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Poland in the Political and Military Strategy of Lithuania, October 1938 – October 1939

The international and geopolitical development of Europe between the two world wars was in fact determined by a few key factors. The first was the peace system of Europe created in Versailles in 1919 led by the League of Nations. The second was geopolitical, economic and cultural-ideological interests of the Great Powers. The third was an ability or inability of medium and small countries of Europe to contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Old Continent. All the three underlying factors affecting the international development of interwar Europe were by no means oriented only to maintaining the *status quo*. Differences among them in years were becoming only more conspicuous and the stability as well as peace in Europe gradually cracked. Unfortunately, noble goals of the LN to ensure peace in Europe in many cases lacked effective means to be put into practice. Therefore, the political supremacy of the organisation in international affairs was nominal rather than actual. Decisions of this most influential international institution of the interwar period often depended on the interests of the Great Powers dominating in that institution at one time or another and their power balance.¹ No wonder that in time the moral authority of the League of Nations diminished. Lithuania was among the first to encounter with inability of the League to solve international conflicts objectively, when after lengthy disputes and a brief war against Poland, Vilnius – the historical capital of Lithuania – was given to Poland.²

At that time overly whimsical and varying geopolitical goals and economic interests of the great democracies also prevented to create united, stable and peaceful Europe. France overwhelmed with fears of rebirth of

¹ R. Dell, *The Geneva Racket, 1920–1939*, London, [1941], p. 8ff.

² H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, 1964, p. 452.

the German military power wanted a 'great alliance' with Russia, which actually existed no longer, and England in general mistrusted the continental Europe and had hopes to either win the position of the strategic and decisive 'weight' on the scales of European power and political balance, or to become the herald and vanguard of the American policy in the Old Continent. However, when the Bolshevik dictatorship established itself in Russia and the United States of America retreated into the policy of 'splendid isolation', neither Paris nor London managed to implement their global geopolitical doctrines. Therefore, the great democracies of Europe had to be content with construction of smaller geopolitical configurations. Thus, almost by the mid-1930s attempting to strengthen its security and establish its dominance in the continental Europe, France relentlessly searched for means to secure stability of the Versailles system, i.e. built various political-military alliances. Meanwhile Great Britain actually worked in the opposite direction. The British were certain that conservation of the Versailles peace system with France's dominance and Germany's political isolation were incompatible with British interests and maintaining peace in Europe. Therefore, London looked for ways of peacefully reforming the Versailles system and creating a geopolitical environment in Europe which would be more beneficial to their interests and maintaining of peace.

A retrospective view forces us to admit that the US political turning back to Europe did not serve to maintaining peace. On the one hand, victory of proponents of the 'nice isolation' in the USA essentially meant that this rising economic and political power was dissatisfied with the *status quo* and *de facto* shaped in the war and Europe after the Great War and also joined the reservist files. On the other hand, the two physically largest countries of the continental Europe, i.e. Germany and Bolshevik Russia (since 1922 the USSR), in fact attempted to destroy the Versailles peace system and the power balance it represented in Europe and worked towards this aim meticulously methodically, often agreeing permanently.³ Berlin and Moscow did not want to reconcile to their role of political outsiders of Europe, and harboured revanchist or even imperialistic plans regarding their neighbours. Weimar Germany wanted both to get rid of the military-political-financial burden assigned to it by the Versailles peace treaty and dreamed of the Austrian *Anschluss*, and had substantial territorial claims against Poland and Czechoslovakia, smaller claims against Lithuania and to some extent against Denmark.⁴

³ K. Rosenbaum, *Community of Fate. German-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1922-1928*, Syracuse (New York), 1965, pp. 220-241.

⁴ H. v. Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations, 1918-1933*, Baltimore-London, 1971.

Having inherited the imperial nature of foreign policy from the *Tsar* Russia and enriched it with its Bolshevik experience,⁵ the Soviet Union crafted its return to or even expansion of the lands ruled by the *Tsar* Empire. Moscow had territorial claims to Poland and Romania and treated the rise of independent Baltic States as a misunderstanding in general, a sign of its own temporary political-economic weakness and a temporal territorial retreat determined by such weakness.⁶ The Lithuanian historical sources confirm the fact that the political power of the *Tsar* Russia appealed to the Soviet foreign policy and diplomacy and that Bolsheviks wished to regain it to some extent. Already in the mid-1920s, when Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the Lithuanian envoy to Moscow, requested the Soviet assistance in Vilnius case, Georgiy Chicherin, the USSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, typically explained:

The Soviet government regarding interests of the nation and state of Lithuania remains favourable. Russia does not refuse to have a say and do whatever it can, if it is necessary for a difficult position of Lithuania or infringed national interests. However, as for Vilnius issue, it requires patience and endurance and in the present situation where Soviet Russia is not yet a powerful state as the Russian Empire used to be, the Soviet government could not contribute to any immediate change of the current position of Vilnius Region.⁷

Such speech meant that the Lithuanian diplomat was recommended to wait for Bolshevik Russia to accumulate its power, get back its military influence and political status held by the *Tsar's* Empire in the Old Continent and to take actions for the benefit of its own interests and those of the Republic of Lithuania. Preconceived imperial intentions of the heads of Bolshevik Russia are evidenced by the statement of Vyacheslav Molotov, the USSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, to the Estonian delegation at Moscow on 25 September 1939, in early stages of the negotiations between Estonia and the USSR concerning entering into a treaty of mutual aid. Demanding stationing of the Soviet military bases in Estonia, Molotov told the Estonian delegation bluntly and rather cynically that:

20 years ago we were planted into that Finnish «pond» and the USSR was forced to confine itself with the small portion of the Finnish Bay. Do you really think it may

⁵ G. Gorodetskii, *Rokovoi samoobman. Stalin i napadenye Germanii na Sovetskiy Soyuz*, Moskva, 1999, p. 355.

⁶ R.J. Misiunas, 'The role of the Baltic States in Soviet relations with the West during the interwar period,' in: *The Baltic in International Relations*, New York, 1979, p. 171.

⁷ Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas, Vilnius (Lithuanian Central State Archive - hereafter: LCVA), fond 383, ap. 7, b. 560, fo. 21, 'The secret message of an envoy to Moscow J. Baltrušaitis' to Minister Valdemaras Čarneckis, 30 June, 1925.

stay like this forever? Then the Soviet Union was helpless and now it has grown in an economic, military and cultural aspect. The Soviet Union is now the Great Power whose interests should be taken into account. I am telling you that the Soviet Union needs to expand its security system and for that it needs an access to the Baltic Sea. [...] Please, do not make us to use force against Estonia.⁸

The fact that Bolshevik Russia in the period between the two world wars never renounced its idea of regaining the lost territories of the *Tsar's* Empire and in occupying the Baltic States in the summer of 1940 it imagined that it acted almost as a suzerain of those countries is evidenced by the official statements of Moscow diplomats. For instance, the USSR envoy to Washington Konstantin Umanskiy explaining to officials of the State Department the causes and circumstances for integration of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the USSR repeatedly emphasised the historical subordination of the Baltic States to Russia, which lasted 'longer than the entire independence of the USA'⁹ and the desire of those nations 'to live in the Russian dominion'.¹⁰ Particularly enthusiastically Umanskiy defended 'historical rights' of Russia to the Baltic States in the meeting of 15 August 1940 with Acting US State Secretary Sumner Welles, telling him in forthright terms that the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR meant nothing else but the fact that those 'small states joined a large state, a part of which they were historically'.

Nevertheless, little political maturity or moral politics was demonstrated by the third factor of the European international politics, namely by the medium and small states formed after the Great War, which by uniting their forces eventually had prospects to become a quite serious and influential subject of the international politics. However, the nationalistic ideology, radically perceived as the right of self-determination of nations, a misleading understanding and focusing on historical heritage, low political culture and a wish to optimally achieve their own egoistic interests led to the situation where after the Great War just restored/established new states in some cases had fiercer conflicts among themselves than the old Great Powers. To clarify the situation it is enough mentioning the irrational territorial conflict of Lithuania and Poland over the Vilnius Region which lasted the entire interwar period, territorial claims of Poland to Czechoslovakia

⁸ *Ot pakta Molotova - Ribentropa do dogovora o bazakh. Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. P. Vaves, O. Zhuryari, Tallinn, 1990, p. 137ff.

⁹ *Na chashe vesov: Estonia i SSSR. 1940 god i yevo posledstvia*, Tallinn, 1999, vol. 2, p. 227.

¹⁰ Acting the US State Secretary S. Welles: 'Pro memoria' about the conversation with the USSR envoy K. Umanskiy, 27 July, 1940,' in: *Foreign Relations of United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1940*, vol. 3, Washington, 1958, p. 330.

(Teschen/Cieszyn/Těšín] Region), and to some extent and for some time to Latvia (the 6th rural district of Latgale). Territorial clashes occurred between Hungary from one side and Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia from the other side, also between Greece and Turkey. From 28 June 1919, when the Versailles Peace Treaty was signed, to 31 August 1939, the last day of peace, Europe was permanently shaken by a fever of various international conflicts. Within mere twenty years of independence, irrespective of serious external threats, Lithuania and Poland showed bravado by balancing on the edge of the mutual war at least three times: in 1919/1920, in the autumn of 1927 and in the spring of 1938.

Despite the fact that in the interwar period Lithuania continually sensed the destructive propaganda and policy of Germany in Klaipėda (Memel),¹¹ and to some extent thanks to Soviet Russia (and the USSR) the problem of Vilnius and the conflict between Lithuania and Poland became practically unsolvable,¹² throughout that long period the foreign policy of Lithuania was strategically oriented to those two revisionist countries, the so-called allies. Seeking to solve the territorial conflict with Poland for their own benefit and to get back their historical capital, Lithuanian politicians and diplomats continually sought political support or even patronage of Berlin and Moscow. This is how the supposedly common interests of Germany, Lithuania and the Soviet Union developed regarding Poland and in the mid-1920s even a peculiar political axis Berlin - Kaunas - Moscow shaped and was directly targeted against Warsaw and indirectly against the Versailles peace system, to the extent the latter guaranteed the territorial integrity of Poland. Such concept of the Lithuanian foreign policy existed almost until the mid-1930s when in Germany national-socialists came to power led by Adolf Hitler and then it became finally clear that the revanchist policy of Germany to Lithuania was no less dangerous than to Poland. In the early spring of 1935 the Lithuanian Christian magazine for intellectuals *Židinys* published a prophetic article: 'Germany from establishment of the Hitlerian regime and even before that quite clearly by its actions proved that it sought the military power under cover of various slogans of national honour, equal rights and similar statements. [...] Bravely facing the reality we must state that Europe is rushing in leaps towards a war'.¹³

¹¹ P. Žostautaitė, *Klaipėdos kraštas 1923-1939*, Vilnius, 1992; V. Žalys, *Ringens um Identität. Warum Litauen zwischen 1923 und 1939 im Memelgebiet keinen Erfolg hatte*, Lüneburg, 1993.

¹² A. Kasparavičius, *Didysis X Lietuvos užsienio politikoje*, Vilnius, 1996.

¹³ 'Europa ir Vokietija,' *Židinys* 1935, no. 3, p. 341f.

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A smooth, nearly model dissolution of the Austrian state in the political blast-furnace of the Third *Reich* in the spring of 1938 left a pessimistic impression on the Lithuanian diplomatic corps. Lithuanian envoy to Paris Petras Klimas in his message to Kaunas immediately after the Austrian events wrote with open bitterness: 'The catastrophe which so suddenly befell Austria [...] caused in the public opinion of France one might say a uniform «horror», but we should openly state that sad as it is the present reaction already did not contain the effort or a belief that something might be still amended [...] the current atmosphere in Paris has become apathetic, narrowly egoistic and without principles'.¹⁴ The Austrian *Anschluss* proved to the Lithuanian diplomats that Europe already did not have the power which would and could resist 'the international gangsterism' and 'fist users' due to which 'all rules of the international morals, behind which the small countries not bound by alliances still felt some security' are vanishing.

Poland, using the opportunity of the disconcerted political situation in Europe after the Austrian *Anschluss* and seeking to consolidate the northern flank of its own country¹⁵ as well as predetermine implementation of the idea of the unified bloc of neutral countries from Estonia to Romania,¹⁶ resorted to 'the method of totalitarian diplomacy'¹⁷ and on 17 March handed the ultimatum note to Lithuania demanding to establish diplomatic relations between the countries immediately. Not really having a choice and efficient international diplomatic or political support, except for the moral one,¹⁸ the government of Lithuania on 19 March accepted the demand of Warsaw. However, the coerced entering into diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland and the official exchange of envoys, while the problem of Vilnius remained unsolved, did not mean that on the eve of the war a positive breakthrough occurred in the mutual relationship between the two neighbouring countries. The political trust of Lithuania in its southern neighbour hardly increased even after the establishment of diplomatic relations. It was determined by a number of significant reasons: 1) in many cases Kaunas treated the foreign policy pursued by Józef Beck as erroneous

¹⁴ LCVA, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 29, fo. 67, The secret message of envoy to Paris P. Klimas, 'The Austrian Events' to Minister S. Lozoraitis, 14 March, 1938.

¹⁵ P.S. Wandycz, 'Poland between East and West,' in: *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. The A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-Five Years*, ed. G. Martel, Boston-London-Sydney, 1987, p. 194.

¹⁶ L. Švec, *Čekoslovensko a pobaltské státy 1918-1939*, Praha, 2001, p. 274.

¹⁷ B.B. Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1932-1939*, New York-London, 1963, p. 109.

¹⁸ A. Gaigalaitė, 'Penkios dienos Lietuvos istorijoje,' in: *Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai. Istorija*, Vilnius, 1997, vol. 36, p. 135ff.

and even 'mean', and promptly leading both to 'the fourth division of Poland', and to provoking of the political catastrophe in the entire Europe;¹⁹ 2) Kaunas feared that using the new international crisis in Europe Warsaw would go down the beaten path and hand Lithuania another ultimatum by which it would already directly threaten to subdue sovereignty of Lithuania for its own interests; 3) the great democracies of the West no longer encouraged Lithuania to trust Poland in the late 1930s;²⁰ 4) no doubt that after the establishment of diplomatic relations the position of Kaunas was still substantially affected by the contribution and inertia of the previous anti-Polish propaganda which was being instilled for over a dozen years.

Due to a set of such reasons the Lithuanian diplomats in Paris, London and other capitals of Europe acted so that Lithuania would not get too close and too friendly with Poland. Already from the first days of the diplomatic relations with Poland, Lithuanian envoy to Paris Klimas relentlessly worked for Lithuania not to get 'entangled' into the Polish 'political orbit and combinations in the Eastern Europe'.²¹ Klimas as well as the majority of diplomats at that time did not even dare to think about a possible cooperation with Poland. His colleague and adviser at the embassy in Paris, Dr. Ladas Natkevičius commenting Beck's policy during the *Sudeten* crisis and Munich conference as well as reactions of French politicians-diplomats concerning Poland in his message to Kaunas stated that 'Poland left a poor impression for Czechoslovakian and other French alliances'.²² After a week in his other message to Kaunas he added: 'it seems the Polish as if have a common plan with Germany and are implementing it in the Eastern and central Europe'. The opinion of Klimas and Natkevičius was supported by envoy to London Bronius Kazys Balutis, who in his message to Kaunas argued that: 'still a headfirst rush to the arms of Poland due to the threat of Germany in my opinion would not actually eliminate the danger, but in fact it would complicate our position by rousing Polish appetite who would grab the opportunity for [...] realization of their historical goals'.²³

¹⁹ LCVA, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 29, fo. 260, The confidential message of envoy to Paris Klimas' to Minister J. Urbšys, 19 December, 1938.

²⁰ *Ib.*, fo. 159, Adviser of the embassy in Paris L. Natkevičius' confidential message to Minister Lozoraitis, 17 August, 1938; *ib.*, fo. 193, Natkevičius' confidential 'Pro memoria' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 October, 1938.

²¹ *Ib.*, fo. 80f., The confidential message of envoy to Paris Klimas to Minister Lozoraitis, 25 March, 1938.

²² *Ib.*, fo. 190, Adviser of the embassy in Paris Natkevičius' confidential message to General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, 5 October, 1938.

²³ *Ib.*, b. 8, fo. 121ff., Envoy to London B.K. Balutis' confidential message No. 59 'Crisis regarding Czechoslovakia' to Minister Lozoraitis, 30 May, 1938.

Such ideas of Balutis concerning Poland remained mostly unchanged until the very spring of 1939.²⁴ Envoy to Moscow Jurgis Batrušaitis and envoy to Buenos Aires Jonas Aukštuolis also encouraged a suspicious or at least prudent approach towards the government of Poland.²⁵ Moreover, such strategy was supported by President Antanas Smetona, who believed that the military-political potential of Poland in comparison to other great states of Europe was insubstantial and its international authority was scandalous, therefore, any close union with Poland would bring Lithuania more damage than benefit. In the president's opinion even if the problem of Vilnius is solved for the benefit of Lithuania, there was no point to go further than being good neighbours with Poland. Such opinion had also the vast majority of the Lithuanian General Staff. Due to Vilnius problem Poland remained the major and most threatening enemy in the military strategy of Lithuania throughout the interwar period. The defence operation plans 'L' (Poles), 'V' (Germans) and 'L+V' (Poles + Germans), which were prepared and approved by the High Headquarters of the Lithuanian Army in 1936/1937 (effective for a long time until November 1939) projected that under certain circumstances Lithuania might be attacked by Poles alone, Germans alone or Poles and Germans together.²⁶ It was intended to defend against the eventual enemy not by positional warfare, but by active manoeuvres and retreating into the back of the country and later organizing guerrilla warfare.²⁷ To fortify its defensive possibilities against external enemies, Lithuania in spring 1939 made efforts to form a military alliance with Latvia and Estonia. Unfortunately, that plan failed. Lithuanian militaries did not seriously consider hints of Polish militaries that Lithuania could struggle against the eventual aggression of Germany together with Poland since the former thought that Poland would be the weak link among the Great Powers.

Still it is significant that Lithuania having adjusted its political and diplomatic tactics regarding Poland, in the spring of 1938 Lithuania did not abandon its strategic goal of foreign affairs, i.e. on the first actual occasion to regain Vilnius. Specifically, this strategic goal was only frozen and covered more deeply. The essence of the new Lithuanian diplomacy was expressed by abovementioned Klimas in the spring of 1938 who characteristically wrote to Minister Stašys Lozoraitis:

²⁴ *Ib.*, b. 9, fo. 38, Envoy to London Balutis' confidential message 'Pro memoria: Relations with Germany' to Minister Lozoraitis, 13 February, 1939.

²⁵ *Ib.*, fond 383, ap. 7, b. 2069, fo. 6, Envoy to Buenos Aires J. Aukštuolis' confidential message to General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Urbšys, 8 April, 1938.

²⁶ V. Statkus, *Lietuvos ginkluotosios pajėgos 1918–1940 metais*, Chicago, 1986, pp. 199–206.

²⁷ *Ib.*, p. 252.

In the demoralized international atmosphere of gangsterism the principal debates with a bit stronger covenant are meaningless. We must survive that ugly moment of crumbling morals through technical and practical saving of the situation and keep the greatest problems in our minds for the better times. Neither press, nor the public should protect the principle '*mises au point*', since they would only trigger the 'force reaction' against which our idealism will have to surrender once again. The Union for the Liberation of Vilnius and all the so-called patriotic slogans will needlessly annoy the foe and make it easier for it to bring further ultimatums in the worst circumstances for us. The government in this case should not hesitate or refer to the so-called 'public sentiment'. At present we may only channel the entire era of our relations with Poland through the technique, which has no principles or shades of aspirations, because only in such a way the technique does not create (if only it remains the pure technique) any assumptions for our national ideology and agenda.²⁸

Influenced by Lithuanian envoys, Minister Lozoraitis, the Army Chief General Stašys Raštikis, some other high officials and the opposition, and President Antanas Smetona in the autumn of 1938 agreed to discontinue activities of the Union for the Liberation of Vilnius and close down Vilnius Foundation. The termination of activities of the then popular public organizations was primarily intended as elimination of the reasons which might become a pretext for new relationship crises between Lithuania and Poland. Lithuanian diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and abroad were certain that in the fragile and complex international constellation a new relationship crisis between Lithuania and Poland would have catastrophic consequences for independence and statehood of Lithuania.

The sombre mood of the Lithuanian diplomacy in the autumn of 1938 was even more darkened by controversial²⁹ decisions of Munich conference. 'Amputation' of Czechoslovakia and unnaturally optimistic faces of representatives of the European largest countries concerning 'preservation of peace' left a stifling impression on the Lithuanian diplomatic corps and pushed the Lithuanian public closer to the political depression. Pessimism of Lithuanians was deepened both by 'dishonourable' actions of Poland during the time of Munich conference and by political cynicism of London and Paris. For instance, high officials at Quai d'Orsay regarded division of Czechoslovakia as natural and consistent. In early October adviser at the embassy in Paris Natkevičius informing Minister Lozoraitis about the radical political changes in Europe sadly wrote: 'The French are rejoicing at

²⁸ LCVA, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 29, fo. 80, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message 'Regarding the new status of relations with Poland. A glimpse to the future' to Minister Lozoraitis, 25 August, 1938.

²⁹ M. Kitchen, *Europe between the Wars*, London–New York, 2006, 2nd ed., pp. 405–408.

avoiding the war [...] by Munich agreement made in extremis, but everyone senses that their foreign policy must alter remarkably and the entire system is collapsing. A new power balance is emerging in Europe and we have to revise the existing alliances, and entirely forget the meaning of collective security'.³⁰ The new strategy of the Lithuanian foreign policy regarding Poland (and other countries) was finalized on 20–22 October 1938 at the conference of Lithuanian envoys held in Kaunas. The core of the new strategy was 'to improve relations with Germany and Poland'. To that end the Government of Lithuania was ready not only to enter into 'an open dialogue' with Poland, but also to eliminate 'psychological tensions' by making certain unilateral concessions to Poland. The secret instruction of the minister of foreign affairs to Kazys Škirpa, an envoy to Warsaw, indicated:

The Government of Lithuania seeking good and friendly relations with all countries, particularly with its neighbours, is ready to show the highest good faith and amenability in its relations with Poland within the limits of the position of an independent and autonomous state. The Government of Lithuania will make great efforts to improve the attitude of the Lithuanian press towards Poland and eliminate from the press such phenomena which Poland could interpret as directed against it. In addition, the Government of Lithuania is ready in the near future to reform activities of the Union for the Liberation of Vilnius so that to eliminate from it the anti-Polish character.³¹

Thus, with the international situation in the Central and Eastern Europe rapidly deteriorating, Lithuania and Poland did not become strategic partners: Poland did not gain the actual political or military ally in the north as well as Lithuania in the south. In late 1938, six months after beginning of the diplomatic relations, the rapports between Lithuania and Poland remained in the stage of 'limited liability', and Poland in the foreign policy strategy of Lithuania could at the very best claim a status of a 'suspiciously promiscuous neighbour'. Such nature of the relations in question was no secret to Warsaw. It was no coincidence that in October 1938 Polish envoy to Kaunas Franciszek Charwat made an official diplomatic *démarche* to Minister Lozoraitis concerning that matter. According to the Polish envoy from the day he arrived to Kaunas and a representative of Lithuania handed his credentials to President Ignacy Mościcki and settled in Warsaw, the relations between Lithuania and Poland not only failed to improve, and

³⁰ LCVA, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 29, fo. 200f, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Lozoraitis, 17 October, 1938.

³¹ *Ib.*, b. 53, fo. 326ff., Minister Lozoraitis' secret instructions to envoys to Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow, London, Paris, Rome, Riga, Tallinn, Stockholm, Prague, 28 October, 1938.

even deteriorated.³² Lozoraitis, answering to such reproaches of Charwat, attempted to persuade the envoy diplomatically that due to the overall geopolitical situation Lithuania would desire better relationship with its southern neighbour, but in fact he only promised 'not to exploit hardships of Poland' and expressed a wish for Kaunas to receive similar treatment from Warsaw.

It would be hardly objective to blame only Lithuania for the crumbling relationship and not to notice irrational sides of the Polish foreign policy. It is likely that in some cases the anti-Polish attitudes of Lithuanians on the eve of the Second World War were determined by Warsaw's policy which sometimes was far from rational and by its assessments and reactions expressed by third parties. Without engaging into a broader and panoramic analysis of this issue, here are a few telling circumstances and facts. For instance, when German ambassador to London Herbert von Dirksen visited the Lithuanian embassy in the mid-summer 1938 he joyfully told Balutis that 'Germany was pleased with Beck and one can hardly imagine a better foreign policy than the one currently pursued by Poland, it would be bad if it went hand in hand with France. Germany agreed with Poland only for that reason, otherwise having unfriendly Poland at its side, armament of Germany would be impossible'.³³ Naturally, such characterization of Poland did not contribute to the strategic trust of Lithuania in its southern neighbour, especially considering the fact that mistakes of the Polish diplomacy leader at that time were frequently criticized by Paris and London.

Warsaw was reproached that it had lost a sense of political moderation and claimed to 'pursue its policy as one of the Great Powers', which only interfered with political consolidation of Europe.³⁴ Quai d'Orsay diplomats were not ashamed to nickname the Polish minister of foreign affairs '*Il est incorrigible*' behind his back, who wants to ride two horses at the same time³⁵ (read: to remain an ally of France and still not abandon the policy beneficial to Germany), whereas the magazine *Europe Nouvelle* in its articles openly referred to Beck as '*le complice invétéré du pangermanisme*'. The British were not charmed by the character and foreign policy of Beck as well, but they regarded the situation in a colder and more reserved manner. For instance, Great Britain Admiralty Minister Duff Cooper commenting

³² A. Gaigalaitė, *o.c.*, p. 140.

³³ LCVA, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 8, fo. 136, Envoy to London Balutis' confidential message 'Pro memoria' to Minister Lozoraitis, 15 June, 1938.

³⁴ *Ib.*, b. 9, l. 202, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Lozoraitis, 17 October, 1938.

³⁵ *Ib.*, l. 159, Adviser of the embassy in Paris Natkevičius' confidential message to Minister Lozoraitis, 17 August, 1938.

Beck's lengthy and boring attempts to persuade him that the Polish policy was 'honest' in all respects, revealed to advisor of the embassy in London Henrikas Rabinavičius: 'If a man tries too much to persuade he is honest, you should better be on guard'.³⁶ Lithuanians apparently listened to the advice.

The Polish diplomats as if hurried to 'confirm' the sceptic and suspicious remarks of Klimas, Natkevičius, Balutis and Rabinavičius regarding the foreign policy of Poland since the said Polish diplomats by the spring 1939 usually criticised the Soviet Union and the doctrine of the collective security system it protected, but on a number of occasions held hands with Nazi Germany as well. Basically sailing in the fairway of German policy, the Polish diplomats, for instance, Polish permanent secretary to the League of Nations Tytus Komarnicki on a few occasions expressed bitter criticism of the organisation for its ideological declarative nature, bias and political impotence. He encouraged his Lithuanian colleague diplomats not to depend on the declarative security guarantees of the League of Nations and claimed that the political organisation in question was in fact only 'a meeting *des filles gateés*, where the states under cover of noble ideals of the pact actually are concerned only with their own egoistic interests'.³⁷ Although the words of Komarnicki had a substantial grain of truth, Kaunas clearly disliked such position, because President Smetona and Minister Lozoraitis quite strongly associated the geopolitical security of Lithuania with the authority of the LN and the international stability it presupposed.

On another occasion in the mid-October 1938 adviser of the Polish mission to Paris Feliks Frankowski to his Lithuanian colleagues not only denied the hegemonic goals of German Nazis in the Central and Eastern Europe, which were supposedly 'only propaganda', but strictly criticized the French who did not understand that the geopolitical factor and military potential of Russia were 'utterly insubstantial' and Russians had left the field of 'the international politics of Europe' long time ago.³⁸ In some cases it is difficult to explain the public arrogance of Polish military officers or diplomats expressed towards their future enemies Germans, which most probably only amused Kaunas and hardly promoted its political trust in Warsaw. In May 1939 during the breakfast in the Lithuanian mission in Paris, Polish military attaché Col. Wojciech Fyda 'was explaining [to Klimas] that Poland

³⁶ *Ib.*, b. 8, fo. 148f., Envoy to London H. Rabinavičius' confidential 'Pro memoria' No. 80 to Minister Lozoraitis, 23 August, 1938.

³⁷ *Ib.*, fond 383, ap. 7, b. 2069, fo. 32, Envoy to the League of Nations Kazys Škirpa's secret message to Minister Lozoraitis, 18 December, 1938.

³⁸ *Ib.*, fond 648, b. 9, fo. 194, Adviser of the embassy in Paris Natkevičius' confidential 'Pro memoria' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 October, 1938.

was supposedly fully prepared for the war and was not afraid of it. The German forces were not as considerable as many believe. Germans lack good specialists, particularly teams of motorized units. The German army presents itself well in parades (which happens because there are no people to fix broken engines), but in the battle it would crumble immediately due to the absence of the trained leadership'.³⁹

A characteristic political posture on the eve of the war was demonstrated to the Lithuanian diplomats by Polish Ambassador to France Juliusz Łukasiewicz, who on several occasions tried to prove to Klimas that Poland financially and economically was prepared for a long period of political tensions or a war and all the talks that the Polish would not withstand a long collision with Germany were only cheap speculations of enemies. According to Łukasiewicz, it was not even adequate to talk about the Red Army as a serious military force, because it would 'crumble' after the first strikes. It is interesting to note that the ambassador positively regarded removal of Maksim Litvinov, an apologist of the idea of collective security in Europe, from the position of the USSR people's commissar of foreign affairs and appointment of 'greater realist' (!) Molotov and associated with him the successful and pragmatic resolution of the British negotiations. Along with Łukasiewicz *ex cathedra* was happy that 'possibilities of closeness between Germany and Russia today have no chances, but the relations of Russia with Poland have reached a degree of unexpected friendliness'.⁴⁰

Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador to Germany, thought (or only pretended to?) in a similar way. Only a few days before the war, on 26 August 1939, in Berlin Lipski complained to Škirpa that according to the data available to him, Hitler was making enormous pressure on Polish allies England and France and is totally blackmailing and provoking Poland itself. However, the ambassador doubted whether Germany would dare to attack his country. 'But if blackmailing turned into a war, Poland is fully prepared for that. An attack of the German army would not surprise the Polish army the least',⁴¹ Lipski was boasting to Škirpa. The Polish ambassador tended to regard overly optimistically or even with a demonstrated bravado both the armed forces of his own country and the factor of the Soviet Union. Škirpa reported this aspect was to Urbšys in Kaunas: 'Mr Lipski explained

³⁹ *Ib.*, ap. 1, b. 30, fo. 68, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 11 May, 1939.

⁴⁰ *Ib.*, fo. 104, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to interim Minister of Foreign Affairs Kazimieras Bizauskas, 7 June, 1939.

⁴¹ *Ib.*, fond 383, ap. 7, b. 2115, fo. 76, Envoy to Berlin K. Škirpa's confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 26 August, 1939.

the non-aggression pact between Germans and Russians as an insignificant event, which would not affect the ratio of forces against Germany. [...] Poland does not see a threat from the side of Soviet Russia, because Soviet Russia itself is afraid to get involved into the war and prefers to be on the sideline if it broke'.⁴² As we all know the war soon broke out and the Polish diplomats had to adjust their attitude promptly and radically. On 20 September 1939 when Klimas visited the Polish embassy at Paris to express 'condolences for the disaster which has stricken the Polish nation', Łukasiewicz was already simply overwhelmed by the military power of Germans, actions of the Red Army and the Allies. According to Klimas, the ambassador openly resented the conduct of French and British who for three weeks were only 'scratching around, mobilizing, searching for positions [...] hunting German ships and dropping proclamations, [...] Łukasiewicz explained the new strategy of Germans and enormous destructive power of moving fortresses. He believes that nearly one million people have been killed in Poland and a lot of cities have been totally destroyed, there have been substantial ruination in Warsaw and Vilnius. Poland has lost everything it had developed with such difficulty within 20 years'.⁴³

The political trust of Lithuania in Poland was not strengthened by Minister Beck's visit to London on the first days of April 1939 where the negotiations regarding security guarantees of Great Britain to Poland also referred to Lithuania. Since Lithuania did not participate in the negotiations, it did not see any documents and officially was not informed, therefore, no wonder that such situation caused certain confusion in Kaunas and led to guesswork: what was the meaning of attribution of Lithuania to the zone of Polish security interests and what consequences it might have? In fact, already in the early summer of 1939 Łukasiewicz disclosed to Klimas 'in private' that the security guarantees of Great Britain granted to Poland in March 1939 also 'covered' the territory of Lithuania, since 'a concept of indirect danger included Lithuania as well, because an attack against Lithuania would be a check against Poland from the back areas'.⁴⁴ The treaty on mutual aid made between Poland and Great Britain on 25 August 1939 in London formalized the inclusion of Lithuania into the zone of Polish geopolitical security interests. However, the British and Polish even then for some time attempted to conceal that fact from Lithuania.

⁴² *Ib.*, fo. 75.

⁴³ *Ib.*, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 30, fo. 3, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 21 September, 1939.

⁴⁴ *Ib.*, fo. 103, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to interim Minister of Foreign Affairs Bizauskas, 7 September, 1939.

On 29 August William Strang, the leader of the Department of Central Europe at the Foreign Office, cornered by Balutis explained that the 'initiative' to include Lithuania into the zone of Polish geopolitical security interests 'came from the Polish' and suggested asking them for such information. In addition, the British diplomat confirmed to Balutis 'confidentially, *i.e.* not for public disclosing' that at 'the Polish initiative' the second clause of the mutual aid treaty referring to the eventual indirect aggression against Poland 'also covered Lithuania'. Picking up the text of the treaty from the table, the British diplomat even underlined the said clause. Strang explained to the Lithuanian envoy that 'if Poland was threatened through Lithuania (if Germans attempted to attack Poland through Lithuania) and Poland defending itself got involved into the war, the pact between England and Poland [...] would operate in such case'. It must be noted that the British official drew attention of Balutis to the end of the second paragraph stipulating that such agreement between London and Warsaw was 'without prejudice, however, to the rights of the other European State concerned'. Such explanations did not satisfy Balutis and he asked what practical meaning of the 'protection clause' could be, since it was 'easy to imagine a possibility that Polish under pretence that Germans might attack through the territory of Lithuania, would want to occupy a part of its territory first [...]'. However, the British diplomat did not tend to darken the situation in such a manner. In the opinion of Strang 'this alliance does not contain anything that would authorize Polish to occupy the territory of another country in advance against its will and that he could not imagine that Polish would do so'. When Balutis once again 'deliberately asked whether that clause was inserted into the pact at the British initiative' Strang 'hastily' confirmed that it was 'the position of both countries, with which they both fully agreed'.⁴⁵

Thus, in the negotiations and agreements between Poland and Great Britain in the spring and summer of 1939 Lithuania already appeared as an equal subject of international relations (though rather an object) the fate of which to a great extent was determined without its participation. Such situation on the eve of the war caused additional concerns for the government of Lithuania and diplomats and additional doubts regarding good faith and strategic neighbourhood of Poland. Still a retrospective view allows us to notice that attribution of Lithuania to the zone of Polish security interests under certain circumstances could have been useful to Lithuania and eventually could protect it against the USSR aggression. Such assumption arises

⁴⁵ *Ib.*, b. 9, fo. 194-197, Envoy to London Balutis' confidential message 'Regarding the situation of the moment' to Minister Urbšys, 29 August, 1939; *ib.*, fond 656, ap. 1, b. 133, fo. 90, Envoy to Washington P. Žadeikis' message to Minister Urbšys, 22 June, 1939.

from the dynamics of the situation of Lithuania in the secret protocols of Ribbentrop-Molotov. Not to discount the possibility of the fact that Stalin was prompted to include Lithuania into the zone of influence of the USSR by elimination of the Polish statehood *de facto*, after which the impact of the guarantees granted to the Polish sovereignty by Great Britain was lost regarding Lithuania. To put it in other words, after statehood of Poland was eliminated, the fact that Lithuania in the above mentioned agreements between British and Polish was attributed to the security zone of Poland, lost an actual political significance, failed to stop the expansion of Moscow to Lithuania and did not threaten to presuppose a conflict situation of the USSR and Western Allies.

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Although Lithuania officially declared its neutrality on the very first day of the war and took certain measures to spread a corresponding sentiment in the public,⁴⁶ that did not prevent Germany from involving Lithuania into the war against Poland. Already in the first days of September the Germans repeatedly offered Lithuania to join the war against Poland and seizing the opportunity provided by the latter's weakness and Germany's military support to reclaim Vilnius. At that time the idea was enthusiastically supported by former Lithuanian envoy to Warsaw, and from December 1939 to Berlin, Col. in reserve Škirpa⁴⁷ and to some extent general consul at Königsberg Leopoldas Dymša.⁴⁸ Germans were tempting the Lithuanian government with the march to Vilnius until mid-September.⁴⁹ The German diplomats in Kaunas were particularly active concerning that matter, namely envoy Erich Wilhelm Zechlin and military attaché Col. Emil Just. Naturally the Germans were concerned entirely with their own interests and not with the fate of the historical capital of Lithuania. By involving Lithuania into the war on its side, Berlin attempted to emphasize to the public opinion of the world the 'unnatural' and 'imperialistic' nature of Poland and in this

⁴⁶ *Ib.*, fond 554, ap. 1, b. 5, fo. 41, Circular letter no. 25/17 of the Chief Board of the Lithuanian Nationalists Union to the Union chairs of regions and districts, 6 September, 1939.

⁴⁷ K. Škirpa, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos. Atsiminimai ir dokumentai*, Chicago-Vilnius, 1996, pp. 192-201.

⁴⁸ LCVA, fond 383, ap. 7, b. 2118, fo. 6, Envoy to London Balutis' confidential 'Pro memoria' to the director of the Politics Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs E. Turauskas, 22 September, 1939.

⁴⁹ D.M. Crowe, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers. Foreign Relations, 1938-1940*, Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford 1993, p. 85f.

manner as if legitimize its own aggression against Poland. In addition it wanted to realize the provisions of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 23 August, i.e. to establish the protectorate of Berlin over Lithuania. However, this scheme of Berlin failed. Firstly, president Smetona in general being against the racist ideology of Nazis and their methods of political battle regarded the *Reich* with distrust. Secondly, the president, government and diplomatic corps did not believe in the ultimate victory of Germany in the new war and though they wanted Vilnius, still did not dare to abandon the 'safe' policy of neutrality. Thirdly, an independent march of the Lithuanian army to Vilnius in September 1939 was prevented by broken communications with the government of Poland and an enigmatic unclear position of Kremlin, which was treated by Kaunas as the key in Vilnius case.

Even though at present it might seem strange, the treacherous invasion of the Soviets into Eastern Poland did not sadden the Lithuanian government and diplomats much. On the contrary, it prompted certain optimistic thoughts that in one way or another they would manage to reclaim the historical capital. Envoy to London Balutis in his private letter to a colleague and good friend, Lithuanian envoy to Washington Povilas Žadeikis at Washington in late September of 1939 apparently quite honestly wrote about the war and its significance to Lithuania: 'Thus, we finally did not escape what we were afraid of and we are in it. Our position under given circumstances is comparatively the best one might expect in all this hell, - naturally on a condition that we will manage to maintain our neutrality until the end. We have a chance, but the longer the war continues, the more unforeseen complications might arise, which could render maintaining of neutrality more difficult. Therefore, we must be very careful in everything we do'.⁵⁰

In the morning of 17 September in Lithuania a speedy additional mobilization of the army was carried out drafting 'to the Polish border a few more classes of reservists', which supplemented the units stationed at the line of demarcation.⁵¹ It seems that this radical decision of the political and military leadership was made not only seeking to strengthen protection of the country in relation to the USSR invasion to Poland, but also to prepare for the eventual surprise attack of Vilnius. The fact that Kaunas had such plans is evidenced by some extant documents, for instance, instructions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to envoys to London and Paris, which clearly told to find out as soon as possible the eventual reaction of British and French.

⁵⁰ LCVA, fond 383, ap. 7, b. 2118, fo. 222, Envoy to London Balutis' letter to envoy to the USA Žadeikis, 25 September, 1939.

⁵¹ *Ib.*, b. 2115, fo. 5, Envoy to Berlin Škirpa's secret 'Pro memoria' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 September, 1939.

Acting as instructed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Klimas was forced to rush hectically to receive a prompt audience with the top officials at Quai d'Orsay. With the ongoing war it was not easy. On Saturday, 16 September, the Lithuanian envoy without avail attempted to meet the Chief of the Édouard Daladier's Cabinet, former French ambassador to Germany Robert Coulondre, who after resignation of Georges Bonnet from Quai d'Orsay for some time acted as the minister of foreign affairs. The audience at ministry with Vice Minister Auguste Champetier de Ribes was fruitless for Klimas. The official claimed that he 'is usually occupied with the administrative matters and barely maintains connection with the Parliament'. In the afternoon of the same day Klimas tried to meet with Émile Charvériat, the Politics Department director at Quai d'Orsay 'who unfortunately seemed to have fallen ill'. Klimas managed to implement the task set in the instruction only on Sunday, 17 September, when after great effort he met with Charles Rochat, the deputy director of the Politics Department at Quai d'Orsay.⁵²

Considering Klimas' report to Urbšys the meeting was quite intriguing. The Lithuanian envoy did not have time to 'say hello' and he already had to 'listen to a bunch of telegrams about the Russian campaigns against Poland'. Yet he was not disconcerted by such turn of the meeting, on the contrary, bravely undertook the role of an adviser. The Lithuanian envoy calmly explained to the French diplomat bewildered by the unexpected invasion of the Red Army to Poland that he should not worry so much and 'immediately interpret that act of Russia as aggression, whereas it may be understood as a means of avoiding the war' because as Lithuania in terms of Vilnius, Russia 'has never abandoned its claims to the Russian regions annexed by Piłsudski', i.e. the Western Ukraine and Western Byelarus, and now as a pre-emption against Germans it only 'reclaimed what' Poland had occupied by force and what lawfully belonged to Russia.⁵³ Klimas found another solid 'argument' to justify the Red Army march to Poland and comfort Rochat. According to Klimas 'In any case Poland has never been happy with those territories in the same way it has not been happy after it occupied Vilnius. Such unnatural configuration of territories in Poland has always threatened with complications harmful to peace'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Klimas like a participant or specialist of the plot between Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov predicted that most likely the Red Army would not march towards the centre of Poland, but would stop at

⁵² *Ib.*, fond 648, ap. 1, b. 30, fo. 159, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 17 September, 1939.

⁵³ *Ib.*, fo. 159f.

⁵⁴ *Ib.*, fo. 160.

the Curzon line. The Lithuanian was also teaching the French diplomat that 'in case now Russia uses an opportunity to outpace Germans, the very fact, if one knows how to read it correctly, in the future may serve to the Allies so that to force neutrality on Russia or even an effective support in the fight for liberation of ethnographic Poland beyond the Curzon line'.⁵⁵

Klimas in the meeting of 19 September with Coulondre with mathematical precision and literary descriptions explained the circumstances for emergence of Curzon line and the history of Lithuanian and Russian fights for 'ethnographic Poland [!]'. The diplomat reported the meeting to Urbšys in Kaunas as follows:

Coulondre did not even know where that the Curzon line had been drawn. I explained it to him in all the detail, inclusive our case for Vilnius, where the Curzon line played an important role. Lithuania has always protected the Curzon line to the extent it, if respected by Poland, would have left Vilnius to Lithuania without the conflict with Poland [...]. I also emphasized that the Curzon line in 1919 was established by Russians and other experts (8 Dec., 1919) as the eastern (ethnographic and religious) border of Poland. But then Poland did not want to accept that line, fought Russia, reached Kiev, etc until it entered into Riga peace treaty on 18 March 1921 and established the current borders. *Conseil Suprême* and *Conférence des Ambassadeurs* recognized such extra-border only after some time. Only at the turmoil of Ruhr when Polish demanded, the border was recognized on 15 March 1923, but with a reservation '*sous la responsabilité des signataires*'.⁵⁶

Having provided a 'well-rounded' explanation of the situation to the French official, Klimas did not stop and tried to show 'the right path' for the entire policy of France and through it for the policy of Great Britain regarding Russia. According to the Lithuanian envoy 'in the further discussion with Coulondre I tried to give him an idea that France and England could in some way seize that «disaster» and maybe with a great sin against Russia to interpret that Poland itself accepted the responsibility for the territories between the Curzon line and borders of Riga treaty. In such a manner Russia «*érigé*» is satisfied with the lands for which the English and French have never pawned their lives and only the Polish have accepted the responsibility [...]. Thus, it follows that «*la guerre continue sans rompre avec la Russie*»'.⁵⁷

Although the French diplomats doubted that the Red Army's invasion to eastern Poland was 'a part and direct consequence of the secret pact'

⁵⁵ *Ib.*

⁵⁶ *Ib.*, fo. 164, Envoy to Paris Klimas' confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 20 September, 1939.

⁵⁷ *Ib.*, fo. 165.

between the USSR and Germany, but Klimas' interpretations apparently were not entirely exotic to them. Stating the overall outrage in the Western public opinion regarding Russian acts in Poland and indulgence of England and France to Russia, Coulondre immediately 'said in a low voice' that 'the great interests' of Paris and London 'force not to break eventual possibilities which could be *préférables à la casse*'.

On 20 September when Klimas once again visited Quai d'Orsay he reminded the French the peripeteia of the Lithuanian historical capital: 'I explained to Mr Rochat that while Polish were there, we protested against them for 20 years, because we did not accept the legal grounds for their presence there. Last year we were forced after Beck's ultimatum to enter into diplomatic relations but even after that we have never legalized the sovereignty and administration of Poland. The relations have not changed our main disposition. While the Polish were in that territory, we deferred to the fact, but now, when the fact has disappeared – naturally the old legal basis has «opened» – namely the treaty of 12 July 1920 with Russia, which has never been cancelled by us, or Russians'.⁵⁸ Rochat did not strongly object to such description of the matter and even acknowledged that Klimas' interpretations were 'quite logic and right' but promptly added that irrespective of the legal side of the matter, any time 'Russians may reply that they are «*successeurs des Polonais*» and remain there until all the issues with Poland are solved' However, warnings of the French diplomat did not defeat Kaunas diplomat and Klimas on that occasion left to Rochat all the necessary documentation and even a map where Vilnius Region was marked as a part of the Republic of Lithuania.

Klimas was not alone thinking and acting in such a manner. In those days Lithuanian diplomats demonstrated a similar, though mild and more diplomatic position in other capitals of Europe. For instance, Balutis on 18 September visited the Foreign Office and made a stronger emphasis of the legal side of the matter. Stating that in the past days two new factors radically changing the geopolitical position of Lithuania developed in the region, namely the collapse of the Polish state and the march of the USSR to the West, occupation of Vilnius and approaching to the Lithuanian borders, Balutis to the British diplomat explained the following dilemma encountered by Lithuania: 'Let us imagine the following possibility: having occupied Vilnius, Russians in implementing provisions of the Peace Treaty of 1920 offer to take the territory of Vilnius. What situation would our government be in? If we refused to accept such offer, we would forfeit our rights to Vilnius recognized in the said Peace Treaty. If we took it,

⁵⁸ *Ib.*

a question may arise how it can be compatible with our neutrality, which we are ready to maintain under any circumstances. Furthermore, one more question is how the Polish would regard such matter'.⁵⁹

According to Balutis after this long and purposeful discussion with the British diplomat the main goal was 'to move the ball from the dead-point and begin rolling it as well as [...] to encourage the British to think of resolving Vilnius problem'.⁶⁰ Continuing 'the moving matter' of Vilnius problem in the international arena, Balutis finally sought help of his colleague Žadeikis. In his letter to the friend in Washington Balutis wrote: 'American Lithuanians in the work for reclaiming Vilnius may play a significant role and provide us assistance [...]. They live in a neutral country and I think they would not breach the laws of their country by holding HIGHLY attended meetings and adopting resolutions which would demand returning of Vilnius to Lithuania (but not for the government of Lithuania to take up arms) and wiring such resolutions to Kaunas and Moscow with copies to the Soviet Embassy in Washington (their content should not be exactly the same'.⁶¹ In addition, Žadeikis was warned that 'neither you personally, nor consuls should by any means appear in that matter', but the campaign should be undertaken 'IMMEDIATELY, URGENTLY'. It was recommended to attract not only the local Lithuanian community to the campaign, but also the 'true Americans', and even better – the US dailies.

Balutis attempted to energetically 'move' Vilnius issue in London one more time in early October when the negotiations between Lithuanians and Russians in Moscow were drawing to the close and the content of the future Lithuanian-Russian political treaty was more or less clear. In the morning of 10 October Balutis came over to the Foreign Office to the director of the Northern Department and began his approach 'round and round': how His Majesty's government regarded the new developments in terms of the relations between the Baltic States and the USSR? Laurence Collier's response was laconic, but clear: 'we gave no advice to Estonia or Latvia [...] because unable to provide aid for those countries, we did not see it possible to give advice'.⁶² Such introduction encouraged and prompted the Lithuanian diplomat to tackle the core issue. Referring to his report of 18 September 1939 regarding Vilnius issue to the Foreign Office, Balutis enquired 'whether

⁵⁹ *Ib.*, b. 9, fo. 224f., Envoy to London Balutis' confidential message to Minister Urbšys, 29 September, 1939.

⁶⁰ *Ib.*, fo. 225f.

⁶¹ *Ib.*, fo. 223.

⁶² *Ib.*, fo. 234f., Envoy to London Balutis' confidential message No. 119 'Prospects of Vilnius Region' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 October, 1939.

upon a radical change of circumstances, no changes' occurred in London's opinion regarding Vilnius issue? However, the British diplomat's response did not please Balutis. 'Once we have taken a position of the guarantor for Poland, we may not [...] recognize any changes in the Polish territory – whether made by Germans, Russians or anybody else [...]' was noted by Collier. Such 'dubious' answer disappointed Balutis so much that he interrupted the British diplomat without letting him to finish his thought:

I noted that I truly did not understand if I wanted to know the position of the British government in that matter, since it concerned or might concern the Lithuanian government as well, which as much as possible would like to remain correct and not to offend any side. [...] You are telling me that Great Britain acted as a guarantor for Poland once and cannot recognize territorial changes made by anybody. That is understandable. But such changes have been already made not only by Germany, but by Russia as well. You are at war with Germany due to that, but you have done nothing regarding Russia. On the contrary, Cabinet member Mr Winston Churchill made open statements that it would be good if Russia (having already occupied the line agreed with Germany) remained where it was «not as an enemy of Poland, but as a friend...» Thus, thinking logically [...] we must conclude that the British Government under the current circumstances is not against the fact that Russians occupied the territory of Poland, a part of which they are now conceding to Lithuania.⁶³

The British diplomat was given a puzzle which clearly tended to hint at the 'right' answer. The diplomat from Kaunas looking Collier into the eye asked: 'by granting guarantees to Poland, what was actually guaranteed – its sovereignty or territorial integrity? The distinction would be major. The position of the British government I just referred would indicate that the given guarantee actually concerned sovereignty of Poland rather than its integrity'. According to Balutis, after the question was posed like this, Collier felt uncomfortable and kept silent for a while as if cornered, but 'suddenly [...] his face turned red and giving a wink he admitted: «Oh, yes... That's a fine point of distinction...»'.⁶⁴

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Due to the notorious reasons the relationship between Lithuania and Poland remained problematic throughout the interwar period. The loss of Vilnius in autumn 1920 remarkably crippled the political consciousness of Lithuanians, distorted the geopolitical orientation, furthermore, it caused

⁶³ *Ib.*, fo. 235f.

⁶⁴ *Ib.*, fo. 236.

a long-term and absolute psychological distrust of their southern neighbour. A negative image of Poland as 'the main and most treacherous enemy' has found its place in the political rhetoric of Lithuanians for many years to come. The positive historical memory of the long and successful political-military cooperation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in defence against external enemies was forgotten. Lithuanian fears and distrust were not cleared by Poland in any noticeable manner in March 1938 with establishing diplomatic contacts between the two countries under very controversial circumstances. However, irrespective of the destructive routine and negative inertia in the political views of Lithuanians, we may presume that there were positive tendencies in the policy of Lithuania regarding Poland on the eve of the Second World War.

The strategy of foreign policy of Lithuania regarding Poland on the eve and onset of the Second World War was mainly determined by a few components: a rapidly deteriorating international situation in Europe and gradually increasing threats to statehood of Lithuania; an established political-diplomatic partnership of Lithuania with Latvia and Estonia (in the historiography known as the Baltic Entente) in the mid-1930s with Machiavellian support of Kremlin (as an alternative to the eventual closeness of Lithuania and Poland); in the heat of the *Sudeten* crisis and on the eve of Munich Conference the Baltic Entente's withdrawal from the collective security system of the League of Nations and their turn towards neutrality; the controversial foreign policy of Józef Beck; attempts of Lithuania to improve its relations with the biggest neighbours on the threshold of the approaching global international crisis; the political-diplomatic struggles for Vilnius without avoiding changes in the tactics and rhetoric.

The strategy of the foreign policy of Lithuania regarding Poland (and other countries) was shaped at the Lithuanian Envoys Conference of 20–22 October 1938 in Kaunas. The core of the new strategy was 'to improve relations with Germany and Poland'. To that end the Government of Lithuania was ready not only to initiate an 'open dialogue' with Poland, but also to make unilateral concessions to Poland in order to eliminate the 'psychological tensions and shadows'. Referring to the facts that in autumn 1938 the Union for Vilnius Liberation in Lithuania was actually closed, and in early September 1939 with the aggression of Germany launched against Poland, the Government of Lithuania not only rejected insistent encouragement from Berlin to 'march to Vilnius' but when the statehood of Poland was collapsing, it interned or harboured in its territory dozens of thousands of Polish militaries and war refugees, we may claim that Lithuania was quite consistent in adhering to its political strategy regarding the state of Poland.

Polska w politycznej i militarnej strategii Litwy (październik 1938 – październik 1939 r.)

Streszczenie

Z powodów powszechnie znanych stosunki pomiędzy Litwą a Polską pozostawały przez cały okres międzywojenny problemem. Utrata Wilna w 1920 r. w wyraźny sposób osłabiła świadomość polityczną Litwinów, wypaczyła orientację geopolityczną i – co gorsza – przyniosła długofalową i całkowitą nieufność psychiczną wobec południowego sąsiada. Negatywny obraz Polski jako „głównego i najbardziej zdradzieckiego wroga” znalazł miejsce w politycznej retoryce Litwinów na wiele lat. W zapomnienie poszła pozytywna pamięć historyczna wielowiekowej i udanej współpracy polityczno-wojskowej Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w obronie przed zewnętrznymi przeciwnikami. Litewskich obaw i nieufności w żaden widoczny sposób Polska nie rozproszyła w marcu 1938 r., gdy oba kraje, w bardzo kontrowersyjnych okolicznościach, nawiązały stosunki dyplomatyczne. Niemniej, niezależnie od destrukcyjnej rutyny i negatywnego bezładu poglądów politycznych Litwinów, możemy przyjąć, że występowały pewne pozytywne tendencje w polityce Litwy wobec Polski w przededniu II wojny światowej.

Politykę zagraniczną Litwy wobec Polski u progu konfliktu determinowały głównie następujące czynniki: a) szybko pogarszająca się sytuacja międzynarodowa w Europie i narastające zagrożenie dla państwowości litewskiej; b) nawiązanie w połowie lat 30. tych współpracy na zasadzie partnerstwa polityczno-dyplomatycznego z Łotwą i Estonią (w historiografii zwanej Ententą bałtycką), przy makiawelicznym wsparciu Kremla, jako alternatywy dla ewentualnego zbliżenia Litwy z Polską; c) wycofanie się Ententy bałtyckiej z systemu bezpieczeństwa zbiorowego i jej zwrot ku neutralności; d) kontrowersyjna polityka zagraniczna ministra Józefa Becka; e) podejmowane przez Litwinów próby poprawienia ich stosunków z największymi sąsiadami u progu nadciągającego kryzysu globalnego; f) zabiegi polityczno-dyplomatyczne zabiegi o okręg wileński, bez unikania zmian w taktyce i retoryce.

Z powodu konfliktu o Wilno Polska pozostała głównym i najgroźniejszym nieprzyjacielem w wojskowej strategii Litwy okresu międzywojennego. Obronne plany operacyjne „L” (Polacy), „V” (Niemcy) i „L + V” (Polacy + Niemcy), przygotowane i zatwierdzone przez naczelne dowództwo wojsk litewskich w latach 1936/1937, obowiązujące do listopada 1939 r. zakładały, że w określonych okolicznościach Litwa może zostać zaatakowana przez samych Polaków, samych Niemców lub wspólnie przez Polaków i Niemców. Państwo miało się bronić przed napaścią potencjalnego wroga nie w toku wojny pozycyjnej, lecz poprzez aktywne manewry i wycofanie się w głąb kraju, by tam zorganizować wojnę partyzancką. W celu wzmocnienia zdolności obronnych wiosną 1939 r. Litwa podjęła wysiłek nawiązania sojuszy wojskowych z Łotwą i Estonią. Niestety, ten plan zawiódł. Litewscy dowódcy wojskowi nie brali pod uwagę sugestii polskich wojskowych dotyczących wspólnej walki litewsko-polskiej przeciw agresji niemieckiej uważając, że to Polska będzie słabym ogniwem wśród mocarstw.

Strategia przyjęta w polityce zagranicznej Litwy wobec Polski i innych państw została sformułowana na konferencji posłów akredytowanych za granicą, która odbyła się 20–22 X 1938 r. w Kownie. Nowa strategia zasadzała się na „poprawie stosunków z Niemcami i Polską”. W tym celu rząd litewski był gotów nie tylko nawiązać „otwarty

dialog” z Polską, lecz również poczynić jednostronne ustępstwa na rzecz Polski, by wyeliminować „napięcia psychiczne” pomiędzy obu krajami. Tajna instrukcja dla posła Litwy w Warszawie Kazysa Škirpy mówiła: „Rząd litewski, utrzymujący dobre i przyjazne stosunki ze wszystkimi państwami, a w szczególności ze swymi sąsiadami, gotów jest okazać swoją dobrą wolę i odpowiedzialność w relacjach z Polską w zakresie przystającym niezależnemu i autonomicznemu państwu. Rząd litewski dołoży wszelkich starań, by poprawić wizerunek Polski w litewskiej prasie i wyeliminować wszelkie zjawiska, które mogłyby zostać odebrane przez Polskę jako skierowane przeciwko niej. Dodatkowo, rząd Litwy jest zdecydowany wpłynąć w najbliższym czasie na zmianę działalności Związku Wyzwolenia Wilna, by wyeliminować jego antypolski charakter”.

Odnosząc się do faktu, że jesienią 1939 r. Związek Wyzwolenia Wilna był już faktycznie rozwiązany, a w początkach września tegoż roku, wraz z napaścią Niemiec na Polskę, rząd litewski nie tylko odrzucił zachęty Berlina „marszu na Wilno”, lecz również w obliczu załamania się państwa polskiego internował bądź przyjął na swoje terytorium dziesiątki tysięcy polskich żołnierzy i uchodźców cywilnych, możemy stwierdzić, że Litwa konsekwentnie realizowała swoją strategię polityczną wobec RP.