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# LITHUANIA IN 1938–1940: GEOPOLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC CONTEXTS OF THE LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE

ARTICLES

### Abstract

The paper discusses the contexts of the political process that led to the subjugation of the Lithuanian state to the Soviet policy, and following annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union. The main focus of the text is on the development of the political situation in the Baltic region, that led to the disintegration of the local political agreements, starting from the 1938 Munich crisis, through 1939 March crisis up to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Polish defeat in 1939, forced dissolution of the Baltic Entente, and finally the annexation of the Baltic states, resulting in the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

**Keywords:** Lithuania, Soviet occupation, diplomacy, 1938 Munich crisis, Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact

## Introduction

The international situation and foreign policy of Lithuania and the Baltic States in general on the eve of the Second World War has been repeatedly discussed in Lithuanian and foreign specialized historiography. Great attention has been paid to this problem over the last decade when new sources were tapped into academic circuit and original interpretations or estimates of the formerly known events were provided. On the other hand, when reconstructing the history of the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the genesis and development of the international crisis of 1938–1940, in their works of synthetic nature, the creators of the academic theatre of history do not always “notice” Lithuania and the Baltic States. They are often left out on the periphery of European political processes or even outside them. Such an attitude is understandable in the interpretation of history from the perspective of foreign researchers when the problems of the Baltic States may, indeed, not always be significant or easily observable. Nevertheless, when analysing this problem from the point of view of political tension concerning Lithuania or the Baltic States, in general, the situation changes drastically because the shift of the pan-European, also the so-called *great politics*, has, in one way or another, nearly always been important to the Baltic Region. Thus, the methodological *credo* of this article is not so much the analysis of the Lithuanian foreign policy in 1938–1940 as the interaction of the context of the above-mentioned international crisis with the policy pursued by Lithuania. Metaphorically speaking, it is an attempt to look at the top of the mountain of international relations from its bottom.

## The Beginnings of the 1938–1940 Crisis

Viewing the events under discussion from the historical perspective of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is rather difficult to claim that the political crisis of the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century hit Europe suddenly and unexpectedly. In the late thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the clouds of the global international crisis, gathering dangerously over the Old Continent, were seen by journalists and intellectuals, politicians and diplomats. Their concern grew particularly at the end of the decade – after the Anschluss of Austria and the Munich crisis. The disappearance of Austria from the political map of Europe was the first

clear indication of the beginning of the global geopolitical catastrophe in the Old Continent. Although as early as the beginning of 1938, the Chancellor of Austria Kurt von Schuschnigg declared that his country “[...] will defend its freedom with all its strength” („Austrija visomis” 1938), only a few weeks after his statement, on 11–12 March, Germany, having, in principle, faced no major international complications, carried out a lightning-speed Anschluss of Austria. When London and Paris made an attempt to demand that Austrian independence be preserved, Berlin retorted that “Austrian affairs are the Reich’s internal affairs and nobody has the right to interfere in them” (“Britų ir prancūzų” 1938). This arrogant reply given by the Germans seems to have “solved” the problem.

This easy, smooth, almost exemplary dissolution of the Austrian statehood in the political blast furnace of the Third Reich in the spring of 1938, generated pessimistic moods among Lithuanian diplomats. Immediately following the Austrian events, in his report to Kaunas the Lithuanian Envoy to France, Petras Klimas, wrote with unconcealed bitterness:

“The catastrophe that Austria so suddenly faced [...] caused unanimous “horror” in French public opinion. [...] yet, one should openly state that, no matter how upsetting it might be in today’s reaction, there wasn’t even an idea left to change or improve something [...], the present atmosphere here has become apathetic, narrowly egoistic, unprincipled.” (Report “The Austrian events” of 14 March 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy to France P. Klimas to the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, Lithuanian Central State Archive [hereinafter: LCSA], f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, p. 67.)

According to the diplomat, the Austrian Anschluss showed that there was no power in Europe that would be willing or could stand up to the “international gangsterism” and “fist users”. This is why “all international rules of morality which meant security to small states” were being destroyed. When Petras Klimas inquired the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the future of Lithuania and other small states, Pierre Arnal, the Director of the Department of the League of Nations of the Quai d’Orsay, claimed that at the time when the League of Nations was falling apart, without effective support of Italy and, first of all, England, France alone was not capable of “resisting destruction” at the international level. Therefore, it would try to guarantee protection only to its direct allies, Czechoslovakia and

Poland, whereas the “small states have to form their own intergroups and look for security themselves” (Report “The Austrian events” of 14 March 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy to France P. Klimas to the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, p. 68.) Having successfully annexed Austria, Germany was not inclined to stop.

In the summer of 1938, the Western European and Lithuanian press repeatedly warned politicians and society about the far-reaching geopolitical plans of the Third Reich and the fact that in them Czechoslovakia was unambiguously “sentenced to death” (“Čekoslovakija Vokietijos” 1938, 3; “Užpuoliką prislėgs” 1938, 1). At the end of the summer of the same year, in his analysis of the policy of the Great Western democracies with regard to the Third Reich and its consequences for the fate of Czechoslovakia, as well as Central and Eastern European countries, an expert in international affairs, a Swiss professor Bern Fay, rather accurately pointed out that if Czechoslovakia’s ally, France

“before it goes to help the attacked Czechoslovakia, will be willing to become absolutely sure that England will join it and if England desires find out if the entire nation agrees to fight, then nothing will save Central Europe from Germany” (Fay 1938, 3).

At that time, there were more such and similar warnings, but the political and diplomatic elite of Europe did not hear them, and on 29–30 September 1938, in Munich, the notorious finale of the Versailles Peace system was played (Kissinger 2003, 301–302), which, as it soon turned out, meant, in fact, the prelude to the Second World War (*The Munich Crisis* 1999). Mainly due to the efforts of the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini (Strang 1999, 184), the resolution to the Sudeten crisis carried in Munich yielded an ambiguous result: the French security system was “freed” of Czechoslovakia, whereas Great Britain – of the prospect of becoming involved in the war against its own will and being unprepared for it (Furnia 1960, 338–339); consequently, Adolf Hitler won another ‘diplomatic Blitzkrieg’ (Adamthwaite 1977, xi). On the other hand, it is hard to disagree with the conclusions made by the American historian, Arthur H. Furnia, and other researchers that the “Appeasement for Czechoslovakia” provided rather grim political prospects. As an outcome of the Munich resolutions, the most democratic and economically advanced state of the region

(Berend 2001, 243, 253) lost about one fifth of its all territories with the population of over three and a half million, a substantial part of civilian and military industry as well as fortification facilities against Germany. The communication, economic and defence systems of Czechoslovakia were destroyed. The country suffered defeat both strategically and tactically, thus, it was essentially deprived of the basis to effectively resist the Third Reich aggression by political or military means (Furnia 1960, 384–385; Albrecht-Carrié 1960, 384–385; Grenville 1994, 250–251; Wiśniewski 2001, 212–215; Kisielewski 2003, 131).

The allies – France and Great Britain – also sustained political losses and suffered a heavy strategic and moral defeat in the geopolitical competition with the Third Reich (Adamthwaithe 1977, xi; Alexander 1992, 279; Beck 1999, 237, 243–244). Actually, in spite of the fact that on the first days of October 1938, the British and French parliament members, approved the results of the Munich Conference as well as the so-called *appeasement* political doctrine (Sir Neville Chamberlain's "Peace for our time" which he brought from Munich had consent of 366 parliament members, 144 were against), though, admittedly, after heated discussions (see Beck 1999, 249) or meaningful silence, yet by an overwhelming majority. Still more impressive was the overwhelming majority when the French House of Representatives and the Senate gave their blessing to the foreign policy pursued by E. Daladier. On 4 October 1938, at an extraordinary session, 535 delegates expressed confidence in E. Daladier's Cabinet, 75 were against, and 3 abstained).

With regard to the studies by the American historian, Professor Paul M. Kennedy from Yale University (Kennedy 1983, 16–18, 30, 101), and other researchers (Furnia 1960, 19–20, 276), in my



Lithuanian delegation to the League of Nations session in December 1927. From left to right: Dovydas Zauinius, Lithuanian Prime Minister Augustas Voldemaras, Petras Klimas. Petras Klimas (1891–1961), signatory of the Lithuanian Act of Independence (1918), Lithuanian diplomat in France (up to 1940), imprisoned by Germans (1942–1943), imprisoned in the Soviet Union (1944–1954). Press photo (1927), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/5/25



opinion, it is possible to state that the British *appeasement* policy that originated as far back as the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and started to manifest itself more consistently from the early thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a rather natural stance of the state-island and a weakening empire ruled from it, which mainly resulted from London's traditional principles of shaping foreign policy as well as unfolding realities: its pragmatic attitude to matters; the aspiration to maximally soothe the decreasing dominant role of Great Britain on the international arena by political and diplomatic means; gradually growing democratisation tendencies in international relations and also economic, financial and military difficulties that the country was facing at that time. It is characteristic that the British military also had a say in London's consideration of the effectiveness and expediency of the *appeasement* policy. In the spring of 1938, when the British government started discussions on the issue of possible military assistance to Czechoslovakia, Sir Cyril Newall, the Chief of the Air Staff, was categorical and relentless. The politicians were told that an armed defence of Czechoslovakia might soon turn from a regional conflict into a world war which at present and with the capabilities available could not be won by the Empire (it was only in 1935 that Great Britain started to modernize its armed forces more vigorously; yet despite this, until March 1939, Britain did not have more than two divisions in Europe) (Howard 1972, 119).

However, in my view, the current situation at the time in the League of Nations and its capability to implement the theoretically declared doctrine of collective security was of rather significant importance for the attitude of the British people towards the Sudeten crisis. In mid-June 1938, in his report to the government R. A. Butler, the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain and its Representative in the League of Nations, stated that the League of Nations cannot carry out the operations of collective security since, like Great Britain, the majority of the countries it includes "[...] now are not really ready to unconditionally join in common action to curb aggressors" (Beck 1999, 254). Thus, such political priorities and estimations made by the British government to a great extent determined London's concessions to Berlin (Alexis) and its position in the summer-autumn of 1938 during the Sudeten crisis and Munich Conference (Neville 1999, 271).

It is interesting to note that observations made by the Lithuanian diplomats of that time contribute rather substantially to the facts and generalisations publicized in Western historiography. For example, according to the data provided by the Envoy Extraordinary and

Minister Plenipotentiary of Lithuania to Great Britain, Bronius Kazys Balutis, in the autumn of 1938, on the eve of the Munich Conference, when taking crucial decisions on Czechoslovakia, the British Prime Minister, Sir Neville Chamberlain, was likely guided by three motives: 1) that he is personally responsible for his nation and morally committed to it; 2) that Hitler is not just a political adventurer but a dangerous madman who can launch war at any moment and under any pretext; 3) that in such circumstances, the main interest of London is to delay the threat of war and win time “at any cost” (A top secret report of 15 September 1938 of the Extraordinary Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary of Lithuania to Great Britain Bronius Kazys Balutis to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Juozas Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 8, pp. 151–152).

However, with regard to another great democracy and a significant policy maker of the international climate of that time, one has to acknowledge quite a different situation. In spite of the fact that the French Prime Minister, a veteran of the Great War of 1914–1918, Édouard Daladier, in his speech in the French Parliament on 5 October 1938, was rather pompous in trying to ground the French decision concerning the division of Czechoslovakia in Munich as independent and honourable, and even as a possibility for a “moral renewal” (Furnia 1960, 386) of this ally country, yet, in fact, Paris’ approval of the Munich Conference results and the *appeasement* political doctrine was not as conceptual as that of Britain’s, and after Munich, É. Daladier felt far from being as “[...] strong, self-confident and triumphant” as his counterpart and partner in London, Sir N. Chamberlain (Thomas 1999, 124–125).

In principle, one may agree with the generalisations of modern historiography that the French position in great politics in the second half of 1938 was dictated not so much by their practical and political estimations or theoretical insights projected to the future. Rather, it was a consequence of the erroneous foreign policy of the previous years. Due to its clearly overrated possibilities in the post-Versailles Peace system and the burden of ineffective and incapable allies, in the late thirties France suffered a rather serious political and strategic overtension, which at first manifested itself only as passiveness and groundless hopes (Furnia 1960, 276), but later led to a certain decadence of foreign policy (Albrecht-Carrié 1960, 110–111, 169, 275; Young 1987, 105–115; Alexander 1992, 279–284; Kissinger 2003, 284). The state security vacuum, which was gradually becoming more and more obvious, was pushing the French society into certain cultural



and psychological discomfort and the ruling elite – towards desperate decisions and unconsidered actions. Desperation of the French ruling elite was particularly evident during the Sudeten crisis and the Munich Conference, and immediately after it, when Paris finally became aware that the French actually have no alternatives to the *appeasement* policy proposed by Britain or the Munich “compromise”, and all talks about French independence are merely a “face makeup” (Thomas 1999, 152).

Again, it is characteristic that it is these major *maladies* of French “great politics” that are emphasised not only by modern Western historiography but also by the diplomats of the Baltic countries and Poland residing in Paris at the end the thirties. The Lithuanian Envoy in Paris, Petras Klimas, discerned the Faustian complex the French foreign policy was obsessed with, well before Munich. Before Christmas of 1937, the diplomat wrote to Kaunas:

“The French cooperation with England in all major peace issues is becoming an outdated tradition, the Pact with Russia is becoming a constant counterbalance to drawing powers in a catastrophic direction, while the alliances with Asia Minor and Poland identify themselves” with the French policy of failures (A confidential report of 16 December 1937 of the Lithuanian Envoy in Paris P. Klimas to Minister S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 383, inv. 18, c. 305, p. 144).

Almost a year later, on the very eve of the Munich Conference, in mid-September 1938, the Adviser at the Lithuanian Embassy in France, Dr. Ladas Natkevičius, described the political atmosphere in Paris as follows: “French official circles are determined to catch at the smallest straw in order to save peace, [...] but the situation of France remains tragic” (A confidential report of 13 September 1938 of the Lithuanian Advisor at the Lithuanian Embassy in France Dr. L. Natkevičius to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, p. 187). Already after Munich, summing up the actions of the French political elite and the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September, and at the beginning of October 1938, Latvian and Estonian envoys in Paris stated that “during these hot days, the Quai d’Orsay was at a complete loss”, and it was impossible “to get anything clear” (A confidential report of 10 October 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy to France P. Klimas to Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, p. 196). During the days of the crisis, the Advisor at the Polish Embassy in Paris, Feliks Frankowski, and other Polish diplomats were also surprised at the

total confusion of the French officials, “losing their heads and [...] being not able to orient themselves in the new situation” (A confidential *Pro Memoria* of 13 October 1938 of the Advisor at the Lithuanian Embassy in France Dr. Ladas Natkevičius to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, p. 194).

However, in the face of the political-military dynamism of the Third Reich, as well as the rapidly unfolding political crisis, the *appeasement* political doctrine did not meet with general approval in Paris or, in particular, in London. The foreign policy pursued by Chamberlain was being ruthlessly stormed with “sarcastic attacks” by such outstanding British statesmen as David Lloyd George, Anthony Eden, Alfred Duff-Cooper, Clement Attlee and, in the words of journalists of that time, the *enfant terrible* of the British Parliament Winston Churchill (Martel 1987, 7; Kennedy 1983, 145–146; Furnia 1960, 386). It is noteworthy that at the end of 1938, official representatives of the Foreign Office also voiced different opinions regarding that issue in private and unofficial conversations.

For example, immediately after the Munich Conference, Laurence Collier, the Head of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office, expressed his straightforward opinion to the Lithuanian Envoy in London that “the Foreign Office is not actually responsible for the current policy because it is purely Chamberlain’s policy” (A confidential report No 88 of 6 October 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy in London B. K. Balutis to Minister S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 8, p. 180). Moreover, L. Collier spoke to B.K. Balutis, like prophet Isaiah of the Old Testament:

“I have long feared that we, the Brits, by these methods have been steering towards a storm and now we have it. And I am afraid it’s far from the end. We can have still more trouble over the coming six months. And what it will lead to, I don’t know... Nobody believes that this Czechoslovakian “crisis liquidation” in Munich would be the end of our trouble. In fact, I don’t think that the Prime Minister himself believes what the Parliament is telling” (A confidential report No 88 of 6 October 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy in London B.K. Balutis to Minister S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 8, p. 181).



Stasys Lozoraitis (1898–1983), Lithuanian foreign minister (1934–1938), minister plenipotentiary in Italy (1938–1940), head of the Lithuanian diplomatic service in exile (1940–1983). Press photo (1934), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/17/9462



Bronius Balutis, Lithuanian envoy in the United Kingdom (left), and Edward Raczynski, Polish ambassador in the UK (right), London, March 1939. Bronius Balutis (1880–1967), Lithuanian envoy to the USA (1928–1934), envoy to the UK (1934–1967). Press photo (March 1939), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/4/1792

It seems difficult to generalize explicitly what issues the diplomats of Kaunas and eventually other Baltic countries had to consider, what actions to take and how to project their states' international future, having heard such grim conclusions made by the long-lasting and experienced British diplomat. Even more so, when replying to the question asked by the Lithuanian diplomat “What should all the other states do after Berchtesgaden, Godesberg and Munich”, when hopes that the “Western Democracies can support them have vanished”, the British official openly admitted that with such a development of the international configuration, the small neighbours of Germany have only one way to solve their security problems: good relations and search for direct agreements with

the Third Reich. And due to such policy, these states “would not be blamed by anybody since they have no other way out” (A confidential report No 88 of 6 October 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy in London B.K. Balutis to Minister S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 8, p. 181).

Nevertheless, Lithuania was not inclined to follow the British recommendations. President Antanas Smetona was strongly opposed to the Third Reich. It is worth mentioning that the President of Lithuania formed his categorically negative opinion about the Nazi leader long before the British Prime Minister did. According to the USSR Envoy to Lithuania, Michail Karski, already at the beginning of 1935, in a conversation, he described Adolf Hitler as “a dangerous political madman”, who, for the sake of implementing his pseudo

ideas was ready “to exterminate half of Europe” (The diplomatic diary of the USSR Envoy to Lithuania M. Karski: 6 February 1935 visit to A. Smetona, conversation record, Archives of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, hereinafter: AVPRE, f. 05, inv. 15, file 109, c. 62, pp. 35–36). Unlike the British Prime Minister, Antanas Smetona himself was not, in principle, inclined either to communicate or negotiate with the Nazi leader. In the late autumn of 1938, already after the Munich Conference, when due to Klaipėda, the Lithuanian-German relations came to a complete standstill, the President categorically rejected the proposals made by the long-lasting Lithuanian Military Attaché to Germany, later – Envoy Col. Kazys Škirpa, and the Lithuanian General Consul in Königsberg Leopoldas Dymša, to meet with Adolf Hitler face to face and negotiate the issue of the fate of Klaipėda and the “settlement of relations” between the two countries, in general (A secret report of 28 November 1938 of the Lithuanian General Consul in Königsberg L. Dymša to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LCSA, f. 383, inv. 7, c. 2048, pp. 138–139). Now, to anticipate the events slightly, we would like to state that after Klaipėda was torn off on 22 March 1939, Antanas Smetona’s hostility towards the leader of the Third Reich increased even more.

After Munich, Lithuania found itself in a very awkward international configuration and faced the dilemma it had essentially never been forced to resolve since the end of the Great War, and the time of the Versailles Peace Conference: between the *appeasement* political theory, which was trying to synthesize pacifism and the Wilsonian approach to international relations, and the austere *Realpolitik* practice, establishing a new European balance of powers. The former, as an example of higher morality in international relations, was declared and welcomed publicly. Meanwhile, the latter, considered to be a morally obsolete and undesirable but until then a still effective and undeniable guide in the development of international relations, it was highly appreciated in backstage games. This dilemma became still more aggravated when the proponents of the *appeasement* policy in Munich, having finally admitted that the Versailles system was neither fair nor effective, and started to radically improve it by the well-known means, at the same time destroyed the psychological and moral basis for the defence of the system which for almost two decades had been, in many aspects, the *spiritus movens* of the international existence of Lithuania and other small states (A confidential report of 23 August 1937 of the Lithuanian Envoy to France P. Klimas to Minister S. Lozoraitis, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 29, pp. 164–165).

Many Lithuanian politicians and diplomats of the interwar period had great hopes in the League of Nations as the main constituent of the international security system, and a guarantor of Lithuania's successful international functioning. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stasys Lozoraitis, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Juozas Urbšys, and others admired the collective security system propagated by the League of Nations. Therefore, when at the end of September 1938, the League of Nations kept silence while “the amputation” of Czechoslovakia was carried out, S. Lozoraitis and nearly all of the Lithuanian ruling elite suffered from a painful moral blow. Lithuania, as a small nation and state, felt to be losing “the best defender” on the international arena and *de facto* losing ground from under its feet. In fact, it can be said that after Munich, Lithuanian foreign policy and diplomacy noticeably lost geopolitical landmarks, whereas the ruling elite of the country fell into disillusionment and even depression.

However, it is worth pointing out that in the very middle of the Sudeten crisis – June–September 1938 – having yielded to the pressure from Germany (A confidential *Pro memoria* of 20 February 1939 of a co-worker of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ex-Minister S. Lozoraitis to the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 54, p. 26), as well as Estonia and Latvia (Kasparavičius 2010, 46–90), and having taken the road of political neutrality, Lithuania itself notably contributed to the political decline of the League of Nations and the degradation of the collective security doctrine (mainly due to Estonian initiative, at the Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic Entente held on 10–12 June 1938, a preliminary decision was made to suspend the commitments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the provisions of Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and to refuse the foreign troops to cross their territory. In the autumn of the same year, this decision was formalized. On 19–21 September, in Geneva, at the Assembly of the League of Nations, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania officially stated that in order not to get involved in the political manipulations of other states, and to remain neutral, the Baltic countries reserve the right to the free interpretations of the provisions of Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations which sets out collective actions against the aggressor, and that in the future only at their own discretion will they make a decision of whether to join in imposing the collective sanctions to the aggressor or not). Despite the warnings from the Foreign Office (“Stiprinamas

Baltijos” 1938, p. 1) and particularly the Quai d’Orsay (A confidential report of 27 July 1938 of the Advisor at the Embassy in France Dr. L. Natkevičius to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 54, p. 150; a confidential report of 30 July of 1938 of L. Natkevičius to J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 54, p. 152), it meant that the neutrality policy will bring no real benefits for the Baltic States and will be merely *pium desiderium* (wishful thinking) but will weaken the League of Nations and, in the first place, their own international security.

## The Factors of the Lithuanian Policy after the Munich Crisis

With the continuous degradation of the League of Nations and the deepening geopolitical crisis in Europe, one more problem related to Lithuania and its small neighbours came to the surface: the disappointment of the great Western democracy powers in these states or even hostility towards them. When the summer of 1939 was approaching, the Quai d’Orsay Secretary General, Alexis Léger, on his comments concerning the negotiations of Riga and Tallinn with Berlin on concluding a non-aggression treaty, described the situation in the following way: the behaviour of the small countries in the international arena causes turmoil and provocation because they are driven by egoistical calculations, they pursue *politique de convenance* (policy of convenience) and *politique d’équilibre* (policy of balance), seek protection from the great democracies, yet they themselves act irresponsibly “and often even hinder interests and plans of the great powers” (A confidential report of 8 May 193 of the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Lithuania to France P. Klimas to the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 30, p. 66). Therefore, in such a situation,

“the ideas of freedom and independence of nations as defensible values become irrelevant [...], the great powers become disinterested in the fate of the small states and in the future they will take as much interest in them as it will be necessary for the interests of the great powers” (*ibid.*, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 30, p. 66).

This was already a threatening signal to Lithuania and the entire north-eastern region of the Baltic Sea.



Nevertheless, with the onset of the summer of 1939, the greatest problem lied not in the West but in the East. The worst thing was that while the great Western powers were still looking for a compromise with the Third Reich, the USSR also spotted its chance to return to the great European politics. Having inherited the imperial nature of foreign policy now enriched with the Bolshevik experience (Gorodetskiy 1999, 16, 355), the Soviet Union planned to repossess or even expand the territories hitherto ruled by the tsarist empire. It has often been observed in historiography that during the interwar period, Moscow had territorial claims for Poland and Romania and treated the emergence of the independent Baltic States more as a misunderstanding, temporary evidence of its political and economic weakness and a short-term territorial withdrawal prompted by it (Misiunas 1979, 171). Joseph Stalin, the dictator of the Bolshevik Russia, and the Soviet diplomacy directed by him cherished a massive “programme of territorial and political expansion”, the aim of which was not only to strengthen Russia’s military power, but in principle, to “prevent the formation of a state or coalition of states capable of posing a challenge to Russia’s security in Central and Eastern Europe” (Kennan 1967, 519–520).

Lithuanian sources indirectly confirm that the Bolsheviks were impressed by the political power of the tsarist Russia and cherished hopes to regain it sooner or later. Thus, in the mid-twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Lithuanian Envoy in Moscow, the poet Jurgis Baltrušaitis, once again asked the Soviets for diplomatic aid concerning the Vilnius case, the People’s Commissar for the Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Georgy Chicherin, declared:

“The Soviet Government remains favourable to Lithuanian national and state interests. Russia does not withdraw a promise to have its say and do everything it can if a difficult situation in Lithuania or damaged national interests should require. However, as regards the issue of Vilnius, here patience is needed since the Soviet Russia is not yet such a great power as the Russian empire used to be” (A secret report of 20 June 1925 of the Lithuanian Envoy to the USSR J. Baltrušaitis to Minister Valdemaras Čarneckis, LCSA, f. 383, inv. 7, c. 560, p. 21).

Therefore, it was recommended that the Lithuanian diplomats wait patiently until the Bolshevik Russia gathers its strength and regains the hitherto possessed geopolitical influence and international status in the Old Continent. Needless to say, the Kremlin did not divulge then the political cost that Lithuanians will have to pay “for Vilnius”.



Signing of the agreement concerning the German annexation of Klaipėda (Memel), Berlin, 22 March 1938. Lithuanian foreign minister Juozas Urbšys (left), German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (right). Juozas Urbšys (1896–1991), Lithuanian envoy in France (1933–1938), foreign minister (1938–1940), imprisoned in the Soviet Union (1940–1954). Press photo (1939), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/17/9496

Although during the entire interwar period Lithuania continuously felt Germany's destructive policy in Klaipėda, and because of the Soviet Russia, the problem of Vilnius and the conflict between Lithuania and Poland became practically insolvable, for a long time Lithuania's foreign policy was directed towards these two particular states, the alleged allies (A secret memorandum No 446 of 18 April 1935 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania S. Lozoraitis to the President of the Republic A. Smetona, *Lietuvos ir Lenkijos* 1995, 96–101). In order to self-advantageously resolve the territorial conflict with Poland and regain the historical capital, Lithuanian politicians and diplomats kept seeking political support or even protection from Berlin and Moscow. This resulted in the ostensibly common interests of Germany, Lithuania and the Soviet Union concerning Poland, and in the mid-twenties even a certain virtual political axis of Berlin-Kaunas-Moscow was formed



Antanas Smetona (1874–1944), President of Lithuania (1918–1920, 1926–1940). Press photo (1927), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/17/9478

that was directly aimed at Warsaw, and indirectly at the Versailles Peace system inasmuch as it guaranteed the territorial integrity of Poland. Such Lithuanian foreign policy strategy with minor exceptions lasted, in fact, until the spring of 1938, when diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland were established in an exceptionally undiplomatic way.

The war or peace dilemma in Europe was finally resolved on 23 August 1939, when the two then greatest totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union – signed the ill-famed Non-Aggression Pact with its secret protocols (*Nazi – Soviet Relations* 1948; Šepetyš 2002; Tauber 2000, 96–106; Read 1988). According to the secret protocol of the Pact, the signatories divided Poland, Romania and the Baltic States

into spheres of influence. This time, Lithuania was assigned to the German zone of influence, whereas Latvia, Estonia and Finland – to that of Russia. Western diplomats had no doubts that the bargain paid certain “political dividends” to Moscow and *de facto* let Germany untie its hands to begin the aggression against Poland. Although on August 25, the Agreement of Mutual Assistance between Great Britain and Poland was signed in London, it could not change the situation. During the last days of August, Monsignor Cesare Orsenigo, Apostolic Nuncio in Berlin, grimly stated that “here everyone is ready for war with really threatening cold-bloodedness”. A similar observation was made then by the Lithuanian Envoy in Berlin Col. K. Škirpa, who after his conversation with the Advisor to the Italian Embassy, Massimo Magistrati, immediately informed Kaunas that the Third Reich was fully technically and politically ready for one more “partition” of Poland (A confidential Pro Memoria of 31 August 1939 of the Lithuanian Envoy to Germany K. Škirpa to Minister J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 54, p. 149).

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began. The hectic attempts made on 1-2 September by the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, to find any alternative to war and “[...] in the last minute to save” peace, yielded no results (A secret Pro Memoria of 2 September 1938 of the Lithuanian Envoy to Germany K. Škirpa to the Head of the Political

Department Edvardas Turauskas, LCSA, f. 383, inv. 7, c. 2115, pp. 30–31). On 3 September, in compliance with alliance obligations towards Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. To tell the truth, they defied the most elementary logic of war, for they did not resort to active actions but took a passive position of defence (Roberts 1995, 148–149). In spite of this, soon, the Second World War was already raging and it finally became clear that the diplomatic efforts of the peace proponents to prevent the war collapsed. Even more so, two weeks later, *de facto*, the Bolshevik Eastern colossus also got involved in the war. According to the secret protocols of the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany of 23 August 1939, on 17 September, the Soviet Union launched an invasion of Eastern Poland. It took just a few days for the Red Army to seize eastern regions of the country – Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, The Vilnius Region – and surround the Republic of Lithuania from the south-east by an iron semi-ring. Under such circumstances, on 28 September 1939, the aggressors concluded one more bilateral pact. Germany and the USSR signed the Boundary and Friendship Treaty, which, in fact, meant a destruction of Poland's statehood and a revision of the "spheres of influence". In a secret additional protocol of the Treaty it was agreed that Germany additionally takes control over the Lublin voivodeship and part of the Warsaw voivodeship, and the Soviet Union is compensated for this by assigning Lithuania to its sphere of influence (*Nazi-Soviet Relations* 1948, 105–107). Thus, the Third Reich actually obtained the entire ethnographic Poland, whereas the USSR "successfully", without even becoming involved in the war with the Western allies, annexed the eastern regions of torn off Poland and formally expanded its influence towards the former territory of the tsarist empire from Helsinki in the north to Vilnius in the south.

According to the additional secret protocol signed by Germany and the Soviet Union on 28 September 1939, on the initiative of the Kremlin, "an exchange" of the Polish Lublin voivodeship and a part of the Warsaw voivodeship for the entire Lithuania was a well-considered and geopolitically weighted decision made by Stalin. In this way, the Soviet dictator was, in principle, striving for three important goals. Firstly, to avoid the formation of a large, influential, politically and culturally consolidated, and active, yet hardly controllable Polish ethno-political enclave in the western part of the USSR. Stalin was interested in history and was well aware of the patriotic nature of the Polish uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, in this way, he tried to avoid the role of Hitler's ally and

“a tearer” of “true Poland” in the eyes of Western societies, and strived to appear only as a gatherer and “returner” of the former Poland’s “non-Polish” territories to historical Russia (USSR). For the sake of clarity, on the eve of the Second World War, the area of Poland was 389,700 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population was about 35,339 million. After the partition carried out by Berlin and Moscow, Germany occupied 188,700 km<sup>2</sup> or 48.4% of the entire Polish territory with nearly 22,14 million inhabitants (62.7%). From this area, Adolf Hitler annexed a territory of 92,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of approximately 9 million and directly incorporated it into the Third Reich. The rest of the occupied Polish lands with approximately 13 million people comprised the so-called Generalgouvernement (General Governorate) which was under Berlin’s control. The Soviet Union received 201,000 km<sup>2</sup>, or 51.6% of the former territory of the Polish Republic with 13,199 million people (37.3%). From this area, a territory of 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 7,733 million inhabitants was ceded to the Belarussian SSR and a territory of 89,700 km<sup>2</sup> with 7,929 million people – to the Ukrainian SSR. According to the Soviet-Lithuanian Peace Treaty of 12 July 1920, the Soviet-Lithuanian Non-Aggression Pact of 28 September 1926, and the Soviet-Lithuanian Treaty on the Transfer of Vilnius, and the Vilnius Region to the Republic of Lithuania and Mutual Assistance, Lithuania regained its capital Vilnius as well as approximately one third of south-eastern Lithuania: a territory of 8,300 km<sup>2</sup> with nearly 537,000 inhabitants (Eberhardt 2000, 6).

Secondly, it was important to Stalin to expand the power of the Soviet Union all over the three Baltic States simultaneously and thus demonstrate to the world the might of the communist empire and the territorial “historic return” in the north-eastern Europe to the lands ruled by the tsarist empire. Thirdly, renouncing the purely Polish ethnical territories (the Lublin voivodeship and part of the Warsaw voivodeship), and defining the Soviet-German border along the line proposed in July 1920 by the British Government, as to where approximately the western border of the post-revolutionary Russia should be, Stalin sent a message to the leaders of the Western democratic powers that the true heir of the tsarist empire was ready for a dialogue and compromise with the Western Governments.

To anticipate the events slightly, it is possible to state that a year and a half later, such a policy allowed Stalin to dissociate from the factual union with Nazi Germany and lay political foundations for the

anti-Hitler coalition with the Western Governments at the time when the Soviet Union, being battered by the Nazi Germany, needed it so badly. He even started a reserved diplomatic dialogue with the Polish Government-in-Exile led by General Władysław Sikorski, residing in London. Moreover, mainly because of this geopolitical manoeuvre (the withdrawal of the claims to the historical Polish lands with undisputed Polish majority), in 1943–1945, in the negotiations with the Western allies in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam, Joseph Stalin managed to gain their approval of the western border of the USSR with Poland with some minor corrections, in principle, as it had been defined in the secret agreements with the Third Reich, and delimited in effect of the conquest of Poland in 1939.

## The Disintegration of Baltic Independence

The factual destruction of Poland's statehood and "the right" to the Baltic States negotiated from Germany had, in principle, catastrophic consequences for Lithuania and its northern neighbours. After the destruction of Poland, these countries, having found themselves in the iron grip of the totalitarian regimes of Moscow and Berlin, *de facto* lost independence and were actually counting the last months of their independence. As history showed, the political agreement between Nazi Germany and the Stalinist USSR of 28 September 1939 was decisive for Lithuania and the Lithuanians. In a historical short-term perspective, it led to the factual destruction of the Lithuanian statehood and a tragic fate of the Lithuanians. By this agreement, for long decades, Lithuania and the Lithuanians remained cut off from the Western culture and civilization, suffered the Soviet mass repression, terror and loss of hundreds of thousands of people.

Between the end of September and the beginning of October 1939, having taken advantage of the favourable international and geopolitical conjuncture (the war in Europe and the factual destruction of the Polish State), in less than a couple of weeks, the Soviet Union implemented its long-cherished plans and *de facto* established its protectorate over the Baltic States. On 28 September 1939, Moscow successfully imposed the 'Mutual Assistance Treaty', which also presupposed the Soviet protectorate, on Tallinn, and on 5 October – on Riga. Lithuania's northern neighbours, the allies of the Baltic Entente – Estonia and Latvia, gave in to the establishment of the Soviet protectorate without even informing Kaunas (Ilmjärv



2000, 91, 95; Turauskas 1990, 74). The coordination of foreign policy and diplomatic consultations between the allies set forth in the Baltic Entente Treaty were ignored (Treaty of Baltic Cooperation of 12 September 1934, *Dailidė* 1939, vol. 2, 237).

Some documents of the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation as well as historiographical researches make it possible to claim that in the autumn of 1939, by establishing its factual protectorate over the Baltic States, the Kremlin consciously started the blackmail campaign in the north (Estonia) and finished it in the south (Lithuania). As recent research suggest, Kremlin's political influence was probably the greatest in Estonia (Butkus 1998, 150–153, 158). It was here that the Kremlin expected to break the Baltic Entente ring in the easiest way. One cannot preclude the possibility that the Kremlin was stimulated by the “pragmatism” demonstrated by the Estonian Government and military leadership during the first weeks of the war. According to the Estonian historian, Magnus Ilmjärv, in September 1939, Estonia, unlike Lithuania and Latvia, was not determined to carry out additional military mobilisation and, in general, “didn't do anything to preserve its security”, which implies that Estonian leaders “already at the beginning of September had decided to surrender to the Soviet Union” and were, in the first place, only thinking how, having come to a peaceful agreement with the Soviets, to wait for the war between the USSR and Germany, and the assistance from the latter (Ilmjärv 2000, 90). Under similar circumstances, Riga then also obeyed the Kremlin's dictate and its political elite continued to believe that Germany's political withdrawal from the northeastern region of the Baltic Sea was tactical and temporary, even after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

Meanwhile, as stated by Soviet diplomats themselves, despite previous partnership between Lithuania and the USSR, in the autumn of 1939, out of all Baltic countries, Kaunas was the most retrograde in accepting the factual protectorate of Moscow. In his analytical note to the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, the Advisor of the USSR Plenipotentiary Representation in Lithuania, V. Semyonov, summed up the negotiations held on this issue and Moscow's pressure on Kaunas as follows:

“As it is known, Lithuania was the last of the Baltic countries that signed the treaty of mutual assistance with the USSR, and only with the greatest difficulties. Its ruling circles were even ready to renounce Vilnius, provided that the Soviet garrisons were not deployed in Lithuania”

(A secret report No 220 of 3 June 1940 “On Lithuanian foreign policy” of the Advisor of the USSR Plenipotentiary Representation in Lithuania, V. Semyonov, to the People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, V. Molotov, his deputy Vladimir Dekanozov, and the Collegium of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, AVPRE, f. 0151, inv. 31, file 57, c. 1, p. 122).

Kaunas obeyed the Kremlin’s dictate only after the Head of the Soviet Government and People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, affirmed to the Lithuanian delegation that in case the Mutual Assistance Treaty was rejected, the Vilnius Region will be attached to the Belarus SSR, whereas in Lithuania, surrounded on all sides by the Soviets and the Nazi, after the capitulation of Estonia and Latvia, Soviet military bases will, in any case, be established by force.

Thus, in the autumn of 1939, it was not very difficult or problematic for Moscow “to agree” with Kaunas peacefully due to a whole range of significant reasons and circumstances: 1) for such “an agreement”, it had prudently secured an indulgence (the secret protocol) from Berlin; 2) as of 18 September 1939, the Soviets directly held Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania and a true “political gem”, and threatened to Sovietize it; 3) after Moscow immediately signed the Mutual Assistance treaties with Tallinn and Riga, Kaunas faced a geopolitical vacuum and knockdown of the foreign policy pursued hitherto, since when suddenly the joint action doctrine of the Baltic Entente failed (Anderson 1978, 128), it actually had no alternative variants of foreign policy; 4) rational diplomatic activity and foreign policy in Lithuania was undoubtedly complicated by the situation in the West, too: the kaleidoscopically changing geopolitical situation in Europe as well as hardly predictable international configuration; 5) the Soviet political and military encirclement of the Lithuanian borders from the south, east and north; 6) the conviction of an absolute majority of the Lithuanian politicians, diplomats and society that, following the example of the great eastern neighbour, Lithuania must take advantage of the new political conjuncture and “finally” resolve the issue concerning the capital and the south-eastern border. This political logic was, most probably, best characterized by the already mentioned Col. K. Škirpa, who immediately after the second Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, stated in his report from Berlin to the Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys to Kaunas that:



Kazys Škirpa (1895–1979), Chief of Staff of the Lithuanian Army (1925–1926), Lithuanian attaché militaire in Germany (1927–1937), envoy at the League of Nations (1937–1938), envoy in Poland (1938), envoy in Germany (1938–1940). After the Soviet annexation of Lithuania, he stayed in Germany, intending to form Lithuanian government under German occupation (June 1941, an attempt blocked by Nazi authorities), in exile in France, Ireland and USA (1945–1979). Press photo (1938), National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/4/979

“The Russian-German treaty of 28 September on Poland’s partitioning, which has, in fact, already taken place, is the reality of such nature that could hardly be changed by anything. In order to change it, it is necessary that such a power emerge that would not only defeat Germany but also force the Soviet Russia to withdraw from Poland. Unfortunately, there is no such power [...] in Europe” (A secret report of 2 October 1939 of the Lithuanian Envoy to Germany K. Škirpa to Minister J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1 c. 40, pp. 100–101).

The Treaty of 10 October 1939 with the Soviet Union enabled Lithuania to regain Vilnius, yet also implied the establishment of military bases of the Red Army in the country and a factual protectorate of the USSR over Lithuania. It took no time for the nation to adopt a sarcastic attitude towards the new geopolitical situation. Already in October 1939, in Kaunas, the temporary capital, and in some other Lithuanian cities and towns the wordplay “Vilnius ours, but Lithuania is Russia’s” [Vilnius musu, Lietuva Rusu] became popular. New folklore got so widely spread in the country that the authorities had to resort to administrative measures: penalties and detention at the police station for several days. Nevertheless, it did not save Lithuania.

In the spring of 1940, the eight-month deceptive silence in the Western front was broken, and the positional, the so-called ‘phony’ or ‘confetti war game’, came to an end. The Third Reich resumed military operations in the West: on 9 April, for the first time in military history, Germans used airborne troops and in a very short time occupied Denmark and attacked Norway, and on 10 May, invaded the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg. On 14 May, the Netherlands fell, and on 17 May, Brussels also capitulated. During these days, the Lithuanian Envoy in Paris, P. Klimas, wrote to Kaunas:

“The attack on the Netherlands and Belgium shocked the society here and made it understand that a real, decisive war has started only now. [...] The great, decisive moment has come when it must become clear who should live in Europe: Germany with its hegemony or France and England with their ideology of democratic freedom” (A confidential report of 14 May 1940 of the Lithuanian Envoy to France P. Klimas to Minister J. Urbšys, LCSA, f. 648, inv. 1, c. 31, p. 270).

At approximately the same time, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Galeazzo Ciano, in a narrow circle of friends described the renewed confrontation of the Third Reich with Western democracies more wittily: both blocs seek political hegemony in the world but the latter would be better because it is “the hegemony of golf, whiskey and chewing gum” (Moseley 1999, 88).

In April-June 1940, Western Europe faced a military and political catastrophe that destroyed the geopolitical equilibrium of the Old Continent in one go, and simply shattered the foundations of Lithuania's geopolitical security. The USSR, which for two decades had been looming in the vast reaches of Eurasia patiently waiting for its hour to come (*Istoriya* 2002, 150–151; Nevezhin 1997, 14, 67), instantaneously took advantage of the geopolitical turmoil and political paralysis in the West. On the same day, when the Third Reich troops marched into Paris, around 11 p.m., the Lithuanian Envoy in Moscow was issued a USSR ultimatum to the Lithuanian Government containing baseless accusations and aggressive demands which were incompatible with national sovereignty (A confidential report of 14 June 1940 of the Lithuanian Envoy to the USSR Dr. L. Natkevičius to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija* 1993, 254–256; a coded telegram of 15 June 1940 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys and the Lithuanian Envoy in Moscow Dr. L. Natkevičius from Moscow to Kaunas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija* 1993, 256). On the night from June 14 to 15, at the last meeting, under pressure from the right and left opposition, under the circumstances of general confusion, chaos and political disorientation, the Lithuanian Government accepted Moscow's ultimatum. It marked the end of the Republic of Lithuania. In the afternoon of 15 June, Red Army units occupied Lithuania and the years of the Soviet terror began. International law was defied, and the Lithuanian-Soviet treaties that were still in force and which were supposed to be the basis for mutual relations between the two countries and the foundation of Lithuania's external security and stability, were brutally broken (Eidintas 1992, 171).

The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939 did not emerge in a vacuum or unexpectedly. The occupation and annexation of Lithuania and other Baltic countries had long been planned by the Kremlin. It took nearly the entire interwar period. Quite many facts testify to the intentions contained in the plans devised well in advance by the leaders of the Bolshevik Russia. Here, we will mention only two of them. On 25 September 1939, when the Soviet-Estonian negotiations on the conclusion of the mutual assistance treaty were held in Moscow, Molotov, when demanding that Estonia allow the USSR to establish the military bases on its soil, gave a straightforward and quite cynical speech to the Estonian delegation:

“20 years ago, we were placed in that Finnish 'bog' and the USSR had to confine to a small part of the Gulf of Finland. Do you think this can remain forever? At that time, the Soviet Union was powerless, now it has grown in the economic, military and cultural aspects. The Soviet Union now is a great power whose interests must be considered. Tell you what, the Soviet Union must expand its security system and for this it needs a gateway to the Baltic Sea. [...] I ask you, don't make us resort to use force against Estonia” (*Ot pakta Molotova* 1990, 137–138).

The statements made by Moscow's diplomats in Washington confirm the fact that in the interwar period the Bolshevik Russia did not abandon the idea of regaining the north-western provinces and occupying the Baltic States in 1940, it imagined to be acting almost as a lawful suzerain of those countries. For example, the Ambassador of the USSR, Konstantin Umansky, when explaining the reasons and circumstances of the incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the USSR to the Department officials, repeatedly emphasized the historical dependence of the Baltic countries on Russia which “is longer than the whole independence of the USA” (A record of the conversation of 1 August 1940 of the Ambassador of the USSR to the USA, K. Umansky, with the Acting Secretary of State of the USA, Sumner Welles, and the Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs of the State Department, L. W. Henderson, *Na chashe vesov* 1999, t. 2, 227), and the ostensible wish of these nations “to live in the Russian dominion” (Pro memoria of 27 July 1940 regarding the conversation of the Acting Secretary of State of the USA, S. Welles, with the Ambassador of the USSR, K. Umansky, *Foreign Relations of United States. Diplomatic Papers 1940* 1958, vol. III, 330). K. Umansky was particularly active in defending Russia's (USSR's) “historical rights”

to the Baltic States on 23 July 1940, in Washington, after the State Department failed to recognize the notorious declaration on the “incorporation” of the Baltic States into the USSR. On 15 August, in his meeting at the State Department with the Acting Secretary of State of the USA, S. Welles, K. Umansky was explaining that the incorporation of the Baltic countries into the USSR was merely a recognition of the fact that those “small states join the big state they historically belong to” (A record of the conversation of 15 August 1940 of the State Secretary S. Welles with the Ambassador of the USSR to the USA, K. Umansky, *Na chashe vesov* 1999, 235). In order to justify “the historical right” of Russia (USSR) to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Moscow’s diplomats in Washington referred to the USA formula of 28 July 1922, concerning the international recognition of the Baltic States, which, in K. Umansky’s words, “contained a stipulation” about a temporary nature of the separation of the Baltic States from the territory of Russia and even an objection against “detaching these states from the territory of Russia” (A record of the conversation of 15 August 1940 of the State Secretary, S. Welles, with the Ambassador of the USSR to the USA, K. Umansky, *Na chashe vesov* 1999, 235). In principle, it meant that the Kremlin was trying to impose the political logic and consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on Washington, as well. However, to no avail. The consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – were never legitimized by the USA Government, France, Great Britain, the Vatican, Switzerland, Argentina or other states of the world.

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