# International Negotiation Training Travelogue

*Anecdotes from Thirty Years of Teaching and Training in International Negotiation Processes*

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This travel writing is a personal account of 30 years of training: an educator's memoir that is intended to be a kind of historical overview with some lessons learned. It records experiences and anecdotes from countries in which I have been teaching and training. On the one hand it is humorous, and on the other there are some lessons to be learned. The main lesson: prepare for the unknown and manage expectations, as perceptions determine reality. This article also reflects my personal approach to international negotiation processes: using negotiation lectures and exercises as an instrument to enhance the understanding of students, civil servants, military officers and politicians in international political relations. Of course, I do my utmost to be empathic to the participants with whom I am working, but unlike many other trainers, my focus is on the mechanics and the context of international negotiation processes.

**Introduction**

In 1989, I delivered my first training abroad in international negotiation. It was a disaster from the start, but it also provides us with a nice anecdote. Thinking about it gave me the idea to write down the many anecdotes derived from my 30 years as a negotiation trainer. I had been hesitant to put them on paper, as some of them may be seen as quite scandalous. However, family members, students and colleagues pressured me not to be shy and to share my tales with those who are interested in training and research in international negotiation. This series of anecdotes is more or less the continuation and conclusion of articles that I have published during the last decade (Meerts 2012, 2020). My 1989 international seminar

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was the first and the only one that year, but it had been preceded by twelve years of developing and implementing simulation exercises, six years of which time I had devoted to developing negotiation skills training as well.

My negotiation skills training programmes all started when young Dutch diplomats complained about the negotiations that they had to perform in simulation exercises concluding their three months of courses in diplomacy. They said, 'you gave us a lot on the content of our exercise, but nothing on the techniques and processes'. Simulation exercises were not new to me: I created the first one when I was twelve years old and I used the ensuing ones with friends until 2008 (Meerts 2008). These simulations were recreational, not educational. They were made for fun, a kind of computer games without computers: with maps, constitutions, 'journals' and conferences, etc. These kinds of recreational models can still be found in the Dutch 'Society for Geofiction'.

The institute where I began working in 1978 had used educational simulations since 1967.

These simulations were conceived by Isaac Lipschits – later a professor at Groningen University and, by chance, my boss in 1974 – who wrote a book on simulations in international politics (Lipschits 1971), the first of its kind in the Netherlands. However, at the time, I had no knowledge about negotiation itself. I had to learn by doing. It greatly helped that I met many experts during the first conference on international negotiation processes of the Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) programme in Laxenburg (Austria) in 1989 and that PIN invited me to join its Steering Committee in 1999.

When my institute merged into the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' in 1983, the development of new exercises became one of the institute's priorities. I am grateful to many of my collaborators, including Roel Gans, Theo Postma and Wilbur Perlot, who helped me to design and implement these role plays and turn them into tools for teaching and training international negotiation techniques at home and abroad (Meerts 2009). I am also very appreciative of trainers from abroad, such as Pierre Casse, Raymond Saner and John Hemery – along with many other colleagues – who helped me accomplish my 30 years of training. I want to stress here that it is an enormous advantage to and enrichment of negotiation training if trainers with different training methodologies work closely together.

**Rome, 1989**

NATO Defence College (NDC) in Rome invited my deputy and me – both working at Clingendael – to deliver a simulation game at their premises in Rome. I would use my best exercise of the time: an exercise simulating a meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, in the 1990s transformed into the OSCE) on a 'Crisis in Yugoslavia'. I wrote this game after doing some research in Belgrade in 1980, discovering that Yugoslavia was a much feebler federation than I had perceived. If it were to fall apart, how would this process unfold? Experts said that my scenario was complete nonsense. However, as time passed, the scenario became reality. I did not need to change my game; it became more realistic by the year. The CSCE meeting negotiated the issues of Security, Economic and Humanitarian Affairs within and among three blocks: NATO; the Warsaw Pact; and the Neutral and Non-Aligned Countries (Meerts 1986, 1989, 1991).

As no direct flight was available, my deputy and I took Alitalia flights to Milan and from there to Rome. When we got on board, my deputy asked me if I was fearful of flying. I said no, but wondered how he, a colonel of the Dutch Airforce, could be afraid of flying. He explained that, as a psychologist, he had never taken to the skies as he did not trust airplanes. At the time, NDC paid for business-class seats, and perhaps it was his fear of flying that encouraged him to take advantage of the all-inclusive bar options we had. In any case, the fact of the matter is that he was completely drunk when we landed in Milan. I managed to get him onto the plane to Rome and, after landing, pushed him into the NDC car with a military driver to take us to our hotel on the Aventine Hill. The next morning, I could not wake him, so I told the hotel reception to wake him at 2 PM and to deliver him to the NDC building for his speech on Crisis Management.

When I arrived at NDC, I was taken to the German commandant, an interesting guy who told me that he had escaped from the Russian Front on horseback, crossing over the Caucasus to the Middle East. I then learned that there had not been enough participants for all the roles I had planned and therefore the NDC staff had removed two member states of the CSCE: Norway and Cyprus. We started the simulation exercise, but after fifteen minutes an adjutant of the NDC commandant arrived, saying 'stop the exercise!' It appeared that the Greek colonel in the group of participants had called his Permanent Representative at NATO in Brussels, demanding that Cyprus be put back into the simulation game. Right, no problem: I took the Netherlands out and asked that officer to take the Cyprus role. He accepted and we continued our negotiations on the crisis in Yugoslavia, but for no longer than fifteen minutes, as the aide-de-camp stormed in again, demanding 'stop the exercise!' The Turkish colonel in the audience had managed to call his Permanent Representative at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, who had called the commandant in Rome, telling him that Cyprus had to be taken out of the game. This was the end of my first simulation exercise performed abroad. Destroyed by reality.

For ten years, NDC did not ask me to come back. Organisations like NDC and diplomatic academies have a rolling staff; every few years new staff members arrive as the old ones leave. This is a disadvantage for a trainer, as you therefore have to renew your network periodically. But the advantage is that the new people are not aware of the problems and mistakes of the past, meaning that I taught again at NDC from 2001 until 2019, twice a year, without any problems. *Lesson learned*: *every disadvantage has an advantage.*

**Bucharest, 1990**

Clingendael's Director Joris Voorhoeve was invited by the Dutch Embassy in Bucharest to take some staff with him to teach at Bucharest University, soon after the December 1989 revolution. We had for breakfast what we had for dinner the evening before, and were teaching in classrooms without heating, taking breaks – after hours of crowding together with the students – in the secretary's room where it was warmer. Nevertheless, we enjoyed it, as did the students. Dutch ambassador Coen Stork was quite a character, with experience in, for example, Cuba. He was a left-winger, which seldom happens in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. When my colleagues had returned to the Netherlands, Ambassador Stork invited me for dinner at his residence. As he had sent the cook home – the guy had to be with his family and the ambassador did not want to be a hindrance – his excellency prepared some bread and butter for me as supper. He had been in contact with the Romanian opposition from the start and spoke Romanian quite well. During and before the revolt against Ceausescu, he had acted as an informal journalist for Dutch television and newspapers: quite abnormal for a diplomat. After the 'dinner', he took me to a meeting at which the presidential candidates presented themselves. As we entered the hall, the people rose and applauded him.

A decade later I participated in an EU project together with consultants of the Dutch Governmental Training Institute (ROI). Our role was to help Romania prepare for EU membership. The idea was to have an EU coordination unit at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but halfway through the project, the Romanians thought it would be better

to have a separate Ministry of European Integration (when the project ended, that ministry was dismantled and the whole coordination unit went back to the MFA). Iliescu, President of Romania at the time, invited our team to tell him what we had to offer him, as he wanted his staff to understand the EU as well. My colleagues decided to work through the night in order to present President Iliescu with an attractive project; however, I went to sleep. The next day we were received by Iliescu and his staff. 'Who is from Clingendael Institute?' he asked. It was me, so he invited me to sit next to him and to explain what we could do for him. I improvised and he was satisfied, stood up and said that he had to go back to the office. My poor colleagues from the other institute. They had prepared a two-hour presentation with overhead sheets.

At the end of my trip, a former student of mine (Zamfirescu 1996), who had become the head of Romanian External Secret Service, took me to the airport. When the customs officers wanted to search my luggage as usual, she showed them her credentials, stating they were not allowed to do so, and I proceeded to get on board without having my luggage checked. Yet why? I had nothing to hide. However, she wanted to show off, including her Romanian hospitality. A similar thing happened during my first trip to Bucharest in 1967 with a student friend. We got lost in the city, no longer had any money as we had lost our backpacks, and we had no place to sleep, while we had to survive for three days until somebody came to pick us up in a Citroën 2CV. This is not the place to dwell upon *that* journey, which took us over land from The Hague to Izmir and back. Suffice to note that an old man saw us on the doorstep of his cabin at dusk and said, in German, 'Welcome; my house is your house'. He even took us to an open-air cinema. Many years later, Ceausescu destroyed that house and the area it was in to build his palace and surroundings.

Two decades after our Bucharest University classes, in 2010, my colleague Wilbur Perlot and I were teaching in Bucharest again, for the so-called 'European Diplomatic Programme'. My wife Judith called me to say a volcano in Iceland was erupting and there would not be flights back to Amsterdam. To be frank, I did not believe her at first. But indeed, it was true. We decided to be risk averse, went to the train station and booked the last *couchette* on the 'Balkans Express' to Vienna. The conductor passed by and gave us a metal clothes hanger, telling us to put it in the *couchette* lock when we were going to sleep to prevent an Albanian gang from entering after the Hungarian border to rob us. Indeed, I woke at three in the morning to an enormous noise in the corridor, with men shouting and fighting. What had happened? In the next wagon, they had not been given clothes hangers to lock their cabins. The Albanians tried to steal from the passengers there, but one of them woke up. He was a member of the Romanian soccer team. *Lessons learned*: *liaise with your embassy, never take your return for granted and carry a clothes hanger in order to prevent a cliff-hanger.*

**Addis Ababa, 1991**

At the request of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and paid for by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), I travelled to Ethiopia in order to design a Diplomatic Academy at its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I would be refunded for the ticket and therefore bought an economy class seat that appeared to be non-refundable. The UNDP (at least at the time) only compensated for business class. I rebooked my ticket and

arrived in Addis Ababa, where the statue of Lenin was still pointing in the direction of the airport in order to help expatriate aid workers from the German Democratic Republic flee the country in case of an anti-Marxist *coup d'état*. My hotel was the Hilton, opposite the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A government car picked me up and brought me back in the evening. The next day, I told the driver that I could walk a hundred metres to the other side of the street. Wrong! My action would have robbed the man of a day's salary.

They gave me a room next to that of the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs and I started working, trying first to create a network of civil servants and university professors to forge a context that would allow the future academy to flourish. Wrong! UNITAR told me that I had to write a mission report and only then could I start to communicate with the Ethiopians. I said: I can write that report at home, after I understand the opportunities and pitfalls. Wrong! As I was already there, I thought about organising a seminar on diplomatic negotiation in order to get to know the diplomats at the ministry. Good idea! As one of the diplomats told me, 'we have to revolutionise this ministry'. Seeing the posters on the wall with revolutionaries waving AK machine guns, my answer was: 'perhaps it is better to *evolutionise* the Ministry?' Anyway, when I returned to Ethiopia the following year, I walked up to my old room and a kind of panic ensued: why did this European come near the minister's office? Did I want to kill him? Was this a terrorist attack? *Lesson learned*: *check the local customs, both of drivers and the ministers.*

**Kuala Lumpur, 1992**

My dear friend Raymond Saner invited me to join him on a tour to Malaysia at the invitation of its Diplomatic Academy (IDFR). I had met Raymond and his wife Lichia at a conference in Ireland. I admired them because, on the way back from Kilkenny to Dublin airport, they both fell asleep, waking up just a few minutes before the train came to a halt. Many years later I saw this phenomenon with William Zartman (Zartman 1982) and his wife, who slept on the plane from their departure in Washington DC until their arrival at Schiphol airport. Anyway, I asked Raymond to teach negotiation at my institute – 'Clingendael' in The Hague – as a successor to the very charismatic Pierre Casse (who could hypnotise participants in class, without them being aware of it). For many years we used Raymond's book *The Expert Negotiator* (Saner 2000), a very useful book that had been translated from German, titled *Verhandlungstechnik* (Saner 1997) and then into French as a translation of the English version: *L'art de la négociation* (Saner 2003). Same book, same content, but different titles, as the Anglo-Saxons focus on expertise and efficiency, the Germans on techniques and the French on art and culture.

We started our three-day seminar in a resort at the seaside. The participants were divided into a group of *Datos* – Malay nobles – in big armchairs at the front. Behind them sat the others. Raymond started, as I was a novice after all, who had to learn about training from him. Indeed, I owe this to him, although I developed my own style later on. This is what I believe: you help young people to become trainers; they copy your style at the beginning, but after a few years they have to develop a new style that suits them. We agreed that he would teach negotiation techniques for one-and-a-half days, and I would follow up with a simulation exercise of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Well into the second

afternoon, Raymond was not ready to wrap up his part yet and continued, filling up the day. The next and final morning, he continued his lecture and I foolishly accepted it. That left me with one afternoon to do my part in a three-day seminar that took us twelve hours to fly to from Europe and twelve hours to fly back. *Lesson learned*: *be assertive, also and perhaps above all towards your gurus.*

**Hyderabad, 1993**

My first and only time in India was at the invitation of the Diplomatic Academy in Delhi, in order to teach at the Indian Administrative Staff School in Hyderabad in the centre of the subcontinent. Arriving at Hyderabad airport in the middle of the night, I discovered there was no car waiting for me from the school. I asked an auto-rickshaw driver to take me to a modest hotel and when I awoke the next morning, I found myself at the edge of a shanty town. Luckily, I had the telephone number of the school and this time they answered the phone. It was daylight, after all. They sent a car and brought me to the beautiful park where the institute was located. There were five problems though: 1) I did not have a suit that could cope with tropical heat; 2) the director wanted to see me all the time, even in the middle of simulation exercises; 3) air conditioners made such a noise that the participants could not hear me; 4) there were no flip-charts; and 5) I thought I could eat ice cream at a five-star hotel where the representative of Mauritius had invited us to his National Day reception… *Lessons learned*: *be prepared for the heat, have the address of your destination, check the room and discuss the arrangements, and don't expect to eat ice cream in the tropics, not even in five-star hotels.*

**Vilnius and Minsk, 1994**

Barry Goodfield (Goodfield 1999), a psychologist and friend of mine, had been invited to Vilnius in order to coach leading politicians in crisis management and, most of all, how to read people. Somehow, he was contacted by a Jewish mafia boss from Georgia who lived in Lithuania and whose son was arrested for killing a journalist. The father wanted Goodfield to help him get his son out of prison. Oddly enough, the father always called the moment we were in our rooms and, as Goodfield's staff had a microphone detector with them (I still wonder why), they swept the room and found the microphones. Goodfield could not help in the end and the son was reportedly executed. Strangely enough, however, one of Goodfield's staff ran into this son in New York City one year later. As for me, I delivered a seminar on negotiation, after which a Lithuanian driver took me to the Belarusian border. On the other side, the director of the Belarusian 'East–West Institute' – who was in opposition to the Belarusian government – waited for me and took me by car to Minsk. Many years later I learned that he had died in a car accident, which happened to many opponents of the regime. *Lesson learned: sometimes (or perhaps often) the reality you observe is not real, so be prepared for surreal situations.*

**Tashkent, 1995**

In 1995, I delivered my first negotiation training in Uzbekistan. How come? Two years earlier, the Mongolians had asked me to have their diplomats invited to The Hague and for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay for it. I told them that the ministry would not pay for

an individual country, but that we might be successful if we combined Mongolian young and mid-career diplomats with those of the Central Asian countries. One motive for me in saying this was that I indeed thought it would enhance our chances. The other reason was that I was very interested in the newly independent states of the Soviet Union and I wanted to get to know them. Clingendael tried to contact the directors of the training departments of the five Central Asian states, but had no response. However, I was later invited to the International State University in Moscow (MGIMO), where the rector showed me five telephones on his desk, directly connected with his colleagues in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. He promised me that he would call his peers and one week later Clingendael received enthusiastic letters from Asia. All the 'Stans' agreed and the negotiation training course could start the following year.

As a consequence, the Central Asians invited me for a lecture tour in 1995. In Uzbekistan, I met Rustam Kasimov, who would become my friend and who invited me again, in 2010, after he became Uzbekistan's minister of education. His students took me on a day trip, by car, to Samarkand, where we looked for the university. The young diplomats asked people where it was, but the inhabitants of Samarkand did not understand their questions, as they spoke Tajik, which belongs to the family of Persian languages. My diplomats, however, could only speak Uzbek, a Turkic language. In the end we found the university, picked up two professors, and toured Samarkand, the beautiful city of Timur Lenk, the fourteenth-century hero of Uzbekistan. Now, they said, we should go to a very special museum in Panjakent, the former capital of the earlier Kushan Empire.

It was to be found in Tajikistan, but the Uzbeks assured me that going there would not be a problem, even though I did not have a visa for this country. We passed the border without any problems, but when we wanted to return to Uzbekistan, the border was closed. Somebody had noticed a European in the museum while no European passport had been seen at the border that day. The Uzbeks said: 'stay in the back of the car and don't show your passport'. They negotiated us out of the situation, I still do not know how, although one might guess. On the way back to Tashkent, we ran out of petrol and there was no service station to be seen. No problem, as one of the diplomats had a friend who was the head of a police station along the road. We went there and his friend sent a policeman up the highway, stopping the first car that passed by. The driver was ordered to empty half of his tank into ours. He was told that this was his lucky day, for if he had not consented, they would have given him a fine.

From Tashkent, I flew to Ashgabat. I entered the small Yak 40 airplane from the back entrance and sat down. Before take-off, a flight attendant showed me what they had for sale. The last item she showed me was a copy of *Playboy*.

On another occasion, this time in 2015, the University of World Economy and Diplomacy asked me if I could bring the Steering Committee of the Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) programme with me to a conference on negotiation that was being organised by another friend of mine, the excellent academic researcher and trainer Alisher Faizullaev (Faizullaev 2006). I looked forward to this, as Rustam Kasimov was then the university's rector. But upon arrival, he was nowhere to be found. Unexpectedly, a new

rector showed up, who had been the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations before. There was no trace of Rustam. I kept asking for him and, at the end of the week, the Uzbeks gave in: I could have a phone call with him. 'Rustam, how are you doing and where are you?' I asked. 'Ah', he said, 'I am hunting in the countryside. I am the rector no longer'. Had he fallen into disgrace? I will never know, but a few years later he was Uzbekistan's minister of education again. *Lesson learned: in Central Asia nearly everything is negotiable, and not only in Central Asia.***Tbilisi, 1996**

This anecdote is as much about St Petersburg as about Tbilisi. Being invited to a conflict management conference in Tbilisi – where I would meet my good friend Tariel Sikharulidze many years later – I had to fly from Vienna through St Petersburg. Arriving in St Petersburg, I looked for the transit hall, but could not find it. I was told that I had to show my Russian visa in order to be transported to the national airport for the domestic flight to the Caucasus. Russia regarded Georgia as its 'near abroad', although it had already been independent for a few years. I had no Russian visa, so I insisted I did not need it as I was on an international trip. To no avail. The customs officer told me to fly back to Vienna, go to the Russian consulate there and get a visa for Russia. I told her I would not do that and would instead stay where I was, waiting to be transported to the Georgian plane. One hour later she came to me and shouted 'passport'! She took it, opened a side-entrance of the airport, and a bus brought me over the tarmac to the other end of the airport where the plane to Georgia was still waiting. In Tbilisi, they did not check my passport, as this was considered an internal flight after all. While I was departing Georgia, however, they noticed that I did not have an entry stamp. No problem (for ten dollars). *Lessons learned: do not forget to take dollars with you, but carry new ones, as old ones will not be accepted.*

**Amman, 1997**

The quite recently established Institute for Diplomacy of the Kingdom of Jordan asked me to deliver two seminars, of two days each, on negotiation processes. Arriving at the Institute, I learned that the plans had changed. Instead of two seminars for 40 participants each, there would be one seminar for 80 people: generals; ambassadors; other high-ranking civil servants; and military officers. As this was not yet the internet age, I had to rely on the documents that I had brought with me. I had enough material for two days, perhaps for three, but not for four. That was not an issue, however, as we needed interpretation from English into Arabic, which slowed down the training process, and I could improvise a bit to buy time as well. On day four, I explained the simulation exercise that we were going to use: a UNSC meeting on a border conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, written a few years earlier for the Oman Diplomatic Academy (in 2015, this war became real). As both the Omani and the Jordanians were fond of Saudi bashing, they loved this simulation exercise. While the participants were preparing for the exercise, I left the main hall to go to the toilets. Coming back, I wondered about the whispering and smiling of the people. I had forgotten to close my microphone, so everybody heard the flushing. *Lesson learned*: *do not forget to switch off your microphone if you are going to do something else.*

**Almaty and Astana, 1998**

The European Union agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Republic of Kazakhstan that Kazakhstan's Diplomatic Academy should be enlarged and professionalised. The EU furnished money for a three-year project. My task was to take care of the software: the curriculum. My Danish colleague did the hardware: refurbishing the building at Republic Square in Almaty, and buying furniture and computers, etc. The academy's rector did not speak English and received us in the only decorated room of the institute, sitting at the very end of the room with the Kazakh flag behind him and his interpreter next to him: a very formal setting and a very formal meeting. At the end of our first week in 1998, the Kazakhstani rector was happy with our proposals and therefore invited us to the *dacha* (country house) of his deputy, a Russian friend whom he knew as a colleague from the Sovkhoz (state-owned farm). After lunch, we found ourselves naked with the rector in the Russian-style sauna of his deputy, who was whipping us with branches of some kind of tree. He was hitting us so hard that we were in doubt about the question of whether the rector was truly happy with our proposals.

The same rector, on a later occasion, invited us for lunch in the countryside, where he proclaimed that 'we Kazakhs are now independent; we don't need to listen to our Russian and Jewish advisers anymore'. Sitting next to him, I noted that he still had a Russian adviser: his deputy. 'Oh no', the rector said, 'that does not count: he is a friend'. 'Well', I said, 'but you also still have a Jewish adviser; he is sitting next to you' (I ignored my Catholic father on this occasion).

The same rector made me eat parts of a sheep I would normally not eat, being a 'bloody Westerner'. However, when he came to the Netherlands and we received him at my home, serving herring and oysters, he would not eat any of them, contrary to his female teaching staff, who took the risk and loved the fish. Something like this happened to me, my wife Judith and my friend Barry Goodfield outside Tashkent, when we were invited to a lunch where a whole sheep was to be eaten. They gave the tongue to the interpreter, one eye to me – which I immediately hid under the ear I already had on my plate, while Goodfield swallowed the other eye – and we ended up with the skull. Our host cracked it with his fist, and everybody received a spoon with brains on it. My wife said: 'not bad, it tastes like pâté'. She is braver than me.

The same rector, at our concluding conference in January 2000 – strangely enough in Astana, as the whole institute had been moved overnight to that city we now call Nursultan – nearly destroyed the conference, as he wanted the Kazakhstani Academicians to talk as long as it suited them. It seemed that all of the foreign invitees had come to Kazakhstan without an opportunity to contribute anything. On the second day, we were moved to a restaurant for lunch. The floor was slippery and I fell when leaving the bus, hitting my head on the bus's iron footboard. My Clingendael colleagues Kees Homan, Rob de Wijk and Theo Postma put me on my feet again. I had a terrible headache. And I became terribly angry at the way the conference was derailing. I called together all of the staff members, including the Kazakhstani staff, and told them that my Clingendael brethren and I were taking over the presidium and that from now on everything had to happen the way we wanted it. Later on, my colleagues told me they were quite surprised by my authoritarian behaviour, which they

said showed itself at just the right moment in an authoritarian country. *Lesson learned*: *effective behaviour is situational.*

**Tehran, 1999**

'You, sir; you are Eurocentric!' The bearded, young Iranian diplomat was of the opinion that my worldview had been very much determined by my West European upbringing. Standing in front of 120 young Iranians – both male and female in the same hall – at the School of Foreign Service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I admitted he was right. 'I am European and I cannot and will not escape my culture, but I try to understand your views, as this is of the utmost importance in diplomacy: empathy. But empathy in diplomacy does not mean sympathy.' It was a good two-day training session after all.

On the third day, I was asked to deliver a workshop at another institute, for department heads from all of the ministries. I was received by the female director and her assistant, who had done her studies at Harvard. All of the participants were smart and very involved ladies. At the end, I asked them if I could take their picture. 'Of course', they replied, 'but you have to sit with us and somebody else should take it'. This picture can be found in *PINpoints Magazine* # 48 (Meerts 2020a): the teacher in a crowd of women in black. A few years later I came back, taking the members of the Steering Committee of PIN with me. We had in-depth discussions with both young diplomats and experienced diplomats, sometimes behind closed doors. By the end of our tour, PIN committee members Zartman and Kremenyuk were cooperating in building a snowman in front of our hotel in Isfahan. *Lesson learned*: *cultural cleavages can be bridged by diplomacy and science.*

**Ulaanbaatar, 2000**

Ever since I was a high school boy, I have been fascinated by the Mongols, the Turks and the Turkic peoples. My early interests were in the Mesopotamians, the Greeks and the Romans, until I found a book about Genghis Khan, whom I greatly admired because of his strategic and tactical insights. Nowadays, I see him instead as a mass murderer, but that is another topic of conversation. In 1969, I wrote a letter to the government of the Mongolian People's Republic, but never got an answer. Who would guess that the State University of Ulaanbaatar would later grant me an *honoris causa*? The gates to Mongolia first opened when I met Khereid Bayasakh (Bayasakh 2016), professor and director of the School of Foreign Service of the National University of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar. We met at a conference of the International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT) in Cairo. I invited him and his colleague to The Hague. They came in 1992. One day we went into town to buy a winter coat for Bayasakh's colleague. When we left the shop, Bayasakh said something to his friend, who started to laugh. I asked what he had said. Bayasakh replied: 'I said, now you look like a gentleman, but we both know there is still a Mongol inside'.

Later, in 1993, I visited Ulaanbaatar and gave a negotiation seminar for civil servants of the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and university students. It was quite a trip. In Beijing, I got stuck for eight hours at the old airport. There was no transit lounge, and I did not want to sacrifice my Chinese visa, as I wanted to visit Beijing after my return from Mongolia. A

customs officer had the solution: I gave him my passport and came back after eight hours to get it back. I then had to find the gate for Mongolia, but as everything was in Chinese this was not an easy job. In the end I found the plane, with the help of a Lufthansa flight attendant, who knew some Chinese and told me that the gate for Ulaanbaatar, which was at the very end of the airport, would close in a few minutes. Bayasakh came to the airport and brought me to the Mongolian government's guesthouse, giving me fifteen minutes to dress up for an official welcome dinner downstairs.

For three days, the Mongolians looked at me without a trace of enthusiasm or criticism on their faces. On the fourth day, it was time for a closing ceremony, which would be a festive lunch in a *ger* (the Mongolian name for a yurt, a tent). Bayasakh and I left Ulaanbaatar in the morning in a Zill limousine, picking up a Mongolian lady who would, as Bayasakh said, serve lunch to us in the *ger*. First, we went to the ruins of a monastery; then we proceeded to the *ger*. However, the lady never served anything and instead participated in dancing. The band played Mongolian songs and suddenly one of the participants started to weep and all the other course members joined him. It appeared that this was a song about the Mongolian mother. The man who started to weep first had lost his mother the year before. To me this was amazing: nobody showed any emotion during the seminar, but nobody had any problem with weeping in public. After lunch, going back to Ulaanbaatar, it became clear that our lady had been hired to serve me that night. I declined. The next day Bayasakh and I drove to the airport. Professor Bayasakh suggested that I could buy the Zill and he would see to it that it would be transported by ship through China. Again I declined.

Then, in 1999, the Maastricht School of Management was awarded a three-year EU project to train the Mongolian civil service. We had a British project leader: Richard Lucking. For me, this meant I had to be in Mongolia every two to three months. In 2000, I flew from Berlin with MIAT Mongolian Airlines through Moscow to Ulaanbaatar. It was a quiet morning flight. Sitting in the back of the plane, still buckled in my seatbelt, I felt the plane falling into an air pocket. It seemed it lasted minutes, but it probably only happened in seconds. With an enormous shock, the plane hit a lower airstream. Many passengers, who were out of their seats to go to the toilets or simply to stretch their legs, bumped their heads on the ceiling. The breakfast wagons went up as well and tomato juice and milk dripped from the ceiling. The plane flew on in very calm weather. Nothing came from the cockpit, nor was there any excuse upon landing in Ulaanbaatar. We were riding the Mongolian way, after all. At the airport, the visa office was still closed and somebody had to call the border police officer, who was still in bed in the city. Moreover, my bag had apparently been taken out of the plane in Moscow and arrived a few days later.

That week I felt more tired than tired. At the end of the day on Friday, while everybody was collecting their belongings in order to start the weekend, I suddenly started to shake and sweat. My head fell on my desk and the Mongolian staff panicked. They took me to the hospital of the Russian Embassy, which was the infirmary they normally went to. It would have been better to take me to the modern Korean hospital. Arriving in the hospital, I was taken to the upper floor, for heart diseases, but we had to wait until mechanics came to repair the lift. Once upstairs, the Russian heart specialist started to treat me. Actually, he

was not a specialist at all, but a general practitioner. He had been posted from Moscow to this far-away outpost in Mongolia, which was in a way still regarded as part of the Soviet Union, even though the USSR had already been dead for nearly a decade. The Russians gave me the kind of clothing used for prisoners and treated me like that. One week later I was picked up by an American doctor. He flew me to Beijing, where I stayed next to the swimming pool of the Dutch ambassador. Three days later, a nurse arrived from the Netherlands and accompanied me to Amsterdam. After being checked into a Dutch hospital, I learned that I did not have angina pectoris after all. Instead, the plane's sudden fall had caused a body trauma resembling heart failure. *Lessons learned: a correct diagnosis can be life-saving; the same is true in diagnosing the problems that a negotiation process has to overcome.*

**Damascus, 2001**

At the request of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Syria, I flew to Damascus to teach young Syrian diplomats, believing it would be better for them to learn how to negotiate than to fight. The students were very interested in the seminar; more interested than the institute's staff. At the end of the course, I asked the students what they had learned. A young woman raised her hand, saying: 'I learned that we Syrians are self-defeating'. After this, they did not invite me again, until 2011 when they had forgotten about the incident. Again at the invitation of the Dutch Embassy, I trained Syrian diplomats, mid-career this time. It was a strange feeling to be able to walk in and out of the Syrian MFA without any problem in 2011; in The Hague, our MFA was already looking like a fortress. At the end of the seminar, I rented a taxi and driver and drove around Syria, all the way to Aleppo. The idea had been that I would deliver a speech at the Syrian State University close to Homs, but the insurgence had started and I had to go back to Damascus, for they did not want a foreigner to speak to the students. Many years later, representatives of the moderate Syrian opposition were trained at Clingendael Institute in preparation for talks with the Syrian regime in Geneva. It did not help, as the negotiations failed. *Lesson learned: the effect of training can be like a raindrop in the ocean.*

**Bonn and Berlin, 2002**

For a decade I taught young German diplomats at the *Diplomaten Schule* in Ippendorf on the outskirts of Bonn. Once I took my eldest son, Edo, with me and met with the Academy's Deputy Director, Michael Schäfer, who later became an advisor to Joschka Fischer, German Minister of Foreign Affairs and, *inter alia*, Germany's ambassador to China. One day I needed more photocopies, so he said: 'join me in the basement and I will copy the pages'. I found this quite astonishing, as the staff of the photocopying department were sitting there smoking cigarettes. 'Why don't you ask them to make the copies?' I asked. His answer was: 'No, no, it is lunchtime, and I don't want to risk a clash with the trade unions'.

In 2002, Schäfer took the young diplomats to Berlin to see the political sites there. He asked me to join and to deliver a seminar in the old building of the Foreign Ministry of the German Democratic Republic. A few years later this building was demolished. He told us that in the main hall, where we did the negotiation training, the West Germans had been blackmailed

by the East Germans during the Cold War: 'Pay, or the East German people will be hungry'. The building had a very interesting structure. It consisted of two parts: to the right the Foreign Office; to the left the East German external secret police. There was only one way to go from the right side to the left side: on the top floor where the ministers resided. *Lesson learned: don't be open to blackmail.*

**Snezhinsk, 2003**

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) both exists and does not exist. As the treaty has not been signed and ratified by a quorum of member states, there is only a skeleton staff in Vienna, the most active part being the training department. In order to gain some momentum, this department became very active in training inspectors who should be able to act if countries do – against the treaty's rules – test nuclear weapons underground. One thing that these experts had to do was to negotiate themselves and their instruments into a country that might have infringed upon the (not yet existing) treaty. Was it an earthquake or a bomb? One of our negotiation training sessions of so-called 'Table Top Exercises' was taking place in a sanatorium in the Urals at the invitation of Russian nuclear experts. The sanatorium was close to Snezhinsk, a forbidden city until the downfall of the Soviet Union. We were with (potential) inspectors from many countries, including Israelis who were in charge of the CTBTO training department, as well as French, British, American and other colleagues, including an expert from Iran. He had a problem when we were invited to the famous Russian sauna. He decided to join us but to keep on his underwear, which of course drew much attention from the others. Yet he went with us into the steam bath, very courageously. Later on, the PIN got involved and this resulted in the PIN book *Banning the Bang or the Bomb*, with a chapter on 'Table Top Exercises' (Melamud 2013). *Lesson learned: whatever your culture, you are human and therefore you can cooperate. If you wish.*

**London and Brussels, 2004**

'Prepare the Brits for their EU Presidency!' With this, my dear friend John Hemery (Hemery 2006), one of the best course organisers and trainers I ever met, asked me to join him in a series of training sessions on chairmanship and negotiation in London and Brussels and to take my eldest son Edo along. We started at Lancaster House in London. This famous building, where for example the Zimbabwe/Rhodesia issue was settled, looks very posh downstairs, a typical place for diplomatic and political negotiation at the highest level. Taking the elevator to the attic, however, revealed a completely different playing field: the other side of Britishness, which you find in hotels that have not been refurbished since the 1960s. In short, a mess. Carpets with holes, lights that did not function, chairs that broke when you sat on them. The British civil servants: the same. As it was the middle of summertime, they participated in shorts and sandals. Interestingly, however, when they did their negotiation exercises, they were exceptionally polite to each other, yet in a very filthy way, offending each other while using very nice manners. I learned a lot about British negotiation culture. It struck me in Brussels that the civil servants at the Permanent Representation of the United Kingdom were as

Europhile as the Germans or the French. They understood the importance of the EU for the UK, contrary to their politicians in London. *Lesson learned: simulation exercises reveal negotiation behaviour.*

**Vienna, 2005**

From 1985, I took part in the Annual Meeting of Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations, also known as the aforementioned International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT), a new name proposed by John Hemery and me at a deans and directors conference in Brasilia in the early 1990s. We wanted to democratise the meetings a bit, but we got no further than a name change. I would participate in all of the meetings until 2015 in Baku. Interestingly, this also gave me a network of consumers for my negotiation seminars. Diplomatic academies used retired ambassadors to teach diplomatic negotiation, but they found that training was much more effective than lecturing. Thanks to these colleagues, I could travel the world and learn about different cultures and negotiation styles. As years went by, I worked with many directors of the Austrian Diplomatic Academy, including Ernst Sucharipa. Sucharipa was a very special man. Being a social democrat, he represented Austria at the United Nations in New York, but when a conservative government came to power in Austria, he had to be withdrawn to Vienna, where he was appointed director of the Diplomatic Academy. Once, at an anniversary of the academy, he organised a conference in Vienna Town Hall where he awarded the academy's diploma to an 85-year-old lady, a former student who now lived in Israel. In 1938, she had been removed from the academy by the Nazis.

Teaching at the academy in the week of Sucharipa's death, I was invited to attend his funeral in a village outside Vienna, together with my daughters Iris and Clarissa, who had joined me on this trip. Being director of the academy was not a full-time job and Sucharipa had been asked to negotiate with US Jews about the real estate and other commodities they had lost during the Nazi era. While doing this, he, a Catholic, found out that he had a Jewish great grandmother from Slovakia, when it was part of the Hungarian portion of Austria during the nineteenth century. At his funeral, a Catholic priest blessed his coffin. After him, a rabbi recited Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the deceased. A coming-out at his funeral! All of Austria's political and diplomatic elite were present and fell absolutely silent. I felt Austria's past boiling from the earth, smelling like a swamp. Across the coffin my eyes met the eyes of a former director of the academy, who had once told me that his father was a staunch Nazi and anti-Semite, who had supported Adolf Hitler in the *Anschluss*. Hitler had wanted to reward him for this. He was to be promoted to an important post in the government, but the regime found out that he had a Jewish grandmother. The father of my diplomatic friend could not live with that and had shot himself. *Lesson learned: the shadow of the past will not wither away overnight.*

**Prague, 2006**

During the 1990s, Michael Schäfer, Raymond Saner and I developed the idea of bringing together young diplomats of EU countries for a yearly programme split into several modules. The Germans said: 'we have to get the French in as one of the initiators of such a

programme'. Saner warned them: 'if you do that, they will kill the idea and later on present it as their own proposal'. And so it happened. However, it did not matter, as the idea

became true at the turn of the century in the form of the European Diplomatic Programme, as mentioned earlier. One of the programme's elements was a training course in international negotiation to be handled by the Diplomatic Academy Vienna and my Clingendael Institute. For over a decade, Bob Weibel, a star trainer from Switzerland, and I worked side by side. We each worked with half of the group, using our own approach, then after one-and-a-half days we switched. One of the training modules was held in Prague. The topic was European security. As I did not have a topical exercise on that subject, I searched for a relevant simulation exercise at Clingendael. One of Clingendael's researchers, an expert in NATO affairs, had one on the shelf. I took it to Prague. While explaining the game on day one, I found out that the exercise was not up to date at all and was bedevilled by many procedural mistakes. The participants already had years of experience in Brussels and heavily criticised the game. During the first lunch break, I left the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs to get my act together in the fresh winter cold. One way or another I managed to get through that afternoon and the following morning, using different exercises in the next round with the other group of participants. A very nasty experience. *Lesson learned: do not trust the experts at face value.*

**Oman, 2007**

I always loved to go to Muscat. Very hospitable people, my loyal Egyptian interpreter Nabil, and an interested crowd of Omani diplomats and other civil and military officers. Being there twice a year, I got used to the Omani habits and, as a member of the Omani Diplomatic Academy's advisory board, I felt in a comfortable position. In one of my sessions, I used the Saudi–Yemenite simulation exercise already mentioned above. This time, there happened to be a participant who was not happy with the written introduction to this simulation, which gave some background information, putting the exercise in the context of Islam and its role during the Arab conquest at the time and age of the Prophet and the Caliphate(s). My critic was of the opinion that I had pictured his religion as being aggressive, while to him Islam meant 'peace'. He became more and more emotional and shouted at me: 'you Christians, you always see Muslims as aggressors'. He then finished his accusations. All of the Omani in their white robes and turbans looked at me. I said: 'you perceive me as a Christian, but my mother is Jewish' (I did not tell him my father was raised a Catholic). The silence was more than silence. I said: 'religion is part of politics, so what is the impact of religion on negotiation?' The Omanis went into an emotional debate and, when it was over, one of them came to me during the break. He said: 'Professor, most of us are Shiite, but the man who offended you is a Sunnite. He wanted to show to us that he was ready to defend Islam'.

On another occasion, we had a meeting of the advisory board of the diplomatic academy. One of the members said that it was very important to bring the academy's programme up to date. He told me this in the corridors. I fully agreed. However, when the formal session started, he had none of it and declared that the most important lesson the young diplomats should be taught was to be loyal to the Sultan. That evening, I was invited to the residence of the Dutch ambassador. I told him about the strange behaviour of my fellow board member.

'Ah', the ambassador said, 'he is ambassador-at-large now, but a few months ago he was the commandant of the Omani air force. He was imprisoned with 350 others who wanted reforms, but they released him, under the condition that he should behave well. And so he did'. Something like that happened the year after. The academy's deputy director wanted to modernise the institute, but the director did not. When I arrived to start my lessons, I saw the deputy director in his room and wanted to say 'hello'. I was told that I should not do this as the deputy was confined to his room. He was forbidden to speak to anybody, to use the phone or write anything down. He just had to be present every day. *Lesson learned: look behind the screens and be yourself.*

**Bruges, 2008**

From 2006 to 2016, I had the privilege of teaching twice a week, four times a month, at the College of Europe in Bruges, with very interested students from all over the world, China included. Every year there were more Chinese students and, in 2008, also an extremely involved Chinese student. He asked several questions in each session. The students of non-Chinese origin started to show irritation as yet another remark, covered up as a question, slowed down our collective work. One day we dealt with culture and the question: have different cultures different negotiation styles? Our Chinese student and his compatriots were so interested in my opinion that they asked me if they could continue after class. I said of course, if they still allowed me to catch my train back to The Hague. The consequence of this was that I walked all the way from the college buildings to the train station with a group of Chinese students around me, debating Chinese negotiation style. It felt something like the fairy tale of a boy called Hans who had a swan and everybody who touched it became glued to it. In the end, a string of people followed Hans through town. *Lesson learned: be careful while telling people about their own culture.*

**Lillehammer, 2009**

Like all other European countries, the Norwegians have an institute dealing with forestry and thereby with timber. One of the countries not living up to international rules is the Netherlands, because the Dutch import and export timber without adequately controlling where it comes from or whether it comes from sustainable sources. As the Norwegian institute would hold the presidency of the European Forest Institute, they invited me to come to Norway. I was picked up at Oslo airport and taken to Lillehammer, a few hundred kilometres to the north. Why? Because they said they wanted to be away from their colleagues, preventing them from distorting our seminar. At least, this is what they said. We ended up in a beautiful chalet next to a fantastic lake. As it was in the middle of winter, we were surrounded by snow. It now became apparent that all ten participants had taken their skis with them and they negotiated a special arrangement with me: to have a late start of our seminar so they could ski before breakfast; to have a stretched lunchtime in order to ski before lunch; and to have a late dinner, as it would allow them to ski before dinner. *Lesson learned: snow might be more attractive than negotiation, depending on the circumstances.*

**Taipei, 2010**

While teaching negotiation in Taipei, I was taken sightseeing, among other places to the memorial hall of Chiang Kai Shek, leader of the Nationalist Party who had fled mainland China with a million soldiers to seek shelter in the old Dutch colony of Formosa (Taiwan). As I wanted to be polite, I admired the enormous statue of the former president. My guide was angry however, and I asked her why. She said, 'this was our oppressor'. Once back at Clingendael Institute, the Taiwanese 'ambassador' and the head of the Taiwanese tourist office came to me for a debrief. They were both from the ruling nationalist party Quo Min Tang (QMT) and not from the opposing Democratic People's Party (DPP). The nationalists wanted to reconquer China, while the democrats were striving for an independent Taiwan. As the ambassador's Mercedes left Clingendael Park, the head of the tourist office confessed, 'I am a member of the QMT, but I vote DPP'. *Lesson learned: be ready for surprises.* **Chernivtsi, 2011**

At the beginning, it was unclear to me why I was so interested in eastern Poland and western Ukraine. In the early 1990s I had to teach in Prague, Bratislava and Kiev. Between teaching in Bratislava and Kiev, I had three days to spend for myself. For quite a long time I had been fascinated by Lemberg, also called Leopolis, Löwenberg, Lwów, Lvov and nowadays Lviv. Therefore, I decided to take a train from Bratislava to Kiev, with a stopover in Lviv. It was the middle of winter and the train was full of people who got off in Kosice, in eastern Slovakia, to ski in the mountains. At the border of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine, the train had to change wheels. The whole train was lifted and the wheels for the European tracks were replaced with wheels for the Russian broad tracks. A very efficient operation. Much more efficient than at the Mongolian–Chinese border many years later, where the wagons were decoupled and each was treated separately. In the evening, we arrived in Lviv and I was taken to Hotel George, a big posh Austrian–Hungarian hotel in the centre of the city. Well, it had been posh in the early twentieth century. Now it was a kind of Intourist hotel, treating its customers in the old communist way. Every time I teach in Lviv, I still go to the Hotel George and, luckily, it has not changed. The old charm is still there, but the staff is much more attentive.

The next morning, while having breakfast, I wondered what was fascinating me about Lviv. I opened my tourist guide and read that the city had once been called Löwenberg. Did my mother's ancestors come from here? Is that why I had wanted to come here for so many years already? Her family name is '*De Leeuw*', which translates as '*Löwe*' in German, or 'lion' in English. I still do not know. While I was walking in the main square, the Rinok, there was a house that caught my eye. The house was in the corner of the Rinok and a small street where trams had only one track and had to wait for each other to pass by. I recognised the balcony on the first floor, although this was my first time to Lviv. I wandered around without a plan and came to a place where I read 'here stood the Jewish ghetto'. Many years later, my wife and I went by car all the way from The Hague to Chernivtsi in the Ukrainian Bukovina, staying in Lviv for a few days. We went to the old Jewish quarter and stepped into the Rose synagogue, which had been burned down by the local population in the first days of the German occupation during the Second World War. It was a mess. People let their dogs defecate on the floor of the ruined synagogue. Many years later I visited the place again, but now the city had declared it a monument. Some restoration had been done with German

money, and school classes of Ukrainian children went there to be enlightened about history by their teachers.

As I was also interested in Chernivtsi, the capital of Austrian Bukovina under the name of Czernowitz, I asked my host, Professor Markian Malskiy, to connect me with his colleague in Chernivtsi. On one of my Lviv trips, I took the ten-hour journey on the night train to Chernivtsi. With six people, of whom five were elderly Ukrainians, it was not easy to get sleep in a train that seemed to stop at every farmhouse along the track. Thank goodness there is a modern-day train nowadays that takes only three hours. On the platform of the beautiful art-nouveau station of Chernivtsi, Vitaliy Makar and his father Yuri awaited me and took me for breakfast at their home. Everybody was dressed up as if I was some kind of gentleman. Luckily, this changed already by the next morning. I quickly became a friend of the family and, years later, a part of the family. Yuri Makar was – and still is – head of a department at the university, although he is far into his 80s. Vitaliy took me to his class. In the front section of the lecture hall, the students were fully participating in one of my simulation exercises. The students in the back, however, did nothing and started to talk among themselves. I went over. 'Why don't you negotiate?' 'We cannot speak English; our second language is German.' 'Ok', I said in German, 'I will explain the exercise and you can start working'.

The city of Chernivtsi is still art nouveau; it looks the same as it did at the beginning of the last century. The same goes for its university buildings. They are built in a Germanic style, like Heidelberg, Uppsala or Tartu universities. In 2011, the university organised a conference with Canadian academics of Ukrainian origin. I decided to take my youngest son Fedor with me on a trip that brought us through Timişoara, Chernivtsi, Kiev and Istanbul to Ankara, where Fedor had worked at the Netherlands Institute. We took the train to Düsseldorf and flew to the interesting – again, art nouveau – city of Timişoara in western Romania. The next day we wanted to board the plane to Chernivtsi, but we had to wait for five hours because of fog at Chernivtsi airport. I was reading a book about Bukovina, written by an Austrian, Kurt Scharr (Scharr 2007). A guy in a Tyrolean outfit came towards me and asked: 'do you like the book?' 'A very interesting book', I answered. 'Nice,' he said, 'I am the author!' He had just come from Chernivtsi.

That night we had a problem, and Chernivtsi could not be reached. We flew to IvanoFrankivsk (formerly Stanislau, in Polish times). We were checked by Ukrainian border police, and I stood outside the airport waiting for my son. He did not come out. Like once in Moscow, and later in Ankara, I went into arrivals from the departure side and found my son discussing with the border police. There wasn't a real problem, but Fedor got so irritated by the authoritarian behaviour of the Ukrainian police that he started to provoke them. In the Netherlands that would not be a problem, but in the former Soviet Union it is. I negotiated and got him out. All of the passengers were crowded onto a small Russian-type bus, with some of them sitting in the corridor. There was no way to get out in the case of an accident. We drove through the night and snow in quite some hours to Chernivtsi, and next morning we walked to the conference in the beautiful German-style building of the University of Chernivtsi.

The conference's topic: Ukraine and Canada. Why this subject? Well, there is quite a diaspora of Ukrainians in Canada and they are well-to-do. With their money, it is easy to get a conference funded. As usual, everybody was present the first morning and many students were observing, but from then on, the number of listeners and participants gradually diminished. Some parts of the programme did not materialise, for whatever reason. The day before the end of the symposium I said to my son: 'your MA thesis was about the High Commissioner on National Minorities, dealing with Estonia, Romania and Ukraine (Meerts 2011). Why don't you give a speech on that tomorrow?' He did, and suddenly there were many girls in the back of the room, listening to his intervention.

As the plane to Kiev was cancelled, we had to take the train. We shared a compartment with a Ukrainian–Canadian businessman who had an enormous number of suitcases and boxes, obviously to be 'exported' to Toronto. Or perhaps they came from there and had been 'imported' to Ukraine? Goodness knows. Arriving at Kiev's central station, all the Canadian businessman's 'cousins' and 'nephews' were awaiting us on the platform and one of them brought us by car to Boryspil, Ukraine's national airport. Many years before, when I went with a group of students to Crimea, we flew with a national flight from the national airport at Kiev to Simferopol. My friend Barry Goodfield took a picture of the plane's tyres. They had no profile. *Lessons learned: a young attractive speaker draws more attention than an old one. But there are exceptions.*

**Durham, 2012**

Durham University has an excellent conflict-management centre. The city is beautiful, remaining untouched from Norman times onwards, or at least the inner town. During one of my trips, I was received by a German lady who had taken over from the usual coordinator. At the end of the first day, we had dinner with the students. I came in last. All of the seats but one were taken. This seat was at the end of the table, next to a student on my right and no students on my left. The German lady was sitting at the opposite end, discussing my lecture with students. The next day I started my workshop. One of the issues I brought forward: 'negotiation is about people. One has to show empathy for them, especially if they are the guest of honour. Take yesterday, for example: the guest of honour should have been seated at the middle of the table, with the host next to him'. The students did not notice my irony. During the break I wondered whether I had been too undiplomatic. I went to the German lady and said: 'I'm sorry for referring to yesterday's supper'. Her answer: 'no problem'.

I have to add that my experiences in Oxford have been quite the opposite. For 30 years, the directors received me most cordially; all of them were former diplomats. Let me just note one interesting moment. The last director, who was as staunchly anti-Brexit as all her predecessors, asked me if my flight had been pleasant: 'how was your flight from Europe?' I answered: 'but I am still in Europe!' *Lesson learned: even if your perceptions are different, you can still be on the same wavelength.*

**Budva, 2013**

The Montenegrins organise a diplomatic course every year, both in the mountains in Kolašin and in the capital Podgorica. My friend Sinisa Vukovic (Vukovic 2013) – although working at

Johns Hopkins in Washington with William Zartman – is very instrumental in this. He takes care of the content and some of the speakers. I remember him showing up in a white Mercedes cabriolet to take me from the airport into the mountains. We were driving too fast and a policeman stopped us. Sinisa got out of the car and went to his superior. After a while he came back into the car. 'No fine?' I asked. 'Well', he said, 'the officer is a friend from school, from a long time ago. I asked him about his wife and kids'. As we continued, we passed a monastery. 'Look, how beautiful!', he exclaimed. I agreed. We passed a church. I wanted to flatter Sinisa, so I said: 'look, how beautiful!' He had a different opinion this time, as the church was not Montenegrin, but Serbian.

After the seminar, Sinisa took me to the beautiful old capital Cetinje and from there to the fortified town of Kotor on the Adriatic. He would stay with friends and had booked a room for me in a very nice authentic hotel on the town's main square, opposite the main medieval gate. I had put pressure on Sinisa to allow me to pay for the room myself and, indeed, I managed. I paid for a simple room. The waiter took me upstairs to a luxurious apartment with a balcony and a view of the square and the fjord beyond. Later, I asked Sinisa how this was possible. 'Well', he said, 'the owner needed some advice when he started this hotel. I gave him the advice he needed'. The day after, we went to another seaport: Budva. This time I was determined to buy lunch for Sinisa and myself. He disliked all the restaurants and took me to a very nice one on the shore, where the owner shouted: 'Sinisa, my friend! Good to see you. Your friends are my friends'. Again, I failed; it was strictly forbidden to pay.

In 2013, Sinisa and I managed to get the PIN group to Montenegro. My assistant Sander des Tombe from the Netherlands and his girlfriend participated as well. They had rented a car and together we visited Budva. Sinisa remained at the conference. When we were leaving Budva, the police stopped us. They claimed we had missed a zebra crossing and had to pay a fine. Zebra crossing? There was no zebra crossing to be seen anywhere. The policemen pointed at some long-gone paint on the road. 'You should have stopped!' 'But we did not see the zebra crossing and, anyway, nobody was crossing the road!' 'Give me your driver's licence and passport!', the policemen shouted to my assistant, who was afraid of giving it to him. I tried to negotiate: 'Okay, let me pay the fine'. No way. The policemen told us that Montenegro is a civilised country. We would have to pay the fine tomorrow morning to the judge at ten o'clock, while not being allowed to leave Budva for the night. I called Sinisa, who talked to the policemen. It did not seem to have any effect. I told my assistant to give his licence and passport to the police officer and this time he did. The policemen gave it back to him without looking at the papers and said: 'okay, no fine, leave'. *Lesson learned: honour is a very important issue in negotiation, foremost in the Balkans.*

**Monaco, 2014**

Belarus is not the last dictatorship in Europe. It shares this honourable position with Monaco. The prince decides and parliament may advise him. How to govern and pamper such a small but rich country? You need foreigners to do that. For example, Prince Rainier had a French doctor. He was seriously ill, but the doctor cured him. The prince said that he could either pay the doctor, or he could make him a citizen of Monaco. The doctor accepted citizenship and could continue his practice in France as well. The only difference: he did not

need to pay taxes to the French, but to the Monegasques instead. Yet Monaco levies no taxes and the doctor's net income thus doubled. Most of the participants in my class were French, hired to do the jobs the Monegasques did not or could not perform. One of the Frenchmen was especially a nuisance for me. He had clearly been ordered to be present, but was not eager to be there. The way to deal with these kinds of spoilers is to ask them questions and to give them an important role, for example as the chairperson. In this way, the spoiler will become your most loyal participant. *Lesson learned: if you cannot beat them, let them join you.*

**San Marino, 2015**

San Marino is bigger than Monaco, but it is still small and surrounded by Italy. When Napoleon came to the borders of San Marino, his troops halted at the frontier. He sent an envoy up the mountain, who declared that the emperor offered San Marino all the land from their mountain to the Adriatic coast, including Rimini. The councillors of San Marino were wise men. They politely refused the offer. This is why San Marino is still independent today, as the Vienna Congress of 1814–1815 would have taken their sovereignty from them for sure.

I was asked to deliver a seminar in San Marino by the Sammarinese lady ambassador to Brussels, who had participated in my training in Bruges with the complete staff of the embassy, which consisted of two more people. A government car from San Marino picked me up at Bologna airport and raced me to its country. 'Why are you speeding? Be careful! you might be fined', I said to the driver. 'Oh no', he said, 'don't forget this is an extraterritorial car'. I got what I had dreamed of: a medieval hotel by the city walls, delivering a seminar in the ministry of foreign affairs by the city walls as well, with the building not much bigger than my house in The Hague. We had lunch in the main square, where the waiter gave us ordinary wine. The Sammarinese were angry: 'give us a decent bottle of Sammarinese wine! Otherwise, you will never see us again…'

I was also asked to give a presentation to the high school pupils of San Marino. This was done in the national theatre. The minister of foreign affairs opened the meeting with a short speech. To be a minister was a side-show for him, for in everyday life, he was a teacher at one of the schools. There were more astonishing job combinations. The Permanent Representative of San Marino at the UN in New York was also the state archaeologist. Actually, he went to New York only twice a year. At the end of my visit, my participants took me to the castle where the two presidents and the parliament reside. We entered from the non-touristic back entrance, attended a session of parliament and visited the room of the presidents. When present, they sit next to each other, each with a telephone, being called by their respective clientele. It struck me that the Sammarinese knew their Italian allies and opponents extremely well, especially their weak spots. Being small and flexible, the Sammarinese are able to act much faster than the Italian bureaucracy, thereby being more successful in many instances. *Lesson learned: being small can be very advantageous, under the circumstances.*

**Yerevan and Stepanakert, 2016**

Although I travelled to Armenia more than a dozen times, I did manage to visit a region that intrigued me very much: Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast revolted against Azerbaijan during Soviet times. They wanted to be part of the Armenian Soviet Republic. Stalin, using divide-and-rule tactics, had put predominantly Christian Karabakh in predominantly Shiite Muslim Azerbaijan: the same trick he used in Central Asia, and the same trick the Western countries applied in Africa. A fiefdom should not have a homogeneous population, as it would strengthen their hand if they wanted to revolt. Always create a substantial minority that will be distrusted by the majority, especially if this majority is a minority in a neighbouring republic. Training diplomats at the Armenian Foreign Ministry still did not bring me one step closer to visiting Karabakh. That was until an Armenian student at the College of Europe in Bruges said: 'I know you want to visit Karabakh. My girlfriend is soon taking a group of Belgian parliamentarians through Yerevan to Stepanakert, Karabakh's capital. You can join them if you want too'. So I did.

The Belgians were parliamentarians and mayors belonging to the N-VA party, a Flemish nationalist grouping striving for an independent Flemish republic. It made sense that they were interested in the break-away non-recognised republic of Karabakh, and the Karabakhi saw their visit as some kind of recognition. Although my political views are completely opposite to the N-VA party, the Belgians regarded me as kin, a kind of northern Flemish guy. This is not completely untrue, as my family on my father's side originated from Waterloo, albeit in the nineteenth century. After a four-hour drive from Yerevan to the Lachin Corridor on the Nagorno-Karabakh border, we were greeted by a police car to guide us into Karabakh. In the capital, Stepanakert, we were received by the president and the minister of foreign affairs. The Belgians were given the opportunity to address parliament, while I taught at the Karabakh University.

The Karabakh University was an old-school Soviet-kind university, with a Soviet teaching style, where using a simulation game was quite new to the students. At the end of our visit, the Karabakhi offered us supper in the city of Susha/Sushi, on top of a hill next to Stepanakert, a special place, both for Armenians and Azerbaijani. After several glasses of arak, the host started to sing Armenian songs. Naturally, all of the Armenian speakers joined in. The host then invited the Belgians to sing their national anthem. Of course, they did not sing '*La Brabançonne*', the Belgian national anthem, let alone '*La Marseillaise*', which a Belgian Walloon minister sang by accident when asked on television to sing the Belgian national anthem. The Belgians stood up, swapped the Belgian national flag for the Flemish flag of a black lion on a yellow background. They sang the 'Flemish Lion', their regional song. After this, the host asked me to sing the 'Wilhelmus', the Dutch national anthem. Not being a nationalist, I refused. Immediately the Belgians stood upright again, put their flags around their shoulders and sang the Dutch national hymn, faultlessly.

In 2016, I returned to Karabakh to teach at the university and at the ministry of foreign affairs, a building as big as San Marino's MFA. While I was in Stepanakert, it was Genocide Day, the annual remembrance of the day when Turks executed Istanbul's Armenian elite. This event is remembered as the start of the Armenian genocide in 1915. Determined youth paraded through the streets, shouting 'we will never be under Turkish rule again'. Elderly

people watched them from inside their windows, burning candles. I met with the minister of foreign affairs again. Later that year, while teaching in the Armenian Foreign Office in Yerevan, I met him yet again. We talked. I said: 'you are visiting the Armenian MFA?' 'No', he replied, 'I have been posted back to my ministry'. With a shock, I understood that the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh – the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic – was just an Armenian diplomatic posting. I should add to this, however, that Deputy Minister Armine Alexanyan of the Karabakh Republic is from Karabakh and that she is the one running the ministry. *Lesson learned: do not be naïve.*

**Paris, 2017**

In 2007, Paolo Bailo, a former student of the College of Europe, invited me to teach in Paris at the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), and I have enjoyed the Paris atmosphere ever since. Most of the time, I served as a trainer at the *Autorité des marchés financiers* (AMF). After a decade, Paolo, who was always present, could have given the training himself, without any problem. It was fun to work together, as we perfectly understood how to deal with even the most difficult *chefs de bureaux*. By now, I am a kind of in-house trainer on negotiation, although I hardly have a clue about the participants' work. Even more strange is working with people from the French medical organisation or the French railway system: all excellent experts, but I was a trainer who had only a dim idea about the content of their work.

In 2017, the famous French institute on negotiation ESSEC IRENÉ (the *Institut de recherche et l'enseignement sur la négociation* at ESSEC Business School) invited me and my dear friend Tariel Sikharulidze from Georgia to join their team in teaching at the French military academy, the *École Militaire*. We were with seventeen trainers and several hundred military officers. They gave me the class with foreign officers, to be given in English.

At the end of the spectacle, everybody was brought together in the main hall, where the chef of our *équipe*, Aurélien Colson, entered with the commandant at his side. He then invited the trainers to join him on stage and the participants would ask questions. After oneand-a-half hours, I wondered why we were standing there, as our boss answered all the questions. None of us was invited to say anything. Being Dutch, this was unacceptable to me. I could understand that the French, being from a collectivistic culture, accepted this, but I, from an individualistic culture, could not tolerate it. I stepped forward when a new question was asked and demanded the microphone. After I got it and gave my view – in English – on the question, Tariel stepped in to give his response to another question. My French is good enough for discussions, but I was tired and did not want to risk mistakes while speaking French. Tariel, meanwhile, is fluent in French. Understandably, I have never been invited back to the military academy. In a French establishment like that, you have to speak only French, at least in a plenary session. *Lesson learned: if you want to be invited again, do not be a nuisance to the locals.*

**Ankara, 2018**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, my wife and I met with the director of the Diplomatic Academy of the Turkish Republic, Deniz Uzmen and his Dutch wife. He invited me

to teach at the academy. In the years thereafter, he became a close friend, although it was impossible to discuss with him the question of the atrocities against the Armenians during the First World War. Furthermore, he was an Atatürkist, fiercely pleading against the rise of political Islam in Turkey. Once, while teaching at the academy, which is based in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself, the new director invited me for lunch when the director of my own institute, Clingendael, made a surprise visit to the Turkish MFA. I went upstairs. My director was astonished. 'What are you doing here?' 'Teaching and training', I replied. During the lunch, my director delivered a speech, expressing his satisfaction with the obvious start of Clingendael–MFA cooperation, started by my teaching. The director of the Turkish academy corrected him: 'your colleague has been teaching here for ten years already'. So much for internal Clingendael communication and coordination.

On another occasion, the Dutch ambassador to Turkey invited the class of young diplomats to a reception in his residence. He spoke, the director of the academy spoke, and the trainer had to speak. I explained why it had been possible to have this one-week negotiation seminar at the academy:

> After the First World War, a Turkish Jew migrated from Istanbul to The Hague, where he married the sister of my Jewish grandmother. He was a carpet merchant and taught my uncles how to mend and sell Persian carpets. One of my uncles was a very clever businessman. He saw the Second World War coming and put 600 carpets in storage, in a secret place. When the family had to hide from the Nazis, he sold a carpet a month on the black market, thereby paying for the survival of 30 people, not only family members. His sister, my mother, and her boyfriend, my father, were also able to go into hiding, my father because he did not want to work for the Germans, and my mother because she was Jewish, of course. They all survived the war. Because of this Turkish Jew, I was born in the Netherlands, a free country, and could deliver the negotiation training for you, young diplomats from Turkey. In other words, I could train Turkish civil servants thanks to a once Turkish citizen.

I did not add that immediately after the war, the Dutch tax collectors told my uncle that he had to pay taxes on all the carpets he had sold in order to safeguard Dutch civilians.

The last time I taught at the Turkish Diplomatic Academy was in 2018. At a certain moment, I put the diplomats to work and went to the toilet. Other than in Amman, I did not have a microphone with me. However, after I did what I had to do, the zipper of my trousers refused to close and got stuck. What to do? I returned to the classroom, entered with my back to the class, sat down behind my desk and debriefed the exercise. I gave the diplomats another assignment and left the classroom with my back to the audience. As I was very well acquainted with the staff, I told them about my shameful problem. One of the staff members took me to the ministry's basement, where there was a laundry shop as well as a shoemaker. The shoemaker solved the problem. In which MFA would they have a shoemaker in the basement?! *Lesson learned: do not despair, there is probably a way out, but you have to think outside the box.*

**Kyoto, 2019**

Peter Kesting and Remi Smolinski organise a yearly simulation competition on behalf of INTRA: The International Negotiation Training and Research Association. They again invited me to be one of the judges of this competition for business-school teams from all over the world. We have had wonderful gatherings in the past in places like Reykjavik and Munich. In 2019, the meeting would be at Will Baber's place at Kyoto University. As I had never been to Japan, I immediately decided to join in. KLM flights to Osaka were expensive, even the economy class. I therefore flew with Emirates. Sitting at Schiphol next to the gate for the direct KLM flight to Osaka, I started to doubt my decision to fly to Dubai first, wait for three hours and then to fly on to Osaka in as many hours as the direct flight from Amsterdam. My resilience has diminished since the days when I took flights to Ulaanbaatar via Seoul, or to Brasilia through Sao Paulo and Rio, but I decided to carry on, as this was to be my final intercontinental trip.

Kyoto was, and is, a fantastic city and the people are remarkably polite, of course. I felt very safe, but, strangely enough, I had felt more at home in Mongolia, as it has been under the Russian influence. The conference went very well and, at the end, I was invited to join the jury to decide the winning team: a Dutch team from Twente University or a team from a Washington business school. The jury had three members: Steve Gates (Gates 2016), who made his millions through his British company, The Gap Partnership; Remi Smolinski; and me. Steve said: 'The Americans are the winners, they got more out of this simulation exercise than the Dutch'. I said: 'the Dutch are the winners because they were creative, and they nurtured the relationship as they showed empathy towards the other party'. Steve did not agree with me. 'You should not be empathetic', he said, as you will yield too much content. He clearly perceived negotiation from the perspective of business culture, while I looked at it as a diplomatic process. *Lesson learned: perception determines reality.*

**Epilogue**

There are, of course, more anecdotes to be recited here. Like the one from Washington, for example, where US diplomats at the training institute of the US State Department were wondering about the relationship between NATO and the EU. This was during the time of the accession of neutral states to the European Union. How, they asked me, was it possible for these countries to get EU membership if they were not (yet) members of NATO? Or the anecdote from Moscow, where I asked the students 'who are the best negotiators in the world?' No answer. I said: 'they are small, and you will find them everywhere'. I meant children, but they shouted: 'The Jews!' Which reminds me of an incident in Zimbabwe, when the director (Mandaza 1997) of the Diplomatic Institute in Harare, who owned several hotels and lodges close to Victoria Falls, took me for a trip to there. On the first evening, we discussed the situation in Zimbabwe. He said it was not good. I asked why not, expecting him to criticise Zimbabwe's President Mugabe. 'Well,' he said, 'you know who is really in charge in the world and thereby in Zimbabwe: the Jews'. This black man took me by surprise, and I decided to avoid further discussion on the issue.

In Oxford, where I was invited to dinner at Christ Church, I was completely surprised by dining on stage in front of all the students in the hall where the Harry Potter films had been shot. In Phnom Penh, where Cambodia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Rhannadin invited

me for talks and asked me: 'Will you stay for lunch? The Ambassadors of the US and Australia will come and visit me'. I gladly accepted and he invited me to sit next to him when the ambassadors entered. Lunch was quite an experience, as the ambassadors harshly criticised the Prince for Cambodia's human rights track record. I had already experienced quite a dangerous situation before that. When the Malaysian Airways plane landed at Phnom Penh airport, Malaysian policemen surrounded the plane to protect it. Being well received by the director of the institute where I would be teaching, he stressed the importance of the location of his organisation, next to a Buddhist temple. He explained why this was so important: 'if they come to arrest me, I can flee to the temple. They are not allowed to drag me out of there'.

At a meeting of Deans and Directors (IFDT) in Cairo, a row arose about the name of the Falkland Islands, mentioned by Ralph Feltham, one of the founding fathers of the meetings. The Argentinian lady ambassador demanded that the name of the islands would be noted in the minutes as 'Malvinas'. Meeting participants then decided to tell the rapporteur, who was me, to skip the whole sentence, which I did. 'Nobody present at Cairo in 1990 will forget the impeccable reaction of the rapporteur when, following a request from the floor, the Chairman directed: '"Mr Rapporteur, delete that remark from the record". Dr Meerts (note: I was not yet a Dr at the time) at once nodded and ostentatiously erased a whole line on his pad with emphatic scratches of his pen, even though, still several sentences behind, his page was quite blank' (Kappeler 1998). The same Argentinian ambassador went on a private Nile cruise after the conference and demanded from the Egyptians that she would keep her hotel room in Cairo during and after her trip as she had to take the plane back to Buenos Aires. The Egyptians, wanting to avoid diplomatic problems, gave in and paid for her hotel.

I have focused here on my experiences outside the Netherlands, while I worked at Dutch universities and, of course, at my own Clingendael Institute for 40 years. I founded the Clingendael Academy in 1983 when four organisations merged into one institute, but my work abroad only started when I became its Deputy Director. The bulk of my training was, of course, at Clingendael Institute and universities, ministries and military staff schools and the like. One particular incident might be worthwhile to recount. Prince Willem-Alexander, nowadays King of the Netherlands, had to follow a curriculum at the Netherlands Defence Staff School in The Hague. One segment was a two-day seminar on international negotiation. I wrapped it up with the so-called 'Donkey Exercise'.

In this exercise, participants were split into two groups, each going to one corner of the lecture hall. The individuals in each group get identical instructions: walk over to the middle ground where you will meet the people of the other group and try to negotiate for one person from that group to come to your corner. You can promise whatever you want, but you are not allowed to push or to pull. Normally, everybody fails, as students see this as a win–lose situation. It is, of course, a win–win exercise, as both groups' members could walk together to one corner and after that to the other. Or better: they could change place in the middle and walk backwards to their opponent's corner in order to exclude the risk of betrayal. Empathy, trust and out-of-the box thinking are the main ingredients. The Prince therefore proposed to his adversary: 'if you walk with me to my corner, I will give you my

kingdom in return'. Whereupon his opponent answered: 'that will not suffice, for being a democracy, the people are in charge, not you'.

Let me highlight just one observation of a 'secret' meeting between the Chechen leadership and Russian Duma members in the Peace Palace in The Hague. Ruud Lubbers, former Dutch Prime Minister and, in 1997, President of the Board of the Clingendael Institute, wanted peace talks between the Russians and the Chechens after the first Chechen war. We worked together with the US non-governmental organisation Search for Common Ground. The talks would be held in the Peace Palace with William Ury (Fisher 1981) as chairman and mediator. The problem arose when the Chechens landed at Rotterdam Airport but refused to show their Russian passports, as their argument was that Chechnya was now the independent Republic of Ichkeria. No problem: Ruud Lubbers took a car to Rotterdam Airport and told the border guards: 'they showed their passports in the Dutch Embassy in Kiev in order to get visas. We don't need to see them again'. And so the Chechens came in. The talks went quite well but failed anyway, as the Chechen leadership felt that the Russians did not show enough empathy for the sufferings of the Chechen people during the war. *Lesson learned: you cannot separate the people from the problem if the people are the problem.*

**In Conclusion**

For me, the art of training is to develop your own programme and to adapt to the circumstances. When I got interested in negotiation processes, there were many seminars on business negotiation in the Netherlands, normally using the Harvard Approach or the model of Willem Mastenbroek (1984). Working closely together with Willem, I learned much about handling participants, especially if there is a spoiler in the class. Nothing existed on international negotiation processes, however, and both Mastenbroek's and Harvard's approaches were effective as training models, but questionable from an academic point of view. They were applicable in the private sector, but hardly useful in the public sector, let alone in diplomacy and international political relations.

Politics and diplomacy are too complex for simple recipes. It is important to find a balance between simplification and utter complexity. Participants need clear guidelines, but these guidelines should help them to understand reality. Exercises and discussions will have to clarify the complexity of negotiation processes and behaviour, but they should not lead to uniformity. As has been said before: every trainer and every participant has their own approach, and they are equally valuable as long as they enhance the insights into the question: what happens and how can I be effective? These conclusions should be drawn by the people themselves and should not be pushed upon them. A teacher telling participants what to do and what not to do is not a good trainer. Participants will have to feel how they should navigate, and learn by doing.

I never had any formal training in negotiation. I learned the trade from other trainers. I learned from others; and others learned from me. In the beginning, you copy the approach of your teacher, but at a certain moment, you have to develop your own vision (Meerts 1992, 2020b). We have to stand on each other's shoulders. I learned a lot from my gurus, but at a certain moment I had to follow my own route and so did my pupils. It cannot and should

not be avoided: at a certain moment, your students surpass you. This is welcomed, as it pushes the training in international negotiation forward and it creates a network of adepts. I formalised my network in 2017 with the creation of the Program on International Negotiation Training (POINT). Without former students such as Ida Manton and Frans Schram, I would never have been able to sustain this network. It also attracted many colleagues from abroad. The problem is, of course, how to cooperate, as trainers are in need of cooperation, but they are competitors as well. *PINpoints Magazine* # 48 (PINpoints) is an exponent of this cooperation, not only between trainers, but also between trainers and researchers, as 'Pointers' are PIN associates.

Lessons learned during these 30 years of training international negotiators? The main lesson for me is: check your assumptions. Who will be the participants? Do I know (some of them) already? Does it matter if they get the same training all over again? What are the participants' needs? What level of skill and knowledge do they have? What kind of organisation has invited me? How independent is that organisation? How hierarchical is it? What kind of staff does it have? Do I know the staff? What are their expectations? What about travel and facilities? What is the situation on the ground? What kind of country am I going to? What is the security, political and economic situation? What are the demands of the country's culture? To what extent should I represent my own culture or adapt to theirs? Do I have a way out if things go wrong? What kinds of surprises might pop up? Should I accept the assignment myself, or should I invite colleagues to work with me, or should I stay home and hand the project over to one or more persons in my network?

Check your assumptions: I will never forget my intervention on the important mediaeval empire Khazaria at a conference on Mongolia for a group of academicians at Leiden University. They were the best Mongolists in the world, coming from Russia and the United States, among others. I thought I brought them something special with my speech on the Khazars, a Turkic nation that converted to Judaism in the ninth century AD. The group listened politely, and then it was time for Q&A. There were no questions; there was something else. One of the Russians rose and started to cite a poem by Pushkin on the Khazars. After the first couplet, the other Russians stood up and joined him. What was hardly known in Western Europe appeared to be self-evident to the east of Europe.

Finally, it should be noted that training in itself is not enough. Training should be supported by research. Otherwise, training will become one-dimensional, only repeating and not renewing itself. Alfred van Staden and William Zartman helped me in publicising my thoughts on international negotiation (Meerts 2014), which gave me new insights into international political negotiation processes. Innovation is the key to successful enduring training; research is the way to discover new insights, keeping training alive and kicking.

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