

LITHUANIAN FOREIGN POLICY DOCUMENTS. VOLUME I: 1917–1920

A Selection of Documents

This edition of historical diplomatic documents 'Lithuanian Foreign Policy Documents, Volume I: 1917–1920' begins a new series of publications of original Lithuanian diplomatic material. The published documents are presented in chronological order, spanning the entire period of independence of the modern Republic of Lithuania: during the interwar period up to the Soviet occupation in 1940, detailing the activities of the Lithuanian diplomatic service in exile between 1940 and 1990, and the period from 1990 to the present day. It should be noted that the publication contains exclusively Lithuanian foreign policy documents reflecting relations with other countries. These documents are to be published sequentially as a series, volume by volume. The project is envisaged to be a witness to the formation, development and continuity of Lithuanian diplomacy, as well as part of Lithuanian history, since foreign policy documents unavoidably reflect internal political changes, the two areas being closely related.

The idea for this project arose from the success of previous similar publishing endeavours, especially those during the last 30 years of independence, alongside the body of research on diplomatic historical sources and examples of their publication, as well as the accumulated experience of publishing historical materials, in particular the publication of several thematic compilations of documents which also reflected certain directions in Lithuanian foreign policy. There have been earlier attempts to publish Lithuanian foreign policy documents; however, none of them came to fruition.

The publication of thousands of previously unpublished documents prepared by Lithuanian diplomats is a qualitatively new, future-oriented project, embodying a shift from thematic or limited chronological publishing to a syncretic multi-volume compilation of foreign policy documents. It is expected that this new series of volumes of documents will qualitatively advance Lithuania in historical source publishing and foreign policy research, and thus enable the country to join the elite ranks of countries that regularly publish a wide range of collections of foreign policy documents.

The idea for this compilation of documents has circulated in Lithuanian society for a while. Dr Tomas Remeikis (1934–2013), who lived and worked in the USA, collected a considerable amount of diplomatic materials and followed closely the publication of similar collections in Western countries, and who initiated the publication of three volumes of Lithuanian foreign policy documents covering the years 1939 to 1940, wrote: 'We still lack systematic documentation of the international relations of the Republic of Lithuania. Apart from collections of what is known as Soviet documents, only one objective volume of materials has seen the light of day: the collection of documents by the Central State

Archive of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Institute of History entitled “The Occupation and Annexation of Lithuania: 1939–1940” (Vilnius, 1993).

‘Many countries, especially large ones, systematically publish multi-volume series to cover their foreign policy, some examples being Great Britain’s *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Germany’s *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik (1918–1945)*, and the USA’s *US Foreign Policy*. Similar series are also published in France, Italy, Poland, and other countries. Therefore, it is particularly important for small nations to publish their own authoritative collections, otherwise the history of small nations gets rewritten by their larger neighbours according to their interests.’¹ In Remeikis’ opinion, it is imperative to publish continuously documentation on Lithuania’s international relations, starting from the creation of the nation-state in 1918 by the Act of 16 February, to the present day and beyond, for as long as the independent sovereign Republic of Lithuania exists. He emphasised: ‘Such compilations are necessary for shedding light on political and national interests, as well as for nurturing the national consciousness, because without the nation’s memory, no nation has a future.’²

This idea finally came to fruition on 27 August 2018, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Vilnius University and the Research Council of Lithuania agreed to act together, and, along with Lithuanian archives, initiate, oversee and support the implementation of this project.

The very first Lithuanian diplomatic documents, revealing the directions in foreign policy followed by Lithuanian politicians, reflect the development of the idea of Lithuania’s independence in four centres of the Sajūdis reform movement, Switzerland, the USA, Scandinavia and Russia; the preparations for the Lithuanian Conference in Vilnius (18–22 September 1917); and appeals and consultations with German military and civilian officials, attempts to enter into direct relations with other countries, seeking international recognition, and the activities of the Lithuanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Also included are important documents related to the Moscow Peace Treaty, the brief recovery of Vilnius in the summer of 1920, and its sudden loss following the success of Lucjan Żeligowski’s ‘mutiny’. These materials show the history of the creation of the Lithuanian state, efforts to secure international recognition, struggles for the unification of Lithuanian lands within the borders of the Lithuanian state, and conflicts with Poland over the issue of Vilnius and Klaipėda.

This compilation of documents contains 466 documents prepared exclusively by Lithuanian diplomats and published chronologically. They are memos about meetings and

1 *Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio politika. Dokumentai, 1939–1940* (Foreign Policy of the Republic of Lithuania. Documents), Volume I: 23 08 1939–25 05 1940, compiled and edited by Tomas Remeikis, Vilnius, 2009, p. 7.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

conversations, everyday information, activity reports, consular affairs, political summaries, replies to Ministry of Foreign Affairs inquiries, policy overviews, diplomatic notes, reports, and correspondence, because at that time it was particularly important for Lithuanian diplomats to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the course of action on time, and the recommended course of action.

Many documents in this compilation tell the story of the beginnings of Lithuanian diplomacy, the founding of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the establishment of diplomatic missions in foreign countries, and the steps taken by the first Lithuanian diplomats.

The systematic selection and publication of Lithuanian foreign policy documents, made possible by the help of the Lithuanian Central State Archive, has revealed that Lithuania truly cherishes its statehood, an important component of which is the diplomatic service (the diplomatic mission being the only Lithuanian institution that operated in countries that did not recognise the 1940–1990 occupation by the USSR). The continuous publication of diplomatic materials will be a significant public asset and part of the cultural and political heritage.

The project is organised by the Research Council of Lithuania, which prepared the terms of the call for proposals and allocated funding for the first volume. The publication was prepared by the winners of the selection process, Professor Zenonas Butkus, Professor Alfonsas Eidintas, and Associate Professor Kęstutis Kilinskas.

Translated by Julija Gulbinovič