Duty of Care: Consular Diplomacy Response of Baltic and Nordic Countries to COVID-19

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Summary

Declaring the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 left thousands of travellers stranded, propelling consular work to the forefront, and testing governments' capacity to aid their nationals abroad. While all consular departments provided assistance and duty of care (DoC) through information and guidance, some were reactive while others were proactive, and some were willing to make exceptions and engage in pastoral care. Analysis of the Baltic and Nordic countries' reactions to the initial outbreak of COVID-19 shows us how DoC diverged in practice, and to note the transition of consular affairs into consular diplomacy and its interplay with facets of digital, citizen-centric and diaspora diplomacy. The conclusion is that all eight countries exceeded normal consular practice and exhibited some level of pastoral DoC, with Latvia and Lithuania exhibiting high levels of pastoral care. In parallel, Lithuania and Denmark, in their responses, effectively incorporated innovative elements of digital and diaspora diplomacy.
Keywords


1 Introduction

In 2018, a special issue of The Hague Journal of Diplomacy dedicated to ‘Diplomacy and the Duty of Care’ pointed out that the study of diplomacy had ‘insufficiently developed the related research agendas’ pertaining to the assistance and protection of citizens abroad. ‘Duty of care’ (DoC) refers to the state’s legal and moral duty to care for nationals, even in instances when they are located outside the state’s territorial boundaries. Thus, ‘the concept lends itself to understanding, explaining and demonstrating effects of territorially defined state practices, as they are exported beyond the border’. The responsibility of care for distressed nationals overseas lies primarily in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and is generally known as consular assistance.

Never has consular assistance been tested so extensively as it was in early 2020, in the immediate aftermath of the declaration of COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO). In mid-March 2020, a significant portion of the world closed its land and air borders, the Schengen area reintroduced internal borders and commercial means of international travel became increasingly difficult. At that time, the European Union (EU) alone had 600,000 citizens stranded outside its borders. As the whole world was simultaneously affected by a single emergency, the ensuing massive diplomatic operation to assist stranded individuals abroad revealed substantial differences in the interpretation of the concept of consular assistance, the means and tools of assistance available to various MFAs, and the perception of mandates to come to the rescue. What accounts for this difference in approaches to providing consular assistance? This article argues that the evolution of the relationship between the citizen and the state

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1 This research was funded by the Latvian Council of Science, project Diaspora Diplomacy and the Global Pandemic, project No. lzp-2020/2-0195.
2 Melissen and Okano-Heijmans 2018, 137.
3 Norwegian Institute of International Affairs n.d.
influences DoC. By analysing the consular response to the pandemic-imposed travel restrictions and state-led efforts in assisting citizens abroad, it assesses the relationship between the state and the citizen in practice through the ‘execution of the Duty of Care, with the chain of care stretching from state to citizen’.5

In the following discussion, the DoC concept will be applied to the evaluation of responses to the pandemic outbreak by MFAs in the Baltic and Nordic countries of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden from March to June 2020 to understand how and why practices diverged. These states’ various responses, captured through interviews with senior consular officials in the eight countries, provide valuable insight into how DoC was interpreted by states in this region. The incorporation of new facets of diplomatic practice into consular work, including engagement with foreign policy, digital diplomacy, citizen-centric practices and diaspora diplomacy, in the responses will be identified.

2 Methodology

The Baltic and Nordic region was selected for this study because, although all eight countries engage in multilateral Baltic Sea Region co-operation frameworks such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Nordic — Baltic Six (NB6) and Nordic — Baltic Eight (NB8), there are still notable differences among them, such as in the standard of living between the Baltic and the Nordic neighbours. These differences are also reflected in state-building and political experience. Although currently the Baltic and Nordic countries are converging in terms of values, the Nordic welfare model, as well as the economies of all five Nordic countries, are more advanced and mutually integrated.

Additionally, the foreign services of the Baltic states were established much more recently and do not have the lengthy experience of their Nordic neighbours. Although the Baltic MFAs were created shortly after these nations declared their independence in 1918, and although throughout the period of Soviet rule these diplomatic corps remained in exile as a separate institution, they fully resumed their activities only after the restoration of independence in 1990. Moreover, the Nordic states have recent experience in dealing with consular crises such as the 2004 tsunami, which ultimately led to consular

5 Leira and Græger 2019, 5.
practice reorganisation and re-evaluation. In Denmark, for example, these changes had a significant impact not only on the consular service (including the creation of 24/7 call centres), but also on the organisational culture of the MFA and its co-operation with other ministries. Nonetheless, scholars have viewed the Baltic states as relatively quick to adopt innovations and modern diplomatic practices.

Leira and Græger suggest that, in terms of protecting their citizens abroad, it is not necessarily the wealthy states that demonstrate the greatest amount of DoC, but rather states where such traditions are more recent. As such, in this case it is not readily obvious that the Nordic states would be more proactive or effective than the Baltic states in their consular performance, despite their greater wealth and experience. As a result, this article provides an opportunity to evaluate how countries with differing political, economic and social legacies in a single region have responded to a consular emergency of unprecedented scale. The aim is to determine whether there are regional differences in the state — citizen relationship and how, in a crisis situation, incorporation of new facets of diplomacy aided consular response.

As the general definition of what constitutes consular assistance and what citizens can expect is rather vague in the consular section overview of both Baltic and Nordic countries’ MFAs, interviews with senior consular officials were deemed the best method for ascertaining how each nation responded to the COVID-19 emergency. Therefore, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted in spring 2021 (see Appendix 1 for a list of interviewees). All informants were promised anonymity to enable the interviews to proceed in a more open manner. In line with praxiography research techniques, the questions were structured to focus more on the ‘how’ and less on the ‘what’, allowing the interviewee to elaborate on practices and strategies and to reflect on the social context of the decisions. Additional materials, where appropriate, were used for reference.

The Tindall and ‘t Hart analytical framework for evaluating consular emergency management response was utilised to structure the interviews, focus on various key crisis response functions and comprehend the interplay between DoC in the state — citizen relationship and the operational response. Tindall and ‘t Hart argue that ‘en masse consular events can differ in location,

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6 Brändström, Kuipers and Daléus 2008.  
7 Kļaviņš 2021a.  
8 Kļaviņš 2021b.  
9 Leira and Græger 2019, 4.  
10 Simpson 2009, 1341.  
11 Tindall and ‘t Hart 2011.
composition and nature, but exhibit common themes and challenges. According to their framework, the response functions of consular departments can be divided into two levels, strategic and operational.

In the strategic phase of its response, the state frames its DoC towards its citizens abroad. To address this phase, interview questions were formulated regarding how the MFAs went about establishing the number of their citizens abroad, the decisions reached regarding the appropriate level of government involvement and how these decisions were communicated. The operational response concerns the actual execution of the actions. In this regard, interview questions asked about the overlap between foreign policy and consular affairs, co-ordination with Baltic and Nordic partners, the management of information and organisation of consular work with the aid of digital diplomacy tools, the use of citizen-centric practices and the engagement of the diaspora to assist the government in its actions.

Thus, the first question guiding the Baltic and Nordic country COVID-19 consular response investigation has to do with the DoC concept and the changing relationship between the state and its citizens. From the information obtained, the study will distil the level of pastoral care exhibited by the state’s response and make note of regional differences. The second question guiding the study has to do with how foreign policy overlapped with consular work as it evolved into consular diplomacy, and how digital, citizen-centric and diaspora diplomacy facets were incorporated in the response.

3 The Duty of Care and the Evolution of Consular Practice

The ‘duty of care’ has its roots in legal traditions. Additionally, the medical field has a long history of interpreting and implementing the concept. The underlying presumption guiding the DoC principle is that moral and legal grounds obligate one party to care for another party. As Sokol states regarding the concept’s applicability to the medical field (and specifically to pandemics), ‘duty of care is neither fixed nor absolute but heavily dependent on context’. Therefore, he argues for ‘more specific descriptions of the obligations’.

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12 Tindall and ‘t Hart 2011, 139.
14 Sokol 2006, 1238.
15 Sokol 2006, 1238.
16 Sokol 2006, 1238.
The vagueness and loose interpretation of the concept carry over into its application to international relations and diplomacy, where ‘states have traditionally taken care beyond borders through diplomatic and consular services’. The obligation to safeguard citizens is a national matter, as stipulated by the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. However, the practical application of this obligation varies greatly across states. “The concepts of “assistance”, “citizens” and “distress” are deliberately left open to interpretation, in line with foreign ministry practice.” The underlying presumption, however, springs from the idea of a ‘contractual relationship between unequal partners, usually, but not exclusively, state and citizen, rooted in a normative community’. As such, there are ‘considerable national and company variations in the understanding and implementation of the DoC vis-à-vis citizens abroad’. As an analytical starting point, Leira and Græger suggest establishing the circumstances under which DoC can be invoked, who can claim the right to be cared for and the questions of power associated with implementation. Deviations in the interpretation of the concept, the ensuing mandate to act in the interest of compatriots abroad, how these compatriots are defined, and the means and tools of assistance available are direct reflections of the variations in how states view their DoC towards their nationals abroad. These differences become visible in consular responses during a crisis.

The divergence of legal arrangements in the domain of civil security is clear in instances where nationals of different countries must be assisted in the same crisis by various consular departments of different states. Tindall and ‘t Hart contend that almost no national policy frameworks exist for large-scale transboundary consular emergencies, and therefore ‘what citizens can expect from their governments during a major emergency abroad is left unspecified’. As a result, different states can respond to the same event differently. As previously mentioned, Leira and Græger maintain that greater care tends to be shown not necessarily by wealthier states, but by those where these ‘responsibilities are recently invoked and acted upon, [as opposed to] states with a longer tradition for acting abroad in aid of their compatriots’.

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17 Leira and Græger 2019, 10.
18 Lafleur and Vintila 2020.
19 Okano-Heijmans 2010, 2.
20 Leira and Græger 2019, 9.
22 Leira and Græger 2019, 11.
23 Brändström, Kuipers and Daléus 2008.
25 Leira and Græger 2019, 4.
One key aspect influencing variations in the application of DoC and the implementation of consular assistance concerns how the state views its citizens in this relationship. Traditionally, consular services have been the providers of care.\(^{26}\) However, Tsinovoi and Adler-Nissen argue that transformations are taking place in the diplomatic realm as states move away from the pastoral care concept, according to which citizens are objects to be protected, to a more neoliberal governmentality conception where citizens are expected to take on more responsibility for their own well-being.\(^{27}\) As a result, ‘citizens are no longer passive recipients of state protection, but active providers of care for themselves’.\(^{28}\) Löwenheim describes this change as a move by which ‘neoliberal societies increasingly acknowledge a responsibility to help citizens make “informed choices”’.\(^{29}\) This neoliberal approach focuses on the effective use of information provided by the MFA through travel advisories, insurance requirements and travel registers, which enable citizens to decide how to care for themselves. Melissen has noted that several countries are exhibiting signs of ‘nudging the social contract with society in the direction of citizens assuming more personal responsibility’.\(^{30}\)

Another key aspect influencing discrepancies in the provision of consular assistance has to do with the changes taking place in consular affairs. The importance of consular affairs and their place in diplomatic work have previously been underrated, mainly because consular work was largely associated with the provision of service and ‘service tasks have traditionally been of a relatively low-priority within the foreign ministry’.\(^{31}\) However, consular affairs, as ‘the “citizen service” end of diplomacy’,\(^{32}\) are experiencing rapid development due to a number of factors, including the previously mentioned evolving relationship between the state and its citizens, a greater interest in citizen-centric foreign policy and the overall transformation of diplomacy, all of which have produced changes in MFAs.\(^{33}\) Consular affairs have grown out of a ‘matter of necessity’ into a constitutive part of other diplomatic functions.\(^{34}\) As Micu argues, ‘the assistance function of consular affairs, which is in the spotlight of

\(^{26}\) Leira 2018.

\(^{27}\) Tsinovoi and Adler-Nissen 2018.

\(^{28}\) Tsinovoi and Adler-Nissen 2018, 3.

\(^{29}\) Löwenheim 2007, 203.

\(^{30}\) Melissen 2020, 221.

\(^{31}\) Okano-Heijmans 2013, 12.

\(^{32}\) Rana 2011, 213.

\(^{33}\) Cooper, Heine and Thakur 2013; Constantinou, Kerr and Sharp 2016; Melissen 2020; Okano-Heijmans 2013.

\(^{34}\) Okano-Heijmans 2013, 473.
the consular departments of foreign ministries, is only a small part of what the daily work of a consul means'.35 Consular officials and the consular service as a whole have become an important component of other forms of diplomacy. How effectively a state’s consular department can work across diplomatic disciplines, such as foreign policy, and incorporate facets of digital, citizen-centric and diaspora diplomacy in its response will impact the level of care received by citizens in need.

As consular practice engages with foreign policy, it evolves into consular diplomacy, which seeks to get rid of the attribution of neologism completely.36 Okano-Heijmans defines consular diplomacy as ‘international negotiations on a consular (legal) framework and individual consular cases that attract substantial attention from the media, public and politicians’.37 In large-scale consular emergencies, consular diplomacy is the ‘strategic coordination of responses within government and with external partners requiring a combination of calling on pre-established relationships and networks, as well as the ability to recognize and exploit new opportunities for mutually beneficial joint action’.38 Crisis situations that impact several countries simultaneously require nations to ‘collaborate to detect emerging threats, share information about unfolding events, arrive at joint decisions under time pressure, coordinate shared resources, and communicate effectively and preferably with one voice’.39 The ability of the consular section to work with foreign policy, developing and implementing foreign partnerships and regional co-operation in an effective manner, has a direct impact on the response.

In recent years, a growing number of academics have started paying attention to MFA digitalisation and the role of innovative technologies in diplomatic practice.40 Bjola and Kornprobst coined the term ‘digital diplomacy’ to refer to ‘the use of digital technologies for diplomatic purposes’.41 An earlier definition of digital diplomacy defines the practice as ‘the use of the Web, ICTs, and social media tools to engage in diplomatic activities and carry out foreign policy objectives’.42 Digital diplomacy has wide application in facilitating information gathering and communication functions, while also encompassing the development and adaptation of digital tools and technologies for

35  Micu 2020, 69.
37  Okano-Heijmans 2010, 1.
38  Tindall and t’ Hart 2011, 143.
39  Kuipers et al. 2015, 2.
40  Stanzel 2018, 28; Melissen and Caesar-Gordon 2016; Manor 2016.
41  Bjola and Kornprobst 2018, 248.
42  Sandre 2013, 9.
The importance of digital diplomacy in promoting the efficiency and legitimacy of MFAs has been noted, along with the fact that digitalisation makes information gathering simpler but information analysis more complex.\(^{43}\) As a result, digital diplomacy has far-reaching applications for the diplomatic service. This article will focus on the aspects of digital diplomacy that are associated with the ‘usage of digital technologies to improve the service delivery’.\(^{44}\)

Digital diplomacy is closely intertwined with citizen-centric diplomacy, as an MFA’s service delivery aims to provide citizens with information that can aid their decision-making regarding their own well-being. Löwenheim describes this process of informing the target audience as the ‘responsibilisation’ of citizens.\(^{45}\) These services are now, to a great extent, delivered digitally. For example, consular sections implementing citizen-centric initiatives provide travel advisories, travel registers and other forms of assistance in a digital manner. However, some scepticism has been expressed regarding the effectiveness of travel advisories and travel registers, as both are voluntary in nature rather than obligatory.\(^{46}\) For instance, Melissen notes that the old-school consular registers are highly ineffective and do ‘not produce anything close to expected levels of registration by travelling members of the public’.\(^{47}\)

Besides encouraging citizens to take on more responsibility for their own well-being, citizen-centric diplomacy is also ‘about how citizens as private individuals can make a difference in world affairs’.\(^{48}\) In citizen-centric diplomacy, citizens are encouraged to aid state diplomatic efforts through citizen-based practices.\(^{49}\) This new way of thinking about citizens as contributors to state development is a direct result of globalisation and increased mobility, as well as increasing risks and overstretched MFA resources. States are turning to their citizens for assistance in fulfilling their duties as ‘governments increasingly perceive the population as a resource of productive forces to be mobilized for governmental purposes, rather than merely protected’.\(^{50}\) For example, citizens can aid in gathering and spreading information, since ‘diplomats are only part of the process by which information is obtained, and often are not

\(^{43}\) Hocking and Melissen 2015, 55.
\(^{44}\) Hocking and Melissen 2015, 23.
\(^{45}\) Löwenheim 2007, 203.
\(^{46}\) Greger and Lindgren 2018, 194; Löwenheim 2007, 203.
\(^{47}\) Melissen 2020, 221.
\(^{48}\) McDonald 1991, 119.
\(^{49}\) Greger and Leira 2019; Melissen and Caesar-Gordon 2016; Melissen 2020; Tsinovoi and Adler-Nissen 2018.
\(^{50}\) Tsinovoi and Adler-Nissen 2018, 20.
the most important part’.51 This ‘digital shift’ towards greater citizen participation in consular assistance has been extensively described by Melissen and Caesar-Gordon.52

In relation to the interplay between consular assistance, digital diplomacy, citizen-centric practices and communication efforts, Melissen has looked at the communication and information challenges faced by consular diplomats.53 He notes that often ‘the greatest challenge for governments assisting their citizens abroad is, ironically, not helping them but getting through to the same people in a fragmented communication environment’.54 In one solution used by consular departments in crisis situations, the application of digital communication, coupled with citizen-centric practices, has ‘harvested data and encouraged citizens to circulate potentially valuable updates’.55 Another citizen-centric information-gathering approach uses first-hand information from ‘ground zero’, where those involved in a crisis situation report back to the consular department and engage directly in assisting the MFA in the sense-making phase of the response via social media.56 This article considers how citizens were engaged in citizen-centric practices associated with information sharing and aiding consular response efforts during the initial phase of COVID-19 containment.

The final diplomacy facet considered here, which is also closely intertwined with citizen-centric practices, is diaspora diplomacy. The term ‘diaspora’ in this article is understood broadly as ‘emigrants and their descendants who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry, either on a temporary or permanent basis, yet still maintain affective and material ties to their countries of origin’.57 Diaspora diplomacy encompasses the expanding national efforts to engage with and leverage these transnational populations. Such efforts, specifically in the Baltic states, have been previously noted by researchers.58 Diaspora diplomacy is defined as ‘diaspora assemblages composed of states, non-state and other international actors that function as constituent components of assemblages, connected through networks and flows of people, information and resources’.59 Thus, Ho and McConnell see ‘the role of diasporas

51 Black 2010, 14.
52 Melissen and Caesar-Gordon 2016.
53 Melissen 2020.
54 Melissen 2020, 225.
55 Melissen 2020, 222.
57 Agunias and Newland 2012, 15.
58 Birka and Klāvņš 2020.
59 Ho and McConnell, 2017, 16.
in shaping diplomacy’s core functions of representation, communication and mediation’.60 Brinkerhoff argues that members of the diaspora can function ‘as agents; instruments of others’ diplomatic agendas’.61 Thus, this study investigates whether and how diasporas were engaged by MFAs as agents in an effort to aid the consular response to COVID-19.

4 Duty of Care in Baltic and Nordic COVID-19 Consular Response

The duty of care, as discussed above, is heavily influenced by circumstance and interpretation. On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic.62 Even though, as suggested by all the interviewees, the consular departments had already been addressing the COVID-19 threat by providing travel warnings and advice, the declaration made it necessary to determine the magnitude and implications of travel restrictions on citizens abroad. The first tool used to establish how many citizens might be impacted was consular registers. Of the eight countries, seven had pre-existing consular registers of those travelling abroad. Only Iceland had no former experience with maintaining and utilising a consular register, and such a register was developed only at the end of February 2020 in an ad hoc manner.63 Furthermore, as already noted, travel registers fail to reflect the actual number of citizens outside the country at any given time. In fact, the Finnish interviewee stated that only about 4 per cent of travellers utilised the travel register service prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.64 As a result, countries faced the challenge of how to make their citizens abroad aware of the situation and establish their whereabouts.

In terms of interpreting DoC in a pastoral care manner, where the state takes an active role in caring for its citizens abroad and offers assistance without being asked, Denmark’s actions in the early days of the pandemic stand out among these countries. According to the Danish consular representative, to find out how many citizens might require assistance, Denmark took the proactive approach of getting information out to those abroad about the consular register and its travel app through an SMS message. Danish mobile telephone numbers abroad were identified in co-operation with Danish telephone operators, and a targeted SMS message was sent to all Danish SIM cards worldwide.

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60 Ho and McConnell 2017, 1.
61 Brinkerhoff 2019, 56.
63 Interview (3) with Icelandic diplomat (9 March 2021).
64 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
with a link to the database and information about the travel app, thus allowing for further country-specific communication through push messages. Not only did this action ensure that the vast majority of Danish citizens abroad eligible for consular assistance received specific information about the emergency, but it also prompted individuals not yet in the consular register to enter their personal details, leaving less room for error in subsequent communications. Furthermore, the respondents could indicate the severity of their situation, thus allowing the consular department to prioritise whom to assist.65

As a result, 117,000 Danes registered as being abroad during the onset of the crisis, giving their government a complete picture of the situation and facilitating adequate planning for the next phases of the response.66

Several other countries, such as Lithuania and Norway, also acquired information from mobile phone operators about their mobile users abroad to aid in establishing the potential number of citizens requiring assistance. This information, however, was used only to inform decision-making and not to directly reach out and offer assistance in a proactive manner. The Norwegian representative stated that they were prevented from doing so because Norway views ‘consular help as being voluntary — first you give up your information and then we can contact you’.67 This reactive approach requires a request from an individual before assistance can be provided.

Finland also wanted to establish the number of those impacted and determine if the MFA could offer assistance but reached out only to those already listed in the travel register. According to the Finnish representative,

We gave a directive to our embassies on the 18th or 19th of March to send out a query to those in the country. Our travel registration system can be used to ask a person, ‘Please reply: do you need assistance in getting home, are you okay?’ These answers allowed each embassy to create a rather accurate picture of the number of citizens requiring assistance.68

As a result, Finland did offer support in a proactive manner, but only to those already registered.

Iceland’s DoC interpretation and proactive approach to assistance also stand out. Because it had only a hastily created consular register, Iceland made the decision in late March to personally call individuals on the travel registration

65 Interview (1) with Danish diplomat (24 February 2021).
67 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
68 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
list to ascertain their situation and offer assistance.69 This was no small feat, considering that Iceland had 12,000 individuals registered in the database at the height of the crisis.70 The other countries’ representatives indicated that they acted in a reactive manner, responding to requests for assistance.

Even though elements of pastoral care are evident in the DoC approach of the Baltic and Nordic countries, state assistance was offered primarily in the form of information and guidance along the lines of the ‘responsibilisation’ of citizens concept in DoC. For example, Iceland had released its 2019 Consular Service guidelines just before the outbreak of the pandemic. The policy document stated very clearly that the assistance the consular service could offer was in the form of information, ‘enabling more people to help themselves, but in more complex situations trained personnel will provide advice and support’.71 All the countries of the Baltic and Nordic region emphasised that this neoliberal, citizen-centric approach to consular assistance was primarily utilised in the consular response, where DoC is interpreted as the provision of information and guidance as a means of protecting citizens abroad. The consular departments worked to provide information and guidance to assist individuals in making their own travel arrangements, and only in special cases would they become more deeply involved. The initial press releases clearly communicated to their citizens that contact with the MFA and its consular department should be their last resort, and that available commercial means of return should be preferred. For example, the initial press release encouraging return to Finland stated explicitly that MFA phone numbers were only for emergencies, that commercial means of travel should be used and that ‘travelers are now required to be resilient and able to deal with uncertainty’.72

Another aspect that comes into play in evaluating DoC concerns boundary setting or specifying who is entitled to state care in a consular emergency, and then communicating this decision. In this regard, most of the Baltic and Nordic countries made clear that those who were travelling abroad as tourists on a temporary basis would be prioritised and that diaspora members should stay where they were. For Latvia, the number of diaspora members wishing to return during the pandemic was so extreme that the MFA prepared a special report to the government on how to handle the situation and on who was or was not entitled to consular assistance.73 The guidelines, however, were vague,

69 Interview (3) with Icelandic diplomat (9 March 2021).
70 Government of Iceland 2020, 3.
71 Government of Iceland 2019, 2.
72 Government of Finland 2020a.
allowing room for interpretation as to who could qualify for assistance. The message to the Estonian diaspora was that ‘you have a home, you have your environment, you are there permanently, and as such you are not needing help from Estonia in that sense’. However, exceptions were made, such as for people who lived abroad for only part of the year and who were in countries ‘where the restrictions were very tough, and for whom medical assistance might be better in Estonia’. Similar exceptions for part-year residents abroad were hinted at by the Norwegian and Swedish representatives. Lithuania and Iceland went even further in extending consular assistance to the diaspora. The Lithuanian MFA representative stated that ‘assistance was offered to all Lithuanian citizens and residents and their family members stranded abroad and in need’. Iceland even paid for the return of a few individuals who had resided abroad for a long time and were destitute. Only Finland and Denmark did not specify in the interviews that exceptions were made for returning diaspora members. Thus DoC was interpreted broadly, and in six of the eight countries it was applied to the diaspora populations.

In analysing the DoC of the Baltic and Nordic countries, actions speak most loudly. Table 1 uses information garnered from the interviews with senior consular representatives and various other documents to compose a quantitative assessment of the situation faced by each country in terms of direct contacts between citizens and the consular department, direct assistance efforts by the consular department and, finally, the arrangement of repatriation flights. Once commercial means of return became increasingly difficult or even impossible, special assistance was offered to stranded compatriots in the form of repatriation flights, ferries and trains. In the Baltic and Nordic countries, repatriation flights were the most frequently used means of returning stranded travellers. The information in Table 1 is incomplete, as for example in the Swedish case, the consular official could not provide a definite number of individuals in direct communication with the consular department, as information was transmitted through the travel app and included everyone who had downloaded the app. In other cases, the interpretation of what constitutes direct assistance diverged. Additionally, in many instances repatriation flights were organised in co-operation with other countries. However, Table 1 provides a good overview based on the interviews and available reports of the actual situation faced by each consular department.

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74 Interview (2) with Estonian diplomat (3 March 2021).
75 Interview (2) with Estonian diplomat (3 March 2021).
76 Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
77 Interview (3) with Icelandic diplomat (9 March 2021).
Table 1 Consular cases in the Baltic and Nordic countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Direct contacts</th>
<th>Direct assistance</th>
<th>Repatriation flights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>1,835</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>5,750</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>6,275</td>
<td>3,258</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on comparisons between the amount of direct assistance offered by the consular department and the number of enquiries received, the two Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania demonstrated the greatest pastoral DoC. In 65 per cent of the cases, Latvia’s consular department was directly involved in going beyond information provision in assisting received enquiries. Therefore, it is no surprise that Latvia was also the undisputed leader in the organisation of repatriation flights. According to the Latvian consular representative, around 4,000 Latvians returned to their country on such flights. Lithuania’s energetic response was especially noteworthy since Lithuania does not have a national airline; the nineteen repatriation flights, which returned 2,765 Lithuanians to

78 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark 2020.
79 Interview (2) with Estonian diplomat (3 March 2021).
80 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
81 Government of Finland 2020b.
82 Government of Finland 2020b.
84 Interview (3) with Icelandic diplomat (9 March 2021).
85 Interview (6) with Latvian diplomat (26 March 2021).
88 Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
89 Ekroll 2020.
90 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
91 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
92 Interview (5) with Swedish diplomat (19 March 2021).
93 Interview (6) with Latvian diplomat (26 March 2021).
Taking into account the above, Table 2 attempts to classify the extent of pastoral care evident in the consular response of the eight countries. The table combines information regarding proactive versus reactive approaches to offering assistance, the extent of direct engagement by the consular department, exceptions made for diaspora members wanting to return and the number of repatriation flights organised.

In our overview, we classify Latvia and Lithuania as exhibiting high levels of pastoral care. Even though in outreach Latvia and Lithuania were reactive, meaning that an individual had to initiate contact and request assistance, once this request was made these two countries were quick to assume a pastoral DoC approach, becoming directly involved in providing assistance, making exceptions for diaspora members wishing to return and organising special means of return. Iceland, according to the interview, was proactive in its initial outreach, going as far as to make personal calls, and there was also a proportionally high level of direct engagement with enquiries. However, Iceland managed to assist the stranded individuals without taking the extra step of organising special means of return. Denmark and Finland were also proactive in their outreach efforts at the beginning of the pandemic; however, their relatively low level of direct engagement, the lack of specific exceptions made for diaspora return and the average number of repatriation flights leads to their classification as exhibiting medium levels of pastoral care. Norway and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Outreach</th>
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<th>Diaspora</th>
<th>Level of pastoral care</th>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Exceptions</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

94 Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
Sweden are also classified as exhibiting medium levels of pastoral care. For the most part, the consular departments of the five countries classified as exhibiting medium levels of pastoral care made attempts to assist individuals through information and guidance, relying on the individual’s ability to make their own travel arrangements, while taking into account that this was an unprecedented global event and that exceptions and special care had to be provided. This general attitude of going beyond neoliberal consular assistance and allowing for elements of pastoral care is corroborated by the Danish report *Internal Assessment of Corona Crisis Management in Consular Services*, which states that ‘the level of service offered during the crisis has exceeded normal practice in terms of consular services usually available to Danish citizens’.

No clear regional differences are observable besides the fact that Latvia and Lithuania, both Baltic states, exhibited high levels of pastoral care in the Baltics. Similarly, Leira and Græger’s contention that states where traditions of consular service are more recent provide the best pastoral care is not clearly confirmed. Two comparatively poorer and newer Baltic countries, Latvia and Lithuania, were very proactive in their response, but Estonia was very clearly following the Nordic model. Therefore, the interpretations of DoC in this situation may best be viewed as country-specific and further investigation is required into the factors influencing these variations.

5 Engagement with Other Facets of Diplomacy in the Baltic and Nordic COVID-19 Consular Responses

5.1 Foreign Policy

International co-operation with foreign partners and how well foreign-policy-shaped partnerships functioned in practice had a significant impact on the consular responses. The nature of the COVID-19 consular emergency, as an event unfolding simultaneously worldwide, required significant co-operation and information sharing among partners. The importance of information sharing between countries, and within the consular response teams, in dealing with the constantly changing global situation was emphasised repeatedly in the interviews. In terms of relying on partners for information needs, Iceland stands out as being very dependent on Nordic colleagues for information on regions where there are no Icelandic diplomatic missions.

95 Government of Denmark 2020, 3.
96 Leira and Græger 2019, 4.
According to representative interviewed, ‘Iceland normally does not give out travel advice in the same way that the Nordics do, because most of the risky situations take place in countries where we don’t have embassies and have no means of gathering our own information’. Accordingly, collaboration with other countries to obtain and share information was essential for Iceland. The Nordic countries generally, as several interviewees mentioned, had a joint list of traveller hotspots that was constantly updated and shared among the countries and then used for decision-making. Information exchange also occurred at the Baltic — Nordic consular level, in the specially established network of consular directors.

The Nordics have long enjoyed highly institutionalised co-operation and are often viewed as world leaders in regional collaboration. This feature was reaffirmed during the interviews, as the Nordics all emphasised their excellent co-operation during the pandemic operational response. One key facet of this co-operation was the organisation of repatriation flights. According to the Finnish representative, there were daily information exchanges on hotspots of trapped travellers, during which lists of flashpoints were jointly composed and repatriation flights were planned accordingly. This resulted in joint decision-making on who would fly where and the coordination of pooled resources. As a direct outcome of this co-operation, Nordic citizens were prioritised on Nordic-organised repatriation flights, which meant they received information about such flights and could book tickets in advance.

In terms of Baltic and Nordic collaboration, within the NB8 format, information exchange and virtual meetings took place but did not translate into practical, tangible results. Lack of effective co-operation at this level was underscored by the Norwegian interviewee: ‘We had very close Nordic co-operation, but not so close co-operation with the Baltics. We were not frequently in touch. There was some initial contact about using airBaltic to get people back but that was mostly commercial flights, and it just didn’t fit our needs’. The Baltics, however, relied heavily on each other, as Latvia organised a massive repatriation effort that also brought Lithuanians and Estonians back to the region. An evaluation of the Baltics’ response concluded that co-operation in information sharing and transit facilitation was successful.

98 Interview (3) with Icelandic diplomat (9 March 2021).
100 Yleisradio Oy 2020.
101 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
102 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
103 Kuusik 2021.
104 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
because of their previously established relationships: ‘Spring 2020 showed that diplomats, officials and politicians in the three countries are used to working closely with their counterparts’.105 However, Latvia’s organising of 41 repatriation flights in co-operation with airBaltic while Lithuania chartered nineteen repatriation flights suggests signs of missed opportunities to work more effectively with regional partners.

Bilateral co-operation also took place; specifically, Finland and Estonia praised their mutual collaboration. The Estonian interviewee noted that ‘we had great co-operation with Finland, and it was heavily used by Estonians for transit during the crisis, because it didn’t close the transit zones’.106 As the Finnish diplomat explained, ‘with Estonia we had a special transit arrangement, where returning Estonians could land in Helsinki and then transit to the harbour in order to take the ferry to go back to Estonia, without quarantining’.107 This bilateral co-operation, which resulted in special transit allowances, also sprang from pre-established co-operation in foreign policy regarding workers commuting between Estonia and Finland.108

As previously mentioned, the region has various multilateral co-operation frameworks in place where different constellations of the states interact. However, the interviews with senior consular representatives suggest that co-operation happened among the Nordics, among the Baltics and in limited cases bilaterally. In short, overarching joint Baltic and Nordic co-operation was not heavily utilised. The Nordics were efficient in calling upon pre-established and tested relationships and networks with other Nordic countries, and in using these networks for information sharing, joint decision-making and co-ordination of resources. However, in terms of recognising and acting upon new opportunities for mutually beneficial response, they were more hesitant. In view of the extensive repatriation initiative coordinated by Latvia, which arranged more repatriation flights than any other country in this group, it seems that opportunities were missed. The same can be said for the Baltics. If the Baltic countries had had tighter relationships with the Nordics, possibly the consular response could have tied in and utilised the repatriation efforts of these foreign partners in a more effective manner, reducing the requirement for self-reliance. In summary, consular affairs in the Baltic and Nordic countries’ response actively engaged with facets of foreign policy and did evolve.

105 Kuusik 2021, 4.
106 Interview (2) with Estonian diplomat (3 March 2021).
107 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
108 Kuusik 2021, 5.
into consular diplomacy in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, but some opportunities were under-utilised.

5.2 Digital Diplomacy

Information management was a massive component of the consular response. As the Swedish MFA representative noted, the COVID-19 pandemic was really an information crisis: ‘Many embassies described this as an information crisis; the information itself was not the crisis, but the need for information was just so large, as so many people needed information, and information needed to be analysed, understood, spread and constantly updated.’\textsuperscript{109} Thus, it is important to evaluate consular departments’ use of digital technologies to improve their service response.

Sweden and Denmark had travel apps linked to the consular register of nationals abroad. These apps were relatively new but already had an active user base. According to the interviews, the Danish app ‘UM Rejseklar’ had 800,000 subscribers before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.\textsuperscript{110} In the Swedish case, the first message regarding COVID-19 sent through the app ‘UD Resklar’ was received by 250,000 users.\textsuperscript{111} These countries used their travel apps for targeted information sharing. Sweden sent out an estimated 1,000 targeted push notifications from its MFA or embassies, and communication through the app was especially helpful to ‘share short pieces of information particularly about transport, such as available seats on flights and information on where to book tickets’.\textsuperscript{112} Lithuania also utilised its MFA app, ‘Keliauk saugiai’, for direct communication with those registered.\textsuperscript{113} In the Estonian case, the travel app was a missed opportunity; such an app did exist but was not used because ‘it did not work with all mobile phones’.\textsuperscript{114} Finland also did not have a travel app as such, but its consular register database platform enabled targeted information sharing via SMS and email and was accessible to both embassies and the general public. Through this platform, Finland disseminated the maximum amount of information possible: ‘We pushed information like crazy to nearly 60,000 users, sending out 491 push messages and 216 queries, with an estimated reach of 65,000 travellers in the period between mid-March to mid-April.’\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{109} Interview (5) with Swedish diplomat (19 March 2021).
\textsuperscript{110} Interview (1) with Danish diplomat (24 February 2021).
\textsuperscript{111} Interview (5) with Swedish diplomat (19 March 2021).
\textsuperscript{112} Interview (5) with Swedish diplomat (19 March 2021).
\textsuperscript{113} Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
\textsuperscript{114} Interview (2) with Estonian diplomat (3 March 2021).
\textsuperscript{115} Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
Traditional digital communication channels, such as websites of the MFAs, saw a dramatic increase in traffic and became a significant means of information sharing, as the consular department could post advice on available commercial travel routes, repatriation flights and quarantine restrictions. For example, Denmark witnessed a ‘twentyfold increase in visitors to the website during the month of March’. According to the Lithuanian representative, ‘during the most active period of the crisis, the dedicated information on the Ministry’s website reached almost 120,000 users’. Norway’s interviewee explained, ‘our page, regjeringen.no, was the third most visited web page in Norway, so we knew we had quite a broad audience’. As a result, the MFAs continued to work with these traditional and well-tested digital tools of communication, as they could see and track the significant increase in users. At the same time, the interviews made clear that many were hesitant to implement innovations during a time of crisis. As the Finnish representative stated, ‘in a crisis situation, it’s better to stick with your own toolbox. If you start introducing fancy new things, you confuse the situation and you will confuse the staff involved, so we stuck with our tried and tested communication channels’.

Social media was another tried and tested information channel utilised by all the MFAs. Norway stacked information channels and calibrated messages through various social media outlets such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. During the onset of the crisis, the Danish MFA chose to upgrade its communication to be able to manually answer all postings on Facebook. As a result, the Danish assessment report concluded, ‘social media turned out to be highly effective for communicating relevant and up-to-date information to many Danes simultaneously, just like the strategic decision to answer questions and respond to comments directly on social media did serve to relieve some of the pressure on “24/7”’. Lithuania’s MFA also registered a vast increase in social media communication, as ‘direct user requests on Facebook Messenger increased by 40 times and led to building and adopting an AI-based chatbot capable of answering most frequently asked questions’. The implementation of this digital innovation in a time of crisis allowed the Lithuanian MFA

116 Interview (1) with Danish diplomat (24 February 2021).
117 Response (8) of the Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
118 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
119 Interview (7) with Finnish diplomat (16 April 2021).
120 Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
121 Interview (1) with Danish diplomat (24 February 2021).
123 Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
to ‘allocate human resources more efficiently and to provide auto-responses to our citizens’ queries around the clock’.¹²⁴

In the Baltic and Nordic consular response, the role of digital diplomacy in providing content that could be constantly updated and available through various channels was of paramount importance. As all the countries initially encouraged stranded travellers to utilise commercial means of return, the digital tools available for spreading the message and providing advice were in heavy demand. Innovations in the application of digital diplomacy can be detected both in the use of direct digital communication channels, such as travel apps, and in the adoption of innovative technologies such as chatbots to improve service delivery. However, most states hesitated to implement technological innovations during a consular emergency, highlighting the fact that timing in digital diplomacy tool adoption is important. MFAs need to implement their ‘digital shift’ before the onset of an emergency.

5.3 Citizen-centric and Diaspora Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy is closely interlinked with citizen-centric practices in which private individuals can assist the state. As social media and various other digital channels became important outlets for spreading information about how individuals could receive state assistance, citizens were involved in the process of re-sharing information and assisting the MFA in identifying those in need through social networks. In particular, the Norwegian representative emphasised how information sharing by citizens helped shape their consular response. As the consular representative explained, ‘before our first flight from Islamabad, we had about 600 people on the list and 300 people left, and the next day we had 600 new people on the list’.¹²⁵ The snowball effect of information sharing, through social media and through individual networks, helped to get the word out about the procedures required for repatriation flights.

With regard to diaspora diplomacy and the involvement of the diaspora as non-governmental agents in aiding the response efforts, most of the MFAs responded that diaspora organisations were involved informally through information sharing in accordance with citizen-centric practices but were not directly engaged by the MFA. Only Denmark and Lithuania directly engaged their diasporas in emergency response and in assisting stranded compatriots. According to the Lithuanian MFA representative, at the beginning of the pandemic the MFA ‘reached out to the Lithuanian diaspora asking its members

¹²⁴ Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
¹²⁵ Interview (4) with Norwegian diplomat (15 March 2021).
to help stranded travellers by providing them with relevant information, translation services, etc.’.\textsuperscript{126} This centralised effort resulted in more than 200 Lithuanians in 40 countries responding to the call and offering assistance in various forms. The Danish MFA also engaged its diaspora as an agent in aiding the government’s emergency response. In the early days of the pandemic response, it set up the infrastructure for a Facebook page titled ‘Danes Globally — Together Against Corona’, through which diaspora members could offer assistance to stranded Danish travellers in various countries.\textsuperscript{127} According to the Danish MFA representative, ‘that was an attempt by the MFA to organise the Danish diaspora to help those who really needed help’.\textsuperscript{128} These initiatives are prime examples of diaspora utilisation by the country of origin. The previously cultivated diaspora links of Denmark and Lithuania, established through diaspora diplomacy, had very real and tangible benefits as these countries could call upon their diasporas for help in various locations around the world.

In many cases, it is difficult to distinguish overlaps between consular affairs and foreign policy, digital diplomacy, citizen-centric diplomacy and diaspora diplomacy, respectively. However, Table 3 attempts to categorise the main conclusions drawn from the analysis of the Baltic and Nordic countries. The resulting conclusion is that Denmark and Lithuania were able to provide the most encompassing DoC, not only because of the high level of pastoral care in their direct consular assistance, but also because their responses effectively implemented innovative elements of digital and diaspora diplomacy.

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Aspects of consular diplomacy}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
Country & Foreign partnerships & Digital diplomacy & Citizen and diaspora diplomacy \\
\hline
Denmark & Nordic & Travel app ‘UM Rejseklar’ & ‘Danes Globally — Together against Corona’ \\
Estonia & Baltic/Bilateral Finland & Traditional & Unknown \\
Finland & Nordic/Bilateral Estonia & Consular register targeted digital information & Unknown \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{126} Response (8) of Lithuanian diplomat (1 June 2021).
\textsuperscript{127} Danes Globally — Together Against Corona n.d.
\textsuperscript{128} Interview (1) with Danish diplomat (24 February 2021).
### Table 3  Aspects of consular diplomacy (cont.)

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<td>Sweden</td>
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6  Conclusions

The DoC concept and the extension of state practices beyond borders were dramatically tested after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in spring 2020. MFAs and specifically consular departments became central beacons of hope for those stranded abroad, and their responses reflected various nuances on state — citizen relations. The review of consular departments’ responses to the pandemic from March through June 2020 allows one to observe the concept of DoC in practice. The analysed responses also highlight the interplay of consular assistance with foreign policy and the prominent role of other diplomatic practices, such as digital and citizen-centric diplomacy, in consular affairs. The successful management of these components of diplomatic practice allows for the evolution of consular affairs into consular diplomacy.

The review of consular practice definitions, documents and interviews with practitioners suggests that first and foremost, the consular departments in the MFAs of the Baltic and Nordic countries are working to provide the necessary guidance and information to assist citizens with informed decision-making. This DoC interpretation is in line with Löwenheim’s concept of the ‘responsibilisation’ of citizens.129 During the COVID-19 travel crisis, the reliance on this approach was evident in the MFAs’ expectation that people would make their own arrangements, even in an emergency, unless it proved impossible to do so, and in working extensively with travel advisories related to COVID-19. Even Iceland, with no prior experience in this field, worked widely with travel

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129 Löwenheim 2007, 203.
advisories, providing individuals with information and requiring them to make their own decisions regarding travel whenever possible.

However, once COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and return travel became increasingly difficult, variations in consular response can be observed, not just between the Baltic and Nordic countries but also between individual states in their willingness to assist individuals further and take on a pastoral care role. For example, while Norway required a request from the individual before it would provide information or assistance, Denmark took the proactive step of reaching out to all nationals abroad and offering help. Furthermore, at the operational stage, practical differences in DoC application were evident. The consular departments of Latvia and Lithuania were much more heavily involved in responding directly to assistance requests and offering additional aid to stranded compatriots in a pastoral care manner than Estonia or the Nordics were.

COVID-19 obliged all consular departments reviewed to make some exceptions in the provision of DoC, for example, in relation to diaspora return or organisation of repatriation flights. However, while some countries made only slight regressions away from the conception of consular assistance being in the form of information and guidance, where individuals are charged with their own well-being, others were willing to engage in much higher levels of pastoral care in the provision of DoC. This article identifies Latvia and Lithuania as exhibiting high levels of pastoral care in their COVID-19 pandemic response. As such, there were no observable differences in the interpretation of the DoC concept between the Baltic and Nordic countries, or between relatively rich or poor countries, but there were differences between individual countries in their interpretation of the legal and moral duty to care for nationals abroad in a crisis situation.

The evolution of consular affairs into consular diplomacy, and the relationship between this feature and the pandemic responses, can be observed in the regional co-operation mechanisms. The steadfast and well-developed regional co-operation between the Nordic states allowed consular affairs to evolve from simple information sharing into broader consular diplomacy, which engaged with facets of foreign policy to co-ordinate a joint emergency response in a synchronised fashion. This response highlights how consular tasks relate to the 'big issues'\textsuperscript{130} in foreign policy, such as regional partnerships. However, the pandemic also revealed weaknesses in Baltic — Nordic co-operation, as information sharing at the consular affairs level did occur but failed to progress to consular diplomacy, in the form of tangible results or a joint regional response.

\textsuperscript{130} Melissen 2020, 219.
Aspects of digital diplomacy were widely employed in the consular responses and enhanced consular service delivery. These ranged from making the latest information and travel advisories available instantaneously through MFA websites and social networks to more advanced digital tools such as travel apps and chatbots. These digital diplomacy tools aided consular affairs offices in communication, sense-making and co-ordination efforts, and chatbots even alleviated pressure on consular department staff. For the MFAs, it is important to continue the ‘digital shift’ and the adaptation of digital diplomacy tools, as travel apps and well-established consular register platforms played a significant role in communication and information sharing functions, enabling travellers to care for themselves.

Diaspora diplomacy was utilised by only two countries, Denmark and Lithuania, which directly encouraged their diasporas to contribute to emergency response through citizen-centric practices and to act as agents on behalf of the state in helping stranded compatriots. Previously cultivated diaspora links proved instrumental for the MFAs, enabling them to call on their diasporas in a time of need and organise assistance. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a very unusual consular challenge, the prominence of diaspora diplomacy in recent literature might have led to an expectation that more countries would deploy their diasporas in a global crisis. Accordingly, its limited implementation here is a missed opportunity that deserves further investigation.

In general, the DoC concept in the Baltic and Nordic nations is interpreted and implemented through the MFAs’ consular departments as the assistance and protection of citizens through guidance and information provision, enabling citizens to make informed decisions and care for themselves. However, when faced with the pandemic, all states made minor adjustments to this approach and assumed some level of a pastoral DoC role by exceeding normal consular service provision. Latvia and Lithuania did so to a greater extent than the other six countries. In the provision of care, we can also observe advancements taking place in consular practice and its evolution into consular diplomacy, with the widespread adoption of diplomatic tools that allow for citizen-centric approaches to diplomacy and aid. The extensive use of digital diplomacy in various forms and, to a lesser extent, the deployments of diaspora diplomacy represented significant efforts to help citizens help themselves. The implementation of these facets of diplomacy, especially by Denmark and Lithuania, allowed their consular departments to fulfil their duty of care in a more encompassing way. The continued evolution of consular diplomacy to incorporate these and other new facets will ultimately aid

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131 Melissen and Caesar-Gordon 2016.
citizens in assuming more responsibility for their own welfare in future crisis situations and will enable consular departments to provide needed assistance in the most effective manner possible.

Appendix 1 — Interviews

<table>
<thead>
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<th>No.</th>
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<td>Written response</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td>1 June 2021</td>
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DUTY OF CARE: CONSULAR RESPONSE COVID-19


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