CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AS A POLICY INSTRUMENT

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Abstract: The development of any society implies a continuous process of renewal, a balance along the vector of domestic policy (security, culture, knowledge and prosperity), but also along the vector of foreign policy and the situation in the external environment. The axiomatic importance of peace in order to achieve any social goal implies opportunities for its preservation. Cultural diplomacy is an instrument of peace, understanding and prosperity. The very concept of cultural diplomacy contains the prerequisites for agreement. The mission of diplomacy is to find solutions without – and regardless of – the presence of force and coercion. In every definition, culture implies a value base and integrity. Linking culture with diplomacy is one of the most goal-oriented, convincing and sustainable ways to achieve results in any area of public policy. This chapter conceptualizes cultural diplomacy as an independent reality, which creates prerequisites for understanding and sustainability in the international environment, but also acts as a tool catalysing cooperation, overcoming faults and prejudices, and creating prerequisites for social cohesion. This analysis uses a conceptual exhibition as a case study to explore cultural diplomacy as a policy tool, focusing on a specific historical episode involving the fate of Jews in Bulgaria during the Holocaust and its role in contemporary memory policies. The conclusions highlight the potential of cultural diplomacy to foster dialogue and understanding on complex historical issues and contentious present-day policies.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Public Policies, Memory Policies

Introduction: problem statement

The topic of cultural diplomacy is important in its theoretical significance and in its practical projections. It creates an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue in the

discussion, but it is also an intersection of understanding the meanings of place and time in the attempt to make sense of historical heritage and the formation of identity. The temporal factor binds history with the present, allowing each epoch to contribute to the logical understanding of processes. Place – as an object of study – allows us to trace historical and current achievements in countries with very different situations, traditions, social capital and circumstances. Sometimes these differences provoke disputes in interpretation, feed prejudices, and irreconcilability among people who have inherited past misunderstandings. Cultural diplomacy has the potential to gain trust, promote understanding, and unite. The key point here is the importance of cultural diplomacy for understanding. It creates prerequisites for reaching the next level of negotiation and achieving central goals. In other words, it improves the prerequisites by helping to build anticipation and trust not only among the immediate participants (politicians, diplomats), but also among the broader audience.

1. What does the topic itself mean and what is the interdisciplinary framework for the analysis?

The first question we need to clarify is the boundary of cultural diplomacy. In other words, what is, and what is not, cultural diplomacy?

The approach to the essence and meaning of cultural diplomacy in this study examines it in the context of the more general framework of public policies, but with a focus on the practical projection of achieving results. However, *cultural diplomacy is not and has never been propaganda*. It does not use culture as a tool for imposing itself or any selfish goals. Cultural diplomacy achieves results by finding shared

understanding and agreement. Propaganda is a type of message intended to influence people's opinion or behaviour in relation to some cause that is the specific interest of a particular group. Instead of unbiased as well as proven facts, propaganda presents deliberately manipulated information with the aim of misleading or guiding public opinion toward a particular end that does not coincide with objective truth. However, when the message to be instilled is likely to be unpopular with the public, it is presented in a way that makes it more acceptable.

The history of cultural diplomacy does not begin with the emergence of the concept of it. In a sense, this particular activity is as old as the history of relations between states. The assignment of diplomatic missions to famous thinkers and prominent figures in society is a sign of the importance of authority in the very skill of diplomacy. At the same time, the popularity of the person entrusted with a diplomatic mission, his personality as a scientist, philosopher, writer, clergyman, etc., sends a message to the receiving country. Examples from world and Bulgarian history are numerous. Petar Angelov's study presents cases of diplomatic missions entrusted to various clergymen and higher clergymen during both the First and the Second Bulgarian Empire (2022). In Western Europe, writers and philosophers such as the founders of the Renaissance era – from Dante and Petrarch, to Giovanni Boccaccio and Niccolò Machiavelli – were engaged in diplomatic missions. Of course, the leading function was of the diplomatic mission itself, but a prerequisite for the success of the mission was the diplomat's personality, namely their authority as artists/philosophers who already had fame and recognition.

To avoid delving too far back into history to illustrate the essence of cultural diplomacy, let us share the understanding

of what it represents as a type of activity: *Cultural diplomacy is a type of soft power "that involves the exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture between nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding*" (Schneider, 1). Its profile is not "either-or." It is the power of "both." In this sense, it can be understood as an achievement through manifestation. The definition cited unambiguously presents the profile of cultural diplomacy as a kind of tool that supports and helps to achieve various diplomatic goals. However, it should be pointed out that the broad field of culture, science, art and all other spheres of creative expression exist outside and independently of diplomatic activity as such. They, of course, have their own independent significance for the development and integrity of societies and, in this sense, represent only a context for relations of understanding between different countries and peoples. The integration of culture into the activities of diplomacy presupposes their purposeful inclusion as an integral part among the tools for achieving its goals.

Secondly, speaking of cultural diplomacy, we consider the issue of partnerships and stakeholders. Among them, various institutions of foreign policy – as well as domestic policy, diplomacy, and numerous participants from the social environment – stand out, connected through the hierarchical vertical relations within the executive branch and the horizontal relations of network politics. On this issue, we can refer to numerous in-depth studies conducted by both academic researchers and specialized centres for public diplomacy. For example, we have the studies of Joseph Nye (2004), Milton C. Cummings, (2003, 2004), Cynthia P. Schneider (2003) on the issues of good practices in cultural diplomacy, as well as the dawn of the concept of public diplomacy as non-secret diplomacy from the time of Woodrow

Wilson. When we talk about cultural diplomacy, we actually mean the following: gaining sympathy, interest, supporters and followers; achieving understanding and agreement; finding intersection and new opportunities; communication in conditions of conflict and tension; two-way networking, integrity, curiosity and expectation. It is obvious that instead of imposing, coercion or manipulation, cultural diplomacy succeeds through cohesion, which is actually a leadership function in any activity.

This approach to understanding cultural diplomacy refers to the concept of public policies. In the words of Tatyana Tomova, "Policies are defined as activities that public authorities stand behind. Political science does not provide a direct answer to the question of the content of successful policies. Rather, it formulates rules that these activities must meet in order for public goals to be successfully achieved… The acting state becomes a regulatory state that achieves the goals it stands for through the free actions of citizens, public groups and their organizations. Pluralistic democracy and representative power are complemented by a policy-making process in which representatives of the state and representatives of society participate equally as partners" (Tomova, 8). The analysis of cultural diplomacy *per se* and its importance for achieving foreign policy goals, made by Lyudmila Dimitrova, outlines a similar approach and conclusions regarding the possibility of citizen participation in this specialized sphere of international politics. According to her, "the democratization of access to information turns citizens into independent observers and active participants in international politics" (Dimitrova, 132).

One of the particularly important results of cultural diplomacy is the effect on the profile of the *national image*. Again, in the words of L. Dimitrova, "this process of image

management can be called public diplomacy, known in the political dictionary as soft power. This is the struggle to win public opinion not only in one's own country, but most of all of the foreign audience. In this process of image management, cultural diplomacy has its own specific place and importance, which in recent years has focused the attention not only of national states, but also of international organizations and, above all, of the EU. In a time of crisis of the image of an individual state or community, such as the EU, of the problematization of institutional legitimacy, cultural diplomacy can offer its own creative solution to the problem by attracting the most important factor – civil society" *(Ibid*).

The integration of the concept of national image into the understanding of cultural diplomacy refers to a separate field of research and policies of states in presenting themselves to a very wide range of audiences. This refers to activities such as tourism, entrepreneurship, investment and everything else that implies the competitive advantages of a given country. Simon Anholt's concept of the national brand (2005) in all its meanings and results supports the ability of national institutions to successfully manage their national image, which is built sustainably as a result of the advanced efforts of many participants. Achievements in areas such as culture, science, art and sports, examples of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, geography, traditions and even the type of relations between people in a given country can be highlighted in the specific profile of the national image.

This national image is a result of diverse, often mediated, information from many sources about real-life objects and phenomena. It can be said that the image creates a duplicating, new reality. This created image is a kind of suggestion directed at the audience by an interested subject (person or institution), which in turn acquires its own communication

path. However, the result of the sent message is largely dependent on different contexts and targeted interpretations. The mediating entities are various types of traditional media and the new reality of social media – all of them, as well as various events, intervene in this process in an immediate and significant way for the overall result. The formation of a cumulative effect and its targeted communication is a function of cultural diplomacy.

In Anholt's concept, this is described as a national brand. The index created by him stems from the detailed concept of national branding and practically measures the effect of building and managing the reputation of the state in the eyes of the rest of the world. In turn, this allows for a comprehensive assessment of the results of these efforts, individual events and everything that is instrumentalized in the active and purposeful activity of cultural diplomacy.

One particularly positive effect of cultural diplomacy that has achieved its goals is, for example, the overcoming of unfavourable stereotypes and stigmas. A popular example in this regard is the so-called Spanish case from the time of the Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. Spain began a targeted campaign to change the opinion of Europeans that Spaniards are lazy, uneducated, corrupt and cruel people. The latter is assumed a stigma inherited from the time of the Inquisition and conquistadors. Spain has developed a national program for creating a good image, which has included the restoration of its museums and monuments, as well as the active presentation of Spanish culture to the world. It is clear that the modern era is characterized by its globality, which has created an environment of comprehensive information. The reputation of a country is constructed based on inherited stereotypes and achievements or failures, but also on the active, purposeful, gradual and constant saturation

with actively broadcasted information about itself. In this sense, cultural diplomacy can be understood as a collective concept, but based on previously clarified goals and analysis of environmental factors.

2. Institutional cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy as a process.

The role of state institutions in cultural diplomacy practically operates in the field of national branding. This process implies both international political marketing and internal branding processes. Usually, it is practiced by various organizations and associations of a given country, in order to promote its image abroad, but with the key role of clearly identified institutions of public authority, which are engaged in this process and this is their permanent responsibility. Some specialists consider *the country's brand as a sum of abstract symbols that generate common perceptions and images, combining a large number of products and services.*

The factors that influence the country's national branding are controlled by the authorities: tourism; foreign investments; state policy; participation in international events; local companies and publicity; economic development; emigration and diaspora; the labour force; public, cultural and artistic representations; language; religion; culture; sports; cinema, as well as civic interaction with guests of the host country.

According to experts on these issues, the creation and promotion of the national image is a task that lasts at least ten to twenty years (it should be carried out regardless of political changes and focus on important aspects that differentiate and create a competitive advantage). Building and managing national branding is not a final process, but a

constantly recurring and renewing one. This is perhaps the most important aspect that must be accepted by all participants. The branding effort is effective if the results are regularly evaluated and strategies adapted to the reality of life are promoted.

The effect of cultural diplomacy does not seem to be a truly new phenomenon in society, even if it has not always been labelled as such. Understanding the reputational potential of achievements in culture, science and art has always been an advantage in international relations and domestic politics. In periods of prosperity, the performances of artists are encouraged and supported, thereby contributing to the good reputation of the country on whose behalf their performances are made. However, cultural flourishing is not cultural diplomacy itself, as both meaning and the way it is implemented. The philosophy of this complex activity for positive communication based on culture – generally referred to as cultural diplomacy – should be distinguished both from cultural achievements themselves and from propaganda.

Distinguishing cultural diplomacy from propaganda

The temptation to use cultural achievements for policy purposes is ceaseless. However, the goals, motives and expected outcomes of cultural diplomacy differ significantly from those of propaganda. Although on the surface the activities of cultural diplomacy and propaganda seem to have common profiles or roots, in fact these are different realities. In propaganda, the self-promotion of a given result is observed, as the effect is rather the imposition of a desired favourable suggestion. Propaganda seeks to soften negative perceptions by blurring them through selective messaging about achievements and exaggerating results as positive

outcomes. Propaganda aims at suggestion by combining true and false to present the false as a real achievement. It is a tool for creating an artificial image, which is a manipulation in communication. It is characterized by one-wayness. It seeks to deceive the addressee in the interest of the subject of propaganda.

Contrary to what propaganda represents, cultural diplomacy is not a means of compensating for deficits in cultural or public policies as such. Unlike propaganda, cultural diplomacy presupposes external audiences and interacts with them through messages. The effect of cultural diplomacy is improved integrity and understanding. It serves to overcome prejudice, mistrust and stigma. Cultural diplomacy is based on real achievements. Propaganda is based on exclusion, while cultural diplomacy is based on inclusion and integrity. In this sense, cultural diplomacy provokes and leads towards better understanding and involvement based on variety cultural experiences.[1] As the analysis of Schneider points out, "Underlying assumptions about the value of the individual and equality of opportunity in a merit-based society are conveyed implicitly in the classes and performances…" (Schneider, 8). This is an increasingly important aspect of international relations. A specific advantage of cultural diplomacy is that it "has the potential to create a unique atmosphere of openness… through the shared experience of a cultural event" (*Ibid.,* 11).

Achieving the goals of cultural diplomacy implies purposeful interaction between interested parties based on various cultural, scientific, athletic, and other accomplishments. This means that the role of cultural diplomacy is a kind of diplomatic tool through which more general foreign

[1] See more on the distinction between cultural diplomacy and propaganda in https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/catalog/diplomatie-culturelle-entre-propagande-soft-power

policy goals are implemented. Insofar as the means for this communication of achievements depend on the level of technological development, in modern times cultural diplomacy has acquired a much larger scale of impact potential. However, only at first glance, cultural diplomacy has gained importance thanks to the technological revolution and the modern scale of communication. As an instrument of foreign policy, diplomacy ensures the achievement of goals and the strengthening of the authority of its country with a rich set of approaches and means in the implementation of this mission. The advancement of technology accelerates processes in all areas of life; however, the underlying phenomenon is not new. Cultural diplomacy has always been a bright way to achieve results in the politics of states and interstate relations. A very good distinction between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy and propaganda, as well as the institutionalization of these activities within European policies, was made in a collection of the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bulgaria devoted to this issue, as well as a more comprehensive overview of public and cultural diplomacy policies in the context of the European Union.[2]

The selection of means involves not only specific communication elements, but also the overall organization of how the cultural message is structured, clarity about dissemination methods, and a clear assessment of the intended impact. Understanding cultural diplomacy as an essential tool of diplomacy helps to highlight its potential effect on perception of the problem areas in the policies of a given country. There are many specific examples. The analysis of such examples does not exhaust the topic, but only highlights the scale of its potential.

[2] See: http://booksinprint.bg/Publication/Details/3ee986d0-425f-46cc-bfbb-b7bbb5b64e53; Public Diplomacy_EU.pdf

3. On cultural diplomacy through examples. Discussion.

In order to recognize a given activity or event as an act of cultural diplomacy, it is necessary to first find the topic to which the initiated activities are indicated. If we assume, for example, that the problem is the lack of recognition of a given country in a given region, then any cultural program, presenting its achievements to the public would be a successful step towards rapprochement. Moreover, sometimes in the direction of aggravated political situations, a bridge to understanding can be sought based on joint cultural initiatives.

There are many examples and, although they cannot be the solution to existing prejudices and problems, they are a prerequisite for achieving dialogue. The selection of a case to illustrate the potential of cultural diplomacy as a tool for fostering understanding refers to the contemporary relevance of a complex historical episode. It is about the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria during the Holocaust and the contradictions in recounting this history. The problem is that the episode under consideration has become the subject of various interpretations depending on the selection of facts for supporting various political goals. In other words, it has been distorted by the practices of propaganda, which over the years have become axes of rupture and the formation of prejudices. In fact, the same events have turned out to be the basis for diametrically opposed conclusions. Contrary to the propaganda approach, activities in the field of cultural diplomacy help to understand the basis of an authentic historical picture. Such examples are various initiatives for joint conferences, seminars, publications, works of art and journalism, which imply dialogue. Each such event has created a prerequisite for understanding the Bulgarian case in its entirety, includ-

ing its significance and meaningful messages. It is precisely these results that encourage dialogue, which is not based on the exchange of monologues. Scientific, journalistic and even fictional publications create an occasion for discussion to make sense of the messages of a given historical episode. *What distinguishes attempts at propaganda (regardless of the sign) from those of dialogue in cultural diplomacy is the ability in cultural diplomacy not to seek the effect of the message suggested through a selective reading of the past, but to make sense of the meaning of this heritage in the logic of its entirety. In the sense of the lessons learned, this means understanding what led to a tragic development and what led to a positive result, as well as not confusing these processes.*

The factual content of the historical heritage related to the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria during the Holocaust turns out to be one of those episodes that has been subjected to various interpretations, some of which use only part of the historical picture, but draw conclusions about the whole. Thus, diametrically opposed narratives have been formed. According to some of them, the Bulgarian case was a heroic rescue of Jews without regard to persecution and deportations. According to others, the Bulgarian case was among those that represented only persecution and extermination of Jews during the Holocaust. Obviously, the same historical basis cannot receive diametrically opposed assessments. The existence of this topic has acquired two images over the years in relation to the Bulgarian case. One, popular outside Bulgaria, is about that part of the history that is limited to the fate of the Jews in the territories of today's Republic of North Macedonia and "Aegean Thrace" (today's Northern Greece), who were deported and killed in the Treblinka extermination camp. The presentation of the entire history in this semantic

perspective misrepresents the historical completeness of the picture in a way that stigmatizes the image of Bulgaria. Conversely, the image of heroic salvation, which presents the protection of Jews from persecution and their rescue from deportation as an act that does not contain any persecution, has gained popularity in Bulgaria, although there are many studies and publications that present an analysis of the entire process. This narrative – focused only on the protection of Jews, without addressing the forced deportations – also misrepresents the historical picture by limiting the narrative to the old borders of Bulgaria, emphasizing rescue while omitting acts of persecution.

Such a one-sided portrayal is the combined result of different types of publications that emphasize such an interpretation of events, which presents the grounds solely on the positive side of this historical past. In turn, it easily becomes a basis for the political appropriation of heritage, highlighting selective acts of protection while overlooking the underlying context of persecution by law, state institutions, and participation in deportations from occupied territories. Ultimately, there are two narratives that contain diametrically opposed messages – positive and negative. They have become a basis for use by different political circles in Bulgaria and elsewhere on contemporary political issues that have nothing to do with the understanding of historical heritage and its role in the formation of values and respect for the historical past.

It is in the sense that the example presented (in brief) below is an illustration of how every attempt to comprehensively examine the historical heritage and achieve dialogue is an act of cultural diplomacy through its contribution to overcoming the distorted historical picture. Such are the cases of conferences, publications, changed educational programs (amended law on Secondary Education, 2015), the presence

of numerous fiction, scientific and documentary publications. Some of the examples would be the Collection of Minutes of the meetings of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the conferences of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University, the Helsinki Committee, etc.[3] Each of these events or publications was not initiated with the aim of being instruments of cultural diplomacy. However, the very fact of their occurrence creates an opportunity for them to be a basis for dialogue and for their intellectual communication with parties concerned. Cultural diplomacy presupposes institutional actors who are able to integrate the various artifacts and events into the basis for dialogue and understanding of the past not as a basis for tearing apart the contemporary social fabric of democratic societies and relations, but for cohesion and integrity based on a validly understood historical heritage. Neither underestimating nor overestimating historical heritage helps to support moral standards in societies. In fact, the ability to look at the overall historical picture and handle the correct labels for the relevant processes is a way to build a better present and future. This approach does not amplify the pain of the past, the shame of the dark pages, or the satisfaction of the good that would erode to arrogant complacency.

[3] See, for example, the documentary collections *Survival*, edited by David *Cohen* (1995); *The Power of Civil Society in a Time of Genocide. Proceedings of the Holy Synodn of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on the Jewish Question* (2005) edited by Taneva and Gezenko; *Bulgaria - the Wayward Ally of the Third Reich* (1992) edited by Vitka Toshkova; a separate issue of the journal *Public Policies. bg*, dedicated to Holocaust memory policies, and many other articles and monographs that contribute not only to the overall scope of the processes. Special mention should be made of the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and Yad Vashem for annual teacher training; the joint seminar of teachers from Bulgaria, RS Macedonia and Greece within the framework of an initiative of the Shoah Memorial in Paris, as well as the annual research competition for high school students, organized by the Ministry of Education and Science with the assistance of the Sofia University and the State Archives Agency – all of these and other initiatives are examples in this direction.

Every event that contributes to this and is recognized by the responsible institutions is a segment contributing to the result of a comprehensive systemic cultural diplomacy towards a given problem.

Below, we focus on one of these examples that is itself an act of academic-institutional partnership in the presentation of a conceptual exhibition displaying a unified narrative about the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria. It was prepared by the Centre for Jewish Studies of Sofia University for the needs of the State Cultural Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of communication events related to this historical heritage.

For the purposes of illustration, it is necessary to present a brief historical background regarding the complexity of the case under consideration.

4. Historical background

After National Socialism came to power in Germany, anti-Semitism was imposed on the Old continent with the brutal force of the all-encompassing aggression of this party as a new political order in Europe. The Bulgarian case also falls into the context of this socio-political environment.

As everywhere, the expansion of anti-Semitism from Nazi Germany was initially through economic instruments, and next through the political expulsion of Jews from public life. The pressure for this was present, but the decision rested with the sovereign Bulgarian government. It prepared and pushed through repressive legislation, which was adopted by a pro-government majority in parliament. This happened in the period November 1940 – January 1941.

This approach was characteristic of the situation in many countries. What was different in the Bulgarian case and de-

serves special attention was the fact that the repressive policy undertaken by the authorities was not met with indifference or gloating in society. Just the opposite. The institutions of state power were immediately addressed by numerous written forms of dissent. Strong voices against the repressive legislation came from individuals and groups from all classes and professions. Among them, numerous professional organizations (of medical doctors, writers, artists, craftsmen, lawyers and many others)[4] stood out, as well as youth organizations, women's societies, letters from ordinary people, journalists and many others. A special place among all of them was occupied by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which was the institution that most consistently spoke out in defence of the Jews in Bulgaria during the years of the Holocaust. Yet, despite the expressed dissent, repressive anti-Jewish legislation was adopted. Moreover, it did not end with a separate legislative act, but contained a series of legislative and government decisions that deepened the methods of persecution of the Jews, reaching the culmination of this policy in February – March 1943 with the signing of a secret agreement to deport 20,000 Jews. According to the plan, the majority of those targeted (about 12,000) were Jews from the so-called New Lands, which were a German occupation zone given to Bulgaria for administration. The remaining eight thousand people were scheduled to be deported from within the old borders of Bulgaria – something for which, even under the repressive legislation, the government had no mandate. However, the entire infrastructure of the planned deportations was prepared and ready to take place. Information about the secret agreement between Germany and Bulgaria became known to citizens of

[4] For more see https://jews.archives.bg/; Taneva, 2024, Nasledje, no. 58, https://unicloud.kg.ac.rs/index.php/s/wXDbZq5B8APoT9A?dir=/&openfile=true

Kyustendil. As another act of decisive protection, civil structures again decided to intervene. The famous Kyustendil delegation, consisting of four people, held a meeting with their fellow citizen and deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev. Thanks to their joint efforts, they managed to achieve a postponement or even cancellation of the deportation order from March 9 to 10, 1943. They had no way of knowing that, in fact, Jews from the Aegean Sea (today's Northern Greece) had already just been deported with the participation of Bulgarian institutions of official power, and the same tragedy would soon befall the Jews of Vardar Macedonia. The fate of the Jewish population within the old borders of Bulgaria – those protected and saved from deportation – fell once again on the plans of the Minister of the Interior, Gabrovski, and the head of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, Belev. Their plans were presented to the head of state Tsar Boris III in May 1943. The first plan (plan A) was for the deportation of the entire Jewish population outside of the country. The alternative plan (plan B) was for expulsion of the Jews from the capital city Sofia (half of the entire population of Bulgarian citizens of Jewish origin, i.e. living within the pre-war boundaries of the country) to the provinces. At this meeting with the Tsar, which was attended by the Minister of the Interior Gabrovski and the Commissioner Belev, the head of state chose plan B.

In short, this historical reference can be reduced to three clear lines of events in Bulgaria regarding the fate of the Jews.

1) Expansion of anti-Semitism from Nazi Germany to all other countries: There was a targeted influence on the government with a view to establishing a repressive policy towards the Jews.

2) Official policy of persecution by the Bulgarian government: Repressive legislation was adopted, which took away

the civil and political rights of the Jews; deportation was being prepared; deportation of the Jews from the occupied territories with the participation of representatives of the official authorities.

3) Disagreement with the official policy of persecution by numerous civil structures and individuals: Active attempts were made to repeal it and take action in defence of the Jews.

The repressive acts of the Bulgarian government were met with disagreement and written positions of criticism and pressure on the institutions of state power to abandon the repressive policy towards Bulgarian Jews. This materialized in numerous written documents of disagreement on the part of many different individuals and groups from all strata of Bulgarian society. It is also clear that these were not one-time acts, limited to only a certain episode, but have their manifestations throughout the period from 1940 to the end of 1943.

The purpose of these lines – recalling the historical picture of the events in Bulgaria concerning the fate of the Jews – is to outline the main profiles of the policy towards them in Bulgaria during World War II. The characteristic form of persecution is clearly evident – independently applied by the Nazis in the occupied countries or in collaboration with the governments of allied countries. The tragic result of such actions led to the deportation of Jews within the occupied territories. However, in the Bulgarian case, a completely different line of behaviour towards Jews is also noticeable. This is the position of protection on the part of various groups and individuals from all strata of society, which practically led to the rescue of the entire Jewish population from the old borders of Bulgaria. All protective acts on the part of what can be called, in general terms, the structures of civil society

were directed at the institutions of state power with a clearly stated demand for the rejection of the policy of persecution as such. The position in each of these documents set out demands for the rejection of the overall policy of persecution of any group of society on any grounds. This type of pressure on the institutions of power was not limited to the call for the rejection of the repressive policy. They switched to defensive behaviour when the authorities attempted to deport part of the Jewish population from the old borders of Bulgaria as well. The sequence of protective behaviour ultimately led to the rescue from deportation/death of the entire Jewish population in the old borders of Bulgaria.

Discussion

The historical circumstances and factual picture are thoroughly investigated in depth and quite well known to specialists. Where, in such a case, is there a basis for diametrically opposed narratives regarding the same factual matter? As mentioned above, the problem is formed based on a selective reading and interpretation of the events. The selective reading is based on a purposefully made selection, which leads from a generalization of part of the historical picture to an exhaustive one for the entire case. Thus, in one case, the story is formed only about the deportation of the Jews from Aegean Thrace and Vardar Macedonia, and in the other only about the protection of Jews from the old borders.

The story only about the deportation has gained popularity mainly outside Bulgaria, and the one about salvation – mainly in Bulgaria. This is precisely what forms the basic fault line on this topic. Where cultural diplomacy can intervene is in an attempt to connect the lines of interpretation of this historical heritage into a common picture. The single

(general) narrative of the entire history is in the interest of both meaningful messages based on historical truth, but also of refraining from abusing historical heritage for various political goals of the present day. All acts of cultural diplomacy that have contributed to overcoming deformed narratives (regardless of whether they are stigmatizing or favouring) fulfil their basic mission of understanding in favor of historical truth and valid messages affirming values.

5. The contribution of an exhibition as an example of public diplomacy

The distortions of the historical narrative described above – rooted in tendentious interpretations based on selective readings of the facts – require multifaceted efforts to counter targeted misuse, regardless of its origin or intent. It became clear that the reputation of the Bulgarian case from the time of World War II and the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria is inconsistent. Despite the public and unlimited access to the documentary heritage in the State Agency Archives, as well as the presence of numerous in-depth and comprehensive studies and publications, the image of events remains fragmentary and deformed according to a preconceived narrative. The effect of the perception of narratives is not only a spontaneous process. Active communication by parties concerned to favor propaganda interpretations affects the formation of attitudes through the effect of manipulated knowledge and a deformed image. However, the study of history suggests that it is not an instrument for punishment or reward. In fact, only compassionate and understood knowledge becomes a lesson from history that can serve to build bridges for rapprochement and a better future. An excellent example of this was the relationship built between

the wise statesmen David Ben Gurion and Konrad Adenauer after World War II and after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It is worth noting that these strategists of the peaceful development of Europe have found a way to deal with the tragic legacy of the Holocaust and the enormous guilt of Nazi Germany for this catastrophe of civilization.

In short, it is not the mere presence of complete or distorted narratives, but the purposeful communication of a deliberately partial interpretation of history that leads to distorted perceptions, formed prejudices and fractures in memory – ultimately affecting relationships between people. The existing parallel narratives with diametrically opposed conclusions – from "heroic rescue" to a "so-called rescue" narrowing the history down to deportation from the annexed territories – become the basis for parallel messages to different audiences. These narratives are distinguished by the essential difference that the "heroic rescue" is popular locally in Bulgaria, while the mostly accusatory texts focused only on the deportation from the New Territories – primarily abroad. As has been said, this is not due to the lack of research and publications on the entire historical picture, published and accessible both in Bulgaria and abroad. Replacing knowledge of the complete narrative with one of partial knowledge actually serves a kind of propaganda effect. It is on this basis that we highlight one of the successful examples of overcoming this rift in memory and a possible path towards comprehensive understanding of historical heritage with both its dark pages and its moral peaks. The specific approach is entirely in the field of cultural diplomacy.

The example presented below demonstrates the potential of a scientific and cultural artefact to help dialogue and support valid knowledge of history. Understood as a tool for influencing a certain problem, even an exhibition can

serve the function of provoking dialogue and understanding messages. However, to perform such a role, it is not enough for a given artefact to exist. As previously mentioned, cultural, scientific, sports and all other achievements that are social facts are not in and of themselves cultural diplomacy. It requires targeted efforts, subordinated to a specific goal, clear topic, and expected achievement in the sphere of social relations, legitimate actors, overcoming self-serving prejudices, as well as improving understanding and interactions.

In general, for each topic, goal and participants, the approach in cultural diplomacy boils down to several key elements, linked in a systemic model. First, every initiative that purposefully addresses a given problem must have prior clarity about the topic it addresses, the reason it is being carried out, and the main goals it seeks to achieve. As a tool of public policies, cultural diplomacy promotes dialogue and understanding.

Secondly, there are elements (organizational and logistical) that relate to the scope of events that imply communication of a given scientific or cultural product. An essential element in this process is also the initiator of communication. When there are contradictions on a given topic, the participation of authoritative legitimate communicators is essential for initiating dialogue. The addressees of a given act of cultural diplomacy are those who usually have attitudes and perceptions formed by conflicting narratives. Their participation is important for achieving a narrative-based dialogue that goes beyond the limitations of their distorted attitudes.

The specific example that illustrates the result achieved through the model of cultural diplomacy on the complex problem of contradictions in memory and understanding (of the Bulgarian case during the Holocaust) is the exhibition "The Power of Civil Society." The results achieved relate to

the policies of memory. Insofar as unity regarding historical memory is a prerequisite for integrity and improving cohesion in contemporary societies, each act of cultural diplomacy in this subject area is of key importance in supporting these processes.

In schematic form, the example of the exhibition "The Power of Civil Society" fully corresponds to the model of successful cultural diplomacy regarding contradictions in the memory of a specific historical process.

The initial impulse for communication of such an artefact came from a legitimate institution for such an activity: the Bulgarian Consulate in New York. They were driven by a real need for an exhibition corresponding to historical truth for the needs of marking a date for commemoration of the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria during the years of the Holocaust. This initial impulse was their letter addressed to various academic institutions regarding the possibility of preparing such an exhibition. It caused a response from those who had already researched and formed a concept for the exhibition "The Power of Civil Society." It was conceived as a concept and implemented within the framework of a project of the Centre for Jewish Studies from the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University. Thus, the beginning of a sustainable partnership was laid, fitting into the model of cultural diplomacy. Providing the necessary resources (financial, human and infrastructural) is a standard organizational aspect of any activity, given that the relevant scale of participation and the level of formality sought follow from the chosen design of the approach. A particularly significant element in this regard is considering the context of the environment as a significance for the result.

The exhibition was created at an expert level (university researchers). The communicators of this artefact were

professionally competent and authorized public institutions, such as the State Cultural Institute under the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Key partners in the presentation of the exhibition in different countries were diplomatic missions of the Republic of Bulgaria and those of the State of Israel, which are authoritative institutions on issues of Holocaust memory.

The very concept of the exhibition and its messages is perceived positively due to the fact of the integrity of the narrative. It places in a single narrative the history of persecution and the history of protection, the act of deportation of Jews from the New Territories and the fact of saving Jews from deportation from the old borders. The message conveyed in its title, "The Power of Civil Society", highlights the significance of the case not as an isolated precedent in a historical episode, but as an indicative example of successful social action in defence of a fundamental principle. It is about the responsibility of every member of a society to protect its constitutional, moral, and value foundations. When Jews become the object of persecution by institutions of political power, they are placed in the position of innocent victims of political arbitrariness on the part of these same institutions of power. Solidarity in civil society and the responsibility for protecting the principles does not belong to the victim, but to all members of society who are not formally affected by the repressive measures taken. This is precisely the main line of the concept in the exhibition, which presents the factual narrative through this semantic key.

The institutions that had undertaken the repressive policy are described, as well as those who were active participants in the defence of the principles of the constitution and morality. On this basis, the authorities were required to

abandon the policy of persecution, and this is precisely what was achieved. The protection sought was not for individual people – acquaintances, relatives, neighbors, colleagues. The rescue became a fact based on the constant efforts of numerous individuals and groups from all occupations, including the active role of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church itself. The exhibition concludes that the tragic fate of the Jews from the so-called New Territories would have also overtaken the Jews from the old borders of Bulgaria, if for three years there had not been active efforts by diverse structures of civil society, who actively sought a change in the policy of the institutions of state power and a rejection of the legislation and actions that persecuted the Jews due to the environment of anti-Semitism imposed in Europe by Nazi Germany. The assessment of the achieved result is possible if there is prior clarity about the initial goals. They are determined by whether the message is decoded by the diverse audiences in a way that meets the initially set goals. That is, whether the expectations correspond to the result.

The exhibition was first presented in Sofia in 2008 on the occasion of the Day of Tolerance on November 17, with an official opening by Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin and with the participation of the Israeli Ambassador Noah Gal Gendler. Over the next 15 years, it has been translated into more than ten languages and presented in over 90 countries. The speaker at the accompanying events in some cases was the curator of the exhibition, other experts, politicians from different countries, ambassadors, and leaders of Jewish communities. We note this fact, as it is indicative of the desired result achieved – *initiating a dialogue based on accepted messages*. The success of this exhibition would not have been possible and would not have achieved its goals if it had remained only within the academic scientific environment.

Then it probably would not have had the chance to reach diverse audiences in so many countries on four continents. On the other hand, if memorial events on the occasion of the anniversaries of the events of 1943 were organized in a protocol manner, they would not have the capacity to go beyond the effect of naming a date on the calendar.

A positive effect has also been visible from other comprehensive narratives in exhibition format created by the State Archives Agency, their documentary collections and a website with access to digitized documents on this topic, which are also the subject of activities in the field of cultural diplomacy. Moreover, there has been a positive contribution to cultural diplomacy on the topic of Holocaust memory through the new art exhibition of the State Institute for Culture to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with posters on the topic of the Holocaust, communicated to different Bulgarian audiences in 2023 and 2024.

These communication units in the considered examples of cultural diplomacy help to achieve a sustainable effect of emotional engagement and dialogue around the historical significance of the Bulgarian case during the Holocaust. This has been done through clearly articulated messages about the case, aimed at reinforcing a unified historical narrative and ensuring the credibility of its memory. However, attempts at a biased reading and even a distorted presentation of the historical picture still have their active protagonists. Yet, the results achieved through the efforts of cultural diplomacy based on profound research and cultural artefacts have left their important positive traces both in terms of the cognitive characteristics of historical memory and in terms of value and affective messages.

Conclusions

The considered case highlights the power of cultural diplomacy in achieving a unified narrative and consolidating historical memory based on a reliable and authentic narrative of the overall picture of a given historical case. Cultural diplomacy does not contain the solutions themselves, nor does it exist as a substitute for solutions on controversial and complex issues. However, it facilitates dialogue through the communication of thematically related scientific and cultural artefacts. Insofar as diplomacy is an instrument of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy is a multifaceted instrument of diplomacy itself. Its primary resource lies in the skilful integration of other areas such as art, culture, science, sports, etc. Through them, it creates opportunities for progress and solutions both in an environment of conflicts and in conditions of normality. Cultural diplomacy achieves agreement where confrontation and conflicts are found based on the manipulation of historical memory. Cultural diplomacy is not a substitute for the power of states to ensure security and order, but it helps to overcome resentment and confrontation by developing dialogue, cooperation and highlighting the strengths of all partners.

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