THE LATVIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY BUILDING
THROUGH THE ARCHES OF TIME (1914–2008)
RĪGA, K. VALDEMĀRA 3

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia
SURROUNDINGS AND MEMORIES

The City of Riga has changed with the times, surviving tremors and transitions and leaving a trail of memories, also on the surroundings of the present day Foreign Ministry building of the Republic of Latvia. In the mid 19th century Riga unshackled itself from the vestiges of the Middle Ages, of the fortification ramparts and bastions, and Old Riga was encircled with a ring of green boulevards. The functional old moat was replaced with a beautiful canal. The esplanade – the territory beyond the town citadel ramparts had not yet been built upon. What is presently known as Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street became a broad main arterial road. In 1858 it was known as Nikolaja Street after the Russian Czar Nicholas I.

The Riga Riflemen's Association, which since its founding in 1859 accepted Baltic gentry and influential representatives of the German community, in 1863 started to build a garden on the esplanade on the right-hand side of the canal. On the land which Governor-General Prince Alexander Surovov had offered for the use of the Association, the architect Robert August Pflug designed the project for the Riflemen's Association building which was erected in 1865. A shooting range was also established. Czar Alexander II was guest in Riga on many occasions and also visited the Riflemen's Association. Thanks to the generosity of the Czar, in 1862 the Association received the gardens as a gift. The gardens were accessible only to members of the Association. In 1871, when the project for the dismantling of the Citadel ramparts was begun, the surrounding territory which made up the Citadel esplanade was handed over to the City of Riga. In 1883, Riga's then landscape architect Georg Friedrich Ferdinand Kuphaldt designed the layout of the Riflemen's Gardens and commenced the planting of trees and shrubs, allowing for a broad unplanned zone along the banks of the canal which in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early 20th century was used to deliver building materials, firewood, and various goods in barges.

In preparing for the Riga 700th anniversary celebrations in 1901, the project known as Vērīga was realised in the space between the city canal and the trench barrier. On a small scale this area was graced by some of the most notable architectural monuments of the first quarter of the 17th century – the Rīga Rathaus, the spires of Rīga, the Kālķu Gate, and wine cellars. Surviving to this day as a memento of the 700th anniversary celebrations in the Riflemen's Gardens is the pavilion built by the master builder Krītājāns Kergulvis.

The Riga Riflemen's Association concluded an agreement with the Ministry of Defence in 1921 on the partial leasing of the Riflemen's Building and gardens to the Army Officers Club. The building became a popular venue for many social events, as well as for the elite society Press Balls. But even so, for at least another ten years the 13 hectares of parkland were not generally accessible to ordinary citizens. In 1933 the Riga City Council granted the Association 9 hectares of land near Babīte in exchange for an equivalent land portion of the Riflemen's Gardens territory. In turn the 3.3 hectares of land and the Riflemen's Building was purchased by the state of Latvia and handed over to the Ministry of War. With these changes in ownership the Army Officers Club thus became the rightful managers of the building. The Riflemen's Gardens were re-named the 15th of May Gardens in 1935, but two years later, in honour of one of the leaders of Latvia's national awakening, Ānis Kronvalds, they were again re-named as Kronvalda Gardens (and since 1965 have been known as Kronvalda Park).

Riga's landscape gardener Andrejs Zeidaks in the second half of the 1930s redesigned the setting of the garden, transforming it into a scenic park. In 1935 a milk pavilion with a terrace was opened. In 1971 the café known as Anāra was built, replacing the pavilion, but today the building of the Riga Port Authority is situated there. Next to this, the building of the Latvian Communist Party (now – the Riga World Trade Centre) was built in 1974. The Officers Club building was pulled down and in 1982 the Political Education Building (today known as the Congress Centre) was built in its place. Together with a monument to the writer Andrejs Upīts.

The construction of most of the buildings along Nikolaja Street from the banks of the Daugava River through Elizabetes Street was mostly completed by the time of the beginning of World War I. This was a collection of some socially significant buildings – banks, schools, a theatre, a museum, a gymnasium, and some elegant apartment buildings. At the lower end of the street, on the park by the canal, a dominant free-standing building remains as a historic witness of past associations to the Foreign Ministry and to the Government. It is one of the early 20th century examples of the art of Riga public building architecture.

THE BUILDING AND ITS MAKING

The architectonic facade detail of this building is dominated by a neoclassical influence – a four column ionic portico capped with a decorated fronton (a triangular rooftop) and ionic pilasters with decorative risalits to each side. Impressive Finland granite front entrance steps lead towards two impressive entrance portals. Above the left entrance portal are engraved the Roman dates MDCCLXIX—MCMXIII. The first of these – 1869 is the year the Rīgas Hipotēku biedrība (Mortgage Society) began work and the second date – 1913 being the year of completion of the building. The relief of the ornamental fronton depicts oak leaves with acorns, representing strength, and a circle formed by two horns of plenty, with a flower garland surrounding, but on the inside – a buckled belt. On the cornice the inscription CONCORDIA RES PARVAE CRESCUNT appears as the motto of the Riga Mortgage Society. In translation it means “In harmony small things grow.”

The building and its early history is mostly connected with the rich and influential Riga Mortgage Society, which in 1913 had approximately 4,400 members and had extended loans to the approximate value of 67 million Russian roubles for the purpose of real estate investment and construction. Due to its successful operations even as early as 1911 it was possible to think of erecting its own representative building with spacious banking facilities and comfortable apartments. The building plot chosen was that on Nikolaja Street, in the Riflemen's Gardens by the canal next to Vingrostu (Gymnastri) Street.

1. The building at No. 3 Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street in 2008
2. The building site area plan: 1 — school, 2 — gymnasium, 3 — Mortgage Society building site, 4 — Riflemen Building, 5 — Girl’s school 1911
3. The Riflemen's Association building site, 5 — Girl's school 1911
4. Riflemen Building, 5 — Girl’s school 1911
After some more purchases of land from the Rīga Riflemen’s Association, the Mortgage Society at a meeting on 25 April / 8 May*, 1911 decided on the construction of its own building. The Society’s architect Karl Ehmcke (1852–1932) was instructed to draft the construction schedule and conditions for the tender. The project was advertised on 2 / 15 June by the Rīga Architects Association. At the time of closing of the competition on 1 / 14 December a total of 19 projects had been submitted. The judging panel members consisted of the president of the Rīga Mortgage Society, the director of the Society, and three notable Rīga architects. The first prize was awarded to the Latvian architect Eižens Laube (1880–1967).

The board of the Mortgage Society at its deliberations on 13 / 26 January, 1912 decided to instruct the competition 3rd place winner, architect August Witte (1876–1969), together with the architect Karl Ehmcke, to plan out a final version for the building, employing Laube’s building design interior space solutions. August Witte’s project was approved by the meeting of delegates of the Mortgage Society on 1 / 14 March, at which he was authorised, together with Karl Ehmcke, to direct the construction process.

Construction began 13 / 26 March and on 22 September / 5 October the foundation stone was laid, in which was placed a lead time capsule that contained some silver coins of the time, some examples of the local press and a copy of the document authorising the laying of the building foundation stone. The construction was undertaken by the building company owned by master builder Krišjānis Ķergalvis (1856–1936). On 22 December / 4 January a ridgepole celebrations took place. All of the year 1913 was taken up with external and internal finishing work. Building materials, construction and furnishings supply and various services were delivered by some 35 local and foreign businesses.

The greater part of the building’s facade work and interior decorative panelling was undertaken by the sculpture and stonemasonry firm of sculptor August Volz (1851–1926). The front steps, the sandstone columns, the rendering of the facade, the artificial stone ornamentation, the broad stairway in the vestibule, other stairways, the blue-grey marble surfacing of the bank transactions hall, and many other elements of the building work attest to the mastery of the August Volz company. The transactions hall and other fitting work was done by the Berlin-based firm Emil Heinicke.

At the beginning of February 1914, the Rīga Mortgage Society entered its newly completed premises at Nr. 3 Nikolaja Street, Rīga. The building launch took place 8 / 21 February, 1914. The building was consecrated by the Protohiereus of the Russian Orthodox Church and by the senior pastor of the Lutheran Church in Rīga. Celebratory speeches were made by Vidzeme Governor Nikolajs Zvegincevs, and by representatives of the Rīga Mortgage Society, the State Bank, the Rīga Council and of the various credit agencies of the time. All of the press coverage from German, Russian, and Latvian reviewers praised the architectonic solutions and the opulent interior setting. However, there was a note of dissonance among the Latvian press reviews: “The consecration had a somewhat forced German accent to it, although about half of the Mortgage Society’s members are Latvian, and leaders of Latvian credit societies were invited as honoured guests. The consecration ceremony should have taken place also in the Latvian language,” wrote Dzimtenes Vēstnesis of 11 / 24 February, 1914.

The first building audit was undertaken in March 1914, after which it was regularly audited. The 1923 audit identifies the building as having four storeys with a habitable basement level. The courtyard contains a two-storey extension. The top three floors of the building contain living quarters – two ten-room apartments and two six-room apartments. The ground floor is mostly dedicated to banking, while the basement contains an apartment and bank offices.

* Until 14 February 1918, the first date indicated (in this text) is that as reckoned by the Julian calendar, in the so-called old style.
THE BUILDING THROUGHOUT WAR, POWER SHIFTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE LATVIAN STATE

During the First World War, with the occupation of Riga by German forces, no damage was inflicted upon the new building. After the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia on 18 November, 1918, the Provisional Government of the new republic was forced to remove itself to Liepāja as a result of the invasion by the Red Army in early 1919. Having taken Riga, the Bolsheviks were in total control of the situation throughout most of the territory of Latvia and inflicted acts of terror against political opponents, against the Baltic Germans and against the wealthier strata of society. In late April 1919 Nikolaja Street was renamed Internacionales Street. The Bolshevik government of Peteris Stučka nationalised all the private banks. The operations and remaining assets were taken over by the newly formed Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic People’s Bank. The former Mortgage Society bank building became the XIVth branch office of the People’s Bank. The rest of the building space was designated for use by the People’s Commissariat for Education, but from 23 February to the War Commissariat and all of its departments.

When on 22 May, 1919, the German Landeswehr (the Baltic German home guard) military formation, together with the “Iron Division” (volunteers of the regular German army) occupied Riga, the building became the headquarters for the Landeswehr strike command. Following the Battle for Cēsis on 23 June where the Estonian army and the Northern Latvian Brigade secured victory, the defeated German units retreated to Jelgava. The Northern Latvian Brigade entered Riga on 6 July, and on 8 July the Provisional Government of Latvia returned to Riga from Liepāja. The Mortgage Society Building was immediately delegated for use by the Prime Minister, the State Chancellery, the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for the Interior. In 1920 the Prime Minister and the State Chancellery moved to the Riga Castle and the Ministry for the Interior moved to No. 37/39 Aleksandra Street (from 1925 – Brīvības Street). Today it is No. 61 Brīvības Street.

The first phase of work by the Foreign Ministry from 19 November, 1918 through to July 1919 mostly took place abroad. With the complicated situation where Latvia was occupied by German forces and Bolshevik forces were approaching Riga, the safeguarding of Latvia’s independence through diplomatic means was the primary foreign policy task of the new government.

Following his appointment to the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs on 19 November, 1918, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics worked in Great Britain, but from January 1919 with the Latvian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. At the same time, under his direction Latvian’s first information offices and legations abroad were being established. Foreign relations issues were initially within the portfolio of then Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis, but practical matters and clerical work in this regard were managed by the State Chancellery. The first technical considerations and preparatory groundwork so that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs could start to function as part of the machinery of government were undertaken in mid-July 1919. Meierovics returned to Riga on 23 July, and by 29 July the first order for the recruitment of civil servants to the Ministry was signed. By the beginning of August, the first structural units of the Foreign Ministry had been established, and by the end of August the ministry department and management structure had been worked out, including representative offices abroad and a list of personnel.

An attack on Riga by a force made up of Russian prisoners-of-war and German soldiers in Jelgava under the leadership of Pavel Bermont-Avalov took place on 8 October, 1919. Under the threat of invasion, Latvian state offices and foreign legations evacuated to Cēsis on 10 October. Of the 87 Foreign Ministry staff, 19 officials remained in Riga so as to guarantee communications and exchange of information with Cēsis. During bombardment, parts of the slate roof and outer stone walls of the building were damaged, the glass in the windows was shattered or cracked. Bermont’s forces suffered defeat, and already by November 1919 normal working rhythm had resumed in the building of the Foreign Ministry.

This building was the venue for many historic moments in the early years of the new state. On 11 August, 1920, the Peace Treaty between the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was signed on the second floor of the Foreign Ministry building.

The news of the recognition of Latvia de iure was received in Riga later, on the morning of 27 January, 1921. State institutions including the Foreign Ministry immediately stopped work and closed for the day. Workers and the public gathered in great numbers on the Esplanade so as to parade past the Finnish, Italian, French, British, and Belgian representations in order to express their excitement and gratitude at the legal international recognition of Latvia. The crowds made their way along Nikolaja Street, past the Foreign Ministry building to the Riga Castle, where they were addressed by Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis.

The Treaty between Latvia and Russia was signed in the Foreign Ministry. The 11 August, 1920, edition of the newspaper Jaunākas ziņas recorded “In somewhat ordinary, rather small rooms […], with strikingly simple décor: no outward gloss, only the most elementary furnishings. These humble but appropriately Latvian rooms were witness to the forging of peace between Latvia and Soviet Russia.”
THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ACQUIRES OWNERSHIP OF THE BUILDING

1923 was a year of important and historic events. In the second half of the year Nikolaja Street was renamed Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street after the outstanding economist and leader of the New Latvians (jaunlatvieši) – intellectuals of the first Latvian national awakening – Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891).

In June 1923, Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics gathered together all of Latvia’s envoys to their first conference. By that time Latvia was represented diplomatically in 21 foreign countries, with legations in eleven states. This first conference was attended by six envoys, three consuls general, one charge d'affaires, the Saeima Foreign Affairs Commission chairman, and leading Foreign Ministry employees.

THE FLOORS
RENOVATIONS TO THE BUILDING. OFFICE DISTRIBUTION AMONG THE FLOORS

In 1923, the State Chancellery moved from Rīga Castle to the second floor of the Foreign Ministry building, where in the space of two apartments (16 rooms) the offices of the State Chancellery and of the Prime Minister were located, as was the great meeting hall of the Cabinet of Ministers.

Changes also occurred in the ownership of the building. From 1920 through to 1923 the Foreign Ministry leased premises from the Mortgage Society – altogether seven apartments (one on the ground floor, and two each on the first, second and third floors). As time passed, there was increasing disharmony between landlord and lessee, therefore on 23 July, 1923 the Saeima (Latvian parliament) passed legislation on the expropriation of the property of the Rīga Mortgage Society at No. 3 Nikolaja Street for the needs of the state. The rights to ownership of the building were confirmed in favour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in 1924 the Rīga Mortgage Society received compensation on 23 July, 1923 the Saeima (Latvian parliament) passed legislation on the expropriation of the property of the Riga Mortgage Society at No. 3 Nikolaja Street for the needs of the state. The rights to ownership of the building were confirmed in favour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in 1924 the Rīga Mortgage Society received compensation from the Bank of Latvia to the amount 757,773 lats. The new bank was given office space on the right-hand wing of the ground floor, with entrance through the front right portal. The front left portal led to the Foreign Ministry. The lobby was divided in such a way that visitors and clients to either establishment would not cross paths inadvertently. In 1935 the Latvian Mortgage Bank moved to Jūkļa Street No. 6/8. However, Foreign Ministry audit statements up to 1940 indicate the Mortgage Bank as the tenant of 14 rooms on the ground floor (noting that practically this space is not being used).

From the second half of 1925 through to the first half of 1926, the premises of the State Chancellery on the second floor of the building underwent extensive renovation. Electrical fan systems were installed, and central heating and plumbing refitting was undertaken by the J. Neimanis Technical Workshop (Rīga). A tender was put out for painting, wallpapering and other renovation work. Of the ten applications for tender, the selection committee decided on Ernests Puriņš’s painters workshop. The contract with Ernests Puriņš was signed on 12 October, 1925, providing that all work would be completed within two months of the signing of the agreement.

The applied arts master Jūlijs Madernieks (1870-1955) was invited to design the decorative paneling and ceilings for the State Chancellery offices consisting of eight rooms (2 meeting rooms, 3 offices, a waiting room and 2 lobbies). Jūlijs Madernieks employed folk style motifs in combination with Art Deco techniques, thus achieving an original décor.

Jūlijs Madernieks wished to create the interiors of the State Chancellery in their entirety, adding also his designs for carpets and furniture. However, in the magazine Austrums May 1928 edition, his close friend, the publicist and composer Emīlis Melngailis wrote: “Madernieks’ intended carpets and furniture were not accepted.” The artist’s achievement was not adequately appreciated in its time – the press was quiet, but society didn’t understand.

In the first half of the 1920s the Foreign Ministry employed between 70 – 80 civil servants and workers. By 1940, this number had shrunk to about 50 people. The Foreign Minister’s office was on the first floor, in apartment number 1.

Next door to the minister one could find the offices of the Secretary-General and of the Director of the Administrative Department. Two apartments provided space for all the divisions of the Administrative Department, the ministry archives, as well as the Eastern Division. The Western and Baltic States Departments were to be found on the second floor in apartment 3. The Treaty Department (two divisions) and the Press Division of the Political Department took up space in one of the apartments on the third floor. The Foreign Passports Division, before it went over to the Interior Ministry in April, 1926, was to be found on the ground floor apartment 7, with its entrance being from Vingrotāju Street. Later, this space was occupied by the Consular Division (founded in 1931). Until

11 In June 1923, Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics gathered together all of Latvia’s envoys to their first conference. By that time Latvia was represented diplomatically in 21 foreign countries, with legations in eleven states. This first conference was attended by six envoys, three consuls general, one charge d'affaires, the Satuma Foreign Affairs Commission chairman, and leading Foreign Ministry employees. Participants of the first Latvian diplomat conference in the garden at the side of the building.

12 Concurrently with work on the offices of the State Chancellery, the Ernests Puriņš workshop provided renovation services to the ten-roomed apartment on the third floor which was intended as accommodation for the Prime Minister. The craftsmen painted the wall perimeters using stencils, the roses were painted with ‘a free hand’. Some of this decorative artwork was recovered during the 2006 building restoration.
that time, consular functions were undertaken by the Political Economic Department Eastern, Western, and Baltic States Divisions. The ministry library was to be found on the ground floor of the building.

13 The waiting room to the Cabinet. Colours: brown, yellow, silvered dominant tone. The other room ceilings and walls also were decorated with ornamental figures. The profuse ornamentation was executed in bright colours. Red, green, and gold were dominant shades in the Prime Minister’s waiting room, while yellow, orange, black and white filled the smaller office, but blue-green, black, and gold featured in the smaller meeting hall.

14 Modernists’ wall and ceiling ornamental design – an example

15 The Government of Martiņš Skujenieks (between December 1931 and March 1933) – in the State Chancellery offices

16 New furniture for the State Chancellery reception rooms was procured in 1928. This was made in the folk style following the designs of the then popular furniture designer Pauls Rubis (1879–1970)
THE PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS AND THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1930s

In recording the most important events in Latvia’s state history, the Foreign Ministry building always seems to get a mention. It was from this building on 15 May, 1934, that the then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kārlis Ulmanis lead the coup d'état – abolishing the parliamentary government and instituting an authoritarian regime. The coup d'état political leaders (War Minister Jānis Balodis, Interior Minister Vilis Gulbis, members of the Saeima Alfreds Bērziņš and Margers Skujenieks) all worked on the third floor of the Foreign Ministry building in the Prime Minister's apartment dining room, from which the windows looked out on Vingrotāju Street. The first floor of the Foreign Ministry became the military headquarters under Colonel Krišjānis Berķis, commander of the Vidzeme Division and chief of the Riga garrison.

By a ruling of the Cabinet of Ministers on 25 October, 1934, the date of Latvia’s recognition de iure – 26 January was struck off the list of celebratory days, and replaced by 15 May as the National Day of Unity and State Renewal.

On 12 September, 1934, in Geneva a Memorandum of Understanding and Collaboration was signed between Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which became known as the Baltic Entente.

By the summer of 1935, when the second conference of Latvia’s envoys took place, Latvia had diplomats in 26 countries abroad, with legations in 12 countries and a permanent delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva. The conference was attended by 13 envoys and senior foreign ministry officials. Speeches were presented by Secretary-General Vilhelms Munters, with the concluding address being delivered by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kārlis Ulmanis.

In 1938, the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Latvia was widely celebrated.

BUILDING RESIDENTS DURING LATVIA’S YEARS OF FREEDOM

The right for Prime Ministers to reside in the building in apartment number 5, from 1926 onwards, was taken up by Hugo Celmiņš, Alberts Alberings and Marģers Skujenieks, but a number of times, and for the longest period – by Kārlis Ulmanis (who from 1936 was both State President and Prime Minister). Dainis Rudzītis, the son of the then Director of the State Chancellery Dāvids Rudzītis wrote in his memoirs "A Youthful View": 

"Ulmanis had very few personal possessions. In moving to the presidential apartment, he hired a removalist – who, with the help of a hand trolley, transferred all of Ulmanis' personal belongings to the Foreign Ministry building."

In the autumn of 1939 Kārlis Ulmanis moved into a residence at Rīga Castle. During the entire interwar period, all of the serving Foreign Ministers starting with Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics lived in the official residence at Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street No. 13 (from 1936 it became No. 11a).
From 1923, apartments in the building were made available to senior officials of both the State Chancellery and of the Foreign Ministry. For 18 years the building was the residence of Miervaldis Lūkins, the adjutant to all of Latvia’s Prime Ministers (and from 1936 also to the President), and just a little less – until 1939 – of the State Chancellery director Dāvids Rudzītis. Following the tragic death in 1926 of Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, his widow Anna Meierovica and her three children were allocated apartment 10 on the first floor, but three years later Anna Meierovica moved to the third floor apartment 13, which she leased until September 1937. The building also contained apartments of those Foreign Ministry officials who served as Secretary-General, Director of the Administrative Legal Department, the Administrative and Protocol Division and the Western Division. The first such resident in 1922 was department director Roberts Liepiņš, who lived in apartment 13 on the third floor for seven years. The longest period of residence – nine years, commencing 1931 – was of apartment 10 on the first floor by Jānis Tēpqers, initially a division head, then department director and, from 1936 – Secretary-General.

Apartment 12 on the second floor was the one with most frequent change of tenancy. From 1925 the door keys changed hands between division heads Ludvigs Ēķis, Pēteris Oliņš, and Jūlijs Feldmans. In 1930 this apartment received a complete renovation as projected by the architect Eižens Laube. Following the renovations, from 1931 through 1933 it became the residence of the Secretary-General Hermans Albats. After that, for one year it was home to Director Ludvigs Sēja of the Administrative Legal Department, and then until 1936, to the Secretary-General Vilhelms Munters. Gradually the basement floor also became fully occupied. In the mid 1930s there were 13 apartments (4 single room and 9 double room) which were reserved for four State Chancellery and nine ministry workers: the chauffeur, switchboard operator, central heating mechanic, messenger, janitor, doorman and others.

THE OCCUPATION AND ANNEXATION OF LATVIA. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS ABOLISHED

In 1940, over scarcely two summer months Latvia’s international juridical status changed quite drastically. On 17 June the state was occupied and lost its independence de facto. On 21 June, a new government was installed by the Soviet occupying emissaries (with the post of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister being provisionally held by Professor Augusts Kirhenšteins).

On 21 June – firstly in front of the USSR embassy and then outside the building on Krīļaņa Valdemāra Street No. 3, the Latvian Communist Party organised a demonstration by Rīga workers and other civilians.
On 5 August, 1940, Latvia was annexed by the USSR and immediately following this the official process of liquidation of the Foreign Ministry was commenced. Ministry archives were placed in 266 boxes which were sent to Moscow to the USSR People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Ministry workers participating in the liquidation were transferred to the Law Courts building. On the basis of a decision by the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 August, 1940, the then Foreign Ministry building was transferred by deed on 26 September to the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party.

At the end of June–early July 1941, Latvia came under the German occupying force. As one of four administrative territories Latvia was under the jurisdiction of Reichskommissariat Ostland (administration of the Baltic States and the part of Byelorussia now Belarus).

With the Soviet military occupation of Riga in October 1944, the building returned to the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party. From the mid-1950s, the ground and part of the first floors of the building housed the Latvian Leninist Communist Youth Union Central Committee. The building was adapted to accommodate the needs of the party apparatus, including changes to the facade. The Mortgage Society ornamentations on the building fronton were removed, leaving only the décor of the horn of plenty. The motto in Latin CONCORDIA RES PARVAE CRESCUNT was removed.

Some minor changes were also made to the finish of the interior of the building. In the process of cosmetic renovation, the ornamental design work of Jūlijs Madernieks in the previous State Chancellery offices was either washed off or plastered over, as happened also in the previous Prime Minister’s residential apartment. The charm of Art Deco and National Romanticism was completely extirpated and replaced by a simple tonal interior. A dining hall for workers and a cinema was also installed in the basement.

On 19 June, 1972, the Riga City Workers’ Deputy Council received from the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR the transfer of the “administrative building on Gorky Street No. 3 with a book value of 293,616 roubles”. By a decision of the Riga City Executive Committee of 28 October, 1974, the building was listed as an architectural heritage monument of local significance. In November, 1974, the Central Committee of the Communist
Party moved to newly built facilities on Kirova (now Elizabetes) Street No. 2, but the Central Committee of the Communist Youth removed to No. 45/47 Kirova Street. However, the aura of the Communist Party remained on the building at Gorky Street No. 3, as, following the departure of the Central Committee, it was to become the new home of the Rīga City Committee of the Communist Party.

BUILDING MANAGER – RĪGA CITY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In 1974, the new building residents became the Executive Committee of the Rīga City Workers’ (from 1976 – People’s) Deputy Council (izpildkomiteja). Moving in to their new premises coincided with yet another cosmetic renovation to individual areas of the building, which had been received in very bad repair. On the ground floor the large and small meeting halls were refurbished, the niche in the lobby was additionally decorated with the word RĪGA and the Order of Lenin image above that. (The City of Riga was awarded the Order of Lenin on more than one occasion.)

Following a preliminary inspection, in the 1980s a complete renovation of the building was undertaken, in addition to some partial restoration. The sun roof above the vestibule of the ground floor was renewed. New interior decorations were fitted to both the large and small meeting halls, which remained until 2004. Furniture was provided by the Riga Decorative Arts Workshop following the designs of interior decorator Ausekils Ozoliņš. The collective Māksla on a special commission created wall tapestries and window curtains. A new clock was installed with woodwork by the wood sculptor Aivars Šmits. The walls received a new, brighter coat of paint. The top floor hallway oak panelling was replaced with veneer. The original outer doors (portals) with polished glass were retained, but some of the original old lined doors inside were replaced with white painted doors.

Much notable work was done, which signified an important change in the future direction of the management of the building – the interior artistic value of the building was recognised and a gradual process of renewal was commenced.

THE NATIONAL RE-AWAKENING. RĪGA COUNCIL

During the Third National Awakening period, in October 1989, Gorky Street was returned its historic name Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street. Following the first, partially democratic local government elections on 10 December, 1989, the newly-elected Riga City People’s Deputy Council commenced work on 16 February, 1990 under its chairman and representative of the Popular Front of Latvia, judge Andris Teikmanis.

On 12 July, 1994, Teikmanis joined the Latvian diplomatic service. A former ambassador to Germany and to Russia, since December 2008 Andris Teikmanis is Foreign Ministry State Secretary.
On 27 February, 1990, the Latvian SSR Supreme Council law adopting the use of the flag of the original Republic of Latvia as the new official state flag of Latvia came into force. After 50 years, the red-white-red flag once again fluttered freely over the building at No. 3 Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street.


On 10 June, 1992, by law of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia local government reform was introduced to the capital city of Riga. By the portals to the building, a plaque with the words RIGAS DOMES (Riga City Council) was affixed to the building for the first time.

The mid 1990s saw a change in the interior furnishings of the building to a more contemporary setting and decor. Although modernisation and change took place to the interior of the building, these did not harm the image of the building in total. The interior unity of the ground floor lobby, the staircase with the elegant lift and light fittings were all preserved. The 1980s interiors of the meeting halls on the ground floor were not altered.
The Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia as early as 16 September, 1991, had passed legislation that "by 1 October, 1991, to place the building on No. 3 Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street at the disposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia". However, to realise this motion it was necessary to take into account the justified need of the Rīga City Council and its Board for suitable new premises. In the autumn of 2003 the new Rīga City Council building in the Rātslaukums (Town Hall Square) No. 1 was completed, and on 1 January, 2004 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally regained its historic home.

On 27 May, 1994, it was possible to view a portrait gallery of past Rīga City mayors, commencing with 1890–1901 and Mayor Ludwig Wilhem Kerkovius. The portrait gallery was later moved from the lobby to the Board meeting room on the ground floor.

The planning for the renovations was completed by the joint stock company LX GRUPA (board chairman Mārcis Apsītis, chief project architect Baiba Maike, architects Aīnārs Āboliņš and Jānis Apsītis with interior design by Ieva Cucure-Erlecka). The contractor of the building works was the limited liability company SKONTO BŪVE (board chairman Gunārs Rāvs, vice-president Ivars Millers, and construction manager Modris Seļakovs).
On 6 April, 2006, Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks and State Secretary Normans Penke solemnly launched the commencement of construction works to the historic Foreign Ministry building at No. 3 Krišjāņa Valdemāra Street.

The reconstruction and restoration project envisaged a complete renewal of the interior of the building and an overhaul of the utilities. Additionally the building had to be able to accommodate all modern-day requirements as expected in a foreign ministry – security systems, computer networking, fire safety sprinkler systems etc.

The message says: “The return of Latvian diplomats to their historic home takes place in parallel to our foreign policy achievement, and in the meeting of new challenges. May this building be a strong base for Latvia’s further achievements in the international arena – for ever after.”

From the left – State Secretary Normans Penke and Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks.

One of the most successful design solutions of the building reconstruction was the Press Conference Hall. The Hall is located in the space of the original inner courtyard and is covered by a glass canopy, thus highlighting the exposed façade work and the building is perceived as a whole.

In the centre of the inner courtyard and above the ground floor roof there is a rest area for discussions in an informal atmosphere.

In the attic – in the rebuilding of the top floor, the original wooden beams and supports were kept in place and small and compact offices have been created.

In the Minister’s office on the second floor, Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks sealed into the wall a memento for future generations: a copy of the 6 April 2006 edition of Latvijas Vēstnesis (the Latvian government gazette) and a silver ten lat collector’s edition coin.

The memento says: “The return of Latvian diplomats to their historic home takes place in parallel to our foreign policy achievement, and in the meeting of new challenges. May this building be a strong base for Latvia’s further achievements in the international arena – for ever after.”

From the left – State Secretary Normans Penke and Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks.
In designing the new building interior, a choice had to be made with regard to which context to retain – vestiges of the early 20th century or the Soviet period, 1950s through to the 1980s. The entrance staircase, the lobby and the public rooms on the ground floor have all regained their original appearance. A surface cleaning of light fittings and safe doors, cabinet doors and wood panelling was undertaken.

The carefully managed restoration process included also a polishing of the marble panels and cleaning of the terrazzo floors – in which the once rather large cracks have been masterfully sealed. The glass canopy over the lobby has also been repaired. This was originally the bank transactions hall and these days is better known as the Foreign Ministry Main Lobby.

The restored Jugendstil fireplaces in the vestibules of the first, second and third floors

The lift shaft with its metal lattice work and the ornate handrail of the staircase fashioned in Jugendstil geometric ornamental style

The lobby of the building back to its original splendour. Flags in the oval niche (on the left hand side) symbolically highlight Latvia’s stable re-integration into the system of international relations.

Outside the second floor meeting room there are photo portraits of former foreign ministers of the Republic of Latvia.
In the place of the former cinema in the basement there are now the archives. The basement floor renovations required some serious hydro-isolation work to be done. The foundations of the outer wall supports were exposed and the brickwork around the building perimeter was treated with special injections of materials, using the technology of the German SCHOMBERG company.

In 2006, during the reconstruction and restoration work, on uncovering a panel on the ground floor workers discovered the following inscription underneath: “I arrived in Rīga as a poor malēnietis (from the northeastern provinces) and dreamt of becoming rich … but I lost all my wages in the public baths. I am participating in these building works as an apprentice. H. Vijupe. 6 December 1935”. A lighthearted and amusing greeting from a fellow tradesman of the past to his modern day colleagues.

In all, the reconstruction and restoration of the building has been carried out in accordance with all the latest architectural trends and contemporary technological requirements. In December 2007, the Foreign Ministry and all of its departments and divisions moved from the Law Courts building by the Vermanes Gardens back to its historic home. The historic succession has also been renewed – just as during the interwar period, the building now serves as the chief government administrative centre of the foreign affairs sector. If in 1919 the foreign department and service had to be created from scratch, then in 2007 seventeen years had passed since the renewal of independence in 1990, and the Foreign Ministry with its many representations abroad was fully formed and had become the driving force of the foreign policy of the state.

Just as in the 1920s and 1930s, today also the main task of Latvia’s foreign policy is to guarantee the interests of the state beyond its borders, in the rapidly changing international environment and world political processes. However, these days there are other responsibilities and requirements, which are determined by Latvia’s membership of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The realisation of the goals of Latvia’s foreign policy and its implementation is ensured by Latvia’s 48 representations: 35 embassies, 9 memberships to international organisations, 2 consular-generals and 2 consulates (as at February 2009). Every year the Foreign Ministry brings together all of its representatives from abroad, and at these meetings there is a review of international political current events, with the consolidation of future strategy and directions of activity.

Since 2000, the Foreign Ministry organises a conference every second year for Latvia’s honorary consuls abroad. Honorary consuls do not receive remuneration. These are people of impeccable reputation, to whom the Republic of Latvia entrusts its representation and consular functions.

The Foreign Ministry building hosts all meetings and visits to Latvia by representatives of international organisations. Foreign ambassadors accredited to Latvia also meet with the Foreign Minister in this building. Press conferences and work meetings also take place here.

It is possible to visit the building and to learn about its history. Open door days and group excursions are offered, and regular seminars and exhibitions are now a part of the life of the building.
SOURCES AND LITERATURE

Latvian State Historical Archives, Fond 2570, files of Inventory 11; Fond 2769, Inventory 1, Files 7917, 7918.

Valsts adresu kalendārs. Rīga: A regular yearly almanac issued by the State Statistics Board. 1922–1940


Interviews (October 2008 – February 2009) with long-time Rīga City Council employee and Council history researcher Vanda Zariņa

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY BUILDING THROUGH THE ARCHES OF TIME (1914–2008)

RĪGA, K. VALDEMĀRA 3

Project Director Vita Timermane-Moora
Authors of text Vita Banga, Silvija Križevica, Vita Timermane-Moora
Translator into English Edgars Kariks
Designer Zane Ēmīrzsteite
Editor Terēzie Švīlāne

Authors of the photos

Harijs Burmeisters (35), Andris Eglitis (34), Eduards Gaķis (10), Dominika Gedžiune (28), L. V. Hričkovskā (4), Georgs Īmeļjanovs (33), Boris Kolesnikovs (45, 46, 47), Jānis Kristaņi (53), Inga Kundziņa (the photo collage at the end of the text), T. Laiva (18, 20), Mārtiņš Lapuņiņš (9), Leika fotot (23, 24), photo from the newspaper Oeklandt Woche, Nr. 3, 1942 (26); Kristis Rakitis (15), Vilis Rīdzenieks (16, 45 cover – upper photo), Ansis Starkns (1st cover – house photo, the photo collage at the end of the text), Jānis Strīgums (12), Indriķis Stirmanis (27), Andris Tone (1, 25, 42, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 45 cover – lower photo), Ilmārs Znotiņš (59, 60, 61), Pēteris Zonvalds (8, 11, 13)

Repositories of the photos

Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (1, 11, 12, 13, 25, 29, 42, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 45 cover – lower photo), Latvian State Archives of Film, Photo and Audio Records (16, 18, 20, 26, 28, 35), Latvian State Historical Archives (2, 3, 7, 19), Latvian State Historical Archives, Fondu 2570, files of Inventory 11; Fondu 2769, Inventory 1, Files 7917, 7918. Latvian War Museum (9, 17, 23, 24), Latvian National Museum of Art (4), Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation (30), Press Agency A.F.I. (1st cover – house photo, the photo collage at the end of the text), Government Gazette Latvijas Vēstnesis photo archives (45, 46, 47), the personal archives of architect Jānis Krastaņi (53), the personal archives of Laima Lapviča (31, 32), the personal archives of architect Baiba Maike (43, 44), the personal archives of Andris Teikmanis (33), the photo collection of Vanda Zariņa (36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41), Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst in den Ostzweigprovinzen, 1912, 5. 70 (4), the newspaper Rīgas Balts, Nr. 46, 1990, 28. februāris, 1. lpp. (34), the magazine Ilustrēti Zinātnai, Nr. 8, 1922, augusta, 5. lpp. (10), the magazine Austrums, Nr. 2, 1928, marts, 74. lpp. (13), the magazine Nodēļa, Nr. 4, 1923, 26. janvāris (8), Kristaņi, Jānis. Jāņegedrīls Rīgas arhitektūrā. Rīga: Zinatne, 1980, 220. lpp. (6), Lejnieks, Jānis. Rīgas arhitektūrā. Rīga: Avots, 1989, 80. lpp. (27), Mademelnieks, Jūlija. Raksti. Rīga: A’s Valsts un Rāpas, 1930, 80. lpp. (14), Rudzitis, Dainis. Ar jaunību sketch [ASV]: GAUJAS apgūdi, 1997 (21, 22)

Cover photo collage – Zane Ēmīrzsteite. The Foreign Ministry building in the early 20th century city environment – the building site by Nikolajs (now Krīšļiņa Valdemāra) and Vingstotāju Streets. Ansis Starkns 2008 house photo (Press agency A. F.I.) and photo from 1911 (Latvian State Historical Archives)

With thanks for their support and cooperation:


Publisher

Nepaštu

Tērbatas iela 49/51–8, Rīga, LV–1011

www.nepaštu.lv

Printed at “Apgūds Imanta”

© Vita Banga, Silvija Križevica, Vita Timermane-Moora, texts, 2009
© Zane Ēmīrzsteite, design and layout, 2009
© Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2009
© Nepaštu, Rīga, 2009