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# THE IMPORTANCE OF PASSION IN DIPLOMACY

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## Interview with *Liga Tarvide*

*Liga Tarvide is an Officer for education, culture, and public diplomacy at the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in the Republic of Korea, where she assists in the development of bilateral relations and cooperation between Korea and Latvia. Liga has endeavored to raise awareness of Latvia in Korea through many projects involving translation, interpretation, event coordination, facilitation, and cross-cultural communication in the fields of education, culture, literature, history, and more. Previously, Liga has worked as an intern on projects in human rights and education for the Center for Dalit Women Nepal (CDWN), an NGO in Nepal, as well as participated in many translation projects in her home country of Latvia. Liga pursued her bachelor's in Asian studies at the University of Latvia in Riga, as well as received her master's in International Development Cooperation from Ewha Woman's University, Seoul.*

The Journal's editor Danielle French sat down with Liga Tarvide to discuss her role as an officer at the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia.

\*All thoughts and opinions presented by Liga Tarvide in this interview are her own, and do not reflect the views of the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia.

### **Y: Would you please introduce yourself and your position at the Embassy of Latvia?**

LT: My name is Liga Tarvide, and I am an Officer responsible for education, culture, and public diplomacy at the Embassy of Latvia in Seoul. My position is exciting and dynamic, and includes many different roles such as that of educator, consultant, curator, and event planner. For the most part, my work involves presenting Latvian history, culture, and values to Korean audiences in order to raise awareness about Latvia in Korea. I also assist Korean students interested in studying in Latvia, and connect them to our many programs available, such as scholarships in Latvia. Moreover, I work to expand partnerships in the field of education and at the institutional level, while also coordinating the participation of different Latvian artists and performers in various events taking place in Korea. Lastly, we also plan and organize different events as the Embassy of Latvia, such as Latvian film screenings, book presentations, exhibitions, and lectures. The ultimate goal of all these activities

is to create a better understanding of Latvia in Korea, and to allow for the cultivation of friendship and closer cooperation between the two countries.

**Y: What kind of efforts have to be made in order to work for an Embassy?**

The Foreign Service itself is very broad, and there are many career tracks in the economic, political, administrative, management, and diplomacy sectors as well as many more. However, quite often these sectors are interconnected and therefore interdisciplinary knowledge is essential to reflect the complex elements of international affairs. That being said, in particular degrees in diverse subjects such as international relations, international economics, international business, law, history, environmental studies, and migration studies, only to name a few, are well suited for work in the Foreign Service. On one hand, the presence of a multidisciplinary approach is important, while on the other hand, regional expertise, a solid knowledge of the region or host country, including its history, and its cultural and political situation, is also essential. Additionally, to work for an embassy, proficiency in foreign languages is required and a good command of the language of the host country is considered to be an immense benefit that adds to the competitiveness of prospective diplomats. Also, while specialized expertise and knowledge in a specific sector remain relevant, intercultural communication skills are crucial considering how networking is a vital aspect of modern diplomacy as diplomats must communicate with a broad range of partners.

**Y: Please tell us about your background and how it informs your current work.**

LT: My background is very much related to Asia. During my bachelor's degree, I majored in Asian studies at the University of Latvia, Riga, studying Japanese through my university, and Korean on my own, as no Korean courses were offered at the time. I later continued my Korean studies, following the completion of my bachelor's degree at Inha University, Incheon. I then pursued my Master's degree in International Development Cooperation at Ewha Womans University, Seoul. Through my studies, I acquired not only knowledge on the [Asian] region and Korea, but I also gained insight into international global issues. Especially, this knowledge enables me to more quickly analyze current events in-depth while working. Additionally, my Korean studies have allowed for greater opportunity to reach out and communicate more effectively with foreign audiences. Furthermore, I have also studied and volunteered abroad, which allowed me to experience various cultures and learn how to work with people from different backgrounds.

**Y: Please give a brief overview of the development of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Korea. What are the future goals for the development of this relationship?**

LT: Latvia established diplomatic relations with Korea in 1991. However, the Embassy of Latvia was opened in 2015, meaning we are one of the newer embassies in

Korea and the newest Latvian embassy abroad. Currently, Latvia and Korea have an excellent political dialogue and promote active exchange in education, culture, trade, and tourism. In fact, during the months of May and June, the first charter flights between Seoul and Riga will begin which we hope will enable us to cooperate more closely in the future. Considering our future goals, we will continue to work in developing our bilateral relations on every level, particularly in the IT sector. We also expect to have Latvian companies expand their reach to the Korean market with high quality niche products, especially design and bakery products.

**Y: What are some of the specific challenges you face as the Officer for education, culture, and public diplomacy for the Embassy of Latvia in Korea?**

LT: At the beginning, one of the major challenges we faced was a very low awareness of Latvia in Korea. Koreans were not, and are still not, completely familiar with Latvia. Often, many Koreans easily recognize the names of famous Latvians, but they do not realize that they are Latvian. Especially in regards to classical music, many world famous Latvian violinists, cello players, and conductors are recurrently invited to perform in Korea. However, generally not many know that they are Latvian. To overcome this challenge was not easy and it took a lot of effort to raise awareness and visibility of Latvia in Korea. In order to tackle this challenge, we focused on the youth by visiting many schools, and universities, as well as inviting students to our embassy. Additionally, we also focused on working with media, producing promotional materials in Korean, and actively promoting these materials through social media. The situation is gradually improving through these efforts. However, we had to start with the basics of who we are.

**Y: As an Officer at an Embassy, cultural challenges must occasionally arise. What skills are needed to deal with culturally sensitive issues?**

LT: In my experience, attention to detail is vital in communication when working in a multicultural and multilingual environment. For instance, while Latvia and Korea share similar history, and some distinctive qualities when it comes to work ethic and resilience in facing challenges, there are also cultural differences. In Korea, society is generally more fast-paced and spontaneous, which has contributed to Korea's rapid development and economic achievements. Conversely, Latvian society is more slow-paced and centers on systemic planning. Throughout my daily work at the embassy, I do feel the presence of these cultural differences and detailed communication is key in avoiding any misunderstandings.

**Y: What are the most challenging and rewarding projects you have worked on during your time at the Embassy of Latvia? Please describe your work on the projects and how you overcame any difficulties that arose during the projects.**

LT: There are a number of very rewarding projects that I have taken part in at the embassy. However, I would like to highlight two particularly notable projects. First, I

would like to briefly touch upon a project we have undertaken in the education field pertaining to the formation and introduction of two courses at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies: Baltic studies and Latvian language. These optional courses have been running for one year, and there has been a keen interest from Korean students with around 19 students registered for both courses. These courses were developed on the initiative of the Embassy of Latvia, in cooperation with the professors from Hankuk University, and with support from the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia. In the future, we hope that the introduction of these subjects will serve as a basis for the establishment of a Baltic research center facilitating further cooperation between the two countries. Secondly, I would like to introduce *Latvia 100 Snapshot Stories*, a project in the field of culture, literature, and history. Prior to the publication of the book *Latvia 100 Snapshot Stories*, there were no one-volume books about Latvia available in Korea in Korean. In order to provide the Korean public with easily accessible information about Latvia, the embassy initiated this project, producing a comprehensive publication that includes a hundred stories about Latvian culture, history, and achievements in various fields. The project took around four months to complete, with most of the work involving translation since the original publication is in English. This is a special project because this book is only available in four languages at the moment, with the original in English, and subsequent publications in Russian, Arabic, and now Korean. Furthermore, this book is not for sale, and has instead been distributed to public libraries and universities, and is freely available online.

**Y: What advice can you give to those hoping to work at an Embassy?**

LT: Working for an embassy is challenging, but rewarding and fulfilling since there is the possibility to contribute to wider goals and objectives. First, to be a successful diplomat you must have a passion for international issues, a passion for the country you represent, its culture and history, as well as a passion for sharing the stories of that country with the rest of the world. Passion is very important because being a diplomat is not only a profession, it is a lifestyle. I would also encourage students to continue to be curious and to attentively observe any developments or trends taking place on the ever-changing international stage.