

Developing Components of Emotional Intelligence, as Part of the Integration Policies for the Afghan Refugees from the Central-Asian Countries¹

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Abstract

This work mainly focuses on the situation of the Afghan refugees from the Central-Asian countries and submits the proposal of a programme aiming to develop components of emotional intelligence – self-regulation, social skills, empathy – as part of their integration policies.

Keywords: Afghan refugees, Central-Asian countries, emotional intelligence, integration policies, psychological assistance for refugees.

Introduction

The retreat from Afghanistan of the NATO mission called ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) was completed at the end of 2014 and aroused the interest of various international intergovernmental organizations and countries from the region in finding solutions to inevitable and irregular population movements in Central Asia. It is expected that the

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number of refugees and asylum seekers would increase, given the existent conflict situation.

Throughout this work, we will take into consideration, on the one hand, highlighting the measures already adopted by state and non-state actors regarding the situation in Afghanistan, in particular the ones addressing the combat of transnational criminal activities such as irregular migration, illicit drug trafficking, terrorism, separatism and extremism, and on the other hand, presenting a programme that aims to develop components of emotional intelligence among the Afghan refugees, with the view of facilitating their acceptance and integration, in the context of the new situation.

Projects regarding the regional security of Afghanistan

The fight against modern challenges and threats posed to the security of the region have generated the reaction of various international and regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which created common mechanisms of coordinating their activity. They engaged in the implementation of international projects that deal with the fight against illicit drug trafficking and also in the development of common and concrete data storage that would help prevent and counteract these threats.

Less known is the progress made - even from its founding in 2001 - by Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as a consequence of a debate which aimed at reaching a consensus regarding the situation from Afghanistan and reiterated the importance of combating “the three evil forces” – terrorism, extremism and separatism – mentioned in the framework documents of the member states: China, Russian Federation and the four Central-Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Subsequently, in 2005, as a consequence of the development of the relations between SCO and other states - principle stated in the Charter² of the organization - high-level officials of the SCO and Afghanistan, meaning the General Secretary of SCO and the President

² According to the article 14, the Charter was signed at Sankt Petersburg, on July 7th 2002, available at www.sectsc.org.

of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed the Protocol on Establishment of the SCO – Afghanistan Contact Group. The group launched its activity the next year, when the two actors agreed on cooperating and consulting on security issues.

The year of 2009 was marked by a series of measures which SCO adopted in connection with the situation in Afghanistan, among them the signing of documents³ regarding common combat actions against terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and organized crime. The most important measures that were taken are:

a) in ***the field of illicit drug trafficking combat***: data exchange between agencies; coordinating the common control actions upon drug trafficking; psychotropic substances and their precursors; instructing the personnel of anti-drug agencies; drug abuse prevention actions by introducing treatment possibilities, social and medical rehabilitation; contact establishment and development of efficient interaction between the heads of the anti-drug agencies within the SCO and authorities of Afghanistan.

b) in ***the field of combatting terrorism***: monitoring mechanisms at the common border; arresting the people suspected to be involved in terrorist activities; coordinating the common operations of counteracting the terrorist threats; establishing an efficient mechanism with the view of preventing and eradicating terrorist activities; making common efforts to obtain data about terrorist organizations that threaten the security of SCO member states and Afghanistan; naming an expert of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) with the purpose of consulting with the Afghan authorities; data exchange on terrorist activities and organizations and practice exchange in the field of combat against them; mutual exchange of lists comprising names of terrorists/suspects of terrorism between the SCO member states and Afghanistan; assistance in the arrest and transfer of the terrorists; identifying and blocking the sources of income of the terrorist organizations; participation of the Afghan competent structures in joint trainings, seminars and workshops conducted by SCO.

³ Statement by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on combating terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, Plan of Action of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on combating terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and organized crime; "Declaration of the Special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", signed on March 27th 2009, available at www.sectSCO.org.

c) in *the field of combatting organized crime*: good cooperation with the Afghan authorities in the combat of illegal trafficking of arms, weapons and ammunition, explosives or other forms of transnational crime; data and practice exchange in the combat of organized crime; mutual assistance in investigating organized crime cases; support in collecting and transferring the evidence; implementing training programmes for specialized officers.

The need to implement a number of regional programs of assisting the refugees

The situation in Afghanistan represents a security issue, since Afghanistan is a source of Islamic fundamentalism and the main supplier of narcotics for the Central-Asian countries, considered to be the core of SCO – both from a geographical point of view and due to the interests of the two big powers, members of the SCO, the Russian Federation and China. Based on the mechanisms of international public law, implemented with the aim of protecting and giving assistance to the refugees, asylum-seekers or to other people in need of international protection, they adopted in 2011, at the Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration, the Almaty⁴ Declaration (Kazakhstan), through which they agreed on developing several common action policies⁵ with the view of counteracting the effects of uncontrolled population movements in the region.

We appreciate that starting with its founding, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization proved political will and active engagement in building a stable and flexible security environment in a space characterized by insecurity, through maintaining the „spirit of Shanghai” and in establishing a platform of cooperation and practice exchange in Europe and Asia, not only in the political, economic and security field, but also in the humanitarian one, which represents an important sign of institutional maturity.

A refugee is a person who „owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his

⁴ Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4ddfb7cd6.pdf>.

⁵ Such as the Regional Action Plan signed by the governments of the Central-Asian countries, available at <http://www.unhcr.kz/eng/mixedmigration/TheRegionalActionPlan/>

nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Article 1 of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*).

Once he finds himself in a new country, which is qualified as foreign for him, the refugee enters a new cultural, economic environment, marked by other customs and values, more or less different from the ones of his country of origin.

Frequently, a refugee is not warmly welcomed by the local inhabitants. Instinctively, we are afraid of people we do not know, and this way fear transforms the foreign person into the bad one. The supporters of Carl Jung’s depth psychology were interested in explaining this fact. Subsequently, Verena Kast (2003) believed that when we project a shadow on the foreigners, we do it because we face the fear that something we deny in us may enter our lives along with them. The ones who project are convinced of the righteousness of their projection, because the „shadow bearer” is not, as practice shows us, an ordinary object, but it becomes every single time one which proves itself to be adequate to the nature of the content which is to be projected - in other words, it offers the thing that is going to be hung an appropriate hook.

Thus, the refugees always become the greedy, the bad, the violent and the immoral. We have the tendency to transform bad experiences in the bad itself, in order to remove it. But when we project the bad, we produce the bad, without even having the intention to; and the torches of the Middle Age burn again at our windows while we lose ourselves in a meaningless witch-hunt, which cannot bring any benefit to any of the parties involved.

Programs of integrating the refugees by developing components of emotional intelligence

Which are the „hooks” a foreigner can offer – without even being aware of it - and which eventually may hinder his acceptance and integration? The fact that most of the time the refugees come from very poor countries, with a much lower degree of civilization and deficient standard of living, may activate among the local inhabitants, including among the ones whose jobs are to offer them psychological assistance, native biases and stereotypes. We will not discuss here about the offences committed by some of the Afghans, which unfortunately contribute to the stigmatization of the

others, because these facts cannot be controlled at an individual level by the refugees. We will rather refer to the cultural differences which imprints every community behavioral specifics.

To tackle these possible problems, a solution would be that these refugees attend a programme focusing on the development of components of emotional intelligence.

The culture in which we have been raised influences the way we externalize our feelings and also the way we express ourselves using the non-verbal language. Personal distance is a good example in this case: social rules can make us diminish, exaggerate, completely hide or disguise a feeling that we try at a certain point. For example, when watching a movie about accidents, the Japanese have a much bigger tendency to disguise the bad feeling with a smile (Ekman, 2009). There are also gestures which have different meanings from country to country, such as, for example, the one with the thumb, which in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand has three implications: it is used by the hitchhikers, it stands for „OK” and when it is all of a sudden arisen, it becomes a sign of offense; whereas in other countries, such as Greece, it always means something offensive (Pease, Allan, 1997). From this perspective, one cannot correctly interpret the non-verbal communication without referring to the cultural environment it occurs. There are highly contextual cultures that confer great importance to the context in order to establish the meaning of a message (such as the Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultures), and cultures that do not emphasize the context so much (examples of which are the North-American, Australian and North-European cultures). For instance, keeping eye contact with a dialogue interlocutor is considered a gesture of politeness in the western cultures, but a rather impolite one in other cultures. One cannot project a successful inter-cultural approach without taking into account these aspects. Non-compliance with them could put us in risky postures from which we might commit mistakes that are hard to manage afterwards.

The way we choose to externalize our feelings and to interpret and understand the non-verbal communication is strongly related to our emotional intelligence. For example, after conducting numerous researches, Paul Ekman (2003) established that, in spite of people's ability to display over 10.000 different facial expressions, using a series of muscles that precisely control the lips, the mouth, the nose, the eyes, the forehead and the cheeks, all people, irrespective of their culture, can easily recognize that

these expressions are conveying basic emotions – sadness, happiness, fury, fear, surprise, disgust and disdain. Therefore, expressing emotions is universal, so as emotional expressions are, in all the cultures. However, most of the researchers agree that there is an innate ability to express joy, anger, sorrow, surprise and despair (Izard, 1971). These emotions are considered to be primordial, elementary from the point of view of the physiological component, transcending the cultural and even the species borders and appearing from birth or from the first year of life, as an expression of the adaptation process. There is still not a unanimously accepted agreement among the researchers regarding the number and nature of these basic, elementary emotions, but the utility of the process must be rather considered from the point of view of the necessity to identify the genetically transmitted emotions, in contrast to the secondary ones, which appear subsequently but are equally important if we aim at understanding the behavior of an individual in a social context.

Research established that people who can observe and efficiently understand and interpret non-verbal communication, influencing the way they are perceived by the others, will have bigger success in life than the individuals who do not possess this ability (Navaro, Joe, 2006, *apud* Goleman, 1995: 13-92). The acting talent is different from person to person. The ability to adjust the emotional communication and the non-verbal language is related to the self-control capacity, but also to the social control, which includes the ability to play a role and abilities of self-presentation, both representing components of emotional intelligence. Riggio (1986) appreciates that the emotional and social control, dramatization and social expressiveness are associated with acting. Most of the time, in professional life, the non-verbal and paraverbal communication count more than the verbal language. Gestures, face expression, intonation, the tone we use when we want to express an opinion, the verbal tics we would rather ignore, they all create our social image, they influence our credibility in the eyes of our collaborators and our business, more than we are even aware of. It is important to be adequate to the cultural environment we enter, to smile, to offer firm hand shakes, to pay attention to our interlocutor and to offer him due consideration by keeping eye contact while we are having a conversation, so that the person in front of us may feel he is engaged in a talk with somebody who is actually interested in his faith. By improving the

way we use the non-verbal language, we strengthen our relationships and we increase the probability of our initiatives to be as successful as we expect. All these can be learned, practiced and improved. Moreover, the ability to recognize other person's emotions, based on the expression indicators – for which there is a certain cultural consensus on meaning - is truly important and, according to Bar-On, characteristic to the emotional intelligence.

The refugee can be assisted in understanding the culture he encounters and in developing and improving social abilities, so that he can integrate into the new environment. Last but not least, he can be helped to become aware and then to manage possible conflicts between systems of values. The adaptation and integration effort is an intensive one and a refugee can easily find himself in the posture of having to evaluate his entire life with the view of building a new identity. Leaving behind the culture he belonged to and his family could become a trauma itself, which might affect his self-confidence. Other feelings and emotions hard to accept and bear may come along: the feeling of alienation, the idea of uprooting, inferiority, guilt, shame, regret, longing, the feeling of losing your own identity. Under the influence of these feelings, even an ordinary event, such as the situation in which somebody did not understand his accent, can remind him of the fact he is an intruder. Hence, it is important for him to change his way of thinking, the lens through which he perceives the reality, because along with their transformation, comes the emotional change which will accelerate the integration process. To alleviate these feelings, the refugee needs a supportive environment, in which he could feel integrated, valued as individual, understood. The necessity of such an environment, healthy through itself, is not a new concept in psychotherapy since Carl Rogers. In order to create and manage this context, the psychologist must first work with himself in order to develop respect and tolerance for different cultures, familiarize himself and empathize with the refugee's situation and with the impact or consequences of the socio-cultural environment he comes from, to understand the complexity of the cultural values, with clear reference to universal human rights.

It happens frequently for the refugee to be the survivor of various traumatic experiences – mutilating practices, extreme acts of violence, rapes, abortions, murders, terror – which must be approached as they are, in

an individual or group psychotherapy. All sorts of trauma affect human dignity and individual independence, breaking fundamental human rights and badly affecting the harmonious development of the human being. The process of healing in this kind of cases can be really slow, requiring from the psychologist a lot of patience, flexibility, tolerance, empathy, perseverance and emotional availability. We must not forget that prolonged stress may facilitate the appearance or worsening of health problems. The probability that emotions influence our health condition on the long run generated a major interest for researchers from various fields. In general, it is appreciated that the emotional-physiological processes involved in cardiovascular diseases are different from the ones we observe in malignant disorders or infectious diseases. In the case of cardio-vascular diseases, most of the people focus on behavior type A, which means managing the hostility, along with the bio-chemical implications it generates, whereas in the case of malignant disorders, the explanations are concentrated on the attitude of resignation, on repressing the feelings he has, process considered to be producing negative effects on the immune system. On the other hand, positive emotions generate another pattern of hormone secretion such as, for example, the peptides, which at a cerebral level are attached to the receptors in a similar way to morphine, reducing the destructive metabolic impact owed to the adrenocortical hormones. However, there are a small number of valuable systemic studies to attest the fact that every emotion produces a typical pattern of physiological response and even fewer studies to describe these patterns and the way in which they could generate distinct effects upon health status (Lazarus, R., 2011). Seyle very thoroughly described the way stressing factors influence hormone secretion produced by the adrenal cortex. In other words, through blood, the adrenal cortical steroids spread in the entire body, as a response to the disruptive factors, whichever they might be. This defensive mobilization causes an increase of general predisposition of the body to various diseases. Individuals develop a form of pathology, according to the heredity, physiological conditioning and vulnerabilities that every person has. Physiological imbalance produced by stress weakens the immune capacity of the body, which rapidly increases the appearance of diseases, with numerous causes. The immune system is a very complex one and science, at present, is not capable of offering us a theory which could make us understand very clearly the operating mode of all the mechanisms involved in the immune system and the interaction between them. Most of

the researchers believe that it is rational to assume that organic changes produced by emotions, only when they have a prominent or prolonged character, greatly influence our health status, which at its turn, like in a vicious circle, amplifies the emotional problems.

Instead of conclusions

The central Asian countries are certainly interested not only in finding solutions to prevent and counteract the transnational threats, but also in developing protection measures addressing the problem of the Afghan refugees, given the fact that UNHCR warned about the problems that could be raised by the asylum and migration issues in the case of a possible massive influx of refugees from Afghanistan. With the help of this UN Agency, they improved the national asylum systems regarding both the alternative accomodation arrangements and local integration of a smaller or bigger number of refugees, and the release of various identification and travelling documents they need, according to the international standards. Hence, based on the information provided by the UNHCR Offices in Uzbekistan⁶ and Turkmenistan, these states managed to offer asylum to a small number of Afghan refugees, whereas Kyrkyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan prepared emergency measures for several thousands⁷ of asylum seekers and refugees.

We agree that the path from the improvement of the national legislation and the exchange of good case practices regarding the protection of the refugees to the implementation of integration programs through the development of components of emotional intelligence, may be long and tough. We also agree that providing sustainable solutions to assist the asylum seekers and the refugees requires an allocation of considerable financial resources, in the context of a gradual decrease of the budget for Central Asia⁸. Given the actual instable security environment from

⁶ Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e487466.html>

⁷ According to <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e487466.html>, Tajikistan hosts approximately 4000 asylum seekers and refugees (97% of them are of Afghan origin), this representing the biggest refugee population from Central Asia, even though Tajikistan is a country facing several socio-economic problems.

⁸ According to <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e487466.html>, in 2010, this represented \$33.3 mil, in 2014 it dropped to \$16.7 mil., whereas in 2015, it will raise only to \$14.7 mil.

Afghanistan, in Central Asia, UNHCR developed emergency plans that imply the mobilisation of additional funds, in the case of an outbreak of possible uncontrolled movements started by the Afghan population.

The implementation of several integration programs concerning the Afghan refugees from the central Asian countries through the development of components of emotional intelligence, do not represent strategical priorities for any of the involved parties, but they certainly represent innovative solutions that may improve the dialogue between the governments and the communities, and, why not, between civilizations, by promoting and consolidating peace in a region rather affected by conflict and ethnic violence.

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