professional level as well. In the encounters with both authorities and public audiences, the knowledge (facilitated also through the adaptation) of values, customs, and of course intercultural communication remain of crucial importance for diplomats.

To conclude, there are two more remarks that need to be made in order to outline the relevance and conduct of intercultural communication in diplomacy. Firstly, it has to be noted that despite the diverse national cultures, the diplomats sometimes have to be also involved with different organisational and professional cultures, working in multilateral and thus multicultural environments (Fust, 2004). Secondly, in such settings, intercultural communication can be efficient as a tool for international cooperation, as well as reconciliation, which both shroud the successful conduct of diplomacy. Based on the overview presented in this subchapter, I can only agree with Borcan (2009) that "diplomacy does not just illustrate the theory of intercultural communication, but is an integral part of it" (p. 139).

2.2. Possible Problems and Complications

Interpersonal communication by itself can be difficult sometimes – yet when it is conducted between different cultures, it automatically becomes an even greater challenge. By the nature of it, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and sometimes even offenses can occur in intercultural communication. However, in such a deliberate setting of diplomacy, where words have to be chosen carefully and understanding is of alarming importance, possible

complications in intercultural communication have significant weight.

Probably the most obvious are problems that stem from cultural barriers, namely the distinct cultural values and norms held by diplomats in communication. In the absence of shared values and ideas, which would be applied when understanding concepts and terms used, consensus-finding in diplomatic interactions gets complex and difficult (Madibekova, 2015). The assumptions, experiences, and information of culturally distinct people are likewise distinct, their interpretations, evaluations, and actions in a communication process therefore vary significantly. This is particularly complicated in the case of multilateral settings, where the multiplicity of involved cultures might lead to a clash of culturally biased interpretations (Kappeler, 2004). Additionally, as Borcan (2009) reminds, "if the diplomats interpret what they see around them in a new country according to their own norms and values, it might be that the result is in fact a misinterpretation" (p. 181).

A communication gap occurring due to different uses of languages can be considered another instance of difficulties in the process of intercultural communication. Even though speaking the local language is of great advantage for diplomats, they can also communicate sufficiently in languages regarded as *lingua franca* (nowadays above all English, but significant are also French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, German, and Portuguese). However, as Madibekova (2015) points out, "some words have a completely different meaning depending on the origin of the culture in which they are used; hence, it may be insufficient to simply translate them from one language to another" (The demand of intercultural communication skills in the modern world, para. 6). Thus, if a diplomat literally translates whatever he wishes to express from his native tongue to, for instance, English, there is a great possibility that the intended meaning will essentially get *lost in translation*. Also, when it comes to understanding a message in a foreign language through a simple word-to-word translation to one's own language, the risk of misunderstanding in intercultural communication increases drastically.

Another complicated layer consists of prejudices and stereotypes that might influence the outcome of the conduct of intercultural communication in diplomacy. Since stereotypes are usually shared by a group, society, or even a whole culture, the encounter of diplomats from different cultures also contains an encounter of culture-specific stereotypes. Moreover, the stereotypes are closely connected with the positive/negative historical relations between countries (Borcan, 2009), while prejudices can be attributed more to personal histories (past

experiences) of diplomats in regard to encounters with people from different groups, countries, and cultures. It has to be kept in mind, however, that diplomats are human beings, and that their natural preconceptions, prejudices, attitudes, and stereotypes might hinder their adaptability in culturally new environments, as well as their success in intercultural communication.

Another problematic element in intercultural communication is the difference between low-context cultures and high-context cultures, which were conceptualized by already mentioned Edward T. Hall (see Hall, 1976). The distinction is based on how much meaning in interactions cultures convey through language and how much through the context. In low-context cultures, the communication is more language- and message-oriented, thus also specific, direct, opinion-expressing, explicit – the focus lies on *what was said*. On the other hand, for high-context cultures the physical context as well as the protagonists are important. The circumstances, non-verbal communication, silence, and other nuances are key when understanding what was ambiguously said (Zaharna, 2004, p. 135). Thus, in a discourse between a diplomat from a low-context culture and a diplomat from a high-context culture, difficulties may arise. As Biletska et al. (2021) for example points out, "when one or both speakers interacting from unique cultural mindsets fail to recognize these subtle face-to-face communication preferences, confusion and misunderstandings are more likely to occur" (p. 1671).

Lastly, an obstacle that can often hinder successful intercultural communication is nonverbal communication or nonverbal language. Facial expressions, body language, gestures, haptics, tone of voice, or even proximity between interactants form nonverbal communication, which tends to be often omitted despite its undisputed relevance. However, the use of nonverbal communication varies across cultures, just as the sensitivity towards this type of communication is determined culturally. So while, for example in Asia silence is considered to be a virtue (Madibekova, 2015), in other countries and cultures a response by silence might imply confusion, loss of interest, or even strong disagreement. The different nonverbal signals and messages are embedded within cultures, thus mere knowledge of language is not sufficient (Madibekova, 2015). If diplomats find themselves in an intercultural encounter and fail to consider the culturally-based differences in nonverbal language, it might end up in misunderstandings and misinterpretations, or even in a worst-case scenario, serious offense taken by representatives of a particular culture.

As demonstrated, intercultural communication is indeed challenging and there are at least the

aforementioned complications that might lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, offenses, and faux pas of serious nature in diplomacy. However, as Borcan (2009) stresses, "taking place between people from different nations, with different cultural backgrounds, the communication process becomes a difficult (but not impossible!) task, crossing cultural borders" (p. 150). Therefore, in the upcoming chapter, I will try to uncover how diplomats can be trained in intercultural communication in order to avoid the outlined problems. In the empirical part I will proceed by studying how (and if at all) Slovak diplomats are trained in intercultural communication.

2.3. Intercultural Communication as Part of Diplomatic Training

Per tradition, the countries' respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs are responsible for the recruitment and following training/education of diplomats. These might differ for example based on the size of MFAs since the bigger ones are resources-wise able to provide a broader range or narrower specificity of training courses, while the smaller MFAs are restricted to generality and even occasionality of these courses. Diplomacy and foreign policy are the two main areas on which the training is structured by the MFA; however, this formative institution might also decide to transfer the responsibility to training centers, diplomatic academies/institutes, or even international training organizations, which then educate the diplomats appropriately (Stein, 2007).

Based on the research conducted on behalf of the Diplomatic Academy of Chile in 83 countries worldwide, intercultural communication is not explicitly stated among the most frequently offered courses in MFAs' syllabuses (see Annexure II in Stein, 2007). Yet there are countries such as the United States, Canada, or New Zealand that include intercultural training into the mandatory education of their diplomats, as I will elaborate on later. However, prior to that, the significance of intercultural communication training of diplomats, which has been continually stressed by experts, should be discussed in the following chapter.

2.3.1. The Significance of Intercultural Communication Training

The importance of training diplomats in intercultural communication represents a notable agreement in academia for at least 20 years now. Naturally, scholarly opinion varies when it

comes to the scope, structure, or targets of the training as such, however, there is a wide consensus on the need for diplomats to acquire intercultural communication competencies in order to conduct their profession successfully. The aim to prevent misunderstandings, faux-pas, or offenses as discussed before is mostly regarded as one of the most important arguments for this kind of training. Moreover, it is stressed that preparedness in intercultural communication is also beneficial for the personal lives of diplomats posted in other cultures.

To begin with, historically, the "first cross-cultural training programs were designed by the American Foreign Service Institute with the aim of improving its diplomats' abilities to perform in foreign cultural environments" (Gesnot-Dimic, 2019, p. 38), which relates to Hall's notable work at FSI mentioned in the first chapter. The need to establish such training grew out of recognized issues with the ineffectiveness of American diplomats, who were unfamiliar with the host countries' culture and language (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). Nowadays, the argument of effective diplomacy in culturally different environments still applies, yet the multiculturality and the multidimensionality of communication are growing and evolving. Somehow, the measure of an effective diplomat in terms of his cognitive abilities steps back, as soft skills such as self-confidence, adaptability/flexibility, the ability to respect and listen to (other cultures), empathy, relationship-building, and tolerance are more and more needed (Mustafayeva & Schnitzer-Skjønsberg, 2016). The number of cultures that diplomats interact with is higher, the communication process is faster, and the length of the adaptability period shrinks. Thus, properly interculturally trained professionals with the ability to appropriately and effectively communicate in whatever settings are becoming indispensable.

Additionally, mere personal communication talents or brilliant argumentative and diplomatic techniques might not be enough when diplomats find themselves in encounters with cultures of completely different communication patterns. Even though negotiation structures are mostly determined by protocol, the culture-specific communication elements such as interruptions, ratio of speech and silence, pauses/breaks, attention, or length of conversation are impossible to regulate by the protocol (Korshuk, 2004). That is why intercultural communication training represents a crucial preparation for diplomats going on missions abroad - sole language training or empty factual knowledge about other cultures is insufficient to strengthen a diplomat's intercultural competency. However, as scholars mention, intercultural communication training serves as a foundation, eye-opener, and support for diplomats in their multicultural carriers, yet only personal experiences within cultural pluralism can fully enhance their intercultural

communication skills and competencies (Bolewski, 2008; Korshuk, 2004; Mustafayeva & Schnitzer-Skjønsberg, 2016).

One of the most obvious arguments for intercultural communication training and proof of its significance in diplomacy education is the prevention of cultural misunderstandings by sufficiently trained diplomats. In the deliberate setting of diplomacy conduct, unconscious offenses, insults, faux pas, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or conflicts stemming from cultural differences of diplomats, might lead to serious problems. As, for instance, Korshuk (2004) and Slavik (2004) mention, (in)effective intercultural communication in diplomatic negotiations and decision-making processes affects the lives of real people within the nations. The crucial awareness of cultural differences in communication and the ability to respond to them respectively in order to prevent disputes also relates to how culturally fluent diplomats are. Madibekova (2015) mentions, that "cultural fluency serves a vital role in preventing disputes as it can forestall miscommunication and misunderstanding" (Cultural fluency in preventing disputes, para. 1) and lists six essential soft skills that according to her constitute it. Thus, to be interculturally educated and to obtain cultural fluency/intelligence, means for diplomats to prepare appropriately for cases, where intercultural communication can lead to serious misunderstandings, which aims to be prevented in diplomatic encounters.

The success of a diplomatic mission, which is in a foreign country permanently exposed to intercultural encounters depends significantly on the communication skills of its diplomats (Borcan, 2009). In cases where these diplomats are sufficiently trained, they manage to conduct both professional and private intercultural dialogues and followingly build successful cross-cultural contacts. Culture therefore achieves a unifying element instead of acting as a dividing force (Borcan, 2009), which can followingly positively influence the outcome of particular diplomatic missions. However, diplomats can serve as cultural bridge builders only under the condition of having the needed intercultural competencies, which need to be first acquired through sufficient diplomatic training.

Some of the experts also underline the importance of intercultural communication training for diplomats in the context of their personal lives abroad. On one side, it is argued that thanks to appropriate training, diplomats are able to communicate effectively more quickly in new cultures, as well as to adapt better to their new life in a culturally different country. As Borcan (2009) claims:

> The intercultural skills of a diplomat abroad are helping him in achieving the necessary adaptability and integration in the new place. The lack of such a skills can be a big impediment in the professional and equally in the private life of the diplomat abroad (p. 223)

On the other hand, pre-departure training is also crucial when it comes to cultural shocks, fatigue, or stress upon arrival in a culturally different environment. It is integral to the training, that the diplomats recognize and cope in time with these experiences, which could undesirably affect their work (Kealey et al., 2004). Swift adaptation and elimination of possible cultural shocks, which both go hand in hand, are enhanced by intercultural skills and proper pre-departure training that delivers them. Truly, as Kealey et al. (2004) point out in regard to the role and impact of intercultural training, "the need to prepare and assist people [diplomats] in being able to live and work effectively in another culture is clear" (p. 436).

2.3.2. The Content and Structure of Intercultural Communication Training

With regard to the content and structure of intercultural communication training, there are two aspects that will be presented in this chapter. Firstly, the proposals and suggestions for improvement from researchers will be compared, as they are crucial for optimizing the effectiveness of diplomatic training. Secondly, the courses and education programs actually provided both by MFAs and external institutions shall be introduced, as they umbrella the intercultural communication training.

Concerning the experts' opinions, probably the two most complex and thoughtful proposals come from researchers and professors of intercultural communication Alena Korshuk (Belarus) and Yunxia Zhu (Australia). Korshuk (2004) strongly argues for incorporating intercultural communication into the training of diplomats, since they are supposed to be part of it during their careers. All above, she argues that diplomats should be trained in cultural awareness and their knowledge should be acquired both on a culture-general level and culture-specific level. According to her, diplomats should take the appropriate course as soon as possible in their careers on a two-step basis – an intensive introductory course in the theory of intercultural communication should be followed by region-specific training that builds on it. Moreover, the

Belarusian scholar also presents a sample course outline, which aims to cover ten comprehensive topic areas such as cultural factors and features, verbal and non-verbal codes of intercultural communication, or acculturation (Korshuk, 2004). On the other hand, Zhu (2004) evaluated the diplomacy training in New Zealand and provided an improved ideal model of intercultural training. Above all, she criticizes the focus of current training on cultural patterns, which are according to her too result-oriented, simplifying and generalizing cultural nuances, and culture-general. Zhu (2004) argues, that "cultural-pattern based training may fail to target high-level [intercultural] competence" (p. 421) and calls for more holistic approach to intercultural training, which would incorporate the emic/culture-specific perspective, include context-situated learning, and be more process-oriented. Therefore, she proposes a Triple-Level Training Model incorporating both the etic and emic perspectives on three levels – macro, meso, and micro – and targeting high-level intercultural competence through the study of sociocultural contexts, cultural language, rhetorics, persuasion, interpersonal relations, or cultural profiles, traits and communication styles (Zhu, 2004).

It remains to mention some institutions, which offer training in intercultural communication for diplomats or even the public. Firstly, there is the already several times mentioned FSI of the United States, which is directly under the State Department and represents the main training institution for the US foreign service. Apart from four other schools concentrating each on training in the concrete area, there is also the so-called Transition Center which "serves all U.S. Government employees and family members preparing for or returning from overseas assignments" (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). This center provides pre-departure life skills training with broad possibilities of courses, among which one can also find a course entitled "Cross Cultural Communication for the Foreign Affairs Community". This course is provided both for diplomats as well as their family members and aims to tackle objectives such as identifying cultural values, understanding reactions to cultural differences, facilitating intercultural communication, and finding life strategies in cultural diversity (FSiSIS, n.d.). In similar terms, the Canadian Foreign Service Institute also employs a pre-posting training program with several centers and schools responsible for coverage of diverse topics. On behalf of The Centre for Learning in Intercultural Effectiveness and International Assistance Policy supporting Global Affairs Canada programs, there is a whole intercultural effectiveness program dedicated to enhancing the intercultural competencies of appointed diplomats. The offered courses focus for instance on bridging cultural differences, identifying cultural tendencies and communication styles, practicing cultural decoding, recognizing intercultural

adaptation, or practicing effective intercultural communication (Government of Canada, n.d.). Apart from the training covered by state departments, governments, or ministries of foreign affairs, there are also outside institutions that offer and provide intercultural communication training not only for diplomats. Mostly recognized is the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, which offers a great variety of courses, workshops, and educational programs. In regard to training in intercultural communication, UNITAR provides a four-week-long course called "Cross-cultural Communication: developing cultural awareness, competencies…", which main objective is to enhance participants' intercultural communication competencies through an understanding of culture's impact on communication and overall development of cultural awareness (Unitar, n.d.). Another interesting course is available at the European Academy of Diplomacy in Poland. The "Intercultural Communication" one- to two-day training focuses on enhancing cultural sensitivity, understanding of culture's effect on communication in a multicultural environment, the ability to analyze and correctly apply verbal and non-verbal codes in culturally different encounters, and more (EAD, n.d.). Lastly, also universities, such as the American University in Washington or the University of British Columbia, might include courses on intercultural communication in their educational programs. Even though they are usually offered for students exclusively, ministries of foreign affairs might establish contracts and provide their diplomats with possibilities to absolve these courses.

Even though the importance of intercultural communication training is clear, it is not always a major focus for some small states with limited resources. Although these can be very diverse in regard to many characteristics, their classification is usually population-based. The Forum of Small States (FOSS), for instance, "defines small states as those with populations of fewer than 10 million people" (Ó Súilleabháin, 2014, p. 3). While the small states' size can have practical implications in terms of the abilities of their diplomacies, one of their common denominators is their excellence in multilateral diplomacy (Ó Súilleabháin, 2014). However, many diplomats worldwide do not receive proper training in intercultural communication; often, there is a complete absence of it in their education. What can, then, explain the fact that diplomatic engagements generate positive outcomes even in the possible absence of formal intercultural communication training? Diplomatic success, in terms of putting forward national interests and reaching agreements, might be partly explained by the theory of institutionalism, which will be presented in the following chapter.

3. Institutionalism

In their book *Essence of Diplomacy,* the Swedish scholars Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall introduced the theory of institutionalism in diplomacy. Their main aim was to theorize diplomacy, and they did so by regarding diplomacy as an institution with three essential timeless dimensions (Jönsson & Hall, 2005). Therefore, institutionalism might be of significance in case of missing diplomatic training in intercultural communication

3.1. Definition and Explanation of Selected Statements

Jönsson & Hall (2005) begin their theorizing by declaring two beginning positions: firstly, they regard diplomacy as "a perennial international institution … as a timeless, existential phenomenon" (p. 3). Here and throughout their whole theory, Jönsson and Hall build on the laid foundations by Robert Keohane (1988), who defined *institution* as a "persistent and connected set of rules (formal or informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations" (p. 383). Secondly, since the scholars focus on diplomacy as an *institution*, not purely as a diplomatic method, they stress the divergence of their theory from the IR study of international negotiation. Moreover, a significant point of departure for Jönsson & Hall's approach to diplomacy is the English School – one of the IR major theories that exceptionally does not neglect diplomacy as secondary and also views it as an international institution. There are at least three crucial analytical points that Jönsson & Hall make in regard to diplomacy as such. Firstly, as already mentioned, they regard diplomacy as an *institution*. Secondly, they claim that diplomacy should be regarded as an institution of international societies instead of an institution of states or other entities. At this point, a comprehensive explanation of *international society* from Hedley Bull (1977) should be presented for more clarity:

> A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. (p. 13)

The idea behind Bull's *international society* lies in the notion that the contact between the states is based on the recognized interests and values they have in common, not just because they have sufficient influence on each other's behavior/decisions (i.e. the case of the *international system*). At the same time, in such relations, the states accept some common rules, such as mutual respect, honor for their agreements, or limited (or even excluded) use of force against one another. Moreover, cooperation in the working of common institutions includes also the indispensable conduct of diplomacy. This is exactly the way that Jönsson & Hall treats diplomacy as an institution throughout their book. Lastly, it also needs to be mentioned that they view diplomacy as constitutive of international society with special parameters that construct its constitutive character. These parameters/three essential dimensions of diplomacy are distinguished as "communication, representation, and reproduction of international society" (Jönsson & Hall, 2005, p. 25).

Crucial in Jönsson & Hall's theory is the emphasis on diplomacy as an institution. Therefore, I believe, a comprehensive and appropriate definition should also be stated here:

> Diplomacy, we posit, should be seen as an institution, understood broadly as a relatively stable collection of social practices consisting of easily recognized *roles* coupled with underlying *norms* and a set of *rules* or conventions defining appropriate behavior for, and governing relations among, occupants of these roles. (Jönsson & Hall, 2005, p. 25)

In less abstract terms, the scholars imply here *roles* – the particular functions, duties, and positions – of diplomats whose behavior and mutual relationships are coordinated by *norms* and *rules* – such as the protocol, immunities, or unwritten widely recognized guidelines. While *norms* are rather implicit and unspoken, *rules* represent specific, explicit behavioral regulations that facilitate predictability between the diplomatic agents. In this sense, the accepted behavior, activities, as well as what to expect is more or less clearly and stably determined by diplomacy as an institution.

When it comes to understanding this position of diplomacy, it is important to look at the process of institutionalization through which it actually evolves into an institution. This process basically describes the way that used practices progressively develop into a shared system of rules that then give structure to accepted roles, behavior, and actions. Jönsson & Hall (2005)

speak here about "coordinating and patterning behavior" (p. 39). Followingly the Swedish scholars distinguish between three levels of institutionalization (symbolic and cognitive level; level of rules; level of organization), while for the purpose of this thesis, it is particularly interesting to take a closer look at the first cognitive level. This level entails the development of shared symbols and references, a common language [what is meant here is not a common *tongue*, but a common *code of conduct*], which, according to Jönsson & Hall (2005), enables a common understanding of symbols, actions, and words in diplomatic communication. Through the institutionalization of the protocol itself, phrases are standardized, the use of expressions is determined, and diplomatic actions are clearly restricted, which, in its essence, actually facilitates a shared understanding of appropriate behavior (Jönsson & Hall, 2005).

As it was also emphasized in this thesis, Jönsson & Hall (2005) argue that diplomacy and communication are inseparable and indispensable – since communication represents one of the three essential pillars of diplomacy. However, they also point out that achieving shared meaning (ergo communicating successfully) has been and remains problematic in diplomatic communication. What represents a possible solution here is the common diplomatic language, and that both in terms of linguistic as well as broader sociological layer. In a purely linguistic sense, the creation of *lingua franca* tackled some challenges that arose due to the multitude of languages in the diplomatic realm. But to be really successful in communication, diplomats need more than just a mutual understanding of one language – there is a need for a common code, an unconscious pre-knowledge, a pattern of thought that followingly facilitates collective understanding and structure of meaning. As Jönsson & Hall (2005) claim, "the diplomatic dialogue, therefore, can be seen to be based on a code that is shared by members of the diplomatic community" (p. 72). In this dialogue, diplomats need to both interpret and produce signs while relying on their intuitive semiotic skills.

Intercultural communication training serves as a powerful tool for the facilitation of the creation of the common code and pattern of communication that Jönsson & Hall refer to. The Swedish scholars do not omit the role of intercultural communication in diplomacy. As they claim, despite the stressed shared code, diplomatic agents are still members of particular cultures with their particular coding and conveying of meaning. These might produce different meanings when interpreted by diplomats from diverse cultural backgrounds. Which one of these codes – whether the common diplomatic code or the code of a particular national culture – takes precedence is difficult to distinguish, as they usually create a fluctuating mix. Therefore,

Jönsson & Hall (2005) comment that diplomats have to be comfortable with the ambiguity of these interactions, while also noting that knowledge of cultural conventions enables smoother and more understandable signaling.

3.2. Applications of the Theory

Various scholars have throughout the years applied the theory of institutionalism to a broad range of topics. Sometimes, the application of the theory is obvious, even from the title, other times it might be hidden between the lines of the argument outlined in the article. In this subchapter, both of these cases will be presented.

The first case is, for instance, contained in the article from Jozef Bátora (2005) titled *Does the European Union transform the institution of diplomacy?*, where he treats "diplomacy as a [constitutive] framework of principles, rules and organized patterns of behavior regulating interstate relations" (p. 44). The Slovak scholar also elaborates on the appropriateness of actions of diplomats as well as states, which makes the development in the international environment both understandable and predictable. Here, the argument of institutionalism lies in the notion that through the set rules, routines, organizational structures, and practices in diplomacy, a common institutional identity of states (facilitated through diplomacy as an institution) arises. Moreover, Bátora (2005) explicitly mentions his pre-departure position from the theory of institutionalism in his articles and characterizes diplomacy as an institution by five mutually constitutive features: a) the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Conduct (1961) represents a transnationally respected legal set of rules setting the legitimacy, rights, and obligations in diplomatic conduct; b) transnationally, there is a shared professional identity and accepted values among diplomats, which are facilitated by common recruitment and socialization processes at MFAs; c) the use of shared professional language (i.e. the *lingua franca*) is also transnational; d) shared norms and principles such as diplomatic immunities or extraterritoriality are recognized and accepted on a transnational level as well; e) standard procedures and working methods are transnationally distributed and exerted. However, as Bátora argues throughout his article, this institution of diplomacy with its established rules, norms, and appropriateness is challenged by the process of European integration.

The second case I want to present concerning the application of the theory of institutionalism are academic debates on the common diplomatic culture or the common culture of diplomacy.

For instance, Bolewski (2008) raises in his article the question of whether there is "a common culture of diplomacy shared by all participants involved in the interactive process of diplomacy" (p. 150). Followingly, he admits that diplomats share some behavioral similarities, guide their actions according to common social rules, follow identical rules, as well as are used to alike procedures. Even though Bolewski is skeptical of the existence of a *unique* common diplomatic culture, his elaboration on norms, rules, and behavioral patterns specific to diplomats' work notably recalls the theory of institutionalism in diplomacy.

On the contrary, for example Rana (2004) views the existence of a specific diplomatic culture as very realistic. According to him, since diplomacy is regulated both by law and custom and the states' structures for the conduct of bilateral/multilateral relations are standardized, there is indeed a pattern unique to the diplomatic profession – the diplomats share certain common characteristics. He mentions some common functional and professional skills, incorporated goals and tasks, as well as shared values of diplomatic agents. Despite the fact that Rana (2004) distinguishes the culture of individuals and institutional culture, his idea of a shared generalized diplomatic culture corresponds to nuances of institutionalism in diplomacy as presented by Jönsson and Hall.

4. Methodology

Building on my literature review, I wish to now continue to the empirical part in order to proceed with my research in the context of Slovak diplomacy. In this chapter, I will briefly outline my methodological approach, stating my research question and hypothesis, as well as elaborating on the method of collecting the data and its analysis.

This thesis concentrates on the research question on how Slovak diplomats acquire essential skills in intercultural communication. Based on this, I formulated the following hypothesis:

> *Slovak diplomats do not receive formal training in intercultural communication structured by the Ministry of Slovak Affairs. However, they acquire skills in this area either through a) other forms of education, or b) self-education, or c) learning from mistakes, or d) by getting institutionalized (Jönsson & Hall, 2005) into diplomatic practices and following the recognized behavior in their surroundings.*

In order to firstly confirm or confute the assumption of missing formal diplomatic training with a particular interest in the field of intercultural communication, I contacted Mr. Marek Brieška, who is the director of Diplomatic Academy. The full statement on this matter, corrected and confirmed by Mr. Brieška himself, can be found in Appx 1.

However, to answer my set research question, I had to choose the appropriate method of collecting data. As I was interested in personal experiences, opinions, and carriers of individual Slovak diplomats, the choice for gathering qualitative data was clear. As Schutt (2019) claims, "qualitative methods emphasize observations about natural behavior and artifacts that capture social life as participants experience it" (p. 647), which was applicable in the case of my research. Even though there are many types of qualitative methods, for the purpose of this study, intensive semi-structured interviews were chosen. Through intensive interviewing, I wished to learn "about people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings (…) in depth and on their own terms, and in the context of their situations" (Schutt, 2019, p. 685). The semi-structured character allowed for great flexibility during both preparing and conducting the interviews (see Horton et al., 2004), yet some pre-existing structure of questions navigated the whole process in certain logical boundaries. I prepared six questions in advance (see Appx. 2), and during the interview, I evaluated which topic or response from the particular respondent needed elaboration – in such

a case, I asked supplementary questions.

For the selection of my sample, I proceeded with a non-probability sampling method, as often used in qualitative research (see McCombes, 2019). Concretely, I used the purposive sampling strategy, which enhances the relevance of respondents to the research question. This strategy is usually applied when certain individuals or categories of individuals "may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured" (Robinson, 2010, p. 32). It is highly selective and based on the researcher's prior understanding and knowledge of the studied topic.

I personally decided to recruit one scholar and seven active Slovak diplomats in order to gain relevant insights for my research question. The scholar of repute has been approached due to valuable experiences from several IOs and IIs, as well as important political offices, which were relevant when discussing the circumstances of Slovak diplomacy. When it comes to formatting the sample of Slovak diplomats, I tried to recruit people whose professional careers ranged from various MFA working positions, through different types of appointments at embassies, to permanent representations or work at IOs and IIs (I managed to cover the EU, NATO, OECD, World Bank, and the UN). Moreover, I also approached diplomats with different lengths of professional careers – while Mrs. Brocková and Mr. Mišík belong to the first generation of diplomats who entered the Slovak diplomatic service during the time of the secession of Czechoslovakia in 1992, young diplomats such as Mrs. Karvašová and Mrs. Šujak have worked in Slovak foreign service only for approximately 13 years. Another factor that I tried to balance in my sample was gender, as the way male and female diplomats communicate might play a role. However, as one male respondent had to cancel our meeting, my sample in the end consisted of 4 female and 3 male Slovak diplomats. All these provisions ensured that a vast array of views were covered by the selection of participants.

The altogether 8 interviews were conducted between 21.01.2025 and 17.02.2025. While almost all took place in person in Bratislava or Vienna, there was one exception of an online interview due to physical distance. The language choice of all eight respondents was Slovak. Moreover, every respondent was asked to sign an informed consent prior to or immediately after the interview while also offered a physical or electronic copy. Upon the respondents' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded, while the recordings and respective transcripts remain confidentially stored by the researcher. All diplomats (Mr. Bátor, Mrs. Brocková, Mr.

Wlachovský, Mr. Mišík, Mrs. Karvašová, Mrs. Šujak, Mrs. Dubeňová) allowed for their names to be displayed, while the scholar preferred the confidentiality of identity.

For the analysis of the gathered qualitative data, I have decided to do a thematic analysis. Thus, identifying patterns in the opinions, ideas, and experiences of the interviewed diplomats and ordering them into common themes (see Caulfield, 2023). However, it needs to be recognized here that my observations, evaluations, and findings cannot ever be "pure". I am not a *tabula rasa* – I bring my own understandings and interpretations into this research. I am biased and influenced by my own worldview, values, and equipped knowledge. However, I honestly approached this empirical part of my thesis with an open and critical mind.

5. Uncovering the Experiences of Slovak Diplomats: Learning by Doing?

In this chapter, I aim to conclude my research by the analysis of my qualitative through thematic analysis as mentioned. I will proceed with elaboration on the main identified themes within the interviews, as well as mention some additional findings of importance, which were brought up by particular respondents.

With the use of different expressions, the interviewed diplomats almost unanimously agreed that communication is an essential, elementary, and crucial tool/part of diplomacy. Moreover, some of them even explicitly recognized the significance of intercultural communication in diplomacy. Mr. Bátor, for instance, claimed that "diplomacy is essentially about communication with other cultures", while Mrs. Brocková pointed out, that every country has a specific culture and language, therefore "every negotiation is intercultural". Interesting was also a remark from Mr. Mišík, who not only reminded of the importance of intercultural dialogue in diplomacy but emphasized, that diplomats have to be familiar with the specifics or main cultural attributes of the host country. Not only to "build bridges" and develop a closer professional relationship but also "to avoid situations that may be uncomfortable for your partner or yourself".

In this context, the influence of culture on communication (style) has been acknowledged by at least four diplomats explicitly. Mr. Bátor, Mr. Mišík, and Mr. Wlachovský all mentioned examples, where they felt cultural differences in communication with other diplomats. For instance, Mr. Wlachovský perceived that his American colleagues were less skeptical and cynical than "Europeans". On the other hand, from his many experiences in NATO, Mr. Bátor mentioned, that his Turkish colleagues approached negotiations as a win-or-lose game, while diplomats from the Netherlands were often direct, the French ones were mysterious but also very assertive, and the Americans' accommodating character was actually only a wall/picture. On the top of this, Mrs. Brocková even added that "communication styles vary even between countries that may outwardly seem very similar", such as, from her experiences, the Slovak and Czech Republic.

As elaborated in the theoretical part, intercultural communication differences can bring several problematic situations, which can result in diplomatic faux pas. All respondents, including the

scholar, were able to think of at least one. Mrs. Karvašová, for instance, mentioned her personal experience with an unreciprocated handshake from the side of an Asian male diplomat, which was similar to the experience of Mr. Bátor, when a Muslim diplomat refused to shake hands with our female president. Other complications in intercultural communication included almost offering alcohol to Muslim delegation or severe verbal conflicts between Turkish and Armenian diplomats full of "culturally-ethnical stereotypes". Also, the "dirtiness" of left hand in Arabic countries, arrogancy of Chinese diplomats, absurd receptiveness and tolerance of Americans, or controversially perceived direct critique towards Asian diplomats were mentioned. The examples brought up by the diplomats applied to both verbal and non-verbal communication while relating to some cultural and educational gaps.

As it stems from the conducted interviews, there are at least three ways in which diplomats partially substitute intercultural communication training. First is the individual preparation or self-education, which already the scholar from my first interview clearly marked as "absolutely essential" or as "absolute necessity". Although Mr. Bátor also claimed the preparation to be important and Mr. Wlachovský shared his personal experiences with self-education, it was interesting to recognize a common pattern from the side of Mrs. Karvašová and Mr. Mišík. They both advocate for individual preparation in terms of learning about your partners prior to meeting them, ergo knowing your partner as a person, not just a "business partner". Moreover, both diplomats, despite the differences in their careers and age, thematize "trust" as an important notion in this sense. For them, knowing sufficiently about a partner allows for building some kind of trust as the guarantee of success. As Mr. Mišík claims here: "You can learn things, and you can observe things, but that can often be the decisive moment that leads you to success—or the opposite".

The second way is collecting intercultural communication skills through practical experiences, or "*learning-by-doing"* as Mrs. Brocková labeled it. Although for instance Mr. Bátor recognize the importance on individual preparation, he also claims that merely studying intercultural differences from books is not enough, "you really have to experience it". In this regard, Mr. Mišík clearly claims that "the best school is life itself – practice" and that "life will teach you" to operate within the intercultural differences. Even though Mrs. Karvašová realized and warned about the possibility of faux pas, she also agrees that the best preparation for a diplomat in this sense is practice. Moreover, she adds that in her case, it was a lot about "observing how other countries and diplomats operate". To conclude, even the scholar from my first interview

stated, that due to quickly evolving world, the diplomats will always "have to learn on the go".

The last point in substituting intercultural education is passing on knowledge between colleagues, which was unexpected, yet very interesting for me. The first respondent to outline this thought was Mr. Bátor when he mentioned that his colleagues appointed in culturally significantly different countries "had to learn much more and gain more experience from those who had already been there" or that he himself was at first only observing his colleagues leading high-level negotiations. This was further developed by Mrs. Brocková, who pointed out that she was always thankful to her colleagues at embassies when they warned her about some cultural sensitivities or specificities in the particular country. Similarly, Mr. Mišík remarked that it is natural for diplomats to consult and prepare with colleagues present in the host countries, as they are the experts on that particular region. For instance, Niki considered this to be an advantage of diplomats, that "there are always colleagues who have already been to the given country, which means there is someone to ask". Thus, learning from older, more experienced colleagues appears to be a quite common way how to substitute a lack of intercultural knowledge.

When asking the diplomats about their opinions on the need for intercultural communication training for Slovak diplomats, three main topics were identified. Firstly, diplomats elaborate on if and why such training is necessary. Most diplomats acknowledge that Slovak diplomats do need training in intercultural communication. Mrs. Dubeňová believes that having it would be positive, but it is only really necessary in regions outside the EU; Mr. Mišík also thinks that intercultural training would be a good thing, but it is not "a necessary prerequisite for our diplomats to be successful", which goes in line with the institutional argument about learning from interaction. On the other hand, Mr. Bátor alike with Mrs. Brocková believe, that an interculturally prepared diplomat can be more effective, while also being able to start working sooner and prevent unwanted faux pas, as Mrs. Brocková lists. According to Mrs. Karvašová, it is a disadvantage for Slovak diplomats not to be provided such training. Her views align with Mr. Bátor's view, that education is all above important in case of more "exotic" countries or culturally strongly distinct regions. Moreover, Mrs. Šujak notes that extra training cannot do harm, and since communication "is a fundamental tool [of diplomacy], it should be as good or as developed as possible".

Another major theme that was raised in the interviews addresses the ideal type of interculturally

competent diplomat and the training they need. This was all above stressed by Mrs. Brocková, who remarked that the pre-posting training "mostly tries to cover the needs of everyone, the whole group of people heading to different regions of the world", which makes it very culture-generic (that is an issue, which was also addressed by Mr. Bátor and Mrs. Karvašová). She therefore believes that the training needs to address more the specificities of particular territories. Also, she pointed out as problematic that we do not have specialists on concrete regions and countries, and since "the essence of diplomacy requires regionalization", there should be specified territories of vital interest for Slovakia, where targeted pre-posting trainings are in place. Mr. Wlachovský similarly warned that we have very few diplomats–experts, even when it comes to our closest neighbors like Hungary. In this manner, Mr. Mišík claimed: "We are more generalists because we don't have enough people or the luxury to have, say, specialists dedicated solely to one specific region". This relates to the size of our MFA, but also as Mr. Wlachovský mentioned, to its lack of financial resources.

As a third training-related topic, I observed an emphasis on the importance of a diplomat's character. The first person to bring this up was the interviewed scholar, who argued that "you can't achieve empathy, creativity, or new ideas through any kind of training", the diplomat has to have it in him. In this regard, Mrs. Brocková also thought that if someone does not have empathy, not even several appointment experiences will make him skillful. Moreover, she reminded that a diplomat needs to be perceptive, "read and sense" the country and respect its nuances. That is also something that Mr. Mišík agreed with, as he mentioned that a diplomat should inherently be interested in the specifics of other cultures. Thus, although he believes that intercultural communication training is a good thing, he does not consider it "an essential prerequisite for our diplomats to be successful".

Lastly, I want to mention a reoccurring point on European cultural closeness and organizational culture, where the opinions of my respondents varied on a wide scale. On one side was Mrs. Dubeňová, who claimed that she did not experience any differences in intercultural communication, as the EU shares a common mentality and she "communicated with people who had a similar agenda, similar values, and a similar approach". On the other Mrs. Šujak, who claimed that there is always a cultural difference between the countries. Somewhere close to Mrs. Dubeňová was Mr. Mišík claiming that the communication standard within the EU is more or less identical and the culture is very similar. Mrs. Brocková agreed that within Europe, "a certain common culture is declared", yet the diversity is noticeable in details. Moreover, she

brought up the idea of like-minded organizational culture and communication within the OECD, which was further developed by Mrs. Karvašová. She believed that since the EU diplomats spend so much time together and function within common institutions, "a relatively close common culture" is present in the case of Brussels. This aligns with Bátora's argument when he claims that "traditional" institution of diplomacy is challenged by the process of European integration.

Apart from the above-mentioned reoccurring themes, there were several interesting ideas expressed by the individual diplomats, which I wish to briefly touch upon here. First is the issue regarding the difficulties that the family of a diplomat faces due to the nature of the diplomatic profession. This was primarily raised by the scholar, as they mentioned, that changing the living environment during an appointment, is "very difficult for the partners of diplomats" but the "children probably have it the hardest". Mrs. Brocková argued similarly and added, that the well-being of the family is closely connected to the diplomat's motivation to travel for an appointment. These opinions cleared to me the importance of intercultural training for family members, as outlined in the subchapter 2.3.2.

Connected to this was Mrs. Šujak's remark on the fact, that cultural shocks can and do occur, but they can also occur after returning home. That is because a diplomat lives with the whole family in a particular system for four years and the "old" system back home becomes distinct. She even mentioned a personal anecdote, when her husband experienced such a shock upon returning to Slovakia with her.

As next, the importance of protocol was briefly touched upon. The scholar argued, that to operate successfully in a culturally different country of appointment, the protocol is not enough. On the other hand, Mrs. Brocková thought, that protocol is sufficient in case of foreign business trip, but not in terms of longer stays or appointments in a particular country. Oppositely, Mr. Bátor claimed, that he has learned a lot during his career from protocol and that there are instances, when intercultural knowledge overlaps with protocolar guidelines. When talking with Mrs. Brocková about the success of negotiations in intercultural settings, she had an interesting remark on men vs. women diplomats in communication. She argued that the gender of a diplomat can also be a factor, which can influence the outcome of negotiations. From her point of view, women were more inclusive in communication, had the tendency to engage and integrate actors into the communication, while men did not demonstrate this ability.

Furthermore, Mr. Wlachovský commented on the importance of knowing a language of a particular country. Even though he recognized the use of *lingua franca*, he also claimed that "for a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, and historical context, it is beneficial to know the local language". Also Mrs. Karvašová noted in this regard, that learning the language, trying to understand and speak, is one of the most important assets of any diplomat.

Last but not least, there has been a very innovative point from Mrs. Karvašová, which I cannot omit. She expressed, that educating our diplomats merely in intercultural communication is not enough. The training should be more complex, allowing the diplomats to develop their cultural awareness towards their own country but also the host country. Somehow, intercultural communication training could be connected to cultural diplomacy, which would also allow our diplomats to present Slovakia properly.

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I showed that Slovak diplomats do not receive sufficient intercultural communication training and, therefore, need to acquire essential intercultural communication skills in other ways. The absence of intercultural communication training was reflected in Mr. Brieška's comment stating that "training in intercultural communication is not included in the educational program for Slovak diplomats" – he recognizes the "absence of a structured educational program with intercultural communication content" (Appx. 1). Although there is this one lecture on intercultural communication during the attestation education, considering the theoretical background of this thesis as well as the answers from interviewed diplomats, I cannot recognize this as *formal training in intercultural communication structured by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

However, how do the Slovak diplomats then acquire the skills in intercultural communication? My main assumption prior to interviewing the diplomats was that other forms of education, self-education, learning by mistakes, or institutionalization facilitate diplomats to gain such skills. In the interviews, diplomats pointed out that there have been other forms of education that prepared them for intercultural communication instead of official diplomatic training. Whether it was a university education (Brocková, Mišík) or foreign educational programs and fellowships (Bátor, Wlachovský). Secondly, the diplomats' answers showed that individual preparation before travels, reading books, or even studying the partner and his cultural context prior to meetings was a common practice. Moreover, the interviews' findings also suggest that diplomats can learn from their own mistakes in intercultural communication. Named situations such as how Mr. Bátor almost bought a cow because he unconsciously repeated a hand gesture or how Mrs. Karvašová got surprised by a refused handshake from a male diplomat show that the diplomats realized their mistake and will, naturally, try to prevent it from happening again.

Most importantly, and this connects the findings to my institutional argument, in several instances diplomats discussed how they and their colleagues are institutionalized into intercultural communication practices – for instance, by the aforementioned learning from practice and more experienced colleagues or observing others. Moreover, following protocol (so the *norms* and *rules* from Jönsson's and Hall's definition) in order to prevent some problems was also identified several times. Lastly, the organizational culture in the OECD (Brocková) or

the EU (Karvašová) also resonates with the notion of institutionalism in diplomacy.

To conclude, this research has enlightened on the work of Slovak diplomats and has shown that it is possible for diplomats in small states to be successful in their profession and achieve their main goal as diplomats – putting forward national interests – even with limited or, sometimes, in the total absence of formal training. Diplomats, as this study suggests, acquire the essential skills in this area through other forms of education, self-education, learning from mistakes, or by getting institutionalized into diplomatic practices.

Resume

Táto bakalárska práca pojednáva o interkultúrnej komunikácii v diplomacii a diplomatickom tréningu. Zameriava sa predovšetkým na situáciu slovenských diplomatiek a diplomatov, ktorých oficiálny diplomatický tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie je limitovaný až absentujúci. Výskum prezentovaný v tejto práci sa preto snaží odkryť, akým spôsobom získavajú slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati potrebné skúsenosti v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie.

Prvá teoretická kapitola prezentuje koncept interkultúrnej komunikácie, jej základy v americkej antropológii 60. rokov minulého storočia ako i v priekopníckom diplomatickom tréningu americkej zahraničnej služby tejto doby. Zároveň analyzuje neoddeliteľnosť konceptov *kultúry* a *komunikácie*, a prináša kľúčovú definíciu samotnej interkultúrnej komunikácie. Druhá z podkapitol sa venuje *interkultúrnej komunikačnej kompetencii* (ICC), ktorá predstavuje schopnosť efektívne a vhodne interkultúrne komunikovať, a to bez predsudkov no v plnom vedomí kultúrnych rozdielov.

Druhá z teoretických kapitol sa už konkrétne venuje interkultúrnej komunikácii v diplomacii. Hovorí o význame a neoddeliteľnej súčasti interkultúrnej komunikácie v diplomatických praktikách, pričom pripomína, že úspech samotných diplomatických rokovaní a vyjednávaní úzko súvisí s efektívnou interkultúrnou komunikáciou. V kontexte efektívnosti zároveň varuje pred možnými problémami a komplikáciami, ktoré v diplomatickej interkultúrnej komunikácii môžu vznikať. Spomínané sú kultúrne dezinterpretácie, jazykové komplikácie, konflikty vychádzajúce z kultúrnych stereotypov či neverbálnej komunikácie, i nedorozumenia medzi rozdielnymi kontextuálnymi kultúrami. Rozsiahla tretia podkapitola následne rozoberá problematiku diplomatického tréningu v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie, pričom pripomína jeho dôležitosť v jednotlivých pracovných i osobnostných spektrách života diplomatov. Zároveň rozvíja expertné odporúčania týkajúce sa obsahu a štruktúry ideálnych tréningov v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie. Na záver tiež prináša príklady zahraničných (diplomatických) tréningov, kurzov a programov zameraných na túto oblasť.

Tretia a posledná kapitola teoretickej časti práce sa koncentruje na teóriu inštitucionalizmu, ktorej implikácie sú v kontexte chýbajúceho tréningu v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie

podstatné. Táto teória predstavená švédskymi akademikmi Jönssonom a Hallom hovorí, že diplomacia by mala byť vnímaná ako inštitúcia, teda ako súbor sociálnych praktík pozostávajúcich z rolí, základných noriem a pravidiel/konvencií, ktoré definujú vhodné správanie predstaviteľov týchto rolí a riadia vzťahy medzi nimi. Po základnom predstavení a vysvetlení inštitucionalizmu nasleduje krátka podkapitola, ktorá predstavuje akademické aplikácie danej teórie.

Ako štvrtá nasleduje kapitola metodológie, v ktorej je okrem uvedenej výskumnej otázky a hypotézy taktiež ozrejmený metodologický postup zberu kvalitatívnych dát kľúčových pre tento výskum. Ide o zber prostredníctvom ôsmych intenzívnych semi-štruktúrovaných interview, ktorých respondenti – slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati – boli vybraní na základe zámernej výberovej stratégie. Deklarované je taktiež trvanie zberu dát od 21.01.2025 do 17.02.2025, spôsob konania a jazyk interview, uschovanie prepisov, poskytnutie informovaného súhlasu a požadovaná dôvernosť identity. Na záver je vysvetlený spôsob analýzy nazbieraných kvalitatívnych dát prostredníctvom tematickej analýzy.

Poslednou kapitolou je samotná tematická analýza pomenúvajúca niekoľko opakujúcich sa tém či myšlienok, ktoré boli spomenuté počas rozhovor. Najdôležitejším výsledkom je pozorovanie troch spôsobov, ktorými si slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati čiastočne nahrádzajú limitovaný tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie – samovzdelávaním alebo individuálnou prípravou, prostredníctvom "*learning-by-doing*“, respektíve získavaním praktických skúseností, a nadobudnutím poznatkov od svojich skúsenejších kolegov. Spomenuté sú však i niektoré zaujímavé individuálne postrehy jednotlivých diplomatov.

Bakalársku prácu uzatvára kapitola diskusie a záveru. V nej je konštatované, že výskum prezentovaný v tejto práci dokazuje, že keďže slovenské diplomatky a slovenskí diplomati neabsolvujú formálny tréning v interkultúrnej komunikácii štruktúrovaný slovenským Ministerstvom zahraničných vecí, získavajú potrebné zručnosti v tejto oblasti prostredníctvom iných foriem vzdelávania, samoštúdiom, učením sa z vlastných chýb alebo inštitucionalizáciou do diplomatických praktík.

Tento výskum preto môže prispieť k lepšiemu pochopeniu diplomacie malých štátov a toho, ako môže uspieť aj pri úplnej alebo čiastočnej absencii formálneho tréningu v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Mr. Brieška's statement

Brieška oficiálne vyjadrenie k 03.12.2024

Tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie nie je obsiahnutý vo vzdelávacom programe slovenských diplomatov a slovenských diplomatiek. Avšak súčasťou atestačného vzdelávania na Ministerstve zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí Slovenskej Republiky je prednáška pod vedením riaditeľa odboru diplomatickej akadémie Mgr. Mareka Brieška, PhD., ktorá vysvetľuje problematiku kultúr vysokého a nízkeho kontextu, pojednáva o kultúrnej senzitivite, mimike, haptike, ale aj o spôsobe rokovania v jednotlivých kultúrne rôznych krajinách.

Napriek absencii štruktúrovaného vzdelávacieho programu s obsahom interkultúrnej komunikácie, možno konštatovať, že uvedená skutočnosť nebráni vo efektívnom a kvalitnom výkone zahraničnej služby slovenských diplomatov a diplomatiek.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for diplomats

1. Can you introduce yourself, please, and provide an overview of your work, current and former posts, as well as the education and training you acquired?
   1.1. SK: Môžete sa, prosím, predstaviť a zhrnúť svoju kariéru, spomenúť svoje predošlé pozície, kde pracujete aktuálne, a zároveň aké vzdelanie a tréning ste absolvovali?

2. In my thesis, I treat intercultural communication as communication among people from different cultures or of diverse cultural backgrounds. How do you perceive the role of communication and especially intercultural communication in diplomacy?
   2.1. SK: V mojej bakalárskej práci považujem interkultúrnu komunikáciu za komunikáciu medzi ľuďmi z rôznych kultúr alebo s rôznymi kultúrnym zázemím. Ako vnímate úlohu komunikácie a predovšetkým interkultúrnej komunikácie v diplomacii?

3. Did you receive any formal training in intercultural communication? Either in your attestation education, pre-departure training or even during some workshops… tell me more.
   3.1. SK: Absolvovali ste nejaký formálne tréning v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie? Či už v rámci atestačného vzdelávania, školenia pred vyslaním alebo na nejakých workshopoch…

4. During your diplomatic career, have you experienced any misunderstandings, misinterpretations, overall problems in intercultural communication?
   4.1. SK: Zažili ste počas svojej diplomatickej kariéry nejaké nedorozumenia, dezinterpretácie, vo všeobecnosti problémy v interkultúrnej komunikácii?

5. If you did not get trained, or even if you did so – how did you adapt in or prepare for situations where intercultural communication was necessary? Can you maybe mention some example(s)?
   5.1. SK: Ak ste neabsolvovali tréning, alebo aj v prípade, že áno – ako ste sa prispôsobili alebo pripravili na situácie, v ktorých bola interkultúrna komunikácia nevyhnutná? Mohli by ste uviesť nejaký príklad?

6. What is your personal opinion on training diplomats in intercultural communication? Do you think it is essential? Or would you say that a diplomat can succeed in his office even in the absence of proper training in intercultural communication?
   6.1. SK: Aký je váš osobný názor na trénovanie/školenie diplomatov v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie? Myslíte si, že je to nevyhnutné? Alebo by ste povedali, že diplomat môže uspieť vo svojej funkcii aj bez adekvátneho tréningu v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácii?