

LITHUANIAN DIPLOMATIC SERVICE IN EXILE FROM 1940-1991

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Lithuanian diplomatic service in exile is associated with the diplomats in service of the state, which was occupied and annexed by another country and thereby erased from the world political map. The diplomats in the diplomatic service of independent Lithuania worked and lived in exile from 1940 till 1991, i.e. for fifty years, driven by a feeling of great responsibility, hope and belief in the restoration of the Lithuanian state.

The survival of the diplomatic service of Lithuania in 1940 was determined by the idiosyncrasy of its activities and the stance that the largest states took towards the occupation of Lithuania. Unfortunately, the whole structure of the diplomatic service did not survive, only some embassies and their diplomatic corps. The fate of Lithuanian embassies depended on the predominant political views regarding the Baltic States in the residing country and its relations with the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of diplomacy in exile, the Lithuanian diplomatic service consisted of five official embassies – in London, Washington, Buenos Aires, the Vatican and Bern, one diplomatic representation in France, which was tolerated by the local government, as well as two general consulates and three consulates. When the independence of Lithuania was restored, there were three official embassies remaining – in Washington, London and the Holy See, an unofficially acting representative of Lithuania in France, one general consulate in New York and four general honorary consulates – in Chicago, Los Angeles, Toronto and Caracas. Only a few diplomats who worked in diplomatic service before the loss of independence were lucky enough to see the restoration of Lithuanian statehood: Stasys Antanas Bačkis, Vincas Balickas and Anicetas Simutis were the only diplomats who remained in service throughout the entire occupation period.

Thus the diplomatic corps that retained diplomatic immunity and the embassies that continued functioning legally in the West created the basis

for not only continuing diplomatic activities under the conditions of exodus but also raising the issue of independence of Lithuania on the international scene.

Begin of the exile

As early as 1939, Lithuanian diplomats called the attention of the President, the Government and other state officials to the threat of the Soviet Union. Lithuanian diplomats working abroad prepared a joint memorandum, which, besides recommendations how to strengthen the state, discussed the issues of transferring the government abroad in case of the Soviet occupation and establishing a fund for financing political activities abroad.

However, to achieve the recognition of a government in exile in the Western states Lithuania would have had to be considered to be at war with a state with which the country receiving the Lithuanian government in exile was also at war. Doubtful about the likelihood of the retreat of the Government abroad and its recognition, Lithuanian ambassadors proposed to amend the 1938 Constitution, so that the substitution of the President would neither depend on elections nor on the Prime Minister's will. Should the government or a body vested with its powers fail to retreat abroad, the envoys proposed to appoint beforehand a person who would be authorised to co-ordinate the activities of Lithuanian diplomatic service abroad.

The Government of Lithuania did not look at the memorandum seriously and the proposal of diplomats was not implemented. In 1941, the ambassador in London Bronius Kazys Balutis wrote to the President in reference to the unimplemented memorandum that "as a result, we were left practically without any resources for further fight and, what is worse, ragged and scattered, on our own, muddling through as best each could."

As the project of the Lithuanian ambassadors was not implemented, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Juozas Urbšys, authorised by the President of Lithuania, informed the diplomats by telegram that, in case of a catastrophe for the state of Lithuania, the chief of diplomacy would be Stasys Lozoraitis. The function of the chief of diplomacy was to coordinate the remaining diplomatic service in exile, as well as appoint diplomats to new positions and confer diplomatic ranks to them.

When the “People Parliament” voted for the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union on July 21, 1940, Lithuanian envoys sent a protest note to most governments to which they were accredited.

The retaliation of Soviet Lithuania against the diplomatic service of independent Lithuania remaining abroad began very soon. The diplomats were deprived of Lithuanian citizenship, banned from returning to their homeland and their property was confiscated. On the basis of the decision of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union to accept the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic to the Soviet Union, the activities of all Lithuanian embassies and consulates were terminated on August 8, 1940.

Lithuania lost its embassies in the countries occupied by the Soviet Union. After the pressure of the Soviet Union, most Western European countries – Sweden, Germany, France and Italy, transferred Lithuanian embassies to the Soviet Union. Although Switzerland did not recognise the occupation of Lithuania, it nevertheless terminated diplomatic relations with the embassy of Lithuania.

Attempts to create government in exile

Diplomats who represented independent Lithuania abroad were no longer even *de jure* associated with the formally created Soviet Lithuania. The goal of restoring the state prompted diplomats to set forth the guidelines for their further activities. According to Balutis, forming a government in exile and obtaining its recognition had to be the *alpha and omega* of the activities of the diplomats. During their first meetings in Rome and Bern, the diplomats formed a prototype of government in exile – the National Committee.

Shortly afterwards, in one of the meetings of the diplomats, President of Lithuania Antanas Smetona, before leaving Europe, signed the fictitious “Kybartai Acts” according which Lozoraitis became the Prime Minister and the acting President of the Republic of Lithuania. However, the so-called “Kybartai Acts” were essentially a transient event, when in autumn 1945 Lozoraitis sent letters to the heads of the USA, Great Britain and France, signing as Prime Minister and the acting President of the Republic of Lithuania. According to Lozoraitis himself, the appearance of the “Kybartai Acts” was the wish “to give certain emphasis to the continuity of our sovereign

power for foreigners; as far as the position of our own people – both official and private persons – is concerned, it would remain as it was, all the more so since I myself don't have the power to change it.”

At that time, it was important for the representatives of Lithuania to show to the international community or, more exactly, to the allies, should they begin to look for manifestations of the continuity of the Lithuanian government among the political strata of emigrants, that there was such continuity after the death of President Smetona. However, the leaders of the great powers made no response.

The National Committee did not even start functioning due to the war in Europe, which impeded communication between diplomats residing in different countries. Another reason for the inactivity of the National Committee has been the differences among the ambassadors themselves and their political conceptions and assessment of the situation because not everyone endorsed the active German role backed by Kazys Škirpa.

At the beginning, Lithuanian diplomats harboured the hopes about the restoration of Lithuania with the war between Germany and the Soviet Union. However, it became apparent that the restoration of independent Lithuania was not included in German plans, which was also shown by the status of the Provisional Government and its fate. After losing hopes restoring the state with the help of Germany, diplomats in the West started searching for a state that would allow the formation of a government in exile and recognise it. No state was inclined to do this. Thus the Lithuanian diplomatic service itself no longer kept the illusions about forming a political entity that would be officially recognised by at least one state.

Gradually, the actions of the diplomatic service acquired a character of consistent work, focusing on the essential issues of the survival of the diplomatic service and the strengthening of diplomatic positions. The constant raising of the issue of Lithuania on the international scene was an inseparable part of diplomatic representation, but the annexation of Lithuania, as well as of Latvia and Estonia, was not the main subject of international debates.

Activities in 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 70s the activities of the diplomatic service of Lithuania became symbolic due to the elderly age of its corps and the thinning out of their ranks. The activities of the diplomatic service of Lithuania waned also due to external factors which had a rather severe impact on the diplomatic service, especially in the states of South America.

The South American region was very dependent on the developments in the international politics, much more than Western Europe, which could afford more sophisticated politics. South American states did not pose significant difficulties for the speedy performance of the diplomatic procedures, which a new representative undergoes in the usual diplomatic practice in order to engage in diplomatic activities. However, whenever the foreign policy line of these countries changed or relations with the Soviet Union intensified, it did not take much time to terminate the activities of a diplomatic residence and its corps. This happened in the honorary consulate of Lithuania in Columbia and the embassy in Brazil. The embassy of Lithuania in Montevideo was forced to terminate its activities after the death of the last Lithuanian diplomat who entered the diplomatic service of Lithuania before 1940.

Difficulties staying abroad – the last decade in exile

One of the greatest problems for the diplomatic service of Lithuania was that its members could not be replaced after their death. The principal position of the US State Department, which controlled the finances of the diplomatic service of Lithuania, was that only those diplomats who worked in the diplomatic service of Lithuania before 1940 could be members of the diplomatic service and receive financial support. The diplomatic service could support itself only with the so-called frozen funds of Lithuania, but it could not dispose of it freely without permission from the US State Department. The

first signs telling that the activities of the diplomatic service in exile should be reconsidered became apparent after the many deaths of the ambassadors: the former envoy in Switzerland, one of the deputy chiefs of diplomacy Jurgis Šaulys, the envoy in the USA Povilas Žadeikis, the envoy in Montevideo Kazys Graužinis, the envoy in London Balutis, the envoy at the Holy See Stasys Girdvainis, the general honorary consul in Toronto

Vytautas Jonas Gylys and the plenipotentiary in the Scandinavian countries Ignas Šeinius. The question was – what is the future of the diplomatic service of Lithuania.

Naturally, everyone hoped that the occupation of Lithuania would not last so long and that members of the diplomatic service of Lithuania would see the independence of Lithuania. However, the continuity of the diplomatic service in exile had to be preserved using only the diplomatic personnel available at that time. The funds of the diplomatic service of Lithuania were also diminishing. So, the restructuring of the Lithuanian diplomatic corps was implemented.

The former secretary of Lithuanian Embassy in Bern Albertas Gerutis became the representative of the chief of the Lithuanian diplomacy in Bern and its unofficial representative in Bonn at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, the former envoy of Lithuania in Paris Bačkis moved to live and work in the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington; Jurgis Baltrušaitis became the Lithuanian representative in Paris, whereas the former adviser of the Lithuanian Embassy in London Balickas became its head. The castling of the diplomats stabilised its corps for some time but the issue of funds and personnel of the diplomatic service retained its pertinence.

In 1980, not without the efforts of Lithuanian emigrant organisations in the USA, the State Department agreed to accept to the diplomatic service of Lithuania persons who were not working in the diplomatic service of Lithuania before 1940. The issue of funding was also resolved when the much wealthier former Latvian diplomatic service, through the mediation of the US State Department, agreed to finance Lithuanian diplomats. At the time when this issue was resolved, there was only \$867 remaining in the account of the diplomatic service of Lithuania.

The resolution of the issues of financing and personnel of the diplomatic service of Lithuania laid the foundation for its stability. When Lozoraitis died in 1983, envoy of Lithuania in Washington Bačkis succeeded him in the position of the chief of diplomacy.

After the 1990

When the independence of Lithuania was declared on March 11 1990, the Lithuanian diplomats working abroad welcomed the news exultantly – this was the goal they had sought for such a long time. However, they felt a moral obligation not to rush ending their mission and transferring the symbolic entitlements to the ministry of foreign affairs of the young and still fragile state. Bačkis told this to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Algirdas Saudargas when the latter was in Paris at the end of 1990. This circumspection was also conditioned by the fact that the international community did not hurry to recognise the statehood of Lithuania, not to mention that this was not done by the Soviet Union either.

States around the world began recognising the independence of Lithuania only after the putsch in Russia in August 1991. As on 6 September 1991 the Soviet Union recognised the state of Lithuania, immediately at the same day Bačkis sent a letter to Saudargas stating that his mission as the chief of the diplomacy of Lithuania was over.

The retirement of Bačkis from the position ended the difficult, fifty-year period period of the diplomatic service of Lithuania in exile. The great efforts of the diplomats did not allow entirely erasing Lithuania from the world political map in the consciousness of the international community.