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## **The Beginnings of Women's Agency in Latvian Foreign Affairs: an Autobiographical Approach**

### **Pirmsākumi sieviešu iesaistei Latvijas ārlietās: autobiogrāfiskā pieeja**

#### **Keywords:**

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#### **Atslēgvārdi:**

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diplomātijas vēsture,  
autobiogrāfiskā rakstība,  
dienasgrāmata,  
Grosvaldu ģimene

## Summary

This article aims to name and place women as active participants in foreign affairs and to offer a case study through the research of autobiographical documents. The Latvian Foreign Service from 1919 to 1940 had 575 paid women employees in civil service positions, both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in diplomatic and consular missions abroad, but only 16 held the highest positions open to women at the time, namely the posts of secretaries, 1st and 2nd class, due to the domination of a patriarchal model in which women were given a subordinate role. The involvement of the Grosvalds family women in the foreign service presents an almost complete picture of women in Latvian foreign affairs in the first decade of its existence, and their autobiographical material is hitherto unrecognised, though essential and diverse, especially the diary of Margarēta Grosvalde. The autobiographical evidence, such as letters and diaries, adds an extra layer for research and allows observation of the foreign affairs scene through the gendered lenses of typist, secretary and envoy's wife, something which had not been done before. The research presented in the article demonstrates conclusively that women were present in, not absent from, diplomacy in the era preceding their full inclusion in the national diplomatic service in the later twentieth century.

## Kopsavilkums

Šī raksta mērķis ir nosaukt un izcelt sievietes kā aktīvas līdzdalībnieces Latvijas ārlietu vēsturē, kā arī piedāvāt gadījumu analīzi, izmantojot autobiogrāfisko dokumentu izpēti. Latvijas ārlietu dienestā no 1919. līdz 1940. gadam bija 575 algotas darbinieces civildienesta amatos Ārlietu ministrijā un diplomātiskajās un konsulārajās pārstāvniecībās ārvalstīs, taču tikai 16 ieņēma tobrīd sievietēm pieejamos augstākos amatus, proti, 1. un 2. šķiras sekretāru amatus, jo dominēja patriarhālais modelis, kurā sievietēm tika piešķirta zemāka loma. Grosvaldu dzimtas sieviešu iesaiste ārlietu dienestā sniedz gandrīz pilnīgu priekšstatu par sievietēm Latvijas ārlietās pirmajā desmitgadē, un viņu autobiogrāfiskais materiāls ir līdz šim neapzināts, lai gan būtisks un daudzveidīgs, īpaši Margarētas Grosvaldes dienasgrāmata. Autobiogrāfiskās liecības, piemēram, vēstules un dienasgrāmatas, pētniecībai piedāvā līdz šim neizmantotu papildu slāni un ļauj vērot ārlietu ainu caur dzimuma prizmu, atklājot mašīnrakstītājas, sekretāres, sūtņa sievas pieredzes. Rakstā izklāstītais materiāls pārliciecināši pierāda, ka sievietes bija klātesošas diplomātijā laikā pirms viņu pilnīgas iekļaušanas diplomātiskajā dienestā 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē.

The history of Latvian foreign affairs is gendered, as diplomacy has traditionally been reserved for men for centuries. Before World War II, women were barred from serving as diplomats<sup>1</sup> in many countries (Leira, Neumann, 2008), including Latvia. In her legendary book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1989), feminist theorist Synthia Enloe has titled the first chapter *Gender Makes the World Go Round. Where Are the Women?*. Enloe's main argument is that researchers should listen to women carefully: "Listen to those trying to break out of the strait-jacket of conventional femininity and those who find security and satisfaction in those very conventions" (Enloe 1989: 11). Diplomatic historians have provided essential insights into how gender was understood and practised in diplomacy over the past few hundred centuries<sup>2</sup>. Karin Aggestam and Ann Towns, both professors in political sciences, have written on ministries of foreign affairs as gendered institutions. They state that these institutions seem to have predictable divisions of labour, including a familiar division of responsibilities and tasks among women and men, with women often ending up in support functions and "soft" policy areas. In contrast, men cluster in "hard" policy areas<sup>3</sup> and are overrepresented in leadership positions. (Aggestam, Towns 2019: 21).

The representation of women in foreign affairs from the founding of the Latvian state in 1918 to the Soviet occupation in 1940 has not been a central subject of research until today. An insightful overview is provided by an article by the Latvian historian Daina Bleiere on women in the foreign service and the security policy of Latvia in the 1990s after restoration of independence (Bleiere 2020). Another commendable contribution is the chapter *Personal Portraits of the Foreign Service of Latvia* by Mārtiņš Drēģeris (Drēģeris 2022: 509–542), a lawyer and employee of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the subsection about the first female diplomats *The First Female Diplomats* (ibid.: 515–519), he highlights some of the female employees of the

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1 The first female diplomat to head a foreign post was Aleksandra Kollontay from Russia, who was appointed to Kristiania (now Oslo), Norway, in 1923.

2 See, for example: McCarthy 2014; Cassidy 2017; Sluga, James 2015.

3 The difference between soft and hard power in international politics is the use of force. 'Soft power' is a type of influence wielded by persuading others through political, moral, or cultural attraction. 'Hard power' coerces compliance through inducements such as military force, economic sanctions, or the control of exports to compel policymakers in other countries to acquiesce.

Latvian foreign service of the interwar period. The presence and contribution of women is mentioned, albeit not explicitly, in fundamental studies of Latvian foreign policy (Andersons 1982, Lerhis 2005) or more popularly written overviews (Treijs 2003), also in some research articles (Gueslin 2017; Lipša, Vizgunova 2018; Viķe-Freiberga 2020).

The compilers of the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Foreign Affairs* (Jēkabsons, Ščerbinskis 2003) have chosen to include 16 women; in alphabetical order they are: Elza Blaua, Emīlija Bole, Alma Ducmane, Līna (Karolīna) Grosvalde, Margarēta Grosvalde, Milda Heninga, Anna Ķeniņa-Rūmane, Elfrīda Lauva, Antonija Lūkina, Angelika Miķelsone, Austra Ozoliņa-Krauze, Anna Rudzīte, Marī Žilbēra Rukvēra (*Marie-Gilberte Rouquiére*), Margrieta Sandere, Matilde Vesmane, Ērika Vilsone. The criteria for inclusion were according to the highest positions open to women at the time, namely the posts of secretaries, 1st and 2nd class<sup>4</sup>. However, the document collection of the Administrative Department and Contracts Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Latvian State Historical Archives (ĀM, Fund No. 2570) shows a much more widespread involvement of women. It also reveals the range of positions held which were hierarchically lower: typist, clerk, telegraphist.

This article aims to name and place women as active participants in foreign affairs and to offer a case study through the research of autobiographical documents. There are several sources to use for the research of women's agency in foreign affairs. It is possible to distinguish between three main categories as offered by the professor of women's and gender history, June Purvis, in her article on primary sources when researching women's history from a feminist perspective: (1) official texts, (2) published commentary and reporting, and (3) personal texts. The last category is personal texts that reveal a person's subjective experience. They include letters, diaries, photograph albums, autobiographies, and life histories. (Purvis 1992: 275) My research is mainly based on the third category, using autobiographical documents of women of the Grosvalds family, although background information has been taken from all sources.

The research of women's participation in Latvian foreign affairs by use of women's autobiographical documents is a completely uncharted field. Daina Bleiere, in the conclusion of her article 'Women in the foreign and security policy of a restored Latvia in the 1990s: the foreign service', expresses the hope that "over time, memoirs or diaries of women diplomats will be published which could provide deeper insights into their actual experiences" (Bleiere 2020: 47). Autobiographical documents of both men and

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4 In the 1920s and 1930s, 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. (Jēkabsons, Ščerbinskis 2003: 427)

women in the foreign service during Latvia's first period of independence, including memoirs, diaries, correspondence and notebooks, are scarce. There are several factors to consider. First, the women involved rarely left any testimony about this period of their lives or otherwise it has been destroyed or lost. Secondly, several officials and diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were deported, and a few men were put on death row. A small number of testimonies have been left, however. Firstly, memoirs were written by men in senior diplomatic positions as envoys and ministers who managed to stay in their posts and travel while abroad during World War II (Miķelis Valters, Fēlikss Cielēns, Kārlis Ozols, Donass, Vilhelms Munters, Fridrihs Vesmanis<sup>5</sup>). There are also annotated collections of autobiographical documents (Ludvigs Sēja<sup>6</sup>) or semi-documental portrayals (Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics<sup>7</sup>, Miķelis Valters<sup>8</sup>). The records of male activities in the public sphere of politics, government, war, diplomacy, administration, and business have usually been carefully preserved, making a fruitful store for the malestream historian. (Purvis 1992: 278) The concern in feminist history with finding women's voices from the past has led to a search for women's personal accounts to capture the complexity of women's lives in all their diversity. The most voluminous autobiographical document is the recently discovered diary of Margarēta Grosvalde covering the period 1919–1926, when she worked for the newly established Latvian foreign service. Other autobiographical material left by women includes diaries, correspondence, autobiographies, and memoirs, such as the autobiography of Anna Rūmane-Keniņa<sup>9</sup>, Angelika Gailīte's memoir *Cēliniece* (The Wanderer, published 1962), and the diary of Ivande Kaija (partly published in 1931). Relevant for research are also autobiographical documents of the wives of diplomats, e.g., the

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5 Fēlikss Cielēns. *Laikmetu maiņā* [In the Change of Eras] (1963); Felikss Donass. *Politiskos krustceļos* [At Political Crossroads] (1969); Edgars Krieviņš. *Viņās dienās* [In Those Days] (1966); Alfreds Bērziņš. *Labie gadi* [The Good Years] (1963); Ādolfs Šilde. *Valstsvīri un demokrāti* [Statesmen and Democrats] (1985); Ādolfs Šilde. *Ardievas Rīgai* [Farewell to Riga] (1988); Arnolds Spekke. *Atmiņu brīži* [Moments of Memories] (2000).

6 Ludvigs Sēja. *Es pazīstu vairs tikai sevi: diplomāta dienaspamāts un memoriāls, 1941–1961* [I Only Recognise Myself: Diary and Memoirs of a Diplomat, 1941–1961], sast. Uldis Neiburgs (2017).

7 Līgotņu Jēkabs. *Zigfrīds (Anna) Meierovics: Mūžs, darbs, liktens* [Zigfrīds (Anna) Meierovics: Life, Work, Fate] (1938); Ansis Gulbis. *Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics: Biogrāfisks romāns* [Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics: a biographical novel] (1959); Rihards Treijs. *Zigfrīds Meierovics* (2007); Jānis Ūdris. *Zigfrīda Meierovica trīs Annas* [The Three Annas of Zigfrīds Meierovics] (2007).

8 Rihards Treijs. *Miķelis Valters: Politikā, diplomātā un literātā* [Miķelis Valters: Politician, Diplomat and Writer] (2012).

9 The manuscript is held at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia.

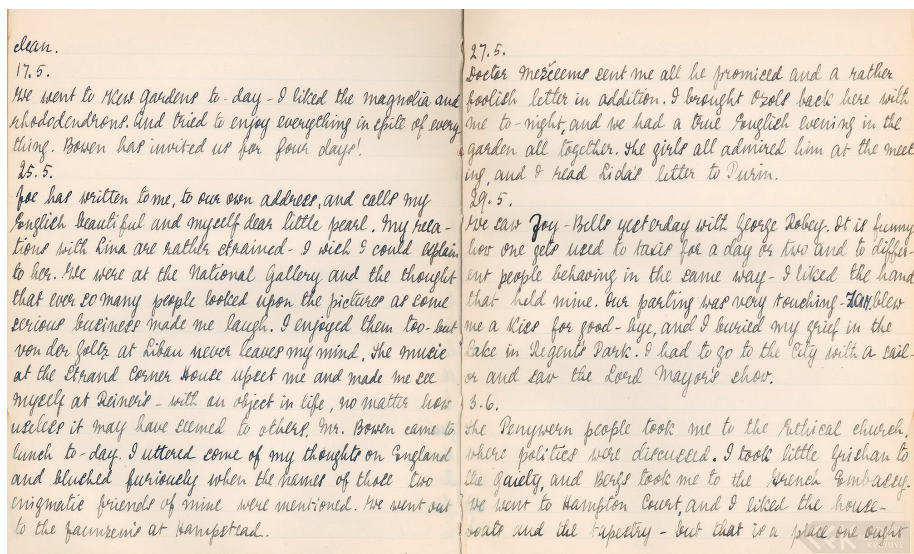


Fig. 1. Margarēta Grosvalde's diary: double-page spread from May, 1919.  
Archives of Latvian Folklore, Autobiography Collection, Ak75, p. 8

autobiography of Milda Salnā<sup>10</sup>, written at the end of her life in exile in America; and the correspondence of Berta Vesmane<sup>11</sup>. The written testimonies of the Grosvalds family women inspired me to look at women and their different roles in the Latvian Foreign Service. They allow observation of the foreign affairs scene through the gendered lenses of typist, secretary, translator, envoy's wife, and envoy's daughter, which had not been done before. The testimonies also offered an opportunity to review the history of diplomacy through the prism of life writing, which is the only way to obtain more information about most women in official positions, along with archive documents. The autobiographical material of the Grosvalds family women is hitherto unrecognised, though essential and diverse. It includes the family correspondence held in the memorial collection of Jāzeps Grosvalds at the Latvian National Museum of Art. Moreover, the diary of Margarēta Grosvalde already mentioned is a unique historical testimony providing an inside look at the beginnings of the Latvian state and the Latvian Foreign Service. The diary is housed in the Autobiography Collection of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (autobiografijas.lv). The involvement of the Grosvalds family women in the foreign service presents an almost complete picture of women

10 Hoover Institution Library and Archives (USA).

11 Literature and Music Museum (Latvia) and private archives.

in Latvian foreign affairs in the first decade of the establishment. The autobiographical evidence, such as letters and diaries, adds an extra layer for research to trace the nuances of attitudes among service personnel and the promotion of international relations through the activities in the daily life of the diplomatic service.

The study of these testimonies correlates with a widespread turn in feminist research to historically disparaged sources, especially personal texts and autobiographical testimonies, to find women's agency in the past, though use is also made of official sources. To sum up, there are several testimonies upon which to base arguments and deepen the existing gender perspective on Latvian foreign affairs, which is mostly masculinised. This article thus will join the discussion on female diplomacy, which has become a lively field of study within international relations. It will identify and give an overview of the beginnings of women's agency and experience in Latvian foreign affairs and diplomacy, and analyse women's representation in the foreign service and specific activities through autobiographical material. Keeping in mind Enloe's encouragement to "exercise genuine curiosity about each of these women's lives" (Enloe 1989: 3), the analyses will broaden understanding of the feminist sense of international politics and use the autobiographical approach as new instrumentation.

## ***We do not want women in diplomatic work.***

### **Women's positions and roles in foreign affairs before WWII**

The exploration of gender in Latvian diplomacy and Latvia's foreign service should be started by naming women who served in the foreign service before World War II. The Latvian Foreign Service from 1919 to 1940 had 1331 paid employees: 756 men and 575 women worked in civil service positions, both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in diplomatic and consular missions abroad. Of these, 278 men and 16 women held (the criterion used by historians Jēkabsons and Ščerbinskis in compiling the encyclopaedic compendium of foreign service staff) the highest diplomatic and consular service positions. Thus 56.8% of all salaried workers were men and 43.2% were women. However, of the 294 senior positions in the diplomatic and consular service, 94.6% were held by men and 5.4% by women (Križevica 2019). These statistics support the statement that women were thus prohibited from occupying official diplomatic positions in virtually all countries until the early to mid-twentieth century (Aggestam, Towns). Although the principle of equal opportunity was established in most European countries due to legislation passed in 1919, Diplomatic and Consular Services posts remained reserved for men until the end of World War II. Statistics compiled by Neumann show that a law

on female diplomats was passed in Denmark in 1934, and Norwegian women became legally entitled to be diplomatic and consular civil servants by law in 1938. In France, this happened in 1929; in Britain in the wake of World War II. During the following decades, the legal barrier to female diplomats was eliminated throughout Europe (Neumann 2008: 676). However, in Latvia this choice to exclude women from the highest grades in the diplomatic and consular service was not fixed in any law<sup>12</sup>; it was an unwritten internal agreement. In theory, there were no legal obstacles in Latvia and, in principle, equality between men and women was recognised, but no women were employed in diplomacy and consular services abroad after 1923, except as technical staff.

A glance into the career of some of the 16 women who have held the highest diplomatic and consular service positions and are included in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Latvian Foreign Affairs* reveals that only two of them (Margarēta Grosvalde and Margrieta Sandere) held senior positions in the Foreign Service from its beginning in 1919 until the ministry was dissolved in August 1940 after Soviet occupation. Another two were transferred to the Ministry of the Interior (Milda Henninga and Anna Rudzīte). The rest had shorter careers in the diplomatic service, mainly until the second half of the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> In 1920–1925, when the ministry was reorganised several times, 12 women had to leave their jobs, 7 of them were dismissed due to the disbanding of the department or downsizing, 4 – of their free will, and one left the service arbitrarily.

Most of these 16 women were recruited by word of mouth within closed social circles. However, they had specific skills, such as foreign language knowledge and/or (type)writing skills. Women who held senior positions often were primarily related by familial ties to men who worked in leading positions in public institutions, including in the foreign ministry. Of the 16 cases analysed, this correlation can be observed in at least nine cases. Three women held the highest position of secretary,

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12 Regulations on service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were promulgated on 2 November, 1922, and remained in force throughout the first period of independence of the Latvian state. Service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was divided into two categories: 1. Diplomatic-consular service; 2. Technical service. The diplomatic-consular service and the technical service were divided into a) officials serving with the central authority (the ministry itself) and b) officials serving in diplomatic and consular missions abroad. Service Grade IV: *Secrétaire de Légation de I-re classe* included secretaries, 1st class, working at the ministry and in the legations. Service Grade V: Secretary of the Legation of the Second Class – *Secrétaire de Légation de II-me classe* included secretaries, 2nd class, working at the ministry and in the legations. (*Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums* [Collection of Laws and Government Orders] No 26 December 28, 1922).

13 In accordance with the 1922 Regulations, there were four secretaries, 1st class and five secretaries, 2nd class.



1st class: Anna Rudzīte<sup>14</sup>, Milda Heninga<sup>15</sup> and Margrieta Sandere<sup>16</sup>. Rudzīte was married to Dāvids Rudzītis, Head of the State Chancellery already before her recruitment, but Sandere married Miķelis Sanders, a previous 1st secretary at the diplomatic mission in London, while working at the Foreign Ministry. Emīlija Alvīne Bole<sup>17</sup> is also an example of the widespread tendency establish family relations among colleagues. In 1920, she started working as secretary, 2nd class, at the Latvian Consulate General in Berlin, and in 1921 she married Pēteris Bole, Head of the Economic and Statistical Department of the same Consulate General. Alma Marija Ducmanis<sup>18</sup> served as secretary, 2nd class, at the Consulate General in Copenhagen from 1920, while her husband Kārlis Ducmanis started his career in the diplomatic service in 1919. Although Alma had a good education, as she had graduated from The Bestuzhev Courses in St Petersburg, the largest and most prominent women's higher education institution in Russia, she had to reconcile herself to the role of a diplomat's wife when Ducmanis took up the post of Consul General in Copenhagen. After the Consulate General was dissolved, Ducmanis became Consul General in Stockholm. From 1927, he became an independent representative to the League of Nations in Geneva, where Alma worked as his assistant. Ducmanis had to justify this choice in a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He stated that after the abolition of the secretarial post in Geneva, finding a qualified Latvian-speaking assistant was impossible, so "for the time being, my wife served as an employee without contract" (ĀM 1928). Matilde Vesmane (née Bērziņa, 1888–1950) also became the wife of the envoy to Soviet Russia, Jānis Vesmanis. From 1919–1920 she served as a record keeper and secretary, 2nd class, in the Foreign Passport Department.

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14 Anna Rudzīte (née Stonslava, 1884–1959) started working as a civil servant in 1919 and became the Head of the Foreign Passport Section.

15 Milda Heninga (1891–1930) who, like Anna Rudzīte, worked in the Foreign Passport Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1919–1926). Before 1919 she was a foreign correspondent and assistant accountant at the *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG).

16 Margrieta Sandere (née Buša, 1899–1979) graduated from the Lomonosov Gymnasium, one of the highest-level women's gymnasia in Riga, in 1916 and immediately began working as a typist. In 1921 she was a clerk at the Consulate General in Berlin for a few months, and the post was soon abolished. She continued working at the Foreign Ministry until World War II, starting as a clerk, 3rd class, and rising to secretary, 1st class, in 1926.

17 Emīlija Alvīne Bole (née Vītola, 1893–after 1959) in 1923 was dismissed due to the abolition of her post. Soon afterwards she divorced Bole, and in 1930 she married Arvīds Bredermans, acting 1st Secretary at the Consulate in Kaunas.

18 Alma Marija Ducmane (née Vītola, 1888–1946).

Several female foreign service employees are also known as prominent exponents of women's writing, art, and other professional and social activism of their time. Elfrīda Lauva was a multi-talented woman, considered the first speech therapist in Latvia after completing studies in speech therapy in Vienna<sup>19</sup>. She worked for the foreign service (1919–1922) as secretary, 2nd class, in the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the diplomatic mission in Switzerland. She was also a great supporter of the disabled writer and philosopher Zenta Mauriņa<sup>20</sup> before her emigration in 1944. Alise Ērika Vilsone, from 1930 onwards Valtere (1896–1973) is one of the most visible figures, finding fulfilment in the foreign service, journalism, and book art, becoming the first woman artist-bookbinder in Latvia. In 1919 she went to Finland and worked at the Latvian Legation in Helsinki. From there, her life's path followed that of her eventual husband, Dr Miķelis Valters, Latvia's first Minister of the Interior and later envoy in Poland and Italy. In 1920, she was appointed as secretary, 2nd class, and stenographer at the diplomatic mission in Rome. In 1923 she was dismissed due to a staff reorganisation, but in 1924 she became a freelance employee at the Latvian Legation in Paris, where she managed League of Nations affairs and communication with Spain and Portugal. Her position in the foreign service had been most hotly debated, with envoy Miķelis Valters and Minister of Foreign Affairs Meierovics defending her. Quotes from official correspondence and protocols from debates in the Saeima prove her exceptional status. For example, the debate in the Saeima Budget Commission on the budget allocations for envoys in Rome and Paris (12 March, 1925) where the Minister for Foreign Affairs [Meierovics] takes the floor: "As for Miss Vilsone, she has been in the Latvian civil service for six years, is a capable employee, and, apart from languages, also knows shorthand. She has been repeatedly employed as a secretary by the envoy Valters. Still, since it is impossible to enlist women in the diplomatic service, she works on a casual contract basis" (ĀM 1925).

Antonija Lūkina and Angelika Miķelsone were colleagues at the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both working as secretaries, 2nd class. Antonija Lūkina, better known as the writer and women's rights campaigner Ivande Kaija (1876–1942), and Angelika Miķelsone (née Gailīte, 1884–1975), better known as the writer and educator Angelika Gailīte, should be singled out separately. Both were dismissed in connection with redundancies: Lūkina as early as 1921 and Miķelsone

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19 In 1937, the Riga City Council decided to train a special teacher for the correction of language disorders and sent Elfrīda Lauva, Head of the Psychology Department at the Riga Institute of Psychotechnics and Vocational Training, to Vienna to complete a specialized course with one of the best specialists in correcting language disorders, Prof. Dr. Emil Froeschels

20 For more on Zenta Mauriņa, see: Ronne 2018.

in 1923. Both also left autobiographical accounts of their work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lūkina recorded her duties and impressions in her diary, and Miķelsone in her memoirs. Miķelsone recalls how she obtained the job and what her main responsibilities were:

In the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, later renamed the Press Department, the director was Pauls Ašmanis, a *tālaviētis*<sup>21</sup> whom I knew from my youth. I went to see him. He asked me if I spoke French<sup>22</sup>. I told him that I had studied it at school and then improved my French language by reading French books. He gave me a questionnaire to fill in. Soon I received a notice to come to work in the Information Department, working with monitoring the French-language press.

So I started working in the Foreign Ministry on 20 March, 1920. My task was to read the French newspapers, choose the most important articles, and summarise them. I handed over my work to the typists (there were several of them). My abstracts were sent on to Minister Zigfrids Meierovics, who did not have time to read all the newspapers. The work was interesting, and my colleagues were pleasant. (Gailīte 1962: 102)

The passage from the diary of Lūkina (Ivande Kaija) reflects on her first working day, her responsibilities, and her salary, presenting the job as a solid opportunity to combine her literary and social activities.

And today is such a big, delightful day for me; I've started working in the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I am supposed to report on the French press. I have been working all day without lifting my head from the desk. 9-3. I had such a pile of French newspapers in front of me that I became scared. But when I read them, it was so interesting that I forgot. [...] I won't have to fear hunger anymore. My salary is 600 roubles a month, and if I receive, as I ought, a 10% supplement for each child, that comes to 180 roubles, 780 roubles in all. (Kaija 1931: 79)

Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa<sup>23</sup> and Austra Ozoliņa-Krauze also occupied a prominent place in high society and the literary scene of the time. Both Rūmane-Ķeniņa and Krauze-Ozoliņa are considered the first female employees<sup>24</sup> of the Latvian Foreign Service

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21 Member of the Latvian student fraternity *Talavija*. Membership in such fraternities was an important channel for building a reliable social circle with high levels of mutual trust. Six of the first nine Latvian envoys from 1920 to 1922 were members of fraternities (corporations). For more, see: Kaktiņa 2005.

22 The Cabinet of Ministers decided (on 4 August 1919) to raise the salaries of French or English-speaking civil servants in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by 10-25% above the established rate.

23 For more, see: Kārkla, Eglāja-Kristsone 2023; Ikstena 1993.

24 Krauze-Ozoliņa was Head of the Information Bureau of the Provisional Diplomatic Mission in Berlin (September 1919–October 1920) and Charge d'Affaires of the Diplomatic Mission in Berlin (September 1920–November 1920). Rūmane-Ķeniņa was Head of the Information Office at the Latvian Diplomatic Mission in Paris (1919 October–1920 July).

and were also involved in public diplomacy and propaganda work for Latvia during World War I. Rūmane-Ķeniņa wrote about Latvia in Swiss, French and English newspapers, making speeches at congresses and meetings, and working at the French Foreign Ministry press centre as a specialist in Baltic affairs<sup>25</sup>. Krauze-Ozoliņa wrote in German and Swiss newspapers, and published an information bulletin on Latvia and two books in which she exposed with incisive logic the unjust statements of German propaganda. However, foreign affairs or diplomacy as a theme appears outside their literary works, although in 1928 a newspaper reported that Austra Ozoliņa-Krauze was going to write a novel about the lives of diplomats ([Anon.] 1928). The reason given was that Ozoliņa-Krauze knew diplomatic society well, having been a representative in Germany and having worked for many years in diplomatic circles in Switzerland. Unfortunately, the novel remained at the level of an idea. As a public figure, parliamentary candidate and leader of Latvian women's activism, Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa was one of the most severe critics of masculine domination among public authorities. She made known that Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics in a conversation had said to her: "Your work is worth more than [its weight in] gold, but we do not want women in diplomatic work" (Rūmane-Ķeniņa 1934). The last-mentioned point is of particular interest, for it draws on the discursive precondition that the term "female diplomat" is an oxymoron; and proves general masculine resistance to re-categorization of diplomatic work as exclusive for males only. (Neumann 2016) Even in 1934, Rūmane argued that exclusion was still the case since Latvia was one of the few countries which did not include women in its delegations to meetings of the League of Nations (Lipša and Vizgunova 2018: 93). Rūmane openly reflected on Latvian diplomacy, referring to the exceptional situation during World War I when women were admitted to diplomatic work and then shown injustice after the country had obtained *de jure* state status:

Later, in Latvia, women in diplomacy were sidelined. The Foreign Ministry gradually dismissed the most self-reliant and capable women. The ministry retained only typists, translators, and other technical staff. However, some good secretaries and typists in our foreign legations are the ones doing all the mission work. (A.M. 1934: 7)

At the end of her report, as the newspaper mentions, Rūmane-Ķeniņa submitted a request for the Latvian government to allow women to work as diplomats. However, it did not receive attention from the relevant institutions.

To recapitulate, after their high-quality and difficult diplomatic work before 1918, Rūmane-Ķeniņa and Ozoliņa-Krauze were denied the opportunity to continue their

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25 For more, see: Gueslin 2017.

work in the independent state – only because they were women. The whole situation in the diplomatic service in the interwar period reflected the contradictory attitudes towards women's employment that generally characterised Latvia at that time. Although the level of women's work skills and education was relatively high, a patriarchal model in which women were given a subordinate role dominated the public consciousness.

### ***My hand is stiff with writing.*** **Women of the Grosvalds family** **in the Foreign Service**

The Grosvalds family played an essential role in Latvian culture and foreign policy during the last century (Eglāja-Kristone 2020)<sup>26</sup>. Frīdrihs Grosvalds (1850–1924) was a lawyer and long-serving head of the Riga Latvian Society, the organisation linked to the cultural emancipation of the Latvian nation. His election to the Russian State Duma and involvement with the Refugee Supply Organisations which fostered the development of the elite of the first Latvian politicians played an important role. In 1919 he was appointed as Latvia's diplomatic representative to Sweden (and soon after to Norway and Denmark as well). His wife Marija Elizabete Grosvalde (1857–1936) was a well-educated mother of eight (three children died in infancy), and a charity activist. Their eldest daughter Mērija Grīnberga (1881–1973) was the wife of Jānis Grīnbergs, Bishop and Consistory President of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Russia, later also a populariser of Latvian ethnography.<sup>27</sup> The oldest son was a diplomat and Latvian envoy to France, also one of the first Latvian professional art historians, Oļģerds Grosvalds<sup>28</sup> (1884–1962). Another son was a renowned painter, one of the first Lat-

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26 The Grosvalds family name has been prominent in the last five years, most recently featuring in the book *Grosvalds*, a fictionalised account of the Grosvalds family (2021) by the writer and film director Kristīne Želve. The documentary drama *Mērijas ceļojums* (Mērija's Journey) (Želve 2018) was made about her as part of the series Latvian Films for Latvia's Centenary. In 2019, the Latvian National Museum of Art presented the exhibition *Mērija's Journey. The Grosvalds Family Story*, and in 2023 an exhibition of Jāzeps Grosvalds.

27 Mērija wrote her memoirs and kept a diary which were recently published: Mērija Grīnberga. *Mērijas Grīnbergas atmiņas un dienasgrāmatas: mana pasaku zeme* [Memories and Diaries of Mary Greenberg: My Fairyland], sast. Agita Ančupāne (2021).

28 For more, see: Gerharde-Upeniece 2014; Pelše 2010.

vian modernists, Jāzeps Grosvalds<sup>29</sup> (1891–1920), who for a short while served as a secretary in the diplomatic mission to the Paris Peace Conference and at the Latvian Legation in France. There were two more daughters who were also foreign service secretaries: Līna Grosvalde (1887–1974) and Margarēta Ternberga (née Grosvalde, 1895–1982). The Grosvalds family is one of the extremely rare cases where five family members were working in diplomacy at the same time. While putting together the first Latvian diplomatic service, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics was willing to place his trust in this family as it had been regarded as one of the high-status Latvian families since the end of the 19th century. Besides the role Frīdrihs Grosvalds had played in Latvian society for decades, the Grosvalds family had grown-up children with extensive language skills who, as young and educated people, were part of the social elite of Riga before World War I. The fact that three women of the Grosvalds family were involved with the foreign service, as well as the fact that father, mother, and daughter served at the same legation, is not typical and should be analysed more fully.

Marija Grosvalde is one of the examples of the first Latvian diplomatic wife. She spoke several languages, including German, French and English. She was active in charity and ladies' committees in Riga, and her work in organising aid for refugees (Kremans 1935) in the Baltic refugee colonies in St Petersburg during World War I is particularly noteworthy. From the summer of 1919, she helped her husband at the Latvian Legation in Stockholm. Her position for the first years was not an official position with set duties and a salary. But from 1921 to 1922, as her husband and envoy Frīdrihs Grosvalds mentioned in documentation, she was an accountant, cashier and press interpreter (ĀM 1922). From 1919 onwards, when the family was separated, Marija wrote long letters to her children, sometimes up to ten pages, in different languages. She could use Latvian, German, French and some Russian in the same letter. In the letters she reflects on her life in Sweden, the people she has met, politics and diplomacy.

Marija describes everyday life at the newly established legation in Stockholm: "We write and talk like in the Tower of Babel." She also reflects on the huge amount of unpaid work and very varied responsibilities: "Goodness gracious, I am going to get into a complete muddle with languages and become a typewriter. It's just a pity that I don't get paid, I really have a heavy workload. Who's laughing???? Figaro here, Figaro there, rewrite, check, pay, record – and nothing but reprimands, often very, very unfounded." (JGM 1920) In the same letter to her oldest son Olģerds, she stressed the importance of knowing several languages. And gives an example by recalling a funny situation: "I very much hope that you have listed all your languages in

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29 For more, see: Kļaviņš 2006.



Fig. 2. Marija Grosvalde with her son Olģerds in Stockholm, on the balcony of the Latvian Legation. Photo from Margarēta Grosvaldes' album, kept at the Riga History and Navigation Museum

the *Dienstlist*<sup>30</sup>, it is a question of showing the abilities of envoys and secretaries, and this is also important when thinking about salaries. Your father wrote in his list 'sufficient' French [language skills] after he had introduced me to the Viscount as *mon mari*<sup>31</sup>." She reflects on several diplomatic receptions and gatherings, giving a vivid picture of people and places: "Our week is really filled up with business and visits. The Ukrainians are *живчики*<sup>32</sup> and overly attached to us. We spent the evening of 31 December in the Royal with du Champ – then we went to the theatre and Cecil<sup>33</sup>. Finally, we were invited to their place with a minister and his wife from Ukraine, and at the very end, I went to a cabaret for the first time in my life!!!" (ibid.) Her notes show that

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30 *Dienstlist* (German) – the Service List.

31 *Mon mari* (French) – my husband.

32 *Zhivchiki* (Russian) – energetic, lively people.

33 Cecil, often referred to as Cecil's, was a restaurant in Stockholm with a dance floor. It was established in 1917 and was a famous entertainment venue.

the early years of Latvian diplomacy were difficult, and emotionally depict the role of women and the distinctiveness of a woman's perspective on the efforts to bring the Latvian state into the foreign arena, since winning the sympathy and trust of foreign political and diplomatic representatives was a great challenge. After her return to Latvia and death of her husband Frīdrihs in 1924, Marija Grosvalde closed herself off from Latvian society and accepted into her salon almost exclusively members of the diplomatic corps, with whom the Grosvalds women maintained friendly relations. It is undeniable that this attitude led to consequences, for example, even the newspaper mentioned that Marija Grosvalde as the wife of the first Latvian envoy in Sweden had not received an invitation to a reception with the King of Sweden during his visit to Latvia in 1929, "although the King knew her personally and would have been pleased to meet his acquaintances." ([Anon.] 1929)

The Grosvalds daughters provide another perspective and insight into foreign affairs. Līna was a talented pianist who, in the 1910s, went abroad to take classes for piano and languages, but there was no encouragement from her parents to study music or any other subject at an academically higher level. Studying and acquiring an academic education was the priority of both of the Grosvalds sons. As a pianist, Līna is mentioned in many advertisements of concerts in support of the Latvian Riflemen from 1915 and 1918 in Riga and in St Petersburg. Līna had completed language courses in several Western European cities, including Stockholm, and was fluent in German, English and French, and with an adequate knowledge of Russian and Swedish. There are only some letters and postcards left from Līna, and they give a partial insight into her duties and interests. Like her mother, Marija, she was engaged in social relief work. While in London, she mentions a new organisation set up after the war to help children in Latvia in cooperation with the Red Cross<sup>34</sup>. Līna thus was one of the many women around after World War I who temporarily redirected their activist, feminist energies towards patriotic war relief under the patriarchal constraints of the Red Cross to define a female citizenship that valued service and sacrifice. In August 1919, she began diplomatic work as secretary, 2nd class (for a while even as 1st class), at the Latvian Legation in Stockholm. Līna was the main helper for her father, indispensable for paperwork requiring language and technical skills. She was a very versatile legation employee because, in addition to her language skills and ability to type, her professional musical talents were regularly put to use at legation events and beyond, representing the Latvian state. In her letters Līna reveals more about her contribution to what can be called cultural diplomacy, namely the presentation of national music and traditional culture:

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34 For more, see: Jēkabsons 2010.



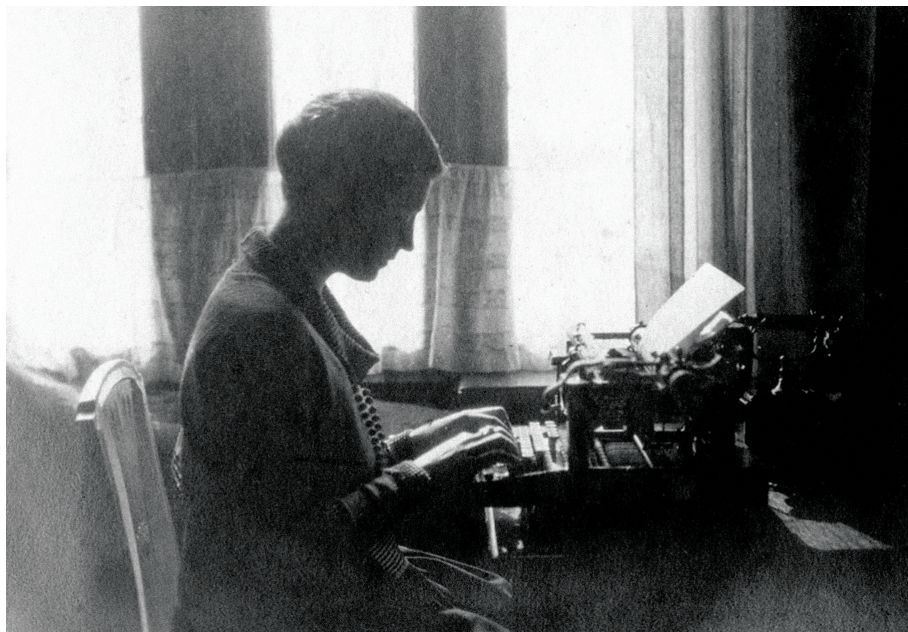


Fig. 3. Lina Grosvalde while working at the Latvian Legation in Stockholm.  
Photo from Margarēta Grosvaldes' album, kept at the Riga History and Navigation Museum

Anna Lindhagen<sup>35</sup> was giving a lecture on Latvia in Uppsala and was determined to get me to play Latvian compositions there. But since I have never done that and don't have any [Latvian pieces], we agreed on folk songs. But now I had to translate them. We tried with a Swedish poet from a text in German by Blaumanis, but when I saw that nothing would work, I immediately sat down with Arabella and started translating myself. I know enough Swedish to hear if the words and the music fit. I know that folk songs are generally untranslatable, but I find that these words are extremely successful and find the greatest acceptance among the Swedes. Anna Lindhagen, a lady in her 50s, is in love with me and Latvia and is doing her best. (JGM 1921)

The friendship with Lindhagen which started while serving in a diplomatic mission continued even when the Grosvalds family returned to Latvia in 1923, and Lina became an active member of the Swedish–Latvian Society.

Margarētas Grosvalde's biography is worth a novel or a drama if we consider that she was at the epicentre of events of Latvia's entry into the international arena

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35 Anna Lindhagen (1870–1941) was a Swedish social democrat politician, social reformer and women's rights activist. Lindhagen was a member of the Stockholm City Council 1911–1923, a licensed nurse and an activist in the Labour movement. In 1902, Lindhagen was one of the leading voices calling for a suffragette movement in women's organisations to stand up for women's suffrage.

as a state, looking to consolidate its independence and Western support. At a more intimate level, she had a romantic relationship with a married man, the first Latvian Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics from 1919 to 1921, and with other men from the diplomatic service afterwards, as revealed in her diary. In 1940 she was married to Helmuth Ternberg<sup>36</sup>, one of the best-known spies of the Swedish intelligence service (alias Teddy). Grosvalde had an education typical of girls from high society Latvian families. She graduated from the German girls' school in Riga and spoke several languages. She worked as a schoolteacher till 1918, when the family left Riga to escape from Soviet occupiers. In February 1919, at the age of 24, Margarēta began working as a typist and later as secretary, 2nd class, at the Latvian Legation in London and started to write her diary in English. One of the first entries in her diary characterises her feelings about the new position and the independence it demanded and offered:

19.2.[1919] My hand is stiff with writing, but the day is too remarkable not to be described. I was engaged at the Legation as a sort of secretary yesterday and entered my post today after writing a beautiful letter to President Wilson<sup>37</sup>. I like my post, my chef [Sir George Bisseneek<sup>38</sup>], and most of all the money I am to receive! But I grew absolutely faint when I was told to write letters out of my poor head. I was not surprised any more at being sent to the City and the letter-box – in fact, I would do everything he made me do – if only I were able to. (Grosvalde 1919–1926)

Margarēta appreciated and took responsibility for this position and participation in important national and foreign policy processes. When going through the files of the London Legation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one can often note Margarēta's neat handwriting, making a notation, the date of receipt, etc. As she states in a letter to her brother Oļģerds: "I will tell you, as you told me, that I want to stay here – we need people with a lot of brains here, and even if I can't do everything as well as I should yet, I think I am one of those brains that can be shown abroad. So, I hope they will keep me here." (JGM 1919a) The first employees of Latvia's legations and consulates were overworked, and it took time to understand the real amount of the work and the human resources needed. Margarēta's diaries and letters to

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36 Ernst Axel Hellmuth "Teddy" Ternberg (13 September 1893–24 May 1971) was a Swedish Army major and intelligence officer who, together with Carl Petersén, led the intelligence service *C-byrån* during World War II. Ternberg continued his intelligence activities under a cover name after the war at *T-kontoret*, the successor organization to *C-byrån*.

37 Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United States (1913–1921).

38 Georgs Bisenieks (in old orthography: Bisseneek, 1885–1941) was a Latvian politician and diplomat. From December 1918 he was the Head of the Latvian Legation in London, and the first Latvian envoy to Great Britain (1921–1924).



Fig. 4. Margarēta Grosvalde at the Latvian Legation in London.

Photo from Margarēta Grosvaldes' album, kept at the Riga History and Navigation Museum

her brother Oļģerds reveal this aspect. After a few months in the new position, Margarēta writes:

I feel deeply sorry for you that you have so many duties, but first, you are the only one who can do them properly. Second, you ended up in the right place, and third, don't think that many better ones are coming to us. My rather weak female powers also often make me feel they are being overwhelmed. But it's still interesting [...]. (JGM 1919b)

However, constant overwork and emotional experiences, especially the death of her brother Jāzepts in 1920 and her relationship with Foreign Minister Meierovics, had consequences for her health which Margarēta, with a good dose of self-irony, mentions in her diary, for example: fainting, prescriptions for spectacles and injections.

12.5.[1921] I had horrid headaches and went to a specialist – the result is tortoise-shell glasses. This goes well with the grey hairs I pull out after washing my hair. (Grosvalde 1919–1926)

16.9. [1921] This afternoon the doctor came to see me [...] said that my illness was more moral than physical, and that I had better marry – nevertheless I am going to have injections "dans le bas du dos". (ibid.)

In Margarēta's diary, affairs of the heart and foreign affairs are the leitmotifs, offering an insight into her life and work as a young woman in London and a unique testimony to the events and personalities of Latvian foreign service history. She also reflects on the different attitude she received from her male colleagues and higher-ranking officials, for example, her impression of the manners of Foreign Minister Meierovics is one of admiration. She initially tries to distinguish between the public/professional and the private, as if using masculine standards.

22.2.[1919] I get my hair waved at 10 o'clock and arrive after my chef, who leaves the door open for me. I said I wondered when he would begin scolding me – but he says some nice words in return. [...] He opens the door for me at any moment and is dear in his way. I have no time to think about *les affaires de coeur* – as I have started reading the papers and being interested in politics. (ibid.)

However, her feminine gaze at Meierovics's overtly friendly behaviour, a familiarity that develops into flirtation, leads to a response in the tradition of patriarchal stereotypes: she becomes his London 'dangerous liaison'. Margarēta's outbursts of affection, which can be traced in the diary, coincide with events of national importance. Her most intimate diary entries are when Meierovics is in London or Paris on foreign visits, which Margarēta has coded in the diary behind the name "Murrey" or the initials "ZAM". For example, in January 1921, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics and the events leading to the *de iure* recognition of Latvia were entered into Margarēta's diary in a personal and playful way. On 1 January, Meierovics arrived in London from Paris as Latvia's Foreign Minister, with an entourage including Oļģerds Grosvalds, Latvia's envoy to France. Margarēta was there to greet the minister and the delegation at Victoria Station. She is later invited to join the delegation at the Carlton Hotel and the Trocadero Leisure Centre. Margarēta admires Meierovics and his manners; she is asked to join the delegation for visits to the theatre, restaurants, and shopping. She often stays at the hotel where Meierovics and his entourage are staying. The diary reflects Meierovics' visits to British politicians and gestures of diplomacy.

12.01.[1921] This morning he placed wreaths on the Grave of the Unknown Warrior and the Cenotaph – those charming manners are admirable. (ibid.)

Diplomatic dinners and various events, including cocktail and dance parties, and balls, are a part of the everyday routine in diplomacy. It required women to look attractive and bare their shoulders.

18.03.[1922] We dined at the Carlton Grill last night – I felt quite giddy from my glass of champagne. Today he entertained Kallas and the legation employees at Piccadilly; we went to the National Gallery and met Marie for tea at the Savoy. We danced a little and saw Hella. In the evening I was sleeveless in mauve and silver – the Savoy looked at me and I hardly knew myself. We danced in the crowded Ballroom after a lovely dinner. (ibid.)

The diary shows Margarēta's struggle with herself to gain the confidence and courage to express her femininity in a highly masculine environment without fear of ambiguous misunderstandings and offensive remarks. At the same time, Margarēta exploited her femininity to create the networks among families of diplomats and officials that facilitate diplomatic work and exchange of information and messages, official and unofficial.

11.03.[1921] Last night we had a party on account of the memento for General Burt<sup>39</sup>. Capt. Bray and I were duly admired one-stepping, the General patted me on the shoulder for getting up for the Anthem and said dear words about Latvia, and the others had too much and were noisy. (ibid.)

Despite her loyalty, hard work and communication with the British military and diplomatic representatives, Margarēta, just like other women in Latvian diplomatic missions abroad, was dismissed from her job in 1923:

31.03.[1923] This is our last official day here – both Gilbert and I have received the sack and been offered ridiculous salaries in Riga. I am stopping on for a while to do the files, at £5 a week. (ibid.)

The directive published in the newspaper given by Meierovics is relentless: "In connection with the downsizing and reorganisation of the Ministry, I dismiss from service, based on Section 37 of the Civil Service Act, the secretary, 2nd class, of the Legation in Great Britain, Margarete Grosvalde, with effect from this day." ([Anon.] 1923) Margarēta does not comment further on this order. After her return to Riga, she was invited to work in the Economic and Financial Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from September 1923 and from October 1923 to August 1940 as a secretary, 2nd class, in the Western Department, where her duties included drafting and translating articles mainly from French and English; she was also despatched to carry diplomatic mail to different countries. Grosvalde was awarded the Order of the Cross of Recognition, V class, for her selfless work in 1938. As research of international politics has uncovered, in the 1920s and 1930s Riga was justifiably considered an espionage capital. Latvia's geographical position and proximity to the border of Soviet Russia made it an ideal location for such activity. Grosvalde's lengthy employment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may have been related to intelligence work. (Drēgeris 2021: 516–517) This assertion may explain the encounter and marriage between

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39 Alfred Burt (1875–1949) was a Brigadier-General in the British Army, and took part in the World War I. During the Latvian freedom struggle, he was head of the Allied Military Mission in Latvia (1919–1920).

Margarēta and Hellmuth Ternberg,<sup>40</sup> although the families of Helmuth and Margarēta had known each other for a long time. Their mothers, the then unmarried Marija Pakalnieks and Auguste Otilie Limberg<sup>41</sup>, attended the Lintene well-to-do girls' school in Alūksne (Marienburg), in the northern-east part of Latvia. The friendship between them continued, and they also met when Marija accompanied her husband as an envoy to Sweden, where Auguste, too, was living.

The existence of these letters and diaries opens a broad research perspective on the implications of networking and informal ties of the people involved in international relations. Margarēta's diary describes the entire flowering of the Latvian diplomatic service in the 1920s and a succession of foreign ministers, starting with Latvian representatives in Great Britain such as Georgs Bisenieks, Eduards Bīriņš, and ministers Zigfrīds A. Meierovics, Ludvigs Sēja, Hugo Celmiņš, Hermanis Albats, Kārlis Ulmanis, Kārlis Zariņš, Voldemārs Salnais, Vilhelms Munters and other officials. Various foreign diplomatic and military representatives in Latvia are mentioned, such as the British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Latvia, John Charles Tudor Vaughan (1870–1929), the British Consul in Latvia, John Lowdon (1881–1963) and the Head of the Allied Military Mission in Latvia, General Alfred Burt, who subsequently became an ardent advocate of Latvia's political, economic, and cultural interests in Great Britain.

The Grosvalds family women's social activities and private friendships unexpectedly revealed a few personalities who had played a role in women's suffrage and the women's rights movement in Sweden and Great Britain. However, neither Margarēta nor Līna nor Marija applied this knowledge in any way to the Latvian women's movement. A small note in Margarēta's diary "Packer sent me Gade's article on women diplomats" on September 17, 1924, leads to a publication which might be one of the few at that time speaking out for women's equality in diplomacy. Gerhard Gade was a secretary at the US Legation in Riga in 1923, and Margarēta has mentioned him in her diary several times. After returning to the US, he published a quite feminist article 'The diplomatess' in *The Foreign Service Journal*. Opening the article with an atypical and passionate setting for male writing, especially in the context of the Latvian diplomatic service: "The hand that rocks the cradle has frequently wielded a sword and— what they say is mightier than the sword — a fountain pen. But while there have been Valkyries and Battalions of Death, yeomanettes, and policewomen, the 'frail' sex so far has neglected diplomacy as a profession", Gade gives four

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40 For more, see: Lindskog 2011.

41 In 1889, she married Robert Ternberg, a naval engineer, and settled in Sweden.



examples of women in diplomatic services around the world. Besides the Bulgarian Nadejda Standoff, the Russian Alexandra Kollantay<sup>42</sup> and the American Miss Atcher-son, he mentions Margarēta: "Miss Groswald, sister of the Latvian Minister to the Court of St. James, was appointed a Secretary of the Legation to London, but was not received as a diplomatic officer by the British Government." (Gade: 219). Margarēta, neither in the diary nor in correspondence, elaborated on her view of this article and her being mentioned in it. She generally does not discuss gender imbalance or equality in her diary, probably preoccupied with her professional duties and private life. Also, the influence of a patriarchal family, which has already been described, must be acknowledged, though she strived to overcome this, becoming more and more independent and creating the image of a modern woman.

## Conclusion

As in many interwar countries, diplomacy, as an area of high social prestige, was not considered a career suitable for a woman in Latvia. However, there were no legal restrictions as there still were in some foreign countries. In general, Latvia's first Foreign Minister Meierovics was liberal and more concerned with knowledge of languages, technical skills, representation, and capacity for work rather than gender. However, the generally conservative standards of the European diplomatic service and the ambivalence of the government led to the dismissal in 1921 and 1923, in waves of redundancies, of 12 of the 16 women previously holding secretarial positions, 1st and 2nd class, in the foreign service.

To sum up, the role of women in the foreign service or in diplomatic work is rarely highlighted. Both the memoirs of diplomats themselves and the commentaries give grounds to speak of two reasons: (1) the foreign service was a highly homosocial structure, especially before World War II, (2) women's role was an auxiliary one, not a process-driving one, and their role in the strategic process of foreign policy was not highlighted. They were regarded as technical workers such as secretaries, typists, stenographers, clerks, and telephonists. Alternatively, there were those who took on the role of representatives and supplied hospitality as envoys' wives. This underrepresentation is entirely borne out by the few surviving autobiographical accounts of women who were associated with the foreign service for a shorter or longer period. Through feminist research, we get to know female secretaries who have played relevant roles in international events. Thus, the role of women in national foreign affairs and diplomacy is a topic where the development of various lines of gender-related

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42 For more, see: Novikova, Ghodsee 2023; Nicolaidis, Nilsson, Dunér 2021.

research and recovering women's agency makes it an essential tool for understanding the gendered nature of diplomacy as a profession and political practice. This conclusion is consistent with the statement by political scientist and researcher of international relations, Ann E. Towns, that "often by focusing on the remarkable lives of individual women who – while not officially designated as diplomats – have historically filled crucial diplomatic functions as letter-writers, behind-the-scenes negotiators, unofficial envoys, and wives in charge of receptions and dinners." (Towns 2020: 576) The research presented in the article shows conclusively that women were present in, not absent from, diplomacy in the era preceding their formal inclusion in national diplomatic service in the later twentieth century. In future research it is essential to outline both the portrayal, the role, and the testimonies of the wives of Latvian envoys abroad and the role and the importance of women employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also to continue the study of other female representatives in the foreign service.

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