

## FROM THE PAST

### *The Soviet Union, Lithuania and the Establishment of the Baltic Entente*\*

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The problem concerning the attitude of the Soviet Government towards the establishment of the Baltic Entente, i.e. the agreement of mutual assistance concluded between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in Geneva on September 12, 1934, has so far been dealt with slightly. There is not much known about the reasons that forced Lithuania to change its earlier negative attitude towards Baltic cooperation. In this respect, the lack of knowledge can be explained by the inaccessibility of Eastern archives, especially the Archive of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The official Soviet interpretation, cited in the history books, was that in 1934, the Soviet Government approved of cooperation between the Baltic States because the Baltic Entente was looked upon as a possibility to strengthen the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and to prevent German expansion in the Baltics. The real reasons and Soviet intentions were not mentioned.

The objectives of this article are to explain Soviet policy toward the Baltic States in 1933-1934, during the period when major political changes took place in Europe. These changes include the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany, the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Poland and Germany and the end of the Rapallo policy; to answer the question why the Soviet Union began to support Baltic cooperation that it had so far opposed. Another question regarding Baltic cooperation is whether cooperation was seriously looked upon by the three states as a means of safeguarding their independence, or, was it simply a move by the three authoritarian regimes to mislead public opinion. Information contained in the reports and memoranda of Soviet diplomats found in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the former Soviet Union has to be used with caution. Fortunately, additional information concerning the same problem may also be found in other archives. The course of events itself also provides important evidence. The reliability of reports of the Soviet mission in Kaunas may be questioned because similar accounts can not be found in the reports of the Soviet missions in Riga, Tallinn or Helsinki.

#### **The Lithuanian memorandum**

The rapidly changing international situation in the first half of 1934 caused Lithuania to change its foreign policy and its previous attitude towards Baltic cooperation. On February 20, Dovas Zaunius, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, in his conversation with Mihail Karski, the Soviet Minister in Kaunas, ruled out the possibility of Baltic cooperation: "It is absolutely impossible to do business with the Balts, especially with the Latvians."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Johan Leppik, the Estonian Minister in Kaunas, wrote that the Lithuanian Foreign Minister was afraid that the proposal to establish a Baltic league may originate from Riga, which the Lithuanian Government could not have opposed, bearing in mind public opinion.<sup>2</sup> Some time later, Karski was informed by Lithuanian

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<sup>1</sup> The diary of Karski. Kaunas, February 27, 1934. AVPR (*Archiv Vneshnei politiki Rossii*, Moscow) 0154-24-48-7, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Leppik from Kaunas. February 19, 1934. ERA (*Eesti Riigiarhiiv*, Tallinn) 957-13-744, 41.

President Antanas Smetona, that there could be no talk about founding a Baltic league. According to Smetona, Poland used the idea of Baltic cooperation in their anti-Lithuanian policy.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, some changes could be observed in the attitude of Lithuania towards its northern neighbors. For example, on 24 February, the anniversary of Estonian independence was grandiosely celebrated in Lithuania. Initially this shift in attitude had no effect on Estonian and Latvian diplomatic representatives.<sup>4</sup>

On 25 April 1934, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Zaunius, sent the ambassadors of Estonia and Latvia, a memorandum aimed at rapprochement of the Baltic States. The first clause of the memorandum declared that every problem which either positively or negatively affects any one of the three Baltic States has the same effect on the other two as well. The second clause stated that any danger aimed at one of the Baltic countries also concerns the vital interests of the others. In the third clause it was said that the governments of all the Baltic States are obliged to take every possible step domestically, to strengthen the solidarity of the Baltic States. The fourth clause stated that there existed no points of conflict between the Baltic States and that future disputes should be settled through negotiations. The fifth clause declared that any of the Baltic States could still have specific problems due to its own geopolitical position or historical background in which case solidarity could not be achieved and that the other two Baltic States should refrain from all acts which could have a negative effect on the state concerned.<sup>5</sup> This clause referred to the Vilna and Memel questions.

The Vilna question and the strained Lithuanian-Polish relations had previously hindered the Baltic States from reaching a mutual agreement. In this form, the fifth clause prevented Estonia and Latvia from supporting Poland and Germany against Lithuania and gave Lithuania the possibility to decide the questions of Vilna and Memel according to its own discretion. Thus, one question was deliberately excluded, allowing one party to act without hindrance and not having to take into account the views and interests of the others. The latter was problematic for Estonian-Polish relations.

Considering Lithuania's attitude towards the establishment of a Baltic Entente so far, the question of Lithuanian motives arises. In the Rapallo era, Lithuania formed a bridge between Germany and the Soviet Union. The tilt of both Lithuanian and German foreign policy towards the Soviet Union disappeared as Soviet-German relations turned hostile. The conclusion of the non-aggression pact between Poland and Germany created a situation where the mutual interests of Germany and Lithuania towards Poland faded. Germany had demanded a corridor from Poland; Lithuania had demanded Vilna. The Weimar Republic, and at first also Nazi Germany, had looked upon Lithuania as a defense for Eastern Prussia against a Polish attack. So far, Germany had also encouraged the rapprochement of Lithuania and the Soviet Union, which was to impede a Polish-Lithuanian agreement and to block the establishment of a greater Baltic Entente reaching from Helsinki to the Balkans.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the common policy of Germany and Lithuania towards Poland ceased to exist. It must be added that immediately after the conclusion of the Polish-German non-aggression pact, the situation in Memel grew more critical.

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<sup>3</sup> Karski's conversation with Smetona. Kaunas, March 19 and 30, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-7, 41-40; On the attitude of the Lithuanian authorities towards Baltic cooperation (see also Rodgers, H.I., *Search for Security. A Study in Baltic Diplomacy, 1920-1934*. Archon Books, 1975.)

<sup>4</sup> The diary of Karski. Kaunas, February 27, 1934. AVPR 0154-24-48-7, 33.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the Lithuanian memorandum. *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (DBFP) Second Series, Vol. VII, 683-684; See also: Karski's diary. Kaunas, April 28, 1934. AVPR 0154-24-48-7, 52.

<sup>6</sup> See: Menning from Berlin. June 9, 1926. ERA 957-12-380, 11p; Zehlin from Kaunas, December 12, 1933. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP) Ser. C Vol. II, 216.

German economic policy started to ignore Lithuania. In May 1934, Britain, which had so far supported Lithuania in the question of Memel, also changed its attitude due to German pressure and ceased to back Lithuania in the League of Nations. Relations between Lithuania and the Soviet Union were also complicated. Kaunas demanded that the Soviet Union equalize the balance of trade, i.e. increase its purchase of Lithuanian goods. On the other hand, Lithuania was afraid that the Soviets could come to an agreement with Poland at the expense of Lithuania. Soviet-Polish negotiations on prolonging the non-aggression pact<sup>7</sup> inspired serious doubts in Kaunas concerning Moscow. In connection with the negotiations regarding the protraction of the non-aggression pact, Jozef Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, directed the Soviet Government's attention towards the fact that the non-aggression pact concluded between the Soviet Union and Lithuania contained a clause which had been interpreted by Lithuania as inconsistent with the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact.<sup>8</sup> On the day of the conclusion of the Soviet-Lithuanian non-aggression pact, the Polish Government brought forward a question concerning the note by Georgi Tchicherin, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, which declared Vilna to be an occupied territory. The Poles asked Moscow to annul Tchicherin's note and stop supporting Lithuania concerning the problem of Vilna, i.e. to declare publicly that it did not support Lithuania.

In his conversation with Litvinov on 11 April, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the Lithuanian Minister in Moscow, said that Poland had brought forward the Soviet renouncement of Soviet-Lithuanian relations as a precondition to the prolongation of the non-aggression pact, and the delay concerning the signing of the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact was conditioned namely by that. On 21 April, Baltrušaitis again raised the question of the renouncement of Tchicherin's note.<sup>9</sup> He was told that the rumors of Tchicherin's renouncement of the note were unfounded. However, by that time, the Baltic States had already prolonged the validity of the non-aggression pacts. The Soviets' proposal to Poland, to prolong the validity of the non-aggression pact and the resulting rumors of the Soviet Union's intention to renounce the note by Tchicherin, were the immediate cause of the 25 April memorandum. This is confirmed in statement made by Eduard Palin, the Finnish minister in Riga, that the decision concerning the memorandum had been taken before 23 April, when the Baltic capitals learned about the planned Baltic protocol.<sup>10</sup>

The memorandum of 25 April, was a maneuver by the Lithuanian government to show Moscow that Lithuania would change its foreign policy provided that Moscow renounced Tchicherin's note. On the other hand, it was an attempt to calm down Lithuanian public opinion. Several foreign representatives in Kaunas, including the Estonian Minister, Leppik, were inclined to look upon the Soviet proposal of a Baltic protocol and Germany's refusal as the cause for the Lithuanian memorandum.<sup>11</sup> A fairly logical conclusion could be drawn: Berlin's refusal to give any guarantees for the Baltic

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<sup>7</sup> The Non-aggression Pact was signed on May 5, 1934.

<sup>8</sup> See: The Stomonjakov Memorandum. April 25, 1934. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (DVP SSSR). Tom XVII, 207; Beck's instructions to Lukasiewicz March 3, 1934 and Litvinov's memorandum of April 2, 1934. *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-polskich otnoshenii* Tom VI, 188-189.

<sup>9</sup> DVP SSSR Tom. XVII, 252; The Minister of Lithuania received by Stomonjakov. April 21, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-52. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Palin from Riga. April 28, 1934. UM (*Ulkoasiainministeriön Arkisto*, Helsinki) 5C/16; the same statement can also be found in the report by Torr, the British Minister in Latvia. See: Torr from Riga. May 5, 1934. DBFP Second Series Vol. VII, 685.

<sup>11</sup> See: Preston from Kaunas. May 2, 1934. DBFP Second Series Vol. VII, 682; Torr from Riga. 2 May, 1934 DBFP Second Series Vol. VII, 685; Eero Medijainen. *Eesti välispoliitika Balti suund 1926-1934*. Tartu 1991, 40.

States again demonstrated her aggressive intentions and the need for the Baltic States to cooperate in matters of common security. Nevertheless, the Baltic protocol and the 25 April, memorandum had no connection whatsoever.

The fact that the 25 April, memorandum was meant as a political maneuver is also proved by the conversation between Minister Baltrušaitis and the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Stomonjakov, on 14 March. The Lithuanian Minister raised the question of Baltic cooperation and asked for the support of the Soviet Government in minimizing Polish influence in the Baltic States. The Minister was of the opinion that the Soviet Union and Lithuania had similar interests concerning Latvia and Estonia; Lithuanian foreign policy helped to prevent her northern neighbors from approaching Poland. With the help of Stomonjakov's memorandum, Baltrušaitis' standpoints can be quoted as follows, "It should be of importance for us... that Lithuania coordinates its activities with us... Lithuania would like, with our assistance, "to bring Latvia and Estonia to Moscow." If it were possible to achieve this, it would mean that Latvia and Estonia would renounce any official and unofficial ties with Poland." Baltrušaitis added that Lithuania's participation in the Baltic Entente was impossible for the time being and he repeated what had already been said, "Lithuania's position will really change only, if as a result of joint efforts, Latvia and Estonia could be shifted away from Poland towards Moscow."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Government of Lithuania wanted Moscow to oppose Poland.

The relations between Lithuania and Poland had become aggravated. The Polish-German non-aggression pact enabled Warsaw to exert more political and economic pressure than earlier. The situation in Vilna also became more acute. The country suffered from a foreign policy crisis. In his conversation with Karski on 19 March, President Smetona asked the Soviet Union to take decisive steps in order to demonstrate its interest in Lithuania. He admitted that the enemies of Lithuania stressed the isolation of the country and alarmed public opinion who, in its turn, forced the Government to change its foreign policy orientation. He said, "It is important to show that Lithuania is not isolated, that it can count on Soviet friendship; it should be demonstrated in a way the neighbors could also feel... You should not forget that we cannot hold out without being helped at critical moments." Smetona warned the Russians explicitly of an anti-Soviet government, "Different forces could come to power who would give up real or nominal independence if you refuse to support us. I think that is not in your interests. I am addressing you because the Soviet Union is the only country who does not demand our independence as the price for support." When Smetona raised the question of Vilna and asked the Soviet Minister to express his opinion the answer must have disappointed him. Karski announced that the Soviet Government had no reason to change its passive policy concerning Lithuania and Vilna. He said, "... Our policy towards Poland is aimed at strengthening peace in Eastern Europe where Lithuania is the one to gain most ... Lithuania should demand nothing from us that could damage this policy."<sup>13</sup> Moscow was afraid that by supporting Lithuania, Poland would be pushed even closer to Germany, which would have led to the formation of a Polish-German bloc. This was the reason why the Russians were not interested in confrontation with Poland.

Thus, Lithuania appeared to be in political isolation and in order to change the situation it began to approach Latvia and Estonia. Because of disagreements with

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<sup>12</sup> The Ambassador of Lithuania received by Stomonjakov. March 4, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-52, 26-29.

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Smetona. Karski from Kaunas. March 30, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-7, 44-42.

Germany and Poland, Kaunas now regarded a Baltic policy as useful. The Baltic policy was also looked upon as a means of disarming the opposition in foreign policy questions.

### **Baltic Cooperation and the Soviet Union, 1933**

What was the Soviet Union's attitude towards the formation of the Baltic Entente? The attitude of the Soviet Government as well as that of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs towards the formation of a large, as well as, a small Baltic Entente had been negative since 1920. The mutual political agreements between the border states were treated by the Soviet government as if directed against the Soviet Union. One of the objectives of the Soviet Baltic policy, similar to that of Germany, had been to impede Baltic cooperation. Moscow was afraid that unity between the smaller Baltic States would lead to the formation of a larger Baltic Entente directed by Poland. In January, 1932, Karski wrote, "The influence that Poland has in Estonia and Latvia should not leave any doubt that "a small Baltic bloc" would only hide the establishment of Polish supremacy in the Baltics, or, even a step towards the formation of a "greater Baltic Entente"."<sup>14</sup> In the opinion of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Lithuania and its foreign policy constituted a factor that prevented Poland from strengthening its influence in the Baltics. The other Baltic States had to be prevented from interfering with Polish-Lithuanian relations and Lithuania had to stay isolated from her northern neighbors.

In the records of the Council of People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of 28 December 1929, it is stated, "To recommend Comrade Sviderski to imply to the Latvian Government that we disapprove of any kind of interference with Polish-Lithuanian relations, especially the influencing of Lithuania by the Latvian Government." To exert pressure upon the northern neighbor of Lithuania, an economic agreement was used. It was declared that in the occurrence of anti-Soviet combinations, the Soviet Union was ready to denounce the favorable agreement signed in 1927.<sup>15</sup> The Council of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs recommended to Sviderski, the Minister in Riga, to warn the Latvians that the taking up of the post of foreign minister by the former social democratic Prime Minister, M. Skujenieks, who favored Baltic cooperation, would be considered in Moscow as a step towards worsening Latvian-Soviet relations.<sup>16</sup> Visiting Riga in January 1931, the Lithuanian Prime Minister, Jonas Tūbelis, was warned by the Soviet Minister in Kaunas that close relations between Lithuania and Latvia were not recommended.<sup>17</sup>

True enough, from the hints made earlier by the Soviet diplomats, it could be understood that the Soviet Government had begun to support the idea of the establishment of a Baltic Entente. While leaving Moscow on 5 May 1933, Julius Seljamaa, the Estonian Minister in Moscow, was asked by the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, who alluded to the German threat, whether the Baltic Entente would not be necessary to oppose German aggression.<sup>18</sup> In his conversation with the Soviet Minister, Feodor Raskolnikov, in September 1933, during the latter's farewell visit, Foreign Minister

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<sup>14</sup> Karski to Raivid. Kaunas, January 21, 1932. AVPR 030-11-12-15, 52.

<sup>15</sup> See also Romuald J. Misiunas, "The Role of the Baltic States in Soviet Relations with the West During the Interwar Period." *Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 3. 1988, 175; AVPR 030-10-10-6, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Protocol No. 2 of the Council of People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. January 30, 1930. AVPR 030-10-10-6.

<sup>17</sup> Edgar Anderson. *Toward the Baltic League 1927-1934*. *Lituanus* 1967, No. 1, 14.

<sup>18</sup> ERA 957-13-532. 7-8.

Seljamaa admitted that the Baltic States represented a barrier which defended the Soviet Union from a possible German attack. Seljamaa thought it regrettable that Moscow did not understand the importance of the Baltic States and that there were circles who dreamed of reoccupying the Baltic States. The Estonian Foreign Minister made the Soviet Minister admit that the attitude of the Soviet Government towards the Baltic States had changed. He said, "... now the role that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania play in the present balance of power in Europe is clear to all leading politicians. Moscow is aware of the danger from the Nazis, and the nice phrases that are from time to time pronounced by Berlin, cannot make non-existent, Hitler's or, Rosenberg's intentions towards the Baltic States." At the same time, Raskolnikov did not exclude the possibility that Berlin would return to the Rapallo policy.<sup>19</sup>

In 1933, the Soviet Government did not yet support the establishment of an Entente. Litvinov's report was mainly an attempt to force the other party to express his attitude towards Baltic cooperation. Raskolnikov's talk about supporting the Baltic cooperation was not sincere. It is important to remember that with the Nazis' rise to power, the question of Baltic cooperation became especially topical in Estonia, Latvia and also in Lithuanian oppositional circles. In March-April 1933, the problem appeared in the press. At the same time, rumours surfaced about increasing collaboration between Germany and the Soviet Union at the expense of the Baltic States. In spring 1933, the newspaper of the Latvian army, *Latvijas Kareivis*, published a notice from the influential French paper, *Le Figaro*, about a military agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany that also included division of the Baltic States, between the two countries. This was to become reality seven years later, in August 1939. Although the information agency TASS, called it Polish-French "sabotage", sensible people were quite alarmed by it. The possibility of the division of the Baltic States was used in Latvia as one of the main arguments for the necessity of the Baltic cooperation.<sup>20</sup> It also influenced the Lithuanian opposition. The Soviet Union was afraid that the Government of Lithuania, which had thus hindered Baltic cooperation could, under the pressure from the opposition, normalize its relations with Poland and approve the establishment of a small Baltic Entente. In April 1933, Stomonjakov, the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, expressed himself clearly on the question of the Baltic Entente, "In the given situation, our practical line is clear. On the one hand, we have to back the negative stance of the Lithuanian Government towards even the small Baltic League... but on the other hand, we also have to carry out a much more active struggle than earlier in Latvia against the formation of the bloc."<sup>21</sup>

Analyzing the Baltic policy of the Soviet Union in 1933, we must also pay attention to the proposal made by the former Latvian Foreign Minister, Felix Cielēns. On 8 April 1933, Cielēns made a suggestion to the Soviet Government via the Soviet Minister, Sviderski, in Riga, to summon a conference of foreign ministers from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the Soviet Union in order to discuss the political situation in Eastern Europe. The agenda of the conference was to include questions concerning German foreign policy, possible intervention through Germany in order to help third countries and, naturally, the question of the Baltic cooperation. According to Cielēns, the Soviet Government's policy was two-faced which was expressed in its wish to make an approach to the democracies and its unwillingness to put an end to the Rapallo policy.

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<sup>19</sup> A summary from Seljamaa's conversation with Raskolnikov. ERA 957-13-643, 144; Foreign political information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the ambassadors. September 8, 1933 ERA 957-13-769.

<sup>20</sup> See: Morshtyn from Riga. March 30, 1933. AVPR 030-12-15-17, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Stomonjakov to Sviderski. April 7, 1933. AVPR 05-13-92-40, 2.

Cielēns told the Soviet Minister about his conviction that the security problem of Eastern Europe could only be solved with the help of the Soviet Union. Sviderski wrote about Cielēns' position, "If we let the moment pass we cause damage not only to the possible anti-Hitler front but first of all to ourselves." As to the establishment of the Baltic Entente, the attitude of the Soviet Minister was negative: "The Baltic bloc could be a good idea but in the interests of peace, it would have a negative meaning if, as a result, the Baltic States appeared to be drawn into "great power politics"... The Baltic bloc is the concern of the Baltic States. But in a critical situation where forces are positioned for war, it could appear as a cause for the breach of neutrality."<sup>22</sup> It is, however, not clear whether the proposal made by Cielēns was a personal initiative or was backed by the Latvian Government.

Of the three states, the Baltic Entente was propagated most in Latvia. Therefore, the Soviet Union had to be especially active in Latvia in its struggle against the formation of the Baltic Entente. The eastern neighbor was helped by some Latvian social democrats. These individuals were used by the Soviet Union in the struggle against Baltic cooperation. Some of the leaders of the social democrats, such as Fricis Menders, Ansis Bushevics, and Brūno Kalniņš, worked hand in hand with the Soviet Embassy. During the conference of social democrats in April 1933, Bushevics said that the Baltic bloc would draw the country into military adventurism and therefore, in the case that Latvia decided in favor of the formation of the Baltic Entente, the social democratic party would lead armed workers against those who were driving Latvia towards a breach of neutrality. However, Bushevics made a mistake and exposed those who had inspired him: he announced that the Soviet Union would give up its neutral Baltic policy and intervene in Latvian politics. To Sviderski, who had provoked that speech, it seemed a big mistake. The Soviet Minister was of the opinion that the speech showed the Soviet Union as a country hostile to Latvia.<sup>23</sup>

According to the instructions given by Stomonjakov, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Sviderski had to suggest that the Latvian social democrats also oppose the Baltic League in the press: "If, for example, *Socialdemokrats* would expose in some issues that, making use of the present anti-Hitler mood, some influential circles in Latvia, of whom the most colorful representative in the Bļodnieks cabinet is Salnais,<sup>24</sup> are preparing behind the back of the parliament, important international agreements which in the present dangerous situation in Europe, bind Latvia and drag it into larger conflicts - such exposures... would force Salnais and especially Bļodnieks to be very careful and to keep from taking concrete measures.

Simultaneously, the social democrats should be systematically influenced in order to make them more active against Latvia being dragged into the Baltic Entente and falling under Polish influence, and contacts with Ulmanis should be strengthened in order to encourage him to greater activity against the Baltic Entente..."<sup>25</sup> Latvia was also offered a new favorable economic agreement, as an incentive not to join the Baltic Entente. By this time, the attitude of the Soviet Government in 1933, towards the formation of the Baltic Entente was absolutely negative, and democracy in Latvia was an obstacle to the formation of the union.

The authoritarian takeover in Latvia and Estonia in the spring of 1934, put an end to the control of the parliament over foreign policy. From that point onwards, foreign policy

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<sup>22</sup> Sviderski's diary. Riga 20, April 1933. AVPR 05-13-93-41, 44-58.

<sup>23</sup> Sviderski's diary. Riga April 20, 1933. AVPR 05-13-93-41, 60-61.

<sup>24</sup> Woldemars Salnais, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia from March 1933 to the coup in 1934.

<sup>25</sup> Stomonjakov to Sviderski. April 7, 1933. AVPR 05-13-92-40, 2-5.

decisions were made by a limited circle of people. Freedom of the press was also restricted. The Soviet Government lost its possibility to use the Estonian and Latvian press, and different political forces, to hinder Baltic cooperation. The Embassies in Riga and Tallinn were in great difficulties. Actually, the Soviet Government should have protested against the termination of democratic order, but this was made impossible by the fact the coups were justified by threat from the radical right. The advent of authoritarian regimes was one of the factors which enabled the conclusion of the Baltic Entente.

Proceeding from the fact that at the moment Cielēns made his suggestion, the attitude of the Lithuanian Government and of a number of Latvian social democrats towards the formation of the Baltic Entente was negative, Moscow had no reason to be apprehensive about the Baltic Entente.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs decided to support Cielēns' suggestion. It was obvious that a joint conference of the Baltic States, Poland and the Soviet Union was impossible to convene. If, by some miracle it had happened, there would still have been no results concerning Baltic cooperation. The approval was a political maneuver. The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs counted on the possibility that the news about Moscow's approval of Baltic cooperation would make Poland and Germany take steps against the establishment of the Baltic Entente. This was in the interest of the Soviet Union. The People's Commissariat was of the opinion that Polish and French diplomacy promoted the rapprochement of Estonia and Latvia with Lithuania, and, of Lithuania with Poland, with the aim of the establishment of a Baltic Entente directed against Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Cielēns' proposal had its use for European policy - as a counter step taken by the Soviet Government against the planned Pact of Four<sup>28</sup>, to demonstrate to Germany that on renouncement of the Rapallo policy, an anti-German bloc could be formed in Eastern Europe under the leadership of the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> This scheme would include Litvinov's and Raskolnikov's announcements to Seljamaa.

What was the Lithuanian attitude towards Cielēns' proposal? The approval of Cielēns' suggestion by the People's Commissariat gave rise to disaffection in Kaunas. Foreign Minister Zaunius informed Karski, the Soviet Minister, that he could not accept Baltic cooperation and there was no reason for Lithuania to change its foreign policy: "To form a union to oppose whom? Germany? Lithuania would not do it. Shall Latvia and Estonia secure Lithuania's ownership of Memel? It is even ludicrous... The activities of Lithuania on the international level are mainly directed against Poland and here Latvia and Estonia have not so far shown themselves as allies... After all, Lithuania cannot have any close contacts with states who are strongly connected with Poland." Zaunius did not understand why the Soviet Union wanted to move against the Pact of Four using the Baltic card. Karski, the Soviet Minister, writing in his letter to Stomonjakov, also criticized the People's Commissariat's approval of Cielēns' proposal, "Participation in the conference suggested by Cielēns, even if by that a maneuver has been kept in mind to hinder a closer approach of Poland towards Latvia and Lithuania, cannot be accepted by

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<sup>26</sup> See: Sviderski to Stomonjakov. Riga April 20, 1934. AVPR 05-13-93-41, 76-78.

<sup>27</sup> Beshanov's memorandum to Litvinov, Krestinski and Karski. March 22, 1933. AVPR 030-12-15-17, 13.

<sup>28</sup> The negotiations concerning the formation of the Pact had begun in March 1933. The Pact between four countries - Italy, France, Germany and England - was signed on 15 July 1933 in Rome. It established the political and economic cooperation of the four states. Germany got equal rights with the others to equip itself with arms. The Pact restored Germany's position as one of the four great powers of Europe. At the same time it accepted the leading role of the four states in the European matters. The Soviet Union as a great power was ignored.

<sup>29</sup> See: Stomonjakov to Sviderski. April 13, 1933 and April 29, 1933. AVPR 05-13-92-40, 6-11.



Lithuania and it would neither participate in it nor play the role you have planned for it. The Lithuanian Government shall not join our maneuver and our position (in case the Government accepts the suggestion of the Council) would arouse mistrust of our policy.” According to Karski, the maneuver could only please the Lithuanian opposition who was not satisfied with the Government’s policy, and force Kaunas to revise its policy towards Poland.<sup>30</sup> The People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs did not agree with Karski’s criticism. Stomonjakov wrote to Karski, “... our decision had been directed by the need not to allow the formation of a Polish-Baltic bloc, the existence of which would contradict not only the interests of the Soviet Union but also those of Lithuania.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Baltic Cooperation and the Soviet Union, 1934**

In February 1934, when the Lithuanian Minister of War, Balys Giedraitis, had in his conversation with Karski already hinted at the possibility of approaching Estonia and Latvia, the latter announced that in case Lithuania joined the Baltic bloc it should count with the positions of Latvia and Estonia which would place constraints on Lithuanian foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> In the spring of 1934, Moscow’s attitude towards the formation of the Baltic bloc changed. A memorandum by the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs concerning the Baltic States admitted: “Our attitude towards the formation of the Baltic bloc had been negative from the beginning of 1934, until May, the same year. In the spring of 1934, our diplomats were of the opinion that the rapprochement of the Baltic States could be useful for us only in such case that if we maintained our influence on one of them (Lithuania). This would enable us to influence the policy of all the Baltic States. German influence in Latvia was strong, while in Estonia, the influence of Poland was strong. Thus, only Lithuania was left for us, where we had to maintain and strengthen our influence.”<sup>33</sup>

In approving the formation of the Baltic Entente, the Soviet Union demanded that Lithuania coordinate its Baltic policy with the USSR. This is vividly illustrated by Stomonjakov’s letter of 7 May 1934, to Karski, “In your talks with Lithuanian leaders it is important to confirm that we proceed on the condition that the rapprochement of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia also concerns Lithuanian-Soviet relations, that Lithuania should maintain contact with us regarding all the Baltic questions which concern our interests. The course of the future negotiations between Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia depends on the positive attitude of your conversation partners to our statement.”<sup>34</sup> With this, Moscow clearly declared that it would not hinder Baltic cooperation provided that Lithuania informed the Soviet Government. The Russians were afraid that a totally negative position of the Baltic question would essentially impair relations with Kaunas and Lithuania would normalize its relations with Poland.

The question is whether the Soviet Government, who in the spring of 1934, was supporting Baltic cooperation, encouraged its “little friend” to join a Baltic bloc. It was surprising that in the spring of 1934, the basis for Baltic cooperation was laid by a Lithuanian memorandum - the same Lithuania whose government had so far been hostile towards any joint activities. During the visit of Estonian and Latvian journalists to the Soviet Union in the beginning of May 1934, it was announced by Julian Rosenblatt, the

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<sup>30</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov. Kaunas April 19, 1933. AVPR 05-13-93-41, 40-42.

<sup>31</sup> Stomonjakov to Karski. April 29, 1933. AVPR 05-13-93-42, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Karski’s diary. Kaunas February 28, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-7, 34-33.

<sup>33</sup> A Report On the Formation and Activities of the Baltic Entente (dateless). AVPR 154-25-36-15, 1-13.

<sup>34</sup> AVPR 05-14-99-52, 52.

editor of *Izvestija's* internal affairs department that on 25 April, under Moscow's encouragement, Lithuania had submitted a memorandum to Estonia and Latvia and had recommended a positive stance towards Lithuania's proposal, despite the questions of Vilna and Memel.<sup>35</sup>

The documentary materials from the archive of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs do not confirm this statement. A memorandum concerning Baltic cooperation states that the Lithuanian memorandum of 25 April, resulted from Lithuania's distrust in the Soviet Union, "At that time our relations with Lithuania were complicated due to our economic relations... Furthermore, the Lithuanians were afraid that ... the Soviet Union could grant Poland concessions at the expense of Lithuania, i.e. would accept the Polish amendments to our demarche..."<sup>36</sup> In the latter case, the negotiations concerning the prolongation of the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact and Tchicherin's note were kept in mind. It should be mentioned that in the course of the negotiations, Poland demanded that the Soviet Union no longer support Lithuania in the Vilna question. Rosenblatt's statement was made at a time when Moscow had no firm stand yet on the question of Baltic cooperation. Most probably it was meant to activate Poland and Germany against Baltic cooperation. The statement included another piece of false information - the wish of the Soviet Government to conclude defensive treaties with the Baltic States.

True enough, on 25 April, even before Tallinn and Riga learned about the memorandum, Foreign Minister Zaunius handed a copy of it to the Soviet Minister, Karski. The latter wrote about his conversation with Zaunius, "Nobody is as yet acquainted with the content of the memorandum except the Soviet Union and Lithuania." This was a game. The same day, the memorandum was also submitted to the British representative to Kaunas. It is possible that the Soviet Minister had been informed some hours earlier. To Karski's question whether by the memorandum, Lithuania sought rapprochement of the Baltic States, or, even the formation of an alliance, Zaunius answered in the negative, "This would only be possible in a couple of years provided real solidarity and mutual interests exist."

Thomas Preston, the British representative to Kaunas, also writes that he could not make Zaunius admit that the memorandum had been the first step towards the formation of the Baltic Entente.<sup>37</sup> By the memorandum of 25 April, Baltic cooperation was not yet kept in mind. For example, president Smetona's talk with Karski on 19 March. The memorandum was a maneuver by Kaunas in order to make the Soviet Government declare its support for Lithuania and its opposition to Poland. Eduard Palin, the Finnish Ambassador in Riga at that time, wrote, "...it is not entirely impossible that - as the skeptics think - Lithuania has submitted the memorandum as a purely tactical maneuver without bearing Baltic cooperation in mind. However, it is difficult to state the aims of the maneuver that could actually be useful for Lithuania."<sup>38</sup>

The wish to find support from the Soviet Government against Poland was not fulfilled. On 5 May, the Lithuanian Government was caught by an unpleasant surprise. That day, the protocol concerning the prolongation of the validity of the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact was signed. An additional protocol was annexed to it by which the Soviet Government actually renounced Tchicherin's note. Karski described the reaction of

<sup>35</sup> Kirotar from Moscow. May 5, 1934. ERA 957-14-9, 10.

<sup>36</sup> A Report On the Formation and Activities of the Baltic Entente (dateless). AVPR 154-25-36-15, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Karski's diary. Kaunas April 28, 1934. AVPR 0154-24-48-7, 54-51; Preston from Kaunas. April 28, 1934. DBFP Second Series Vol. VII, 682.

<sup>38</sup> Palin from Riga. April 28, 1934. UM 5C/16.

the Lithuanian president, the prime minister and the foreign minister as follows: “Smetona ... thought that the protocol aggravated Lithuania’s position ... He considers the signing of the protocol to have negative consequences for Lithuania. Tūbelis said that the protocol was unfavorable for Lithuania; it restricts the interpretation of Tchicherin’s note, increases the imaginary picture of Lithuania’s isolation... Zaunius received me very coolly. Lithuania cannot be pleased with the protocol.”

At the same time, on 6 May, *Pravda* wrote that the Soviet Union would welcome an agreement between Lithuania and Poland. This was understood in Kaunas as the Soviet Government’s call to capitulate to Poland. Noel Charles, the British representative to Moscow and Thomas Preston, British representative to Kaunas, also took the protocol of 5 May, as an abrupt change in the Soviet Union policy towards Lithuania - leaving Lithuania to her fate.<sup>39</sup> The evaluation was correct. On 5 May 1934, the Soviet Union betrayed Lithuania for the first time. There was nothing the Lithuanian Government could do except carry out the memorandum initially meant only as a political maneuver.

Keeping in mind relations with Germany and Poland, Lithuania’s memorandum placed Estonia and Latvia in a difficult position. Though only a month earlier, Foreign Minister Seljamaa had supported Estonian-Lithuanian cooperation, on 10 March, he told Soviet Minister, Ustinov, that “Estonia would never engage itself with such a partner who faces problems like those of Vilna and Memel.”<sup>40</sup> Bronius Dailidė, the Lithuanian Minister in Tallinn, was of the same opinion as Seljamaa. According to the words of the Ambassador, Lithuania was not going to tie its hands by forming a Baltic bloc; “Lithuania is interested in developing economic relations with other Baltic States but has no intentions of joining a political bloc which would only cause losses...”<sup>41</sup> Tallinn and Riga feared that in order to break out of its political isolation, Lithuania would move closer to the Soviet Union, or, even conclude a military alliance. Latvia and Estonia would in that case be cut off from the rest of the world.

Bearing in mind Soviet policy towards Germany and Poland, their apprehensions were unfounded. But they had not seen through the two-faced policy of the Soviet Union. In addition, the Latvians were afraid that if the 25 April memorandum were renounced, then Lithuania would seek a compromise with Poland. That would have meant a substantial growth of Polish influence in the Baltic States which did not coincide with Latvia’s interests.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the pressure of public opinion also must have had some influence, as several historians have pointed out.<sup>43</sup> The Estonian and Latvian press often contained articles propagating Baltic solidarity. That was one of the reasons why Estonia and Latvia acquiesced with the Lithuanian memorandum.

In May and June 1934, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania negotiated the principles of establishment of the Baltic Entente. Lithuania’s memorandum was discussed on 7-8 May, by Heinrich Laretei, representative of Estonia and Wilhelms Munters, representative of Latvia. According to Seljamaa, the Latvians were ready to go much further in their cooperation with Lithuania than the Estonians. Estonia was not ready to let Lithuania join the Estonian-Latvian military alliance, whereas Latvia agreed to conclude an unconditional alliance with Lithuania. The Estonian Foreign Minister explained this by the Lithuanian orientation of Latvian society and newspaper articles in favor of the Baltic

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<sup>39</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov. Kaunas May 11 and May 18, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-53, 102-106 and 111-112; Charles from Moscow. May 8, 1934. DBFP, 686-687.

<sup>40</sup> Ustinov to Stomonjakov. Tallinn March 23, 1934. AVPR 05-14-109-102, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Ustinov from Tallinn to Stomonjakov. March 23, 1934. AVPR 05-14-109-102, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Palin from Riga. April 28, 1934. UM 5C/16.

<sup>43</sup> See: Arumäe, H. Kahe ilma piiril. Tallinn 1979, 79-81; Medijainen, 38.

Entente which also had an influence on members of the Government. Seljamaa was pessimistic about the formation of the Baltic Entente. He admitted to Ustinov that Estonia would never conclude an agreement that might drag her into the inevitable over the unsolved Vilna question.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, on 12 May, Estonia and Latvia submitted a joint reply to Lithuania whereby the parties proposed that Lithuania join the Estonian-Latvian alliance agreement signed on 17 February 1934. The latter was meant to supplement the Estonian-Latvian treaty of alliance concluded in November 1923. On 29 May, Lithuania submitted a counter memorandum asking to establish the date on which the representatives of the three states would start discussions on Baltic cooperation in Kaunas.<sup>45</sup> On 7-9 July, a conference took place in Kaunas. The Government of Lithuania set as its objective, the elaboration of the basic principles of the agreement of cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia proceeding from the 25 April memorandum. Lithuania was represented by the new Foreign Minister, Stasys Lozoraitis; Latvia by the Secretary General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Munters and Estonia by Foreign Minister, Laretei. At this meeting, the main principles for the joint activities of the three Baltic States were worked out. But the conference did not fulfill expectations. The main point of disagreement was the question concerning "specific problems". Lithuania demanded solidarity from the other Contracting Parties on the question of Vilna and Memel and that in their domestic and foreign policy they should keep from any activities which could damage Lithuania's interests.

Munters and Laretei refused to accept the last demand stating that Lithuania which had "specific problems", had in its turn, no obligations with respect to Latvia and Estonia. The acceptance of the Lithuanian demand would have momentarily meant a rise in tension in the relations with Poland and Germany which could only be in the interests of the Soviet Union. Laretei and Munters made a suggestion to include a clause in the agreement, according to the provisions by which any Contracting Party would have had the right to denounce the agreement with one month's notice in case "specific problems" endangered the joint activities of the three Baltic States. The last formulation was not accepted by Lithuania. The agreement on the establishment of the Baltic Entente was not signed. The negotiations held at the conference showed the different attitudes of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia towards foreign policy. Lozoraitis informed Karski of the principles of cooperation that had been discussed at the conference. The position of Lithuania with respect to the cooperation of the Baltic States made Karski admit, "Lithuania in its Baltic rapprochement policy is operating objectively in compliance with our interests as far as it continues to fight against the influence of Poland and Germany."<sup>46</sup>

After the conference, Estonia and Latvia decided that if it was impossible to leave out the question of Vilna, the negotiations had come to a deadlock. Neither Tallinn nor Riga wanted to bind themselves with obligations that would lead Estonia and Latvia into a conflict with Poland.<sup>47</sup> Dissatisfaction could be observed in Lithuania too. The reason for this was the presumed Polish and German orientation of the other Contracting Parties

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<sup>44</sup> Ustinov's diary. Tallinn May 28, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 36; See also: Leppik from Kaunas. September 7, 1934. ERA 957-13-747, 88.

<sup>45</sup> A weekly review by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to all Estonian ministers. June 1, 1934. ERA 957-14-13, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Karski's talks with Lozoraitis on 8, 9 and 12 July 1934. Kaunas July 17, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-7, 92-88.

<sup>47</sup> See: Ustinov's diary. Tallinn July 22, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 57.

which threatened to terminate Baltic cooperation.<sup>48</sup> Notwithstanding these differences, the foundation of the Baltic Entente was still laid in Kaunas.

The “Agreement of Solidarity and Cooperation” between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was initialed on 29 August 1934, in Riga and signed on 12 September 1934, in Geneva. The first Article of the agreement obligated the three Governments “to work together in foreign policy matters of mutual importance and to provide mutual assistance in political and diplomatic matters in their international relations.” The third Article of the agreement accepted the existence of specific problems which constituted an exception to the first Article. By that, Estonia and Latvia declared their neutrality in relation to the problems of Vilna and Memel. Thus, Lithuania had to solve the most important questions without the assistance of Estonia and Latvia. The seventh Article of the agreement announced that the agreement was also open for accession by the third states, but only with the approval of all the Contracting Parties.<sup>49</sup> In reality the said clause turned the agreement into a closed one. Estonia and Latvia would have liked in the future to have Poland and Finland as Contracting Parties but, in the opinion of the Lithuanian Government, as well as Karski, the Soviet Minister in Kaunas, the seventh clause prevented Estonia and Latvia from concluding a political treaty with Poland or Germany.<sup>50</sup>

Taking into consideration the different interests in the foreign policy of the Contracting Parties, the Soviets were especially satisfied with the wording “specific problems” (non-interference of Estonia and Latvia in the problems of Vilna and Memel) and the possibility of accession to the agreement upon the approval by the Contracting Parties (an obstacle for Estonia and Latvia if they wanted to conclude an alliance with Poland or Germany). Despite Finland’s anti-Soviet orientation, it was not interested in joining the Baltic Entente; and although that was known in Moscow, it still caused apprehension.<sup>51</sup>

On 31 August, two days after the preliminary approval of the agreement on the Baltic cooperation, Foreign Minister Lozoraitis made a statement to Karski. It should be quoted word for word:

“The Government of Lithuania fully accepts the Soviet Government’s positive position on the question of the Baltic pact. This fact can only strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. The Government of Lithuania considers it important to declare to the Soviet Government that Lithuanian-Soviet friendship shall continue to form the basis of Lithuanian policy. It is of greater importance than any other agreement. The rapprochement of Lithuania with Estonia and Latvia cannot harm Lithuanian-Soviet relations in any way. The Government of Lithuania shall in its relations with the Baltic States proceed from the same principles that formed the basis for our relations.”

Karski noted that, “In addition, Lozoraitis reaffirmed the Lithuanian Government’s commitment to our “gentlemen’s agreement.” He said in plain words that the confidential information we gave him not to make the agreement known to the other Baltic States without our approval, shall not be known to the others. At the same time the obligations of the Lithuanian Government under the gentlemen’s agreement shall be in force.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov. Kaunas September 9, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-54, 51.

<sup>49</sup> Eesti lepingud välisriikidega XII, 1933-1934. Tallinn 1935, 278. The Conference of the Baltic Ministers for Foreign Affairs in Tallinn 30 November to 1 December 1934. ERA 957-14-72, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov. Kaunas, September 9, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-54, 51-52.

<sup>51</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov (On the basis of the report of the Italian Ambassador to Helsinki). Kaunas April 7, 1933. AVPR 05-14-102-109, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Karski to Stomonjakov. Kaunas September 9, 1934. AVPR 05-14-99-54, 52-53.

What agreement was kept in mind? In 1926 Lithuania and the Soviet Union had concluded a non-aggression pact. A secret so-called *gentleman's agreement* was added. Lithuania agreed to inform the Soviet Government about its neighbors' intentions. The *gentleman's agreement* was renewed in 1931.<sup>53</sup> The change in the Lithuanian attitude towards the Soviet Union took place in the spring of 1938, and that was due to the Polish ultimatum and the Vilna crisis. In 1934, however, the opposition of the Soviet Government to Baltic cooperation that had existed from 1920, came to an end. The Soviet press wrote after the establishment of the Baltic Entente, that Baltic cooperation would strengthen the independence of the Baltic States. At the same time the Baltic States were warned not to fall under the influence of some great imperialist powers.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the Baltic Entente was possible due to the great changes in European politics in 1933-1934. One of the main reasons had been the political isolation of Lithuania and the renouncement of Tchicherin's note of 1926, by the Soviet Government. The role of the Soviet Union in, and its approval of, the formation of the Baltic Entente has been overestimated by a number of authors. The coming to power of the National Socialists and the resultant strengthening of revisionism, the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Poland and Germany and the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Estonia and Latvia in the spring of 1934, deprived the Soviet Government of the possibility to interfere with Baltic cooperation. In 1934, the best way for Moscow was not to impede, but to approve Baltic cooperation which left a possibility for directing the political behavior of the Baltic States.

Moscow was afraid that the Lithuanian Government's negative stance regarding Baltic cooperation would force the latter to normalize its relations with Poland which could have formed a basis for a Polish-Baltic (German?) bloc. The territorial and economic problems of the Lithuanian Government, however, dictated its collaboration with the Soviet Union on the question of Baltic cooperation. But this did not determine the position of Estonia and Latvia regarding Baltic cooperation. The approval of Estonia and Latvia had been conditioned by the fear that Lithuania could move even closer to the Soviet Union. In Tallinn, as well as, in Riga, the Baltic Entente was mainly looked upon as a means for obliging Lithuania to consider the standpoints of the northern neighbors.

By approving Baltic cooperation, the Soviet Government wished to use Lithuania in imposing its influence upon Latvia and Estonia. Germany wanted to use Estonia with the same aim - to impose its influence upon Latvia and Lithuania. It would be a mistake to consider it as Moscow's wish to conclude any agreement with the border states or establish political cooperation. The Soviet Union and Germany looked upon the Baltic States as an object of agreement in lieu of solving the general political matters of Europe. Therefore, the statements of the Soviet Union concerning the Baltic States and its expressions of support for Baltic independence should be taken as a tactical maneuver, the aim of which was to convince Germany of the need to continue the Rapallo policy. Afraid of pushing Poland even closer to Germany and of damaging the Rapallo policy, the Soviet Government did not actually want to establish any closer political or military-political relations with the three Baltic States.

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<sup>53</sup> See: Zenonas Butkus. Antilatviškas Lietuvos ir SSRS "džentelmenišką" susitarimą 1926 M. *Acta Baltica* 1994. Kaunas 1997, 127-128.

In the 1930s, Soviet diplomats made statements as if the Soviet Government wished to conclude some kind of pact of mutual assistance with the Baltic States. Up to the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, such statements should be looked upon as political maneuvers which were meant for Berlin to pay attention to the possibility of an alternative to Rapallo. When any Baltic military or political officials proposed further negotiations on the question of cooperation, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs terminated talks on that issue. Soviet foreign policy of the 1930s had two alternatives: orientation towards Germany or the states of the Versailles System.

The main aim of Soviet foreign policy was to prevent war on two fronts - with Germany in the West and Japan in the East. Therefore the first alternative was the inevitable one and any political maneuver that could jeopardize it was prohibited. Thus, each maneuver had its limits which could not have been exceeded. The Baltic question could have been solved by the Soviet Union and Germany only after solving the problem of Poland.