

Diplomacy and family life: co-existence or burden?

Dragica Pungaršek¹

ABSTRACT

The article deals with diplomatic families from a non-career diplomat perspective. It is based on author's master's thesis and it reflects her eleven years of experience living abroad, being non-career diplomat as well as accompanying spouse. Then there are also countless hours of conversations with people sharing the experiences of living abroad as diplomats, together with their families. Significant part of her life was dedicated to diplomacy, which caught interest ever since stepping in for the first time into Slovenian Foreign Ministry. Hence a deep respect towards diplomatic core and everyone involved in it. Among those, in accordance with firm believe, are not only diplomats but also all those, rather often overlooked persons, who are indirectly connected to a diplomacy and diplomats. These are diplomatic families who form the main research subject of this paper. Last but not least, by comparing personal observations and of the author's peers with the foreign literature, the article depicts some authors, mainly from United States and England, where diplomacy has much deeper roots and experiences compared to her country.

Working in foreign countries and with them related stories of diplomatic families, their experiences, their efforts for being recognised firstly abroad and later back in their home countries, facing with the new environments regardless of the country with many other challenges, all these are forming the basis of this paper. What is just listed here and is common among career diplomats and they demonstrate more adaptability, the same cannot be stated for non-career diplomats. For them it is a web of completely new experiences, which rather often dictate their destiny in private life as well as in professional. Therefore, it is no surprise that during times abroad, chances to meet families who have really grown into diplomacy, as well as to meet families who had rather bitter experiences, could be based on their false expectations together with the lack of preparedness for their new lives.

KEY WORDS: diplomacy, career and non-career diplomats, diplomatic families, diplomacy training, integration and reintegration

POVZETEK

Članek obravnava diplomatske družine s perspektive nekarijerne diplomatke. Je izpeljava iz avtoričine magistrske naloge in temelji na enajstih letih lastnih izkušenj v tujini, tako v vlogi nekarijerne diplomatke kot v vlogi spremljajoče soproge. Temu so pridodane še mnogotere ure pogo-

¹ ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dragica Pungaršek, M.A. in Diplomacy. She has spent more than a decade abroad being closely attached to diplomacy in both roles: as a diplomat and a spouse of a diplomat. Currently she is employed at the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. Email: dragica.pungarsek@gmail.com

vorov z ljudmi, ki so delili svoje izkušnje življenja v tujini v vlogi diplomatov, skupaj z njihovimi družinami. Diplomaciji je avtorica zapisala dobršen del svojega življenja in v njej je prebudila zanimanje za poglobljeno preučevanje, odkar je prvič prestopila vrata zunanjega ministrstva. Avtorica goji globoko spoštovanje do diplomatskega dela in vseh njegovih izvajalcev. Ti po njenem trdnem prepričanju niso samo diplomati, ampak vsi tisti, nemalokrat celo prezrti ljudje, ki so posredno povezani z diplomacijo in delom diplomatov. To so družine diplomatov, ki so v središču preučevanja tega članka. Nenazadnje s primerjavo lastnih zapažanj in zapažanj avtoričinih kolegov s tujo literaturo, članek povzema nekatere avtorje, predvsem iz Združenih držav Amerike in Anglije, kjer ima v primerjavi z njeno domovino diplomacija mnogo globlje korenine.

Delo v tujini in z njim povezane zgodbe družin diplomatov, njihove izkušnje, prizadevanje po uveljavitvi sprva v tujini, po vrnitvi v domovino pa tudi doma, soočenja z novimi okolji ne glede na državo ter še marsikaj drugega sestavlja celoten članek. Če je naštetu nekako že stalnica med kariernimi diplomati in so lažje prilagodljivi, to vsekakor ne drži za nekarierne diplomate. Gre za splet povsem novih izkušenj, ki nemalokrat narekujejo nadaljnjo usodo tako v zasebnem kot tudi v poslovnem življenju. Avtorica je imela opravka z družinami, ki jim je diplomacija zlezla pod kožo, ter tudi s takimi, ki jim je – največkrat zaradi nepripravljenosti in neupravičenih pričakovanj – prinesla tudi marsikatero bridko izkušnjo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: diplomacija, karierni in nekarierni diplomati, diplomatske družine, diplomatske priprave, integracija in reintegracija

INTRODUCTION

The author was always attracted to the diplomatic life and was fortunate to have spent a good part of her life in it. That is why, when choosing the title, she was guided primarily by the personal experience of non-career diplomats with regard to the lives and work of diplomats abroad, and above all, what it means for them and/or their families. Therefore the main research question through the article relates to diplomat's accompanying families: do they or can they contribute when going together with a diplomat to a foreign land and consequently is there an added value. We should also point out that this research stems from the Slovene diplomatic practice.

Working abroad is a great challenge for every individual. Of course, different people face different challenges, especially in terms of adaptation, but leaving home, relatives, friends, acquaintances, leaving a familiar environment is never an easy decision. The decision is even greater when accompanied by a spouse² abroad. If there are children, the magnitude of the challenges is increasing exponentially. The above challenges are suddenly joined by a bunch of new ones, such as school, kindergarten, new living space, many times bringing children to a brand new language, finding new friends. The whole family is confronted with a new culture and habits, sometimes with different attitudes, which, especially for children in the initial stages of life abroad, can be a big problem, as they may conflict with the parents' well-being and those in which they were brought up to go abroad. In short, by coming abroad, the whole family may experience a real shock at the abundance of all the changes that have been foreign to them until recently.

If an individual is sent to a diplomatic environment, he³ becomes a diplomat and represents political, economic, defense and other interests in a receiving state. A family that may accompany a diplomat abroad becomes a diplomatic family and the responsibility for the diplomats and members of his family is even greater. Both successes and failures abroad become part of the national and foreign policy story. In this case, the diplomat and his / her spouse are no longer just individuals with their own family, who care solely for their own family and their own economic interest, but both are additionally in the service of their country. A diplomat is certainly in the service of his country, but indi-

2 The words spouse, partner and diplomat are hereafter meaningfully used for both genders.

3 We use the masculine form in a neutral form for both genders, unless specifically pointed out otherwise.

vidual members of his family need not be aware of it. They are definitely part of a mosaic called the international diplomatic environment. Of course, it is primarily the diplomat who is much more exposed, due to the nature of the work, while his or her spouse is most concerned with the functioning of the family. However, this does not end the spouse's role, as he is often the one who also takes care of informal forms of diplomatic socializing that can later produce formal results. In modern times, there can be a very narrow line between formal and informal, since sometimes decisions that result from informal socializing are also found at the formal level.

The fact is, while working abroad, relationships in the country of origin are changing, and the old situation, which was there before going abroad, is mostly gone. Last but not least, the relationship between the home and the domestic situation is changing, as well as the people who live or have lived abroad. The longer individuals and families are abroad, the greater the difference in attitudes toward the homeland and is getting smaller in comparison to the foreign environment. What can be forgotten is why they are abroad, which is especially important when it comes to working in diplomacy. Both locals and those who have lived abroad become trapped in the expectation that everything will be as it was. But it is not and cannot be because life goes on, with or without them. How the family can help itself, how the state can help it reintegrate are just two of the many questions raised by families abroad as well as the author of the present contribution on its own as a challenge to this task.

This article also discusses the attitude of the employer to provide the diplomat with a safe and stable living environment towards the diplomat's family. Are better pay and status the only incentives for diplomatic families to live abroad? Are there other options for improving the quality of life of diplomatic families? Do career and non-career diplomats and their families have different views on the challenges of living abroad? Does the current system even encourage the deployment of the whole family abroad or does it favor singles? Can and how can the state help maintain the soundness of a marriage that is too often put to the test by working abroad? What to do with spouses after returning home? These are just some of the issues that we find worthy of consideration. What the article intentionally omits itself are the guidances of the receiving states which dictate the lives of diplomats and their families. By doing so it keeps the focus on

common issues regarding the diplomat's families, regardless of the different geographical areas.

Let us point out also here briefly the distinction between career and non-career diplomats. A career diplomat is the person who deals with diplomacy on a permanent, professional basis and this presents his career, regardless of this if he starts with this occupation at the beginning of his career or later. And non-career is the one that steps into this profession only temporarily for certain, most often specialized tasks and projects (like those recruited for the Presidency of the EU Council in the Slovene case in 2008).

THE FAMILY OF A DIPLOMAT

As mentioned earlier, each diplomatic family meets many challenges. To summarize just a few of them: changing the environment, a new country, a new language and new habits. Before a family can even face these challenges, it must first make a conscious decision to go abroad. This is definitely the hardest decision to make. One of the reasons why Foreign Ministry sometimes have a problem sending people abroad is that diplomats do not choose to work abroad for purely private reasons – family reasons, which are purely practical in nature, are at the forefront: the concern of partners from losing their jobs, the fear of a partner and children about the unknown and the like. By far, the most common problem is employer of a partner, as many employers are either justified or unheard of for their years of absence from work. If a diplomat's partner works in the private sector, then the employers' compassion is even less so, to say the least. The very same just listed reason and much more resulting in the absence of attractiveness of being abroad together with a family are depicted in the Kravec's work.⁴ In it one of the leading conclusions was that only a few of accompanying spouses (2 out of 18 families being studied) managed to continue their careers or even find new ones. We quickly come to a situation where even the short-term effects of a diplomat's salary (for the duration of their term abroad) do not outweigh the loss of a spouse's income, not to mention the long-term dangers (loss of spouse's employment). Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the purely Slovenian features when it comes to quality of life assessment. For many Slovenians, the quality of life is measured by a house, an indispensable car (preferably of higher class), as well as the

⁴ Kravec, 2015, pp. 207 – 220.

closeness of relatives and friends. If these conditions are met, then there is less need to go abroad.

We distinguish diplomats who are seconded to work abroad alone or with a child, diplomats who go with families, and as a consequence of diplomatic life, we also have diplomats who are divorced. The burden of diversity of life interests can lead to a family breakdown. In the Slovene diplomacy there are cases when, for example, a partner goes to work abroad and his family stays at home in Slovenia. This is due to a conflict of interest when the other partner has a well-paid job, or because of the proximity of the diplomat (Klagenfurt, Trieste, Sarajevo, Vienna, Budapest, Zagreb) and individuals in such situations decide to go abroad independently, while their families remain at home. Nowadays, technology has advanced to such an extent that communication is no problem, as it runs via email, phone, and across platforms on smartphones (Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, and many more). The proximity to home, however, allows the family to be seen almost every weekend, assuming, of course, that there are no diplomatic obligations during this time.⁵

In any case, diplomacy can also be a burden, as families go either formally apart or only for the period of secondment. The author states that during her first term of service abroad, when she cohabited with her son for some time. This period of time was extremely arduous for her, considering that she had no support in child's care after regular working hours, respectively in the afternoon and when her employee required her presence at work until late in the evening. The burden was high; there was no free time except for the weekends.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through it the state directs the work of a diplomat. They both expect results from him while at the same time his family also demands their share. The state as well directs its expectations, which, due to the nature of the work, often cannot be met. The constant accusations that a diplomat spends too little time at home with a family have outgrown many diplomats over their heads and are suddenly caught between the diplomatic environment and their families. Certainly, diplomats like to be involved in their profession, they want to validate and prove themselves, even more so when it comes to career diplomats. Poor conscience about the family, fatigue, and anxiety about the job are sometimes the reason why expectations from

5 Pungaršek, 2019, p. 38.

partners and children are simply left unfulfilled. Each individual is expected to live up to certain expectations in the family, not to mention the professional life. By trying to please everyone often leads to failure.

If we consider for a moment the difficulties of a family in making the decision to go abroad, it is also necessary to be aware of its advantages when it is already abroad as well as of new positive experiences for the whole family. The benefits are mainly reflected in the diplomat's emotional stability, as his family offers him security and stability, as well as his easier integration into the diplomatic environment. A diplomat with loved ones will certainly be more committed to his work than someone from a far-off home who is burdened with maintaining physical contacts. The second reason mentioned above is to facilitate integration into the new environment with diplomats with families. We have in mind both positive professional consequences (a wider range of diplomatic contacts) and purely private consequences (exchange of experience with other families).

The experience of living abroad is not only an experience for a diplomat; it also leaves a positive mark on other members of his family. The experience abroad is an added value that can be appreciated and used by diplomats' spouses and by their children. Of course, knowing at least one additional foreign language is absolutely paramount. In comparison with the ones left behind the whole family is definitely changing its perspective and as a result of this experience, it is richer for a new knowledge and new skills dictated by the new environment. The next positive experience is an improved ability to adapt, whether it be adjusting to new professional environments, living between different nationalities, different school systems, or adapting to situations that they might never face in Slovenia. We noticed that the experience of being abroad enriched the author for another important realization: more appreciation for certain advantages of her homeland. At the same time we noted that she has become more critical of certain social phenomena in Slovenia.⁶

DIPLOMAT'S PARTNER IN THE SUPPORTING ROLE

What kind of role should be performed by a person being married to a diplomat going beyond just following their partners around the world

⁶ Pungaršek, 2019, p.39.

is an opening question by Hendry.⁷ The role of the diplomat's partner is emphasized in the diplomatic activity, as he is also a subject of preparations/training topics before going abroad. If he really gets into the subject, it's another question, and especially so when referring to non-career diplomats with their family. The principle expectation of a diplomats' partners is that they should be educated, pleasant to talk to and being great hosts⁸ when necessary. The importance of the role of partners in the pursuit of the diplomatic profession (as well as any other) comes from the following thought: "A head of a mission who has an unregulated partner relationship or an unregulated family situation is more difficult to devote himself fully to work."⁹

When it comes to women accompanying diplomats abroad, expectations can easily be too high, not to mention stereotypical. What kind of a woman is expected in diplomacy is best described by Čačinovič Vogrinčič, by speaking of her mother. She describes her as a legend who had a terrible fervor and energy. She was a creative woman who found herself in all foreign worlds, cultures, different languages, social lifes, and at the same time knew how to keep a solid home. The truth is, as Čačinovič Vogrinčič puts it, that her father, diplomat Rudi Čačinovič, would never have become a successful diplomat without her.¹⁰ In order to actively support a family abroad, the diplomat's partner is actually the one who has to show the most flexibility in a new environment. We say this because, for example, diplomats, soldiers, police officers and others find jobs abroad that they are used to, or very similar to their jobs back home. Even if it is a completely new experience it is almost always the rule of using the same common language (usually English) – thus their integration is getting easier.¹¹

These two benefits (work knowledge and the ability to speak one of the world's languages) are usually not provided to a diplomat's partner. Therefore, the partner of the diplomat is the one who, first of all, must find himself or herself in a new country, in a new culture, and possibly in a foreign language unknown until then. We give the latter absolute priority, since at least a partial knowledge of the local language makes it easier for the diplomat's partner to carry out purely

7 Hendry, 1998, second paragraph.

8 Petrič, 2010, p.330.

9 Marc and Pogačnik, 2012, p.25.

10 A Slovenian psychologist and social worker, also the daughter of a diplomat during the time of Yugoslavia, who published a specific statement in the journal Plus, published on 25 December, 2016, p.54.

11 Pungaršek, 2019, p.40.

daily tasks that benefit the entire family (for example, the purchase of food and other necessities for life). That is why we dare to say that the diplomat's partner is the one who should be provided all the support in the preparation of the language of the receiving state, while it is inherently possible for the diplomat to actively master at least one world language.

In order for a partner to accompany a diplomat abroad, he or she must leave his or her job. After arranging a standstill, giving up their careers (some for good, and those with more luck for a certain period) only a few manage to continue their professional career abroad. This is just one side of a coin, because they also leave their friends prior to embarking on a foreign, unfamiliar environment. It depends on the personality of the individual how he or she prepares to move, but in any case, this is considered to be a great psychological burden for the diplomat's partner and the family as a whole. A diplomat's work stretches from official eight hours every day to late evening hours, often affecting family life, whose holder at one time becomes only one adult member, in this case the diplomat's partner, but still with a danger of a prejudice that he or she is a passive partner (in terms of an income) and that it contributes nothing for the benefit of the family. Even the financial allowance he or she receives is not so great as to cover the loss of pay, and this allowance is only an integral part of the salary received by the diplomat, not the partner, into his or her bank account.

In the case of a standstill, it should be made clear that spouse's working period is suspended for the duration of the diplomat's follow-up and is only entitled to coverage of a retirement funds and a disability contributions. There are many cases where diplomatic spouses have lost their jobs despite legal provisions. They are only entitled to at least 6 months reimbursement of the Employment Service in the event of losing their job after returning to Slovenia.

To prevent partners from being characterized as passive monitors abroad, it would be a good idea to give them better job opportunities, for example in the form of part-time employment. The same approach is suggested by Hendry. Maybe this could encourage their employment in the Foreign Service. Many of the accompanying partners come from, *inter alia*, scientific, academic and educational backgrounds while others have practical knowledge profiles. They could be allowed to continue their profession and, upon their return home,

be offered to work in the industry they represent. It is a mutually profitable approach as the country saves money and the diplomat's partner can continue his career continuously without losing his status.¹²

DIPLOMATIC PARTNER IN THE SERVICE OF DIPLOMACY

Diplomats's partners choose to travel abroad for different reasons and with different expectations. These can be very different. Some accompanying partners have young children and wish to devote only to them. There were many mothers who claimed that their period abroad was the most enjoyable, as they could devote their time to their toddlers for several years instead of the usual one year immediately after birth. Other partners decided to devote their time exclusively to themselves and their hobbies so that they could finally do what they always wanted. The next category of partners – and this one is the most numerous – are those who have a day-long preoccupation with a house logistics, childcare, international schools, not to mention a support to their diplomat spouses. There are also partners who are looking for a job during their stay abroad, as they would like to contribute to their family budget and wish to be richer for a new work experience.

There is another category of diplomatic partners who during their time abroad would also like to become more involved in diplomacy. It would be wise to offer this option to all diplomats's partners for consideration before being sent abroad. Let us emphasize immediately that in this role we do not see partners as excellent hosts of social events, although some authors emphasize this role¹³. In most cases, diplomatic partners are also educated people from different working backgrounds and with a wealth of experience that could be used for the benefit of the sending state during their stay abroad.

It's not really anything new, but it's underused a lot. During the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2008, the Foreign Ministry developed a good practice of recruiting both partners to the diplomatic service, one of them coming from the Foreign Ministry while the other was added to the Foreign Ministry for the term of the first. The partners of the diplomats thus worked with them at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia in Brussels (hereinafter referred to as SPBR). We understand that

¹² Pungaršek, 2019, pp.40-41.

¹³ For example, see Marc and Pogačnik, 2012, p.25.

this was a single act and its next iteration will not be until the second half of 2021¹⁴. We understand that such an event also has completely different needs – requirements for more staff, the need for more staff diversity and the need for more support and administrative tasks. But the presidency is behind us, the experience has been excellent but the diplomatic partners are again in their most passive role.

The problem is that diplomats, when they are abroad with their family members, receive some allowance, and they also have some of their contributions¹⁵ arranged. Of course, we do not oppose the latter, but the amount itself is nothing stimulating and the status of a spouse is not comparable to the employees in Slovenia. The amount is lower than the Slovenian minimum wage, which has the effect of deterring spouses with better jobs – they do not even run the risk of losing their jobs. Concerning the standstill of employment in Slovenia, the partners of the diplomats who are employed in the public administration are definitely in the advantage – the security of keeping the job is definitely higher than in the private sector. Notwithstanding this experience, it has been shown that employers in the public administration do not have too much regard for diplomatic partners who, while receiving a job back, are often worse off jobs. Far from the eyes, far from the heart, is a logic that is still all the more so in an increasingly competitive work environment and diplomatic partners are generally in a subordinate position.¹⁶

EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT TO DIPLOMATIC FAMILIES

Everything in life revolves around expectations. If they do come true, we are full of impetus for new challenges, if not then we are disappointed, be it in private or in diplomatic life. First, the diplomat and his family are expected to abide by the law of the receiving state, and diplomatic immunity cannot be an excuse here. Furthermore, the diplomatic family is expected to respect and accept diversity and to behave appropriately. These are some basic, even self-evident, expectations that should never be foreign to a diplomatic family.

But here are completely different expectations. In an international environment, there are social events that diplomats and their families are

¹⁴ The Slovene Presidency of the Council of the EU 2021.

¹⁵ Uredba št. 14/2009.

¹⁶ Pungaršek, 2019, pp.42-46.

expected to attend. These can be many and it depends on the diplomat's position and desire to attend. Due to the abundance, social events and receptions can also be exhausting, but in a diplomatic family the desire to participate must be present, otherwise it may be pushed into isolation. These events, as mentioned above, play an important role for the family itself, as they give it the opportunity to better connect with the diplomatic community and access to information, lessons learned and getting new acquaintances that have a great impact on the continuation of a life abroad.

For the diplomat as an individual, and purely from the point of view of the profession's need, such events can be a springboard for facing the future challenges in diplomacy, since they are often attended by people who will be easier to connect with because of their previous social life acquaintance. Regarding the expectations at such events, Čačinovič¹⁷ jokingly says that the modern role of ambassadors is to become caterers, hoteliers and their wives to be experts in diplomatic discounts, high fashion and drugstores, in order to fulfill the expectations of the environment, in which they live. That is not far from the truth. If there are children, they are expected to have polyglot skills. In short, the international environment expects the diplomat and his family to connect with the environment in which they live as quickly as possible. The expectation is in place, as this is the only way to ensure smooth interaction.

This is just one side of a diplomatic social life, most often demonstrated in the form of diplomatic receptions. But foreign life expects much more from the diplomatic family. If there are children and they attend schools abroad (especially international ones), then the school environment also has certain expectations. International schools thus require and expect their students to follow a particular school protocol which is quite different from that used by the children in the Slovenian school system. This protocol occasionally includes families as well.

To sum up, it can be argued that a diplomatic family abroad can be fully occupied, which is more often than not even expected. Especially during the last financial crisis, there was a widespread expectation that families get as engaged as possible with as little or almost no support from the sending state. Another question is if the family wants to do it or at least wishes to do so. In any case, modest approach is

17 For example, see Čačinovič, 2006, p.57.

in place because otherwise it can become overwhelming. Too much passivity when it comes to non-attendance at diplomatic receptions, however, is certainly in conflict with the expectations of the sending state, since in this case the diplomat, though informally, does not fulfill his overall mission. If his family is with him, then the potential for non-participation is even worse, because such absence does not escape the attention of a diplomatic eye. Diplomacy needs diplomatic families capable of interacting with the international environment, and it expects this from them all the time (or at least wishes to have them), because this greatly enhances the diplomatic potential of a host country. One thing are closed-door diplomatic meetings, the other are diplomatic receptions, international fairs, bazaars and more, but all of them reinforce the potential of a country, and in the case of smaller states, their recognition. In diplomacy, the size of the country is even more important and follows the principle that you get as much as you give. In case of small states and without a wide-spread diplomatic network what is another way of getting closer to the expectations of the diplomatic environment? According to the author, the answer lies in diplomatic families.¹⁸

THE LIMITS OF DIPLOMATIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

A diplomat abroad, in the environment in which he lives and works, is primarily a foreigner. As such, he faces a number of challenges, best described by Jazbec.¹⁹ Challenges and a change in environment lead to a change in diplomatic habits – their magnitude is usually proportional to the length of their term. The longer we are abroad, the more we change, the more we become alienated from our homeland, but we are never really accustomed to the new environment, since the latter will never really allow us to do that – we are and will remain strangers to that environment. In doing so, it is necessary to adapt to the new culture, and not just the latter, since it is also necessary to find the right balance between a diplomatic (professional) environment and privacy.

Being a diplomat abroad has its advantages and disadvantages. The great advantage is the start with the financial incentive and all the benefits of diplomatic status. As for the financial benefits of working abroad, the fact is that when you add up the various costs of staying abroad and the cost of maintaining physical contacts (such as airfare), the time spent

18 Pungaršek, 2019, pp.46-48.

19 Jazbec, 2016.

traveling between work abroad and your home country quickly comes to the realization, that a higher salary abroad does not outweigh all the difficulties, not to mention the traumas that foreign life brings to a diplomat and his family. If someone goes abroad solely for the sake of money, there is a good chance that he will be disappointed because then he is simply not ready for the challenges ahead. Conversely, anyone who goes abroad in the desire for new experiences and in the desire for personal and professional development, is very likely to have pleasant time. For starters, a great experience is a completely different work environment that introduces processes and solutions than we were not used to before. What enriches the time abroad, however, is the exchange of experience in a multinational environment.

Therefore, money cannot compensate for weakness. These are mainly reflected in private life. Slowly contacts with the homeland and loved ones (friends) are being diluted despite efforts to preserve them. These contacts can even become an effort, instead of the joy of re-visiting. You are getting horrified because you cannot make everyone happy with your presence. It is about the fact that the relatives and friends of the diplomat expect a lot of attention during their short stay in the homeland, they simply expect you to find the time for just about everyone – this in the end requires daily visits and a selection of visits. The latter becomes more and more tiring that you end up wanting to go back abroad as soon as possible – we are punished with even greater isolation from the people. If it is put in the words of Jazbec, the foreign country with its stunner has brought a curse of alienation. In keeping a contact with a loved ones, modern communication tools do not help us much either, because this is not the right one, it is not genuine contact. Our home media coverage does not help us as well, because the diversity of living abroad changes our expectations – we become more demanding and critical towards our homeland, angry with some nonsense in our homeland, which may not even exist abroad. It can also be the case that we become indifferent to our homeland. If anyone, then the diplomat must maintain real contact with the homeland and what is happening in it – at least professionally, because otherwise the foreign country can suck a diplomat into itself and who ultimately forgets whom he actually represents. First and foremost, it is the diplomat's duty to look after the interests of his homeland. Of course, it is also a sender's duty to watch over the diplomat's engagement abroad, since a diplomat is there precisely to represent a sender. During her eight years of service in Brussels, the author noted a number of diplomats who eventually relented to the expectations of in-

ternational organizations and ultimately only resented over the capital's directions. Sometimes it has been quite clear that a certain person has omitted professional guidance directed by his/her capital.

Those with enough sense for socializing make a new circle of friends abroad to compensate for their absence from the loved ones in their home country. But abroad, too, friends are leaving, which is rather common in diplomacy (this is even more common in military life abroad – because of shorter rotations). Farewells from new but unfortunately short-lived friends abroad are painful, leaving us in the end between two or more banks of friends and acquaintances you can never really commit to. During these periods of change, we feel a void, and it is even more difficult to watch our children, who are forced to leave their classmates and friends overnight, and some of them find it very difficult to deal with. Often thinking that children are more adaptable than we older are does not help us much, since it is actually difficult for children as well. With the exception of the few who consciously choose to stay abroad, most diplomats return home. In doing so, Lukčič Hacin²⁰ states that reintegration into the home environment is a worse experience than socialization in a foreign environment. Secondly, the author states that there is never a real return, for sure no return to the past situation, because everything has changed, from them being abroad to people back in their homeland.

Depending on the number of terms, we leave and come and leave, but life goes on without us and even the most persistent are not ready to wait forever, nor are we entitled to expect it. We are the ones who are constantly running away somewhere else. The author's spouse is an officer of the Slovenian Armed Forces and he says that they are a nomadic family that has no rest in one place and must always go somewhere else. He has spent more than a decade in his career abroad, living in six countries on three continents for extended periods of time, visiting dozens of others for a shorter time. It's a real curse and a stunner. We want to see and experience something new, but at the same time we always leave something behind. The hardest time was always coming back from a longer, long-term stop abroad, as we get used to the latter. Now we find ourselves that we have been in many places and at the same time nowhere, since there is practically no time to grow roots anywhere.²¹

20 For examples, see Lukčič, 2009, p.25.

21 Pungaršek, 2019, pp.48-50.

HOME COMING

Each member of the family of a diplomat at an end of his / her term abroad and upon a return home is conveyed by different feelings, expectations, desires, goals, as well as doubts²². Experiences from abroad shape a person in their own way, both in relation to domestic, neighbors, friends, our loved ones, and in relation to the time and place in which we will be located in the future, for example at work or school. Returning home may be an even more difficult act than going abroad, but, according to the information available to us, Slovenia pays little attention to the repatriation.

Realizing that the situation and relationships that we were used to prior to leaving Slovenia will be mostly gone and that everything will start building anew can be a heavy burden for the whole family. Suddenly, we feel like we no longer fit into the place, however it is us who need to readjust because this is our country, our home. As Gorman names coming home, it is a “reverse culture shock”.²³

We believe that diplomats who complete their service abroad have gained professional experience and of course knowledge that could be used in the organization in which they work. At least these are the expectations of all who have worked abroad and are richer with new experiences that employers should appreciate. That is why they often expect that the return to the previous workplace will be easier, since with their knowledge and experience they will contribute to the team and, if possible, occupy at least an old if not new better workplace. However, these expectations are quite often not met after arriving at the previous job. Due to the inconsistent personnel policy of the leadership, even the fear of new knowledge, which is perceived as a threat by those who remained in Slovenia rather than as an added value and due to inconvenience, there were situations where a good experienced diplomats who were put in a corner left to themselves, waiting for better times or for someone who wanted to use their knowledge. Adding to that any unpleasant experience while working abroad, both professional and/or private, the frustration back home grows even bigger.

It is also challenging for a diplomat's partner and for their children. In case of children a transition from one school system to another is

²² Marx, 1999, p.131.

²³ Gorman, 2015, last chapter.

always a huge shift. However it could be easier for children if they return to the same school and to the same classmates as they had been in before going abroad. It is even more difficult for children who have entered school abroad for their first time. The latter need much more attention, professional guidance and, above all, understanding of teachers. These are young personalities who, because of their youth, have almost forgotten their homeland, which they left before turning five years old. In my experience, the entire burden of repatriating children lies solely on the shoulders of parents. Of course, different school systems are not the only challenges that children must face. Like adults, they have to deal with coming and going, changing friends, surroundings, language. This may seem a little easier for the children, because at least outwardly they give a sense of quicker adaptability but is that really the case? By judging the author's two sons they have had the same regrets as their parents did.

The magnitude of the reintegration problems rises with a spouses who while being abroad haven't invested much in additional education (training) and haven't maintained regular contacts with their employers back home. The last can create a situation where accompanying spouses can be simply forgotten by the employers. It is true that the spouse of a diplomat for the duration of his/her stay abroad, in accordance with the law governing employment regulations, has the possibility of suspending contractual and other rights and the obligations arising from employment related to his/her work – provided that he/she has an understanding employer. Of course, this does not apply to the private sector. Upon the return back home, the previous posts are supposed to be waiting for the spouses, but there is no absolute guarantee that this would be the case. Many times, when returning from a foreign country, a diplomat's partner is reassigned to another post, in some cases even losing a job. For the latter, the main reason is the employers' need for continuity of work. That created a new regulation where the ministries provide diplomatic partners with unemployment insurance upon their return home. Despite the insurance, this is a bad consolation, as it allows coverage of income loss only up to six months after returning home. Judging by the experiences, few can find a new job during this time.

In the previous paragraph, we discussed exclusively problems associated with the employment of a diplomat's spouse. What about the loss of the circle of people we lived with abroad? Of course this is also

the case in other professions, but the peculiarity of diplomatic life is that this phenomenon is repeatedly present during the diplomatic terms. It is a painful experience comparable to the experience of leaving our loved ones when going abroad in the first place. Through the homecoming process, we are once again leaving someone, this time a community of people with whom we have lived abroad. The author especially mentions her great experience within the parent community in the international schools, than communities of people living close to their place of residence which had an international flavour thus making the experience of going well beyond solely related to the new country habits. Of course not forget to mention families of their spouse's co-workers.

With the return home, the process of reintegration begins, which is much more difficult than the process of re-socialization. According to Lukšič Hacin: "Returnees in their memory bear the image of their original environment from the time they left and expect to find the same, but that has changed in the meantime. People in the returning environment also expect the individual (family) to come back as they were, but he or she has also changed. The interrupted communication is alienating people."²⁴ Despite the technology that surrounds us, genuine contact is still the one that ensures relationships to be maintained.

When we look at author's past experiences of living abroad in both roles (as a diplomat and as a supporting spouse), we find that upon each return to her homeland she felt some emptiness and anxiety, as if she had somehow outgrown her previously professional environment as well as the home environment. Talking about professional life the new experiences and ideas from abroad can be disturbing rather than welcome by the previous colleagues. There is also a denial of knowledge from abroad, since "here we do things differently." This is especially pronounced in environments dominated by people who do not have the experience of working abroad - neither they are willing to do it.

To sum up, going abroad is a difficult decision, and returning home is often an even more one. This is difficult already for an individual diplomat, and for a diplomat's family it is all the more difficult.²⁵

²⁴ Lukšič Hacin, 2009, p.25.

²⁵ Pungaršek, 2019, pp.60-62.

CONCLUSION

Diplomacy is not something that came only with the Slovene independence; it is part of the Slovenian space and history that can be easily attributed to the previous century. But even under different national formations, the experience was not collected, stored (perhaps not even appreciated) and transmitted – and, above all, not implemented in a timely manner. Why do we emphasize the word timely?

If contemporary Slovene diplomacy had set its beginnings on a broader basis (both in terms of content and legislation), it would have been accepted as such. Today instead of upgrading the content we are forced to go back to upgrading the legislation. This is an arduous task in current times, unfortunately probably already doomed to modest chances of success. The legally regulated life of families or partners abroad does not end the task of the state. Equally important is return, reintegration and, above all, how the lessons learned from people accompanying diplomats translate into new job opportunities and promotion opportunities for existing employees. People who have returned home should not be viewed as individuals who are at risk of those who were not ready to face the challenges by going abroad. We have to accept them as healthy competition because if we admit it or not, they were ready to do something more for their organization. Staying with one job or be firmly anchored within the organization, regardless of its broader needs beyond borders, while portraying those who dared going abroad as opportunists for higher earnings (or well-paid extended vacation, which is one of the common statements) is an escape from the reality of today. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the umbrella diplomatic organization, does not encounter the problems described, while it is noted for other departments where non-career diplomats come from.

So is the diplomat's family abroad a burden? It depends purely on each individual, every family, every system standing behind the family, and of course on the receiving state. We have not discussed much the latter, but in any case, their internal solutions have a great impact on the lives of diplomatic families – in fact they dictate it. Current solutions in Slovenian diplomacy or legislation could be more favorable to families. Therefore, the answer to the title of the article is best given in a way to paraphrase it: the coexistence of families abroad is burdened by the current state of affairs with its incomplete legislation. There is

still a lot of room for improvement and not all of them are necessarily of a financial nature (for example compiled of lessons learned). The fact is that as long as there is an external service and related diplomatic families and individuals with or without partners, there will always be new challenges. The latter should not be treated as a problem, but rather viewed as an opportunity for further development of the service.

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