

## INTERCULTURAL ASPECTS FOR THE PREPARATION OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE MISSIONS

### A NEMZETKÖZI BÉKEMISSZIÓK FELKÉSZÍTÉSÉNEK KULTÚRAKÖZI SAJÁTOSÁGAI

Amikor a 20. század második felének és a 21. század elejének társadalmi-történelmi folyamatait vizsgáljuk, megfigyelhetjük a világ különböző kultúráinak egyre sokoldalúbb és egyre erőteljesebb érintkezését. Századunk egyik kulcsfogalma a globalizáció, vagyis a modern világ népeinek növekvő kapcsolatrendszere és kölcsönös függése. A globalizáció következtében egymástól igen távol élő emberek, közösségek is kapcsolatba kerülnek egymással. A köznapi ember, de még a szakemberek egy része is úgy tartja, hogy a globalizáció elsősorban gazdasági folyamat. Az egységesítő törekvések azonban számos más területen is tapasztalhatók: az etnikai, a vallási, a kulturális, a politikai, a civilizációs és egyéb szférákban. Tanulmányozásuk, elemzésük segítségével kaphatunk választ a világban zajló társadalmi folyamatokra, és ezzel együtt a multikulturalitás és annak kommunikációs kihívásaira is.

When studying the social and historical processes in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can observe more and more wide ranging and intense contacts between the various cultures of the world. One of the key ideas of our century is globalisation, that is, a growing network of relationships and interdependence of the nations of our modern world. As a result of globalisation even people and communities who live very far from one another can get into contact. Both lay persons and some specialists think that globalization is an economic process, primarily. However, we can see that similar unification efforts are made in many other areas, too: ethnic, cultural, political, civilization, religious and other. The study and analysis of these trends will help us find correct responses to social processes going on worldwide, including the issue of multiculturalism and its communications challenges.

#### INTRODUCTION

When studying the social and historical processes in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can observe more and more wide ranging and intense contacts between the various cultures of the world. One of the key ideas of our century is globalisation, that is, a growing network of relationships and interdependence of the nations of our modern world. Technological development speeds up the flow of goods, capital, people and information. As a result of globalisation even people and communities who live very far from one another can get into contact. One of the spectacular signs of economic globalisation is that almost identical shopping centres are emerging in most big cities of the world, which all sell the same goods and merchandise. Scientific literature and empirical studies show that the process is irreversible. Both lay persons and some specialists think that globalization is an economic process, primarily. However, we can see that similar unification efforts are made in many other areas, too: ethnic, cultural, political, civilization, religious and other. The study and analysis of these trends will help us find correct responses to social processes going on worldwide, including the issue of multiculturalism and its communications challenges. (Vincze, 2003:93)

#### NEW CHALLENGES RAISED BY THE ACCESSION TO THE NATO AND EU

Hungary has been a NATO member for ten years and an EU member for five years, now. By joining these alliances, our country undertakes a lot more international assignments, which all offer new opportunities for the Hungarian army and police officers and warrant officers. The forced isolation of the country before the political restructuring took place has by now changed into a high degree of openness: allied forces take part in joint exercises, they change experience; and more and more foreign students can be seen in our universities and colleges. It is obvious that specialists who intend to stay in a specific country, i.e., in a specific cultural region for any length of time simply must have an amount of knowledge and a set of useful information to rely on in order to have an insight in the national customs, ethical and religious specifics and in the typical standards of interpersonal and social communication in a host country. (Vincze, 1999:18.)

### *The preparation of the personnel delegated to a foreign mission*

Our officers serving in staffs or organisations consisting of the representatives of several nations say that it is not the lack of language proficiency that poses the biggest hurdle to understand the people in a foreign country, but rather, it is that the person on mission is unaware of the totally different communication customs, social and historical traditions, and of the geopolitical specifics there. These shortcomings prevent the person on mission from getting on well in a country's social build-up of which he has hardly any knowledge. Servicemen and policemen are prepared for foreign missions on individual training courses. In line with preparing the candidates professionally, these courses help their smooth adaptation to the culture of the host country so that they can learn and recognise the communication customs found strange there.

### *The preparation for the new challenges of international security*

In response to the new challenges of international security, multinational organisations have been set up to implement military and peace keeping missions. Servicemen and policemen who are going to serve in multinational staffs have to prepare themselves for the challenges raised by multicultural environments. The language being a basic cultural code of communication is an indispensable tool to understand others. However, a language course alone, no matter how successfully it is completed, is not sufficient. The individual's well-being and success greatly depends on how well he knows the cultural background behind verbal understanding in the foreign cultural environment he is working in. It is something one can acquire only through socialisation while coexisting with a given nation. E.g. one should be aware of the way the idea of time is considered in a given culture, or how seriously punctuality is taken, or when to shake hands, or how and when to accept or refuse an invitation, how to eat, how to phone, how to tip, or how to negotiate, etc. according to local standards. It means that those who are going to work in a multicultural environment should know the culture, customs and the standards of conduct both of the host country and of the coalition partners.

Should one not know these social rules, he might get into a state of *cultural shock*. A person can be exposed to a cultural shock when he meets for the first time a new cultural environment totally strange to him. A drastic change of the environment, entirely different from the home environment, may cause anxiety or orientation disorder to many. The experience of a cultural shock will have its negative impacts on a person in the first weeks of his adaptation, primarily: all of a sudden, he faces too many challenges in a short time.

This experience strengthens the sensation of disorientation. Here is a short list of challenges a person has to face up to while meeting a strange culture: he finds everything strange; he misses his family background, friends, well-known customs, foods, traditions, and the degree of comfort he is used to, and what is more, he has to overcome the problem of the language. A cultural shock may cause a series of symptoms ranging from a mild irritation, through panic to a psychic crisis. (Bali, p.6.)

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Those staying in a foreign culture may face serious problems in case they have but an inadequate knowledge of the *nonverbal communication customs* and of the codes of social conditioning typical of the host country. A smile, or posture, or a nod may not necessarily convey the meaning we are used to in our own cultural environments.

Even in a multicultural army or police environment, one can often see the feelings of rejection appear: these are *stereotypes or prejudices*, which normally have a negative emotional charge generated as a result of a gross generalization. We cannot tell for certain how much truth these stereotypes convey, because they generally develop as a result of rumours, public beliefs, or of a personal impression, or, they can as well develop to media influence. Stereotypes relevant to a specific nation, if working efficiently, may be the sources of serious tensions at joint work. Real or presumed historical or personal grievances can act as massive hurdles to the successful implementation of a mission.

Therefore, during the preparation of the personnel for a foreign mission special attention should be given to the prejudices and stereotypes possibly turning up in a multicultural environment. A stereotypical mindset magnifies the differences in the ethnic, religious, or national customs and morals of a foreign nation. Though, there are some positive stereotypes, most often however, we can see negative ones, primarily. (Vincze,2003:102.)

Those serving in a foreign environment should be aware of how others look at us and of what they think of us.

Even in the official terminology of international organisations (NATO, EU, UNO, OSCE) one can observe that some *professional terms* are used differently, merely because the *different principles of warfare and a different service culture* based upon the different rules for the use of the military or police force in a country produce a different term usage. One should know this army and police language to the extent his nation participates in the work of the multinational organisation concerned and to the extent the individual is involved in a military or police action.

## CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

There is no universal scientific answer to the question what culture is?

Generally speaking, communication means to give or exchange information via a common code system. This is a process where the exchange of information and ideas goes on continuously. People continuously give and receive signals throughout their lives, i.e., they always communicate. Communication is one of the basics of social life: without it there would not be social life, at all. The word comes from the Latin verb *communico*, -are (tell, give, grant, share, discuss, talk), and from the noun *communicatio*, -onis (publication, implementation, granting, sharing ideas with the audience). Looking at culture from the aspects of communication theory, we can state that the *idea of communication* implies a set of common ideas and emotional information shared by both the issuer (sender) and receiver (addressee) of the communication. The point of communication is to transfer ideas having identical or, at least similar interpretations as correctly as possible. (Vincze, 2004/a:156.)

Intercultural communication is but an interactive communication between partners who follow different standards and values and who use different forms of thinking and of comprehension-evaluation, or simply, it is communication between parties coming from different cultures (e.g. young and old generation, men and women, nation A and nation B). The requirements of a successful intercultural communication are emotional competence and intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural communication is made when one leaves the world of set values he has been socialised for to arrive in a world of values entirely different from his own. Should he disregard the cultural differences, he may encounter conflicts in the process of communication. One of the sources of communication "noise" in a multicultural environment is the different cultural backgrounds of the speakers. In order to avoid this noise, one has to develop and improve his *intercultural competence*.

*The culture of verbal communication*

In interpersonal communication, people normally use two channels to exchange information continuously: *verbal and non-verbal channels*.

A verbal channel is any form of communication made with the help of articulated human speech (language). One of the characteristics of human speech is that it is based on conventional symbols (agreed upon). Being the most efficient tool to communicate, think and to obtain and transfer information, verbal communication implies speech, writing and other speech-based vocal signals.

One of the most important factors to understand the other party in an intercultural communication is language proficiency. A visitor speaking the language well will not feel embarrassed in a foreign environment, because he understands what he is told and can make himself understood. Still, disorders and misunderstandings may happen sometimes. A person having an insight in another culture will then experience what amount of cultural reserve, how many special meanings, symbols, and idiomatic phrases that foreign language has. One has to stay long in a foreign culture before his feeling of isolation fades away. (Buda, 1998:16.)

### *The culture of non-verbal communication*

Another field of communication culture under study is the field of non-verbal communications, meaning communication without words. Research shows that the verbal elements make 30%, while the non-verbal elements give 70% of the communication. The non-verbal signals, also known as body language, are facial expressions, or mimic, as well as gestures, posture and the distance a speaker keeps from the other party. The most commonly used elements of non-verbal communication are *facial expressions* or the way the motions of the muscles reflect the emotions on the face. The eyes, eyebrows and lips also have their share in reflecting emotions. However, most facial expressions are made unconsciously in a communication process, and in most cases, they accompany and mingle with the verbal expressions. A *glance and eye contact* play a controlling role in a communication process, since they act as feedbacks to indicate the degree of understanding and to show the emotional relationship between the parties. *Gestures* (motions of the hands, feet and head), as well as *posture* also have an important part in an efficient and successful communication. Furthermore, the distance or closeness of the speakers has its importance and meaning in a communication process. The *space control* between the parties depends partly on the customs of the culture concerned, and it is partly defined by the speakers' emotions. The distance between communicating parties is normally smaller in the southern countries and in the Arab world, while it is obviously larger among the Northern European and North American people. (Vincze, 2004/b:58.)

### *Intercultural competence*

*Intercultural competence* is a faculty of successfully communicating with people born in different cultures. Or, in a more specific sense of the word, it is an ability to build mutually satisfactory relations with people coming from different cultures. Or, in other words, intercultural competence is actually an adaptation process where a person socializes a foreign culture he is staying in. Adaptation skills can be improved through conscious development. Intercultural competence contains many traits including tolerance, empathy, flexibility, and will and intention to listen to, accept, moreover, to understand a person coming from another culture.

In the globalising world, intercultural communication is bound to have an increasingly important part for the mutual and better understanding between the nations. It is true, however that the coexistence or cooperation of different cultural groups may come with difficulties. As Huntington states, tensions tend to develop along the break line dividing the nations on the basis of economic wealth and political power. However, the problems of cooperation with foreign parties can turn up irrespective of these differences, and they can be active in the most common daily interactions. This means that we may be reluctant to understand and accept cultural differences even when no power aspirations or conflicting eco-

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conomic interests are involved, and therefore, we can easily get into conflicts simply because our human nature is not inherently coded to accept a strange culture, but rather to protect and prefer our own. In order to prevent the conflicts coming from our human nature, we have to recognize that a "stranger" has the same right to have his own national identity, ethnic, religious, and cultural values as we ourselves have. (Vincze, 2003:94.) One important element of manageability is civilized communication. Intercultural communication is implemented through interpersonal communications. Communication is conveyed not only by the language and gestures, but also by a specific mindset, work culture, feasts, customs, clothes, diet, religious and artistic approach, symbols and many other things, building stones to a nation's culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion described earlier, we can state that we should be especially careful while selecting persons for a foreign mission. Of the applicants, those who have realistic ideas about the various problems they might encounter abroad, and who can tackle intercultural problems and who consider their assignments as opportunities for personal and professional growth are very likely to do their work successfully in a foreign environment. This is the reason specific training courses are especially important in the preparation for foreign missions. Here the trainees can obtain an intercultural orientation and sufficient information and they can develop a sound intercultural competence, as well. These skills will help the individuals avoid unpleasant situations and tackle the negative impacts while working in a foreign mission.

In order to implement a military or police mission successfully, it is indispensable for those involved to meet some important criteria: to speak (at least at a basic level) the language of the people in the operation area, to be aware of their cultural and social attitudes, customs, and history, and to be familiar with the local economic and political situation, as well. All this information and knowledge will support the individuals on mission to have an in-depth understanding of the local conditions and have fewer conflicts while taking part in the solution of a situation.

*Kulcsszavak: kultúra, kommunikáció, békefenntartás, globalizáció*

*Keywords: culture, communication, peacekeeping, globalisation*

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