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EMBASSY OF DENMARK, LATVIA

A large yellow rectangular area with a white cross, representing the flag of Denmark, positioned on the left side of the cover.

THE ROLE OF  
DENMARK  
IN THE RENEWAL OF  
LATVIAN  
INDEPENDENCE

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*by Didzis Kļaviņš*

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## FOREWORD

Preparing for the celebration of the 25 years anniversary of the re-established diplomatic relations between Latvia and the Nordic countries, I contacted my good friend Žaneta Ozoliņa, Head of Department of Political Science, Director of Advanced Institute of Social and Political Research, University of Latvia, and asked her if she knew a qualified researcher who could look into this issue. Žaneta quickly proposed Ph.D. Didzis Kļaviņš, who has written the following article “*The role of Denmark in the renewal of Latvian independence*”, of which I am most grateful. I am not least pleased to see that the article is thoroughly based on many different types of Latvian and Danish sources, and that Mr. Kļaviņš has taken contact to some of the key actors 25 years ago. The perspective of the article is the role that Denmark played. As the Danish ambassador I welcome this of course, but I also hope that future research can be made on the role that the rest of the Nordic countries played in the early 1990’s when Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were gaining full independence and sovereignty. Since then, the Nordic-Baltic countries have become very well integrated. Along with the anniversary we can also celebrate the results of the journey that started out 25 years ago.



*Hans Brask, August 2016*



# THE ROLE OF DENMARK IN THE RENEWAL OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE<sup>1</sup>

by Didzis Kļaviņš

*We were saved from occupation and given the opportunity to grow up in freedom and affluence. I could travel around the world and speak and write as I liked. So much luck gave me an obligation towards those who had not been given that chance. And that is why the awakening of the Baltic peoples suddenly made me realise that their fate had always been a black spot on my conscience.*

**Uffe Ellemann-Jensen,**  
Former Foreign Minister of Denmark  
(1982-1993), 2016<sup>2</sup>

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**1** I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Jānis Jurkāns, Kirsten Mailing Biering, Lars Grønbjerg, Rikke Helms and Herbert Pundik, for sharing with me their personal memories. I am also grateful to Hans Brask, Royal Danish Embassy in Riga, Iveta Šķiņķe and the Foreign Service History and Diplomatic Documents Division at the Latvian

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for assisting me with valuable information from the early 1990's.

**2** Ellemann-Jensen, U. Personal communication. July 12, 2016.

**3** Grønbjerg, L. Personal communication. July 12, 2016.

**4** Ibid.

**5** Mailing Biering, K. Personal

communication. July 25, 2016.

**6** In 1990, Rikke Helms was appointed as the head of the newly established Danish Cultural Institute's office in Riga. Helms held the position until 2003 when she was appointed as director of the institute's office in Saint Petersburg (2003-2013).

**7** Helms, R. Politisks atbalsts kultūras

## Building People-to-People Connections

Looking back on the recent past of the last 25 years, when Latvia, along with its neighbours Estonia and Lithuania, regained its independence, it is important to bear in mind those countries that were alongside Latvia when the shoulder of a strong friend was needed and which ventured to express their firm position against the USSR's policy in the Baltic States. One of those countries that through its purposeful and forward-looking foreign policy contributed to the rapid return of the independent Baltic States to the Western family was the Kingdom of Denmark. Expressing support for the Baltic peoples persistent efforts to be free in their own countries and as former Danish foreign minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and one of the most visible Baltic defenders in the international arena shares in the introductory part of his memories, the aim of this article is to highlight a part of the most important events and historical testimonies which have strengthened diplomatic links between Denmark and Latvia and the mutual contact between their peoples. Being aware of

the abundance of history in the events and transformations during such a short period of time, the article describes only one part of all the episodes that illustrate the important role of Denmark in the restoration of Latvian independence.

Since the end of the 1980's, in Danish society there was broad support for Baltic efforts to regain independence. Although there are various explanations for this growth in sympathy, one of the most important factors that fostered it was Denmark's clearly formulated and proactive foreign policy on the issue of renewal of Baltic independence and reintegration with Europe<sup>3</sup>. According to Lars Grønbjerg, a Senior Advisor at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one of the first Western diplomats who arrived in Riga in August 1991, a significant element of Denmark's positive attitude in foreign policy and among the public toward the Baltic States is connected to the occupation of these countries in 1940. There is a parallel to be drawn with German-occupied Denmark at the same time, as well as the fact that if the Red Army had reached Denmark before the British army did in May 1945, Denmark perhaps would have experienced the same destiny as the Baltic States<sup>4</sup>. Also former Danish

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iepakojumā. *Diena*. Rīga, August 19, 2015. Available on <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/viedokli/politisks-atbalsts-kulturas-iepakojuma-14108739>

**8** His wife's mother was born and raised in Riga before immigrating to Denmark. Pundik, H. Personal communication. July 27, 2016.

**9** Helms, R. Politisks atbalsts kultūras

iepakojumā. *Diena*. Rīga, 2015. gada 19. augusts. Available on <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/viedokli/politisks-atbalsts-kulturas-iepakojuma-14108739>

**10** Ibid.

**11** It began operations under its first director Rikke Helms already in June 1990.

**12** Helms, R. Politisks atbalsts kultūras iepakojumā. *Diena*. Rīga, 2015. gada 19.

augusts. Available on <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/viedokli/politisks-atbalsts-kulturas-iepakojuma-14108739>

**13** Ibid.

**14** Latvijas radošo savienību laikraksts *Literatūra un Māksla*. April 28, 1990. p. 3.

**15** Latvian MFA Archive. Visited on July 26, 2016.

**16** Latvijas radošo savienību laikraksts

ambassador in Latvia Kirsten Malling Biering recalls that support for the Baltic States “was a hugely popular issue in Denmark, but much less so in the international community, where greater caution was usually advised”.<sup>5</sup>

Recalling the time when in Danish society attention to the situation in the Baltic Soviet republics increased, the former head of the Danish Cultural Institute in the Baltic States, Rikke Helms, remembers January 1989, when the newspaper *Politiken* invited a cultural delegation from Latvia to Copenhagen in order to learn of events in Soviet Latvia.<sup>6</sup> This visit later served as an incentive for a funding campaign by *Politiken*, informing Danish society about the fates of the three forgotten neighbouring countries and their efforts to regain independence.<sup>7</sup> *Politiken's* editor-in-chief Herbert Pundik, who played an important role in the foundation of the Danish Cultural Institute in Riga, also had a familial tie with Latvia.<sup>8</sup> As a result, at the end of 1989, then-general secretary of the Danish Cultural Institute Per Himmelstrup received a transfer of 1.8 million Danish Kroner.<sup>9</sup> The money collection was organized by the newspaper *Politiken* that had asked its readers for a contribution, as well as Jānis Peters and the Latvian Writers' Union.<sup>10</sup> In turn, on August 18 of the next year the Danish Cultural Institute in Latvia was officially opened in Riga,<sup>11</sup> which was the first and only partially official foreign institution in the three Baltic Soviet republics.<sup>12</sup> The Danish Cultural Institute, which Rikke Helms pointedly referred to as the first “open window to

the West”, was an important initiative that fostered cultural exchange between Denmark and the Baltic States. An exchange of visits among cultural representatives, study programmes at Danish universities and language courses were only some of the activities actively implemented by the newly opened institute. Slightly later Uffe Ellemann-Jensen also founded the Danish Democracy Fund, which promoted the expansion of international contacts.<sup>13</sup>

On April 21, 1990 the first direct SAS airline flight from Copenhagen to Riga was unveiled, serving as a reminder that many European cities are closer to Riga than Moscow (see Image 1).<sup>14</sup> Numerous representatives of the Danish government arrived on the first official flight to Latvia, as well as the future head of the Danish Cultural Institute in Riga, Rikke Helms.<sup>15</sup> Ideas about the exchange of cultural values and cooperation between residents of Denmark and the Baltic States were proposed as primary issues from the beginning. Thus, soon after, residents of Latvia could acquaint themselves in more detail with Danish language courses, visit cultural seminars and exhibits, or enjoy concerts and films, all offered by the Danish Cultural Institute. In order for more individuals to be aware of these initiatives from Denmark, information was also placed in newspapers. Thus, for example, an entire issue of the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* was devoted to Denmark.<sup>16</sup>

It is also important to highlight that Denmark

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*Literatūra un Māksla*. Nr. 27 (2377). July 21, 1990.

**17** The Baltic Information Office was opened in Copenhagen on 20 December 1990.

**18** Jundzis, T. Centieni ārpolitikā. In: Bormanis, U, Kaņepe, V. (Eds.). *Latvijas valsts atjaunošana*. 1986.-1993. Rīga: LU žurnāla “Latvijas Vēsture” fonds,

1998. p. 306.

**19** Jurkāns, J. Personal communication. July 14, 2016.

**20** Ritenis, J. *Diplomātiskā cīņa par Latvijas Republikas suverenitātes atjaunošanu*. Rīga: LU žurnāla “Latvijas Vēsture” fonds, 1998. pp. 108-109.

**21** It is important to point out the multitude of activities of the World

Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL) prior to renewal of Latvian independence, which permitted the newly formed foreign office of Latvia to successfully address Western governments. During this time WFFL representatives, exercising ties with representatives of other countries formed as a result of many years of activities, helped Latvia's politicians and diplomats to integrate into

was one of the first countries in which a Latvian information office was opened,<sup>17</sup> which served as an important support point on the path to renewal of Latvian independence and international recognition<sup>18</sup>. According to Jānis Jurkāns, the first foreign minister of the renewed Latvia, Jānis Ritenis, who after renewal of Latvian independence became Latvia's first ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark, played an important role in fostering cooperation with Denmark and Western European countries as a whole<sup>19</sup>.

## Political efforts in 1990

Alongside adoption of the declaration "On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia" on May 4, 1990, the issue of closer cooperation with the Baltic States on foreign policy and policy as a whole was reviewed. Realising that to a large extent it would depend greatly on actions coordinated by the Baltic political activists whether it would be possible to draw the attention of other countries and renew independence completely, in a short amount of time politicians and foreign policy representatives from all three Baltic States formally established their cooperation. On May 12, 1990 the chairmen of all three Baltic Supreme Councils signed the Declaration on cooperation among the Baltic republics, and shortly afterwards formed the Baltic states foreign ministers' council<sup>20</sup>.

One of the first political forums in the West where it was possible for political participants from Latvia, as well as from Estonia and Lithuania, to raise the issue of the rights and independence of the Baltic peoples took place in June 1990 at a seminar organised in Copenhagen by the People's Party and Conservative Party of the European Parliament. This was followed by a meeting of the Human Dimension of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in Denmark, where, although as a result of counteractions by the USSR, the Baltic States were not granted the status of observers, they gained the sympathies of Scandinavian and, in particular, Danish foreign ministry. Before the close of the conference Uffe Ellemann-Jensen invited Baltic national and exile organisation representatives<sup>21</sup> to lunch at the Danish Foreign Ministry.<sup>22</sup> As Jānis Ritenis indicates in his memoirs, this meeting provided a significant impulse for closer cooperation between Denmark and the Baltic States.<sup>23</sup>

In turn, on August 28, 1990, almost exactly one year before the renewal of Latvian-Danish diplomatic relations, Jānis Jurkāns' first working visit to Denmark was organised, during which specific tasks to be performed were discussed with regard to the fight for renewal of the sovereignty of Latvia and the other Baltic States. For example, strengthening of cultural ties that were initiated, opening of the Information office of the Baltic States in Copenhagen, providing support for the education of new employees, and

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the community of Western European nations. See: Celle, O. Rietumu latviešu līdzdalība demokrātijas attīstībā. In: Bormanis, U, Kaņepe, V. (Eds.). *Latvijas valsts atjaunošana*. 1986.-1993. Rīga: LU žurnāla "Latvijas Vēsture" fonds, 1998. pp. 452-453.

**22** Ritenis, J. *Diplomātiskā ciņa par Latvijas Republikas suverenitātes atjaunošanu*. Rīga: LU žurnāla "Latvijas

*Vēsture" fonds*, 1998. pp. 111-112.

**23** Ibid. pp. 111-112.

**24** Latvian MFA Archive. Visited on July 26, 2016.

**25** PBLA Informācijas birojs. Dānijas atbalsts. *Brīvā Latvija: Apieņotā "Londonas Avīze un Latvija"*. Nr. 36. October 1, 1990. p. 2.

**26** Ibid. p. 2.

**27** Sillis, J. J. Jurkāna vizīte Dānijā. *Diena*. February 12, 1991. p. 1.

**28** Latvian MFA Archive. Visited on July 26, 2016.

**29** Sillis, J. LR sadarbības protokols ar Dāniju. *Diena*. Nr. 55. March 22, 1991. p. 1.

**30** Diena. J.S. Jurkāns atkal Rīgā. *Brīvā Latvija: Apieņotā "Londonas Avīze un Latvija"*. Nr. 12. March 25, 1991. p. 1.

inclusion of the Baltic States in the group of independent states that received significant financial assistance from Denmark in speeding up democratic reform processes.<sup>24</sup>

In implementing the necessity for providing greater assistance in the efforts to renew the independence of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Denmark widely used international organisations in order to reach a wider audience and seek out allies. Both its broad representation in international organisations, as well as unwavering support for the freedom of the Baltic peoples made Denmark stand out significantly among other countries. So, for example, one year before renewal of Latvia's independence, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen in his September 26, 1990 speech to the United Nations annual meeting expressed the hope that also the Baltic States would soon be permitted to take part as full-fledged members in international cooperation.<sup>25</sup> As Uffe Ellemann-Jensen emphasised, Denmark had never accepted the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union in 1940, and he invited participants to the talks to express their goodwill while attending.<sup>26</sup>

## Latvia's return to independence in 1991

Former foreign minister Jānis Jurkāns had already over the course of several months before international recognition of Latvian

national independence developed a close cooperation with the Danish government and members of the Danish parliament. So, for example, on February 11, 1991 Jānis Jurkāns met with the prime minister, parliamentary speaker and members of the parliamentary presidium of Denmark. It bears noting that during this visit the most important meeting was with Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, who expressed Denmark's support for Latvia's efforts to renew its independence, as well as raising this issue at the European Council<sup>27</sup>. As Jānis Jurkāns stated in a press conference in Copenhagen, "Scandinavian support is not a decoration, but pragmatic policy".<sup>28</sup>

An important milestone in Danish-Latvian relations was the cooperation protocol signed between the countries on March 18, 1991, which stated that Denmark had already recognised Latvia's independence in 1921 (see Documents 1-2). Since Denmark never recognised Latvia's incorporation into the Soviet Union, the conviction was expressed that in the near future talks would begin between the USSR and Latvia regarding complete renewal of Latvia's independence.<sup>29</sup> In addition to signing the protocol, a reception for foreign minister Jānis Jurkāns was organised at the Nordic Council.<sup>30</sup>

The intergovernmental cooperation protocol between Denmark and Latvia provoked an angry response in Moscow. On March 19 Deputy foreign minister Yuliy Kvitsinskiy delivered a harsh protest note to the Danish ambassador to the Soviet Union. According

**31** Nichol, James P. *Diplomacy in the former Soviet Union*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1995. p. 116.

**32** *Diena* (Amerikas Balss). Dānija noraida PSRS protestus. *Diena*. Nr. 56. March 22, 1991. p. 1.

**33** LETA – "Baltija". Gorbačovs dusmojas uz Dāniju. *Jelgavas ziņotājs*. Nr. 81. May 22, 1991. p. 1.

**34** *Ibid.* 1.

**35** Ellemann-Jensen, U. *Towards a new era in Danish-Baltic relations*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. Copenhagen: Byrlev & Jørgensen. April, 1991. P. 3.

**36** Grønbjerg, L. Personal communication. July 12, 2016.

**37** Ritenis, J. *Diplomātiskā cīņa par*

*Latvijas Republikas suverenitātes atjaunošanu*. Rīga: LU žurnāla "Latvijas Vēsture" fonds, 1998. p. 151.

**38** Jurkāns, J. Personal communication. July 14, 2016.

**39** It is important to note that following the January 1991 Soviet crackdown in the Baltic states, Denmark had already invited Baltic governments to set

to the note, “the question of ‘restoring’ diplomatic relations with a union republic runs counter to the principle of international law and to Denmark’s commitments under the 1975 Helsinki Final Act regarding respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention in internal affairs, and nonviolation of the borders...”<sup>31</sup> A day later, on March 20, Denmark rejected Soviet protests in relation to recognition and cooperation agreements that Denmark had signed with the Baltic countries. Although the Foreign Ministry of the USSR claimed that the agreements contravene international law, Denmark’s foreign minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen explained that the agreements signed with the Baltic States comply entirely with international law, as well as Danish foreign policy. In addition, Denmark’s foreign minister indicated that as soon as the situation permits, diplomatic relations between Denmark and Latvia would be renewed<sup>32</sup>.

Without a doubt, Denmark’s consistent support for the independence efforts of Latvia, as well as Estonia and Lithuania, did not go unnoticed and led to criticism from the government of the Soviet Union. Michael Gorbachev, who visited Norway and Sweden on June 5 and 6, 1991, did not express the remotest desire to visit Denmark. Furthermore, during this time, the issue of taking retaliatory measures against Denmark was raised<sup>33</sup>. Instead of bowing to Moscow’s threats, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen stated that he had been expecting a reaction from Moscow. As indicated by the Danish foreign minister, one has the

right to live freely, and neither we, nor that part of the world to which we belong, will forego these rights<sup>34</sup>.

In order for international organisations and nations to keep the issue of the Baltic States on their agendas, an important precondition was an active dialogue with allies. During this time great credit goes to Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, who since 1989 actively defended the interests of the Baltic peoples and who was not only a major shaper of public thought in Denmark, but also a highly respected and influential politician in the international arena. As Ellemann-Jensen wrote in 1991, “Denmark is a small country which has also experienced the loss of freedom. Danes, therefore, feel a special solidarity with the Baltic peoples and their desire for freedom and independence.”<sup>35</sup>

Both Uffe Ellemann-Jensen’s article “Den rette hjælp til Baltikum” (The Right Help for the Baltics), as well as his speech on defence of the Baltic peoples in parliament a couple of months later, serve as proof of this<sup>36</sup>. According to Jānis Ritenis, “we often heard from Denmark’s diplomats that Uffe Ellemann-Jensen had again “gotten through” another decision in the European Community favouring the Balts, as he was the most senior minister there with the greatest work experience.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, Ellemann-Jensen and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Germany’s longest-serving foreign minister and an architect of German reunification, played a major role in the formats for political cooperation

up exile governments if necessary. See: Nichol, James P. *Diplomacy in the former Soviet Union*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1995. p. 116.

**40** Grønberg, L. Personal communication. July 12, 2016.

**41** Ellemann-Jensen, U. Personal communication. July 12, 2016.

**42** Ellemann-Jensen, *Letter to Minister*

*Janis Jurkans*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. August 24, 1991. Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.

**43** Iceland reaffirmed the recognition of Latvia on August 22 and diplomatic relations were established on August 26.

**44** Ellemann-Jensen, U. Personal

communication. July 12, 2016.

**45** Jurkāns, J. Personal communication. July 14, 2016.

**46** Joint communiqué. Signed by Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Lennart, Meri, Jānis Jurkāns and Algirdas Saudargas. Copenhagen, August 26, 1991.

**47** Ritenis, J. *Diplomātiskā cīņa par Latvijas Republikas suverenitātes*

among nations in international organisations. As the foreign ministers with the greatest experience, they were able to convince and influence representatives of other countries to support the renewal of Baltic independence.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most important events took place in August, 1991. The coup against Mikhail Gorbachev began on August 18, led by hard-line communist elements of the Soviet government and military. Two days later, on August 20 Latvian foreign minister Jānis Jurkāns arrived in Copenhagen with a mandate to establish a Latvian government-in-exile.<sup>39</sup> During this time the Danish government had an emergency plan prepared for the possibility to accommodate Baltic refugees.<sup>40</sup> On August 21, after the Soviet coup d'état attempt, the Supreme Council adopted a Constitutional law, "On statehood of the Republic of Latvia", declaring Article 5 of the Declaration to be invalid, thus ending the transitional period and restoring *de facto* independence. Remembering these days, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen states, "Up to the Putsch and the hours until it broke down we were scared that the reactionary forces in Moscow would take over and that there would be more violence. We had already seen the murders of unarmed borderguards in Medininkai in the summer, and tensions were strong."<sup>41</sup>

On 23 August, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen informed his eleven colleagues in the European Community that Denmark would re-open diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries

and urged all European Community members to do the same. One day later, August 24, Ellemann-Jensen sent to Jānis Jurkāns a diplomatic note regarding the readiness to re-establish diplomatic relations. According to Ellemann-Jensen, "It is with a profound sense of joy and relief that the Danish government and the entire Danish people have learned of the developments which mean that your country can now begin the construction of a free and democratic society [...]" and further "it is my pleasure to confirm that in accordance with your previously expressed wishes Denmark is now ready to establish diplomatic relations with your country" (see Document 3).<sup>42</sup> Although formally Iceland's government recognised the renewal of Latvia's independence on August 22, 1991,<sup>43</sup> and Denmark's foreign minister signed a letter regarding renewal of diplomatic relations on August 24, Denmark was the first country that signed a cooperation protocol with Latvia which caused the strongest Soviet reaction. It is important to note that Denmark did not need to recognise the independence of Latvia as it already had done in 1921. The key thing was to re-open diplomatic relations with Latvia (see Document 4-7). On August 26, the Baltic foreign ministers came to Copenhagen from Reykjavik and were received by Queen Margrethe II of Denmark. This was a very emotional and uplifting event. Recalling this day, Ellemann-Jensen states, "We went up to her summer residence in Fredensborg where we arrived at 23 o'clock. It was a full moon, the Royal

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*atjaunošanu*. Rīga: LU žurnāla "Latvijas Vēsture" fonds, 1998. p. 180.

**48** *Diena*. J.S. Dānijas vēstnieks. *Brīvā Latvija: Apie notā "Londonas Avīze un Latvija"*. Nr. 33. September 2, 1991. p. 1.

**49** Sīlis, J. LR atzīšana turpinās. Ieradies Dānijas vēstnieks. *Diena*. Nr. 166. August 28, 1991. p. 1.

**50** Sīlis, J. Dānijas vēstnieks sāk darbu.

*Diena*. Nr. 167. August 29, 1991. p. 1.

**51** *Diena*. J.S. Genšera paziņojums. *Brīvā Latvija: Apie notā "Londonas Avīze un Latvija"*. Nr. 33. September 2, 1991.

**52** The constitutional law passed on August 21, 1991 repealed the transitional law passed in May 1990 for renewal of the authority of the Republic of Latvia *de facto*. Along with the

end of the transitional period, the Constitutional legal provisions of the Latvian SSR lost force, and the *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia, adopted on February 15, 1922, became the constitutional basis of the Latvian state. At this time, when it was determined that Latvia would be an independent, democratic republic, where the sovereign power of the state belongs

Lifeguard was lined up in their gala uniforms in front of the palace, the orchestra played a ceremonial march – and the royal dog stood on the stairs to the castle and barked. “Don’t cry, Lennart”, said Jānis Jurkāns dryly – but I think we all had wet eyes. The Queen received us, gave a fine little speech welcoming them back in the free world, and we drank a glass of champagne...”<sup>44</sup> Jānis Jurkāns also confirms that this was one of the most remarkable and momentous events.<sup>45</sup>

On August 26, 1991 a joint communiqué was signed by Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and three Baltic foreign ministers – Lennart Meri, Jānis Jurkāns and Algirdas Saudargas (see Document 5). According to the joint communiqué, “This is a decisive moment in the history of the peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuanian. 52 years after the conclusion of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent illegal Soviet annexation, a long, dark chapter in Baltic history has finally come to an end. We rejoice at this momentous event.”<sup>46</sup> According to Jānis Ritenis, “pleased by these beautiful gestures [in Fredensborg Palace], afterward we all hurried in the half-dusk of the northern summer night to the Danish foreign ministry, which was all lit up, in order to sign the diplomatic cooperation agreement among our nations. When the document signing was completed, it was already after midnight. Then the toasts and congratulatory speeches began.”<sup>47</sup>

With the words “I have arrived to renew diplomatic relations between Denmark and

your country and to discuss with your country future cooperation between Denmark and Latvia in relation to business, finance and culture”, Danish ambassador Otto Borch arrived in Riga, Latvia on August 26, 1991 (see Image 2).<sup>48</sup> On that day that Borch as ambassador in special mission was the first western diplomat together with Lars Grønberg and secretary Rita Jørgensen to arrive in Latvia without a USSR entrance visa, while the Danish Queen Margrethe II held a reception at her summer residence for the foreign ministers of the Baltic States.<sup>49</sup> One day later, upon signing the note affirming complete restoration of diplomatic relations between Denmark and Latvia, which makes reference to the note of August 24 confirming that from this date the diplomatic relations were restored, ambassador Borch authorised by the Danish government indicated that Denmark is awaiting the moment when Latvia’s people will be able to represent their country in all of Europe’s international organisations.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, on August 27, Genscher announced that if the three foreign ministers of the Baltic States so wished, he would stand up for involvement of these countries in the European Community. As the foreign minister of the German Federation emphasised, “we support the Baltic States on their path to Europe”.<sup>51</sup> After the renewal of Latvian independence, the respective foreign diplomats and cultural representatives were closely involved in the renewal of Latvia as a sovereign state.

Immediately after renewal and international

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to the Latvian people, it was important to receive letters of recognition from other countries, in order to affirm that the Republic of Latvia with its renewed sovereignty is the legal successor to these rights.

**53** By September 18, 79 nations had recognised the independence of the Republic of Latvia.

**54** Bojāre, I. Rīgā ieradies Dānijas ārlietu ministrs. *Diena*. Nr. 175. September 10, 1991. p. 1.

**55** Malling Biering, K. Personal communication. July 25, 2016.

**56** *Ibid.*

**57** Ritenis, J. *Diplomātiskā ciņa par Latvijas Republikas suverenitātes atjaunošanu*. Rīga: LU žurnāla “Latvijas

Vēsture” fonds, 1998. pp. 193-194.

**58** Jurkāns, J. Personal communication. July 14, 2016.

**59** Jundzis, T. Centieni ārpolitikā. In: Bormanis, U, Kaņepe, V. (Eds.). *Latvijas valsts atjaunošana*. 1986.-1993. Rīga: LU žurnāla “Latvijas Vēsture” fonds, 1998. p. 307.

**60** Ellemann-Jensen, U. Personal

recognition of the independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1991.<sup>52</sup> Latvia began its rapid return to the international community.<sup>53</sup> In turn, already on September 9 the Danish foreign minister arrived on a visit to Latvia (see Image 3). He again emphasised the preparedness of his country to begin in the very near future a broad cooperation with the Baltics, in order to lessen the republic's potential economic problems.<sup>54</sup> In order to strengthen relations between Latvia and Denmark further, on October 2, 1991 the first permanent Danish extraordinary and authorised ambassador to Latvia, Kirsten Malling Biering, was accredited. She occupied this position until 1995. Looking back on the process of changes 25 years ago, Kirsten Malling Biering recognises that it was one of the most emotional periods in her diplomatic life. As the former ambassador states, "rarely is it possible for a diplomat to be that much part of the development of society and experience professional relations in such depth".<sup>55</sup> As notes Biering, "my posting to Latvia was and remains remarkable, because we also privately felt so much part of the picture".<sup>56</sup>

A few weeks later, on November 12, 1992, when Jānis Ritenis was appointed ambassador to Denmark, this was viewed as a transition from people's diplomacy to work in the diplomatic corps of Latvia<sup>57</sup>. Already in the first month after adoption of the law "On the national status of the Republic of Latvia" by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia on August 21, Latvia joined the UN, together with Estonia and Lithuania.

Former Latvian foreign minister Jānis Jurkāns remembers this time as very busy with many visits abroad. In 1991 alone, he spent 155 days outside of Latvia, with the aim of forging closer relations with politicians and diplomats in Western European countries.<sup>58</sup> Also the first minister of defence of the renewed Latvia, Tālavas Jundzis, in characterising Latvian foreign policy from 1990-1991, assessed it as consistent, active and relentless.<sup>59</sup> Recalling this time, Elleman-Jensen states, "We followed a clear line with very broad support in our Parliament. We wanted to see full restoration of independence in a way that would give room for future peaceful relations in the Baltic Sea Region. We were not always successful in opening doors for our Baltic friends— but we kept pushing. And found out that a small country can punch above its weight when it is a member of a larger family, like the EU [*earlier the European Community*] and NATO..."<sup>60</sup> Kirsten Malling Biering highlights that, "1991 was in all aspects an eventful year, politically and personally. At the time I served as Head of the European Affairs Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Copenhagen. We were all impressed by the gigantic changes taking place, for nations as well as institutions. It was a moment of great hope for Europe"<sup>61</sup>.

communication. July 12, 2016.

**61** Malling Biering, K. Personal communication. July 25, 2016.

**62** As indicated by political representative and later European Court of Justice judge Egils Levits, according to this logic, if the annexation is not recognised, i.e. that the Baltic States would be a legitimate part of the Soviet Union, then

this means that in this territory the independent Baltic States continue to exist. See: Levits, E. Latvijas valdības starptautiskās atzīšanas process. *Diena*. Nr. 43. March 5, 1991. p. 2.

**63** *Laiks*. Dānijas premjerministrs apsveic A. Gorbunovu. *Laiks*. Nr. 46. June 9, 1990. p. 5.

**64** Jurkāns, J. Personal communication.

July 14, 2016.

**65** Bojāre, I. Rīgā ieradies Dānijas ārlietu ministrs. *Diena*. Nr. 175. September 10, 1991. p. 1.

**66** Sīlis, J. LR atzīšana turpinās. Ieradies Dānijas vēstnieks. *Diena*. Nr. 166. March 28, 1991. p. 1.

**67** *Ibid.* p. 1.

## Concluding remarks

Already before August 21, 1991, Denmark announced on all political levels that it had already recognised Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania back in 1921. Since this recognition was still in force, after 1940 it was never annulled.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Denmark was one of the most visible nations that helped the Baltic States be heard in the international arena and provided significant support to the efforts of politicians and diplomats from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in rapidly renewing the independence of their countries. Already in mid-1990, when Poul Schlüter sent Latvian Supreme Council chairman Anatolijs Gorbunovs a message that Denmark's government congratulates with the greatest pleasure the beginning of democratic processes in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, he clearly emphasised that Denmark had never recognised the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup>

It is not possible to reduce the renewal of Latvia's independence to just a single explanation. A whole multitude of factors converging allowed Latvia to regain its independence after 50 years of occupation. Denmark played a very important role in these processes, because with Uffe Ellemann-Jensen at the forefront, Denmark strongly and resolutely supported independence for the Baltic States. In any event, without the farsighted support of Denmark, for Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania the path to renewal of independence would have been more difficult and more filled with obstacles. As former foreign minister Jānis Jurkāns shares in his memoirs, in the diplomatic battle for renewal of independence for the Baltic States, Denmark was the champion.<sup>64</sup> Even before the declaration

of Latvia's independence, Denmark played a special role in European countries' relations with the Baltic States. Denmark was both the first country that signed an intergovernmental cooperation protocol with Latvia and the first whose parliamentary delegation arrived in February 1991 in Riga, thus affirming the legitimacy and continuity of the relationship established in 1921<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, Danish Ambassador to the Latvian Republic Otto Borch was the first who, thanks to a letter sent by President of the Supreme Council Dainis Īvāns to the Baltic Border troop commander of Latvia, crossed the border without an entry visa from the USSR<sup>66</sup>. As stated by former Supreme Council of the Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Mavriks Vulfsons, "Our Danish friends always said that they would be the first to open the diplomatic parade"<sup>67</sup>.

To conclude, the right of a people to self-determination, a democratic system of state rule, freedom of speech and the right to travel have already been granted to many peoples. For others, these are still dreams and longings. For some, freedom has come more easily, while other peoples have had to fight a bitter and hard struggle. Looking back on the political and diplomatic battle for renewal of Latvian sovereignty, it is clear that without such trustworthy allies and friends as Denmark was and still remains, these dreams of freedom would be more difficult to attain and secure in the international arena. Although in the hustle and bustle of daily life and work people often do not appreciate the privileges provided by a democratic and free state, not to mention those who critically express their doubts about the uniqueness of these values, memories of the years of renewal of Latvia's independence and the assistance provided by allies is an invaluable reminder of life's true values.

# ANNEXES

Image 1



On April 21, 1990 the first direct SAS airline flight from Copenhagen to Riga was unveiled

Source: Copy of newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla*. See: Latvijas radošo savienību laikraksts *Literatūra un Māksla*. April 28, 1990. p. 3.

Image 3

On September 9, 1991 Danish foreign minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen arrived on a visit to Latvia. The photo illustrates the meeting between Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Latvia.

Image 2

Otto Borch as ambassador in special mission arrives in Riga on August 26, 1991



Source: Copy of newspaper *Diena*. See: Silis, J. LR atzišana turpinās. Ieradies Dānijas vēstnieks. *Diena*. Nr. 166. August 28, 1991. p. 1.



Source: Copy of newspaper *Diena*. See: Bojāre, I. Rīgā ieradies Dānijas ārlietu ministrs. *Diena*. Nr. 175. September 10, 1991. p. 1.



Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia on 18 March, 1991.

Joint protocol on cooperation between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia.



The foreign ministers of the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia met on 18 March, 1991, in Copenhagen and agreed to continue and further strengthen their cooperation to mutual benefit on the basis of the following basic principles:

The parties recalled that before the Second World War the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia, which were both members of the League of Nations, had good and friendly relations, but that these were interrupted for 50 years by the forcible incorporation of the Republic of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940. Denmark, which recognized Latvia in 1921, never recognized the legality of that incorporation.

Denmark welcomed the fact that the people of Latvia in the spring of 1990 had the opportunity to express themselves in free elections, which resulted in a democratically elected parliament and the subsequent formation of a legitimate government, which aims at creating a democratic society based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Latvian parliament decided on 4 May 1990 to re-establish the full national independence of the Republic of Latvia and this decision was confirmed by the plebiscite of 3 March 1991.

The parties expressed the hope that negotiations will soon be started between Latvia and the Soviet Union with a view to solving the problems related to the reestablishment of full national independence of Latvia.

Denmark will continue its efforts to gain support for the admission, or readmission, of Latvia to full membership of relevant international organizations of which it wants to become a member. In this context, the Danish foreign minister reiterated Denmark's support for the desire of Latvia to participate fully in the CSCE-process.

The parties will seek to take full advantage of their agreement on the establishment of a joint contact group on economic, industrial and technical cooperation which was concluded in 1990. The first meeting of the contact group will be held in the near future. On that occasion the parties will examine a number of concrete projects for cooperation to their mutual benefit.

The parties noted in particular that a number of cooperation ventures have been initiated or are under discussion,

notably in the area of agriculture, fisheries, education and environmental protection. They will continue to give priority to this cooperation.

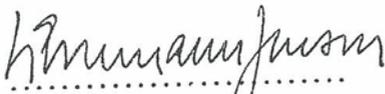
The Danish government will, subject to approval by the Danish budget authorities, continue to provide financial support for this cooperation.

The parties noted that the cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts have expanded rapidly during the past year. They will in the near future conclude an agreement to establish a joint contact group for cultural, educational and scientific cooperation on the basis of the draft agreement proposed by the Danish side on 31 October 1990.

The parties agreed to stay in contact with each other, inter alia through the Latvian representative at the Baltic Information Office in Copenhagen, in order to expand their cooperation.

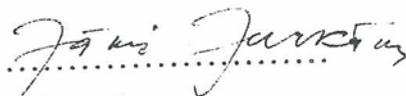
When the situation makes it possible, Denmark and Latvia will seek to reestablish diplomatic relations.

Copenhagen, 18 March 1991.



Uffe Ellemann-Jensen

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
of the Kingdom of Denmark



Janis Jurkans

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
of the Republic of Latvia

Document 2

Joint protocol on cooperation between  
the Kingdom of Denmark and the  
Republic of Latvia (March 18, 1991)

Source: Copy from the Danish MFA Archive.

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MR. JANIS JURKANS  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
REPUBLIC OF LATVIA  
RIGA  
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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DENMARK, COPENHAGEN

COPENHAGEN, 24 AUGUST 1991

DEAR COLLEAGUE,

IT IS WITH A PROFOUND SENSE OF JOY AND RELIEF THAT THE DANISH GOVERNMENT AND THE ENTIRE DANISH PEOPLE HAVE LEARNED OF THE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH MEAN THAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN NOW BEGIN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WISHES OF HER PEOPLE. I WISH TO CONGRATULATE YOU AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA WITH THIS HISTORIC EVENT, FOR WHICH YOU HAVE WORKED SO HARD.

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO CONFIRM THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED WISHES DENMARK IS NOW READY TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH YOUR COUNTRY.

I HOPE THAT, WITH YOUR AGREEMENT, A DANISH REPRESENTATIVE CAN TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN YOUR CAPITAL IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

I HAVE APPOINTED A SMALL DELEGATION TO PREPARE THE PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THIS CONNECTION. I HOPE THE DELEGATION CAN VISIT YOUR COUNTRY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

THE DANISH GOVERNMENT IS AWARE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE TASK NOW FACING YOU WHEN YOU CONTINUE THE REFORM PROCESS. THE DANISH GOVERNMENT WILL SEEK PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL TO INITIATE A PROGRAMME OF ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION WITH YOUR COUNTRY WHICH, HOPEFULLY, CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO OVERCOME SOME OF THE INITIAL PROBLEMS AS WELL AS TO THE LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR COUNTRY.

I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE THAT WE DISCUSS THIS MATTER DURING A MEETING ON 9 SEPTEMBER 1991 IN ONE OF THE BALTIC CAPITALS.

SINCERELY YOURS  
UFFE ELLEMANN-JENSEN  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK

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Document 3

Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, regarding the readiness to re-establish diplomatic relations (August 24, 1991)

Source: Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

His Excellency  
Uffe Ellemann-Jensen  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Kingdom of Denmark

August 25, 1991

Your Excellency:

I wish to express the gratitude for your announcement to the effect that the Kingdom of Denmark has passed the resolution to renew diplomatic relations on the level of ambassadors with the Republic of Latvia. It is an event long waited for in our country that after more than fifty years of occupation testifies to the reestablishment of the historical truth. The people of Latvia have never lost the hope to return back to the community of European countries it has always considered to belong to.

May I express the conviction that the renewal of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia is turning a new page in history and it will strengthen the ties of friendship and cooperation between our peoples and will further promote peace and stability in Europe and in the whole world in the name of humanism and Christian spirit.

Sincerely yours,

Jānis Jurkāns  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Latvia

Document 4

Letter from Jānis Jurkāns, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, to Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark (August 25, 1991)

Source: Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.

Joint communiqué. Signed by Uffe Elleman-Jensen, Lennart Meri, Jānis Jurkāns and Algirdas Saudargas (Copenhagen, August 26, 1991).

Source: Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.

We, the foreign ministers of the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Denmark, met today in Copenhagen to celebrate the achievement of full national independence by the three Baltic States. We confirm the reestablishment, as of August 24 1991, of diplomatic relations between Denmark and each of the three countries. We recognize that this important development has come about in large measure thanks to the recent valiant efforts of the democratic forces, who so courageously resisted the unconstitutional coup attempt in the Soviet Union last week. We pay tribute to their efforts.

This is a decisive moment in the history of the peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. 52 years after the conclusion of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent illegal Soviet annexation, a long, dark chapter in Baltic history has finally come to an end. We rejoice at this momentous event. The Baltic people are again masters in their own house.

We agree that we must now turn our eyes to the future. The Baltic countries have already undertaken vast political and economic reforms, but it is clear that a multitude of problems remain to be solved. We agree that ever closer cooperation between our countries is now urgent. Denmark stands ready to assist Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in their efforts at recovery by all possible means, including the extension of large-scale economic assistance. In this connection, Denmark will work within the EC towards the opening of negotiations between the EC and each of the Baltic states on association agreements.

The conditions for full membership of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the CSCE, the United Nations and other international fora have now been firmly established. Denmark will do its utmost to achieve this goal for which the Baltic countries have waited far too long.

It is with a feeling of profound joy and satisfaction that we now enter a new era in the relations between our countries.

Copenhagen, August 26, 1991



Lennart Meri  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs of the  
Republic of Estonia



Janis Jurkans  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs of the  
Republic of Latvia



Algirdas Saudargas  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs of the  
Republic of Lithuania



Uffe Ellemann-Jensen  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs of the  
Kingdom of Denmark

Riga, August 27, 1991

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to the joint protocol of cooperation between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia signed in Copenhagen on 18 March 1991 which i.a. reconfirmed Denmark's recognition in 1921 of the Republic of Latvia as an independent state, and stated that Denmark and Latvia when the situation makes it possible will seek to reestablish diplomatic relations, as well as to the Danish letter of 24 August 1991 signed by H.E. Mr. Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark on the reopening of diplomatic relations between our two countries with immediate effect.

I furthermore have the honour, acting upon instruction from my Government, to confirm the contents of the letter of 24 August 1991, and to suggest that the present Note and Your Excellency's reply to that effect shall be regarded as constituting an agreement between our two Governments reconfirming the reopening of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia as from 24 August 1991.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express to you, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

*Otto Borch*

Otto Rose Borch  
Ambassador of Denmark

His Excellency  
Mārtiņš Virsis  
Acting Foreign Minister  
of the Republic of Latvia

**Document 6**

Note by Otto Borch, Ambassador of  
Denmark to the Ministry of Foreign  
Affairs of the Republic of Latvia  
(August 27, 1991)

Source: Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

Riga, August 27, 1991

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency's Note of August 27, 1991, which reads as follows:

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to the joint protocol of cooperation between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia signed in Copenhagen on 18 March 1991 which i.a. reconfirmed Denmark's recognition in 1921 of the Republic of Latvia as an independent state, and stated that Denmark and Latvia when the situation makes it possible will seek to reestablish diplomatic relations, as well as to the Danish letter of 24 August 1991 signed by H.E. Mr. Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Denmark on the reopening of diplomatic relations between our two countries with immediate effect.

I furthermore have the honour, acting upon instruction from my Government, to confirm the contents of the letter of 24 August 1991, and to suggest that the present Note and Your Excellency's reply to that effect shall be regarded as constituting an agreement between our two Governments reconfirming the reopening of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Latvia as from 24 August 1991.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express to you, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

In reply, I have the honour to state that the Government of the Republic of Latvia accepts the proposal of the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark, and agrees that Your Excellency's Note and the present reply shall constitute an agreement between the two Governments.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express to you, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Mārtiņš Virsis  
Acting Foreign Minister  
of the Republic of Latvia

Document 7

Letter by Mārtiņš Virsis, Acting  
Foreign Minister of the Republic of  
Latvia (August 27, 1991)

Source: Copy from the Latvian MFA Archive.

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