

Foreign Ministries and the Rising Challenge of Consular Affairs: Cinderella in the Limelight

Maaïke Heijmans and Jan Melissen

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

The prioritization of consular affairs

Practitioners of diplomacy generally do not hold consular affairs in high regard. To be sure, in most countries the Cinderella Service, as D.C.M. Platt famously called consular work, is hardly a launch pad for a fast track diplomatic career. Neither do consular affairs appeal sufficiently to students of diplomacy to merit much study and reflection. But there are clear signs that the tide is changing, at least for practitioners. An increasing number of foreign ministries are now taking a closer look at what was once widely considered as an essentially second class activity for ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs). Consular affairs are becoming a core task for the MFA. The globalization process and instability are two ingredients of international relations that make people travel overseas in increasingly large numbers, and that may help get them into trouble in foreign lands. Changing patterns of international tourism, cross-border crime, international terrorism and natural disasters account for a surge in consular challenges. The terrorist attacks of September 2001, and the subsequent Bali bombings and Asian tsunami, have for instance served as eye-openers for countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada, and Sweden. Other countries have reasons of their own to prioritize consular affairs.

For MFAs it can be hard to meet the demands of citizens in distress, and parliament and the press come into the picture almost automatically. They tend to give a great deal of attention to human interest issues that after all have the special quality of attracting voters and readers. In defence to the onslaught from public opinion, the needs of individual citizens are firmly on the diplomatic agenda. Today foreign ministries acknowledge that part of their mission is to deliver services to their own citizens - and MFAs are constantly reminded that the perceived quality of such services has a direct bearing on the MFAs own reputation at home. It should therefore not be surprising that in an increasing number of MFAs consular affairs nowadays

receive attention at the highest levels. As one diplomat described his superiors' attitudes towards consular affairs, 'the people at the top are like re-born Christians.' The prioritization of consular affairs by senior management has generally however not filtered through to lower levels. A rather lukewarm attitude to consular affairs seems to dominate in the rank and file of most MFAs. Many individual practitioners still consider consular services as a separate activity, and one that is in fact outside the realm of 'real' diplomacy: consular officers deal with citizens' concerns and are not in the business of managing change in international relations. Sometimes diplomacy and consular affairs are even juxtaposed as fundamentally distinct activities taking place in the same professional environment.

The new emphasis that consular affairs receive in a number of recent MFA strategy documents is not a matter of intrinsic vision or a result of long-term planning. It is first of all an institutional response to the increasing demands of government assistance to citizens abroad, and also an implicit recognition that consular affairs are part of a wider phenomenon affecting MFAs. Like the current surge in public diplomacy activities, the rising challenge in consular affairs evidences of a strengthening nexus between diplomacy and society, a trend towards a growing 'societization' of diplomacy. As a Danish report on managing foreign affairs put it: 'The classic distinction between high-priority sovereign representation and the relatively low-priority service tasks of MFAs and their representations is no longer accepted, as MFAs are turning into public-service organizations responsible for handling a mixture of tasks, whose relative priority is not given in advance. In one context the classic diplomatic tasks may take precedence, while in another the overarching task is to cope with problems related to international migration or mass tourism.'¹ Consular services are in other words part of broader developments in contemporary diplomatic practice. Many individual citizens with no particular interest in foreign policy or diplomacy have discovered the relevance of the MFA as a result of their own transforming, increasingly international life-styles. They see consular affairs as 'diplomacy for people' and consular affairs can therefore be seen as an activity that helps strengthening the bond between the MFA and its domestic constituency.

For the MFA, the consular job has however a clear element of risk. MFAs that fail to live up to the expectations of citizens in distress, as many of them have learned the hard way, may be crucified by the press and expect a barrage of questions in parliament. The fact of the matter

¹ Jorgen Gronnegaard Christensen and Nikolaj Petersen, *Managing Foreign Affairs: A Comparative Perspective*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Studies, 2005, p. 41.

is that the MFAs domestic reputation is dependent to a large degree on its perceived success in meeting citizens' expectations in the field of consular affairs. This poses a dilemma. There is a drive towards professionalization of consular affairs and the meeting of growing public expectations. That external pressure on the MFA is however accompanied by a quiet call for 'expectation management' within the ministry, and a confidential debate as to where the limits of consular services lie.

This paper is meant as an introductory discussion of consular affairs as a new priority for foreign ministries. It was written parallel to a pilot project on consular affairs commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.² In line with the project for the Netherlands MFA, consular affairs is here limited to assistance to nationals abroad, and the paper is therefore not dealing with immigration matters, i.e. assistance to foreigners, or other issues such as for instance the political role of consulates. Rather than treating the subject exhaustively, we merely highlight the growing importance of consular affairs by discussing selected issues and some of the principal challenges facing the MFA. Our focus is on external trends and triggers for professionalization of consular affairs within the MFA, the creation of a legal framework and consular networks, and MFAs' dealings with the media and the public. Finally, for the purposes of future research and a broader perspective, the final section of the paper raises some questions on consular affairs in the context of the changing nature of diplomatic practice. Our overview starts with a brief historical perspective on the subject.

From trade interests to citizens interests

The function of consul came about before that of the resident ambassador and can to a certain extent be regarded as its forerunner. The consul existed before the emergence of the state system. A functionary similar to today's honorary already existed in Ancient Greece. The so-called *proxenos* was a citizen appointed by another city-state to represent the interests of his employer among fellow citizens. The first consuls in the modern sense did however only emerge in medieval times. In the wake of expanding international trade in Europe, the need for representatives of merchants in the main harbour cities in Southern Europe and the Levant increased. These representatives were not diplomats, as they were not officially appointed, but

² Maaïke Heijmans and Jan Melissen, *Consulaire Zaken en Diplomatie. Buitenlandse Zaken met Binnenlandse Prioriteiten*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael", 2006, 128 pp. (not published).

mostly people that were elected by and within their own community. One of their primary tasks was to administer justice in case conflict would arise, and they also occupied themselves with the facilitation of international trade and the representation of the interests of merchants.

After the creation of the European state system with the Westphalian Peace Treaty in 1648, the consul became a state official, but for long his status was not based on international law. It was not until the Vienna Convention of Consular Relations in 1963 that the consular function was stipulated in an international treaty. Until then, consuls performed their duties under special bilateral agreements. Their main task was to promote (maritime) trade, but they commonly were also requested to provide services of general representation. The distinction between diplomatic and consular work was often not so clear, and at consular posts outside Europe consular work was often profoundly political. Many British and Dutch consuls, for example, performed much broader tasks than their consular status alone would justify³.

Over the years it became generally accepted that the primary function of consuls was to represent the interests and rights of nationals abroad⁴. As relations of European with non-European states were mainly of an economic nature, these services were mostly provided to fellow countrymen engaged in international trade. Following the economic expansion of the imperial powers, consular representation of European countries sharply increased from the mid-19 century⁵. The interconnectedness of consular services and national politics already became apparent in this age. Aware of the political importance of flourishing international trade and the well-being of overseas citizens, members of parliament in various European countries showed great interest in consular affairs. MPs in the Netherlands, for instance, showed reluctance to reduce MFA expenses for consular affairs, whereas they were highly critical of a further expansion of the diplomatic network. Consequently, from 1840-1870 the number of Dutch consulates grew significantly, and the diplomatic service did not⁶. The organization of the consular service was however far from professional. According to Wells, the Netherlands MFA had little understanding of new developments in the international economy and managed to avoid professionalization of its consular service until the end of the

³ D.C.M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825*. London: Longman, 1971, p. 120, and C.B. Wels, *Aloofness & Neutrality: Studies in Dutch Foreign Relations and Policy-Making Institutions*. Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1982, p. 182.

⁴ L. Spanjaard, *Nederlandsche Diplomatieke en andere bescherming in den vreemde 1795-1914*. Amsterdam: Vereenigde Drukkerijen, 1923, pp. 118 – 121.

⁵ M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*. London and New York: Longman, 1993, pp. 107-8.

⁶ Wels, *Aloofness & Neutrality*, pp. 189-90.

19th century. The big European powers, England, France, Prussia and the German Empire, showed a greater drive in the consular field and appointed professional consuls to their most important posts⁷.

Consular affairs changed dramatically in the 20th century. The First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War with its aftermath in the field of emigration and immigration, brought to the surface specific consular problems. These 20th century experiences turned the main focus of consular affairs away from trade and maritime affairs to the well-being of citizens abroad. Developments in the early 20th century rather than present-day tourism, international drugs trafficking, natural disasters and terrorism, have thus marked the beginning of profound change in consular representation and assistance. A major change in the environment in which consular services are delivered that *did* come about in the second half of the 20th century, was the growing pressure from the media and individual citizens.

The inter-war period transformed consular affairs in a way that ultimately led to the integration of the diplomatic and consular services after the Second World War. Political and economic functions of diplomatic representation abroad became interrelated as the economic aspect of international relations grew in prominence. Representation of trade and maritime interests became a diplomatic task, and was increasingly performed by representatives of other ministries and government institutions rather than the MFA. As commercial diplomacy professionalized, the interests of individual citizens became one of the core tasks of consular affairs, with other governmental players such as the ministries of justice and home affairs as associated players. Consular affairs did in fact express the link between foreign ministries and domestic society. Today, many individual citizens perceive consular affairs as the most important responsibility of the MFA and foreign ministries themselves see consular affairs now commonly as assistance to overseas citizens in distress.

Booming business?

Some governments include assistance to foreign nationals in their description of consular work, but most of them distinguish between immigration matters and mainstream consular

⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

work. The simplicity of the dominant definition of modern consular affairs does however conceal a complex subject. Inside MFAs any discussion of consular work triggers seemingly obvious but delicate questions such as: ‘What is assistance?’, ‘How can distress be described?’, and ‘Who is a citizen and who is not?’

Consular practice differs widely in most countries, but three kinds of consular services are generally distinguished: i) documentary services, i.e. issuance of passports and legal documents, including elections abroad. These services are sometimes referred to as the ‘city-hall function’ of representation abroad; ii) individual assistance to citizens in distress, including help to hospitalized, detained, deceased or missing persons abroad, as well as guidance to their next of kin in the country of origin; iii) all consular aspects of a major crisis abroad. Some countries also regard specific legal functions such as international legal help as consular affairs.

While documentary services are at a fairly equal level in all countries, individual and crisis assistance to citizens abroad are not only defined differently but also organized in dissimilar ways around the world. The division of responsibilities between the consular department and other departments differs widely. While in some countries the consular department takes the lead in crisis management, in others it is just another - albeit very important - player in crisis management that is coordinated at a higher level. Generally speaking, consular affairs constitute a field of diplomatic activity where trial and error and pragmatic improvement rule. Rather than a complex legal framework, it is daily consular practice that is a guideline for the development of consular affairs.

The demand for documentary services and various types of assistance to citizens abroad has grown substantially over the past decade. Increased travel is a particularly important trigger for consular services. More and more people are going abroad for work, study and above all holidays. Tourists increasingly travel individually rather than in organized tours and they look for challenges that add to the potential for trouble overseas. What complicates matters for consular officers is that news about citizens in distress is traveling fast, and that the press and the public have become more outspoken and demanding. Consular matters tend to get a lot more news coverage than most other foreign affairs issues, and the reputation of the MFA at home probably depends more on its perceived success in assisting citizens than on any other

issue. This new reality has not escaped senior management in MFAs and it should therefore come as no surprise that consular affairs have moved up on the agenda of many foreign ministries. Several of such ministries have requested reviews of consular practice and MFAs have looked at various ways of boosting their performance and involving more high-level diplomatic staff in consular affairs.⁸ In several countries consular experience has now become a requirement for diplomats, and improved career options for those with experience in the consular field are likely to encourage the appeal of this area of work in the foreign ministry. Countries such as the UK, Japan, Canada, and Peru have developed career plans for diplomats in which experience in the consular field is either mandatory or highly recommended. The Dutch foreign ministry boasts the fact that some of the people in the top ranks of the department have substantial experience in the consular field during earlier stages of their career. Generally speaking, there is an increasing awareness of the need for a more service-oriented approach and a better feel for dealing with the public. Several MFAs, including the UK, Canada, Australia and The Netherlands, have drawn up service standards in order to inform their citizens of the level and limitations of the consular services they may expect from government⁹. Such standards are also instrumental in providing a services framework for consular officers and, at least to some extent, in protecting MFAs from *ad hoc* political intervention.

The importance attached to consular affairs should nevertheless be qualified. Cultural change within MFAs takes place at a slow pace and mostly for defensive reasons, and consular affairs are not always liked among MFA staff because of the risks involved. Consular matters are after all always about problems of one kind or another, and high-profile cases tend to result in a great deal of attention by politicians and the media. In spite of the much higher priority attached to consular affairs, it is therefore ironical that many individual practitioners still appear to see consular affairs as an activity that is only by necessity located inside the foreign

⁸ An internal review by the Office of the Inspector General of the Canadian MFA was published in November 2004: *Review of Consular Affairs – Final Report*. The National Audit Office in November 2005 published the report *The Foreign and Commonwealth Office – Consular Services to British Nationals*. The authors of this paper completed a study for the Consular Department in the Netherlands Foreign Ministry in June 2006: Maaïke Heijmans and Jan Melissen, *Consulaire Zaken en Diplomatie* (2006).

⁹ The UK and Canada provide a general framework for consular assistance as well as norms for specific services. In March 2006 the British FCO launched the document ‘*Support for British Nationals abroad: a Guide*’, which can be downloaded from <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/consularfullguide,0.pdf>. The Canadian Consular Affairs Bureau is to publish ‘*Consular Services Foreign Affairs Canada – A Framework of Operations*’ in the near future. Australia and The Netherlands have drawn up standards for targeted consular services. The Australian Passport and Information Service has, in cooperation with its partners, drawn up a *Client Service Charter* for passport services. The Netherlands agreed on norms for assistance to citizens detained abroad following a review by the General Audit Office.

ministry. Even today, consular officers generally get little recognition from their peers within the ministry, in spite of the renewed importance attached to this branch of work. In their relations with the outside world, they often see themselves as victims of success, as satisfied customers tend to go unnoticed whereas those who have complaints tend to generate disproportionate amounts of negative publicity.¹⁰

Globalization in all its aspects and with all its consequences can be seen as the overall cause for the growing emphasis on consular affairs. In the area of documentary services, for instance, the need for increased border security continues to have a great impact on the requirements of (biometrical) passports, and thereby on their issuance. The demand for individual assistance has grown because of a steady increase in the number of inexperienced travelers, dual nationalities, international marriages, drugs smuggling and other problems. What is striking in consular practice in The Netherlands is that the MFA is doing a great deal for Dutch nationals who have been convicted in other countries. In the past six years, the high-quality services delivered to the large number of registered citizens detained abroad has developed to the point of a true welfare system of assistance to prisoners and their families at home. Significantly, the change of policies in The Netherlands was triggered by political pressure in a much publicized case that was followed by an evaluation of consular services by the General Audit Office. Dutch excellence in the field of assistance to prisoners abroad is unrivalled worldwide, but there are also questions as to whether pressure from parliament and the press has perhaps pushed the ministry of foreign affairs too far.

Legal framework and consular networks

The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 is the first and to the present day most important document in the consular field. It is even said to be more path breaking than the 1961 Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which builds on earlier agreements¹¹. The convention provides the judicial basis and general framework for consular relations between states and the delivery of consular services. It does not give an insight in current consular practice, as it has not been adapted to developments in the consular field during the last fifty years. Maritime issues dealing with vessels and their crew, for example, are explicitly brought up in the convention text, but these are nowadays an area of minor interest in consular affairs.

¹⁰ Interviews in Canada, France, The Netherlands, and the UK.

¹¹ L.T. Lee, *Consular Law and Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 25.

Like the Vienna Convention, legal frameworks at the domestic level, insofar these exist, fall short of any linkage to current practice. As a result, consular affairs are to a large extent governed by customary law, which makes this area of diplomacy all the more vulnerable to the media and political pressure.

Whilst most countries currently do not have a consular law on the right to consular assistance, some MFAs consider exploring the possibilities in this field. The reasoning is that such a law may be attractive from a client perspective, but also to protect consular departments from political oversight. Germany is exceptional in having legislation that stipulates the right to consular assistance.¹² But the law is very general as it has to suit all countries' systems and practical realities. In practice, German consular officers do usually make reference to the social assistance law rather than the consular law when setting limits to consular assistance. The latter is too general, whilst the former significantly limits the right to obtain social assistance abroad. French consular officers refer to the *Code Civil* when setting limits to assistance. Article 205 and 206 of this law confer the responsibility of family members for one another, stipulating that government has no financial responsibility in assisting citizens in distress abroad. Approaches on setting limits and increasing public awareness of consular problems do therefore vary, but most consular departments seem to agree that they are constantly stretching the limits of what they should be doing. Whereas consular assistance should be need-driven rather than demand-driven, many MFAs confess to delivering 'Cadillac consular services'.

Foreign ministries feel the need to search for alternative ways of dealing with the challenges and dilemmas in the consular field. One new approach focuses on increasing co-operation and interaction with third parties. Such third parties may be partner organizations and stakeholders contributing to the delivery of consular services, but should also include critics such as the media and the public. Consular co-operation between countries is also increasing: bilaterally as well as multilaterally, and through headquarters (sometimes represented in institutions, such as the European Union) as well as on-the-spot. The focus here is however on domestic networks, as this form of collaboration has a greater effect on the working methods of foreign ministries.

¹² *Gesetz über die Konsularbeamten, ihre Aufgaben und Befugnisse (KonsularG)*, of 11.09.1974 (BGBl. I S. 2317) and altered through Article 12 on 04.05.1998 (BGBl. I S. 833).

Partner organizations consist of a variety of government agencies, public and private organizations. Within the foreign ministry these include the information department, the intelligence unit and honorary consuls associated with the MFA. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, each play a role in different fields of consular affairs. Outside government, co-operation with non-governmental organizations and even private companies, such as travel agencies and insurers, is essential in delivering the high standard of consular services demanded by the public. Such cooperation takes many different forms. One is general discussion with all partners and stakeholders on broad consular issues, such as the sharing of responsibilities between the ministry and third parties (private emergency centres and insurers, non-governmental and volunteer organizations, etc) and the limits of consular assistance. Another is co-operation with organizations engaged in a specific area, such as assistance to citizens detained abroad, international child abduction, forced marriages or crisis management. Although considerable investment is required to make such partnerships work, these various forms of co-operation are indispensable. They increase private and public support for policies and tend to improve and broaden specific consular services.

Consular departments are nevertheless confronted with a balancing act. They are compelled to go into partnerships with third parties as an extension and improvement of their consular services, and they simultaneously need to preserve the kind of independence that is expected from government. The consular field is in this sense different from most departments within the foreign ministry. It may provide an example of increased future cooperation between the public and private sectors. While government has traditionally shied away from linkage to the private sector, consular departments have to engage in a more business-like approach in order to deliver the quality of service that customers expect. Several countries go as far as to allow private companies such as travel insurers to publish in their safe-travel brochure, or to deliver their consular 'travel safe-message' in more inventive ways, for example on typical tourist products like sun cream or money change envelopes. Others are more reluctant or less inventive in engaging in such partnerships. They limit themselves to providing subsidies to non-governmental organizations in order to achieve a higher level of consular assistance. What is however clear, is that governments alone cannot live up to the high expectations of its citizens, and face an increasing need to co-operate with third parties, whether in providing services or delivering its messages.

Apart from looking for partnerships with private companies and NGOs, ministries of foreign affairs are also reconsidering the consular value of their diplomatic networks. They are confronted with tighter budgets and looming political pressure for cheaper diplomatic representation, and they see themselves forced to brainstorm about revising the structure of their diplomatic networks. While embassies and consulates obviously have an important role to play, honorary consuls, if managed and assisted professionally, may prove to be cost-effective. The role of honorary consuls in assisting in passport-related affairs lapses with the introduction of biometric passports, but a re-configuration rather than abolition of their function appears justified. Honorary consuls have an important role to play in other than documentary aspects of consular assistance, which may surface as a result of the changing character of consular affairs. They are a cheap form of representation in remote (but tourist) areas where immediate presence can be of crucial importance, not only in delivery of consular services but also in terms of representation and image-building. After re-adjustment and adaptation to present-day needs, existing networks may well turn out to become a significant asset in delivering consular services.

Consular affairs, government and the general public

A recent survey showed that the general public in Sweden perceives consular affairs as the most important of all tasks of the foreign ministry. Individual diplomats may have doubts of their own about the importance of consular affairs as part of the overall agenda of the MFA, but citizens do generally not share that sense of perspective. They generally find the media as a powerful ally on their side. It is unusual for the journalists reporting about their own nationals in distress to take the side of the MFA and call for a greater sense of individual responsibility. In most countries the expectations of ordinary people and the pressures to meet public demands are so high and so effective, that they tend to give consular affairs the character of an external dimension of the welfare state.

The media generally report about supposed MFA failure in consular affairs and the rapidly transforming media landscape has far-reaching implications for media handling. It is not only the tabloid press that exposes government failure, quality papers also take a special interest in the tribulations of consular work, whereas news and debate on high-profile consular stories does of course spread most rapidly via the internet. Such disparate challenges call for pro-

active policies towards the media and the public. Ironically, consular officers' presence and compassion shown to people in distress are sometimes as important as the actual level of assistance, which is especially true in the case of on-the-spot assistance in times of crisis. The risks of crises are evident as there is only so much one can do in advance, but even a seemingly innocent activity like issuing passports has the potential of backfiring as a result of media involvement. Problems surrounding illegal travel documents and human trafficking may turn routine consular work into a public relations disaster for the MFA.

Foreign ministries have to come to terms with the fact that they are rarely in control of information. The new media and state-of-the-art communication devices generate additional layers of information, provide everyone with instant access to news, and turn individual citizens in active on-line participants in the public debate. Governments will therefore not only have to engage in a more pro-active, but also a more open strategy: they need to give credible accounts and even learn to communicate uncertainty. If consular departments succeed in such an approach and manage to increase public confidence in its consular services, this may produce positive results for the limits that governments set to consular affairs, as people become more aware and are likely to take a more positive approach towards government. All too often limits to assistance are now stretched as a result of media pressure, especially on ministers of foreign affairs, who are more susceptible to pressure from parliament and the electorate. A distinct political logic then applies to consular affairs: the bigger the crisis, the bigger the exception.

The first task of consular departments in their relations with the press is to do what is virtually impossible: managing the way in which consular work is treated in the news. In this effort media departments have to walk the tightrope of respecting privacy laws that prohibit giving information about individual citizens¹³, while avoiding accusations of being secretive and untrustworthy. As a second line of approach, MFAs make greater efforts to increase public awareness of the limits to consular services offered, knowing that people tend to score high on expectations but low on knowledge and awareness. The gradual increase of public service targets, guidelines and service charters in consular affairs can be explained against this backdrop.

¹³ Examples of such laws are the Privacy Act (Canada) and Personal Data Protection Act (The Netherlands). The case of Sweden is exceptional, in that the country has a Secrecy Act which stipulates that all information available to the government is in principle public, unless clear reasons to argue otherwise exist.

Consular affairs and diplomacy

There is no doubt that consular affairs will continue to be a growth business in the years ahead, and that the challenges and problems associated with consular work will not go away. It is part of a trend towards diplomacy's increased dealings with 'ordinary people'. It raises intriguing questions about the changing nature and practice of diplomacy.

First, *diplomacy is increasingly seen in terms of service delivery*, as it is not only dealing with peers or officials and policy but also with customers looking for products and services, involving broader questions about the relationship between the state and its citizens. As argued above, the distinction between high-priority representation and the relatively low-priority service tasks of MFAs and their representations no longer holds. MFAs are turning into public-service organizations. Domestic considerations have the potential to place citizens in distress high on the agenda, whether detainees, abducted children, hostages or the victims of natural disasters. So far the response of MFAs has been largely defensive and largely focused on individual cases. MFAs do however need to regard individual cases in a larger perspective, by stimulating discussion of the more general consular affairs framework. Meanwhile, within some MFAs, improved career options and professional training increasingly motivate diplomats to take up consular positions. This adds to the improved image of consular affairs not despite but because of its service-oriented character.

Secondly, *diplomacy as public reputation management* is no longer an alien notion to MFAs. It is widely accepted that modern diplomacy is an activity intrinsically related to the overseas image of the country as a whole. Most of the world's MFAs now profess to be into public diplomacy and a substantial number of them now make a sustained effort aimed at both improving their relationships with target audiences abroad and mainstreaming public diplomacy within their own apparatus. What is at stake in consular affairs, as argued above, is not the nation's image overseas but nothing less than the reputation of the MFA at home. Where consular services fall short of expectations, the MFA may be in the dock as soon as the news about citizens in distress reaches a variety of media outlets. In dealing with this formidable challenge, foreign ministries that set up an overall framework of consular policy as well as a media strategy that prevents consular cases from becoming political are likely to be more successful than those sticking to traditional ways.

Thirdly, in an increasingly complex domestic and international environment there is growing acceptance of the notion of MFA engagement in *collaborative diplomacy*, consisting of different forms of collaboration with governmental, public and private third parties. In the future organization of consular work, to be sure, there is no alternative to making the most of various forms of consular networks, both at home and abroad. MFAs may thus develop closer links with civil society organizations and in future become less dissociated from the corporate sector. This is part of a broader development in contemporary diplomatic practice. If anything does indeed characterize diplomacy today, it is the MFAs gradual expansion of vertical linkages with governmental players and horizontal linkages with non-governmental organizations that are a necessary condition for MFAs' successful management of international relations.

Finally, there is the potential of consulates and also honorary consuls in the redefinition of the roles of overseas missions, as a result of pressures and trends that push towards broader reflection on the future of *diplomatic representation*. The consular workload is bound to increase in the years to come and the 'Cinderella service' will increasingly be seen as an integral part of the practice of diplomacy. What falls outside the scope of this introductory discussion is that globalization may well dictate new roles for consulates that strengthen the overall diplomatic effort. More study of consular affairs and various forms of diplomatic representation would contribute to our understanding of the richness of diplomacy today. To be sure, it would fill a void in the study of diplomacy that has received hardly any attention from academics. A wider academic perspective on consular affairs could even be of some practical use, as MFAs may benefit from further thinking on consular affairs in the context of other challenges for foreign ministries.