

# **Gastronomic Diplomacy as a Way of Preserving Ethnocultural Identity of Modern Nations**

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**ABSTRACT:** The authors consider the new direction of cultural diplomacy - gastronomic diplomacy. Gastronomic diplomacy is one of the ways to preserve the ethnocultural identity of modern peoples and ethnic groups. The authors show the possibilities of gastronomic diplomacy for the popularization of national culture. The authors note that many countries are carrying out work aimed at incorporating national culinary traditions into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The authors pay special attention to the national cuisine of the peoples of the extreme North of Russia, especially the preservation of their national culinary traditions. The article notes the importance of preserving and popularizing the culinary traditions of the peoples of the Russian Arctic in order to maintain cultural diversity

in the world. The article highlights the importance of gastronomic diplomacy for the development of new forms of cultural diplomacy. **KEYWORDS:** ethnicity, diplomacy, cultural exchange, gastronomic diplomacy, national cuisine, indigenous peoples of the North Russia, cultural heritage, UNESCO

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## **Introduction. The problem of preserving ethnocultural identity in the contemporary world**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the content, direction and forms of diplomacy have significantly expanded. It is undoubtedly due to the processes of globalization and the democratization of international relations. Diplomatic activity today involves a large and socially, professionally and religiously diverse audience. New forms of diplomacy, based on the use of the possibilities of culture, science, education, sports etc., are also emerging. This diversity of actors, forms and instruments and the active use of digital space makes it possible to talk about the emergence of “new cultural diplomacy”.

In the age of globalization with its characteristic processes of cultural standardization and dominance of the mass culture, the problem of preserving cultural identity has become crucially important. It stems from the acquired awareness of the commonality of culture, history, a language with a certain group of people. The ethnocultural values on which the ethnocultural identity is based have many different manifestations, including those in traditions, customs, folklore, rites and holidays, national costume, and national cuisine. The need to preserve cultural identity in authentic forms is one of the problems of modern society and modern civilization in the context of globalization.

The desire of many peoples and ethnic groups to preserve their traditions results in the popularization of national culture in all its

richness and diversity becoming a noticeable trend in contemporary cultural exchange and is reflected in the issues of diplomatic activities. These activities can be directed towards the promotion of national music, dancing, literature and other forms of culture and art. In addition to advancing the various achievements of their national culture, both traditional and modern, countries are increasingly focusing on the popularization of national cuisine. On the interest to the national cuisine, tourism development (gastronomic tourism) can be built. Its study may be included in professional, academic, museum, library exchanges, and other directions of intercultural interaction. Interest in national cuisine can become the basis for international cultural, ethnographic festivals and exhibitions.

The national cuisine is a reflection of the special cultural and historical context in which the special ethnicity has emerged, and it has absorbed all the peculiarities of everyday life, world-view and traditions of different ethnic groups and peoples. The authentic cuisine reflects customs and traditions, lifestyle, spiritual and religious beliefs of peoples and contacts with the outside world. The cuisines of the world are directly related to the geographical and climatic conditions of peoples. It is often the nutrition that affects the lives of peoples, especially when it comes to ethnic groups living in difficult climatic conditions. It can, therefore, be concluded that the national cuisine is a special manifestation of cultural identity, as well as a very promising course of cultural exchange.

### **The phenomenon of gastronomy diplomacy as a form of new cultural diplomacy**

Today, many countries are making serious efforts to promote their culinary traditions in the world. The increased interest in this type of activity has led to the emergence of a relatively new notion of

“culinary” or “gastronomy diplomacy”. Gastronomy diplomacy is a form of cultural diplomacy based on the popularization of national cuisine in the world. The main point is that the easiest way to conquer the hearts and minds of people lies through the stomach.

The terms “culinary diplomacy” and “gastronomy diplomacy” began being actively used in the early 2000’s through researchers in public diplomacy from the United States, Paul Rockower and Sam Chapple-Sokol. For the first time, culinary diplomacy, as an independent concept, was presented on the Economist’s 2002 pages in the article on Thai cuisine in the world. The launch of the International Programme in Thailand named “Global Thai program” has become the ground for this article. The programme was initiated by the Government to increase the number of Thai restaurants in the world. As a result of the implementation of the programme, their number of 5 500 in 2002 increased to more than 10 000 in 2013. In 2010, a similar programme was adopted in Malaysia under the name “Malaysia Kitchen” Programme. In 2011, these examples were followed by the Peruvian government by launching a formal programme of Peruvian culinary diplomacy to include Peruvian cuisine into the UNESCO list as an intangible cultural heritage item. The initiator was chief Chef Gastón Acurio, the owner of several restaurants around the world.

In September 2012, the US formally launched the “Culinary Diplomacy Partnership Initiative”. The initiative was organized by the State Protocol Department of the United States.] More than 80 chefs, including the White House chef Kristeta Comerford William Jossesa, José Andrés, became the initiators and first members of the so-called “American Chef Corps”. One of the objectives of the programme was to send members of the Corps to the United States embassies abroad with a mission of public diplomacy: to promote knowledge of the American cuisine.

As far as Russia is concerned, there are no such ambitious programmes in the field of gastronomy diplomacy, as in the case of the countries considered, although the work on this matter is already being pursued. For example, St. Petersburg city holds the festival “National Cuisine is the key to the friendship of peoples”, where representatives of different peoples meet to show the peculiarities of their cuisines. The Rossotrudnichestvo Federal agency organizes an annual contest “Ambassador of Russian Cuisine” to popularize Russian culinary traditions abroad.

Thus, national culinary traditions and the ethnic peculiarities of cooking are gradually becoming an autonomous form of cultural diplomacy that fosters cultural contacts between countries and peoples. At the same time, these traditions help to preserve the ethnic identity of different peoples.

### **International cooperation in the preservation of national gastronomy traditions and UNESCO**

National cuisine is not only an intercultural exchange but also an object of the cultural heritage of mankind. The international organization of UNESCO is responsible for the preservation of cultural heritage. In addition to protecting the material cultural and natural heritage, this organization has addressed the intangible cultural heritage of the mankind, also known as the “Living Heritage”. On October 17, 2003, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Convention 2003). As of 2017, about 100 countries have signed it. The intangible heritage includes customs, forms of presentation and expression, knowledge and skills, as well as related instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural

spaces recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, by individuals as part of their cultural heritage.

For the first time in 2010, gastronomy traditions became the subject of the non-material heritage of UNESCO. On November 17, in Nairobi, at the UNESCO Special Committee Session, French cuisine was added to the list of world intangible cultural heritage of mankind. This verdict was unprecedented. It was the very first time when the gastronomy art of particular nation or ethnos entered the list of world intangible cultural heritage. The French authorities reacted instantly to the international community's recognition of the country's culinary traditions. New programmes have been developed to promote local culinary habits, the education of younger generation on the national cooking culture has been launched, and the funds have been allocated for the development of culinary domestic tourism and for the promotion of French cuisine on the international scene (French cuisine 2010).

The successful experience of France has also aroused interest in other countries, which consider their cuisine to be the masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO list can be made up of the culinary traditions of different countries, selected culinary masterpieces, rites and traditions associated with the gastronomy culture. For example, Mexican cuisine was included in the list in 2010. Notably that it includes not only certain specific dishes (such as tortilla or burrito) but also the ways in which products are processed (maize washing in lime water) and traditional kitchen utensils, including, for example, millstone and stone mortar for grinding spices and herbs. UNESCO experts noted that the set of traditions and recipes that distinguish Mexican cuisine contributes to the national development and the strengthening of regional ties among the inhabitants of the country and also expresses the cultural identity of the community. In addition, Mexican cuisine preserves legends, songs, and stories that are usually told at the table.

The UNESCO list also contains the traditional cuisine of the entire region - the Mediterranean diet of such countries as Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco. In 2010 it was also included into the authoritative list. The experts noted that the variety of products of the region (olive oil, cereals, fish, dried vegetables and fruit, spices, as well as wine and infusions) was simply unique and facilitated the transfer of knowledge about the local lifestyle and activities popular in the Mediterranean region. In 2011, Turkey succeeded in including the Keshkek into the UNESCO list. Keshkek is known as the traditional ceremonial dish of chicken (or other meat) and wheat, which is prepared and served before the wedding ceremony.

Today, the "Hall of Fame" of the international cuisines welcomes also the culinary traditions of Korea with its South Korean vegetable dish Kimchi, which is sour Chinese cabbage, richly dressed with red pepper, onions, ginger and garlic. The UNESCO list also contains the national cuisine of the Japanese, which has a different preference for natural, minimally processed products, extensive use of seafood, seasonal characteristics, specialties, specific rules of decorating dishes, serving, and the etiquette.

On November 26, 2014, at the 9th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, held in Paris, it was decided to include the Armenian "Lavash: production of traditional bread, significance and cultural manifestations in Armenia" into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. And in 2016, international experts decided to include the Uzbek Pilaff and Tajik dish "Oshi Palav" into the UNESCO list. The experts noted that the tradition of preparing the Uzbek Pilaf is preserved in the families, transferred from the master to the follower. The dish fosters social cohesion and solidarity and is part of the community's cultural identity (The list of cultural heritage of UNESCO has been supplemented with the Uzbek n.d.).

Thus, the gastronomic traditions of the peoples of the world are now receiving considerable attention within the framework of UNESCO, and the world cuisines are perceived as a unique source of information about history, culture, customs and rites, the moral principles of separate societies and ethnic groups. In addition, for the states whose national cuisines have entered the UNESCO List as items of intangible cultural heritage, this fact is also important as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, as it promotes the popularization of national culture, serves as an engine for the development of tourism and cultural exchange.

### **Culinary traditions of the indigenous peoples of the North Regions**

In Russia, according to the data of the Russian census, there are 193 different peoples or ethnic groups (National composition of the population of the Russian Federation 2010). Each one has unique cultural traditions, their own recipes of national cuisine. In this article, as a separate case, we would like to refer to the culinary traditions of the indigenous peoples of the North. These traditions can become both a form of Russian cultural (culinary) diplomacy and an invaluable item of intangible cultural heritage, reflecting all the peculiarities of the everyday lifestyle of ethnic groups that inhabit the Russian Far North. The nomadic traditions of the peoples of the Arctic Regions have a wealth of distinctive culture, domestic and spiritual traditions, which are, of course, an integral part of the intangible cultural heritage of Russia.

The cuisine of the Arctic Region as the traditional food of the peoples inhabiting this harsh province can and should be considered as an integral part of their culture, and as a unique example of intangible culture. The composition, ways of preparation of daily, festive and ceremonial dishes constitute the ethnic tradition.



The peoples of the North Regions have paid great attention to balanced and quality food since ancient times. Over the years, traditional approaches to nutrition have evolved and have not lost their relevance today. The Far North Regions are populated by different ethnic groups: Chukchi, Evens, Evenks, Eskimo, Yukaghirs, Yakuts. Their cuisine also depends on the lifestyle (nomadic, semi-settled), difficult existence in the conditions of the Arctic Regions. Each nation has its own traditional dishes, which can be described as special gastronomic brands. And it is the use of venison in cooking that brings together virtually all the peoples of the North Regions. Venison for North people is the product of universal use. The nutritional characteristics of this meat are, in the opinion of specialists, much higher than of pork, beef and other types meat and game.

The experts have repeatedly pointed to the unique, balanced set of vitamins in venison. The continuous inclusion of venison in the diet helps to avoid vitamin deficiency, scurvy and contributes to the carrying out the metabolic reactions in a proper way. The scientists point out that venison comprises the ascorbic acid 4-5 times more than beef. 100 g of venison contains the daily dose of all the vitamins necessary for a human body (Vladimirov, Reshetnikov and Robbek 2005, 32).

During their long history, the peoples of the North Regions have learned to prepare a variety of dishes from venison. These dishes are distinguished not only by interesting and original flavour, but are also curative and nutritious. Practically every ethnic group in the North Regions has its recipes and its rules for the use and preparation of venison. For example, evenks treat deer's brain or wild deer's kidneys as the special delicacy. Note that they prefer to eat wild deer meat. Deer milk is usually drank with tea, as well as with berries and flour porridge. The meat is the main ingredient for the preparation of sausages and jelly. Yukaghirs, for example, use the

blood of deer and often freeze it for future use. One of the popular dishes today is khasha, which is the thick soup made of deer blood. The tundra chukchis eat frozen deer meat. During the period of mass slaughter, the meat and blood of the reindeer are frozen, long kept and then used for food in the harsh winter time (Traditional food of the indigenous peoples of the North Regions n.d.).

Those evens who are occupied in hunting and deer farming, usually eat venison as the main courses of daily meals. Their daily diet has always been modest and has been subordinated to the nomadic way of life, but almost always included dishes prepared from deer by-products. For the most part, they eat dried meat, cut on slices as the base of diet. This meat is cooked in a special way. Evens dry meat under the sun until it acquires dark, almost black color. This original dish is called the Horcho and it's very popular with the peoples of the North Regions. The nomads of the North Regions also take finely cut dried deer meat for the road. The meat is folded into specially stitched pouches. Such meat is referred to as the Gignje or Nirgiti. There are other ways of drying deer meat. For example, for the preparation of Ulekte, or Khurcha meat is cut into large pieces of 10-12 cm width, the thickness of 3-4 cm and dried so that it is hard and rubber only at the top, and a bit row inside. This dish is very tasty, but as the Arctic people note, it can only be prepared from fresh meat of very high quality (Traditional food of the indigenous peoples of the North Regions n.d.). The peoples of the North have also eaten deer meat for ritual purposes, and the bones are still being used for creating utilitarian and artistic products.

Today, the traditional culture of the northern peoples is in a difficult situation: it is forced to survive, to resist the influence of modern culture. The same goes for national cuisine. And, of course, by carrying out protection activities, great attention must be paid to the gastronomic traditions of the region, which are one of the most accessible cultural manifestations to the third person. According to

the prestigious specialist in the modern branding of the territories Keith Denny, “The value of food is something more than its nutritional content, it is one of the oldest instruments and the most specific cultural manifestations defining who we are and to what group we want to belong” (Denny 2013, 87). Culinary traditions are now increasingly being incorporated into the formation of the brand of the territory, or constitute an independent brand, which is very popular, for example, in the development of a tourist route.

In April 2016, during the conference devoted to the Arctic Region Cultural heritage, it was announced about the preparation of request on including separate items of the Arctic Region into the tangible and intangible heritage Lists. For the first time, the theme of the culinary traditions of peoples as an intangible cultural item was introduced (Browse the list of Intangible n.d.).

Including items into the UNESCO List would also enable Russia in general, and the Arctic Region in particular, to address many important issues related to the protection and promotion of unique monuments. Foreign researchers note that the items included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List significantly increase the number of tourist arrivals in the regions, 9-12 times. In addition, participation in UNESCO activities for the country and the region opens an opportunity to participate in modern scientific research and to obtain qualified assistance and advice. It also certainly raises the international credibility of the country, that is to say, it works as an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

## **Conclusions**

As can be seen from the above, work in this area should become an important part of cultural diplomacy of Russia. Moreover, it is also the most important direction of a domestic policy aimed at preserving the cultures of small peoples. The invaluable traditions

of the material and intangible culture of the peoples of the Arctic Regions require the painstaking study, careful maintenance and persistent popularization. International cooperation of Russia in the Arctic Regions should be aimed at solving these problems.

With regard to the use of the culinary traditions of the North peoples in the practice of cultural diplomacy of Russia, this direction is still very young, although it has recently evolved dynamically. There are already some approaches and original forms of public diplomacy based on culinary traditions. Such forms include cooking master-classes, gastronomy festivals, participation in the activities of international organizations.

Of course, national cuisine is a unique cultural phenomenon and an area of international activity that can create a climate of confidence, to prepossess the participants of the most responsible political events to the adoption of mutually beneficial solutions. The gastronomy culture and the culinary diplomacy that is based on it is a sphere that is familiar to every human and can contribute to the deeper study of the country, its history and culture, which is an important task of contemporary cultural diplomacy of Russia and other countries.

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