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ARTICLE



# The transformation of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the Baltic countries

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the transformation of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the nature of changes in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). By applying Brian Hocking's analysis of 'gatekeeper image' and 'boundary-spanner image', the answers to the question of how the MFA in the three Baltic countries adapt to the transformation of the international system in the twenty-first century have been sought. Foreign policy yearbooks, reports, and 48 in-depth interviews with high rank diplomats form the basis of the empirical material of this research.

**KEYWORDS** Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA); diplomacy; foreign policy; whole-of-government; Baltic countries; Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania

## Introduction

Upon regaining their independence, a fully-fledged return among the democratic countries of Europe, including integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, became the main leading-motive of foreign policy of the Baltic countries. The membership in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were two of the most explicit foreign policy objectives of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which were achieved in 2004, thus marking a symbolic return of the Baltic countries to Europe and affiliation to the largest defense alliance in the world. With access to both EU and NATO, one historically significant stage in the history of the Baltic countries was ended and a new stage was put on the agenda of three countries: a deeper integration with EU and NATO without putting other foreign policy and domestic policy issues in a state of neglect. Concurrently with the changes in the international environment, increasingly significant changes were observed in the states' main foreign policy instrument – diplomacy, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (Barston 2006; Constantinou, Kerr., and Sharp 2016; Cooper, Heine, and Thakur 2013; Hocking et al. 2012; Hocking 2013; Hocking and Spence 2002; Kļaviņš 2018; Rana 2004a, 2007, 2011, 2013; Rana and Kurbalija 2007; Riordan 2003). MFA compliance with the twenty-first century diplomacy requirements was also addressed more often. As the Baltic countries were no exception and since 2004, the foreign affairs have undergone significant changes, the purpose of this article is to understand the nature of these ministries' transformation in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Diplomacy has historically been regarded as an exclusive and vital part of the implementation of a state's national interests for several centuries already, however, the modern and rapidly changing international environment requires a review of the significance of diplomacy in a wider pattern and context. Varied types of diplomacy such as commercial diplomacy or public diplomacy are obvious confirmation of this. Although the number of publications on different types of expression of diplomacy and the influence thereof on international relations increases year by year, and the research projects which analytically review how the MFA – historically a leading implementer of the basic functions of diplomacy – adapts to the changes in the international system are relatively few. Considering that the classic vision of the MFA is a 'gatekeeper role' (Pigman 2010, 37–9; Rana 2004b, 65), which is based on the realism school paradigm and reflected in international law such as the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations,<sup>1</sup> the MFA's conformity with the requirements of the twenty-first century has become current. In the context of this article, it is important to clarify whether the MFA in the Baltic countries functions as a 'gatekeeper,' or if it operates according to some other model.

The relevance of this case study of the three Baltic States is driven by two factors. Firstly, diplomacy research lacks comparative studies of how the MFAs in the Baltic countries adapt to changes in diplomacy. Compared to other European countries, where the MFAs have been actively working much longer time, the Baltic countries after re-gaining their independence invested a lot of effort to restore a fully functioning foreign services. With this in mind, this article also provides an insight into how the relatively new MFAs structurally and functionally adapt to the diverse changes in diplomacy. At the same time, it must also be noted that research describing the changes in the MFAs utilize data on ministerial structural diagrams, institutions under MFA control, and staff and budgets while devoting considerably less analysis to changes in the MFA from a functional perspective. With that being said, this article does not have aim to generalize for applicability to other similar countries. Secondly, researchers are still discussing how and to what extent national integration with the EU transforms state administration, including MFA operations. Historically, some EU theoreticians have argued that the importance and influence of institutions is unambiguous and determinant (Bulmer 1983; Aspinall and Schneider 2000; Bulmer and Lequesne 2005) while other scholars have compared the EU integration process to a complex game format, in which EU institutions interact with structures in member states (Mény, Muller, and Quermonne 1996). Although more studies are conducted every year, much less attention is paid to the matter of how the EU influences the national institutions of member states (Hanf and Soetendorp 1998). In fact, there are relatively few studies of the significance of the EU in relation to MFA operations. Therefore, considering the rapidly transforming nature of diplomacy, the question of the EU's impact on both the structure and agenda of the MFA remains unanswered.

### **Theoretical approach: 'gatekeeper' versus 'boundary-spanner'**

This research utilizes the comparison of the many cases approach (Bennett and Elman 2008) which allows for a better understanding of whether MFA adaption to the twenty-first century agenda and challenges are similar in the Baltic countries. In the words of David Collier (1993), comparison is a fundamental analysis tool, which both allows the testing of the postulated hypothesis and gives impetus to developing new hypotheses and theories. In Arend Lijphart's view (1971), certain forms of case studies can be considered to be part of the comparative method. Similarly, Donald T. Campbell

(1975) highlighted that a single case cannot be used objectively to test a hypothesis or develop a theory. Taking this into account, both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to analyze the Baltic MFAs. Although structural changes in each country's MFA are initially expressed statistically, the main approach used in this article is qualitative.<sup>2</sup> This is used to describe the functional changes in the MFA central apparatus and diplomatic missions abroad from 2004 to the end of 2012. Based on a description of the MFA development trends in the twenty-first century (Barston 2006; Constantinou, Kerr., and Sharp 2016; Cooper, Heine, and Thakur 2013; Hocking et al. 2012, 2013; Hocking and Spence 2002; Kļaviņš 2018; Pigman 2010; Rana 2004a, 2007, 2011, 2013; Rana and Kurbalija 2007; Riordan 2003), and the multifaceted demands of the international system (Clark 2011), this work's hypothesis is tested using Brian Hocking's (2002) analysis of 'gatekeeper' and 'boundary-spanner.' According to Hocking, MFAs have historically played a significant role in controlling domestic-international transactions. Working in compliance with the *raison d'état* principle, the MFA as a 'gatekeeper' has held exclusive status in public administration system, whose 'specialness' in foreign affairs is not questioned. Thus, the 'gatekeeper' role is characterized by emphasis on monopolistic management of the external environment. In contrast, the 'boundary-spanner image' is based on the assumption of a transformed MFA which, by abandoning its monopoly position in foreign affairs, places itself at the center of international relations. Unlike the 'gatekeeper' approach traditionally employed by MFAs, the 'boundary-spanner' role partially delegates this role to other actors, and serves as a service provider for all those who need support in use of international mechanisms. Although still the leading state authority in foreign affairs, the MFA is forced to rely on the activities of other institutions and actors (see Table 1).

Hocking has also argued that this transformation of the role of the MFA has 'resulted in twin processes of diffusion of policy management combined with a growing emphasis on "whole-of-government" concerns expressed in demands for effective coordination' (Hocking 2016, 340). The 'whole-of-government' approach stipulates that the foreign ministry no longer fulfills the role of a 'gatekeeper' between foreign and domestic policies, but has instead become an assisting authority or platform for other national administration institutions. The types of support may vary, from the coordination of inter-institutional issues to the servicing of all government institutions. Overall, the MFA is not the only exception but also one of the central ministries in which active involvement in the coordination of international issues is expected. Other authors, amongst whom are Kishan Rana, Jan Melissen, Shaun Riordan and Paul Sharp, have also underlined the great importance of inter-institutional cooperation of the MFA (Rana 2011; Hocking et al. 2012, 2013). Although the MFA is one of the government ministries, the international dimension of its operation requires closer cooperation with other public administration institutions. According to Hocking, 'the emphasis on partnership, inclusiveness and transparency challenges the closed, guild-like characteristics of traditional diplomacy' (Hocking 2016, 75). Nowadays, the MFA forms a subsystem in the 'national diplomatic system' (NDS), which 'reflects the enhanced complexity in the management of governments' international policy agendas, growing involvement of agencies outside the MFA, and a consequent degree of uncertainty as to its role and structure' (Hocking 2013, 127).

Using information from foreign policy yearbooks, reports, and interviews, this article will seek answer to two questions. First, do the ministries of foreign affairs in the Baltic countries continue to align with the 'gatekeeper' image? Second, what changes were

**Table 1.** Hocking's images of diplomatic systems.

	Gatekeeper	Boundary-spanner
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● State-dominated environment according high salience to territorial boundaries.</li> <li>● Assumed priority of 'high politics', special qualities of foreign policy and clear identification of national interest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complex mixed actor system comprising permeable boundaries and multilayered policy arenas.</li> <li>● Boundaries as areas of intense activity.</li> <li>● Emphasis on complex, interactive agendas with relatively little issue hierarchy; national interest often hard to identify and/or articulate.</li> </ul>
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To control domestic-international transactions.</li> <li>● Emphasis on exclusive management of external environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To achieve access and presence; to mediate across porous policy arena boundaries. Facilitative role in management of issue-directed coalitions.</li> <li>● Emphasis on shared, cooperative management strategies with public and private sector actors.</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintaining key role in determining national responses on major areas of international policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asserting foreign policy 'voice' in diffused international policy management processes.</li> </ul>
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asserting status inscribed in the 'specialness' of foreign policy.</li> <li>● Bureaucratic bargaining in response to domestic bureaucratic challenges.</li> <li>● Seeking coordinating role defined in hierarchical terms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing 'cooperative' relationships with public and private agencies through policy networks.</li> <li>● 'Coordination' defined as facilitating information flows and sharing 'lead' department status on international issues.</li> </ul>

**Source:** (Hocking 2002), 11.

observed in the ministries of foreign affairs in the period from 2004 to the end of 2012? Examining images of 'gatekeeper' and 'boundary-spanner', a total of 48 in-depth interviews with high ranking diplomats were conducted in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The advanced interviews were carried out in rounds of fieldwork (22 interviews in 2014; 26 interviews in 2018), thus allowing a retrospective analysis of the changes in the MFA of three countries and a validation of the replies provided by the respondents. Some of the questions asked in the interviews are included in the notes below.<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis of this article is postulated as the assumption that the operation of the ministries of foreign affairs in the Baltic countries aligns with Hocking's image of a 'boundary-spanner' (Hocking 2002).

Given that the four dimensions of Hocking's 'images of diplomatic systems' (setting, role, objectives, and strategy) are closely linked, and in some places overlap, this article will structure the hypothesis testing in each country under two subdivisions: structural changes in the MFA and the cooperation with other public administration institutions. The analysis of cooperation with public authorities will take into account both the general principles of the 'whole-of-government' approach (Hocking 2016; Christensen and Lægheid 2007) and Hocking's (2002) aforementioned four dimensions, which will be integrated in a unified analysis. All the conclusions will be presented at the end of this article.

## The Estonian case study

### *Structural changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia*

During the period of time under review, three significant events changed the layout of the structural unit of the MFA of Estonia (*Välisministeerium*). The first event was closely related to the accession of Estonia to the EU that subordinated the work procedures of

the central body and diplomatic missions to the varied EU subjects (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 19). As a result, most of the divisions of the ministry were involved in addressing the EU issues and defining the position of Estonia. Moreover, the involvement of the structural units in EU coordination allowed the MFA to improve the forms of cooperation with other public administration institutions by concurrently justifying the input of the ministry and employees thereof in the work involving EU issues more clearly. The second event was the global financial crisis of 2008, which influenced every governmental ministry of Estonia, including work processes in the central body and diplomatic missions abroad of the MFA. By taking into account the rapid budget reduction, the management of the ministry was forced to optimize internal costs and improve efficiency of the operation of the institution rather quickly (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). Besides, at this time the total number of employees of the ministry was decreased, which directly influenced the redistribution of functions between structural units of the MFA (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). Thus, the ministry was forced to ensure direct work duties with less human and financial resources. Moreover, the economic crisis made one evaluate and review the efficiency of the activity, and especially expenditure items of the MFA. Far more significant changes in the MFA were however, facilitated by a review published by the OECD regarding the public administration of Estonia in which the necessity to reduce the number of structural units, to improve the coordination mechanism in institutions and among ministries, and also to reduce the excessively large number of managers in ministries were underlined (OECD 2011). The last recommendation was especially applied to the management structure of the MFA and its processes (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). Furthermore, as recognized by Estonian diplomats, this message had large resonance in the public space (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 19). Concurrently, the report indicated that during the economic crisis huge reforms were not implemented in the MFA and other public administration institutions. Therefore, by taking into account the recommendations provided for in the OECD review, the Estonian MFA started to implement large structural changes on 1 August 2012 by joining geographical departments of the ministry with the functional departments and divisions thereof (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 19). For example, the coordination of EU affairs was moved to the EU Secretariat of the Government Office (Raik 2013, 78). Moreover, three departments (the Political department, the External economic and development cooperation, and the Department of Europe and transatlantic cooperation) were joined together 'to create a less top-heavy structure' (Raik 2013, 78). The aim governing the political level to involve the ministry more in export activities and to help Estonian undertakings abroad should also be mentioned as a significant stimulus for the performance of the reforms that, in turn, was closely related to the lessons learnt from the economic crisis (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 19).<sup>4</sup> As a result of the referred to reforms, many structural units were joined and 15 departments were functioning in the central body of the MFA at the end of 2012. Lastly, it must be admitted that one of the main principal purposes for merging the geographical and functional departments was the aim to address agenda issues aggregately, by concurrently ensuring a rapid and efficient servicing of other public administration institutions. Such an approach should be assessed as concordant with the vision of leading diplomacy researchers in respect of further development of the MFA, where the ministry performed the role of a coordinator among executive

institutions (Rana 2011; Hocking et al. 2012, 2013). It is also significant to mention that the MFA, before undertaking new functions, entrusted a part of the previous functions to other public administration institutions.

By reviewing changes in the personnel of the MFA, it must be concluded that from 2004 until the end of 2007 the total number of employees increased from 647 to 673 employees. In turn, due to the influence of the economic crisis, the ministry reduced the number of employees in the central body from 2008. In 2004 the total number of employees in the central body was 330 employees, but nine years later the number of employed persons had been reduced by 46 employees, or almost 15%. At the same time the number of employees slightly increased in diplomatic missions by exceeding the number of employees working in the central body (in 2004, 317; in 2012, 342). The largest increase has been observed amongst local employees that, in turn, completely conforms to the ideas of Hocking (2007) and Rana (2011) on the agenda and priorities of the reforms of the MFA in the twenty-first century (see Table 2). Moreover, such a distribution of employees allows for the diplomats stationed abroad to use the more advanced knowledge of local employees on the political, economic, and social environment of the receiving country, and also to ensure the main functions of representations (Malone 2013, 124–32).

Within the context of these changes, it is important to look at one more indicator: the number of diplomatic missions abroad. In 2004, the total number of diplomatic missions was 38, but nine years later Estonia opened 46 missions abroad (33 embassies, 7 permanent representations, 4 general consulates, 1 archive, and 1 special diplomatic mission) (Interview 2; Estonian 2010a).<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, it was exactly during the crisis period the largest growth in the number of new missions was observed,<sup>6</sup> which confirms the fact that even under circumstances when the financing for foreign affairs is significantly reduced or significantly fluctuates, the MFA is able to continue to enlarge the number of representations abroad.

**Table 2.** Structural changes in the MFA of Estonia, 2004–12.

Indicators	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1. The number of employees in the central apparatus of the MFA	330	334	333	336	313	293	283	296	284
2. The number of employees in representations	317	307	322	337	360	324	329	346	342
<i>The number of diplomats in representations</i>	223	224	237	256	266	227	222	235	232
<i>The number of local employees in representations</i>	94	83	85	81	94	97	107	111	110
Total number of employees	647	641	655	673	673	617	612	642	626
3. The size of the average mission	8	8	8	8	9	8	8	8	7
4. The network of diplomatic missions	38	38	39	42	42	42	42	46	46
5. The budget amount. The operational costs of the MFA (€, million)	29.8	38.2	53.8	62.3	45.5	41.4	45.9	49.8	46.4
<i>In proportion to annual budget, %</i>	1.22	1.36	1.59	1.54	0.96	0.91	1.06	1.09	0.90

**Source:** Data provided by the MFA of Estonia. E-Mail correspondence, 9 September 2013.

In total, during nine years the number of diplomats in missions was even slightly increased, which was mainly caused by the increasing number of local employees: 94 local employees were employed in the representations in 2004, but in 2012 their number reached 110. Although the issue of attracting more specialists and integrate them in the work into the foreign service, along with the necessity to send employees of other government institutions to work in the premises of embassies became current from time to time, there was no purposeful work of the MFA in this direction (Interview 1). Although the MFA did not position the diplomatic missions as platforms for ensuring the government's interests, the diplomatic missions of Estonia as an essential support mechanism in the achievement of the objectives of foreign policy were increasingly more involved in the coordination of political issues among the authorities. It was determined by both the new EU format and agenda and the decision of the management of the ministry to support the undertakings of Estonia abroad (Estonian 2004b, 2005–2012). Despite the fact that the number of employees in the representation of Estonia increased and that the MFA had established several new cooperation frameworks among diplomatic missions and certain public administration institutions of Estonia, for example 'Enterprise Estonia', neither an analysis of the reports on foreign policy and the interviews did not confirm that the representations of Estonia ensured varied services to other ministries and government agencies. Thus, the diplomatic missions cannot be determined as a support platform for other public administration institutions.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the budget of the Estonian MFA experienced significant changes. Until the beginning of the economic crisis, the MFA of Estonia received more and more budget assignation each year, but upon the emergence of the global economic crisis, the budget was rapidly reduced. In 2008, compared to previous years, budget reduction was 27%. In 2009, a reduction in operational costs of the ministry was observed. Although from 2010 until 2012 inclusive, the budget of the MFA slightly increased, it was still less than before the crisis, especially in 2006–7. It should also be admitted that in 2012 the ministry, compared to the previous period of time from 2004, received the smallest budget assignation measured in per cent from the central government. Besides in 2007, the budget of the ministry accounted for 1.54% of the total government budget, but in 2012, its financing was only 0.90% of the total budget. This, in turn, allows one to conclude that during the years of the economic crisis, foreign affairs were not a priority for the government of Estonia, since the pressing issues of social policy and overcoming the labor market crisis demanded more attention. At the same time the structural reforms initiated on 1 August 2012 must be assessed as a positive turn, which helped the MFA to develop closer cooperation with other governmental institutions. The increase in the number of local employees must also be assessed positively, as well as the enlargement of the diplomatic network during the years of the economic crisis. It indicates the fact that one of the priorities of the MFA was still enlargement of the number of representations abroad, although the government reduced the amount of the budget for foreign affairs. In order to better understand the nature of the abovementioned changes, the cooperation with other public administration institutions will be discussed further in this article.



### **Cooperation with other public administration institutions**

With the accession of Estonia to the EU, the MFA increasingly positioned itself as the ministry of coordination and support. For example, on 8 June 2004 the Minister for Foreign Affairs Kristina Ojuland, presenting the main foreign policy guidelines of Estonia in Riigikogu, paid attention to the role of the MFA as a coordinator of Estonian foreign policy (Estonian 2004a). Although other structural units of the government and agencies of Estonia were involved in the implementation of the foreign policy and security policy, the minister emphasized that the service of foreign affairs might provide more support to international activities of other institutions. Ojuland also indicated the necessity to improve the mutual cooperation of Estonian institutions even more in the development and implementation of external economic policy (Estonian 2004a).

Being aware of the role and significance of other institutions in the development of foreign policy and implementation of national interests, the MFA of Estonia established several permanent interagency working groups in a short time after access to the EU. The activity of these working groups embraced a wide range of subjects (for example, ensuring export supervision and coordination of aid for the development of Estonia). The MFA was also involved in the working groups of other structural units of the government, especially in those where there was a necessity to perform the role of a coordinator in addressing international issues. Besides, during this period of time the issue of the attraction of specialists to the service of foreign affairs became current. For example, in order to ensure efficient protection against all kinds of cyber threats, the ministry employed several specialists-coordinators. Although in the interview the representative of the MFA recognized that the involvement of specialists in the activities of the ministry was not particularly successful, and this issue is still being resolved (Interview 2), on a conceptual level it shows the readiness of the MFA to balance diplomats-generalists with specialists or experts, thus expressing the readiness of the MFA to transform in the direction of the 'boundary-spanner image' (Hocking 2002, 11).

Notwithstanding the frameworks established by the cross-ministry cooperation, the OECD report in 2011, however, disclosed that the leading public administration institutions of Estonia, including the MFA, still had much work to do concerning the improvement of the coordination mechanism among executive authorities, and also the number of managers in the ministries must be reduced (OECD 2011). The reforms started by the MFA in 2012 clearly indicated the deficiencies of inter-institutional cooperation. The representatives of the ministry also recognized in interviews that the nontransparent administrative cooperation mechanism and non-proportionally large number of leading employees in the central body were two main reasons for the commencement of reforms (Interview 1). Although at the end of 2012 these reforms were just starting to be implemented, in the interviews the respondents assessed the results achieved within a short period of time and total changes in the work of the ministry positively (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). As a result, for example, the MFA started to pay more attention to the planning activities and internal communication of the structural units (Interview 12; Interview 13).<sup>7</sup> By taking into account the period of time selected for the research, the cooperation with other public administration institutions, however, cannot be seen as conforming with the 'boundary-spanner' image." Although in official documents and reports, the MFA of Estonia positions its activity as conforming with the basic guidelines of the 'whole-of-government' approach (Estonian 2004b, 2005–2012), the nonexistence of a unified inter-institutional mechanism in practice did not confirm this. Besides, the

deficiencies established by the OECD in the cooperation of the ministries attested to the same (OECD 2011).

Further study also reveals how the MFA demonstrates that, by reduced financing during the economic crises, it was possible to carry out significant improvements in certain foreign policy issues, for example, in commercial diplomacy. Also, the activities of the MFA in e-diplomacy and improvement of the information circulation among structural units of the ministry and other public administration institutions, and also the increase of the role of representations<sup>8</sup> and attraction of local employees to work in diplomatic missions, should be positively assessed. As indicated by Hocking, Rana, and other leading researchers of MFA and diplomacy, nowadays not only should the number of specialists in the MFA be increased, but more obligations should also be entrusted to local employees (Hocking and Spence 2002; Rana 2011; Hocking et al. 2012, 2013) which help strengthen cooperation with other public administration institutions.

## The Latvian case study

### *Structural changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia*

After joining the EU, the MFA of Latvia (*Ārlietu ministrija*) also underwent significant structural changes. The wide range of EU policy issues and coordination thereof became a significant part of the service of foreign affairs (Latvian 2004–2012) by changing the organizational structure and types of cooperation of the MFA with other participants (Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 18). It was confirmed by both the establishment of the EU department and the task for embassies to be more actively involved in the establishment of EU policy. Closer cooperation between the MFA and the public administration, social partners, and the non-governmental sector was equally important. Such changes were also obvious in the establishment of a combined model of a structural unit, in which the geographical and functional divisions of the central body were mutually more closely integrated. In interviews, Latvian diplomats also confirmed that access to the EU should be regarded as a determinant factor for changes in the MFA of Latvia that not only changed the structural arrangement of the ministry, but also the distribution of responsibilities and the range thereof, both in the ministry itself and the diplomatic missions abroad (Interview 7; Interview 9).

During this period of time an increase in the number of employees and diplomatic missions can be observed. For example, during the first three years after accession to the EU, five new diplomatic representations were opened. A rapid increase in operational costs of the ministry was also observed. In 2004, the total expenses of the MFA were almost €26 million, but in 2007 the total costs exceeded €66 million (see Table 3). Such an increase in financing not only promoted the opening of new embassies, but also allowed one to assign more funds for new initiatives and programs of foreign policy (for example, development cooperation), training of employees, and contributions to international organizations. The situation radically changed in 2008 when the budget of the MFA was significantly reduced as a result of the economic crisis.

The state budget consolidation of 2008 referred to the budget reduction for foreign affairs in a direct way. In 2008 the budget of the MFA was slightly more than €58 million, whereas in 2010, the annual budget of the ministry was only around €37 million. Compared to 2008, the amount of expenditures of the MFA in 2010 declined by 36%.

**Table 3.** Structural changes in the MFA of Latvia, 2004–12.

Indicators	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1. The number of employees in the central apparatus of the MFA	357	345	384	419	404	384	327	342	334
2. The number of employees in representations	279	258	295	296	316	306	201	188	200
Total number of employees	636	603	679	715	720	690	528	530	534
3. The size of the average mission	7	6	7	7	7	7	5	4	5
4. The network of diplomatic missions	40	43	45	45	45	45	44	44	44
5. The budget amount. The operational costs of the MFA (€, million)	25.8	31.5	39.9	66.5	58.5	42.7	36.8	42.4	40.9
<i>In proportion to annual budget, %</i>	<i>1.17</i>	<i>1.14</i>	<i>1.07</i>	<i>1.43</i>	<i>1.09</i>	<i>0.94</i>	<i>0.79</i>	<i>0.96</i>	<i>0.88</i>

**Source:** Data provided by the MFA of Latvia. E-Mail correspondence, 7 July 2012 and 1 August 2014.

Notwithstanding the small increase in financing in the next two years, the budget of the ministry was still quite below that before the crisis. When we look at the administration expenses of the MFA, it can be seen that the central body reached the lowest point in financing in 2011, while the expenses of diplomatic missions abroad were reduced in 2010. Such a reduction in the budget was implemented in accordance with the promises given by the government of Latvia to the international creditors in respect of the measures for the reduction of excessive budget deficit. In addition, it must be mentioned that the MFA experienced a budget decrease in proportion to the annual state budget. In 2008 the budget of the ministry was in the amount of 1.09% of the total amount of state budget expenditures. In turn, in 2010 the budget was decreased to 0.79% and it approves that under the circumstances of the economic crisis the issues of foreign policy were not a priority.

In 2010, for instance, the Latvian Institute, a state agency subordinated to the MFA and which carries out a great deal of public diplomacy functions, also experienced significant cutbacks. Compared to 2008, the budget of the Latvian Institute was reduced by €18,869 or 91.4% (Kļaviņš, Rostoks, and Ozoliņa 2014, 6). In order for it to be possible to ensure fully-fledged work all year round, the institute was forced to reduce the number of employees from 14 to 4. It must be admitted that starting from 2008, the MFA experienced a rapid reduction in the number of employees. In 2009 the ministry was forced to reduce the number staff from 720 to 690, but a year later it experienced the largest reduction in the history of the MFA since regaining independence: 192 permanent positions were eliminated in the ministry, in both the central administration and the diplomatic and consular representations abroad. It means that the total number of employees in 2009 was even less than before accession to the EU and NATO in 2004.

The reduction in financing was not even and it was critically reduced for the performance of several functions. The financing assigned for the training suffered the most, which during the period of time from 2008 to 2012 was reduced by more than 90%. Before the economic crisis the employees of the MFA had wide-ranging possibilities to improve their qualification, not only in Latvia, but also abroad; however, during the years of crisis these possibilities were reduced to a minimum. It can be concluded that because of the economic crisis the financing allocated to foreign affairs was significantly reduced. Many employees were dismissed, and the total payroll was also

reduced. At the same time, those employees who remained at the embassies sometimes had to take on new work duties. Moreover, the reduction of resources had significant impact many initiatives and new foreign policy areas, for example, the development cooperation policy. The reduction of financing in Latvia also negatively influenced the training programs for the personnel and official travel, as had happened in Estonia. Although, after becoming members of the EU and NATO, the MFA reconfigured the structure of the MFA by establishing new divisions for EU issues, by bringing geographical departments into working more closely with functional departments, the ministry was forced to implement a wide operational audit and make rearrangements in the short term due to the economic crisis. Additionally, it must be concluded that the reduction in the MFA budget after 2008 negatively affected all indicators of structural change, and also caused calculated risks for the performance of foreign policy objectives.

It is also important to note that after the accession of Latvia to the EU and NATO, the MFA continued to enlarge the network of diplomatic representations abroad. During the first four years five new embassies were opened, and the number of diplomats working in representations was increased by 13% (from 279 employees in 2004 to 316 in 2008). During this period of time, by taking into account the limited amount of financing, the management of the MFA faced a dilemma – to close several representations abroad or to reduce the number of permanent staff in the ministry, and also to reduce the salary fund of employees. The management of the MFA decided to reduce the number of employees in diplomatic and consular representations, however not to close them.<sup>9</sup> It cannot be denied that by the reduction in the number of permanent positions in representations, the amount of work rapidly increased. Although the average size of a mission demonstrates that the number of employees in diplomatic and consular representations decreased from seven to four or five employees, only ambassador or one diplomat continued to perform duties in more than half of the embassies (25 out of 44, 57%).<sup>10</sup> In turn, the increased average size per mission can be explained by the significantly larger number of employees in the representation to the EU and NATO, and also in certain key countries such as the US, Russia, and the UK. Also, the management of the ministry was forced not only to reduce expenditures of representations, but to also restrict the number of official trips.

Notwithstanding the significantly reduced financial resources as a result of the budget optimization of the MFA and the lack of personnel in diplomatic missions, the employees of the service of foreign affairs continued to ensure all basic functions of the embassy. Besides, the number of functions and the work load did not reduce, but actually increased (Interview 6; Interview 8). It is proven by the fact that the employees of the MFA in small embassies, by sacrificing overtime and work on weekends were forced to tackle both the political and economic issues and take care of administrative and consular obligations. As indicated by respondents in interviews, in addition to manifold EU issues which were added starting from 2004, embassy employees were actively involved in strengthening the Latvian diaspora and in commercial diplomacy (Interview 6; Interview 8; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 16; Interview 18). A greater demand for consular services was also observed. For example, in 2010, in representations of Latvia 137,811 visa applications were processed, which was 12% more than in 2009 (Latvian 2010). Lastly, it is important to admit that although an increase in functions was observed during recent years, the diplomatic missions did not position themselves as support platforms for other ministries and agencies. The MFA

only established close cooperation with a few institutions, amongst which the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, or LIAA, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of the Interior may be highlighted. The number of employees in representations from other institutions was also minimal.

### ***Cooperation with other public administration institutions***

Timely provision of EU documents and information circulation and coordination of preparation of the opinion of Latvia in respect of the agenda issues of the EU institutions were just two of the most significant tasks of the MFA after accession to the EU. In 2004 special attention was paid to coordinating the opinion of Latvia and the continuity thereof in different stages of the EU decision-making process. The central issue – how to use the permanent representation of Latvia in the EU, and also other diplomatic representations and contacts with other EU member states, in order to protect the interests of Latvia most effectively. Moreover, in order to ensure the regular exchange of information with EU member states, in 2004, the MFA began informing the diplomatic representations of other member states in Riga regarding the opinion of Latvia in the meetings of the Council of Ministers of the EU. The MFA also continued to work on improving the functions of the EU Document Accounting System (ESDUS) introduced in 2003, and also organized seminars in the line ministries on information circulation issues. In turn, at the end of 2004 draft amendments to several legal acts which determine the legal framework for the development, approval, and representation of the national opinion and information circulation within the context of EU decision-making, were drawn up and coordinated with the involved authorities.

During the years of economic crisis, closer cooperation of the MFA and responsible institutions in economic diplomacy and commercial diplomacy was observed. At this time the foreign service was actively involved in the protection of the economic interests of Latvia by carrying out the attraction of investments, promotion of export and protection of the interests of entrepreneurs abroad. The MFA also provided a contribution to the establishment of a contractual-legal base for trade complying with the interests of Latvia (Latvian 2010, 11). Unlike the subjects of the agenda of the EU and also NATO, the involvement of the MFA in other issues was, however, not regular and it did not serve as a platform for other executive authorities. Also, the replies of respondents in interviews indicated that the main objective of the employees of the MFA was to perform the objectives defined by the ministry rather than to promote compliance with the ‘whole-government approach’ principles in practice (Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 8; Interview 9).

Overall, the analysis of the situation of Latvia allows one to make several conclusions. Firstly, the range of subjects in foreign policy complied with new agenda issues. At the same time, like in the example of Estonia, the work of the MFA of Latvia was determined by EU issues to a large extent that changed the work of the ministry both structurally and functionally. Secondly, the conformity of the MFA with the ‘whole-of-government approach’ principles was not detected, neither in the annual yearbooks, nor in interviews. Neither the central body of the MFA nor diplomatic missions served as the platform for other public administration institutions. Thirdly, during the economic crisis commercial diplomacy was restarted, which is confirmed by close cooperation of the MFA with the Ministry of Economics and the LIAA, and also the involvement of the employees of the services of foreign affairs in different activities of commercial

diplomacy (for example, business forums, seminars, round table discussion cycles, and trade missions). Fourthly, the MFA had mainly only established regular cooperation with certain organizations of the non-governmental sector and think tanks which are operating in the EU, as well as security issues. Lastly, it is worth admitting that under the circumstances of a reduced budget, the MFA was able to restructure several departments, thus promoting more efficient performance of the functions and tasks of the institution.

## The Lithuanian case study

### *Structural changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania*

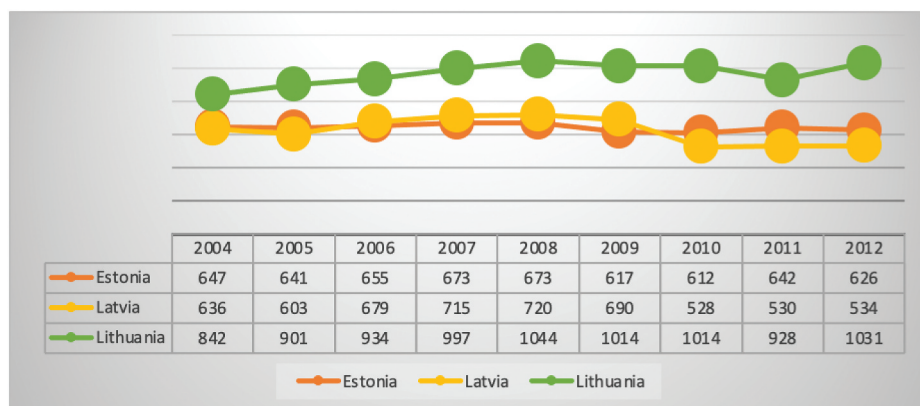
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania (*Užsienio reikalų ministerija*), like the MFAs of Estonia and Latvia, experienced a closer merging of geographical and functional structural units, which was determined by the new EU agenda and initiatives to a large extent. Undeniably, other issues of foreign policy also demanded more interaction of departments, however the range of EU issues that demanded the largest connection of the ministry with other public administration institutions was the widest. In turn, with the increased amount of functions, the MFA was also forced to increase the number of permanent employees in the central body and diplomatic missions. In accordance with the data provided by the MFA,<sup>11</sup> in 2012, compared to 2004, the total number of employees in the ministry was increased by more than 18% or 189 employees (see Table 4). Similar to the Estonian and Latvian MFAs, the largest growth in the number of employees was observed right before the beginning of the economic crisis (see Figure 1). According to provided information of the MFA, however, during the first two years of the crisis a rapid reduction in the number of employees was observed. Only in 2011 did the ministry experience the most rapid reduction in the number of employees.<sup>12</sup>

Although the ratio of the central body and representations is continuously fluctuating, compiled and accurate statistics on changes in personnel since 2004 was not at the

**Table 4.** Structural changes in the MFA of Lithuania, 2004–12.

Indicators	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1. The number of employees in the central apparatus of the MFA	421	450	467	499	522	507	507	464	516
2. The number of employees in representations	421	451	467	498	522	507	507	464	515
Total number of employees	842	901	934	997	1044	1014	1014	928	1031
3. The size of the average mission	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	8	9
4. The network of diplomatic missions	50	55	56	58	59	58	58	58	58
5. The budget amount. The operational costs of the MFA (€, million)	46.1	53.3	66.3	75.1	79.0	59.7	54.0	61.9	65.5
<i>In proportion to annual budget, %</i>	<i>1.21</i>	<i>1.23</i>	<i>1.33</i>	<i>1.25</i>	<i>1.11</i>	<i>0.88</i>	<i>0.77</i>	<i>0.86</i>	<i>0.93</i>

**Source:** Data provided by the MFA of Lithuania. E-Mail correspondence, 28–9 August 2013.



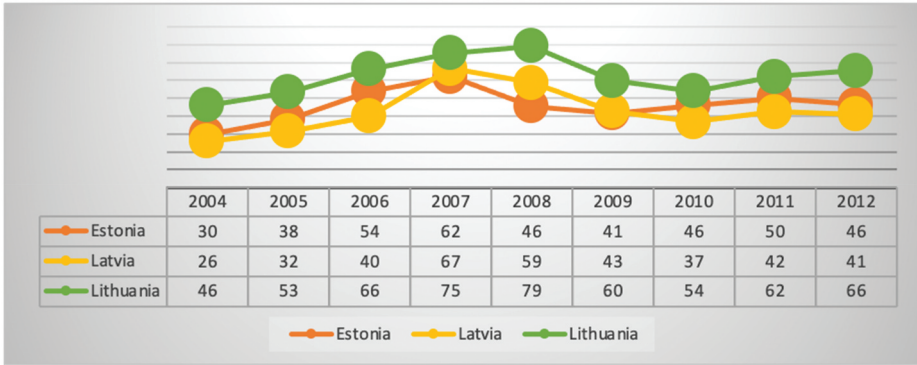
**Figure 1.** The total number of employees in the MFA of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 2004–12. **Source:** Figure based on the data obtained from Baltic MFAs and foreign policy reports.

disposal of the MFA of Lithuania. According to the data the MFA could provide, approximately half of the permanent staff were employed in diplomatic missions, which, in turn, means that an average of eight or nine employees were employed per mission abroad. Notwithstanding that this indicator was higher for Lithuania than Latvia, the ratio of local employees in diplomatic missions was as low as that of its neighbor, namely, from 2004 to 2009 the number of local employees did not exceed 10%, but from 2009 this number was 14%.

With the increase in the total number of employees, the ministry also enlarged the number of diplomatic missions abroad from 50 in 2004 to 58 in 2012. Like in both other Baltic countries, Lithuania had also established not only a wide network of embassies abroad, but also representations in international organizations. In 2012 Lithuania had 22 embassies in the EU member states. Almost the same number of embassies (20) were opened in the countries outside the EU. During this period of time the national interests and rights of Lithuania were also represented by diplomats in international organizations, including the EU, the European Council, the UN, NATO, the OSCE and UNESCO, and also employees of the service of foreign affairs in ten consulates abroad and one special diplomatic mission in Afghanistan.

As with the cases of Estonia and Latvia, the MFA of Lithuania also experienced not only a rapid growth of the budget in the first year after accession to the EU and NATO, but also the same reduction in operational costs after 2008 (see [Figure 2](#)). During the period of time from 2004 until 2008 the budget of the ministry was increased twice, namely, from 159 million litas to 273 million, but as a result of the economic crisis the budget of the ministry was reduced by several tens of millions of litas. In 2010 the budget of the ministry was almost 187 million litas, which was 32% less than in 2008. During the first two years the salary fund was decreased by almost 12 million litas, or 22% of the remuneration budget of 2008.

This rapid budget cut was a determining factor for the reduction in the number of diplomats and their withdrawal from the work in diplomatic missions. In order to reduce the work load for the permanent staff remaining in missions, the ministry increased the ratio of local employees in representations. Also, employees of the central body had a greater work load in relation to the expected presidency of Lithuania in the OSCE and



**Figure 2.** Operational expenditures in the MFAs of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 2004–12 (€, million). **Source:** Figure based on the data obtained from Baltic MFAs and foreign policy reports.

EU Council. At the end of 2012, almost all 19 departments of the ministry were involved in the presidency preparation and coordination work. In summary, it can be concluded that, although the economic crisis caused negative consequences to all indicators of structural changes, both presidencies forced a review and improvement of working processes in the MFA, and also brought about improved cooperation with other authorities and the non-governmental sector (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17).

### **Cooperation with other public administration institutions**

Up to the end of 2008, the cooperation of the MFA with other public administration institutions was mostly determined by current EU agenda issues. Although the cooperation was regular, the mechanism for the coordination of issues was not transparent, which was substantiated by the establishment of the ‘Sunset’ Commission (Commission for the Improvement of State Administration) in 2006 the purpose of which was to reform public administration in Lithuania. Notwithstanding the many good proposals by the ‘Sunset’ Commission, most parts of the reforms were not introduced due to the lack of political support (Nakrošis and Martinaitis 2011, 76; Vilpišauskas, Nakrošis, and Kuokštis 2014, 44).

Upon taking office, the new government headed by Andris Kubilis began implementing major reforms of the public administration. At the end of 2008, the government defined seven sectors in which structural reforms might be implemented, including in the public administration. From an organizational point of view, all ministries were reformed during 2009–11, and one new ministry was established: the Ministry of Energy. Also, the number of public institutions was significantly reduced from 1,190 – in 2008 to 855 in 2011, as well as the budgets for all institutions (Vilpišauskas, Nakrošis, and Kuokštis 2014, 45–54). As indicated by the project on efficiency of reforms in Lithuania by researchers at the Technology University of Kaunas (Rauleckas et al. 2013), and affirmed by Lithuanian diplomats (Interview 4; Interview 5), the structural reforms, however, have not been completely implemented. In certain issues, for example the cooperation framework of institutions for external economy, aid was not improved during the years of economic crisis. Several respondents even admitted that the cooperation for export aid has become even less transparent and more



inefficient. The decentralized cooperation mechanism between responsible institutions and a lack of political will were mentioned as the main deficiencies of cooperation (Interview 5). These deficiencies also presented difficulties in the coordination between the public institutions. The research by the Technology University of Kaunas also showed that the coordination of issues between institutions was inefficient and poor. In interviews civil servants of a higher level underlined the lack of the co-ordination mechanism between the ministries as the worst in the entire public administration. The researchers discovered that reforms initiated during the fiscal crisis were mostly aimed at a reduction of costs, but not the improvement of administration quality (Rauleckas et al. 2013, 359–60; Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17).

Although preparation for the presidency of Lithuania in the EU helped to improve the efficiency of the cooperation between ministries and institutions subordinated thereto (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17), significant improvements until the end of 2012 were not observed. It must be admitted that by the establishment of a special government commission for the coordination of EU issues, more serious work on regular cross-ministry dialogue commenced before the presidency. Preparation for the presidency in the EU also enabled employees of ministries to better understand the role and functions of each institution (Interview 11; Interview 17). In general, from the point of view of the MFA, examples of successful cooperation with other institutions were observed in the implementation of a diaspora policy (Interview 17; Birka and KĻaviņš 2020, 5–6),<sup>13</sup> the establishment of EU neighborhood policy (Interview 11), and energy safety issues (Lithuanian 2004–2012). The co-operation mechanism of most other issues was however, not transparent and based on an *ad hoc* principle. During this period, the overall cooperation was mostly determined by the agenda of the EU. It is important to mention that the MFA did not function as a platform for another public administration institution in solving foreign policy issues. Although the government implemented structural reforms in the public administration during the years of the economic crisis, they were mostly related to a reduction of costs. As admitted by respondents in interviews and researchers of the public administration of Lithuania, the cross-ministry coordination issues were not completely arranged (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17).

To sum up, the analysis of the operation of the Lithuanian MFA confirms that after accession to the EU and NATO the range of the agenda of the ministry was significantly enlarged. The work of the ministry was mainly determined by the issues of the new agenda, including enhanced integration with the EU, strengthening the energy security of Lithuania, development cooperation issues, and also taking care of the communities of Lithuanians immigrated abroad (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17). It is also worth mentioning that, in Lithuania, the president has played an important role of the country's foreign policy formation and implements it together with the MFA. The Lithuanian diplomats also approved in the interviews that after accession to the EU the number of the functions of the ministry significantly increased (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17). Furthermore, the Governmental Commission for the European Union which was headed by MFA official served as an important governmental coordination body. Moreover, the coordination of development cooperation issues and the department of the ministry established for this purpose obviously confirmed the involvement of the ministry in the performance of different new obligations (Interview 4; Interview 5). Also, access to the EU not only broadened the knowledge, skills, and competence of the employees of the ministry in the coordination of EU issues and different EU formats in the representation of foreign policy interests of Lithuania, but also changed the role of the

ministry itself (Interview 4; Interview 11; Interview 17). As indicated by a high-ranking diplomat of Lithuania, with the accession to the EU, the self-assessment of the MFA of Lithuania and the awareness of the capability to influence regional and even global decisions increased (Interview 4). Moreover, accession to the EU led to equal treatment and distribution of responsibilities by the old EU member states (Interview 4). Notwithstanding the manifold and even ambitious objectives in foreign policy, for example to take on a leading role in the region, the MFA of Lithuania could not succeed, however, in reforming the ministry completely. Further, structural reforms in the cross-ministry coordination mechanisms were not completely introduced. Although during the years of economic crisis, the government of Lithuania reformed several communication channels between the ministries, the total coordination mechanism was nontransparent. In the interviews the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania also recognized that an efficient cooperation framework was not established between the responsible institutions. For example, the decentralized system had caused a nontransparent aid system to entrepreneurs who wanted to export and enter new product and service markets (Interview 5). As a result of all this the different interests of the activity of institutions and competition prevented implementation of a coordinated action policy.

## Conclusion

This study reveals that during the evaluated period the MFAs in the Baltic countries were not functioning in accordance with the 'gatekeeper' image, thereby affirming significant changes in MFA functions and roles. At the same time, the postulated hypothesis that the ministries in all three countries aligned with Hocking's image of the 'boundary-spanner' was not proven either, because the operations of the MFAs in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania did not comply with the 'whole-of-government approach' (Hocking 2016). Despite the fact that during the years of economic crisis the Baltic governments improved and reformed several inter-ministerial communication channels, and the MFAs in all three countries improved their cooperation with other ministries and governmental agencies, the MFA as a sub-system of a 'national diplomatic system' (Hocking 2013) overall did not serve as a platform for other state institutions. This leads to the conclusion that the MFAs are still in the transition to a 'boundary-spanner image'. Although all three MFA had reformed their operational processes in both their central apparatus and diplomatic missions, there were divergent causes. Changes in the MFAs of Latvia and Lithuania were mainly driven by two important factors, namely, both countries' accession to the EU and the results of the 2008 economic crisis (Interview 4; Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 11; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 16; Interview 17; Interview 18). In Estonia, reform was stimulated by these two aforementioned factors, as well as by the 2011 OECD report on the deficiencies and problems in MFA administration. As a result, on 1 August 2012, the Estonian MFA began a reorganization process that led to a significant reduction in the numbers of subunits and management, as well as a significant improvement in the MFA's cooperation mechanisms with other institutions. Interviewed diplomats described that the MFA modernization beginning in 2012 as the most significant change of recent years (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 19).

The decisive driver of changes during the relevant period was assuming EU responsibilities. Several observations confirm this. First, in the years immediately after EU accession, the ministerial geographic departments were merged or more closely integrated with the functional units. Second, the MFA had undertaken EU coordinator functions, thus altering coordination formats with other ministries. Third, diplomatic missions including embassies were involved in developing EU policy. Fourth, after EU accession the Baltic countries directed much greater financial and human resources to developing and implementing cooperation development policy, for example for projects in Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries. Fifth, the 2004 EU expansion and the new agenda led to more active involvement by all three countries in multi-lateral Baltic Sea Region cooperation formats such as Baltic Assembly, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Northern Dimension, E-PINE, Nordic-Baltic Six (NB6) and Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8). This period also saw increasing cooperation between the MFA and non-governmental, private, academic, and public sector representatives. It must therefore be concluded that EU accession significantly increased the range of functions performed by MFAs in both the central apparatus and diplomatic missions. Often the question of missions is not adequately addressed, as suggested by Paul Sharp when he said that both theoreticians and practitioners of diplomacy do not fully appreciate the mission's vital role in diplomacy. The examined MFA cases confirm that rather than being reduced, the role of the diplomatic mission is in fact increasing. This is also proof that missions do not comply with the core principles of the 'gatekeeper' image.

The EU accession has not only expanded knowledge, skills, and competence in coordinating EU issues and representing national interests in various EU formats, it has also changed the role of the ministry itself. As many diplomats acknowledged, joining the EU has boosted the confidence of all three MFAs and raised awareness of their ability to influence regional and even global decisions (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 4; Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 11; Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 16; Interview 17; Interview 18; Interview 19).

Moreover, an analysis of the examined cases clearly shows that multi-vector or '*tous azimuts*' foreign policy had become common practice in the Baltic countries. Taking into account the rapidly changing international agenda, the MFAs of the examined countries projected a wide range of foreign policy priorities. The MFA of Estonia is a prominent example of this. Almost all multifaceted issues were assigned equal importance in the ministry's published reports. It is also important to note that three MFA analyses reflect boundaries as areas of intense activity and emphasis on complex and interactive agendas. At the same time, MFAs are not always involved in two-way communication with cooperative relationships with public and private agencies (including NGOs). The main areas of activity were EU issues, formulating development cooperation policy and security. NGOs however, played a smaller, irregular role in developing other foreign policy issues.

This research also reveals that Hocking's 'images' of diplomatic systems provide an overall good understanding of the direction and framework of the MFAs, but have shortcomings to determine the exact stage of diplomacy transformation. This is due to the lack of a number of MFA development phases, which is evident in the case study of the three Baltic countries, where the MFA in each country is no longer a 'gatekeeper', but is not yet a 'boundary-spanner'. As boundaries of setting, role, objectives, and strategy of both images are closely related and overlap in several places, more detailed

description or even indicators of such a framework would also allow to define a more precise stage of the MFA and better compare with other countries. Overall, the research framework employed and the analyses of foreign policy documents, as well as 48 in-depth interviews with high ranking diplomats, demonstrate that the foreign ministries in the Baltic countries have not become anachronisms in the twenty-first century. On the contrary, the MFAs have become important and essential coordinators of foreign policy and core drivers of the 'national diplomatic system'.

## Notes

1. Article 41, section 2 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, for instance, reads: 'All official business with the receiving State entrusted to the mission by the sending State shall be conducted with or through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the receiving State or such other ministry as may be agreed'.
2. Although these methods are used quite often in diplomacy research, the diverse approaches and viewpoints of authors have hindered the synchronization of studies with the same or similar methodological frameworks to MFA studies. Therefore, this article examines Baltic MFAs from the aspect of changes in tasks and operations where diplomacy is understood in the traditional (narrower) sense as an instrument for implementing state foreign policy, as well as from changes in diplomacy in its broader sense.
3. Some of the questions asked in 48 interviews: What have been the main structural and functional changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) since 2004? What has been the EU's impact on the structure and function of the MFA? What are the signs of the transformation of diplomacy and its influence on the work of the ministry? How did the economic crisis in 2008 affect the MFA? What types of diplomacy has dominated the work of the ministry? How would you describe the cooperation of the MFA with other public authorities (government agencies)? What is the role of the ministry? Does the MFA serve as a platform for other ministries and agencies? Is it common for all line ministries to pursue a single (synchronized) foreign policy? Do you have specialists or experts from other institutions working in the MFA? Do embassies also employ civil servants from other ministries and agencies? If so, how would you describe the format of inter-institutional cooperation? What training has the MFA offered to employees? What has been the ministry's cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks?
4. In the interviews, Estonian diplomats admitted that the consequences of the economic crisis were not the main factor which determined the implementation of the reforms of 2012. Although the reduction in the budget made the ministry review its work organization and efficiency, the recommendations of the OECD, and also the necessity for the ministry to be more involved in promoting external economics, were the determinant factors for the introduction of structural reforms.
5. It is important to admit that four new diplomatic missions were opened in 2011, three years after the commencement of the economic crisis. For example, in order to provide aid to entrepreneurs of Estonia in foreign markets, the MFA enlarged its number of diplomatic missions in Asia and the Middle East. In 2010 the management of the MFA decided to open an Estonian consulate in Shanghai and appoint honorary consuls in South Korea, Hong Kong, and Syria (Damascus).
6. During the time period concerned, the interests of Estonia were represented by 162 honorary consuls abroad.
7. Also e-mail correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 9 September 2013.
8. In 2012, for example, in the central body of the ministry less employees were employed than in the diplomatic missions of Estonia abroad.
9. The only exemption was the General Consulate of Latvia in Bonn, which was closed and the property sold.
10. E-Mail correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 27 December 2012.
11. E-Mail correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 28–29 August 2013.

12. Provided data by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. E-Mail correspondence, 28–29 August 2013.
13. In 2009, reorganization in the diaspora policy issues took place. As a result, the MFA of Lithuania was entrusted to take care of nationals living abroad. The ministry established a special department for the formation of relations with diasporas of nationals abroad and implementation of a coordinated diaspora policy. One of the first diaspora strategies was 'Global Lithuania'.

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## Interviews

Interview 1. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 13 May 2014.

Interview 2. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 14 May 2014.

Interview 3. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 15 May 2014.

Interview 4. Author interview with Lithuanian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Lithuania, Vilnius, 20 May 2014.

Interview 5. Author interview with Lithuanian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Lithuania, Vilnius, 21 May 2014.

Interview 6. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 13 June 2014.

Interview 7. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 25 June 2014.

Interview 8. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 4 July 2014.

Interview 9. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 23 July 2014.

Interview 10. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 3 October 2018.

Interview 11. Author interview with Lithuanian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Lithuania, Vilnius, 12 October 2018.

Interview 12. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 18 October 2018.

Interview 13. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 19 October 2018.

Interview 14. Author interview with Latvian diplomat, face-to-face meeting, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 25 October 2018.

Interview 15. Author interview with Latvian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 26 October 2018.

Interview 16. Author interview with Latvian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 2 November 2018.

Interview 17. Author interview with Lithuanian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Lithuania, Vilnius, 9 November 2018.

Interview 18. Author interview with Latvian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Latvia, Riga, 30 November 2018.

Interview 19. Author interview with Estonian diplomats, face-to-face meetings, MFA of Estonia, Tallinn, 11 January 2019.

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