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DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES

For citation: Prakapienė D. (2022) Development of intercultural competence in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. *Sociālo Zinātņu Vēstnesis / Social Sciences Bulletin*, 35(2): 78–95.

Citēšanai: Prakapienė D. (2022) Starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšana Lietuvas Bruņotajos spēkos. *Sociālo Zinātņu Vēstnesis*, 35(2): 78–95.

Intercultural competence is culture-general knowledge, skills, abilities, developed through education, training, and experience that provide the ability to operate effectively within a culturally complex environment. In order to perform their duties effectively and efficiently, military personnel often have to operate in a cultural environment that is unusual for them. The research conducted in Lithuania on the issue of intercultural competence development in the military mainly focuses on the analysis of the concept of intercultural competence and the problem of its development; however, little analysis has been done from a managerial point of view. The aim of this article is to identify the main problems and possible opportunities for the development of intercultural competence in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The qualitative research chosen to achieve this aim is a semi-structured in-depth interview. 10 informants – military personnel (n=10) participated in the research. The research was conducted in February and March 2022. The results of the interviews with the military personnel show that intercultural competence is expressed in terms of language skills, knowledge of other cultures, the ability to communicate and integrate with other cultures, and the ability to quickly apply intercultural knowledge to real-life situations. However, the informants also pointed out that this alone is insufficient. They indicated that experience and knowledge of general patterns of behaviour and thinking in certain critical situations is also very important. According to the informants, the Lithuanian Armed Forces lack continuous and ongoing development in this area and advance preparation for future activities in intercultural environments. In their opinion, this should not be left to the personal responsibility of the military personnel but should be organised at institutional level. This can be achieved by combining the theoretical and practical levels, by providing guidelines for the development of intercultural competence in the strategic operational documents of the armed forces, through the organisation of courses or specialised training, the sharing of experiences, or the analysis of case studies of lessons learned.

Key words: intercultural competence, military personnel, Lithuanian Armed Forces, cultural awareness, methods of development of intercultural competence.

Starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšana Lietuvas Bruņotajos spēkos

Starpkultūru kompetence ietver vispārējas kultūras zināšanas, spējas, prasmes, kas attīstās caur izglītību, mācībām un pieredzi un nodrošina iespēju sekmīgi darboties sarežģītajā kultūrvīdē. Lai efektīvi veiktu savus pienākumus, militārpersonām bieži vien jādarbojas sev nepierastā kultūrvīdē. Lietuvā veiktie pētījumi par starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšanu bruņotajos spēkos fokusējās uz starpkultūru kompetences jēdzienu un tās attīstīšanas problēmu; tomēr visai maz analīzes ir veikts no vadības skatpunkta. Šī raksta mērķis ir starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšanas galveno problēmu un iespēju noteikšana Lietuvas Bruņotajos spēkos. Šim nolūkam kvalitatīvais pētījums ir veikts ar daļēji strukturētas padziļinātas intervijas metodi. Pētījums tika veikts

2022. gada februārī un martā. Pētījumā piedalījās 10 informanti – militārpersonas (n = 10). Izpētes rezultāti parādīja, ka starpkultūru kompetence izpaužas valodas prasmē, zināšanās par citām kultūrām, spējā sazināties un integrēties citā kultūrā, kā arī spējā ātri pielietot starpkultūru zināšanas reālās dzīves situācijās. Tomēr intervējamie arī norādīja, ka ar to vien nepietiek. Viņi minēja, ka liela nozīme ir arī pieredzei un zināšanām par vispārējiem uzvedības un domāšanas modeļiem noteiktās kritiskās situācijās. Intervējamie atzina, ka Lietuvas Bruņotajiem spēkiem trūkst nepārtrauktas un pastāvīgas attīstības šajā jomā un gatavības nākotnes aktivitātēm starpkultūru vidē. Viņuprāt to nevajadzētu atstāt militārpersonu personiskajai atbildībai, bet būtu jāorganizē institūciju līmenī. To varētu panākt, kombinējot teorētisko un praktisko pieeju, nodrošinot vadlīnijas starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšanai bruņoto spēku stratēģiskās darbības dokumentos, organizējot specializētas apmācības kursus, daloties pieredzē, analizējot apgūto materiālu uz konkrētajiem piemēriem.

Atslēgvārdi: starpkultūru kompetence, militārpersonas, Lietuvas Bruņotie spēki, kultūras apziņa, starpkultūru kompetences attīstīšanas metodes.

Развитие межкультурной компетентности в Вооружённых силах Литвы

Межкультурная компетентность – это общекультурные знания, навыки, способности, развиваемые посредством образования, обучения и опыта и обеспечивающие способность эффективно действовать в сложной культурной среде. Для эффективного и результативного выполнения своих обязанностей военнослужащим часто приходится действовать в непривычной для них культурной среде. Проведённые в Литве исследования межкультурной компетентности в вооружённых силах представляют собой, главным образом, анализ концепции межкультурной компетентности и проблемы её развития; однако с управленческой точки зрения данный вопрос изучен недостаточно. Целью данной статьи является анализ основных проблем и вероятных возможностей для развития межкультурной компетентности в Вооружённых силах Литвы. Качественное исследование, выбранное для достижения этой цели, проведено с помощью метода полуструктурированного глубинного интервью. В нём участвовали 10 информантов – военнослужащих (n=10). Исследование проводилось в феврале и марте 2022 года. Результаты интервью с военнослужащими показывают, что межкультурная компетентность выражается в языковых навыках, знании других культур, способности общаться и интегрироваться в другие культуры, а также способности быстро применять межкультурные знания в реальных жизненных ситуациях. Однако информанты также указывали, что одного этого недостаточно и что опыт и знание общих моделей поведения и мышления в определённых критических ситуациях также очень важны. С позиции информантов, Вооружённым силам Литвы не хватает постоянного и непрерывного развития в этом направлении и заблаговременной подготовки к будущей деятельности в межкультурной среде. По их мнению, это должно быть предметом не личной ответственности военнослужащих, а организованного на институциональном уровне управления. Такое управление может осуществляться путём объединения теоретического и практического подходов, разработки рекомендаций по развитию межкультурной компетентности в стратегических оперативных документах вооружённых сил, организации курсов или специализированного обучения, обмена опытом или анализа конкретных ситуаций, а также в ходе апробации освоенного материала на конкретных примерах.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетентность, военнослужащие, Вооружённые силы Литвы, культурное сознание, методы развития межкультурной компетентности.

Introduction

Given recent political, economic and social changes around the world, globalisation processes and the need for intercultural cooperation and communication have become even more relevant. This concerns both individuals and organisations or societies in the broadest sense. In this context, there is therefore a growing need to explore the importance and expression of intercultural competence at different levels. In this article, the military organisation is chosen as the object of study, as a unique organisational unit where the development of intercultural competence becomes even more relevant in the context of contemporary political and military events.

The concept of intercultural competence is quite broad and includes elements such as language proficiency (DeVisser, Sands 2014, Watson 2014; Kozyar et al. 2020), cultural awareness (Fantini 2009; Portera 2014), communication, cooperation (Dear-dorff 2016; Liang, Schartner 2022), the ability to act in an intercultural environment (Juknytė-Petrekienė 2013; Aggarwal, Wu 2021); critical thinking and decision making (Miller, Tucker 2015; Newson 2020), etc. It generally involves three elements: intercultural knowledge of oneself and others, skills (skills to interpret, relate, discover, and / or interact) and attitudes (valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours, and relativizing one's self) (Bagwe, Haskollar 2020).

Intercultural competence is defined as general knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes of culture developed through education, training, and experience that provide the ability to operate effectively within a culturally complex environment (Mackenzie, Miller 2017) as military personnel are often placed in unusual situations, whether on missions, international training, or in cross-cultural environments, where critical and rapid decisions have to be made. A review of research shows that components of intercultural competence such as cultural understanding, flexibility, the ability to build sustainable intercultural relationships, tolerance of uncertainty, empathy and openness are also important for the smooth, effective and efficient implementation of the duty in warfare (Portera 2014; Miller, Tucker 2015; Rodman 2015; Rasmussen et al. 2016; Ibrahimov 2017; Kozyar et al. 2020; Abbe 2021). These components are commonly integrated into the educational process and achieved through the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cultural awareness.

Intercultural competence is not a given, but needs to be developed and refined throughout life at different levels: national, institutional, and personal (Norvilienė 2014). When developing and improving intercultural competence at the national level, it is important that strategic documents emphasize the importance of intercultural education, create conditions, and provide for its implementation. At the institutional level, it is important for the institution to be involved in the internationalisation process, i.e., the development of internationalisation within the institution. At the personal level, intrinsic motivation, the desire to develop intercultural competence and to actively participate in intercultural activities and exchanges are essential to the acculturation process. These three levels form a coherent system, thus research needs to take this into account and analyse intercultural competence from different perspectives.

The need to develop intercultural competence in the Lithuanian Armed Forces is supported by the fact that every year Lithuanian military personnel are regularly involved in international missions (e.g., in September 2022, officially 91 Lithuanian soldiers were deployed in international operations and missions) or work in intercultural environments, i.e. environments that are unusual for them. Therefore continuous and ongoing development of cultural competence is important because it opens the way to intercultural dialogue and constructive communication and cooperation between people of different cultures.

In the field of development of intercultural competence in warfare, research conducted in Lithuania is more focused on the analysis of the concept of intercultural competence and the problem of its development (Paurienė 2011), the development of cultural awareness of intercultural competence (Žotkevičiūtė 2014; Žotkevičiūtė-Banevičienė 2018), and the areas of development of intercultural competence (Melnikas et al. 2020; Prakapas, Prakapienė 2020). This shows that although analysis of intercultural competence is being conducted in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, this process and the system have not been studied at the managerial level in the Lithuanian Armed Forces so far. Therefore, the subject analysed in this paper is related to the identification of problems related to the development of intercultural competence in this organisation. Thus, the aim of this article is to identify the development of intercultural competence in the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

The concept of intercultural competence

Intercultural competence is defined in scientific sources as the complex set of abilities, knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to interact effectively and appropriately with linguistically and culturally diverse others (Fantini 2009; Portera 2014); as inter-group interaction between people with different or opposing emotional, cognitive or behavioural orientations to the world (Spitzberg, Changon 2009; Paurienė 2011); as a tool for integration and adaptation to a rapidly changing labour market, increasing competitiveness in the international labour market and the ability to function in an intercultural environment (Juknytė-Petreikienė 2013; Aggarwal, Wu 2021); other authors equate the development of intercultural competence with the importance of intercultural communication (Gut et al. 2017), that is, applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to communicate effectively in an international context. Being able to communicate and work with people from across cultures has always been relevant; however, how people behave and make decisions in the same situations depends on many different factors. Paurienė (2011) argues that each person has a model of his or her environment through which he or she evaluates situations and behaviours and also plans and implements actions. This is primarily related to being in an unusual environment in relation to other cultures. To correctly understand and interpret the behaviour of a person from another culture, it is first necessary to know and understand the ways of thinking and acting that are acceptable in that culture. Therefore, intercultural competence is defined as the ability to understand another culture and the ability to behave appropriately, which requires the continuous development and im-

provement of skills and competences. In summary, the concept of intercultural competence is most often associated with the ability to behave in an intercultural space and to deal effectively with the problems that arise in order to achieve the objectives of an international mission or other activity (Table 1).

Table 1

Variety of definitions of intercultural competence

Author	Definition
Bennett, Bennett 2004	The ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts.
Sememelski 2007	The ability to perceive quickly and accurately, and to act effectively and appropriately, involving individuals from different cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired result.
Jiaquan 2009; Gallus et al. 2014; Bagwe, Haskollar 2020	The ability to interact with people from other cultures through cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and intercultural communication skills, and the ability to use communication skills effectively in intercultural situations.
McCloskey et al. 2010	The emotional, cognitive and behavioural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities that lead to effective mission fulfilment in a cross-cultural environment.
DeVisser, Sands 2014	The ability to deal with complex interpersonal situations, to express and interpret ideas or concepts across cultures, and to understand the social and cultural behaviour of other cultures.
Wolff, Borzikowsky 2018	A complex of abilities that are needed to interact with people from other cultures adequately and effectively.
Olar 2021	An adequate knowledge about certain cultures, as well as general knowledge about problems that arise when members of different cultures interact, maintaining receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with different people, and the necessary skills interacting with others from different cultures.

Source: compiled by the author.

Intercultural competence manifests itself in a wide range of areas in modern society. In the economic sphere, intercultural competence is linked to the development of global markets and the ability to communicate; in the area of labour force, it is a matter of integration not only in the EU but also in other parts of the world; in the social sphere, it is manifested in the processes of migration, assimilation, the creation of blended families, and working in multinational companies and teams; and in the field of intercultural mobility, it is a matter of vocational training and education (exchange programmes, professional exchanges, etc.) Intercultural competence is also manifested through intercultural competence (Melnikas et al. 2020). Žydzūnaitė et al. (2010) elaborate on the areas of intercultural competence and distinguish between the fields of education, social policy, human resource management, psychology and organisational psychology, quality management, communication, research methodology, health care, etc. Navai-

tiėnė et al. (2013) extend the field of intercultural competence by stating that intercultural competence is also important for all major national institutions – migration regulation, health and medical services, education and other socially sensitive areas. Intercultural competence is argued to be important for organisations whose activities are related to intercultural environments, such as those working or seeking to work with foreign organisations, working in multinational teams, developing joint projects, or solving problems. From a defence and security perspective, that is, when analysing the specifics of the Lithuanian Armed Forces' functions, it should be stressed that it fully meets the criteria of an intercultural environment, and therefore the development of intercultural competence is becoming more and more relevant.

Summarising the interpretations of the concept of intercultural competence presented by scholars, it can be stated that there is a diversity of definitions and that the concept itself is not homogeneous but that it is most often linked to the changing cultural environment and the challenges it faces. Therefore, appropriate selection and development of the right set of knowledge, skills, influence/motivation and cultural awareness at all the three levels (individual, organisational, and strategic) would enable people to adapt effectively in a cross-cultural environment.

Developing intercultural competence in security and defence

The development of intercultural competence in the field of security and defence is one of the components of national security. This is also highlighted in the strategic documents of the Republic of Lithuania. The Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania (Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania 2016a) states that Lithuania, as a member of NATO and the European Union, shares responsibility for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area, which requires the Lithuanian Armed Forces to be ready to respond to emerging international security challenges together with its allies. In this context, Lithuania cooperates with other international organisations and partner countries, contributes to the strengthening of Euro-Atlantic and international security by participating in international missions or trainings, hosting troops from other countries, etc. Therefore, the Lithuanian Armed Forces are required not only to be able to act independently, to react quickly to threats, to be prepared to operate in a wide range of operations, but also to provide effective military command and control, etc. The document also focuses on the ability to operate alongside NATO allied forces and the interoperability of military and civilian capabilities in international operations. The need for intercultural competence of military personnel through international cooperation is also reflected in the Operational Doctrine of the Lithuanian Armed Forces (Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, 2013). The document identifies four key elements that strengthen cooperation and trust: mutual relations, respect (mutual respect for partners' professional skills, culture, history, religion, customs, and values strengthens cooperation), knowledge of partners (in international operations, it is necessary to have information not only about friendly forces, but also about the enemy forces), tolerance (in order to cooperate effectively, it takes a lot of time and patience to reconcile different opinions and approaches).

The Lithuanian Military Doctrine (Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania 2016b) states that competent military personnel are the basis for the success of the current and future armed forces and indicates that the 21st century military personnel must excel at the following: physical strength and hardening (emotional and psychological); tactical and technical competence; adaptability and initiative; continuous learning, ability to work in teams and with others, communication, critical thinking and problem solving; cultural and legal awareness; and the ability to operate in multinational, multicultural, inter-institutional, inter-organisational and transnational environments. The above-mentioned competences for military personnel reflect the concept and key elements of intercultural competence as identified by Wolff and Borzikowsky (2018), Bagwe and Haskollar (2020), Olar (2021) and other researchers. According to Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011), Braslauskas (2021), the most important elements for the development of intercultural competence are the following: (1) communication abilities (foreign language skills; ability to build contacts; understanding of nonverbal language; ability to communicate in different situations); (2) ability to work effectively in multicultural teams and/or in a multicultural environment; (3) flexibility of behaviour; (4) ability to resolve/avoid conflicts; (5) ability to create social networks with new people in different environments and to build trust; (6) ability to communicate in situations dominated by different interaction styles, rules, rituals and symbols; (7) ability to find and use the support of public and private institutions to facilitate contacts with representatives of another country or culture. All of these elements and their continuous development are likely to facilitate the success of military personnel in collective defence and other military operations, in international military structures, and in multinational and multicultural environments.

Intercultural competence can be developed in a variety of methods and educational models. It is argued that the individual is a lifelong learner and continuously acquires new knowledge and skills. In this case, not only is formal learning important, but it is primarily achieved at the individual level and depends on the individual's personal willingness to develop through a variety of means (Aube 2011). Caligiuri et al. (2011) present a learning model for developing intercultural competent military personnel that includes both formal learning and experiential social learning. In addition to the core elements of intercultural competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural awareness), the model includes communication, influencing and cognitive skills, as well as qualities such as open-mindedness, extraversion, flexibility, etc., which are considered by the authors to be facilitators of intercultural competency. With the model developed, the authors present a multidimensional learning framework by which both military personnel and trainers could apply different learning or teaching methods to further support the development of intercultural competence. This model combines all of the three levels mentioned above (individual, organisational, and strategic) and is a challenge for the organisation as intercultural competence is not an 'end point' but a long-term process for both the organisation and its employees to achieve the strategic objectives set.

O'Connor et al. (2010), Reid et al. (2012) highlight the importance of experiential education in developing intercultural competence. They argue that teaching and learning

must be long-term, and a specific toolkit must be developed that includes intercultural psychology, co-cultural assimilation, and real-life cases. This is supported by Holmes-Eber et al. (2016), who found in their research among military personnel that the most valued experiential factors were language skills, multicultural experience, travel experience, and frequency of interaction with the local population during previous deployments.

Ibrahimov (2017) argues that military personnel and leaders need to have sufficient intercultural and regional competence to perform their duties effectively at their assigned level and to possess the cognitive, interpersonal, and cultural skills needed to operate in complex contexts. In this context, the authors stress the importance of education and specialised competence centres, which should provide quality language and intercultural competence training.

The quality of teaching can be achieved through a variety of teaching methods and techniques. Abbe (2011) argues that educational technology does not in itself lead to better intercultural competence, but contributes strongly to it. However, Mackenzie et al. (2013) demonstrate the importance of technology through the delivery of virtual specialised courses. They argue that courses such as Introduction to Culture and Introduction to Intercultural Communication, or similar courses, contribute to the upskilling of military personnel and the development of intercultural skills. Braslauskas (2021) adds that in order to ensure effective intercultural communication, it is necessary to combine intercultural competences with creativity competences, while Hantsiuk et al. (2021) suggest using the design thinking methodology to improve the development of intercultural competences. Olar (2021), analysing the case of the Romanian army, proposes developing intercultural competences of military personnel through real-life situations by transferring them to role-playing games or simulations: (1) selecting the most appropriate scenarios related to possible and probable intercultural situations in which military personnel involved in stability and support operations may find themselves; (2) translating those situations into role-playing games and simulations; (3) effective use of new information and communication technologies in the intercultural communication competence formation process can be successfully achieved. Another intercultural competence development tool 'story circles' is recommended for the transfer of experience and 'lessons learned'. The advantages of the method (Deardorff 2019) include the following: demonstrating respect for others, practicing listening for understanding, cultivating curiosity about similarities and differences with others, gaining increased cultural self-awareness, developing empathy and developing relationships with culturally different others.

Although research and studies demonstrate and point to various ways of developing intercultural competence, there is also a need to critically assess the challenges. Braslauskas (2021) states that insufficient intercultural competence causes problems related to: (1) different time planning and management; (2) different temperaments of communicators; (3) different work culture and rules of conduct; (4) different perceptions of managerial and subordinate relationships.

Research methodology

The type of research is qualitative. The research method chosen was the semi-structured in-depth interview. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the problem under study, for obtaining detailed research results, for identifying problems, and for clarifying the causes. Since the subject and problem of the investigation is specific, focused on the assessment of the situation in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, expert selection of informants was applied. The interviews were conducted with 10 persons serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces with at least one year of experience working in an international environment. The research was conducted in February and March 2022.

The interview questions focused on the following problem areas: the importance of the concept of cultural competence and its elements, the role of the army in the development of intercultural competence and support for military personnel, and the problems of development of intercultural competence in the Lithuanian army.

Table 2

Characteristics of informants, n = 10 persons, 2022

Informant number	Military rank	Years of service	Intercultural experience
I1	Major	18 years	Mission in Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I2	Senior Lieutenant	26 years	2 missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I3	Major	23 years	Missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I4	Senior Lieutenant	25 years	Missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, participation in international exercises*
I5	Senior Sergeant	20 years	Mission in Iraq, participation in international exercises*
I6	Major	24 years	Mission in Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I7	Major	23 years	Mission in Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I8	Colonel Lieutenant	10 years	Mission in Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*
I9	Sergeant	20 years	Mission in Iraq, participation in international exercises*
I10	Sergeant	19 years	Missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, participation in international exercises*

*International military training is not detailed in the table in order to preserve the principle of confidentiality and to avoid disclosing sensitive data about the informants, as some of the training sessions were attended by only a few Lithuanian Armed Forces personnel, which would reveal their identity.

Source: compiled by the author.

The research was carried out according to the principles of research ethics and confidentiality. The study was limited by the fact that not all participants were able to participate in the study due to their service commitments. Also, some of the results of the study are not analysed in the article due to sensitive information (e.g., names, locations, and content of courses are not detailed).

Analysis of the survey results

In an attempt to clarify the military personnel's perceptions of intercultural competence, it was found out that the majority of the informants primarily associate it with NATO and EU commitment and characterise it in the context of international missions and training. This reflects, in principle, the concept and mission of intercultural competence as defined in the strategic documents of Lithuanian security and defence. However, it should be noted that the informants mostly associated it with participation in international missions and training, but did not take into account the experience gained from serving in Lithuanian military units, interacting and cooperating with military personnel from other countries deployed in Lithuania.

<...to effectively execute assigned multicultural tasks with NATO or other allies> (I8); <...as a person familiar with other cultures and customs> (I6); <understand intercultural competence as the experience of working in different teams in different countries, of working in international units, and of the competences and qualifications acquired there> (I4).

When explaining the elements of intercultural competence in the experience of military personnel, the most frequently mentioned ones were language skills and the ability to communicate with other cultures. The informants indicated that it is advisable to know more than one language, as this allows direct unmediated communication with colleagues or representatives of other countries.

<...poor knowledge of English limits communication> (I8); <the first thing is, of course, the language, the knowledge of the foreign language, which is a key element, which in particular facilitates the understanding of each other, and consequently influences all the results> (I7); < the knowledge of languages can never be too much, it is one of the main things to make life easier during a mission> (I6); <...not knowing the language I think should not be in such an environment, especially if you have to communicate and not just go for technical work> (I1); <...knowing a foreign language, especially military English, is already half the job done> (I4).

The informants stressed the need to develop cultural awareness. Most of the informants confirmed the need for knowledge of the cultural specificities of nations, i.e., to understand religious differences, traditions and customs, specific patterns of behaviour, etc.

<Customs and religion itself are completely different and you need to know, in the sense of that minimum knowledge> ... <you can get into trouble>

(I7); *<In practice, you will be a white elephant if you do not take into account religious aspects and customs. Not only will you not be understood, but next time it may be perceived as a gesture of humiliation and disrespect>* (I4).

However, they also noted that this alone is insufficient. The informants pointed out that experience and knowledge of general patterns of behaviour and thinking in certain critical situations are also important. For example, the element of overestimating oneself, of being overconfident, or often following stereotypes, e.g., *<We imagine ourselves to be more advanced, more civilised, more tolerant, but when you encounter another culture, you may not necessarily have cultural shock, but you may wonder how it can be>* (I3). Stereotyping is also linked to attitudes towards other people and their patterns of behaviour. Experience shows that stereotyping makes it more difficult to adapt to the environment and to communicate: *<you go, you talk and you realise that your understanding is wrong, that it is only in your head...>* (I4); *<stereotyping can destroy relationships between people, it prevents you from being realistic, you lose people's trust>* (I8); *<...prejudice and stereotyping make our work and communication with other cultures much more difficult. I always try to distance myself from that...>* (I5).

From the point of view of the informants, the role of the organisation in the development of intercultural competence is very important. The interviewees stated that there is a lack of continuous development of intercultural competence at the organisational level. It is not a continuous process. In most cases, investment in staff is only made when they are deployed on a mission or international training, and it is completely ignored in day-to-day activities:

<I was sent to training very shortly before the mission...> (I2); *<I have the feeling that if you don't go on a mission or an international exercise, you don't need that cultural understanding... But what if there are foreign soldiers in the unit... the impression is that there is no need to communicate with them... This is where improvisation begins; improvisation>* (I7).

They highlighted also the lack of time to prepare for an international mission:

<The worst thing is that the time available to prepare for international missions is very short... you have to learn a lot in a short time...> (I5); *<there are courses before the mission, they are oriented toward the consolidation of the necessary knowledge... But what you don't learn in such a short time, you either know or you don't know in principle...>* (I1); *<...when I went to international training, the thing I missed most was cultural knowledge. We had a pre-departure course, but it was too short, it's hard to absorb everything so quickly...>* (I10).

Another problem highlighted by the informants was the lack of a clear system for selection and evaluation for international missions or training. However, this should be looked at more closely, as this study did not seek to examine the internal system of preparation for an international mission, and therefore assumptions can only be made

on the basis of the views expressed by the informants: in general, the majority of the informants stated that the system was not clear, and that no selection criteria were identified:

<...> <We weren't assessed in any way, only information was given. There was no guidance on how prepared you were, how knowledgeable you were, the cultural stuff> (I6); <...> to ensure an impartial, orderly English language certification, I would suggest that before going on an international mission, one should not only take into account the PERVIS data on English language proficiency, but also send the soldier out for additional testing, perhaps even considering something like an interview, just to have some kind of dialogue, or to ask questions, or to ask them to talk about the nature of the work or some kind of field, in order to actually test their knowledge of the English language. (I8); <basically, there was no selection, they said that as a specialist in the field, I was the right person for it...> (I9).

At the same time, they argue that there may not be a need to do so because when it comes to missions or training, there is no need to make a selection because the organisation is small and there is not much choice. However, it is worth pointing out here that motivation is perhaps the most important factor. As Žotkevičiūtė (2014) states, a motivated military personnel who wants to go on a mission or international training will be more motivated for self-development.

Meetings with experienced colleagues and the sharing of their experiences were identified as the main advantages of the training. This reflects the insights of O'Connor et al. (2010) and Reid et al. (2012) that self-directed learning is not enough and that it is necessary to make use of staff's existing experience by sharing it. However, the informants point to both the importance and the inadequacy of such shared experiences.

<...> through the transfer policy, there should be evaluations of the courses to ensure that they were effective and useful. That line of lessons learned is one of the most important ones, it is good, what was bad, what was not taught, and what needs to be addressed. That is what we lose. I have been there and written: the minuses, the pluses, what went wrong when I was taught, but if we do not pay attention to that again, if we do not provide funding for the training of the staff, then we will lose all that. (I4); <...> it takes one hour, one lecture, which is impossible to transmit the whole experience and it is done informally (I8); <We hear a lot about these lessons learned, about some kind of database... but it doesn't really exist, the system doesn't work here...> (I6).

Therefore, it is suggested that the collection of lessons learned and the creation of a database would help ensure its smooth development and the preparation of military personnel. There is also a need for the systematic involvement in institutional training of military personnel who have been to a country where an international operation or international training is taking place.

The study of the informants' opinion on the content of the organized training found that from a professional point of view the informants give a positive evaluation

to the content of the training, but miss the use of themes that correspond to the development of intercultural competence and the use of more diverse educational methods in the training: *<it is understandable that you want to say a lot in a short time, it is a lot of text, facts... and you want to look deeper, understand it in some other way...>* (I7); *<We've had lectures about the country and its culture, but frankly they were boring. I would have liked something more interactive, more engaging, something you could do yourself>* (I10). As the analysis of scientific literature shows, the solutions to this problem are widely analysed and discussed, and a variety of educational methods can be used to develop intercultural competence, such as design thinking, simulation and role-playing games, case studies, creative methods, etc. (Deardorff 2019; Olar 2021; Braslauskas 2021, etc.). In particular, the informants themselves suggest extending the range of learning methods and tools through the following: *<creation of special virtual lectures on traditions and customs of other cultures>* (I2); *<...e.g. list of recommended films with comments on what to watch...>* (I8); *<...create distance learning courses or organise live consultations with specialists (psychologists, cultural studies, etc.)>* (I9), etc.

The role of the institution's responsibility for preparing the military personnel to work in an intercultural environment is also mentioned. Military personnel represent the Lithuanian Armed Forces as a specific organisation, so their ability to adapt to a new cultural environment and to work with colleagues from other countries is particularly relevant.

<Preparing for working in a cross-cultural environment is very important, because you are there to represent not only yourself as an individual, but also and most importantly the country you are serving... You represent it through your actions and behaviour...> (I2); *<We have to remember that first and foremost we represent our country and we represent it. So we create the image of our country through our behaviour. Therefore, you are not only responsible for yourself...>* (I9).

In this context, another research problem that requires a separate study is how to measure the level and impact of intercultural competence of military personnel. According to Rodman (2015), the impact of military intercultural competence will not be known until appropriate evaluation methods are in place to assess the need and cost of investment in developing these competences.

The informants highlighted the individual role of the military personnel in the preparation for intercultural activities. It is argued that a great deal depends on the individual himself, his personal qualities, and his willingness to be involved in the development of this process:

<...and however you look at it, it is mostly up to you – whether you want to do the course or not...> (I3); *<when I went on my first mission, I spent a lot of time preparing myself individually: talking to colleagues, reading a lot about the customs of the country, trying to gather everything myself, which was quite difficult>* (I7); *<I think you have to be critical of yourself first. How much effort you put in, how much it matters to you. No amount of training will help if you don't take an interest yourself>* (I4).

Although it is true that organizations should make every effort to develop training models and systems to help staff acquire the necessary intercultural competences, the conscious cultivation of self-directed cultural learning requires the participation of the individuals themselves. The success of the development of intercultural competence must be based primarily on the ability of staff to learn and develop cultural competence independently (Rasmussen et al. 2016). In particular, this requires both the organisation and its members to recognise that much cultural learning takes place through experiential activities and concrete situations rather than in the context of formal training and that the development of intercultural competence must therefore focus on the development of a set of practical strategies and the opportunities to use them in the course of the learning.

Conclusions

The analysis of sources and documents from the scientific literature suggests that the concept of intercultural competence is broad and multidimensional. It is most commonly defined as the ability to operate in multinational, multicultural, interinstitutional, interorganisational, and transnational environments and includes elements of intercultural competence such as cultural understanding, flexibility, the ability to build sustainable intercultural relationships, tolerance for uncertainty, empathy, and openness.

The results of the interviews show that intercultural competence is expressed in terms of language skills, knowledge of other cultures, the ability to communicate and integrate with other cultures, and the ability to quickly apply intercultural knowledge to real-life situations.

Analysing the possibilities of intercultural competence development at the individual, organisational, and strategic levels, it is necessary to clarify the directions and methods of intercultural competence development at the strategic level, focusing not only on international missions and trainings, but also on everyday activities and tasks. At the organizational level, it was found that the Lithuanian Armed Forces create and maintain an intercultural environment, organize special courses and trainings, and have ongoing cooperation with partner countries. However, the above activities are mostly focused on military personnel on missions or international training. Meanwhile, there is a lack of a permanent and continuous model for the development of intercultural competence: fragmentation of course content, lack of time, lack of diversity of teaching methods, and insufficient use of the experience of other military personnel.

At the individual level, internal motivation, the desire to develop intercultural competence and to actively participate in intercultural activities and exchanges are essential for the development of intercultural competence. Culture is inherent in all groups of people, but specific cultural traits are acquired depending on the individual, his/her motivation, and experience.

Based on the results of the study, it is argued that in order to create an appropriate system for the development of intercultural competence in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, it is worth combining the existing professional military training programmes, organisational and functional training, and lifelong learning skills through training,

education, and experiential opportunities. Both the organisation and its members need to be aware that cultural learning does not take place in the context of formal training, but through experiential activities and concrete situations, and that the development of intercultural competence must therefore focus on the development of a set of practical strategies to be used and accessed during learning. It is also argued that effective intercultural competence can be developed in cooperation with civil society organisations and educational institutions.

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