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**МИНИСТЕРСТВО ЗА ВНАТРЕШНИ РАБОТИ**  
REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
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АКСИОЛОГИЈА НА БЕЗБЕДНОСТА  
(ПРИЛОГ КОН ФИЛОЗОФИЈАТА НА БЕЗБЕДНОСТА)

ПРОЦЕС НА РАДИКАЛИЗАЦИЈА, ОБУКА И ПРОФИЛИРАЊЕ НА  
ТЕРОРИСТ САМОУБИЕЦ

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**(НЕ)НАМЕРНИ ГРЕШКИ ВО ПРОТОКОЛОТ:  
„ПРАШАЛНИК“ЗА СВЕТСКАТА ДИПЛОМАТИЈА**

**(UN)INTENTIONAL MISTAKES IN FIELD OF  
PROTOCOL: A QUESTION MARK FOR THE WORLD  
DIPLOMACY**

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**АПСТРАКТ**

Дали безбедноста и стабилноста во и на една држава зависи само од евидентната, т.н. „тврда сила“, „тврда моќ“, односно Армијата, вооружените сили, опременоста, економскиот капацитет? Не. Постои една многу посуптилна форма на моќ која и тоа како влијае врз безбедноста и сигурноста, врз моделирањето на идните геополитички односи помеѓу играчите на глобалната сцена. Станува збор за одбранбената дипломатија, која, пак, е нераскинливо поврзана со правилата и процедурите на протоколот, како составен дел на дипломатската практика. Протоколот е практика поврзана со културата, јазикот, религијата, кралската власт, историјата и „де факто“ претставува начин на добро однесување и практикување на очекувани манири и правила. Според тоа, исклучително значајно е да се направи вистинска класификација на секоја грешка – дали таа е намерна или случајна и да се извлече заклучок кој може да влијае на геополитичките односи, на глобално ниво. А, грешките во протоколот, иако предмет на недоволно познавање на практиките од страна на лицата задолжени за протокол, можат да предизвикаат политички скандали, па

дури и нетрпеливост на државно ниво. Трудот се темели на примери кои прават јасна дистинкција на вистински грешки со монтирани случаи кои имаат за цел да пратат јасна политичка порака.

**Клучни зборови:** протокол, грешки, дипломатија, безбедност, одбрана.

## **ABSTRACT**

Does security and stability of a state solitary dependent on the evident and obvious – “raw power” or “brute force”, meaning its armed forces, military equipment, or the economic power? No. There is a subtler form of power that directly influences security and stability, in the form of modeling future geopolitical relations on global scale. What we are referring to is the power of defense diplomacy, a power very much dependent on the rules and regulations of protocol as an integral part of diplomatic practices. Protocol is a discipline in close connection with culture, language, religion, royal traditions, and history. In practice protocol means “good manners”, implemented through pre-determined rules and regulations. This is why it is highly important for one to know how to make a professional observation of every error during protocol procedures – whether it was done on purpose, or by accident, and draw a conclusion which can significantly influence geopolitical relations on global scale. Although possibly made due to inadequate professional “know-how”, errors in the field of protocol can result in political scandals and even lead to tensions between countries. This paper aims at making clear distinction between honest mistakes and staged incidents which serve the purpose of sending a political message.

**Key words:** protocol, errors, diplomacy, security, defense.

## I. IMPROVISATION – AN EVERYDAY OCCURRENCE IN TODAY’S ORGANIZATIONS

Today’s companies and even institutions are facing some rather substantial changes, fueled by many contemporary phenomena, mainly connected to the changing environment, the need for the organization to adapt to these changes, the increasingly faster pace of decision-making and the dissemination of information that is nearing “the speed of light”. By definition, “improvisation involves using an element of creative thought, combined with an intuitive feel for what will assist in the resolution of a particular problem”<sup>66</sup>.

Improvisation as a concept and phenomenon has remained a largely unstudied and untheorised topic, especially in terms of its relevance for contemporary work in cultural studies, anthropology, pedagogy, sociology, and philosophy – in other words, it is an interesting and obvious topic for interdisciplinary research<sup>67</sup>. It is of outmost importance to acknowledge the fact that improvisation is potential that can be found in all our activities, all professions. When improvisation occur, that is the result of past experiences, previous activities, that put in context will be reborn as a completely new experience, thus increasing the pool of possible solutions to a challenge in a professional sense.

That is completely true when we look at the diplomats and other international practitioners, which “are simultaneously influenced by past experiences and constantly innovating in response to situations that are never exactly the same”<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> <https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2010/08/improvisation-as-a-way-of-dealing-with-ambiguity-and-complexity-3/>, accessed October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>67</sup> “Improvisation as a tool for worldwide communication and interaction”, Alterhaug, B., NTNU

<sup>68</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354066117725156>, accessed October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## II. PROTOCOL PROFESSION AS A MIX OF SCIENCE AND FINESSE

When we mention “protocol”, we think of a very specific occupation that has its positive and negative side – it carries many responsibilities but is also a very significant part of the world order, diplomacy, peace and stability. Unfortunately, this profession is maybe the one that is most often prone to mistakes, errors that push protocol specialists into improvising, and that can backslide into unforeseen and unpleasant situations. The most interesting part of practicing protocol is the fact that every success story in this profession goes unnoticed, while on the other hand, any mistake during public events are highly noticed and more or less become the “star of the night”. Protocol specialists must be experienced leaders, but also extremely well practiced **team players**. A successful leader in protocol management always relies on the team and the pre-determined course of action, but also on his’/hers’ professional qualifications and – luck. Having great **communication skills** and openness is a precondition for successful and apt completion of protocol operations. Inadequate communication and assumptions lead to mistakes. One other essential skill is the **organizational** one. Good coordination of activities is a key to a successful organization of any protocol event; regardless it is related to a visit from a foreign dignitary, a conference, or a celebration of any kind. Protocol means organizing a network of activities and services that must work with each other and also parallel to each other. Still, the capacity to improvise in each situation is possibly the added value of every protocol specialist and professional. The word “improvise” comes from the Latin *providere*, “make preparation for”, and its derivative *improvisus*, “unforeseen”. Improvisation, thus, involves dealing with the unforeseen without the benefit of preparation. Improvisation is a skill that can also be used in all professions.

Being **cooperative** is also high on the skill list. Being part of a protocol team means to foresee, plan, coordinate, organize, execute, and control a great number of tasks and responsibilities. Protocol specialist must have close cooperation with every stakeholder – they have to project calmness, politeness, humbleness. **Flexibility** is

also key ingredient in making a protocol specialist. Plans will often go in different directions, most of which not in the right ones. On-time reactions may very well save the day since improvisation is a well-known tool in this profession, not because there are no rules and regulations, but because high ranking dignitaries don't follow those rules and regulations (intentionally or not). Not having the perfect balance of all of the above-mentioned skills lead to mistakes (small or big) that can easily influence not just one's reputation, but the reputation of the whole country at the same time. Mistakes will happen, and that is quite normal. What is important is the ability to accept that a mistake has happened and to take corrective measures in a manner that will lower their "cost" and damage. Even more important is to be able to implement lessons learned and to not repeat that mistake in future.

### **III. PROTOCOL'S FINESSE IN DELIVERING MESSAGES**

There is no upper limit to politeness. But there is an irreducible minimum below which bad manners become obvious. The failure by one country to extend to another country's representatives an appropriate level of good manners may well be taken as a sign of deliberate insult, or at least a level of carelessness which amounts to the same thing (Wiki on "Diplomatic protocol").

Talking of the subtle finesse in protocol, one has to have in mind that every movement, every decision, every step might have its own meaning and – consequence. Seasoned politicians and diplomats know how to use this art to relay their message to their target audience – whether it is the other person, or the wider audience connected to that person. And this perspective is the one that is a so-called grey or uncharted area: do we perceive one error in protocol procedure as just that – an error, or does that relay certain message that needs to be understood?

It all comes to the sender and the receiver has the sender intended to send a "cover" message to the receiver; is it a plain error of the diplomatic protocol's staff; is that message understood as an error or is it understood as its intended meaning. There are many examples in the world of diplomatic protocol, throughout history, and even more today that can be subject to interpretation.

Maybe the easiest way to explain this complex matter is by deductively looking into several examples from both Macedonian and world diplomatic practice, and come with a conclusion, from a perspective of a protocol specialist (as follows).

#### **IV. DIPLOMATIC PROTOCOL MISTAKES – A NEED FOR IN-DEPTH ANALYSES OR NOT?**

Protocol mistakes could occur at any event, even at those considered as high-profile events which are organized by large number of professionals. During such events (organizing of reception for foreign dignitaries in front of the building of the government of Republic of North Macedonia) the country and its diplomatic protocol utilize the capacities of the government protocol department, protocol department of the Ministry of foreign affairs, and the protocol department of the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, part of which is the honor guard. (Military Protocol Rulebook, Army of the Republic of North Macedonia)

##### **1. Austrian Chancellor bowed to foreign flag**

We still hold fresh the memories from the visit of Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. On 7<sup>th</sup> of September of 2018 in front of the plateau of the government of Republic of North Macedonia, during the welcoming ceremony in his honor, the playing of the Austrian and Macedonian anthem – all went under the flight of a mistaken Austrian flag.

At first glance this seemed to be a minor mistake which did not have a major impact over the official visit, while it was the most important news that came out of this official visit. Unfortunately, mistake like this leads to following conclusions – Austria is of no great importance for the Republic of North Macedonia, or that the Republic of North Macedonia is a state without professionals operating in a sector as important as the protocol.

The Austrian flag is rectangular and is divided in three equal rectangles top and bottom being red while the middle one is white. The flag at the ceremony had more narrow middle white line than the red ones, thus reminding more of the Latvian flag although the colors do not correspond to this flag as well.

## **2. US Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis meets broom**

Yet another mistake made by the Macedonian diplomatic protocol which was once again result of the (lack of) cooperation between the protocol of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that of the Ministry of Defense happened during the welcoming ceremony for the US Secretary of Defense, who arrived at Skopje International Airport on 18<sup>th</sup> of September of 2018.

During preparations for the brief military ceremony goal of which was to show respect for the high-ranking guest from the United States of America, couple of professional soldiers from the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia came in the way of Defense Secretary Mattis while sweeping the red carpet. Picture from this very important even caused sensation, and left room to be interpreted as an example of dysfunctional state and in context with this a dysfunctional army.

Facts resulting from the internal research show these mistakes were not done with the purpose of deliberately disrespecting protocol rules, which by the way were especially strict during the arrival of the high-ranking American guest (high ranking guest comes out of the plane only after the protocol team leader come aboard and gives green light). These mistakes were more of a classic example of lack of cooperation and coordination between protocol personnel from various institutions (Smiljanov, 2018). In the first case mistake was done by not appropriately checking the flag when obtaining it (flag was being kept and archived as the flag of Austria) and in the second case partial fault comes on to the guest who did not sufficiently take into consideration the appropriate protocol rules and procedures.

## **3. Kosovo springing up protocol spirits**

A true example of how much one protocol mistake can spring up the spirits in world politics is the recent episode with the seating arrangement for Kosovo President Hashim Thaci during the ceremony commemorating World War One 100-year anniversary.

This mistake had a very profound impact onto international relations. So much so that Frederic Mondoloni, French ambassador to Belgrade had to send a formal letter of apology to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and the Serb nation. Apology stated "...We are very close with Serbia. During World War One Serbia lost almost one third of its population, 62 percent of its male population. France will never forget this." This points out to the fact that this mistake left a profound impact over the relations between Serbia and France. French Ambassador went on saying "...I am sad because we were suppose to celebrate our joint victory as a prelude to the announced visit of French President Macron to Serbia, but in a kind of a way this spoiled everything." This is true example of how much a seemingly harmful event and mistake can stain relations.

After the scandal with the seating arrangement during the Paris-held ceremony commemorating the trust that ended World War One, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci once again came in front line during the Peace Forum, where the same protocol mistake happened once again. In the picture that went viral you can see Thaci seating right behind the leaders of the greatest country participants in World War One – France, Germany, and Russia.

Extend of the impact such protocol mistake (or not!?) can have in springing up geopolitical spirit can best be seen through the comment by Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic – "Can you imagine what someone was thinking when putting Thaci next to Putin. Thaci came from behind Putin's back and offered him a hand. When Putin realized who he was he just turned towards the others," said Vucic before the reporters covering this event.

#### **4. Soccer World Cup in Russia – not enough umbrellas for high-ranking officials**

Vladimir Putin, Emanuel Macron, and Kolinda Grabar – Kitarovic all in one place – Russia held Soccer World Cup Finale played between France and Croatia.

Soccer World Cup is a planetary event held every four years and has always attracted great attention worldwide. The importance of this event can be seen through explosion of media attention directed at Croatian President Grabar-Kitarovic who as an experienced former diplomat used this well to promote her country. What was really interesting to see was not just the match, but events following the match as well. Once the match ended, heavy rain set in. Security and protocol personnel had only one umbrella which was intended for the Russian President Putin.

From aspect of protocol this picture indicates serious organizational mistake, but on the other hand this may have been the best moment for demonstrating strength and power by humiliating the “enemy” and presenting your opinion regarding the leaders from the “opposite side”. This is an example of how one unbelievable protocol mistake, one bad misjudgment and lack of quick reaction, can open the question about the relations between the two European forces, France and Russia.

#### **5. Mistakes in protocol during the official visit of the Russian President Putin to Serbia**

During the recent official visit of the Russian president Vladimir Putin to the Republic of Serbia (Belgrade, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019) there were a couple of protocol mishaps that a protocol specialist can easily detect. Primarily, after the plane with several Russian businessmen landed, there was no protocol personnel to greet them and to direct them to the designated vehicles. Because of that mishap, they had to find the vehicles themselves that led to chaos. The second mistake that was observed is the fact that right after the official greeting by the commander of the Honor Guard, the two presidents (Putin and Vucic) passed by the second marker (where they should have stood). The third mistake is Putin’s point of entry in the VIP-vehicle – he entered from the left, instead of the right side of the vehicle, which is one of the most cherished rules in protocol – the guest is always on the right. One may argue that it actually was

Putin's vehicle, but that in no way has impact on the standard protocol rule. The fourth observed mistake was at the laying flowers ceremony that contrary to the established rule, there was no signal from the trumpet at the beginning and the end of the ceremony.

All of them are simple rules, but also a “must have” elements in every activity, especially when it comes to high-ranking foreign officials.

## **6. Israel humiliating the Turkish Ambassador**

January 12, 2010 is the day when through a protocol mistake an Israeli official made it public to the whole world, and especially the Arab portion of it, what is his opinion of Turkey. In the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during a meeting between Israeli Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Danny Ayalon and Turkish Ambassador to Israel, Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, the two co-speakers were seated at places with obvious height differential.

Just a day later, on 13<sup>th</sup> of January, came an express apology by the Israeli side due to the fact that the ambassador was seated at a lower stool. Turkish ambassador and Turkish authorities expressed open outrage over the humiliation of their special representative. In a short ultimatum to Israel, sent just one day after the incident, official Ankara demanded apology for “Ayalon's humiliating behavior towards their ambassador”. Headlines in Turkish newspapers reflect on this anger: newspaper “Vatan” had the headline “Scandalous”, “Cumhuriyet” published article titled “Ties with Israel tarnished”, “Sabah” had the article “Evil conspiracy”, while pro-Islamic daily “Yeni Safak” wrote “Disrespectful and Immoral.”

Later, the public affairs office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, came out with an announcement, in which in one portion of it states that the “protest note handed to the Turkish Ambassador should have been handled in a conventional manner”.

Ayalon himself came out with an announcement stating “it is not my style to disrespect ambassadors and in future I will demonstrate my positions in a **diplomatically acceptable manner**”.

## **7. Examples of other protocol mistakes influencing (defense) diplomacy**

List of diplomatic errors and mistakes which are presumably not made intentionally and with the purpose of sending a political message is truly long. Those directly involved in defense diplomacy and protocol know that every element and detail regarding protocol, can have repercussions over political developments. Therefore, simply put, mistakes in implementing protocol are intolerable.

Following are some presumably unintentional mistakes – Montenegro Prime Minister Igor Luksic congratulating Sweden its Statehood Day as part of which he is wishing Denmark success and prosperity; former US first lady Michelle Obama hugging English Queen Elizabeth the Second (protocol strictly prohibits any kind of physical contact with the Queen); inappropriate seating arrangement for the Presidents of Albania, Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro at the plenary meeting hall in the Parliament of Republic of North Macedonia, during the inaugural ball for Republic of North Macedonia, President Gjorge Ivanov (Masalkovski, 2017). White suit of Macedonian VIP representative during commemoration for Polish President Lech Kaczynski... There is also the reception with the Pope in Vatican, and the entry of one of the personal bodyguards of the President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia with a weapon. Other such instances include losing of the pistol by a personal bodyguard of the Macedonian Government Minister, during a plane ride and putting the same by airport employees in the suitcase of a Macedonian news reporter. Losing the luggage of the head of the Macedonian Church during his visit to Rome, wrongfully putting the EU flag on the right side when that should be the place for the Macedonian flag (Закон за употреба на грбот, знамето и химната на Република Македонија, 1997, 2008), wearing a red tie by Macedonian politicians during inaugural balls, and often showing up late by Macedonian politicians for official meetings are also just some of the many protocol mistakes.

Taken from diplomatic practice, one of the most common protocol mistakes made by the Macedonian state institutions is misplacing the flag of Macedonia and the one of the European Union. The list of examples is long, but I would like to point to some of them: Misplacing MK and EU flag in one of the formal rooms in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, same mistake in the press-centers in

the Macedonian Government, other institutions like the Ministry of Finance, of the Ministry of Agriculture... Yet, this specific protocol is clearly written in the Law for the usage of the coat of arms, the anthem and the flag which states: If the flag of the Republic of North Macedonia is right next to some other flag, it must be on the left side) from the position of looking directly into the flags). The one exception is when some high-ranking foreign dignitary is in an official visit of the Republic of North Macedonia.<sup>69</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Looking back at protocol mistakes and “mishaps”, it can be concluded that there is a very thin line between contemplating something as a political message on one and honest protocol mistake on the other side. People not directly involved in defense relations or protocol for that matter, can look at any of the above-mentioned examples any which way, which in self can lead to consequences similar to those in the Israeli-Turkish example. Protocol, Defense Diplomacy, and Security Affairs are very closely connected with one another. Therefore just one wrong detail in any of these three components can directly influence the remaining components of this equation.

Poorly organized protocol, regardless of whether intentionally or not, can lead to inefficient defense diplomacy, which in its self can directly influence the state security. In that context, all above mentioned mistakes, as well as the most recent ones, don't reflect well on the readiness and professionalism of the Macedonian Protocol services and practitioners.

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<sup>69</sup> Смиљанов, С. (2021). Улогата на протоколот и одбранбената дипломатија во остварувањето на безбедноста на Република Македонија. Докторска дисертација. Скопје: Филозофски факултет, стр.106 – 111.

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### **Photographs of interest:**

1. <https://pressingtv.mk/makedonija/znaminjata-bile-mnogu-slichni/>, visited 09.02.2019

