Placement Report
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in New Zealand
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Introduction

From July 2018 to December 2018 I have worked as an intern in the political affairs section of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Wellington, New Zealand. Fulfilling my internship at one of the 140 embassies of the Netherlands worldwide has been my preferred placement since I started the MA program. The main reason for this was my fascination with the work of diplomats. During the BA and MA program, many opportunities were given to hear about first hand experiences from (former) diplomats, which greatly enhanced my interest in the field. Secondly, what sparked my interest most about these stories, is the fact that the subjects and tasks at an embassy are extremely diverse. As I have a very broad interest in general and I am very curious to learn about new topics, this prospect was very appealing to me. Thirdly, after my positive experience abroad as an exchange student in Indonesia, I was very eager to live abroad again and learn more about a new country and its politics. I felt that my earlier semester abroad had been a very enriching experience and I was certain an internship abroad would be equally enriching.

I have chosen for the Embassy in New Zealand in particular for two main reasons. Firstly, as I am following the East Asian Studies track within the MA program, I was to keen to continue to deepen my understanding of the Asia-Pacific region. During my studies I have written a very large amount of my papers about China, aiming to understand its role and ambitions in the region. This helped me understand that China’s presence in the region in increasingly perceived as a threat, both by non-regional powers as well as countries in the region who more often find themselves dependent on China due to enormous debts to the country. The internship at the Embassy in New Zealand provided me with an opportunity to learn about these developments from the perspective of one of the Western allies in the region. As New Zealand finds itself in the middle of this newly contested geostrategic space, its foreign policy is greatly pointed towards managing the difficulties (and sometimes opportunities) that arise from it. It is this perspective of Western efforts against threats and instability in the Asia-Pacific that convinced me that this internship could add to my knowledge gathered during my MA courses.

The second reason for me to opt for the Embassy in New Zealand in particular is more career oriented. As I wanted to get an idea whether the diplomatic work would be something that suits me, I thought it would be best to work at an Embassy that is representative of most embassies. The fact is that only a handful of embassies are priority posts for the Ministry in the Hague. Therefore, a small, non-priority post like New Zealand could give me an accurate view of the daily work at an embassy. In addition, the benefit of working in such a small team is that interns are given bigger tasks and more responsibility because labour is limited.

Preparation

The preparation towards my placement was fairly straightforward. The vacancy arose and after sending my CV and motivation letter I was invited for a Skype interview with the Deputy Head of Mission and an Economic and Public Diplomacy Officer. This required a little sleeping break before the interview as due to the time difference it took place at midnight. In my preparation for the interview I focused on finding examples to illustrate my competences. Furthermore, I wrote a pitch which clarified who I am, what I would like to get out of the internship and what I could offer the Embassy. Also, I read articles and documents about the topics I thought the embassy would be working on.
In the preparation for the internship itself, I read the foreign policy strategy published by the in 2017 elected Ardern government. This document helped me to understand which topics are a priority for the government and which ones I could be expected to work on. Furthermore, I approached the previous political affairs intern to ask him what would be the best preparation. He sent me a document outlining a political and governmental introduction to New Zealand. This helped me understand how the political system in New Zealand works and which issues are currently debated. Furthermore, within the framework of the placement plan, I started thinking about the goals I wanted to achieve during my internship. These were a mixture of professional skills as well as an addition to my academic knowledge.

In practical terms, I focused a lot of my preparation on financing my internship, as New Zealand is known to be an expensive country. I wrote applications letters to a few grants and eventually was awarded the Holland Scholarship, which helped me pay for a part of my flight tickets. Furthermore, the preparation required a lot of administrative work such as applying for a Verklaring Omtrent Gedrag (VOG). Therefore, I started immediately after receiving the offer with applying for these kinds of forms. Fortunately, finding housing did not require so much time as I was able to take over the room of the previous intern. All in all, the administrative preparation took most of my time. Nevertheless, I felt adequately prepared for the content related part of my internship as I was in good contact with the previous intern who regularly updated me about topics he was working on.

**Expectations**

My expectations about the internship were various. Firstly, although (or perhaps because) I was very excited about the prospect of this internship, I took into account I could very well be disappointed by the placement. Within IRIO there is a lot of ‘hype’ around the diplomatic career and I would not have been surprised if the reality of the work would actually be less interesting than I had imagined. This idea had been strengthened by many friends and study peers who pursued an internship at an embassy and came back slightly disappointed as they found that sometimes ‘there was just not so much to do’. Therefore, I expected the workload to come in waves of busier and quieter times.

Secondly, I expected to be away from the office relatively often as I had the impression there were many opportunities to join staff to official meetings with government officials. This is an outlook that looked particularly attractive to me as it not only makes the work more diverse but also enables me to get a better understanding of the issues at play within New Zealand by directly talking to people who are working on them. Furthermore, I expected to be able to attend various events either organised by the Embassy itself or for which the Embassy staff is invited. This seemed interesting to me as it would give me the opportunity to gain a wider insight into the diplomatic community and perhaps also spot the differences between how the Netherlands and other countries present themselves within the community.

Thirdly, I expected that next to my political tasks I would also be engaged in a lot of hands on and public diplomacy related tasks. This includes helping with the setting up of events but also maintaining the social media accounts. During the interview I was asked about my willingness to take on such tasks, so I expected these to arise regularly during my internship period.

Fourthly, I expected to work closely with the other intern, Susanne, who was appointed as the Economic Affairs intern. From the previous interns I had heard that they experienced a lot of overlap in the activities and tasks there were doing. Occasionally they would also organize events together. Thus, I expected to be engaged in some economic work as well. As I have a second Master’s degree in Economic Policy I felt confident I had enough knowledge and skills to also take up these kinds of tasks.
Fifthly, I expected a lot of my political tasks to be on the topic of or related to China’s growing influence in the region. As I have specialized on this issue during my study program and the issue is of obvious importance to New Zealand, I expected this to be a primary subject within the political work of the Embassy. As mentioned in the introduction, this is something that is of particular interest to me as I really wanted to add to my existing knowledge with this new perspective from a Western ally in the Asia Pacific.

Lastly, and more related the general concept of an internship abroad, I expected to feel very homesick in the starting up phase of my internship. This was the case during my exchange semester in Indonesia, so I expected this experience in New Zealand would be no different in that respect. In my experience it takes time to adapt to a completely new environment and this effect is amplified in a non-European context. I took into account that this uneasiness could possibly affect my performance in the beginning of the placement.

**Chosen Institution**

The Embassy of the Netherlands in New Zealand is part of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy serves the interests of the Netherlands in New Zealand. These interests vary from generating economic value in for the Netherlands in NZ (by e.g. assisting Dutch entrepreneurs who want to enter the NZ market or sell Dutch expertise) to giving consular protection and assistance to the very large Dutch community living in New Zealand. On the political level, the Netherlands has an interest in strengthening cooperation with this likeminded partner on topics such as the rules based world order and the protection of free trade. As small countries’ voices can easily get lost into the global realm it is important for the Netherlands to ‘team up’ with likeminded countries to generate more support for its ideas and values in institutions such as the United Nations. The Embassy in New Zealand has the task to strengthen the bilateral relationship with New Zealand for this purpose.

Furthermore, there are a few topics that the Ministry identifies as a priority for the Netherlands to promote in New Zealand. Firstly, our expertise on water management is perhaps the most important one. New Zealand and particularly the small Pacific Islands states are very prone to the effects of climate change (e.g. floodings, tropical cyclones and poor water quality). The embassy thus promotes our expertise in water management to assist with these issues. Secondly, (sustainable) agricultural food production is an important sector in both countries. Thus, the embassy aims to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from this shared interest.

**Tasks**

My tasks can be divided into three categories: political, organizational and social media related.

*Political tasks*

This was the bulk of my tasks. The most important duties in this category consisted of writing political reports for the Ministry in The Hague together with Mira, the Ambassador of the Netherlands to New Zealand. I have written three such reports; one about the growing influence of China in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, one about one year of the Ardern government and one about human rights in New Zealand. The latter encompassed suggestions for the Dutch delegation to the UN in New York, as to what recommendations it should make during New Zealand’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is a session during which countries peer review each other’s human rights situations and make recommendations for
improvement. I have started writing a report on New Zealand’s multicultural and bicultural policy but this will have to be completed by my successor. In order to write these reports, the Ambassador gave me the responsibility to find out which persons were relevant to talk to in order to gather information. Usually these were people of government and scholars from Victoria and Massey University. I would accompany the Ambassador to these meetings and together we would interview these experts to gather information for the report. I would then make a draft of the report, which served as a starting point for her to write the final report.

Other political tasks included the writing of background documents and speeches. The Ambassador would often attend meetings in other cities to discuss a wide range of topics, for example Antarctic policy or human rights in the wider Asian region. It was my task to draft background dossiers with important developments concerning the topic as well as the key points of the policies of the Netherlands and New Zealand towards the issue. This allowed me to learn more about topics I had no prior knowledge about.

Furthermore, the embassy organises various events each year. These events are usually opened with a speech given by the Ambassador. It was my task to draft the speeches for these events. These included the yearly tulip festival, the film festival, the visit of a Dutch professor and the embassy’s human rights event.

Lastly, as the Ambassador only started her posting in New Zealand in July 2018, she had the duty to go to Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati and Tuvalu to present her credentials as the Embassy is also accredited in these countries. It was my task to write background dossiers that give an overall summary of the political and economic situation in these countries and give an update about developments in the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the relevant island state in recent years. Usually I would also provide input for the Ambassador’s speech that was to be given during the presentation of her credentials.

Organizational tasks

During my internship I have assisted in the organization of three events; the yearly film festival, the visit of Louise Fresco (Chair of Wageningen University) and the yearly human rights event.

The film festival was perhaps the most labour intensive event as the Embassy was responsible for all of the organization. At the start of the process I was responsible for getting the copyrights from the film producers in the Netherlands as well as getting the films classified in New Zealand. The films were shown in three locations: Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch. I was responsible for the screenings in Auckland, meaning I had to liaise with the theatre in Auckland about catering, technicalities, ticket sales and promotion. As we organized panel discussions after the screenings, I was also responsible for defining the topic and reaching out to panel speakers in Auckland. I was able to physically go to Auckland during the opening night and coordinate the evening together with the Honorary Consul.

The second event was the most interesting one in my opinion and concerned the week long visit of Louise Fresco, Chair of Wageningen University, to New Zealand. The theme of her visit was sustainable agricultural food production. During this week, the Embassy organized a public talk in Parliament, a dinner with experts at the Ambassador’s residence and an alumni reception for WUR alumni at the residence. I was in charge of composing the entire briefing package for Ms. Fresco (including the activities that were organized by other parties). The briefing package consisted of Ms. Fresco’s hourly schedule, background documents on New Zealand’s agricultural sector, biographies of persons she was going to meet as well as other logistical information. In addition, I was responsible for the content related preparation of the dinner at the residence. The dinner brought Ms. Fresco in contact with various New Zealand experts on food innovation and agriculture. I came up with four main themes that should be
discussed during the evening, gathered background information on them for the Ambassador and listed questions she could ask the invitees in order to connect them with each other.

Lastly, the Embassy organized, in cooperation with a local LGBT NGO, a human rights event at the end of the year. I was the contact person from the Embassy liaising with the local NGO in the organization of the event. We decided to screen a documentary about gay rights of Syrians followed by a panel discussion. Together with this NGO I looked for an appropriate venue and managed the promotion. In addition I briefed the Ambassador about LGBT rights in New Zealand, the policy of the Netherlands towards it and made a draft for the speech she gave during the event.

**Social media related tasks**

Together with Susanne, my co-intern, I was responsible for managing the Embassy’s Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. Each Monday, we would sit together to plan the posts for that week. We would draft posts relating to the Embassy’s priorities or to report about important events the Ambassador attended. At the end of the internship we were also asked to think about and provide input to the Embassy’s public diplomacy strategy in general and how we could improve the use of the social media channels.

My attitude during the internship can be described as hands on. I was very eager to learn about all of the aspects of an embassy. Therefore, I was also willing to take on smaller, ad-hoc tasks just to see how the embassy is involved in it. Furthermore, as I like to have some pressure to work more productively I was not reluctant to ask for more work even if I already had enough to do. This enabled me to gain a very wide insight into the Embassy’s activities and the topics it is working on.

The supervision I received met my needs. In general I like to work independently, therefore elaborate feedback sessions only took place at my own request. On the other hand, for larger reports or article either my supervisor (Xiaoling) or the Ambassador would sit with me to go through the draft I had made. If time was constrained this would happen digitally using track changes in word to provide feedback on my work. Most importantly, it was made very clear to me that if I had any questions or doubts I could always walk into the Ambassador’s or the Deputy’s office. I regularly did this in order to get a clearer idea of what was expected of me.

Something that occasionally lead to confusion was that sometimes I received feedback from the Ambassador and the Deputy that stood in contrast with each other. For example, for my report about a year of the Ardern government, the Ambassador wanted me to shorten the report and emphasize the government’s foreign policy. The Deputy on the other hand, wanted me to make the report longer and focus more on domestic policies. After this happened a few times I raised the issues with both of my colleagues and they made efforts to streamline their feedback more.

**Living conditions**

My housing was very comfortable. I lived together with my landlord (a Dutch man) in Brooklyn, a suburb just outside the CBD. The first few months Susanne also lived in this house, which was challenging at times as we also shared an office together and made many weekend trips together. Although there was a bus going to the CBD I made use of the opportunity to get my daily exercise to walk to and back from the Embassy, which was 40 minutes each way. This time helped me to reflect on the day and leave my work at the Embassy. The cost of living greatly depends on the season. In winter it was impossible to find affordable fruit and vegetables. To illustrate, at some point a cucumber sold for $18. I was very lucky that my landlord had a vegetable garden and provided me with the food coming
from this garden or it would have been very difficult to sustain healthy eating habits. Eating outside on the other hand is relatively cheap as you can find places where you can eat for the same price as a home cooked meal. As summer approached, fresh food became more affordable.

**Tips**

Although the bulk of my work consisted of tasks with political or economic content, there were also a variety of smaller ad-hoc tasks such as helping out with setting up the logistics for the Embassy’s events. People seeking a placement with the Embassy should expect to be tasked with such duties in order not to be disappointed. The academic environment is certainly different from many workplaces where attention also has to be given to daily issues and practical tasks.

Furthermore, when seeking a placement with an embassy, students should consider what is most important to them when selecting which embassy to apply for. On the one hand, there are large embassies, which are priority posts for the Ministry in the Hague. These include for example the embassies Washington, Moscow and Jakarta. On these posts interns often get the opportunity to work on fairly ‘big’ topics often featured in the news. Since there are a lot of personnel they can go more into depth in specific topics. However, this also means they will have less responsibility as there are more people higher in the hierarchy to take up the tasks with more responsibility. The second category of embassy is the smaller posts working with small teams. The Embassy in New Zealand is a good example. Although topics might be less crucial in global politics, the tasks and responsibility given to interns is much bigger since there is less personnel. This also means an intern will be working on a larger variety of topics instead of going much into depth on a smaller set of topics. Both have their advantages but it is useful to think in advance about what kind of experience you would prefer.

In addition, as a university student performance is mostly dependent upon and tested against content-related production. However, I found during my placement that my social skills and performance counted equally much. All of the tasks are performed in cooperation with others and decisions of what direction should be taken in certain projects are taken together. This means that as an intern you should expect to not only pay attention to the way you behave and communicate to others but also that this might be a big part of what you have actually learnt after the internship (instead of solely new knowledge about politics or economics). My colleagues at the Embassy noted that many interns do not fully realise this when they start their internship.

Lastly, the people working at the Embassy in New Zealand are very approachable and open-minded and as an intern there are many opportunities to take advantage of this. For example, own initiatives or requests to attend meetings are usually responded to positively. I found it at times difficult to ask if I could join high level meetings because I thought that if I would be entitled to join somebody would have already asked me to do so. However, I later realized that that often my colleagues would be so busy that they simply did not think of asking me. Thus, I can recommend future interns to be very pro-active and to not be shy in asking for more. Such an attitude can really enhance the internship experience.

**Learning process**

The activities and tasks undertaken have been described in a fair amount of detail in earlier sections. Therefore, in this section I will entirely focus on my learning process during these activities.
Broadly speaking, I feel my learning progress can be categorized into nine focus areas. I will discuss each of them below, illustrated by examples.

**Prioritizing and multitasking**

This is the area where I feel I made the most progress during my internship. When I just started I was sometimes confused in what order I should do tasks and which ones to give priority. In addition, I was not used to having so many different tasks at the same time. Thus, in the beginning I felt quite lost in handling this. I started with a strategy of ‘first come first serve’, which to put it bluntly, failed miserably quite soon. My strategy entailed that some very small and easy to do tasks, like calling the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ask their position on the Global Migration Pact, would be severely delayed as they came last. I would be asked for the result quite soon after the request and not have it. Thus, I changed my strategy to doing smaller and easy tasks right away, which greatly improved my productivity and performance.

Furthermore, I realized that because these smaller tasks come quite often, they could easily get in the way of finishing bigger tasks like the political reports I had to write. Thus, as the internship progressed I started planning my days more and giving myself deadlines for the smaller tasks so I could spend the rest of the day on the more time consuming reports. For example, I would give myself until the lunch break to finish all ad hoc tasks like phone calls, emails and social media posts so I would have that afternoon to focus on the report. Of course ad hoc tasks could still come in during the day but the amount would be much more manageable. I think this way of working was very productive as later in my internship my colleagues would rather be surprised of how fast I had finished the tasks instead of asking me when they could expect the result.

In terms of prioritizing, I found the shortest way to find out is simply to ask where my priorities should lie. Nevertheless, this sometimes remained a difficulty because I had the impression my colleagues did not always agree among each other where the Embassy’s priorities should lie. The strongest example of this was the organization of the film festival. Linda, the economic and public diplomacy officer was made in charge of this project and was of the opinion that the interns should have a daily meeting with her about the organization of the festival. During this time (around 2 months) I and Susanne were working on this project almost full time. During that time I would also receive reports to draft for the Ambassador. Thus, I wanted to sacrifice some of my time dedicated to the film festival (for example the daily meetings) to also work on the reports. During a meeting with Linda herself, the Ambassador and the Deputy it became clear that my colleagues had different ideas about how big this festival should be and how much capacity it should take up. From this I learned that when I encounter such issues I should bring all the relevant people in the same room so they can agree on a course of action before they delegate to the interns.

Another slightly different example was the writing of political reports. I found that in general when writing speeches or press releases the most time consuming part was waiting for and incorporating the different input from other colleagues. Nevertheless, there is a clear task division within the Embassy: the Deputy is end responsible for all economic affairs and the Ambassador is end responsible for all political affairs. In the beginning, I made the mistake to also pass my draft of political reports to the Deputy as I thought she was very knowledgeable about the topic, which resulted in feedback that was contradictory to the feedback given by Ambassador and drained the process. Thus, I learned to always direct my work and questions to the person end responsible for the project as to avoid slow processes.

**Writing for a specific audience**

This is an area which I greatly enjoyed spending time on. I have written a great variety of pieces including speeches, press releases, background documents, threat assessments, and
political reports and speaking points. This helped me to be more flexible in my writing style and being able to make a quick switch to different language and structure. In particular the writing of speaking points was very interesting task. I had to do this in the context of political consultations that took place in the Hague between a Dutch and New Zealand government representative. In this writing I learnt to make sentences of maximum one line that still encapsulate a strong message. Also, I learnt to be very careful about my choice of words in order to prevent misinterpretation or overstatement.

In writing the political reports I learnt a lot from the Ambassador who gave me an insight into the thought process of the people working in the Hague. She taught me how to put the key messages in the beginning of the report and how to make them eye catching and thought provoking. Particularly in the report about China’s influence, she gave me an insight into specific themes or events that always serve as a trigger for the Ministry and should therefore be incorporated in the beginning of the report. The most important thing I learned from both the writing of speaking points and political reports, is creating a feeling for what the Netherlands’ interest is in the issue. This greatly helped me to select what information is relevant.

Something new I really enjoyed was the writing of speeches. Since I had no previous experience in this, I was very insecure about my work at first. However, I might have found a hidden talent in it as the Ambassador was so impressed by my first speech she questioned whether I had written it myself and not taken it off the Internet. Of course my later speeches were not always as flawless as that first strike of what was perhaps beginner’s luck. Nevertheless I found it relatively easy to write text that moves, inspires or motivates people. As I really enjoyed doing this, it is something I would like to continue to do in a next job or internship.

Communication

In this area I have not so much improved myself but rather have felt confirmation for my communication style. Our team consisted of very different personalities as well as one person of American nationality. I quickly felt what kind of language and attitude resonates well with them and applied this accordingly. For example, I could make much more progress and receive help from my American colleague if I regularly engaged in small talk and ‘packaged’ my message a bit more. I chose my language very carefully if I had a critical comment or question. I made sure she always had the feeling I was listening to her point of view. On the other hand, with the Ambassador, who was often very time constrained, I would be better off coming straight to the point. She also expected me to have critical thoughts and highly valued this input so I adapted my attitude and language to this. I noticed that this resulted in a very good and comfortable working relationship with everyone in the office. These social skills were therefore also one of the biggest positive feedbacks I received from my colleagues after the internship.

Delegation

Towards the end of the internship I was made responsible for co-hosting an international human rights event together with a local NGO. This process started off quite rocky as this NGO had no previous experience with co-hosting such events. Therefore, I was quite concerned and had the tendency to micro manage and make sure every detail was adequately taken care of. My worries increased when two weeks before the event only 19 tickets had been sold. However, I realized that the more I was micro managing, the more this NGO was relying upon me, completely trespassing the advantage of outsourcing an event to a third party. Thus, I tried to give the organisation an enhanced feeling of responsibility. First, I invited the contact person over at the Embassy to set expectations of each other’s role in the organization more clearly. Secondly, I asked this contact person to be the master of ceremony of the event during the night itself. This immediately helped to divide the responsibility and...
commitment of the both of us more equally. Within a week we had sold 80 tickets more. Thus I learned that if you want increased effort from someone you should increase his or her sense of responsibility and ownership over the project.

Attention to details

This is one of my strongest flaws and something I definitely wanted to improve during this internship. I feel I have improved myself in this respect but that there is still work to do. I can make a distinction between organizational details and details in writing. I have overcome my issues in the first category but still have to improve in the second.

As to the first category I started off being quite inattentive to details. This became clear during the film festival in Auckland, where I had prepared everything and was ready to welcome the panel speakers and go through the programme with them. I then realized I had no idea what they were looking like. I solved this by quickly googling them but realized I should pay more attention to such details. Thus, when I had to write biographies of invitees to the Ambassador’s residence, I made sure to include pictures for her. As the Embassy organized lots of activities I had many opportunities to improve myself in this respect and this really paid off in the end. Making runsheets for the events forced me to go through every little step in my head. As I had also pointed this out as a learning goal to my supervisor, she made me responsible for the logistical package during the visit of Louise Fresco. This is a task I took up vigorously. Thinking of all the logistical steps of the entire week and communicating these to all people involved really helped me to get the details into my system. During the weeklong visit I encountered no issues I had overlooked.

Nevertheless, even towards the end of the internship I would occasionally still stumble upon mistakes I had made in writing, such as mentioning the wrong political party or a wrong name. I realized I have to be more disciplined in proofreading my own work after I finish it. I would sometimes not have the patience to read it over again. Also, I was less confronted with these mistakes, as usually two or more people would proof read my work again before it would be sent to the recipient in The Hague. Thus, this slowed my process of improvement. I aim to set this as a priority during my next internship.

Responsibility and commitment

I received the feedback that I was very committed towards my tasks in the sense that I not only geared my full effort towards them but also that I really enjoyed doing them. However, the Ambassador warned me for the flip side of this strong commitment. In the final evaluation she noted that in the long run such an attitude could trigger over exhaustion. This is advice I take gratefully at heart. I noticed during the internship that, as it became clear to me that I aspire to work in this environment, I felt a certain pressure to give my maximum effort and prove all that I had to offer. A good example is the human rights event I organized towards the end of the internship. When ticket sales were initially disappointing, I felt great pressure to give my maximum effort and prove all that I had to offer. A good example is the human rights event I organized towards the end of the internship. When ticket sales were initially disappointing, I felt great responsibility and the issue continued to play in mind even at night. In addition, I work best under pressure and therefore was never reluctant to ask for more work. I realize this combination makes me very vulnerable for over exhaustion and that sometimes I should take things at a slower pace to prevent unhealthy stress. Thus, there lies a challenge for me in the future to continuously protect a healthy balance between commitment, relaxation and putting things into perspective.

Familiarizing with new topics

One of the most exciting things I have learnt during my internship is the familiarization with a wide range of topics I had no prior knowledge about. The Embassy provided me with an environment in which my curiosity was constantly sparked for unfamiliar terrain. Examples include Antarctic policy, technological start-ups and sustainable agriculture. In particular on
the latter topic I have greatly enhanced my knowledge during the preparations surrounding the visit of Louise Fresco. When preparing Ms. Fresco’s dinner at the residence, I got the opportunity to delve deeper into the areas of water, meat & dairy, knowledge sharing, land use and their relation to climate change. Previously I had not much knowledge about these topics but the more research I did, the more I became interested in them. In addition, switching often between these topics taught me how to see the connections between them and what their role is in the bigger global realm. I think in this way the diversity of topics deepened my understanding of the dynamics at play in global politics. The feedback I received from the Ambassador entailed that she found me very adept in familiarizing quickly with new these topics and easily distinguishing between the main and side issues of the subject matter.

**Expectations**

In this section I will discuss the expectations as mentioned in the third section of this report.

*Possible disappointment*

Fortunately, the working environment did not disappoint me at all. In fact, my experience was more positive than I initially expected. Precisely because I had heard many experiences of study peers beforehand, I knew very well what kind of tasks I could expect and this led to no disappointment. Furthermore, the tendency of workload coming in waves was true to some extent, but I never experienced not having enough work to do. I assume this also has to do with my own pro-activeness in regularly asking for more work.

*Many external activities*

I expected to be away from the office relatively much but this happened less often than I had hoped for. I did get the opportunity to attend all of the interviews related to the political reports I was writing in cooperation with the Ambassador. However, attendance of meetings or events that were not directly linked to tasks I was working for was limited. I have to admit that I later realized I could have done more to increase this. Often it was just a matter of boldness and asking to join colleagues to meetings. However, I sometimes felt a bit intimidated and hesitant to make such a bold move. This doesn’t mean that I never asked, but when I was in doubt I would usually opt for the safer the option and not ask. I do think that my colleagues would have been receptive to these kinds of requests and would never have taken them negatively. I that respect I could have taken a bolder stance.

Nevertheless, I did get the opportunity to attend for example various meetings at the EU Delegation, the 75th Anniversary of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a gathering with local NGOs about human rights and a summit about sustainable agriculture.

*Engagement in hands on tasks*

As I expected, I was also regularly given hands on tasks. These ranged from setting up banners and tables for the film festival to writing nametags or hanging up posters in town. Although not the most exciting tasks, I often found it refreshing to give my brain a little break from the tougher tasks I was doing before. I never felt as if all the small practical tasks would always end up on my plate as for many of them they would be outsourced or taken up by the general affairs officer.

*Cooperation with the other intern*

I expected to work very closely with Susanne, the other intern. However, this was rarely the case. We had a very strict division between political and economic tasks and for these
projects we would report to different people. One of the reasons for this is that Susanne indicated to our supervisor that she would find it difficult when tasks were not strictly allocated to one of us as she would then have to divide the work herself in consultation with me. As I had no outspoken preference for a fluid or a strict division of tasks we decided that our colleagues would always allocate the work to one of us.

Nevertheless, there were some projects where we still had to work together (in addition to sharing an office). The most important one was the film festival. Although we were each responsible for the organization of the festival in another city, we were responsible together for the promotion of the festival as a whole. During this cooperation, we didn’t come across any issues and in my opinion the teamwork went very smoothly. The other project we had to cooperate on, was maintaining the Embassy’s social media. Also this went very smoothly as each Monday we planned half an hour to jointly discuss which topics or events we wanted to feature on the Embassy’s social media and then divided who would write which post.

Although I am very happy with how the work was divided, in retrospect I think it could have been even more challenging if I would have had to cooperate more closely with Susanne. I did cooperate a lot with other colleagues but they were all in higher positions than me. I think cooperating with someone on the same level gives a different dynamic to teamwork, which can be a very useful learning process. This is something I will thus be looking for in my next working experience.

*Importance of China related work*

As mentioned earlier, I expected most of my political tasks to be on the subject of China’s growing influence in the region. This was (fortunately) not the case. In total only two of my reports concerned China’s role in Asian-Pacific politics. In retrospect I am very happy that this was the case. As I was working on these topics I realized that my MA degree had provided me with a very solid background on China in global politics and thus that there were relatively few things that were new to me. Instead, I really enjoyed building up new knowledge in other fields of IR. For example, I was given the task to write a report about human rights in New Zealand. This provided me with the opportunity to learn more about the difference between social and political rights and what the mechanisms within the international community are to improve situations in which human rights are not protected. In fact, I became so enthusiastic about the topic that I would like to continue to work on it in my future career.

*Homesickness*

Fortunately, I have never felt homesick during my stay in New Zealand. I think the environment of the Embassy, with a small team of Dutch people, helped to a great extent to quickly make me feel at home. Also, there were many differences with my experience in Indonesia. For one, New Zealand is a developed country in which the same standards of hygiene are applied. Secondly, New Zealand is a Western country meaning that there is a lot of similarity in the way social behaviour and norms are conducted with how these are conducted in the Netherlands. Thirdly, the spoken language in New Zealand is English, which meant I was able to understand everything around me and communicate easily with local people. These three things and the absence of a cultural shock made it very easy for me to feel at ease in New Zealand.

*Connection with degree*

Writing the political reports about China, I could see a strong connection with the East Asian Studies track of the IR program. The understanding of China’s ambitions I had learnt about
during my MA was very useful in writing the reports. Also, it helped me to place certain events into a context. For example, for political reports I wrote about many projects and loans China is undertaking in various Pacific Islands. Thanks to my MA I could place them in the wider context of China’s One Belt One Road project and identify possible intentions for such projects.

In addition, the writing of policy papers during my MA was very useful in the writing of the reports. It helped me to think in terms of how the Netherlands should react to these developments from China’s side and how this reaction translates into possible courses of action. Also when I was writing background information for the political consultations taking place in The Hague, my experience with policy papers helped me write concisely and make a selection of the relevant information.

In a broader sense, I can see a similarity in the wide range of topics treated. My MA courses focused on the political, economic and social aspects of Asia. At the Embassy my tasks also concerned such a wide variety of topics. I looked at social inequality of Maori and European settlers for example, but also at New Zealand’s political system. I reckon that this multidisciplinary approach during my studies helped me to also see the connections between topics during my work at the Embassy. Issues of social inequality may for example very well explain the composition of the coalition government. The multidisciplinary character of the MA degree provided me with a solid understanding of the basics of each of these fields and made it easier for me to familiarize myself with these topics in the New Zealand context.

Lastly, my MA (and BA) in IR taught me how reality is strongly subjective and that the quality of an idea depends on strong argumentation. I found this skill to be particularly relevant in the diplomatic world. A good example is when I joined the Ambassador to EU meetings where representatives of the EU countries would have to draft a common text. I saw how for example New Zealand’s constitutional system triggered different interpretations among member state representatives about New Zealand’s ability to protect human rights. In the end the quality of argumentation in the discussion determined the support for a certain idea and determined whether it would be included in the common statement or not. In this sense, I saw a lot of overlap between the academic side of IR and the diplomatic work.

**Career prospects**

My internship strongly motivated me to apply for a diplomatic career. The reasons for this are the following. Firstly, as can be expected from my choice of studies, I very much enjoy working on topics with a strong international component. Secondly, I enjoy working on a variety of topics as this keeps me sharp and motivated and feeds my curiosity for the unknown. Thirdly, working for an Embassy or the Ministry in The Hague means working in the area of the political process where policy is shaped and decisions are made. This gives me a sense of meaningfulness as I can see how the work directly influences decisions that shape societies.

Moreover, the ability to work in a different country every four years highly appeals to me. During those four years you get the chance to get a thorough understanding of a country, from its social tensions, to its economic role in the region to its political interests in the world. Being able to learn these things about a new country every four years feels like an exciting new job every time.

Lastly, I really enjoyed the connecting component of the work of an Embassy. The most concrete example is the dinner I organized at the residence, where I had to connect experts on agricultural food production from academia, government and business with each other. I feel that often problems don’t get resolved because people are too focused on their own discipline
or their own piece of the puzzle. In my opinion people who work at an Embassy can really be facilitators in connecting these different expertises and in that way make a valuable contribution to solving problems. This connecting role logically also plays a role between countries. I can find great motivation in the idea that no matter how complex bilateral relations can be, there is always a need to keep looking for cooperation where possible and yield for example economic prosperity despite difficult political issues. Embassies play a pivotal role in keeping such connections alive and profitable.

Therefore I intend to apply for the traineeship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ambassador and my supervisor at the Embassy both encouraged me to apply so this is something I am working on at the moment. The contacts I have made at the Embassy will certainly help me in this process. Nevertheless, I realize these elements I enjoyed at the Embassy can be found in other professional environments as well. The institutions of the European Union have similar features as well as international organisations such as the OSCE or the International Committee of the Red Cross. I certainly will not limit myself to employment opportunities within the Netherlands. I enjoy working on topics with an international character and therefore I think there are many opportunities at international organisations abroad. In particular, I will be reaching out to (inter) governmental or supranational organisations. I find the goal of working not for profit but for the general interest to resonate well with my ambitions and sense of meaningfulness.

As I created interest for so many new topics during my internship, I want to pursue a second internship in order to find out if there is a single topic I would like to focus my future career on or whether I really prefer an environment in which people with a generalist attitude and interest are sought. Furthermore, as this placement was my first working experience I think it would be good to experience a second, different environment (in a larger structure) to compare and reflect upon what suits me best.

**Conclusion**

My placement at the Embassy has been an experience that positively exceeded my expectations. I gained a lot of knowledge on and interest in topics I was previously unfamiliar with. Moreover, I felt very much at ease in such a people-oriented environment in which the building up of partnerships and connections plays such a central role. In that respect the placement has given me a lot of insight into what elements attract me in a job and what I should pay attention to when I start applying in the labour market.

Moreover, I feel the placement has offered me an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement of my skills. I am reinforced in my belief that a good communication style is key to effective teamwork. I thus found it particularly educational to work closely with a colleague from a different nationality, where I could practice adapting my communication style to someone with a different cultural framework. In addition, after six years of studying it was extremely refreshing to learn how to deal with daily hectic moments, short-term deadlines and the management of many different tasks simultaneously. I am aware that I can improve on the degree of meticulousness in my work and I aim to take this up as priority to work on during my next working experience.

Most importantly, I have gained a completely new, more practical perspective of international relations in general. This perspective has reinforced my enthusiasm for the discipline of IR and has increased my commitment to pursue a career in the field. In short, the past six months have been well spent!