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(Re)Digitalization of Diplomatic Practice During COVID-19: Implications for Development of China-Western Balkans Relations

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to explore the three pivotal pillars of Track One and Track Two diplomacy (time, space, and protocol), by situating it in the context of the imposed digitalization of diplomatic practice during COVID-19, and digital diplomacy *per se*. Moreover, the paper attempts to record some of the recent changes in the dynamics of conduct of digital diplomacy, through the prism of China-Western Balkans relations. This qualitative study draws on the technique of semi-structured interviews with state officials, civil society representatives, academicians, political analysts, and media outlets from the Western Balkans, who work either on promotion or observation of relations between China and the Western Balkans. Due to the COVID-19, most actors from the state and civil society were forced to move their activities to the online sphere, and thus direct resources towards digital diplomacy – meaning that the study notes transformations in the online space and records interactions, instances of good practice, communication patterns, and assesses the role of disinformation during the pandemic.

Key words: *time, space, protocol, digital diplomacy, China, Western Balkans, COVID-19*

1. Introduction

This study starts from the premise that contemporary diplomatic practice (objective-oriented diplomacy) mainly includes a wide range of state and non-state actors in its core, which theoretically and terminologically can be classified in either Track One or Track Two diplomacy. The processes of globalization and modernization have further blurred the lines

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between the actors, placing online sphere actions at the forefront of various agendas – meaning that digital diplomacy, in a way, represents the intersection between Track One and Track Two diplomacy due to the widespread use of digital tools by all parties involved. Therefore, this research attempts to pay attention to digitalization of time, space, and protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its transformation into an online space, while considering state and non-state actors that contribute to the development of functional ties between China and the Western Balkans on a daily basis. The advantage of this approach is reflected in the possibility of obtaining broad and accurate data, which is needed due to the fact that relations between China and the Western Balkans are still in the initial development phase, which only intensified recently, with the launch of the China-CEEC initiative, or *Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries*. Moreover, the importance of this approach is also reflected in the presumption that it could provide concrete positive and negative instances of practice, which could then, to some extent, improve the daily work of all actors in post-pandemic conditions, but also provide reflection and evaluation of what has been done so far.

In the contemporary world, digital diplomacy is a foreign policy essential, meaning that state and non-state actors all compete for influence and power in the same online space (Adesina, 2017, p. 10). Nonetheless, Purwasito and Kartinawati add that social media, webinars, and online meetings have influenced the way in which diplomacy is being conducted, meaning that actors constantly need new strategies, tactics, management, and governance (Purwasito and Kartinawati, 2020, p. 663). Several authors believe that any process of digitization of diplomatic practices and routines is a direct consequence of offline events, such as in the cases of the Arab Spring, the 2016 U.S. elections, or more recently – COVID-19. As it is noted by Abdeleli, digital platforms were implemented early on in the pandemic, enabling diplomats to hold conferences and discussions from a distance (Abdeleli, 2021). During the pandemic, digital diplomacy has also facilitated day-to-day diplomatic activities, as it was seen in the case of employing bots for consular communication purposes (Bjola and Manor, 2020). Moreover, Manor argues that several technologies could help diplomats overcome challenges posed by COVID-19, and therefore outlive the pandemic – video conferencing in order to save time and resources, chat bots in order to mimic human behaviour, and big data modelling for narrowing the distance (Manor, 2021). In their research, Justinek and others showcase that social media usage in the Western Balkan countries is increasing and social media can

strengthen values of openness and cooperation between the citizens and governments (Justinek et al, 2019, p. 193).

On the one hand, China is a country that invests significant resources in human-to-human interaction, as well as soft power, which can best be explained through the concept of *guanxi* (关系.) Deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy, *guanxi* is a social concept in which personal connections, relationships, acquaintances, and trust play a pivotal role in achieving meaningful private, economic, or political cooperation. On the other hand, China is at the forefront of the digital revolution, devoting extensive resources for digitalization of its own and other societies – as can be seen through initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road. Therefore, during the pandemic, the development of functional private relations between China and other countries was significantly transformed and transferred to the digital sphere, implying that one of the aims of this study is to find a correlation between the aforementioned phenomena and try to understand the transformation of relations, practices, and cooperation patterns.

During the pandemic, the first online China-CEEC Summit, chaired by President Xi Jinping, was held, and although it was conducted online, it was described as the meeting at the highest level since the initiative started in 2012. On the one hand, this meeting demonstrated the advantages of online and hybrid methods of organizing events at the highest level, and on the other hand, it confirmed China's commitment to the Western Balkans and further development of multi-level connections and interactions between different sectors at macro and micro levels. For instance, Vangeli believes that the Balkans is now regularly seen as one of the regions that matter for the Belt and Road, and for the impact of Global China – something which was not the case until recently (Vangeli, 2020). Although there is a public perception that state actors from China and the Balkans are still those who are most involved in various forms of interaction, recent research conducted by Shopov suggests that this trend is changing, and that there is a growing role of China within academia, civil society, and the media in the region – therefore describing it as a multi-level strategy and rising embeddedness (Shopov, 2020). Moreover, Bjola and others write that the growing inclusion of non-state actors at the “table of power” could be seen as a strategic alternative – particularly in the cases where the state actors lack the resources to establish missions or achieve influence (Bjola et al, 2019, p. 98).

A distinctive feature of Chinese diplomacy during the pandemic was the so-called "vaccine diplomacy", which was particularly visible and present in the Balkans through

donations of medical equipment, tests, and protective gear. Although the aid was reluctantly accepted in the spring of 2021, there was a dose of skepticism in most Western Balkan countries in the beginning stages of the pandemic. For instance, Arežina notes that during this time, negative narrative surrounding China has, to some extent, affected a smaller number of Western Balkan citizens which had reduced their enthusiasm for cooperation with Beijing (Arežina, 2020). Out of all countries, Serbia was the most explicit when welcoming the moves of Chinese diplomacy, and expressing gratitude to the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, while at the same time, criticizing the European Union for the lack of solidarity. Therefore, on the one hand, this research looks at the ways in which the Chinese diplomatic network (including state and civil society) in the Balkans countered the narratives surrounding COVID-19, while on the other hand, it examines the possibility of lasting consequences for the region, reflected in specificities of China's presence and policies towards the region. For instance, when speaking about the Chinese involvement through vaccine diplomacy and potential repercussions, Vangeli believes that, although China does not have hegemonic pretensions in the area, no one will be able to talk about the Balkans in the post-COVID era without taking China into account (Vangeli, 2021).

In recent years, often characterized as the post-truth era, online space has served as breeding ground for various types of conspiracy theories, fake news, radicalization, and extremist worldviews. This is particularly pronounced in societies such as those in the Balkans – with a limited and inadequate regulation of online space, and high levels of hate speech – primarily on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. COVID-19 only intensified these sentiments, primarily due to the lack of verified and official information by (previously) confidential sources such as political actors and the media, where even these sources occasionally relied on the so-called "blame-game" instruments. As Bjola and Manor note in their previous research, fighting disinformation is crucial as conspiracy theories erode trust in government, reduce faith in legitimate media and breed suspicion and fear of other nations, meaning that they are the very undoing of diplomacy (Bjola and Manor, 2020). Therefore, this research considers the segment of the work of the diplomatic networks that includes combating online disinformation during COVID-19 and attempts to understand the ways in which the majority of actors reacted to this phenomenon.

The rest of the paper is structured in the following way. The second section explains the methodology employed in the study, selected actors, cases, as well as the target countries. The third section deals with the analysis of results and is divided into three parts – the first part looks

into interactions and instances of good practice, the second part discusses the transformation of time, space, and protocol within digital diplomacy, while the third one approaches the issue of disinformation and fake news, and ways in which diplomatic practice counters these phenomena. Lastly, the paper concludes with the final remarks that derived from the study and attempts to give a comprehensive summary of the major interpretations found in the result section.

2. Methodology

This small-scale, empirical, qualitative study is based on a total of 10 interviews, which were conducted during months of August and September 2021 with diplomatic actors from state institutions, embassies, civil society organizations, media, and academia. All actors come from a variety of institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, and work directly or indirectly on strengthening or analyzing relations between China and the Western Balkans. Due to the ongoing restrictions caused by the pandemic, the interviews were conducted in an online environment, and the author ensured the anonymity of the respondents, while respecting the applicable national laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as general ethical regulations for writing a scientific paper. All respondents were asked a total of eight broad questions (see: Appendix), which opened the possibility for comparison between cases and institutions, as well as individual countries – primarily in relation to instances of good practice and impediments caused by COVID-19.

3. Research results

3.1 Cooperation, interactions, and instances of good practice

Projects within civil society that were mostly in digital format before the pandemic did not record major changes in the way and methodology of implementation once they had to switch to fully digital format – primarily in cases where there was adequate knowledge and previously acquired skills. To a certain extent, those organizations, and institutions (such as the Confucius Institutes) that had a large number of professional domestic staff to carry out day-to-day activities, as well as previous experience with digitization of practice, benefited because they were forced to take over the job of those institutions where this was not the case. As a direct result of the pandemic, one of the respondents states that the Confucius Institutes thus

became more the property of domestic universities, because they had to dedicate themselves to self-sustainability and preservation of integrity.²

However, one of the significant shortcomings was the physical constraint, which prevented human-to-human exchanges and departures in both directions. For instance, a respondent from a government institution notes that, although institutions tried to move activities to the online sphere, it became difficult to conduct any cultural exchanges, since these do not have the same end result as live ones.³ One of the respondents from the civil sector emphasizes the importance of personal contact for China, known as *guanxi*, where connections between people play an important role – meaning that Chinese are more eager to do business with foreigners if they know them personally.⁴ Likewise, the lack of visits in both directions meant fewer opportunities to gain positive first-hand impressions and experiences, which could affect the positive perceptions of both China and the Western Balkans that go beyond traditional, media-driven perceptions. Still, a respondent from the media sector believes that the idea of *guanxi* should not be viewed as something exclusive to Chinese society, but that it is rather present in all societies, in various forms.⁵

When it comes to organizing activities such as round tables, conferences, and workshops, which were the primary activities conducted in all sectors, there was a declining interest for participation in online events – mainly due to the large vertical structure, focus on formal segments such as long introductory speeches, as well as the lack of opportunities for participants to meet on a personal basis. Most respondents also agree that the transition to the online sphere has changed the quality of interactions even if the intensity has not changed in individual cases, mostly because live conversation offers opportunities for interlocutors to understand each other more easily and to adequately recognize real narratives. On the other hand, in most cases where the interaction existed before the pandemic, there was a desire to maintain it to the extent that there would be no major changes in private and business relations – except in cases where the frequent changes in positions within institutions in China and in the Western Balkans were recorded. One of the interviewees states that it was immensely difficult to establish a meaningful relationship with people you have not seen live before or the people that constantly

² Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

³ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

⁴ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 30 August 2021.

⁵ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

change positions, and that this was also the biggest challenge in establishing functional connections and relationships.⁶

In all countries covered under this study, there was a significant exchange of knowledge and experiences in the field of health care, medical devices, and laboratory construction during the pandemic, which took macro-level relations between China and the individual countries of the Western Balkans to a new dimension. However, out of all states in the region, these observations are predominantly noticeable in the case of Serbia and the so-called "vaccine diplomacy." One of the respondents notes that, although the pandemic conditions cannot be viewed from the aspect of "winners", it can be said that they have contributed to the improvement of cooperation on a practical level between Serbia and China.⁷ Another interviewee suggests that cooperation has progressed to a new level, resulting in a privileged status in vaccine procurement, subsequent human exchanges, the construction of joint laboratories, but also in the fact that Chinese vaccine diplomacy has directly enabled Serbian "vaccine diplomacy." The respondent also adds that, although it will not be accepted in every country, China's positioning as a global leader in vaccines can be characterized as commendable, primarily due to the narrative that vaccines are a public good and that they should be available to all humans.⁸ One of the most compelling examples of pandemic digital diplomacy occurred in March, 2020, when the Serbian Embassy in China opened its Weibo account, and reached a large number of followers and donations in a short period of time – which was seen at the time as a generous help from Chinese citizens to fight the pandemic in Serbia. One of the respondents reminds that the Chinese ambassador to Serbia opened her Twitter account at the very beginning of the pandemic, which shows that the state officials are also adapting to the realities of global life.⁹ On the other hand, in the case of Montenegro, one of the interviewees coming from the state institution asserts that relations between China and Montenegro, although transferred to the digital sphere, have remained at an equally good level, with a special focus on sharing experiences of medical experts from China with their counterparts in Montenegro – mostly via video conferencing.¹⁰

As an example of good practice, most interviewees highlighted the visible digitization of most Chinese embassies in the Western Balkans, where a large number of activities have shifted

⁶ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

⁷ Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 10 September 2021.

⁸ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

⁹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

¹⁰ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 12 August 2021.

to the online sphere. One respondent singles out the Chinese Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a positive example and an actor who has moved flexibly into the digital space, despite the fact that it is a diplomatic institution with more complicated protocols.¹¹ On the other hand, some respondents state that in the case of diplomatic missions, live interaction has significantly decreased – without many mutual visits, as was the case before the pandemic – mostly because these types of institutions tightened protocols and put their daily practices into a type of quarantine.

3.2 Time, space, and protocol

Digital diplomacy could bring some benefits in relation to efficient use of time, predominantly in instances where daily work is based on online tools, as in the case of a civil society respondent who says that all her activities depend on digital promotion and that she does not rely on printed promotional materials.¹² Therefore, taking into account the similar considerations of several other respondents from the civil sector, academia and the media, it can be concluded that there are no significant differences in these sectors compared to the time frames used before the pandemic. Yet, on the other hand, state actors note that the concept of time can best be viewed through a change in types of activities, where new, digitized forms of day-to-day work have been introduced, shortening implementation time relative to their pre-pandemic counterparts. One media respondent believes that while the benefits of digital diplomacy are clear, real diplomacy at the state level requires live interaction, especially when it comes to large systems like Chinese – regardless of the fact that it might have a long decision-making process that is slower than the online one.¹³ Another respondent from the civil sector notes that although the process might become accelerated, this does not necessarily mean that it will be conducted well, which then shows that the digital world should be viewed only as a segment or an addition to offline activities – never as a totality.¹⁴ A similar opinion is shared by a respondent from the academia, who believes that when it comes to digital diplomacy, as well as the discussion on sensitive issues (crisis situations), inaccurate and rapid information can produce more harm than good.¹⁵

Although digital diplomacy might be able to relativize spatial distance, one respondent from civil society believes that there are major shortcomings such as exclusion of face-to-face

¹¹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 1 September 2021.

¹² Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

¹³ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

¹⁴ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

¹⁵ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

interaction, body language, and energy exchange, meaning that digital diplomacy will never be an adequate substitute for traditional diplomacy.¹⁶ A similar opinion is shared by a respondent from the civil society, who adds that, although the result of the work and the final product are mostly the same, the experience itself is much worse, as the essence of diplomacy is to meet live, build trust, and undergo the whole experience.¹⁷ On the other hand, a respondent from a government institution asserts that online meetings have more advantages than offline ones – mostly because it is possible to gather prominent officials and experts without worrying about distance, which in the post-pandemic period could mean that online conferences will occupy significant percentage of total diplomatic activity.¹⁸ A respondent from another state institution agrees with this statement, and believes that digital diplomacy has a bright future as an essential complement to traditional diplomacy.¹⁹ This respondent also emphasizes that activities of his institution were carried out in both digital and traditional form during COVID-19, where the institution tried to cope with challenges, regardless of the type of events and spatial issues. Nevertheless, one of the most plausible options in relation to alternatives to traditional diplomacy is the growing number of hybrid events, as existing technology can respond to this type of task. One civil society interviewee cites the example of a summit of political parties in Beijing, which showed that lower-level meetings can be organized in a hybrid form, while those at the highest level should remain in a traditional form of offline geographic spatiality.²⁰ This view is shared by a respondent from the media sector, who believes that the "real" diplomacy at the state level requires live interaction, but that it is also fair to expect a transfer of the large number of meetings to the online space in the future.²¹

When arranging events in which high-ranking officials participate, the diplomatic protocol represents a significant part of the organizational process, and the transition to the online sphere led to the transfer of the traditional protocol to the digital framework – best seen through various online conferences, seminars, summits, and workshops. For instance, both respondents from state institutions have similar views when it comes to advantages of the "digital" protocol, and therefore highlight cost-efficiency, time-saving, convenience, openness to the public, and easier arrangement of the schedule for leaders to attend the online events.²²

¹⁶ Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 10 September 2021.

¹⁷ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

¹⁸ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

¹⁹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 12 August 2021.

²⁰ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 1 September 2021.

²¹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

²² Online interview #1 with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021; and online interview #2 with male representative, Sarajevo, 12 August 2021.

In addition, interviewees from civil society organizations and the media believe that less money is spent on transfers, hotel accommodation and publications, which significantly reduces the budget and facilitates the organization.²³ In addition, another interviewee from a civil society organization cites an example from his own practice, stating that the possibility of having overseas participants and high-level speakers increases in the online setting, whereas in other circumstances it would be almost impossible.²⁴ A similar example is given by a respondent from a civil society organization who believes that not only the participation of guests from abroad is facilitated, but also of members of management boards who are abroad, and whose presence is required at the event.²⁵ On the other hand, the complete digitalization of all forms of interaction has its drawbacks, and several principal ones pointed out by interviewees from state institutions and the media include the issue of safety or vulnerability to cyberattacks, poor Internet connection, and the sense of distance.²⁶ Also, respondents from civil society organizations agree that the chat room cannot replace human interaction and "coffee break", which is an instrument of socialization at all events – adding that China-related online conferences organized during COVID-19 were overly structured and formal, without the opportunity to meet Chinese and regional partners in person.²⁷

3.3 Alternative facts and disinformation

The media space has been contaminated with disinformation for a long time, and during the pandemic, this issue came to the surface due to the context and characteristics of the pandemic. COVID-19 also gave rise to a significant amount of hate speech and misinformation through social media and showed the full depth of the problems that the entire civilization faces, which ultimately posed a challenge to both the diplomatic practice and daily work of the respondents involved in this study. One of the respondents working in an institution whose main activity is the promotion of China states that at the very beginning of the pandemic, it was impossible to work due to the great fear of the public and open hate speech.²⁸ Therefore, China was under immense public pressure, and one of the respondents from the media points out that

²³ Online interview #1 with male representative, Sarajevo, 1 September 2021; and online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

²⁴ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

²⁵ Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 10 September 2021.

²⁶ Online interview #1 with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021; online interview #2 with male representative, Sarajevo, 12 August 2021; and online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

²⁷ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 1 September 2021; and online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

²⁸ Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

his outlet attempted to place information from official sources through its channels, in order to refute the rumors that were present at that time.²⁹ Also, two respondents from state institutions note that there has been a great politicization of the story about the virus, which, looking at the wider picture, has only hindered global attempts to bring the pandemic under control.³⁰ In such an environment, Chinese actors attempted to utilize the online sphere and digital tools in order to offer the public their own perspective, and highlight the story of humanitarian work, aid distribution, and vaccine donation. According to respondent from academia, this approach is often criticized and labeled as an attempt of China to expand the global outreach, as well as push to gain influence on social networks that are not even available in the Chinese mainland.³¹ However, looking at the countries of the Western Balkans, and particularly Serbia, it is noticeable that China does not need to shape the narrative in its favor, since most pro-Chinese narratives come from domestic political elite, and not China *per se*. On the other hand, looking at the broader picture of the impact of disinformation on diplomatic practice, one of the respondents from the civil sector raises a point that disinformation is currently used as an adequate diplomatic tool, which serves to present information from a single point of view and violate the legitimacy of the other party – regardless of who the other party is.³² Therefore, there is a significant danger when it comes to rapid and irrational reactions of state and non-state actors in the online sphere, as well as non-compliance with basic state procedures, which can ultimately produce significant consequences for diplomatic networks.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to observe the concepts of time, space, and protocol, as well as to record interactions, examples of good practice and the role of disinformation, in the time of imposed digitalization of diplomatic practice during COVID-19. Moreover, this research looks at the changes that have taken place in the context of relations between China and the Western Balkans and draws on data obtained through a series of interviews with state officials, civil society representatives, academicians, political analysts, and media representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia. Through analysis of cooperation, interactions, and instances of good practice, it is possible to single out several assumptions that emerge from this

²⁹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

³⁰ Online interview #1 with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021; and online interview #2 with male representative, Sarajevo, 12 August 2021.

³¹ Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

³² Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

study. First, institutions that previously underwent digitalization of practices did not encounter problems with a thorough transition to the online sphere – whereas some of them even benefited, taking over work from partners who were unable to continue. Second, the implementation of cultural exchanges has proven to be impossible in the online sphere, primarily because of the concept of human-to-human interaction and its relevance in Chinese society. Third, interest in activities such as conferences, seminars and roundtables has declined due to a lack of opportunities to make acquaintances, and frequent changes in positions within partner institutions during COVID-19 affected the ability of building trust between staff. Fourth, Serbia is a country whose interaction with China reached a record high level during the pandemic due to the large number of joint actions in the field of health care and vaccination. Fifth, the noticeable digitalization of China's diplomatic missions in the region, which leads to easier communication with the citizens of the Western Balkans is singled out as an example of positive practice during COVID-19. On the other hand, the concepts of time, space and protocol were also analyzed through everyday practices during COVID-19, and the following conclusions were drawn. First, although the digitalization of practice reduces the time frame for carrying out activities, the prevailing view is that the acceleration of the process does not necessarily equal quality. Second, the issue of the spatial placement of diplomacy in the online sphere has shown several advantages, such as the ability to gather prominent officials and experts without worrying about distance, which could lead to an increase in hybrid events in the future. Third, the emergence of digitalized protocol has yielded several instances of both good and bad organizational characteristics, including easier arrangements for leaders' participation, more possibilities for high-level speakers, cost-efficiency, time-saving, convenience, and openness to public – but on the other hand also the inability to interact during the "coffee break", vulnerability to cyberattacks, poor internet connection and a sense of distance. Lastly, during COVID-19, global society also faced the issue of disinformation and fake news, which led to the use of diplomacy as a tool to present information from a single point of view, while at the same time excluding all others. Therefore, the research also showed increased desire of actors from China to engage in the online space, where they can offer personal perspectives to the public and highlight humanitarian work during COVID-19.

Appendix

The questionnaire

1. Did COVID-19 influence the general cooperation, and exchange of knowledge and skills between China and the country of your residence?
2. By moving to the online sphere of activity, did the interaction between you and other institutions decrease or increase? What are the reasons for that?
3. Which actors within your circle of activities were the most active? Who had the best/smoothest transition to the online sphere? Do you have a positive example?
4. Are there any practices that proved to be better when conducted online, in contrast to the time when they were conducted within the realm of traditional diplomacy? Can digital diplomacy be an alternative in some segments?
5. Are there any practices within digital diplomacy that you believe will persist even after the restrictions caused by COVID-19?
6. How do you see live and online interaction? Has the quality of the relationship between the actors deteriorated with the transition to the online sphere, or have these relationships been strengthened? Are there any challenges that were difficult to overcome?
7. How important is the concept of time in your daily work? How do you view the time frame for implementing the activities? Do you think that digital diplomacy contributes to efficiency or increases the time frame?
8. Have you encountered problems with misinformation and fake news in your practice during COVID-19? What impact do alternative facts have on contemporary diplomatic practice?

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Interviews

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Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

Representatives of civil society organizations:

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 1 September 2021.

Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 15 September 2021.

Online interview with female representative, Sarajevo, 10 September 2021.

Representatives of the media:

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 2 September 2021.

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.

Representatives of the academia:

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 30 August 2021.

Online interview with male representative, Sarajevo, 21 September 2021.