



Honorary Consuls are integral to the effectiveness of the Icelandic Foreign Service in its primary role of furthering Iceland's interests abroad. A Group of Honorary Consuls of Iceland who participated in the second Consular Conference in Reykjavik in 1977.



Ingvi S. Ingvarsson, Permanent Secretary of State with Matthias Á. Mathiesen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, on his left side, at the third Consular Conference in Iceland in 1986. The Consular Conferences are important venues for updating Honorary Consuls of Iceland about the country they are serving. The next Consular Conference will be held in Iceland in September 2001.



Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill of Great Britain visited Iceland in 1941, at the height of the battle of the North Atlantic in the Second World War. Iceland's strategic location between North America and Europe was important during the war to secure convoys and Allied shipping from attacks by German U-boats.

Icelanders celebrate the achievement of independence on 17 June 1944. Iceland had already assumed control of its foreign affairs following the German occupation of Denmark in 1940. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was formally established in 1941 and during the Second World War Iceland established diplomatic relations with the other Nordic countries and the Allies.



The tenth Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO, was held in Paris in 1952. From left: Hans G. Andersen, legal counsellor, Ólafur Thors, Prime Minister of Iceland, Hörður Helgason, First Secretary and Gunnlaugur Pétursson, Permanent Representative of Iceland to NATO.



The coat of arms of the Kingdom of Iceland was removed from the entrance to Embassy of Iceland in Washington D.C. on independence day, 17 June 1944 by Embassy officials. From left: Þórhallur Ásgeirsson, later Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Hendrik Sv. Björnsson, First Secretary and Thor Thors, Ambassador of Iceland to the United States.



The policy of the Icelandic government is to participate fully in the formation of a new security environment in Europe and to shoulder the responsibility this entails through active participation in the international defence and security co-operation. The picture shows an Icelandic medical unit during NATO's operations in Bosnia.

History of the Foreign Service in Pictures

The Icelandic Foreign Service celebrated its sixtieth anniversary on 10 April this year. As part of the celebrations, the Foreign Ministry organised a photograph exhibition at the National Library under the heading "Historical Overview of the Icelandic Foreign Service".

The Foreign service came into existence in 1940, when the Althingi decided that Iceland, although still a dependency of the Danish Crown, should take charge of its own foreign affairs following Germany's invasion of Denmark early during World War II.

The exhibition itself highlights two aspects of the Icelandic Foreign Service. On the one hand, the history of the Service is narrated in broad terms with photographic illustrations of various important events and occasions, and on the other hand a selection of photographs of the Foreign Service staff provides an insight into the work conducted by the Service.

The main focus of the Foreign Service's work is on protecting Icelandic interests abroad in politics, security, the economy, trade, and culture. Thus, the Foreign Service is involved in all the principal aspects of Iceland's relations with other countries.

The work of the Foreign Service has changed profoundly in the course of these 60 years. In the first year of the Service, a consulate was opened in New York, and embassies were opened in London and Stockholm. With the embassy in Copenhagen, a total of four diplomatic outposts were operated on foreign soil. The diplomatic service had a staff of 15, and 5 persons worked at the Ministry. Now there are 17 fully-fledged diplomatic representations with 105 employees. The Ministry employs a staff of over 80 people. Iceland now has 188 consulates in 61 countries staffed by 225 honorary consuls. Iceland has political relations with 120 countries and is involved in 90 international organisations.

The selection of photographs on these pages represents a small fraction of the exhibition of the Foreign Ministry illustrating the history of the Icelandic Foreign Service.



From left: Geir Hallgrímsson, Prime Minister and Einar Ágústsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs with President Jimmy Carter during a NATO Summit in Washington D.C. in 1977.



Sigríður Ásdís Snævarr, the first woman to be appointed Ambassador in the Icelandic Foreign Service in 1991 with President Nelson Mandela of South Africa during her presentation of credentials as Iceland's Ambassador to South Africa in 1998.



Iceland's membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO and the bilateral Defence Agreement with the United States remain the cornerstones of the security of Iceland. Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, signs the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949, confirming Iceland as a founding member of the Atlantic Alliance.



The five Nordic countries enjoy a solid and deep rooted co-operation at all levels of government. They work closely within the Nordic Council of Ministers. From left; Halldór Ásgrímsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs with his colleague Tarja Halonen, now President of Finland as of January 2000, during her visit to Iceland in 1998.



Foreign Minister Einar Ágústsson and Anthony Crossland, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, sign an agreement between Iceland and the United Kingdom which put an end to the fishing dispute between the two countries on 1 June 1976.



At the initiative of Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Iceland was the first country to recognize the regained independence of the three Baltic Republics, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and to establish full diplomatic relations. This was confirmed at Höfði House in Reykjavik on 26 August 1991 in the presence of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the three Baltic Republics. From left: Algirdas Saudargas, Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Janis Jurkans, Foreign Minister of Latvia, Lennart Meri, Foreign Minister of Estonia and Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, Foreign Minister of Iceland. Standing are Chief of Protocol Sveinn Björnsson and Legal Advisor Guðmundur Eiríksson.



The World Exposition, EXPO 2000, opened in Hannover in Germany on 1 June 2000. Iceland has a strong profile at the exposition with an ambitious exhibition plan. More than half a million guests visited the Icelandic exhibition hall during the first three weeks of EXPO 2000. Foreign Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson and his wife Sigurjóna Sigurðardóttir introduce the Icelandic exhibition hall to Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor of Germany, and his wife on the opening day of EXPO 2000.