THE LATVIAN FOREIGN OFFICE, 1918–1991

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE

In 1917–1918, when the First World War was drawing to a close and the Russian Empire had collapsed, for the first time in history the Latvian people had the opportunity to proclaim its own independent state. The new country of Latvia needed a diplomatic service that might conduct the foreign relations of a sovereign state. An institution had to be formed, with a staff whose knowledge and intellectual potential would permit them to quickly get their bearings in the field of international relations and master the practical work of diplomacy. The foreign office – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic and consular missions under its charge – had to achieve international recognition of Latvia, establish diplomatic relations with other countries, exercise Latvia's rights as a member of international organisations, protect the interests of Latvian citizens abroad and further the attainment of the country's economic aims at the international level. The foreign service had to be established under difficult military and political conditions. Latvia's administrative structures were only emerging and many of those who were experienced specialists in foreign affairs and no diplomats.

Even before the proclamation of independence, on 16 November 1918, a meeting of representatives from Latvian political organisations in Riga agreed on the government ministries to be formed, and these included a foreign office. On 18 November 1918, the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed, and on 19 November, Z. Meierovics was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, work on developing the ministry's central apparatus was delayed for at least half a year, because of the situation in the country. On 2 January 1919, the Red Army took Riga and the Provisional Government withdrew to Liepāja. The work of establishing the ministry began only in the mid-July of 1919, when, following the liberation of Riga from the Bolsheviks and defeat of the German forces at Cēsis, the Provisional Government returned to the capital. Foreign minister Z. Meierovics led the work of foreign relations whilst in London at the close of 1918 and as one of Latvia's delegates to the Paris Peace Conference in the first half of 1919. Although the central apparatus had still not been set up by the spring of 1919 because of the war, there had been considerable success in the development of a network of missions. These missions were opened in the countries of Western and Northern Europe: in London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Paris and Berlin. Missions were also opened in the territory of the former Russian Empire. Already in December 1918, K. Bahumiens was appointed the Provisional Government's representative in Ukraine, V. Bandreivs was appointed representative in Lithuania and J. Rauters was made – representative in Essoma. V. Bandreivs, though, was unable to take up office in Vilnius because of the Red Army's attack and was forced to return to Riga. In Switzerland, already in 1917–1918, there were two offices: the Latvian Information Office in Basel and the 'Pro Lettonia' office in Bern. Later, information offices were also established in Copenhagen, Berlin and Paris. The direct
dissemination of information was very important in 1919. In June, E. Freivalds, director of the Latvian information agency wrote to K. Ducmanis, secretary of the diplomatic mission in Copenhagen, that the city was regarded as the main information centre. E. Freivalds emphasised that K. Ducmanis should see to the collection and distribution of information as his main task, while secretarial duties should be fulfilled on the side, only if time allows. This is also the reason why one of the first diplomatic missions was opened in Copenhagen.

One of the major obstacles to the successful organisation of foreign service activities in the first half of 1919 was lack of money. Only in the summer of 1919 did the situation begin to improve. The institutions of the Provisional Government returned to Riga, allowing the organisation of the foreign service to proceed under more suitable conditions. Z. Meierovics returned to Riga from Paris. The first instructions were issued on the formation of the central ministry apparatus. On the other hand, there was still a degree of uncertainty in the work of the missions, caused by administrative matters that had to be taken care of, as well as the lack of funds.

In late 1919, the role of the foreign service grew significantly in connection with the attack by the forces of Bermonc, since the country had to seek help abroad. Permanent diplomatic and military representatives began their activities in several of the neighbouring countries (Estonia, Poland and Lithuania). The missions abroad were successful in obtaining military, political and financial support for the Latvian government. At the close of 1919, after victory against the forces of Bermonc, self-confidence and a sense of security helped motivate the work. In the early 1920s, the figures moulding Latvian foreign policy began to take a more definite approach and created a conceptual foreign policy framework for the coming years oriented towards the creation of a union of the Baltic States and promotion of policy at a regional level aimed at preserving the status quo.

This intense activity in the field of foreign policy necessitated changes and improvements to the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In early 1920, the ministry consisted of a General Department including an Administrative Division, a Colonies, Refugees and Prisoners Division, a Political-Diplomatic Department including Entente, Germany, Scandinavia, Baltic States and Slav States divisions, an Economic-Consular Department including Economic, Consular and Foreign Passport Divisions, an Information Department with Foreign Propaganda, Special News, Press and Courier Divisions, and a Legal Office. By 20 February 1920, the ministry had a staff of 119, including technical personnel.

At a meeting on 11 September 1920, considering a proposal from the Cabinet of Ministers on the introduction of an austerity regime, the council decided to reorganise the ministry on the model of the Polish foreign ministry, forming two departments: an Administrative-Legal Department (for general functions) and a Political-Economic Department (organised on a geographical basis). In the course of these changes, in October 1920 the Administrative-Legal Department took over all the functions of the previous General Department and Legal Office, as well as the Courier Division of the Information Department and the Foreign Passport Division of the Information Department. The Administrative-Legal Department consisted of six structural units: a Chancery, the Refugees and Colonies Division (responsible for the affairs of Latvian refugees from the First World War and Latvian colonies in Russia), the Foreign Passport Division (responsible for passport matters), as well as the Courier Division, the Administrative and Financial Divisions and the Legal Office. The staff of the department included the post of head of the minister’s office (who performed the duties of a chief of protocol and intended to the correspondence addressed personally to the minister). This department also included the post of assistant director.

The Political-Economic Department took over all of the functions of the Political-Diplomatic Department, and in part also the functions of the Economic-Consular and Information Departments.
The Political-Economic Department had seven structural units: an Eastern Division responsible for Soviet Russia and the Near and Far East, a Baltic States Division (Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland), a Central Europe Division (Germany and Central Europe), a Western Europe and American Division (Western Europe, except Germany and Central Europe, and America), a Press Department (provided information for the domestic and foreign press, supplied material to the missions, promoted international cultural cooperation and compiled publicity material), a League of Nations Department and the department's secretariat (whose functions included processing of reports from the missions on economic and financial issues, preparation of political and economic reports and instructions for the missions to coordinate their activities and general administrative work).

The reforms led to a staff reduction. In order to reduce the budget even more in the interests of economy, the mission and consulate in Switzerland was closed. In October 1930, the information offices were also closed, and their functions were transferred to the diplomatic missions. Also for financial reasons, many of the planned diplomatic missions were never actually established. This shows that projects had been talked with relatively little regard for the budget and actual needs, but more in accordance with theoretical considerations.

Each of the two departments had a staff of about 40-45 -- directors of departments, heads of divisions, secretaries, attachés, stenographers-correspondents and other technical staff. L. Seja, Director of the Political-Economic Department noted that, under the difficult economic conditions in the country, in the autumn of 1920, the foreign ministry had tried to show the way and be a good example to other ministries, reducing its staff by 35% and in April 1921, in the course of another staff reduction, by another 10 people, leaving the ministry with a staff of 82. In 1924, the ministry had only 74 employees. In 1925 and 1926, the number of staff stabilised at 72.

After 1921, change to the structure of the ministry was generally minor. The 'Regulations on Service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs', passed in July 1919 and approved by the government in November 1922, stipulated that employees for whose variable post could not be found (these usually being upper ranks -- officials -- envoys), were to be placed at the disposal of the foreign ministry, but for no more than six months. If during this time a suitable post was not found in the ministry, the official was put in the charge of the foreign ministry without pay (but for a maximum of five years). For example, L. Liepiņš, being in the charge of the ministry, at the same time from 1919 also held the post of Mayor of Riga. In 1924, the post of Director of the Political-Diplomatic Department was abolished as an economic measure.

In 1930, the Legal Division drafted a new scheme for the structure of the ministry. Basically, it preserved the previous structure. In order to coordinate the activity of the political divisions, the post of Director of the Political-Economic Department that had been abolished in 1924 was restored. A Consular Division was also envisaged, but its establishment was delayed, while the proposed Economic Policy Department was never actually created. In 1938, when major restructuring took place, a new department, the Treaty Department, was formed.

Diplomatic missions were closed or established in particular countries. In total, Latvia had diplomatic representatives in 32 different countries during the 1920s and 30s, with resident envoys in 16. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Latvia closed its legations in some countries because of the war and by June 1940 the number of countries with which Latvia had diplomatic relations had been reduced slightly, to 27. There were resident envoys in 15 countries, including a permanent delegate at the League of Nations and an envoy at the Vatican. In the years 1918-1940, there were 31 foreign diplomatic missions in Latvia, with 25 existing in June 1940. During the 1920s and 30s, Latvia had had a total of 248 consular missions, with only 197 in June 1940, many having
been closed because of the Second World War. By comparison, in the late 1930s, Estonia had about 10 diplomatic missions in Europe and around 150 consular missions, while the pay-roll of Lithuania’s foreign service included 16 envoys. Latvia’s situation in this aspect is characterised by the foreign ministry’s report for 1929. During this year, the number of Latvia’s missions abroad had increased significantly. On 1 January 1925, there were 38 missions, but by 1 January 1929, the number had grown to 124. This was considerably less than many other countries. (For example, Denmark at this time had 591 missions, Sweden had 620 and Norway had 616.) However, this sufficed to effectively protect the interests of the country and its citizens abroad as far as it was possible.

Particularly important is the development of the decision-making procedure in the Latvian foreign ministry. Already up to 1934, decision-making in the field of foreign affairs was largely the prerogative of the foreign minister. The involvement of other officials in the decision-making process was insignificant. The President’s lack of interest in his power to influence foreign policy, and the influence of the Saeima Foreign Affairs Commission was also quite negligible, mainly being connected with the choice of a candidate for the post of envoy and discussion of budgetary questions. However, the foreign ministry budget saw little change right up to 1940. Financial cuts were quite limited, and during the period of parliamentary rule officials connected with the ministry explained this in terms of a limited understanding of foreign policy on the part of the members of the Saeima’s Budget Commission. However, even after the coup of 1934, the budget funding allocated to the foreign ministry effectively remained at the previous level. Funding from the state budget for foreign relations varied from 1.1% in 1918–1920 to 1.7% in 1922/1923 and 1937/1938. Only in 1921/1922 did this figure reach 2.7% of the budget.

An element of democracy in the discretion of issues in this field was the practice of holding weekly meetings of the senior staff – a practice established by Z. Meierovics, but later discontinued. In the early period of the ministry’s activity in 1919–1920, as well as in the years 1927–1928 (under minister F. Cieliens) meetings of the Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were convened. (The council consisted of the ministry’s senior officials.) After the coup of 15 May 1934, decisions were as often taken personally by the ministry’s secretary-general, later foreign minister V. Munters. In the years 1934–1936, K. Ulmanis was formally the foreign minister, but he was occupied with domestic matters and took little interest in foreign affairs. Later too, in his time as minister, V. Munters rarely attended government meetings, and then only to submit reports.

In order to understand the principles behind the structure of the Latvian foreign ministry, it is useful to compare its structure with the respective institutions in neighbouring countries. In Sweden, the ministry was divided organizationally according to the nature of the matter at hand, rather than according to region. This meant that, for example, material on Latvia could end up in any division. Similarly structured was the foreign ministry of Estonia. This form of ministry structure was justified on the grounds of economy, an important consideration for small countries. The structure of Latvia’s foreign ministry was closest to that of its Polish counterpart.

THE FOREIGN OFFICE STAFF IN THE EARLY YEARS

The first representatives of the Provisional Government, who performed diplomatic and consular duties, were appointed already in late 1918, and in the following months representatives were also appointed to other countries. However, the performance of diplomatic and consular activities in accordance with international standards was limited by Latvia’s international status prior to de facto recognition of independence. Thus, the posts held by these officials had different names than they
did later on: they were representatives of the Provisional Government, diplomatic representatives and consular agents. Regardless of formal restrictions, their functions were very similar to those of the representatives of officially recognized states.

The appointment of representatives within the area of the former Russian Empire, then in the midst of civil war, took place in various ways. Some representatives were appointed by instruction of the Provisional Government, but in view of the problems of communications, the majority were appointed and conferred in office by an authorized government representative or even by a person authorized by him. Later, the Latvian foreign ministry recognized some of them as representatives of the Provisional Government (those appointed in Southern and Northern Russia). For example, as already mentioned, K. Bahmanis, the representative in Ukraine and later in Southern Russia, was appointed already in 1918, and then began to establish a network of authorized representatives in the region. The government paid a pension to the family of V. Graberis, a representative of the Provisional Government who was killed by the Bobrovs in 1920.

Though the rights and duties of the Provisional Government representatives were not laid down in any special instructions, the main aims of their activities were to defend the rights of Latvian citizens, to issue identity documents and, in particular, to posthumously repatriate refugees. These representatives were in many cases also the only people to disseminate official government information and in some places they also fulfilled certain diplomatic functions. The Provisional Government representative K. Bahmanis was empowered on 8 March 1919 as envoy ‘at the government established in the southern part of the former Russian’. He also had powers to organise the Latvian citizens living in this area for mobilisation into the Latvian Army, secure the discharge of these mobilised citizens from military service and ensure that all of them should be sent to Latvia to serve in the national armed forces. All in all, the duties of the representative corresponded largely to the field of activity of consular representatives in the traditional sense. Even more than this, in certain cases these representatives were in fact regarded as consuls. The credentials of A. Likers in Archangelsk were recognised only by the British in the summer of 1919, but not by the local anti-Bolshevik Russian government or the French representative. On the other hand, the government of Soviet Russia recognised the mission at Rostov on the Don as a consulate. They announced this in a circular published in the newspaper ‘Investija’, issued by the Soviet of People’s Commissars in January 1920.

In Russia, which was in the throes of civil war, conditions in various parts of the country were quite different, but up to 11 August 1920 (i.e. the peace treaty with Soviet Russia) the activity of Provisional Government representatives was possible almost exclusively in the areas under the control of anti-Bolshevik forces. However, the attitude of the different anti-Bolshevik governments towards the Latvian representatives varied. Not only did the chaos of the civil war in Russia complicate political matters, but often the complete economic collapse made the functioning of the representative duties excessively difficult. Postal and telegraph communications were interdicted, and correspondence was very much delayed if it arrived at all. Thus, it was difficult to send information and money.

The majority of representatives of the Provisional Government in the territory of the former Russian Empire were the most active figures in Latvian society, as well as educated Latvians who were prominent in society. For the most part, they had previously been engaged in the work of organizing refugees from the world war or had been active in the Latvian community. They were people who were highly regarded among the local Latvians.

In the early development of the diplomatic service, up to Latvia’s international recognition de facto, the country could not be represented by actual envoys, so diplomatic representatives of
resident ministers were appointed in the countries of Europe. On 13 February 1920, the Latvian government approved provisionsal regulations on the appointment of representatives abroad. These stipulated that: 1) diplomatic representatives and consuls were to be named by the foreign minister and appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers, 2) trade, supply, financial and military representatives were to be appointed by the respective ministry in collaboration with the foreign minister and confirmed in office by the Cabinet of Ministers, 3) the officials of diplomatic missions, consulates etc. were to be appointed by the foreign minister. These regulations formed the basis for later legislation regulating the work of the foreign service.

In recruiting people to serve in the ministry’s central apparatus, the senior staff of the ministry did not really have much choice. Mainly people with foreign language knowledge and university education were engaged. Only one member of the staff of the Latvian foreign ministry (G. Lehe) had previously been in the diplomatic service of Tsarist Russia. In the early years, most of the diplomatic representatives were socially active figures and people from the humanities. Essentially, the diplomat service of the new state was characterised by the diversity of its staff in terms of social activity, education and ideological orientation. A large section of these officials soon left the foreign service, since they turned out to be unsuitable or wished to resume work in their own profession.

THE FOREIGN OFFICE STAFF IN THE 1920s AND 30s

In accordance with the Regulations on Service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued on 16 July 1919 and approved by the government in November 1922 (see Appendix 6), service in the ministry was classified into diplomatic-consular service and technical service. Diplomatic and consular service, in turn, was classified into six ranks. The first rank included Class I envoys extraordinary and ministers plenipotentiary, the second included Class II envoys and ministers plenipotentiary, resident ministers, directors of departments, the head of the minister’s office and consuls-general, the third included chargés d’affaires, advisors to the legations, heads of divisions and Class I consuls, the fourth had Class I secretaries and Class II consuls, the fifth had Class II secretaries and vice-consuls, while the sixth included attachés and consular agents. All other officials, including Class III secretaries, belonged to the technical staff as civil service officials. In addition to these, the technical service included posts not filled by officials, for example typists, stenographers, porters, couriers etc.

The work of the ministry was headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (up to 15 May 1934, the minister was combined in his post by the Sejm along with the rest of the government). The practical work of the ministry was overseen by a secretary-general (up to the early 1920s by an administrator), who led the foreign office when the minister was absent or occupied. (In 1934–1936 this task was performed by V. Murners, while the post of foreign minister was formally held by Prime Minister K. Ulmanis). The director of departments and heads of divisions were responsible for the work of the units under their control. Like the missions abroad, the ministry employed secretaries of Classes I, II and III, as well as other officials and technical personnel.

After 26 January 1921, when Latvia’s independence was recognised de jure, the status of the diplomatic and consular representatives changed significantly. The representatives of Latvia obtained official status and were included in diplomatic and consular lists. Along with these changes, the whole diplomatic and consular staff was transformed in line with international traditions and regulations.

In accordance with the regulations for diplomatic relations agreed on at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, diplomatic representatives were classified into several internationally recognised classes. The highest class included ambassadors, regarded as the direct representative of the government of
his country in a foreign country. Equally in status to an ambassador was the apostolic nuncio, repre-
sentative of the Vatican. Latvia had no ambassadors up to 1991. The second class included envoys
extraordinary and ministers or envoys plenipotentiary, as well as papal nuntiuses. At various
Washington, Paris, Stockholm, Trondheim, Rome, Bucharest, Budapest, Bern, Amsterdam, Brussels,
Copenhagen, Luxembourg, Lisbon, Oslo, Madrid, Vienna, Buenos Aires, Sant Paulo or Rio de
Janeiro, Athens, Sofia and Tirana. Most of the envoys were accredited in several countries at once
(resident and non-resident), so the actual number of legations was considerably smaller. The envoy
represented the interests of his country in the respective country and informed the Latvian
government about the foreign and domestic affairs of this country.

In the early years, professional diplomacy in Latvia was only developing, and there were few
people suitable for office as envoys. The choice of candidate for the post of envoy was determined
by the education of the candidate, political experience and ability to work in diplomatic circles.
Undeniably, the appointment of envoys and diplomatic representatives abroad was subject to political
factors. Since candidates for the post of envoy were proposed by the foreign ministry, approved by
the Saeima Commission on Foreign Affairs and accepted by the Saeima, many parties sought the
appointment of their members as envoys. Often, envoys already in office had to ensure political
backing in order to remain in their posts. However, in the period of democracy, 1918–1934, inter-
vention by political parties to the appointment of envoys was of relatively minor importance. The
directions of the ministry were for almost the whole of this time in the hands of a right-wing party –
the Latvian Farmers’ Union, and a large proportion of envoys were members or supporters of this
party (such as M. Ularens, Z. Gruviela, E. Feldmanis, V. Bandzhevski and J. Sejkin). However, sev-
eral envoys of social democratic persuasion were in office for extended periods (O. Bisenieks,
F. Cieļons and V. Salais).

After the coup of 15 May 1934, there were no significant changes among the envoys. The only
exceptions were the removal of F. Cieļons from his post as envoy in Paris and the appointment of
L. Eks, the envoy in Karlsruhe, as Minister of Finance. On 18 July 1934, in a letter to F. Cieļons the
Prime Minister K. Ulaitis, losing his request on Cieļons’ affiliation to the Latvian Social Demo-
cratic Workers’ Party and ‘the new situation in the life of our country’, asked him to submit his
resignation, otherwise he would be dismissed.

The third class in the diplomatic list included resident ambassadors, however, already by the mid-
1920s, this post had practically gone out of use, though right up to 1940 the Regulations on Service
in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs envisaged the appointment of resident ministers. The fourth class inducted chargés d’affaires, attached to the foreign minister of the receiving
country. Latvia had permanent chargés d’affaires in Brazil and Argentina (envoys were not
appointed there). Temporary chargés d’affaires (Class I secretaries) performed the duties of an
envoy in cases where the previous envoy had left office, but the newly appointed envoy had not yet
taken up his post. The personnel of diplomatic missions also included advisors and attachés.

Advisors worked in several Latvian legations, where they depended for envos in their absence,
and during the rest of the time they maintained various contacts between the mission and the insti-
tutions and society of the receiving country.

In the 1920s and 30s, the secretaries of the foreign office were graded in three classes. Class I
secretaries were responsible for the records and correspondence of a legation and the management
of the clerical staff. Formally, they could not perform the functions of envoys, but in practice, this did
take place in Latvia’s missions abroad. (On the instructions of the envoy, Class I secretaries could
also perform official functions.) In the early years of the foreign service, appointed as secretaries
were people with a university education and foreign language knowledge. Later on, the institution of secretaries stabilised. There were only minor changes, and many of the original Class III secretaries attained quite high office.

The duties of attaches were connected more with clerical work. In addition, from the mid-1920s, special officials were appointed at certain legations – agricultural and commercial attaches, directly responsible for stimulating the country’s foreign trade and dealing with matters relating to agriculture. Commercial and agricultural attaches were proposed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture respectively and appointed with the approval of the foreign minister. Agricultural attaches were appointed in those countries where Latvia was most keen to establish a market for its agricultural produce – Britain and Germany. There was also a post of commercial attaché in Moscow.

In 1940 a new post appeared in the country’s diplomatic service – the commercial advisor, whose task was to stimulate the country’s foreign trade in various ways. The work of the commercial advisors, as with the commercial attaches, was funded by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Commercial advisors were attached as legations like the foreign ministry officials, but in terms of seniority they ranked after advisors as the legations, Class I secretaries and military agents.

Several missions also had military agents (the military attaches of the present day). These were officers charged with the task of maintaining contacts with the armed services of foreign countries and representing the Latvian Army. They had to bring together information on military questions in the countries where they were accredited, analyse the military potential of those countries, the strength and training of armed forces, military education and the quality of the officer corps, the armament industry, etc. Military agents were subject to the envoy, but in their special capacity they were under the army chief of staff, to whom they reported regularly on matters relating to foreign armed forces. Altogether, Latvia had military attaches in 12 different countries at various times (Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Germany, Britain, France, USSR, Romania, Hungary, Sweden and Norway), though some of these were accredited in several countries.

In terms of official service, the consuls were classed into career consuls and honorary consuls. Career consuls belonged to the staff of the foreign ministry, while honorary consuls were not paid by the state. In terms of rank, both career consuls and honorary consuls were designated consuls-general, consuls, vice-consuls or consul agents. The duties of the consuls included defending the country’s economic interests, – protection of the rights of its citizens, as well as matters relating to citizenship, passports etc. They were also responsible for notarial and legal matters, as well as the promotion of shipping and trade. The general duties of consuls were laid down already in 1919. Initially, the foreign office made use of the Russian consular ordinance, supplementing it with particular instructions. In 1935, a Consular Ordinance was passed as law, focusing the basic of the activities of Latvia’s consular service and consular officials.

Career consulates were established at foreign cities of particular importance for Latvia, where economic interests were concentrated or where there was a large number of Latvian citizens. In some countries, career consuls only were appointed, for example in Lithuania (at Klaipėda and Šiauliai) and in the USSR (Moscow and Leningrad). In countries without career consuls, general, the duties of consuls-general were perfonned by the head of the legation.

The institution of honorary consular was established already in the early 1920s following the achievement of Latvia’s international recognition at inter. The first honorary consuls were appointed as honorary consular agents, but later, depending on the importance of the city (major transit, commercial and industrial centres, etc.), they were confirmed in office as honorary vice-consuls, consuls or, in certain cases, as consuls-general. Almost all of the honorary consular representatives were
local merchants or industrialists, who performed their consular activities with varying degrees of success and tried to promote Latvia's foreign trade.

In the 1920s, quite a large number of people from the local Latvian communities were appointed as honorary consular representatives, but in the 1930s this practice was gradually discontinued. For various reasons it was the Latvian candidates in particular who often turned out to be unsuitable—in most cases this was because their financial circumstances deteriorated. In reports from legations to the foreign ministry, the work of consular representatives, particularly in the USA, was often rated as being of little importance. Honorary consuls were accused of inactivity and lack of interest in popularising Latvia. However, in the 1930s, the foreign ministry was generally satisfied with the number of honorary consuls and their work. There was a wide consular network covering the whole of Western Europe, and many of the honorary consular representatives did actively promote economic cooperation and protected the interests of Latvian citizens. It should also be noted that a large proportion of consuls, particularly in distant locations of minor importance for Latvia, in practice had no opportunity to promote economic cooperation with Latvia on a large scale or fulfil other consular functions. Particular status was accorded to Latvia's honorary consulates in Vilnius and the honorary consul F. Bononi. The consulate was in essence, in terms of all its characteristics, a career consulate, but because of the strife between Poland and Lithuania over the city and region of Vilnius, for diplomatic reasons the consulate was officially given the status of an honorary consulate.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the work of the consular service also became much more difficult. Nevertheless, most of the honorary consuls continued their activities to protect Latvian citizens and their property in the changed conditions. Only a few honorary consuls resigned (Cairo, Johannesburg), while others were inactive (the consuls in Indore and Vancouver). Very important were the secretaries of the consulates. Since honorary consuls usually performed official functions, the practical work of consular representation was undertaken by secretaries. These secretaries were in some cases paid by the honorary consuls themselves, and elsewhere by the foreign ministry. Since their duties involved visa and passport matters, information and publicity work, the selection of candidate for the post of secretary was the competency of the foreign ministry. Though there were not many secretaries in Latvian consulates, they were present in the majority of the most important cities (Copenhagen, Hamburg, San Paulo etc.).

The 1920s and 30s saw little change to the staff of the foreign ministry, i. e. the central apparatus. In the early 20s, following the staff reductions mentioned above, a considerable number of lower-ranking officials left the foreign-service. In later years a career system for officials was gradually developed: the most able were gradually promoted, often being posted to missions abroad. However, because of the limited personnel resources and the large number of missions, staff rotation from the ministry to the missions and back again was never to become a permanent and strictly regulated feature.

In 1932, the secretary-general of the ministry V. Munters listed the following as the main personnel problems: 1) appointment and transferability of officials was carried out by the central apparatus, i. e. the ministry; 2) the problem of foreign office staff had not yet been adequately resolved, resulting from the fact that in the early years it was necessary to recruit people who were not properly qualified for a diplomatic career; only in recent years had people joined the service who were entirely suitable in terms of their education, language knowledge and personal characteristics; 3) a diplomatic system had not been established for transferring staff; there were cases where members of the staff worked abroad for many years and even at the same location, thus becoming distant from work at the centre and from the conditions in Latvia; 4) the limited personnel resources, which meant that it was necessary to provide training for the present staff; 5) the limited
budget imposed a ‘double’ responsibility on the ministry to ensure that staff reduction would not affect the most capable officials. 

Because there are quite detailed biographies for almost all the staff of the foreign service, it is possible to analyse the biographies of the people included in the dictionary of biography. Most of the staff of the foreign office – 125 – were born in the region of Vidzeme outside of Riga, quite a large number in Riga as well – 65, with 47 born in Kurzeme. 40 in Zemgale, 31 outside of Latvia (mainly in the present territory of Russia, Estonia and Lithuania), only four employees coming from the Latgale region. In the first place, this is explicable in terms of the different social status of the Latvians of Latgale in the late 19th and early 20th century, therefore the level of education in Latgale was significantly lower than in the rest of the country. Another potent factor was the historical isolation of the Latgale region from the rest of Latvia before 1918 (in practice right up to 1920), the consequences of which were not entirely overcome under the Republic of Latvia. 

In accordance with the available information about the social background of the ministry staff, the majority of the foreign service officials listed in the dictionary of biography – at least 101 – were from the families of peasants with small and medium-sized holdings, innkeepers, millers and foresters, 46 were from the families of intellectuals, teachers, doctors, architects, lawyers, engineers, pastors and officers, 34 were born in the families of city house-owners, estate-owners or owners of small or large businesses, 21 were from the families of workers and farmhands, 18 were from the families of officials and 15 were from families of craftsmen. 

In terms of religious denomination, almost all of the foreign service employees were Lutherans. Only 10 members of the staff belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, eight were Catholic, with one member of the Reformed Church, a Baptist and a Jew. In terms of ethnic affiliation, the service was almost mono-national: the majority of the staff were Latvians. There was a comparatively high number of Germans (15 people, or 4.7%), as well as two French people, a Dane, a Swiss and a Jew. These figures do not at all represent the ethnic or denominational composition of the population, and from this we may only conclude that Lutheran Latvians dominated in the foreign service. Such a tendency, though not so marked, was characteristic of Latvia’s state institutions in general. 

A large section of the ministry’s staff were already in the foreign service from 1919-1921. Senior posts (directors of departments, heads of divisions) were initially occupied by people from various branches of the humanities: lawyers, scientists, and prominent social activists. In later years the level of director of a department was gradually attained by people whose first and only place of employment had been the foreign ministry. 

In view of the absence of foreign service professionals at the time the state was founded, it comes as no surprise that leading positions were held by quite young individuals. For example, R. Liepiņš, A. Kampe and V. Munters became directors of departments at the age of 32, V. Munters was appointed head of a division when he was 26, A. Kampe at the age of 28 and J. Teppars at the age of 30. Some of the best-known foreign ministers were also quite young, Z. Meierovics, on coming to office, was 31, while V. Munters was 38. Only the Minister of Finance A. Valdmanis was younger than Z. Meierovics, taking office at age 29. 

Many employees of the foreign service held a diploma from a higher education institution (at least 136 people), but it should be noted that a proportion of these pursued their studies while already in the employ of the foreign office. Lawyers were the most represented, numbering 42, while 14 people had graduated from faculties of commerce, 9 were philologists, 12 were economists, seven were agronomists, seven were engineers seven were philosophers, and there were six people who had graduated from studies in each of the following fields: chemistry and theology, along with another six military academy graduates. Another 55 of the employees had not completed their
studies (16 of these were students of law). Fifty-eight people were secondary school graduates (includ- ing six graduates of teachers’ colleges, one from a teachers’ institute and 11 graduates from secondary school level military schools). These figures show that the average level of education among foreign service officials was quite high, an education in law being the most requisite for foreign service staff.

Over the years, as the state cut back funding for salaries, the staff of the foreign service was pro-
gressively reduced in number. This meant that it was difficult to ensure a reserve of younger staff to gradually replace the older generation, the original staff of the service. To avoid the prospect of not having a reserve of competent staff and in order to raise the level of proficiency of diplomatic staff, in 1935, the ministry created five post-graduate places in diplomacy studies, where people suitably trained for the diplomatic and consular service might be recruited on a competitive basis. However, the competition examinations in 1935 and 1936 revealed lack of suitable candidates. Thus, in order to provide training for future work in the foreign service, scholarships were established for studies at specialist teaching institutions: two scholarships to the École libre des sciences politiques in Paris and to the London School of Economics and Political Science. The candidates for these studies were selected from among university graduates. Before obtaining the scholarship, the candidates had to sign an undertaking to remain in the foreign service for at least five years. In addition to the above-mentioned educational and language knowledge requirements, in the 1930s, candidates for employment in the foreign office had to be able to write shorthand and type, since there was lack of technical staff in the missions. However, in the 1920s and 30s, there was only one person in the foreign service (A. Kampe) with a degree in the field of diplomacy.

Foreign ministry employees could belong to political parties, and many were not politically neutral. Several people who later became prominent envoys and leading officials in the ministry came from politically active circles. The names of many employees of the foreign service may be found among Sancius-deputies, candidate deputies and other political activists. At least 28 members of the foreign office staff were members of the Latvian Farmers’ Union, 15 were members of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (in addition to which honorary consuls M. Pēcens and J. Vīķis were members of foreign social democratic organisations) and eight were members of the centre party ‘Democratic Centre’. Three of the staff can be found to have been members of the active nationalist organisation ‘Pārkonskrūtas’. At least two belonged to each of the New Farmers’ and Smallholders’ Party, the New Farmers’ Union, the Radical Democratic Party, the German Party of Progress, the National Union and the Union of Progress. J. Rancinas was a member of the Latgale Christian Peasants’ Union. J. Ozolins was one of the founders of the National Club, while A. Friden-
bergs was an active member of Legions, an association of holders of the Līguleāns Military Order and fighters in the War of Liberation. Openly sympathetic towards the Communist Party was A. Ozolins-Krause, an active foreign service staff member in the early years, while the consular agent in Switzerland was arrested in Austria for his links with Soviet intelligence. However, most of the staff of Latvia’s foreign service were without any doubt right-wing in their political sympathies, although several well-known and active social democrats worked there too.
On 21 June 1940, immediately after Latvia was occupied, a puppet government took office, the so-called ‘People’s Government of Latvia’. Prime Minister A. Kirhensteins, appointed by the occupying Soviets, also fulfilled the functions of foreign minister until 26 August. On 25 July, the local communist A. Jablonskis was appointed deputy foreign minister, his task being to abolish the foreign ministry. In late July, all the representatives abroad received an instruction from A. Kirhensteins to return home immediately to report, and after Latvia’s annexation to the USSR they were instructed to transfer the archives of all the Latvian missions ‘and the rest of their property’ to the Soviet Union missions in the respective countries by 6 August (following a decision by the ‘Cabinet of Ministers’ on 5 August to abolish the missions abroad). On 27 August, the Soviet of People’s Commissars of the Latvian SSR charged A. Jablonskis with the task of abolishing the ministry. The instruction was that those members of its staff ‘who can be employed in other offices should by 1 September be marked for transfer, and the rest should be dismissed’.

At a meeting of the staff of the ministry on 29 July 1940, it was announced that foreign affairs were to be transferred to Moscow authority, but that there might be the possibility of forming a consular mission of foreign affairs, which would ‘deal with foreign affairs affecting Soviet Latvia’. At the meeting, those envoys who refused to recognise the legitimacy of Soviet power in Latvia were condemned, and the leaders of the meeting falsely maintained that national and cultural interests would not suffer. Dismissed immediately were officials who were crucially important to the work of the foreign office. Over the coming weeks, almost all the rest of the staff were also dismissed. The Treaty Department and the Political Department were abolished quite soon (on 10 and 16 July respectively). The ministry building along with its furnishings was handed over to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia. On 31 August, the central apparatus formally ended its work and it was considered that the ministry had been abolished. However, in April 1941, it was found that the work of abolishing the ministry had not yet been completed. The archives (apart from personnel files and financial documents) had been sent to Moscow already in September 1940 (the ministry having terminated its work in August). At the same time, the liquidator of the ministry A. Jablonskis admitted that it was not very clear where most of the documents from Latvia’s missions abroad had ended up. In February 1941, a total of 54 staff of the ministry remained abroad, ignoring the instruction to return, since they rightly considered that the country had been occupied. Only two consular officers in Lithuania and Estonia (these countries also having been annexed to the USSR) remained with their families, but the rest of the staff elected not to return for political reasons. Several missions did not transfer their archives to the Soviet institutions, including Washington, London, Buenos Aires and others. Several honorary consuls also refused to give up their archives to the Soviet authorities. T. Hedberg, honorary consul in Halmstad, Sweden, in reply to the demand from A. Jablonskis, wrote that he had been empowered by the government of Latvia, while the instruction to hand over the archives had come from the Soviet mission in Stockholm, so he did not recognise it as legally binding. Since there was no longer a Latvian mission in Sweden, he gave up the archives to the Swedish foreign ministry. The Swedish foreign ministry, in its turn, handed over the archives to the Soviet mission. On 10 April 1941, the last instruction of the liquidators of the Latvian foreign service was signed.

Persecution of the former staff of the foreign ministry began immediately after Latvia’s occupation. The first to be arrested were staff of the legation in Moscow, the secretary P. Alberts (on 12 July) and the envoy F. Kočiņš (19 September). These were followed slightly later by the arrests
of former and current employees of the foreign service G. Bloineks, A. Brodermanis, H. Celmins, V. Jaunais, A. Kapte and others. However, most arrests of foreign ministry staff by the Soviet security services took place on the day of mass repression, 14 July 1941, when their families were also exiled to Siberia. At least 75 people were arrested (more than a quarter of the foreign service employees included in the dictionary of biography who were alive at the time of Latvia’s occupation). Fifty-five of them died in imprisonment, 18 returned to Latvia after having served their term of punishment, and the fate of one person after arrest remains unknown, and one did not return to Latvia after imprisonment. One was in a Soviet prisoner of war camp after the conflict and later emigrated to Germany (A. Stricks). Three former foreign service employees — (L. Seja, J. Straute and G. Celmins) were kept under arrest by the Germans for a period of time during the war. One was killed in battle, an officer in the Latvian Legion (V. Veisl). When the prospect of a second Soviet occupation approached, a large section of the former staff of the foreign service went into exile. At least 135 people ended up in the west (41%, not including honorary consuls of Latvian origin who lived permanently abroad before 1940). The known last countries of residence are: 31 in the USA, 29 in Germany, 30 in Sweden, eight in the United Kingdom, seven in Australia and Canada, seven in France, five in Switzerland, two in Brazil, two in Spain, two in Austria, one in Denmark, one in Belgium, one in New Zealand, one in the Netherlands, and one in China. Twenty-seven people, all now deceased, lived in Latvia after the Second World War without being subjected to persecution.

THE MISSIONS IN EXILE, 1940–1991

After the Soviet occupation, most of Latvia’s diplomats refused to accept the authority of the institutions of occupation and, based on emergency powers issued to K. Zarins by the Cabinet of Minister on 17 May 1940, maintained the legal existence of independent Latvia in exile. A major support for their work was the unwavering support of Western countries on the Baltic question: neither the USA nor the United Kingdom ever recognised the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR de facto (and the USA never recognised it de jure either). This meant that the diplomats of the Baltic States had the opportunity to continue representing their countries, to a limited extent (because the countries were under occupation).

The emergency powers issued to K. Zarins empowered him, under special conditions (if the government ‘would no longer be able to communicate with the missions abroad because of war’), to appoint and dismiss Latvia’s representatives abroad, except for some countries (the USSR, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden) and to utilise Latvian state funds allocated to the legations. In case K. Zarins, the holder of these emergency powers, should die or lose his freedom of action, the powers would transfer to the envoy in Washington, A. Bihuis. Unfortunately, the text of the emergency powers did not envisage any further course of action.

None of the envoys responded to the call from the puppet government in July 1940 to return to occupied Latvia (except, of course, for the envoys in Moscow, Rausus and Tallinn, who were forced to return). Quite the opposite, they announced that the occupation and annexation had been illegal and tried to counter the propaganda spread by Soviet authorities. Already from late July 1940, the envoys V. Saluins, J. Tepfers and V. Smurnais, later joined by other envoys, in the course of several meetings tried to establish an organisation that would represent independent Latvia — a national committee. In 1943, V. Saluins and F. Celins abroad and L. Seja in Latvia became involved in the activities of an underground political organisation, the Latvian Central Council.
At a meeting in Geneva on 26 May 1946 the Latvian envoys K. Zarins, O. Grossvalds and J. Feldmans made fundamental decisions on the principles that would guide their activities: 1) the struggle for restoration of Latvia’s independence to be continued as intensively as possible, 2) the emergency powers issued by the government of independent Latvia on 17 May 1940 to envoy K. Zarins and the proposed successor to these powers A. Bliemants should be regarded as the continuation of the idea of the sovereign authority of the Latvian state and would thus represent the legal basis for the activity of the envoys. The Latvian envoys continue to represent Latvia’s sovereign power at those countries and international organisations where they have been accredited and where they are able to work, 3) the envoys should collaborate, so far as political conditions and communications allow, with all patriotic Latvian organisations and social and national activities both in the homeland and in exile whose aim is — the restoration of Latvia’s sovereignty, 4) to this end, meetings of the envoys were to be organised and, as far as possible, together with representatives of all national patriotic organisations.

The previous diplomats continued to fulfil their functions as diplomatic and consular representatives of Latvia. In the course of time the head of the diplomatic service promoted several of them or posted them to different countries, but because of the limited funds available and their special status, the number of diplomats fell over the course of time. In addition to the diplomats, quite a large number of honorary consuls continued their work. During the post-war years about twenty honorary consuls were appointed in the United Kingdom, USA, Canada and Australia. Because Latvia was under occupation, their status was not equivalent to that of representatives of other countries, so after 1940 all the consular representatives were formally designated acting consuls, acting vice-consuls etc.

K. Zarins also appointed to diplomatic and career consul post some people — such as A. Berziņš in Newfoundland and K. Gulbis in Belgium and Luxembourg, who up to that time had not been connected with the foreign service. However, in most cases the work of these new officials was difficult, since their possibility of being included on the diplomatic and consular lists of the countries of residence was determined by the position of the country on the question of the occupation and annexation of the Baltic States. The newly-appointed officials of the diplomatic service performed their duties with the status of private individuals, except in Spain. For example, K. Gulbis, appointed representative of the head of the Latvian diplomatic service in Belgium and Luxembourg in 1951, was empowered by K. Zarins as a ‘representative to undertake the duties of protecting the interests of Latvian citizens in Belgium and Luxembourg’. In practice the main task of all the Latvian representatives during the occupation was to legalise their status and, as far as possible, to protect the interests of the country and its citizens in cooperation with other representatives of Latvia. However, in practice, apart from legalising the documents of Latvian citizens and providing information to K. Zarins, these representatives performed virtually no other activities. J. Tepfers, former envoy and now K. Zarins representative in Sweden, held similar status.

Following the death of the holder of emergency powers K. Zarins in 1963, the question arose as to who would now take his place, i.e. who would become the head of the Latvian diplomatic and consular service. The envoy to the USA A. Spekke recognised that although the powers terminate with the death of the holder, the missions had political and moral power. A specially convened meeting of envoys in London on 5 May 1963 decided that the service should henceforth be headed by A. Spekke, and so Latvia’s main mission was transferred from London to Washington. 25 October 1980 saw the issue of a declaration by S. Aijello, adviser on ethnic issues to US President George Carver on the procedure for accrediting representatives of the Baltic States, stipulated that the appointments should be on the advice of the head of the legation and in consultation with the US government and the State Department, which on 7 November 1980 agreed to this principle,
It should be noted that in the exile community the work of the diplomatic service and its staff was variously rated. Although the whole of the organised Latvian exile community recognised the diplomatic service as the only expression of the legal existence of the state in its international relations, the work of the envoys was criticised and there was disagreement over who should have the right to direct diplomatic posts. There was particularly heated discussion over the question of utilisation of funds. (For maintaining the missions, funds were obtained in various ways, for example, the USA permitted interest from Latvian state funds frozen in its banks to be used for this purpose.) The cause of this situation was that on 17 May 1940 the government had issued special powers to K. Zaris, but had not detailed how they should be exercised. Both K. Zarinis and his successors usually had to act according to the demands of the situation at hand.

On 16 and 17 September 1971, a meeting of Latvia’s diplomatic representatives took place in Paris. A. Dibergs was elected in place of A. Spēks as the head of the Latvian diplomatic service in the free world. The meeting was attended by the adviser to thelegation in Washington A. Dinibergs, the former envoy, now representative in Germany R. Līpāns, the former envoy J. Telpers, the acting chargé d’affaires in Prague K. Beižis, the chargé d’affaires in the United Kingdom T. Oolins, the consul-general in the Hague B. Pavars and the representative of Latvia’s diplomatic service in Switzerland and at the international organisations in Geneva A. Skibers, A. Dibergs continued to head the country’s diplomatic mission in Washington right up to December 1991. Because the US government had declared in 1980 that people who had not been in the diplomatic service of the Baltic States during the time of independence would henceforth also not be accredited as staff of the legations of these countries (appointing being in accordance with the advice of the head of the legation), several new people joined the diplomatic service in the 1950s, most of whom continued to work here after Latvia regained independence.

In December 1991, after Latvia’s independence had been restored and recognised internationally, the legation in the USA laid down the powers of the Latvian missions and these were assumed by the foreign ministry of the restored Latvian state. Thus ended a 73 year long period of the history of Latvia’s foreign office during which it was formed, developed and survived the harsh years of occupation as one of the symbols of the independent Republic of Latvia.

CONCLUSIONS

The foreign service is one of the symbols of every country’s independence, an essential element of state sovereignty. In the early period of the country’s development, foreign relations had to be conducted while at the same time as the foreign service itself was being created. There was a lack of staff, experience and material means. Already at the very outset of the activity of the foreign service, the missions abroad were staffed by well-educated people with foreign language knowledge. It was to a large degree these first, difficult years of the country’s existence which revealed that Latvia’s foreign service had a considerable number of able and talented people. It was due particularly to the work of the foreign service that Latvia was able to successfully resolve the issue of its borders and achieve international recognition already by 1921. In later years, the first generation of diplomats of the new state showed in the field of international relations they could prove themselves the equals of diplomats from countries that had incomparably greater experience in developing their foreign services. This was seen in all fields of international relations; the work of missions in foreign countries and international organisations, the policies pursued by the central apparatus (the foreign ministry) and the performance of diplomatic protocol. After 1940, when the
country was occupied by Soviet forces, Latvia’s diplomats were the ones to maintain the continuity of the independent state and remind the world of the criminal actions of the Soviet Union.

Although the development of the foreign office was part of the country’s general political development, the successes and activity of the service undoubtedly contributed to Latvia’s role as a member of the international community. In the first place, through the skilful performance of its allotted tasks, the foreign service hastened international recognition of independent Latvia. Secondly, right up to the eve of the Second World War, Latvia succeeded in balancing between the aggressive great powers and retaining its independence. Of course, Latvia’s diplomats could not avert the country’s occupation. Thirdly, by creating and constantly maintaining a system of economic agreements with foreign states, the foreign service ensured favourable conditions for the country’s economic development. Fourthly, the staff of the ministry, the diplomats and consuls successfully undertook to protect Latvian citizens and their property abroad.

All in all, it must be admitted that Latvia’s foreign service was organised in line with international conventions and practice. It worked in accordance with the possibilities and needs of a young and small country. The lack of professional foreign service staff was a problem resolved already in the 1920s, when a small, but permanent staff of officials was established. In the second half of the 30s much more attention was already being given to the selection of foreign service personnel. Later, during the occupation, the staff trained in the foreign office and the legal framework for their activity permitted the idea of the country’s independence to be kept alive at the international level over a period of 50 years.
THE LATVIAN FOREIGN OFFICE
1918-1991

Biographical Encyclopaedia
Series "Latvia and International Relations"

Erik Juhans
Latvian Institute of International Affairs

Ziedonis Publishers
Riga, 2003

In Latvian