

A BRIEF NOTE ON GROSHEIM-KRISKO¹

C.G.McKay

Summary: Hermann Grosheim-Krisko was employed as a Russian translator by the Swedish Legation in Budapest in 1944 and given a false identity as the Norwegian , “Henry Thomsen” . When the Red Army occupied Budapest, Grosheim-Krisko, like Raoul Wallenberg, was arrested by *Smersh* ,sent to Moscow and accused of anti-Soviet activities and espionage. Unlike Wallenberg ,however, he was eventually released in 1953 and turned up in due course in Stockholm where he provided the Swedes with further information while simultaneously claiming financial compensation for his years in Soviet custody.

On the basis of an old file in *Auswärtiges Amts* Archive, new light is shed on Grosheim-Krisko's family and background *prior to* his wartime years in Budapest.

Never speak ill of serendipity: it will often advance us in our search for information where more well-organized methods of discovery have hitherto drawn a blank. In connection with matters quite unrelated to the case of Raoul Wallenberg, I was in touch with the archivist of *Auswärtiges Amt* - the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs- who very kindly sent me a detailed listing of the Ministry files pertaining to Latvia for the interwar years. Imagine then my surprise while perusing the list to encounter an old file (RAV Riga, Gesandtschaft Riga 1851-1941, Aktenzeichen Kons.Po. 10) to which two words had been appended by way of summarizing its contents: ”Grosheim-Krisko”. Could it be that the file was about *that chap?* *That chap* was Hermann Grosheim-Krisko, one of those strange marginal figures who enters the case of Raoul Wallenberg and serves to muddy the water for the dedicated investigator. In 1944, he had been recruited by the Swedish legation in Budapest as a Russian translator on the recommendation of the Hungarian police official Nandor Batisfalvy, a close collaborator of Anger and Wallenberg in Budapest, and assigned a false identity as Henry Thomsen, a Norwegian. Hardly standard diplomatic practice. For some time I had looked in vain for snippets of information that would throw more light on the man and his past. Of course, there is the information which he presented to the Swedes at his debriefing after his release from the Soviet Union as well as the information garnered earlier by the Soviet organs in their successive interrogations. The trouble with this latter information is that Grosheim-Krisko was subsequently to make a general retraction of his earlier statements and it is unclear how far during the initial interrogations he was merely

¹ © C.G.McKay, May, 2014. This essay is made freely available as a contribution to public knowledge. However those who make use of it, should follow normal academic good manners and acknowledge it in their list of sources. I am very grateful to Susanne Berger and VadimBirstein for reading what I had to say and for their useful comments and corrections. Any errors still present in the revised text are my own.

served up a mish-mash of concocted but plausible stories which had to be signed *so oder so*. It is also prudent to approach the interesting and detailed account he presented to the Swedes after his release in 1953 from Soviet captivity with just a smidgeon of caution. Grosheim- Krisko was not merely an impartial witness testifying to past events of long ago. He was an undisguised supplicant for Swedish financial compensation and doubtless had an eye to presenting himself in a way best designed to gain his reward with the minimum of fuss. It is typical of the imperfect state of our present knowledge that even the spelling of the man's name is uncertain with otherwise well informed sources like the Swedish official report SOU 2003: 18 and the Makinen-Kaplan report favouring "Grossheim" when in fact the correct spelling is "Grosheim" with a single letter S.

As it happens, the *Auswärtiges Amt* file turned out not to be about *Hermann Grosheim-Krisko* but about his parents. Nevertheless all is not lost. Hermann does enter the story indirectly and in so doing, we obtain a fascinating glimpse both into his movements before the outbreak of war in 1939 and perhaps- but less certainly- into his character.

So to the file. Its principal subject is the investigation of a complaint received by the German legation in Riga in August 1935 from Hermann's mother Hedwig Grosheim (described as a *Reichsdeutsche* born in Osnabrück) , that she had been unlawfully detained and improperly treated with excessive severity by the Latvian authorities, in the course of an officially mounted action to determine if a violation of the Latvian foreign currency regulations had taken place. Hedwig's husband, Woldemar Krisko, described as an engineer, acted on a commission basis as the representative of foreign technical firms in Riga, among them *Krupp-Druckenmüller* , *Gesellschaft für elektrische Zugbeleuchtung* and various companies like *Tudor* producing batteries and accumulators. Unlike his wife, Woldemar Krisko had been born in Russia at Kalinski but was now stateless and the holder of a Nansen passport. According to the Latvian authorities, Krisko had wilfully misled them with the aid of falsified invoices and used his business dealings to hide the unlawful transmission of funds abroad contrary to the currency regulations. Acting on these suspicions, a surprise raid had been carried out on Krisko's home and office. Papers and documents were seized and Waldemar and Hedwig as well as members of the office staff were taken in and detained for questioning over a period of several days, Hedwig contended that she had nothing at all to do with her husband's business dealings but the Latvian authorities refused to accept this, arguing that she was more implicated than appeared at first sight. Although the couple were formally divorced, they had continued to live together and Krisko had carefully made use of his wife's name in many of his business transactions.

So much for the bare bones of the case. But there was an oddity of presentation. Hedwig and Woldemar chose to emphasize a particular aspect of the matter. According to them, prior to the raid they had received a visit from a certain Goldmann . Goldmann's message was that he was acting on behalf of another Jew called Tuvij Abramson who demanded the sum of Ls. 5400. If this was not paid,

“then a noose would be drawn round the neck of the whole family from which it could not escape.” Goldmann was sent on his way without the money and three days later the raid by the authorities took place.

Did such a visit and threat actually take place? One's spontaneous reaction is that the tale was simply a device enabling Krisko and his wife to play 'the Jewish Card' to strengthen their case with talk of Jewish blackmail and extortion to a hopefully receptive German legation. This feeling is strengthened by the fact that when the Legation failed to act with sufficient urgency in the eyes of the Krisko side, Hedwig Grosheim through her Berlin lawyer went to the trouble of contacting the *Ausland* Organisation of the NSDAP to put pressure on the Legation.

Needless to say, the Latvian authorities were keen to affirm that there was no connection whatsoever between their raid and Goldmann's supposed visit. They had simply acted on evidence which they had amassed. However an article in the newspaper *Rigaschen Rundschau* (Nr. 276, 30 November 1935) was later to reveal that the Contraband Section of Latvian Customs which had been involved in the case against Krisko and his wife, *did* make use of informers, including a person seemingly linked to the alleged blackmailers of the engineer. Thus the possibility remains that such an informer or accomplice, based on their privileged knowledge of Krisko's business operations might have chosen to make use of that knowledge for their own illegal purposes.

The case against Krisko and his wife naturally threatened serious consequences for their commercial and personal future in Riga. Very soon after it became known that the couple were in trouble with the Latvian authorities, the German firm Krupp-Druckenmüller who had made use of Krisko's Bureau began to look for a replacement and sought the advice of the German Legation in this matter. Worried by developments, the sons of the couple sought to intervene on their parents' behalf. First out was Karl Woldemar Grosheim-Krisko writing to Auswärtiges Amt from Stuhmer Allee 5, Berlin-Charlottenburg on 27th July 1935 and complaining that „despite his frequent requests“ the Legation in Riga had failed to assist the family. His mother who suffered from malaria had been placed in a damp cell without a bed, despite the fact that she had just embarked on a course of treatment recommended by Professor Siebeck in Berlin. Now his parents were being threatened with all sorts of consequences. It was therefore imperative that the German Legation in Riga got to the bottom of the circumstances behind their arrest and he ended by offering to make a financial contribution if this would help in the investigatory work.

There is no information in the file telling us more about young Karl Woldemar. But my hunch is that he was identical with a certain K.W. Grosheim-Krisko, an expert on the chemistry of metals and the author (with W.Hofmann and H. Hanemann) of the paper *Über die Löslichkeit von Sauerstoff in Blei (On the Solubility of Oxygen in Lead)*, which appeared in *Mitteilungen d. Institut f. Metallkunde d. Technischen Hochschule Berlin 36 Jahrg. H.4. April 1944*. It was still being quoted in the scientific and technical literature in 1977.

But things were now accelerating fast. Already on July 30, 1935, Engineer

Krisko had been found guilty in at least 7 documented cases of illegal manipulations. His Latvian import licence was withdrawn and he was fined the sum of 39,400 Lats.

By the end of 1935, it was time for Karl Woldemar's brother Hermann to become involved. On July 28 of the same year, he had received official authorization in Berlin to act as his mother's legal representative. This naturally required his presence in Riga. However when he attempted to enter Latvia from Lithuania, he was stopped at Priekules, the Latvian border station and was told by the police that an instruction dated July 26 1935 had been issued forbidding “*Reichsdeutschen Hermann Grosheim-Krisko*” from entering Latvian territory. In his letter of December 13, 1935 to the German legation in Riga, Hermann stressed that he had not been involved in any business dealings in Latvia and had been a non-resident for more than a year. He now requested the Legation to investigate the entry ban and to do whatever they could to have it reversed.

The Legation in Riga wrote a note to *Auswärtiges Amt* summarizing what Hermann had told them and contacted the Latvian authorities to hear their side of the story. The Latvian Foreign Office replied on March 7, 1936. According to them Hermann Grosheim-Krisko had failed to pay in full his taxes for 1932 and 1933 and owed the sum of Ls 558,42. It was for this reason that he - an “*unerwünschter Ausländer*” - had been refused entry.

The file gives no indication of Hermann's reaction to the charge that he had failed to pay his taxes. What we do know, is that a year later on January 11, 1937, Hermann wrote once more to the German Legation in Riga and intimated that the dispute between his father and the Latvian authorities had been resolved and that the whole matter could now be laid to rest. What had happened? It turned out that Engineer Krisko had managed to raise the money to pay off the fine of 39,400 Lats. One odd feature of the repayment, shrewdly noted by a member of the German Legation was that Krisko had taken a loan for 12,800 Lats from the bank of Aron Schmuljan- a Jewish bank. Was n't it rather odd that a man who had claimed to be the object of Jewish blackmail, was now borrowing money from such a source?

The legal wrangle over the activities of Krisko and his wife was now over. But there was a further curious tail-piece concerning their son, Hermann Grosheim-Krisko. In a note of 17 October, 1938, addressed to the German Legation in Sofia, Bulgaria, the German Legation in Riga explained that they had received a complaint from a lady called Mackenzie-Kennedy at the American Legation in the Latvian capital. Apparently Grosheim-Krisko owed her (or the legation) the sum of 200 Lats, a debt which he had failed to settle. Instead he had departed for Bulgaria in order (so it was said) to avoid serving in the German Army. So what had the German legation in Sofia to say about the said Hermann Grosheim-Krisko?

Well he was living at the hotel “Slawianska Beseda” in Sofia and had willingly come to the German Consulate when requested. He had absolutely no intention of avoiding military service. In fact, he would be returning to Berlin shortly in connection with a business matter. He rejected all of Mackenzie-Kennedy's accusations and claims. Indeed, as a mark of his innocence, he was prepared to give a

sum equivalent in Bulgarian Lew to 50 Reichsmark to *Ortsgruppe* Sofia of the N.S.D.A.P. Finally his passport checked out: it was the genuine article.

The residence of Grosheim-Krisko in Bulgaria at the outbreak of war did not, as it happens, come to the present author as a complete surprise. It merely confirmed a detail which I had known for some time. When Britain declared war on Bulgaria in December 1941, this led to the freezing of Bulgarian assets in Britain. Among those whose assets were seized was a certain Hermann Grosheim-Krisko at P.O. Box 460 at Sofia. Those assets did not amount to any princely sum: in fact, it was made up of a paltry bank balance of eighteen shillings!

Fast forward to Budapest in 1945. Grosheim-Krisko must have seemed a genuine mystery to *Smersh* and other Soviet organs. For a start, he did not appear in the Official List list of wartime Legation personnel in Budapest already given to the Soviet Union by the Swedes . So who was he? Secondly he also appeared to know something about the activities of Raoul Wallenberg and Lars Berg, people who interested *Smersh* on quite independent grounds. In analogous circumstances, it is unlikely the *initial* response of the Western special services would have been so very different. After all, it is the business of all security services to be suspicious . But unlike *Smersh* – and this is the salient difference-it is extremely doubtful that the Western services would have considered it necessary to hold on to him until the 1950s.

How do things appear from the purely Swedish perspective? Grosheim-Krisko was first of all a German national, a strange choice for employment at the Legation just at the point when the Russians would soon be entering Hungary. While it is true that Grosheim-Krisko had an excellent command of the Russian language and this served to qualify him technically for the post of translator, were there no other equally qualified candidates? Both the linguistically accomplished Langlet and his Russian wife were in a position to make suggestions and knew the local scene far better than most.

In short, we are left with the fundamental question: why was Grosheim-Krisko chosen and how come that it was the Hungarian policeman Batisfalvy who nominated him for the job.? No wholly satisfactory explanation has ever been given.

Personal details relating to Hermann Grosheim-Krisko as recorded by the German Consulate in Sofia, Bulgaria. Source RAV Riga, Gesandtschaft Riga 1851-1941, Aktenzeichen Kons.Po. 10 .

A b s c h r i f t .

M e l d e b l a t t

zur Meldung bei der Deutschen Botschaft — Gesandtschaft,
beim Deutschen Generalkonsulat — Konsulat — Vizekonsulat
in Sofia.

1	Familiennam e <small>(bei Frauen auch Geburtsname)</small>		G r o s h e i m - K r i s k o	
2	Vornam en <small>(Namen unterstreichen)</small>		H e r m a n n	
3	Geburts - tag - monat - jahr		30. XI. 1907	
4	Geburtsort, Kreis, Staat		Rostow a/Don Russland	
5	Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit*) durch Geburt - Legitimation - Eheschließung - Einbürgerung am Besitz einer ausländischen Staatsangehörigkeit neben der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit? Frühere ausländische Staatsangehörigkeit vor Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit		eingebürgert am 15.2.1922 Einb. Urkunde d.R. in Dessau N g 2 Russische	
6	a Religiöses Bekenntnis	b Abstammung**)	a Griech-Kathol.	b arisch
7	Familienstand ledig; verheiratet, verwitwet, geschieden: } seit	Bei Frauen Familien- name und Vorname des Ehemannes	Gesamtzahl der Kinder der Rinder (Söhne, Töchter)***)	verheiratet seit 1931
8	Beruf: <small>(wenn nicht selbständig, angestellt bei wem?)</small>		Ingenieur	
9	Vater Vorname, Familienname	Mutter Vorname, Geburtsname	Woldemar Krisko Kalinski 1.VII.1880(Russland)	Hedwig Grosheim Osnabrück Bez.Hann 17.X.1885
	Geburtsdatum = ort	Geburtsdatum = ort		
	Religiöses Bekenntnis	Religiöses Bekenntnis	Griech.kathol.	Lutherisch
	<small>wenn verstorben: † (Kreuz) und Sterbejahr</small>	<small>wenn verstorben: † (Kreuz) und Sterbejahr</small>		
10	Schulbildung		absolv. Hochschule	
11	Kenntnis lebender Fremdsprachen		französisch, englisch, russisch	
12	Nachweise, Zeugnisse über besondere Fertigkeiten <small>(z. B. Führerschein)</small>		Führerschein	
	Wehrdienstverhältnisse Renten- und Ruhegehaltsempfänger <small>(auszubildende Stellen)</small>			

*) Deutsche Staatsangehörige des Landes Österreich haben in Spalte 5 des «Meldebatts» zur ersten Frage nicht Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich, sondern Österreichs als österreichischen Bürgerrechts, zur letzten Frage die frühere ausländische Staatsangehörigkeit vor Erwerb der österreichischen anzugeben.
**) Der Tag der Geburt, ab Jahr oder jülicher Mitteilung.
***) Gegen Kinder unter 15 Jahren sind in das Meldebatt des mitverantwortigen Eltern teils aufzunehmen, wenn sie gleichzeitig mit diesem gemeldet werden (siehe Ziffer 19). Das Meldebatt ist für jede zu meldende Person, also auch für die Ehefrau und die über 15 Jahre alten Kinder, ein besonderes Meldebatt einzureichen.