

OFFICIALS' OF THE STATE BORDER GUARD PROFESSIONAL INTERACTION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CULTURES, POSSIBLE OBSTACLES AND COMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. *In the performance of their official duties, SBG officials come into contact with representatives of other cultures on a daily basis. In order to effectively perform official duties, each SBG official needs not only to know the characteristics and peculiarities of other cultures, but also to be able to apply this knowledge in communication. The purpose of the research was to examine possible peculiarities of communication of State Border Guard officials with representatives of different cultures, to identify factors that influence effective communication, as well as to propose possible solutions to the problem. In order, to achieve the goal, the authors of the article set the following tasks: to study the literature on the peculiarities of communication with representatives of different cultures, to study the external and internal normative acts that determine the principles of communication of State Border Guard officials with representatives of other cultures, as well as, based on the obtained information, to draw conclusions and develop proposals for effective intercultural communication. In order to achieve the set objective, the following research methods were applied: literature research method, analysis method, descriptive method, statistical and data processing method. As part of the study, the authors concluded that there are several cultures in the world with certain distinctive characteristics, because each group of society and representatives of different religions have their own beliefs, language, symbols, ideas and values. The authors also concluded that SBG officials need to know the main features of other cultures in order to be able to create effective communication, as well as to avoid conflict situations during it. In order to improve the intercultural communication of SBG officials, the authors propose to put emphasis on the ethical norms, as well as the observance of the principles of non-discrimination and equality, in the performance of official duties. The authors of the article consider that the intercultural communication skills of SBG officials should be developed within the framework of the training/study programs implemented by SBG, placing emphasis on the role play of various practical situations.*

Keywords: *causes of intercultural communication occurrence, main problems of intercultural communication, Officials of the State Border Guard, peculiarities of non-verbal communication, legal regulation, verbal and non-verbal communication.*

Introduction

Nowadays, everyone has the opportunity to travel to other countries who wants to. Interest in traveling grows every year, because it is a unique



opportunity to get to know other countries, new cultures and broaden horizons. Namely, there are several reasons why people travel to other countries, as some of them can be mentioned - moving to relatives, stable life, job search, persecution in their own country, etc. The number of people crossing the Latvian border every day is very high. The first person to be seen and contacted by a border crossing person shall be a border guard. During the communication, verbal and non-verbal means of communication are used and the border crossing person gets a first impression of both the State Border Guard and the country. The main aspects of a first impression are appearance, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.

Verbal communication is a type of communication where we use spoken and written words to get our message and information across to the other person. This definition of verbal communication highlights that whenever we use words to express our thoughts and feelings, we are verbally communicating - even when we are writing to someone (Pavlovics, 2023). According to experts, a substantial portion of our communication is nonverbal. Every day, we respond to thousands of nonverbal cues and behaviors including postures, facial expression, eye gaze, gestures, and tone of voice (Sooriya, 2017).

SBG officials deal with thousands of foreigners every day, directly and indirectly. Officials come into contact with different cultures, traditions, and religions as part of their official duties. The SBG official is the person who has to make the decisive decision - to allow or not to allow a person to cross the state border of the Republic of Latvia. In order to make an objective decision, the SBG official needs knowledge, skills and abilities in many areas, including intercultural communication.

In this field, the State Border Guard conducted research on, for example, the following topics: intercultural communication in the field of immigration; recognizing signs of lies through non-verbal communication; interviewing travellers and offenders; communication with persons crossing the state border at border crossing points, peculiarities of SBG officials' communication with representatives of different nationalities, religions and cultures in the performance of official duties.

Within the framework of this study, the authors will research scientific literature on intercultural communication, its peculiarities and main problems, as well as external and internal regulatory acts related to intercultural communication, analyze statistical data on illegal crossing of the state border of the Republic of Latvia and offer proposals for improving intercultural communication.

In order to achieve the objective of the research the following research tasks have been determined:

1. Study the literature in the field of intercultural communication, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication.
2. Investigate external and internal regulatory acts that discourage intercultural communication.
3. Draw conclusions and develop proposals for improving intercultural communication in the State Border Guard.

The following research methods were used: literature research method, analysis method, descriptive method, statistical and data processing method. Research period - 2023 - October 2024.

The concept of intercultural communication, the causes of its occurrence

Intercultural communication is often widely considered within communication studies, which often emphasize international business or international student migration. Initially, research was devoted to language, non-verbal behaviour and concepts such as culture shock, stereotypes and prejudice, but today research has expanded into much broader topics: identification, migration, health communication, intercultural relations, tourism and intercultural media use (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2017).

Before examining intercultural communication and its problems in the context of the State Border Guard, the authors of the article will provide information about the concept of intercultural communication. To understand what intercultural communication is and in what way it affects the performance of official duties of SBG officials, the method of studying certain concepts will help. Communication generally means the exchange of information between people using verbal and non-verbal means of communication. People exchange different ideas, emotions, thoughts, memories. Communication plays an important role in the quality performance of an official's duties. While performing duties, the official communicates with work colleagues, cooperation partners, border crossers and border violators. SBG official uses professional, practical communication techniques to clarify the purpose of entry, conditions of stay and other information of border crossers.

The term "culture" comes from the Latin verb *colere*, which meant - to process, take care of the land, take care of, cultivate, build, develop. The verb applies not only to agriculture or environmental transformation, but also to human development, knowledge acquisition and improvement (Bumanis et al., 2001).

Today, culture is interpreted as the way in which people who have similar positions and resources in the social space bring their perceptions, values, and behaviours to life in shared lifestyle forms.

One culture is not characteristic to all the people of the world, nor it can't be talked about one culture in the environment of people belonging to one country or one religion. In modern social science, it is generally accepted that concepts, ideas, words and other symbolic systems come from the society or group where they are used, so it usually looks at the cultures of certain social groups: the development and use of the concept of "culture" is related to people's values and beliefs about society, social change and the desired society.

The term "intercultural communication" refers to communication that takes place between people belonging to different cultures (Lazda-Mazula et al., 2009). Intercultural communication is a science that includes psychology, culturology, sociology, ethnology, linguistics and anthropology, and it is also indispensable because it can teach how to reduce the difficulties that arise in the process of communication between representatives of different cultures, as well as in cases where it will be necessary to reduce possible causes of conflicts (Teaching material "Intercultural communication", 2011).

Effective intercultural communication requires knowledge of the cultures and traditions of other nations, religions, as well as the peculiarities of countries. It should be noted that it is important to know not only verbal means of communication and their peculiarities, but also non-verbal ones. In this case, in order to successfully create intercultural communication, which will be beneficial to both parties, it is necessary to observe etiquette (Kļaviņš, 2021).

The occurrence of intercultural communication promotes the following causes - globalization, migration, immigration and emigration.

Globalization describes the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information.

Migration – the movement of a person or of a group of persons within the territory of the same country and from that country to another country. Migration is divided into external and internal. Internal migration is movement within the territory of the same country, and external movement from one country to another.

Immigration - the international movement of people to a destination country of which they are not natives or where they do not possess citizenship in order to settle or reside there, especially as permanent residents or naturalized citizens, or to take up employment as a migrant worker or temporarily as a foreign worker (Dictionary of populism, 2024).

Emigration – the relocation or process of people leaving one country to reside in another.

The legal regulation in the field of intercultural communication

State border guard officials, while performing their official duties, need to fulfil the concluded international agreements, as well as understand them and be able to interpret them both in general and in relation to the internal laws of countries, as well as based on the principles of international law and international legal customs (Jundzis, 2018). The principles of intercultural communication are stipulated both in external regulatory documents, including the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and in SBG's internal regulatory documents - the State Border Guard Law, the State Border Guard Officials with a Special Service Rank and the Employee Code of Ethics, etc.

Article 2 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone shall enjoy all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, regardless of race, skin colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or other origin, property status, rank or other status." (Ziemele, 2005).

In the context of intercultural communication, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms establishes the principle of non-discrimination, for example, in the Article 14 of the declaration it is stipulated that "The implementation of the rights and freedoms mentioned in this Convention is ensured without any discrimination - regardless of gender, race, skin colour, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, affiliation with a national minority, property status, order or other status." (Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 143/144, 13.06.1997.)

The code of ethics of State Border Guard officials with special rank and employee contains ethical values, ethical principles, rights and obligations of SBG officials and employees. Analysing this document, the authors of the article concluded that SBG officials in the context of intercultural communication must follow the following basic ethical principles: "The employee does not use words, gestures and hints that may offend the honour and dignity of other persons and do not correspond to business communication;" and "The employee observes the dress code, the external appearance and uniform (clothing) is neat, clean and orderly" (Code of Conduct of SBG, 2020).

The authors of the article examined and analysed the internal regulations of the State Border Guard No. 13 of October 16, 2023 "Service organization procedure in the structural units of the territorial administrations of the State Border Guard, which carry out border control

and immigration control", because the mentioned regulations describe how the work of a border guard who performs official duties is organized at border crossing points, border surveillance structural units and immigration control. These regulations stipulate that the SBG official must follow the established procedure, as it is not permissible for him/her to undermine public trust and create a negative first impression on arriving foreigners with his/her actions or external appearance (Internal Rules No 13 of the SBG, 2023).

Referring to the internal documents of the SBG, which are related to observing the principles of intercultural communication, it is necessary to mention the "Methodical instructions on interviewing persons crossing the border", which were approved on November 3, 2020 by SBG order No. 1285. The methodological instructions stipulate the actions of the SBG official during interviewing, as well as the most important signs that need to be paid attention to in order to detect lies are mentioned, questions that need to be asked during the interview are offered, it is determined how to formulate it correctly, and what kind of speech culture must be present that a foreigner would like to cooperate (Order No 125 of the SBG, 2020).

Observing and using the principles of intercultural communication is also stipulated in the Professional Qualification Requirements of SBG inspector, junior officer and senior officer. All the above-mentioned documents stipulate that the SBG official - SBG inspector, SBG junior officer and SBG senior officer must be able to communicate in a multicultural environment, observing the principles of intercultural communication.

The authors of the article consider that it is necessary to mention the Code of Conduct developed by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), which promotes professional values based on the principles of the rule of law and the respect of fundamental rights and establishes the ethical behaviour standards that guide all persons participating in Frontex activities (Frontex. Code of conduct, 2020).

Compliance with the requirements of the above-mentioned documents promotes effective communication with representatives of other cultures, ensures the fulfilment of legal official duties and increases public trust. Of course, in compliance with the requirements of these regulatory documents, official duties are performed legally and exclude many impermissible actions of officials.

Peculiarities of communication with representatives of other cultures

Considering the situation on the Latvia-Belarus border since July 2021 and a large number of illegal border crossings, the authors of the article will

use statistical data regarding illegal border crossings in the period from July 26, 2021 to December 31, 2023 in their research. Based on the statistical data of the State Border Guard 2023 report, in the above-mentioned period, a total of 1,149 persons were detained and 23,194 persons were prevented from illegally crossing the state border. Conversely, in 2023, 491 persons crossed the border of Latvia illegally and were detained (Unpublished materials of the SBG). The number and nationality of detained persons are reflected in Figure 1.

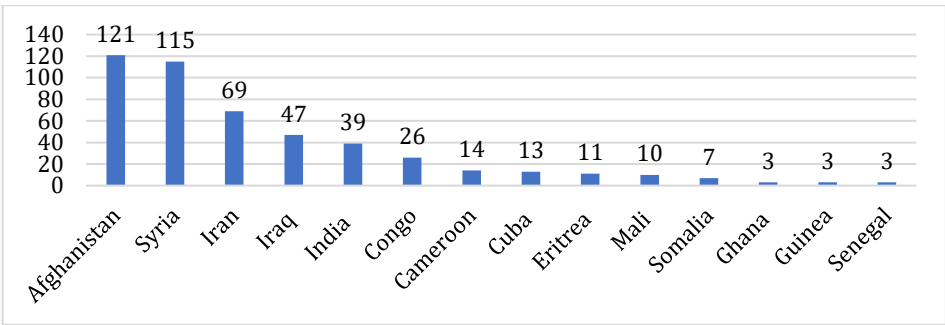


Fig. 1 The number and nationality of detained foreigners on the Latvian-Belarusian border in the period from July 26, 2021 to December 31, 2023 (Image created by the authors)

An analysis of the statistics presented in the Figure 1 shows that, for the most part, the Latvian state border was crossed illegally by people of the following countries - Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and India. This fact can be explained by the low standard of living in the above-mentioned countries, as well as by war activities in some of them. In several cases of illegal crossing of the state border, the final destination of the border crossing persons was countries such as Germany and Poland, where the standard of living is relatively high. In order to prevent threats to national security and public health, the state border guard official, communicating with nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and India, should be familiar with their culture, traditions, religion, as well as the peculiarities of verbal and non-verbal communication. Using intercultural communication knowledge and skills, the official will be able to ensure effective communication and detect signs of threats.

Based on statistical data, as well as taking into account that Islam is the main or most widespread religion in several countries, which are reflected in Figure 1, the authors of the article want to outline the main distinguishing features of Islam. Islam is the world's second largest religion and is spread across several countries in Asia and Africa. The list of cases of illegal border

crossing of Latvia includes the following countries where Islam is widespread - Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Ghana, Guinea and Senegal. The representatives of this religion are Muslims, who are divided into two large groups - Sunnis and Shiites. The Quran is the holy scripture of Islam and is seen as Muslims main source of faith and religion. When communicating with the believers of Islam, it should be remembered that Muslims use their right hand when greeting or eating, as well as when handing an object to another person, because the left hand is used only for activities related to body hygiene, therefore it is considered impure (Shvarcs, 2013). Ramadan is considered one of the holiest months of the year for Muslims. In Ramadan, Muslims commemorate the revelation of the Quran, and fast from food and drink during the sunlit hours as a means of drawing closer to God and cultivating self-control, gratitude, and compassion for those less fortunate. Ramadan is a month of intense spiritual rejuvenation with a heightened focus on devotion, during which Muslims spend extra time reading the Quran and performing special prayers (Ing, 2024). Another distinguishing feature of Islam is the ritual of prayer. Muslims pray at the appointed time at least 5 times a day facing Mecca. There are also food prohibitions in Islam - it is forbidden to consume blood or the meat of a dead animal, as well as pork. At present, the consumption of alcohol is also categorically prohibited, although in the early stages of Islam, according to some researchers, there was no unequivocal and categorical prohibition. The main religious duties of Muslims are expressed in the 5 Pillars of Islam:

1. Solemnly declare faith in the only God Allah (shahada);
2. Say at least five prayers (salat) a day;
3. To make a special donation of part of the annual income to the community fund (zakat);
4. To observe a 30-day fast in the month of Ramadan (saum);
5. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) (M.Hatšteins, 2008).

Fulfilling these duties is the duty of every believer. In the religion of Islam, every action is done to fulfil the worship of God and to please him.

Collecting and analysing information about Islam and Muslims from several sources, it is necessary to mention that, in several Muslim countries, there is still a strict separation of men and women in the public space (Geikina, 2017).

Conclusions and suggestions

Drawing up the scientific article, conducting research and analysis of the concept - intercultural communication, theoretical bases and binding legal

acts, collecting and analysing statistical data of SBG regarding illegal crossing of the state border and nationality of detained persons, the authors came to the following conclusions:

1. There are several cultures in the world with certain distinctive characteristics, because each group of society and representatives of different religions have their own beliefs, language, symbols, ideas and values.
2. The main components of intercultural communication are anthropology, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, linguistics and ethnology. The aim of intercultural communication is to improve the effectiveness of communication with people from other cultures by reducing communication barriers and eliminating the causes of conflict.
3. Immigration, emigration, migration and globalisation are the main causes of intercultural communication.
4. As a result of the analysis of external and internal regulatory acts, the authors concluded that they contain behavioral requirements that affect the principles of equality and non-discrimination.
5. The Professional Qualification Requirements of the SBG inspector, junior officer and senior officer stipulate that the SBG official must be able to communicate in a multicultural environment, observing the principles of intercultural communication.
6. The first impression of a foreigner regarding Latvia and the State Border Guard comes from meeting official of the SBG. In order to create a positive impression, prevent conflicts and ensure effective communication with a foreigner, the official of the SBG must be familiar with peculiarities of different cultures, including verbal and non-verbal means of communication, the peculiarities of certain religions and national traditions, thus preventing threats to public health and for national security.

The authors of the article consider that it would be useful to:

- Organizing training in SBG structural units, it is necessary to emphasize the observance of ethical norms, as well as the principles of non-discrimination and equality in relation to foreigners (representatives of other cultures) performing border control, immigration control, or border surveillance.
- Organizing and leading classes in the separate topics of the subject "Ethics" and the study course "Professional Ethics and Psychology", it is necessary to emphasize the development of practical skills in multicultural communication, offering students to role-play various situations.

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