

Article

Gender and the *Concours Diplomatique*: On the Recruitment of Switzerland's First Generation of Female Diplomats

Eva Kocher

Abstract

This article examines women's integration in the Swiss diplomatic service from 1956 to the early 1970s, after the service's reform and following the introduction of the *concours diplomatique*, and it relates this process to modern diplomacy's professionalization at an international level. Why, in Switzerland, were women admitted to the newly created recruitment procedure at a time when they still lacked basic civil rights such as suffrage? A qualitative analysis of administrative documents such as examination committee minutes, correspondence, reports, and notes shows how strongly marked by gender bias both the new recruitment process and professional life in the diplomatic service were, particularly when it came to questions of marriage and family, but also regarding different allocation of professional responsibilities, and even different treatment in relation to security issues.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Integration von Frauen in den schweizerischen diplomatischen Dienst nach der Einführung des *concours diplomatique* 1956 bis in die frühen 1970er Jahre. Dabei wird dieser Prozess in den internationalen Kontext der Professionalisierung der modernen Diplomatie gestellt. Im Zentrum steht die Frage, weshalb Frauen formal zum diplomatischen Dienst zugelassen wurden, obwohl sie zu diesem Zeitpunkt in der Schweiz noch kein Wahlrecht besaßen. Basierend auf einer qualitativen Analyse von administrativen Dokumenten, Berichten, Prüfungsprotokollen und Korrespondenzen lässt sich ein Verständnis von Gleichstellung rekonstruieren, das noch weit von heutigen Vorstellungen entfernt ist: Geschlechtsbezogene Rollenbilder vor allem in Bezug auf Heirat und Familie erschwerten den beruflichen Alltag und den Karriereverlauf von Frauen im Aussenministerium und führten aufgrund von Sicherheitsbedenken gar zu Einschränkungen im Privatleben.

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Gender and the *Concours Diplomatique*: On the Recruitment of Switzerland's First Generation of Female Diplomats¹

Eva Kocher

Diplomacy has traditionally been, and remains, a field with clear pre-¹conceptions of roles and codes of behaviour. The lengthy development of women's inclusion, and the change of their role in diplomacy had profound consequences that still raise numerous questions. The continuous media attention reflects public interest in this issue from the mid-1950s until today, ranging from the appointment of the first female career US ambassador to Bern to more recent reports on the negotiation successes achieved by female Swiss diplomats at home and abroad as well as women heading important missions such as Berlin (Christine Schraner Burgener 2015–2018) or Paris (Livia Leu Agosti since 2018).² This concerns not just the Swiss context, which is the main focus of this article, but also numerous other countries, particularly when it comes to the promotion of gender equality abroad.³

This article aims to analyse how gender policies were developed in the pro-²cess of professionalizing diplomacy in Switzerland, and what tensions were created thereby. It considers not only the Swiss national scope but also the relevant networks of expertise, and policy debates at a national as well as transnational level. In other words, it seeks to answer the question of how women were included into professional diplomacy and which factors and actors influenced this process in the case of Switzerland. What were the historical concepts that influenced the gender policies developed in the *Federal Political Department* (FPD)⁴ during the 1950s and the gender-relevant practices that determined the department's staff policies up to the first public debate in the mid-1970s?

Why is it important to understand gender mechanisms in public diploma-³cy? First, the topic is of interest to professionals in this field. It is moreover crucial for minimizing and removing the gaps between decision makers, the economy, and civil society – in the sense of creating more inclusive representation and leadership. Recent public debates on gender policies in a number of countries' foreign services demonstrate this.⁵ Finally, public diplomacy is often referred to as a tool for advancing women's issues and for closing the gender

¹ This article is based on my master's thesis, submitted in 2016 under Prof Jussi Hanimäki's supervision at the Graduate Institute Geneva, titled «A Silent Revolution? The Role of Gender in Swiss Diplomatic Service since its Professionalization and Democratization until the Early 1970s». I warmly thank the peer reviewers for their helpful comments and their constructive criticism, which made this publication possible.

² Cf. for example publications on prominent individual female diplomats such as Pascale Baeriswyl, Livia Leu-Agosti, Christine Schraner Burgener, Heidi Tagliavini; «Frauen erobern die Schweizer Aussenpolitik», in: *swissinfo* 12.2.2019, www.swissinfo.ch; «Switzerland's first female ambassador in Paris», in: *swissinfo*, 21.11.2018, www.swissinfo.ch; «Frauenpower in der Diplomatie», in: *Basler Zeitung*, 8.1.2015, www.bazonline.ch; Or, on the general demand for more representation of women in diplomacy; Emilia Pasquier: «8 femmes – du film à la diplomatie», Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Aussenpolitik (SGA ASPE), March 2015, www.sga-aspe.ch.

³ Cf. for example Frances Adamson: «Progress of women in Diplomacy», in: *The Interpreter*, 10.7.2019; Stéphanie Trouillard: «A Look at the Four Women Vying for the UN's Top Spot», in: *France 24*, 14.4.2016; or US Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto's speech at the CARE 70th anniversary exhibit, 12.5.2016, www.geneva.usmission.gov.

⁴ Name of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs from 1886–1979, cf. dodis.ch/R27.

⁵ Talyn Rahman-Figuero: «Celebrating the Rise of Women in Diplomacy», in: *The Diplomatic Courier*, 8.3.2012, www.diplomaticcourier.com.

gap, such as the US mission to the UN, «The Future She Deserves», led by Pamela Hama Moto.⁶ Yet, the effectiveness and credibility of this tool in achieving such aims is undoubtedly linked to gender politics and gendered structures within diplomacy itself.

There is only one relatively recent article on the topic of gender and modern diplomacy in Switzerland, published by two scholars at Dodis, Ursina Bentele and Sacha Zala.⁷ Their pioneering work is a crucial point of reference for further studies. The article provides extensive resources for an analysis of the multiple functions of women in modern Swiss diplomacy, and also proves how under-analysed this subject has so far remained.

In Switzerland, this widespread scientific ignorance of, or disinterest in, gender and diplomacy clashes with the subject's recurring topicality and with the public's interest in it. Thus, the debate about former Swiss Federal Council and foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, particularly about the policy changes she made to the hiring process for future diplomats, attracted great political and public attention, and inspired discussion on gender policies in the diplomatic field.⁸ An evaluation by the University St. Gallen examining the Swiss foreign ministry's personnel policy emphasized the low number of women in leading functions. It also highlighted the difficulty women experience in accumulating an equal number of years of service abroad, and even the fundamental question of what labour is perceived as equal.⁹ Calmy-Rey's intervention in favour of more equal opportunities, and her promotion of women in the selection process for future diplomats, were sharply criticized for going too far and preferring less qualified candidates on the basis of their sex. This is a common pattern of criticism in the context of quota for women.¹⁰ Opponents of Calmy-Rey's new system emphasized that the *concours diplomatique* was a selection procedure that had proven itself effective at selecting the candidates most qualified for a diplomatic career. They also argued that the small number of women in the diplomatic corps was due only to the small number of qualified women in the field.¹¹

Without disputing the high quality and professionalism of the current *concours*, one can still note that, surprisingly, little to no historical assessment has been published dealing exclusively with the *concours* or with the professionalization and democratization of diplomacy.¹² Although the creation of the *concours* is frequently mentioned in literature on Swiss foreign policy and Swiss diplomacy during the Cold War, these references are rarely accompanied by any kind of analysis.¹³ Apparently, no one has yet wondered why Switzerland, maybe one of Europe's most conservative countries with regard to gender,¹⁴ happened to formalise women's access to diplomatic careers almost twenty years before granting them political rights at a federal level. This gave rise to an

⁶ Cf. www.futureshedeserves.net.

⁷ Ursina Bentele and Sacha Zala: «Von Ehefrauen, Sekretärinnen und Diplomatinen», in: Corina Bastian et al. (eds.): *Das Geschlecht der Diplomatie. Geschlechterrollen in den Aussenbeziehungen vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln 2014, 237–256.

⁸ Cf. «Bananenrepublik Schweiz? Eklat in der EDA-Zulassungskommission», in: *NZZ* 12.2.2006; «Gleichstellungspolitik: Calmy-Reys Vorgehen in der Kritik», 8.2.2006, www.humanrights.ch.

⁹ Cf. Sarah Henneberger-Sudjana et al.: *Evaluation der Personalpolitik des Eidgenössischen Departements für auswärtige Angelegenheiten*, St. Gallen 2012, 17.

¹⁰ Cf. for example Susan Franceschet et al. (ed.): *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, Oxford 2012, 47.

¹¹ «Geschlechterquote im Fadenkreuz», in: *swissinfo*, 5.2.2006, www.swissinfo.ch.

¹² Cf. Pierre Keller: «Recrutement et formation des diplomates en Suisse», in: *Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Vereinigung für politische Wissenschaft*, 2 (1962), 50–58.

¹³ Cf. Johannes Manz: «Bundesverwaltung, Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten (EDA) und schweizerischer Aussendienst», in: Alois Riklin et al (eds.): *Neues Handbuch der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik*, Bern 1992, 151–166, here 159–160.

¹⁴ Cf. for example Rolf Graber: *Wege zur direkten Demokratie in der Schweiz*, Wien 2013, 57.

exceptional situation in which female diplomats were representing their state abroad, while at home, the gendered construction of their citizenship limited their political representation.

The Dodis scholars' article found that a career in diplomacy remained difficult for women despite the *concours* formally admitting all candidates regardless of their sex.¹⁵ Yet the *concours* has to be considered in the context of its introduction, which involved an extensive process of reforming the FPD under the headings of professionalization and democratisation. How did women come to be included in this reform, given the social and political climate of Switzerland in the 1950s, which embraced conservative gender roles and deprived women of civic and political rights until the 1970s? This article aims to shed more light on women's inclusion in the newly created *concours*. In doing so, it supplements these first findings mentioned on early female diplomats' career paths with a qualitative analysis of the recruitment process, documenting how the examination board treated female candidates.

The historian Edgard Bonjour has written a short article, originally published in 1983, about the *concours* and about his own work for the examination board from 1959 to 1968. Already the editor's introduction states quite clearly that the promotion of women was not an issue in the early years of professional diplomacy.¹⁶ The quote implies that gender equality was not part of the FPD's discourse on democratization. Bonjour's article goes even further, describing how Walter Stucki, who chaired the examination board from 1955 until 1960, denied women's suitability for the diplomatic profession.¹⁷ Moreover, the article demonstrates the influence exerted by the head of the examination board, as it describes not only Stucki's sceptical-ironic attitude towards even successful female candidates, but also how the committee followed his lead, «quietly amused».¹⁸

Yet, one wonders – how come women were granted admission in the first place? If key figures like Walter Stucki were so sure of women's ineptitude for the profession of the diplomat, how could the first female candidate pass the exam in 1956? Under what conditions were women admitted to a diplomatic career and what were the gender-relevant practices that influenced their careers within the foreign ministry? These questions will be answered by analysing the relevant material from federal sources on the development of the *concours*, as well as examination minutes, minutes of the committee's meetings, and the committee's correspondence.

The Implementation of the *Concours Diplomatique* and the Admission of Women

While there was a certain understanding in the federal administration of the necessity and the desire to improve female collaborators' status in the 1950s, there is no evidence that male and female work was actually perceived as equal. In the Federal Council's report on Convention No. 100 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on equal remuneration for men and women (which was not ratified until 1972), the delegation ventured that there was no need to ratify this convention, arguing that, particularly in administrative fields, salary gaps were legitimate since the work performed by men and women was predominantly of a different value.¹⁹ To justify this claim, the report stated that women were less easily transferrable and had more days of absences (not taking into

¹⁵ Cf. Bentele and Zala: «Von Ehefrauen, Sekretärinnen und Diplomatinen», 250–254.

¹⁶ Edgard Bonjour: «Auslese der Diplomatenanwärter» first published 1983, cited from replication in: Max Schweizer: *Diplomatenleben*, Zürich 2014, 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. «Bericht der Expertenkommission zur Prüfung der wirtschaftlichen Auswirkungen gleichen Entgeltes für gleichwertige Arbeit männlicher und weiblicher Arbeitskräfte», in: *Bundesblatt* No. 52, 28.12.1956, Beilage 3, 975–990.

account men's absences for obligatory military service) and it generally referred to physical and psychological differences between women and men, as well as different economic interests.²⁰

As early as the late 1940s the Swiss Foreign Minister, Max Petitpierre, in a letter to the Swiss Female Academics Association, had specified certain conditions for women in diplomacy, despite the fact that, at the time, the department had not yet had any experience with female employees other than as secretaries:

«Pour le personnel féminin nous envisageons de nous assurer les fruits de son activité sur les plans tout particulièrement propres à la femme: questions sociales, conditions de travail, entraide, presse, relations culturelles etc. Il résultera nécessairement de cette différence dans les attributions, tels qu'elles découlent naturellement des propriétés particulières à chaque sexe, que la collaboration de la femme sera plus spécialisée que celle de son collègue masculin.»²¹

Petitpierre's message was a response to a 1946 public éclat caused by a letter of regret sent to a female jurist who had applied for an FPD position. Her rejection had provoked intense press reactions, as well as demands by the Female Academics Association²² and the Swiss Association for Women's Suffrage (SVF)²³ for qualified women's inclusion in the foreign service. In the rejection letter, the FPD had informed the applicant that the department only hired women as steno-dactylographers.²⁴ Politics also responded, for instance with the parliamentary request «Siegrist-Aarau», made on 27 March 1946, which increased the pressure on the FPD:

«Le Conseil fédéral reconnaît-il qu'une telle réponse porte atteinte à la dignité de la femme Suisse et à l'honneur professionnel des candidates, et a-t-il l'intention de veiller à ce que cette mentalité cesse de régner au Département politique?»

In its answer, the FPD stated its readiness to examine applications of women with an academic background «with good will», and to hire women in other domains of the federal administration if the positions were especially apt for women.²⁵ This answer, and those to the women's associations, reveal the extreme division between gender roles, allocating various tasks to only one sex. They shed light on the belief that women were not as equipped for diplomatic and consular tasks as men, and could serve only in specific positions.

Whereas the FPD acknowledged female academics' rising interest in posts,²⁶ it was only the pressure from the press, from women's associations, and from politics that finally forced it to actually examine the question of hiring women for consular and diplomatic services.

The FPD commissioned consultants, for instance hiring the economist Arnold Muggli in 1949.²⁷ The Muggli-report recognised that gender played a significant role in the FPD's personnel situation in the post-war years. Muggli emphasized the challenges faced by the department due to increasing numbers of

²⁰ Ibid., 982–983.

²¹ Letter from Max Petitpierre to the Swiss Association for Academic Women (Association suisse des femmes universitaires), 7.6.1946, dodis.ch/53382.

²² Cf. letter from the president of the Association suisse des femmes universitaires, Blanche Hegg-Hoffet, to Max Petitpierre, 28.5.1946, dodis.ch/53379.

²³ Cf. letter from the Swiss Association for Women's Suffrage (Schweizerischer Verband für Frauenstimmrecht, SVF) president Elisabeth Vischer-Alioth to Max Petitpierre, 13.6.1946, dodis.ch/53380.

²⁴ Cf. for example «Des professions féminines», in: *Gazette de Lausanne*, 16.4.1946, CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#674* (a.284.38).

²⁵ Cf. Summer Session of the National Council 1946, question by Siegrist-Aarau, 27.3.1946, CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#674* (a.284.38).

²⁶ Cf. the notice of the Federal Political Department: «Recrutement du personnel féminin», 26.10.1945, dodis.ch/53383.

²⁷ Before, Muggli had headed the food agency's section for rationing during World War II, cf. dodis.ch/P3504.

female personnel, describing how women were often in positions inadequate to their knowledge and skill, and pointing to the resources thus squandered. Furthermore, he specified that an overly schematic delimitation of female and male personnel often caused problems in deployment.²⁸ Reflections on the personnel situation such as the Muggli-report were products created, and used, in the complex reform process of the FPD and Swiss diplomatic service, which took about a decade. The reform was lengthy and led to pushing and pulling not only among departments and administrative organs but also the *Verband der Beamten und Angestellten der Eidgenössischen Zentralverwaltungen* (VBAEZ) and the *Association des fonctionnaires supérieurs de la Confédération*.

In addition to external consultation and interior negotiation at this early stage, reports from other countries regarding their foreign service personnel became crucial for the drafting process under project-leader Walter Stucki. The FPD was certainly already aware that other countries handled their conditions for admission differently, as in 1953, the United States had appointed Miss Frances Willis as American Ambassador to head the mission in Bern. She was the first female career foreign service officer to serve as an ambassador for the US (and likewise the first female career officer serving as an ambassador in Switzerland). As described by Bentele and Zala, Willis's appointment triggered a number of uncertainties regarding protocol within the FPD, ranging from her title (the department stuck to the male forms *Frau Botschafter* and *Madame l'Ambassadeur*, respectively) up to difficulties with seating arrangements.²⁹

Under Stucki's leadership, questionnaires were sent out to several missions to collect data on the local conditions for foreign service admission and employment. The resulting reports on different countries varied in length and scope, and they did not all cover the same aspects. The central questions were evidently aimed at the legal framework and the third reform of the civil servants regulation (*Réglement fonctionnaire III*, *Beamtenordnung III*, often abbreviated as RF III/BO III.) For example, whether local diplomats were subject to separate service regulations or to the general civil service law, whether the foreign ministry differentiated between the permanent personnel at the headquarters and the personnel in posts abroad, and whether separate conditions existed for the chiefs of mission. A number of the questions asked were gender-related, such as one regarding salary principles and additional benefits, one on whether diplomats were allowed to marry foreign women, and particularly the question asking about the criteria for admission to foreign service positions.³⁰

In addition to the regulations and practices in the US and the UK, those in neighbouring countries as well as Scandinavian and small Western countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria were of interest for the FPD. However, some officials also looked beyond these horizons, citing examples from Yugoslavia, Greece and Spain.³¹ The US, the UK, Germany and France seem to have functioned as the most important templates for Switzerland, as several reports were issued separately on regulations and practices in these countries.³² An early 1954 summary by the FPD's section for administrative issues listed and compared the general procedure for recruitment, the formal

28 Cf. Arnold Muggli: «Bericht über die Aufgaben, die Organisation und den Personalbestand des eidgenössischen Departements», 10.12.1949, dodis.ch/53368, 124.

29 Cf. Bentele and Zala: «Von Sekretärinnen, Ehefrauen und Diplomatinen», 242–244.

30 Cf. for example letters with respective questionnaires sent by Walter Stucki to Maurice Jaccard in Oslo and Peter Anton Feldscher in Vienna, both from the 9.2.1954 or see Stucki's note to Max Petitpierre on 22.4.1954, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#62* (6). Cf. also the notice from Sigismund Marcuard to Walter Stucki: «Notes sur le recrutement du personnel au Département Politique fédéral», 18.3.1954, dodis.ch/54486.

31 Notice from Richard Pestalozzi to Walter Stucki, 29.1.1954, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#60* (6).

32 Cf. CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#60* (6).

conditions for admission, as well as the examination procedure in the following countries: Germany, Belgium, USA, France, UK, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.³³ The German *Diplomatenschule* was of particular interest to the FPD. Special attention was given not only to their terms of examination and admission, but also to the general training of future diplomats. Moreover, Stucki personally observed examinations for diplomatic service in Paris and Bonn in order to get an impression of the procedure.³⁴ The section comparing the admission criteria focused particularly on the candidate's education, health, and civil status, as well as factors such as nationality, reputation and military service, and the nationality and reputation of the spouse. The wives' citizenship was a particular point of interest to the FPD's administration, which repeatedly expressed doubt or suspicion towards wives of Swiss diplomats with non-Swiss citizenship.³⁵ For obvious reasons, the US were of special interest when it came to women, so Stucki asked the Swiss legation in Washington the following questions, among others:

«Quel est aujourd'hui le nombre de femmes employées dans le Foreign Service dans les classes rangées au-dessus de la classe 7 [...] Lorsque les femmes furent admises dans le Foreign Service a-t-on constaté dans les années qui suivirent une augmentation rapide du nombre des candidates? [...] En ce qui concerne le personnel féminin employé dans le Foreign Service, quel est le pourcentage de femmes [...] qui quittent prématurément le service (mariage, maladie, etc.)?»³⁶

The experiences made abroad with female diplomatic personnel raised no red flags in the FPD about giving women admission to a diplomatic or consular career. Relying much on these models from abroad, the new regulations and the legal framework for a professional diplomatic service for Switzerland were reformed. Especially the understanding of the diplomat as a civil servant was a novelty. Precisely because foreign service officers were now subject to civil service law, marriage was legitimate grounds for the dismissal of female professionals.³⁷

The criteria for candidates to compete in the newly created *concours diplomatique* were Swiss citizenship, good conduct, a university degree, two years of professional experience, good knowledge of a second national language and a third language of international relevance and finally, not being older than 30. Successful candidates examined by the board would be recommended to the head of department for filling *stagiaires* vacancies. During their two-year stage, they would not only be trained in the department, at the headquarters in Bern, and in missions abroad, they would also have to acquire more training in academic disciplines, not least in order to pass their final exam after a period of two years, which would determine their appointment as a civil servant. Moreover, the University of Bern, where most of the academic committee members had their chair, and the Graduate Institute in Geneva provided additional academic training to the *stagiaires*.³⁸

³³ Notice from Sigismond Marcuard to Walter Stucki: «Notes sur le recrutement du personnel au Département Politique fédéral», 18.3.1954, [dodis.ch/54486](https://www.dodis.ch/54486), 6–22.

³⁴ Cf. letters from Walter Stucki to Anton von Salis and Albert Huber, both 12.1.1955, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#60* (6).

³⁵ Letter from Walter Stucki to Markus Feldmann, 8.3.1954, [dodis.ch/54474](https://www.dodis.ch/54474).

³⁶ Letter from Walter Stucki to the Swiss Legation in Washington, 16.10.1954, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#58* (6).

³⁷ Cf. «Statut des fonctionnaires», 30.6.1927, Art 55.2, www.admin.ch and «Règlement des fonctionnaires III», 29.12.1964, Art. 94, www.admin.ch.

³⁸ Members of the commission 1955: Walter Stucki (president), Prof Jaques Freymond, Prof Hans Huber, Prof Werner Näf, federal judge Louis Python, Pierre Micheli, Hans Schaffner, Eduard Zellweger, Alfred Zehnder; experts: Paul Clottu, Olivier Long, Prof Léon Kern, Prof Giovanni Laini. Cf. [dodis.ch/R23294](https://www.dodis.ch/R23294).

In the documentation of the RF III's drafting process, women attracted the most attention, and provoked the most debate, in their roles as secretaries and diplomats' wives. The idea of women as diplomats was not openly debated. This seems to support Altermatt's claim, as well as that of Bentele and Zala, that women were given admission to a diplomatic career in Switzerland in a rather silent manner, following the model of other countries such as the US or the UK. Thereby, as Bentele and Zala point out, the FPD interpreted Swiss citizenship as more encompassing than many other civic rights, particularly suffrage (not to mention conscription). In view of both international practice, such as for instance in the UK and the US, and of Swiss civil service law, it went without saying that marriage impeded women's access to foreign service, and that a female diplomat was indeed expected to leave the service, just as many other female federal employees did in Switzerland. Finally, the Swiss authorities must have been aware of the trend of admitting women to foreign service. The United States' first female career diplomat had served as ambassador to Switzerland since 1953. With the professionalisation of modern diplomacy, publication on developments intensified and for instance, the Philippine diplomat Dr. Roberto Regala devoted an entire chapter of his book to the trend of women appointees in 1959.³⁹

When promoting the FPD as an employer at the Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work (SAFFA) in 1959, the FPD's representative Heinz Langenbacher emphasized that women were treated just like men and had equal career opportunities within the department.⁴⁰ However, he had to admit that the federal administration had not yet acted on demands, from within and outside, for equal pay for equal labour. Indeed, as mentioned above, the Federal Council's report on the 38th and 39th congress of the ILO, and on the convention for equal salary for men and women, claimed that whereas the number of women in the federal administration was rising, women's work was hardly of the same value as men's. The report also claimed that where men and women were competing, the small number of women employed was exclusively due to the fact that not enough women met the high requirements to carry out superior functions, pointing to education and physical aptitude amongst other things.⁴¹

**Women Entering
Service: the Selection
Process**

Apart from the issue of remuneration, what did such conceptions of female labour mean for the recruitment and the careers of female diplomats? Between 1955 and 1974, at least 14 women were offered a place as *stagiaire diplomatique*. Not only is this era insufficiently documented (the precise number of female *stagiaires* is not known), but the number is too small to allow for a purely quantitative examination.⁴² In the first ten years of the *concours*'s existence, only five female *stagiaires* were selected, of which only three successfully finished their stage to then be appointed. Among these, only Francesca Pometta, the first female *stagiaire diplomatique*, is documented as being appointed ambassador later in the course of her career. According to a speech by Minister Max Troendle, who headed the examination board from 1968 onwards, the higher rate of

³⁹ Roberto Regala: *The Trends in Modern Diplomacy*, Milano 1959, 60–63.

⁴⁰ Presentation by Heinz Langenbacher: «Die Schweizerfrau im auswärtigen Dienst der Eidgenossenschaft», Zürich 1958, dodis.ch/53378, 8–9.

⁴¹ «Bericht des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die 38. und 39. Tagung der internationalen Arbeitskonferenz sowie zum Postulat der eidgenössischen Räte betreffend der Gleichheit des Entgelts männlicher und weiblicher Arbeitskräfte», 21.12.1956, in: *Bundesblatt* No. 52, 28.12.1956, 893–994, 977.

⁴² The body of source material was described as scant already by Ludwig Meier in a letter to Max Troendle from May 29th 1967, in which he describes how difficult it was for him to produce meaningful and reliable statistical breakdowns, especially when it came to the number of applicants, cf. dodis.ch/48349.

dropouts was a general trend among both men and women between 1955 and 1964, for which he named 19 cases.⁴³

	Year	Stagiaires admitted	Female stagiaires	%	% of women recruited
Walter Stucki	1955	10	0	0%	3.57%
	1956	10	1	10%	
	1957	10	0	0%	
	1958	10	0	0%	
	1959	8	0	0%	
	1960	8	1	13%	
Robert Kohli	1961	8	2	25%	9.80%
	1962	8	0	0%	
	1963	8	0	0%	
	1964	8	0	0%	
	1965	7	1	14%	
	1966	5	1	20%	
	1967	7	1	14%	
Max Troendle	1968	12	1	8%	5.75%
	1969	9	0	0%	
	1970	12	0	0%	
	1971	8	0	0%	
	1972	12	1	8%	
	1973	17	1	6%	
	1974	17	2	12%	

Source: multiple dossiers from CH-BAR#E2004B#a.23* *Personalbestand und Mutationen (1923–1979)*.

Interestingly, the number of women admitted after 1965 rises, both expressed as percentages and by absolute numbers. However, there were still longer periods without any female stagiaires, for example from 1969 until 1971. The number of female stagiaires accepted mostly alternates between one and zero, with the exception of 1961 and 1974, when two female stagiaires were accepted. Significantly more of the female *stagiaires* selected between 1965 and 1974 later had successful careers in the foreign service, up to heading a mission.⁴⁴ However, expressed as percentages, the admission of women slows down again in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In order to better understand gender aspects in the FPD's recruitment process and the career situation of female diplomats in these years, one has to examine the background of these numbers qualitatively, precisely because they were so low. Undoubtedly, the marriage bar, which was only lifted in 1972, had a significant impact on the number of female employees in the FPD.⁴⁵ However,

⁴³ Cf. Max Troendle: «20 Jahre Zulassungsprüfungen (Concours) zum diplomatischen und konsularischen Dienst des Eidgenössischen Politischen Departements», March 1976, dodis.ch/39236.

⁴⁴ Of the five stagiaires between 1956 and 1965 only Francesca Pometta (dodis.ch/P16364) was appointed ambassador, of those between 1966 and 1974 Marianne von Grünigen (dodis.ch/P15361), Sylvia Pauli (dodis.ch/P19849), Maria Luisa Caroni (dodis.ch/P17216), Catherine Krieg (dodis.ch/P16244), Ingrid Apfelbaum-Pidoux (dodis.ch/P51644) and Sylvie Matteucci-Keller (dodis.ch/P51223) have received the highest diplomatic rank.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bentele and Zala: «Von Sekretärinnen, Ehefrauen und Diplomatinen», 254.

the marriage bar only indirectly offers an explanation for the fact that so few women were elected as *stagiaires* in the first decade of the *concours*, considering the rather constant interest of at least a handful of female applicants, who were also admitted to the *concours* thanks to their qualifications. For example already in the case of the very first Swiss *concours* in 1955, three out of 88 valid applicants were women.⁴⁶

Moreover, there are records which document other reasons than marriage for women to quit their service. For example, both of the candidates being elected as *stagiaires* in 1961 did not finish their two-year *stage* successfully. One apparently did not even start her stage and the other did not pass the final exam.⁴⁷ In 1971, the final exam was abandoned and replaced by a final course, as the FPD aimed to make careers more attractive to applicants.⁴⁸ In the mid-1960s, in the midst of Switzerland's economic upswing, the FPD received a comparatively small number of applications, which led it to more actively promote its career opportunities to the general public.

In the margins of a critical press article that was circulating among the FPD's management in 1976, one of the readers noted for his colleagues that «one can as little force women to turn to a career in diplomacy as one can force them to become invested in any other profession, such as chimney-sweeping».⁴⁹ Such statements imply that the growing number of women admitted is due exclusively to a rise in interest, and that diplomacy was a male-dominated professional sphere like any other, which completely denies the representative function of diplomacy and its political dimension. Yet, one could argue that, by then, careers and higher education for women were generally less promoted in Switzerland than for men, and that women were therefore less likely to meet the high requirements for the entrance exam. Similarly, the marriage bar for female civil servants not only impeded the careers of active female diplomats, it also represented an obstacle that could potentially scare off future candidates.

One way to qualitatively rather than quantitatively assess information on the recruitment and service of diplomats is to analyse the documentation of the *concours diplomatique* as it exists in the form of minutes, correspondences, audit plans, and qualification sheets.⁵⁰ These documents prove that, from the 1950s onwards, women influenced diplomacy not only as secretaries and wives. Qualified women had constantly been applying for the selection process ever since the creation of the *concours*. Even before the call for applications to the first *concours* in 1955, three out of 88 applicants who met the new requirements were female.⁵¹ Records of entrance exams in the late 1950s show that women were indeed interested in, and often qualified for, a diplomatic career. In 1956 and 1957, two women were invited to the oral exam, three in 1961. Over the course of 1956, 1957 and 1958, three women were invited to take part in the written exam, four in 1961.⁵²

⁴⁶ Cf. notice from Angelo Berla to Walter Stucki, 24.2.1955, dodis.ch/34254, 2.

⁴⁷ Which, however, the record shows, also happened to men, cf. Max Troendle: «20 Jahre Zulassungsprüfungen (Concours) zum diplomatischen und konsularischen Dienst des Eidgenössischen Politischen Departements», March 1976, dodis.ch/39236, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ «Diplomatinnen dürfen Ausländer heiraten», in: *Tagesanzeiger*, 1.4.1976, CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1201* (a.221.90).

⁵⁰ Yet, one has to consider, that these documents only regard the diplomats hired through the process of the *concours*, therefore this article cannot make any assumptions on the number of women working their way up from chancellery to consular services or on other potential appointments, for example as specialists.

⁵¹ Cf. notice from Angelo Berla to Walter Stucki, 24.2.1955, dodis.ch/34254, 2.

⁵² Based on CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#65* (6).

Francesca Pometta was the first woman to be assigned as a Swiss ambassador, in 1978. She was also the first female candidate to pass the *concours diplomatique*, in 1956. Her performance was apparently so good that in the examination committee's minutes, her ranking among the ten best candidates was not debated. In the commission's records, her exam is not commented on, and it is marked with the abbreviation for the pool of very good candidates.⁵³ The same is found on the exams of seven of her male colleagues with excellent results, who were likewise assigned to «group A, without further remarks». In her case, the equal and professional treatment of candidates regardless of their sex appears to have been completely realized. 29

However, this seems less the case for the *concours* of the following year. When discussing the performance of one female candidate, Minister Stucki is protocolled as expressing doubts regarding the «general impression» made by the candidate and as stating that in this case, the judgment of the candidate's aptness for diplomatic service was rather a question of «intuition».⁵⁴ Prof Huber suggested that the commission should find out whether the department wished to recruit more women at all, to which Stucki responded that Minister Clottu had already answered this question evasively.⁵⁵ 30

Both statements are quite interesting, because they do not even profess to evaluate the candidate's performance professionally. Huber openly makes the decision depend on whether or not the department intends to train more female diplomats. Prof Jaques Freymond's contribution to the discussion is equally illuminating. He expresses the need for female candidates to be «a class above their male colleagues, because a woman should be able to compensate the disadvantages of her sex» with intellectual merits.⁵⁶ This comment demonstrates the higher intellectual requirements for women, and it casts these requirements as the result of gender-specific, purportedly natural characteristics such as the disadvantages of «the female constitution». 31

Stucki agreed with this statement, furthermore adding that one had to consider not only a candidate's intelligence, but also their «talent». When elaborating on the importance of talent and of making an impression, however, he referred to women's talent mainly in terms of their «pleasant appearance», clearly objectifying them. Moreover, Stucki expanded on this argument by bringing up naturalized gender relations and arguing that his colleagues too, would react positively to a pretty young woman, referring to «human weaknesses». This is proof of a sex-based characterization of skills and talent in the context of an assessment of fitness for diplomatic service. It also constitutes a reduction of women to external appearance. 32

Bringing the debate to a close, Minister Clottu finally stated that «of course there are problems resulting from women's service in the department, however, a candidate's sex should never play a decisive role».⁵⁷ While making the only argument against sex-based judgments, he thereby also conceded that women's service for the FPD causes problems. 33

Visually, female candidates were highlighted as special cases with the use of red colour or red marks on the qualification sheets. The candidate's sex was 34

⁵³ Minutes of the meeting of the examination board, 25.10.1956, CH-BAR#E2004B#1974/53#299* (a.224.122), 10.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the meeting of the examination board, 19.10.1957, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#65* (6), 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 5–6.

not recorded amongst the standardised list of attributes such as, for instance, age, mother tongue, or field of study.⁵⁸

Moreover, there are inconsistencies in some of the discussions recorded in writing concerning the performance of female candidates. Take, for instance, the case of one female stagiaire in 1962, who is described by a member of the examination board as too inflexible and unfit for working abroad, despite the fact that she had good references from her time working for a comparatively important Swiss mission in a European country during her stage.⁵⁹ The board member is recorded suggesting that the *stagiaire* could classify contracts for the FPD's legal service, a suggestion he makes using informal language best translated as «slogging away».⁶⁰

Furthermore, the language recorded as used in the assessment of female candidates differs from that used for male candidates. When discussing any candidate, the commission usually started its debate either with a strikingly positive or problematic point, or with their overall impression of his or her performance. Specifically, the *culture générale* was frequently referred to when a candidate was debated or in doubt. In the assessment of women, the head of the commission is repeatedly recorded as starting the discussion with the following words: «Impression: left to each member of the committee» or «I leave the impression up to you [the other committee members]».⁶¹ Such phrases are not documented for men and are not a consistent feature of other board presidents' records. They point to an objectification of women, implying that the general impression made by women, unlike that made by men, is more of a matter of personal taste, implicitly referring to external appearance.

With regard to gender, the minutes of examination board meetings further document the role of body expectations. For example, when assessing another female candidate's performance in the written exam of the 1957 *concours*, the head of the commission began by stating that the candidate's face was disfigured and that it would be interesting to know if this was curable, adding that in her current condition, she was not eligible for service.⁶² The next committee member added that he found both her appearance and her performance «insufficient» in comparison to the other candidates.⁶³

One cannot simply infer here that men's appearance was any less important for a career in diplomacy than women's, however, men's looks are never debated by the commission as openly as in this example. And interestingly, the male candidate discussed next, whose qualification sheet documents written exam results similar to those of the female candidate, was, unlike her, admitted to the oral exam. When discussing the written performance of this candidate, the committee members stressed his military accomplishments, along with his good character and positive references.⁶⁴ This example testifies to the distinct body expectations by which the candidates were measured. It also includes the application of military experience as a gendered selection criterion.

⁵⁸ Cf. qualification sheets from the *concours diplomatique* 1961 and 1962, both CH-BAR#E2004B#1974/53#299* (a.224.122).

⁵⁹ Cf. minutes of the meeting of the examination board on 30.10.1962, dated 1.11.1962, CH-BAR#E2004B#1974/53#303* (a.224.123.U'ch), 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Minutes of the meeting of the examination board on 5.10.1956, dated 10.10.1956, CH-BAR#E2004B#1974/53#299* (a.224.122), 14 and 16.

⁶² «Die Kandidatin ist im Gesicht entstellt. Es wäre interessant zu erfahren, ob dieser Zustand heilbar ist. Beim jetzigen Zustand käme sie für unseren Dienst kaum in Frage.» Minutes of the meeting of the examination board, 4.10.1957, CH-BAR#E2801#1968/84#65* (6), 6.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

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These points do not lead to the conclusion that the commission or the FPD was averse to recruiting female diplomats as a matter of principle, but they show that conditions for admission, as well as physical and intellectual expectations of candidates, were highly gendered. These gender-specific selection criteria should be held responsible for the small number of women selected at least as much as the marriage bar. 39

One could object that the examples presented here are not necessarily evidence of wide-spread practices or of a culture, as the statements were made by individuals in specific contexts. Yet it is precisely the context in which these records were produced – the function in which these people acted and the acceptance their statements found – that serve as rebuttals to such objections. 40

Even if one were to insist on the individual nature of the remarks, the composition of the examination board is documented as remaining relatively stable during these two decades. The head of the commission changed only twice (Walter Stucki, Robert Kohli, Max Troendle) and committee members normally gave up their seat on their own initiative, mostly due to age, health, or other duties. This resulted in some influential figures, such as Prof Jaques Freymond, holding their position continuously, in his case from 1956 until 1974. Prof Hans Huber and Ambassador Pierre Micheli both held their seats from 1955 until 1970. 41

Testimonials such as Prof Edgar Bonjour's, who had a seat in the commission since 1959, confirm that in the commission's assessment of candidates, the importance of key figures' attitudes included the impact of gendered criteria. Bonjour describes Stucki as someone who not only highly valued candidates' military experience, but on principle did not consider women suitable candidates for a career in diplomacy. Bonjour even relates Stucki making fun of a candidate during her audition, mocking her with her ambition to become the next Miss Willis, and stating that diplomacy is about more than pretty robes.⁶⁵ Yet, an analysis of the committee's composition shows that prominent supporters of women's suffrage received seats later in the 1960s, for instance Prof Werner Kägi, whose public seminars on human rights were also promoted by the SVF.⁶⁶ 42

Women did not hold seats on the examination board until 1972, when, for the first time, two women were among those suggested for filling a vacancy, and the seat was eventually taken by Lilian Uchtenhager-Brunner, MP.⁶⁷ Significantly, she was one of Switzerland's first women to enter parliament, just after the Swiss vote for women's suffrage in 1971. Before her, only one woman had worked for the examination committee: as an expert for the language tests in English. This shows that a truly democratic selection process had not been possible before, in a state which was undemocratic at least to the extent to which it granted only limited civil rights to women. 43

**Administrative
Practice and Working
Life**

As mentioned above, however, after the creation of the *concours* and the full integration of diplomacy into civil service, the FPD repeatedly made efforts to promote its career options specifically to women, for instance at the SAFFA 1959. Female diplomats were featured in Swiss newspapers, in magazines, and on television, in part by public demand, but in part on the department's own 44

⁶⁵ Cf. Edgar Bonjour: «Auslese der Diplomatenanwärter» first published 1983, cited from republication in: Max Schweizer: *Diplomatenleben*, Zürich 2014, 21.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Die Staatsbürgerin*, No. 11, November 1967, CH-BAR#E2807#1974/12#537* (16-07), 7.

⁶⁷ Cf. notice from Erik Lang to Antonino Janner, 17.10.1972, CH-BAR#E2004B#1970/2#165* (a.224.121).

initiative.⁶⁸ The FPD also replied to questions from the press, schools and career advisors, and issued information on the career options for women within the department, often given equal prominence to all opportunities accessible to women: the secretariat chancery⁶⁹ and, for applicants with a university degree, the diplomatic and consular services.⁷⁰ In this material, one repeatedly encounters the claim that with the reform of the mid-1950s, gender equality had been completely realized in the department, or at least that any distinctions made did not touch upon women's career opportunities.⁷¹ Yet Paul Clottu, then head of the section for administrative issues, conceded in a letter to an academic career counsellor that «from experience» women were believed to be less fit than men for some of the diplomatic and consular services' posts or charges. He also pointed to unhealthy climates and «special working and living conditions» that afflicted women more aversively due to their specific constitution and nature.⁷² It is unclear what experiences or conditions he was referring to, as the only female *stagiaire* accepted and working for the diplomatic services at the time was Francesca Pometta.

There were indeed responsibilities and tasks in the diplomatic field for which women were not considered fit, or at least less fit than men. One example is the courier service. In 1966, in a letter to the then Head of department Willy Spühler, the Swiss Ambassador to China criticized the FPD for ignoring the equality of female and male employees. He drew particular attention to the fact that the mission could not normally charge its female personnel with doing courier service, which he described as unfair, unreasonable, and a cause for bitterness amongst his staff.⁷³ Keller's letter cites other countries' missions to stress the irrationality of the Swiss practice of limiting courier service to men. According to Keller, other missions in Peking assigned courier service to women, in contrast to Switzerland. The female couriers from other countries occasionally even transported confidential Swiss correspondence. Keller's letter refers to two explanations typically given for not charging women with certain tasks, such as courier service. First, the idea that women needed more protection than men and that certain tasks were too demanding or dangerous. Secondly, that women were not sufficiently trusted, or perceived as sufficiently competent, for taking on certain tasks.

Other sources from later in the 1960s show a profound suspicion of unmarried women in a more explicit way. A security officer suggested in 1967 that the marriage bar had become a liability to the department and that the employment of married women would also have its advantages. Unmarried women, he ventured, were not necessarily trustworthy, «as no one can expect them to

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⁶⁸ Cf. for example the letters by Heinz Langenbacher to a female diplomat and a female concours candidate for a Radio Basel radio show, 29.7.1968, CH-BAR#E2004B#1971/13#181* (a.224.123.Uch); «Prüfungen ersetzen Beziehungen: Die Berner Diplomatenschule», in: *Wochenblätter*, No. 15, Zürich 14.4.1962, CH-BAR#E2004B#1974/53#301* (a.224.122.Uch.2), 7 or «Gesucht: Schweizer Diplomaten», in: *Rundschau SF DRS*, 27.6.1973, CH-BAR#J2.225#2007/195#266#64*.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of career opportunities for female secretary staff see letter from Sophie Wiederkehr (signed by nine other women) to Paul Clottu, 1.7.1957, dodis.ch/53374; his answer from 9.7.1957, dodis.ch/53375 and the letter from August Rebsamen to Paul Clottu, 7.9.1957, dodis.ch/53376.

⁷⁰ Cf. for example the FPD section for the administration's correspondence with the rectorate Dr. W. Haerberli of the «Mädchengymnasium Basel», March and April 1957; or its correspondence with Hugo Wyss, academic counselor in Lucerne in July 1958, all CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#399* (a.224.12).

⁷¹ Letter from the FPD's administrative section, sig. by Sigismond Marcuard, to the rectorate of the «Mädchengymnasium Basel», 25.4.1957, CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#399* (a.224.12), 2.

⁷² Letter from Paul Clottu to Hugo Wyss, 21.7.1958, dodis.ch/53372.

⁷³ Letter from Hans Keller to Willy Spühler, 12.5.1966, dodis.ch/53377, 7.

live like nuns», so that, in fact, marriage clarified a woman's private situation.⁷⁴ By making this argument, the notice presented unmarried women as a security risk and moreover suggested that the department should monitor all private relations of its unmarried female as well as male employees.⁷⁵

Efforts to promote the diplomatic profession to women could not cover over the fact that there were gender-specific reservations regarding the deployment of women in the foreign service. In his speech at the SAFFA in Bern 1959, Heinz Langenbacher argued that women basically had the same career opportunities in the FPD. In the very next phrase, however, he suggested that women were less fit for certain posts or activities in the diplomatic and consular service, due to their «constitution or specific female disposition».⁷⁶

Moreover, the marriage ban for female civil servants completely cut maternity and women's family life from professional existence in entire sections of the federal administration, including the diplomatic field. It was not abandoned until 1972, when the *Office fédéral du personnel* (OFPER) had to react to Switzerland's ratification of the ILO Convention No. 111.⁷⁷ The newly created *concours diplomatique* and the third regulation for civil servants by no means prevented such sex-based inequalities; nor can the later revisions be shown to consistently address these issues, as the changes instead aimed at making the *concours* more attractive by relaxing the conditions for admission to a certain extent, for instance when raising the age limit and improving the remuneration of the *stagiaires*.⁷⁸ When the examination board evaluated the recruitment and training process of young diplomats in 1964, for instance, the debate did not address the topic of female candidates, let alone any gender-related issues or problems.⁷⁹

Yet, motherhood of unmarried employees, for example, was indeed causing problems when it came to women's professional relationship with the FPD. In 1969, for instance, the Federal Court approved a female vice-consul's complaint against the FPD refusing to pay her the same basic allowance for her household with children as would be paid to married, divorced or widowed civil servants.⁸⁰ The verdict reveals not only the systematic neglect of unmarried civil servants with children in the federal administration, it also highlights that the basic household allowance for single civil servants was designed with a view to other relatives, such as siblings or parents, not children.⁸¹ Therefore it seems that the RF III had completely ignored single parenthood and the possibility of unmarried civil servants being mothers and heads of a household.

Neither the *concours* nor the RF III seem to have actually improved the situation of married female personnel. While female diplomats had to quit when getting married, many other female employees remained in their jobs, but under more precarious conditions: as non-permanent staff. This practice is first documented in the early 1950s and was maintained throughout the 1960s. And,

⁷⁴ Cf. notice from Ludwig Meier to Otto Bornhauser, 24.11.1967, [dodis.ch/40598](https://www.dodis.ch/40598).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁶ Heinz Langenbacher: «Die Schweizerfrau im auswärtigen Dienst der Eidgenossenschaft», 1959, [dodis.ch/53378](https://www.dodis.ch/53378), 9.

⁷⁷ Cf. circular letter from Ernst Lobsiger: «Internationale Arbeitsorganisation», 26.7.1971 and the answer by Jean Bourgeois, 26.8.1971, CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1201* (a.221.90).

⁷⁸ Cf. decision of the Federal Council No. 770: «Revision des Règlements über die Zulassung zu den Ämtern des EPD vom 9.6.1955», 23.4.1963, [dodis.ch/34257](https://www.dodis.ch/34257).

⁷⁹ Minutes of the meeting of the examination board, 12.3.1964, [dodis.ch/34256](https://www.dodis.ch/34256).

⁸⁰ Cf. Arrêt du Tribunal fédéral (ATF) 95 I 398, 23.5.1969, www.bger.ch, 399 – 408.

⁸¹ Cf. Ibid., 408.

again, marriage with a spouse of non-Swiss citizenship caused even greater problems or provoked even greater suspicion.⁸²

There is no record of women's associations actively pushing for a better representation of female career diplomats in the Swiss diplomatic corps once the FPD granted women formal admission in the mid-1950s. Nevertheless, thanks to public presentations and information events, the department intermittently remained in touch with exponents of various women's movements. Notably, Heinz Langenbacher reported that after a presentation at the Zurich Club of Professional and Business Women,⁸³ his audience had expressed the wish that Swiss diplomats should only be allowed to marry Swiss women.⁸⁴ Ironically, members of an organisation that claimed to act in the interest of professional women thereby signalled their desire to secure women's status in diplomacy as wives, rather than women's equal access to a career in foreign service.

Only in the 1970s sources indicate first attempts to fight against the use of so-called natural differences in legitimizing unequal treatment.⁸⁵ In a report written for a task force in charge of personnel questions, Marianne von Grünigen, criticized references to women's nature.⁸⁶ She questioned the distinctions made between female and male diplomats, with particular emphasis on certain gender-based assumptions such as the existence of thematic areas, like cultural or social issues, for which women were especially apt.⁸⁷ However, when discussing existing gender-inequalities in her report, the author did not refer at all to the selection process or the selection criteria. Instead, she did draw attention, for instance, to the double role unmarried female diplomats had to play in their daily routine, as in the case of married couples, the role of host was usually filled by the diplomat's wife. While the author emphasised that this problem concerned both unmarried male and female diplomats, she pointed out that a female diplomat was also expected to take on duties that would be those of a male diplomat's wife, such as preparing receptions and cooking. In this context, the author stressed the difficulties in getting aides and sufficient funds.⁸⁸

The report thus shows a complex distribution of roles and tasks in the work of a diplomat, and their classification as either masculine or feminine. How such classifications were perceived depends on context. In a late 1960s TV appearance aiming to promote the diplomatic career, von Grünigen referred to this range of tasks in positive way. The TV programme described such variety as this profession's special charm, which allowed professional fulfilment on an intellectual level during the days at office, but also offered an opportunity for women to play a classical female role as a host with representative functions.⁸⁹

⁸² Cf. circular letter from EPFA: «Beschäftigung von verheirateten Frauen als Angestellte» 2.11.1953; circular letter from EPFA: «Dienstrechtliche Stellung der verheirateten Frau», 22.8.1958, both signed by Ernst Lobsiger, CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#375* (a.221.22); Lobsiger to the FPD's administrative section: «Fonctionnaires du sexe féminin qui se marient, sont maintenues en activité ou sont réengagées après une suspension des rapports de service», 21.7.1967, CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1186* (a.221.22).

⁸³ Club der Zürcher Berufs- und Geschäftsfrauen.

⁸⁴ Notice by Heinz Langenbacher to Paul Clottu, 7.1.1959, [dodis.ch/53371](https://www.dodis.ch/53371).

⁸⁵ Marianne von Grünigen: «Gedanken zur Stellung der Diplomatin in ihrem Beruf, Florian Dokument IV/7», Köln 2.4.1974, [dodis.ch/50471](https://www.dodis.ch/50471). This document has already been cited by Bentele and Zala as the first official statement of a female Swiss diplomat on the situation of women diplomats within the FPD.

⁸⁶ Cf. Bentele and Zala: «Von Sekretärinnen, Ehefrauen und Diplomatinen», 252.

⁸⁷ Marianne von Grünigen: «Gedanken zur Stellung der Diplomatin in ihrem Beruf, Florian Dokument IV/7», [dodis.ch/50471](https://www.dodis.ch/50471), 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁸⁹ Cf. «Gesucht: Schweizer Diplomaten», in: *Rundschau SF DRS*, 27.6.1973, CH-BAR#J2.225#2007/195#266#64*.

Furthermore, the von Grünigen notice rejected any form of protectionism or of unequal treatment on the grounds of women's nature or constitution, yet she conceded that some posts could be difficult for a women assigned to them, due to the local political climate, pointing for instance to the Vatican. 54

All in all, the sources considered point to the following problematic areas: marriage, the perception of the female body, and the classification of roles on the diplomatic parquet as either male or female, regardless of new principles of democratization and professionalization. 55

The mid-1950s reform may have aimed for a democratized diplomatic and consular service; the discourse on democratization, however, focused on class and a broader representation of the Swiss state. This discourse therefore focused on citizenship, in particular. Civic duties were relevant to the selection of candidates, and the state required a <monogamous> relationship from its diplomats and their spouses: dual citizenship was not only impossible for Swiss diplomats, it was also looked upon unfavourably in their wives.⁹⁰ 56

Women were ill-equipped to compete for representative functions according to these terms, because they were exempted from certain civic duties and had no active civic rights, and consequently no political representation. Along similar lines, historian Julie Anne Demel stated in her study on women in French diplomacy, that due to the lack of civil rights, women could not take on all diplomatic tasks, despite their admission to the concours: «Les femmes ne jouissant pas leurs droits civiques, ne pouvaient pas exercer tous les services au sein d'une ambassade.»⁹¹ Moreover, in the classical role model that experienced a popular resurgence in Switzerland's post-war years, women's sphere of activity was primarily the private one, and where it was the public, it was in particular fields associated with female tasks and activities, such as charitable and social work. Diplomacy's integration into the civil service administration subjected its functionaries to civil service law, which normatively formalized the three-step model of women's professional activity, as marriage was legitimate grounds for dismissal, a practice which internationally had gained currency in the post-war years. 57

It was only the introduction of women's suffrage that finally produced a drastic shift in women's status as citizens and employees. It forced the federal administration to abandon the marriage ban. A shaken FPD sought to analyse the situation of its female employees in the framework of «Arbeitsgruppe Florian»⁹². And it was only with women's suffrage that women could finally gain seats on the examination board of the *concours*, thereby becoming fully involved in the selection process. The 1970s thus mark a watershed of the FPD starting to reflect on its own gender policies, with lasting consequences concerning not only women's admission and professional life, but also the department's general family policy. With the marriage bar gone, debates were unleashed on maternal leave, payment of the marriage bonus for female 58

⁹⁰ Cf. respective documentation in CH-BAR#E2004B#1978/136#373* (a.221.2) and CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1186* (a.221.22).

⁹¹ Julie Anne Demel: *Regard historique sur la diplomatie féminine en Autriche et en France*, Frankfurt am Main 2013, 218.

⁹² «Arbeitsgruppe Florian» was a FPD working group headed by Antonino Janner, consisting of six commissions, tasked to examine a number of reforms, also see: dodis.ch/R27249. Florian Commission IV was responsible for personnel matters and took a more critical look at women's status in the department for the first time; still this topic remained rather on the sidelines compared to the overall work, see for instance the report: «Ein Aussenministerium befragt sich selbst», March 1975, dodis.ch/40926.

officers,⁹³ the representational allowance for male accompanying persons,⁹⁴ but also allowances for officers with working wives.⁹⁵ However, the department's family policy would require a separate, more detailed analysis.

Conclusions While it is true that women gained official admission to the consular and diplomatic career in 1955, in theory equal to that of men, one has to remember that this did not happen in a larger context in which gender equality would have been the department's default attitude. The 1950s slogan of democratization must be taken with a pinch of salt here. The FPD was endeavouring to offset diplomacy's unpopularity: its popular perception as illegitimate and elitist. Women, however, were not yet part of Switzerland's electorate. In contrast to foreign ministries of other states, the FPD issued no report specifically on women's employment and their professional situation before 1974. Until women gained suffrage, the department's strategy instead ranged from passive to reactive, particularly in the field of the diplomatic services, where at that time only a handful of female career diplomats were affected by these issues. 59

Women's admission to the *concours* was first and foremost a result of importing foreign recruitment models – and as the number of women in diplomacy remained rather low in places like the UK and the US, the experience of other states was no cause for concern. American and British influence on the FPD's gender and recruitment policies appears to have been significant. The falling of the marriage bar should be seen as both policy change on both a local and international level, as it was abandoned almost simultaneously, in the early 1970s, such as in the US, the UK, Australia, and Ireland.⁹⁶ In France, however, which had served as an important model for the *concours*, the marriage bar was reinstated during the Vichy-Regime only to be abandoned again after the end of World War II.⁹⁷ 60

At a domestic level, public opinion, especially as it manifested itself in the press, was one force pushing the mid-1950s reform and the idea of a democratized and professionalized foreign service. But another, important force shaping the department's employment policies were the protracted negotiations with two staff associations. The VBAEZ's efforts to secure a better standing for female secretary staff and to facilitate their promotion, in particular, proved momentous. As the FPD was facing demands for competent female employees to be promoted to the chancellery and even to consular services, and as the latter had had been merged with the diplomatic service, it was difficult to keep the doors shut on women in the new recruitment process for diplomatic and consular services. 61

In the recruitment process, female candidates were considered the exception. They were not treated in an equal manner, but judged by clearly gendered standards regarding appearance, capacities and flexibility. Moreover, there are several cases indicating a segregation by sex within the FPD, with women being assigned only particular tasks and even being cast as a security risk. Such aspects are barely reflected on in later statements on the department's gender policies which often deny the existence of discriminative prac- 62

⁹³ For first cf. letter from Alfred Glesti to the Federal medical services, 2.5.1975. For latter cf. notes from the meeting with the EPA on the consequences of the parliamentary initiative Blunschy (on the introduction of the marriage bonus for women civil servants), 13.3.1972, both CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1201* (a.221.90).

⁹⁴ Cf. notice from Alfred Glesti to Antonino Janner, 1.6.1976, dodis.ch/40599.

⁹⁵ Cf. documentation CH-BAR#E2004B#1990/219#1201* (a.221.90).

⁹⁶ Marian Sawyer: *Removal of the Commonwealth Marriage Bar*, Canberra 1997, 7–11; Helen McCarthy: *Women of the World*, London 2014, 287–289.

⁹⁷ Cf. film «Par une porte entrouverte» du Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, 7.3.2017.

tices and blame the low number of women on other factors, particularly a lack of interest among women. Moreover, the examination body itself was a rather non-transparent institution with no female members before 1972, after women had gained political rights in Switzerland at a national level. This indicates that only the developments of the 1970s, particularly the introduction of active civil rights for Swiss women, meant a real turning point for women's status in the FPD.

Both protectionism and selective, sex-based allocation of fields clash with the publicly promoted argument that the existing differences between men and women in the department did not represent any obstacle for women's careers. Moreover, they conflict with the department's claim, in the mid-1970s, that unmarried women had enjoyed the same treatment as men ever since the mid-1950s reform, that only married women had been discriminated against, and that the department had thus been especially progressive in the implementation of gender equality.⁹⁸

In contrast to what other historians, such as McCarthy, have shown in the case of the UK in the interwar years, there is no sign yet in Swiss sources of a narrative that would associate the female sex with any kind of benefits for working in diplomacy or would see feminine qualities as an asset to diplomatic work.⁹⁹ Instead, early sources from the mid-1940s suggested that women were suitable candidates for only a few positions, as specialists, but not as full diplomats with a more general portfolio and comprehensive responsibilities.

The records of the recruitment process illustrate women's special status. The examples discussed in this article show that women's «fitness» for the profession was measured by different criteria and even by the application of higher requirements. This observation, regarding an institution that defined standards for admission to the service, is an important addition to the field, as other scholars have pointed out in qualitative studies that women in the foreign service often felt «they were required to work much harder, than the men around them [...] regardless of their position».¹⁰⁰ The observations made in the present article suggest that such problems are not merely individual perceptions, but that gendered demands and constraints can be seen to be documented at the level of nationwide institutionalisation. Female candidates are recorded as being discussed with different schemata applied and different language used by the examination committee.

The marriage bar was unarguably a crucial regulation in the employment of women, spread internationally¹⁰¹ and institutionalized through Swiss civil service law, which affected diplomacy once it was fully integrated in the body of the federal administration as part of the mid-1950s reform. On the one hand, this law cut off female diplomats from family life and even partnership until the 1970s. On the other hand, it served to protect men's status, since it meant they could not become an accredited diplomat's significant other, occupying the less prestigious position in that liaison. As Bentele and Zala showed, the FPD only clumsily integrated male spouses from other countries into the protocol,¹⁰² and in the 1970s, FPD representatives considered the prospect of the department financing diplomat's husbands to the same extent

⁹⁸ Notice from Antonino Janner to Pierre Graber: «Statut de la femme au DPF», 8.5.1974, dodis.ch/40603.

⁹⁹ Cf. McCarthy: *Women of the World*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ Caroline Linse: *Challenges Facing Women in Overseas Diplomatic Positions*, Malta/Geneva 2004, 257.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Talyn Rahman: *Women in Diplomacy – an Assessment of British Female Ambassadors in Overcoming Gender Hierarchy 1990–2010*, Chapel Hill 2012.

¹⁰² Cf. Bentele and Zala: «Von Sekretärinnen, Ehefrauen und Diplomatinen», 241.

as diplomats' wives (travel and representational allowances etc.) as highly problematic.¹⁰³

Finally, this article also gave an example of members of the Swiss foreign ministry perceiving unmarried women's sexuality as a security risk, which led a security officer to openly suggest that the private relations of unmarried employees should be meticulously observed. This aspect, too, might merit a more detailed study, for instance drawing on comparative approaches. Thus, in a case study of Allison Palmer, between 1959 and 1981 a US foreign service officer, who was in legal dispute with the U.S. Department of State because of a gender discrimination complaint and a class action lawsuit, Loftus McKenzie similarly argued that the sexual revolution of the 1960s played a crucial role in sexualizing unmarried women officers, which in combination with the marriage bar led to less rather than more gender equality in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰⁴

103 Cf. notice from Alfred Glesti to Antonino Janner, 1.6.1976, dodis.ch/40599.

104 Loftus McKenzie: «The Problem of Women in the Department – Sex and Gender Discrimination in the 1960s United States Foreign Diplomatic Service», in: *European Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2015), 6, DOI: doi.org/10.4000/ejas.10589.