

# Moscow and the Baltic States: Experience of Relationships, 1917–1939

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OLEG KEN AND ALEXANDER RUPASOV, DEC 19 2018

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After the First World War, the Eastern Baltic region was seen by the European politicians as something that was very far from the mainstream of international affairs. It was seen as ‘the edge of diplomacy.’[1] For Moscow, on the contrary, the Baltic region was the starting point of its practical politics and, throughout the entire interwar period, it remained in the sphere of primary concerns. Nevertheless, scholarship and diplomatic knowledge about the relations between the USSR and the Baltic States rather confirms the first of these assertions. Stereotypes about the marginal nature of the Baltic aspect of Moscow’s politics reproduced the essential elements of the thinking of the Soviet political leaders, diplomats and the military men. Experiencing the interwar reality, this approach gave birth to an internal conflict in the Soviet policy towards Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This conflict laid between the desirable and the real, between the urge to play a great global role not registering the small states and the actual dependence on them. This conflictive perception strongly affected each stage of the relationships between Moscow and these neighbouring states for two decades. Therefore, the centre of our attention is directed on the shaping and development of the Baltic policy of the USSR. This policy combined general political agenda and economic necessities, great-power calculations and a genuine concern, ignorance and attention to the nuances of the political evolution of each of the Baltic States. The study of this problem facilitates the identification of the sustainable elements in the motives and practical actions of Moscow. It also helps to assess the overall dynamics of the relationship between Soviet Russia and the Baltic States.

### **The time of unexpectedness: 1917–1920**

The first attempts to establish Soviet power in the Baltic provinces of the former Russian Empire took place at the end of 1917. However, these failed endeavours clearly demonstrated that the experience of the world war contributed to the crystallization of opposite political vectors. Although for the Bolsheviks, the Great War was the final proof of the advantages of the international class approach as the only way of humankind’s salvation, the political elites of the Baltic States (including the social democrats and socialists) quickly accepted the idea of national self-determination. In a few months, the autonomist aspirations of the Balts were pushed aside by the idea of independent national statehood that in a large degree determined the result of the struggle for this region in 1918–19.

These events in each of the new Baltic States were developing under a similar scenario. After the November revolution of 1918 in Germany, the Red army, relying on the ‘pro-Bolshevik’ local groups, overthrew the governments in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that were created with the help of German occupation authorities. The Bolsheviks established Soviet power in Narva, Riga and Vilnius. By the end of the summer, 1919, despite the lack of significant external assistance (at the same time the Latvian and Estonian units fought against the German ‘Baltic division’), the national political and military forces ultimately defeated the supporters of the orientation in Moscow (the capital of Russia and of the International). In addition, in a bloody civil war the Soviet government that struggled for its own existence had no possibilities to change this unexpected outcome in the Baltic region. Already at the beginning of September 1919, the Bolshevik leadership sent proposals to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to enter into peace

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negotiations. For the former Baltic provinces, it was really a gift of fate. While the victorious Western powers left the question about the indivisibility of Russia open, and defeated Germany was not in a hurry to withdraw its troops from the Baltic region, the Soviet government by its offer to start the peace negotiations legitimized the existence of new national states (the Entente powers recognized the independence of Estonia and Latvia only in 1921, and the independence of Lithuania in 1922).

Moscow paid a very 'generous' fee for the readiness of the Baltic States to make peace. The Soviets signed the first peace treaty with Estonia on 2 February 1920. Six months later, the peace treaties were signed with Lithuania (on 11 July) and Latvia (on 12 August). Under these agreements, Russia recognized the sovereignty of the new states and their boundaries, including the attachment of Jamburg and Izborsk to Estonia, and Pytalovo (Abrene) to Latvia. Occupied by Soviet troops, Vilnius, with its predominantly Polish population, was transferred to the Republic of Lithuania (but, in October 1920, the Vilnius region was occupied by Poland). At the same time, Moscow demonstrated its understanding of the difficulties its new neighbours faced. The decision to transfer the Pytalovo rail junction with its adjacent areas (where Latvians were a minority) to Latvia was motivated by the consideration that otherwise all Latvian railroads would be 'suspended in air,' and the 'people, that have recognized rights for self-determination and for an independent statehood, would actually be deprived of the opportunity [to implement these rights].'[2] The Soviet government finally recognized the new states's rights to repatriation of cultural valuables and to obtain forest concessions and evacuated property.

It is not easy to assess the first steps of Soviet Russia towards the Baltic States. On the one hand, Moscow, in the beginning of the 1920s, paved the way to the 'foreign NEP' (New Economic Policy) and changed the original Bolshevism's attitudes towards the long-term approach of 'peaceful coexistence' with the capitalist world. On the other hand, Moscow's activity was motivated by the need for 'breathing space' before the renewed onslaught on the West. The Baltic States were needed as trade mediators for military materials purchasing and for maintaining the fighting efficiency of the Red Army[3]. In any case, the Soviet leaders were reluctant to abandon their goals to transform the Baltic into the 'sea of Revolution.' Probably, the directive of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Vladimir Lenin (1917–24) concerning the transfer of Vilnius and its suburbs to the Lithuanian government should be interpreted in this manner. Lenin wrote: 'We consider this not as a renunciation of the Sovietization of Lithuania, but as a delay and as a variant of the form of its Sovietization.'[4] However the Bolshevik prime minister could hardly explain what this formula really meant: the Soviet policy on the Baltic States was just making its only first steps after the signing of the peace treaties in 1920.

On the other side of the border, the national inspiration and the fears experienced in the revolutionary era influenced the formation of new worldview attitudes. According to these attitudes, the Eastern Baltic countries, unlike bolshevizing Russia, were the organic component of Western civilization. During the initial stage of the relations between the Baltic States and Soviet Russia (unlike, for example, the Finnish-Soviet contacts), the perception of the border with Russia as coincident with the 'civilization barrier,' just to a small extent affected the consciousness of the Baltic national elites and it was not a primary factor for the subsequent development of their relations with Moscow.[5] The main problem for new States was not to project the emerging identity into the European context, but to provide reliable guarantees of their independence. This, from the very beginning, encouraged these States to unite forces. After the establishment of peaceful relations with Russia, 'the idea of the Baltic bloc got to the stage of organizational and contractual formalisation.' By the middle of September 1919, in order to elaborate a general line of conduct regarding Moscow's peaceful proposals, the first negotiations of the Foreign Ministers of the Baltic States took place in Riga and Tallinn (also, Finland took part in the later meeting). Thus, not the Baltic hostility to the Russian Bolshevism, but the ability of Moscow to understand and take into account their vital interests became the axis of the subsequent relations between the USSR and the Baltic States.

### **In search for a political course: 1921–1925**

During the period of Russia's civil war (1917–21), the Bolsheviks perceived the Baltic States as a battlefield. The victory there, according to the Bolsheviks, could help to create a revolutionary springboard to the West. Despite the conclusion of the peace treaties, such perceptions were only gradually giving way to a more realistic view on the Baltic States. The Sovietization of Georgia in the beginning of 1921 was not considered the completion of the 'first

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round of wars and revolutions.' With hesitation, the Bolshevik leadership refused the 'idea to seize Bessarabia by the only attack' ('Ilyich [Lenin – *edit.*] was very tempted by this idea') in summer of 1921.[6]

The bloody attempt of the Communist coup in Tallinn on 1 December 1924, despite the failure of similar adventures in Bulgaria and Germany a year before (there were more favourable conditions for its success), could be regarded as an example of the persistence of the revolutionary approach. The action of the Estonian Communists relied on the support of Comintern and its Chairman Grigory Zinoviev, who was the actual dictator of Leningrad. However, the lack of coordination with the Soviet secret services during the coup and unexpected retreat of the Red Army units that were previously advanced to the Estonian border, suggest that this coup was rather a 'personal initiative' of Zinoviev, whereas other members of the 'triumvirate' (Jozef Stalin and Lev Kamenev) hardly sympathized with it. The failed 'coup' and the 'white terror' in Estonia that followed weakened the political position of Zinoviev. Probably the highest Soviet circles considered the 'insurgence' in Tallinn primarily linked to the internal struggle for power and did not perceive it as the beginning of a new stage of revolutionary expansion.

On the contrary, defeat in Tallinn was one of the reasons that, in February 1925, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) passed a resolution to stop the 'active intelligence' and 'military and rebel works,' that were guided by the Soviet state bodies in the 'neighbouring states of the USSR' (the resolution also stated that 'more or less normal diplomatic relations' were established with these states)[7]. However, already from the beginning of the 1920s, Moscow's attitude towards the Baltic States was essentially determined by the state needs of weakened Russia.

At the end of the civil war, the Soviet economy was lying in ruins. The capital of Moscow's tsardom became the new Russian capital instead of Imperial Petrograd. Two centuries of domination of the Russian Empire over the Baltics were reduced to nothing. In this region, Russia faced problems that were partly similar to those that it faced during the times of Ivan the Terrible (1533–84) and Peter the Great (1682–25). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1920, none of the Great Powers tried to fill out the authority vacuum created by the 'Balkanization' of North-Eastern Europe. Thanks to these circumstances, Soviet diplomacy was inclined to perceive the new States not as an external force, opposed to the USSR and similar to the 'real' Western states[8], but as its closest partners and even as a 'permit to the outside world.' It was typical that in 1921–22, the posts of the plenipotentiary representative of Soviet Russia in Tallinn or in Riga were considered quite suitable for the Deputy of the People's Commissariat for the Foreign Policy (Maxim Litvinov) and other member of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for the Foreign Policy (Adolf Ioffe), respectively.

In February 1922, shortly before the Genoa conference, the Soviet delegation initiated a meeting in Riga with the representatives of the Baltic States. However, when Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Poland signed in 1922 the treaty of the military-political alliance (the 'Warsaw accord'), the functionaries of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Policy (NKID) started to talk about the intrusion of their 'love' towards the Baltic States was becoming 'not only pointless, but even discreditable.'[9] Despite this, Moscow met the challenge of the signing of the 'Warsaw accord' with a proposal to hold a regional disarmament conference (which took place in Moscow in December 1922). After the refusal of Finland and Poland to ratify the Warsaw treaty, Estonia and Latvia signed an agreement of military alliance in November 1923. In parallel, the Latvian government assured Moscow in its firm intention to keep neutrality in the case of the Polish-Soviet armed conflict.[10] From its side, the USSR sent Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia a proposal to conclude a neutrality or even mutual non-aggression pact (Moscow refrained from it before, arguing that the non-aggression pact was an unnecessary excess).[11] The diplomatic correspondence shows that the breakdown of the plans of the consecutive Soviet-Baltic conference was caused not only by the resistance of Warsaw, but also by the internal crisis in the Russian Communist Party that took place at the end of 1923-early 1924.

The basis for political partnership between Moscow and the Baltics was accompanied by the development of the economic relations of the USSR with Latvia, partly with Estonia and even with Lithuania (which, being separated from the USSR by the Polish territories, became the hostage of tensions between the USSR and Poland. Also, Kaunas became excluded from the profitable Soviet transit to Germany). Meeting the wishes of these countries to expand trade and economic contacts, Moscow, according to Yakov Ganetsky (Fuerstenberg), a member of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Policy and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade, was motivated by the

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desire of economic benefits, and endeavoured to dispel fears that the strengthening of Soviet Russia would mean the 'beginning of the end of any sorts of Latvias.'<sup>[12]</sup> Trade, primarily transit trade, served as the paramount sphere of interactions between Moscow and the Balts. Mutual interests stimulated extraordinary efforts in the sphere of development of the transport infrastructure. In a short time, the Latvian authorities put in order the port installations of Riga and Ventspils, deepened the waters of the ports, and repaired and built railway bridges and elevators for grain, arriving from Russia.<sup>[13]</sup> Despite the objections of the Revolutionary Military Council (*Revvoensovet*), Soviet organizations invested funds in the modernization of Tallinn's port. Moreover, plans for analogous investment into the railroads of Lithuania in the interests of timber exports via Memel were nurtured (despite the fact that, since the summer of 1922, there was no trade representative of the USSR in Kaunas).

Soviet diplomats vigorously forged ties with Baltic politicians, officials and journalists. Some of the Director posts in Riga Transit Bank, established in 1923, were offered to the representatives of the Social Democratic party. The year after, when Z. Meyerowitz, one of the most promising politicians of Latvia, became the leader of the Farmers Union, the NKID charged its plenipotentiary representative office (*Polpredstvo*) in Riga 'to try to enter him into our waterways while he is not yet in power.' The achievement of this goal was facilitated by 'the emerging interesting case,' namely 'the ability to drag the Farmers Union into our Cooperative and Transit Bank.'<sup>[14]</sup> The attempt succeeded and subsequently the Bank saved the enterprises of the Farmers Union with its preferential loans many times. Konstantin Päts, one of the leaders of the Farmers Assemblies and a few times head of the Estonian state, was not ashamed to receive the salary of a legal counsel of the Soviet trade mission ('on trade of petroleum products') during several years. Future prime minister of Lithuania, A. Voldemaras, as far back as 1924 offered his services to the diplomatic mission of the USSR. Apparently, Moscow, through its legations, rendered assistance to different candidates from left-wing radical parties during the parliamentary elections.<sup>[15]</sup> This perfectly coexisted with cherishing relations with personalities Moscow itself considered fascist or extreme nationalist.<sup>[16]</sup>

With the same energy, Soviet diplomacy tried to influence the published media in the Baltic States, including the Russian-language ones. In 1921–22, the Soviet Legation in Latvia subsidized the newspaper *Novyi Put*, whereas the NKID bustled about the permission to sell the newspaper in Estonia and Lithuania, and even searched the advertisers for the newspaper. In 1924–1925, the Soviet mission in Kaunas similarly had a 'special relationship' with a weekly *Vairas*. In addition, the Soviets demonstrated a strong interest in the influential Riga newspaper *Segodnya*. The publications of *Segodnya* caused either flashes of anger or the desire to bribe its editorial board (that most likely was never realized) by the Soviet leaders.

Generally, in relations with the Baltic States, its 'Russian-speaking' politicians and 'provincial' governments, Moscow unconsciously focused on the way of action that was typical of the North American 'dollar diplomacy' of those days.

The initial Soviet assessments of the prospects of coexistence with the Baltic States were overestimated. Already in 1923, Soviet circles started to recognize that the Baltic desire to turn aside from the close arms of a partner was increasing. The new small states put the real guarantees of the preservation of their independence at the forefront, and no assurances from Moscow could stop search in this direction. Despite Russia temporally accepting the arbitration principle, Riga, Tallinn and Kaunas interpreted the Soviet idea of disarmament as a bid for dominant influence in the region, which could be balanced only by the active cooperation, if not with the Great Powers, then with neighbouring Finland and Poland. The USSR faced with the situation, when it was 'impossible' to gain the confidence of the Baltic States, because of 'all our peaceful declarations and reassurances' (that Russia 'will not swallow') could be effective only for the short time.<sup>[17]</sup> Thus, an idea emerged that it was 'much easier "to put a bridle on" a big government than on the Baltic political pranksters, assured in their impunity.'<sup>[18]</sup> This way, the peacefulness of the USSR was connected with its inability to recognize the natural concerns of the Baltic States.<sup>[19]</sup>

Therefore, if in the early 1920s the Soviet leaders worried about the external threat to the Baltic States (they predicted the imminent takeover of independent Lithuania by Poland<sup>[20]</sup>), by the middle of the 1920s, Moscow was concerned with the Baltic States's endeavours to coordinate their activity between themselves as well as their disposition to rely on Helsinki and Warsaw. After the failure of the 'Warsaw accord,' Moscow expected new attempts to create a military-political union (in the form of a Small or a Large Baltic Union under Polish hegemony), that could become an important springboard for the 'big imperialists' – Britain and France. At the beginning of 1925, a regular

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informational meeting of the military experts from the Baltic States and Poland took place in Riga, but it did not produce serious political or military consequences.[21] This ordinary event became an occasion to review the spontaneously evolving Baltic policy of the USSR. The Politburo, after an analysis by its special commission, decreed that the cooperation of the Baltic States with each other and especially with Poland and Finland is 'fraught with the imminent threat of danger to the USSR.' The economic, diplomatic and intelligence services of the USSR were ordered to prevent such a risk.[22]

The turn in attitude of the USSR towards the Baltic States is partly explained by the changing economic conditions. After the reestablishment of political and trade-economic relations with other European Powers, primarily Britain, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union needed either the Balts's commercial mediation or their special services (for example, for secret trade and financial transactions decreased).[23] The commercial port of Leningrad restored its pre-revolutionary turnover and, thus, transit via Latvia ceased to be indispensable for the USSR. Moscow started to regard it as philanthropy, to which Riga should have responded with political concessions. Moreover, the industrial equipment inherited by the Baltic countries was getting old and was incapable of operating (for example, the shipbuilding and ship-repair enterprises of Estonia). That is why it was also losing attractiveness for Soviet customers.[24] In such circumstances, Soviet leaders were ready to reconsider trade relations with the Baltic States mainly from the point of view of providing 'economic pressure' on these States. Taking into account the scale of trade and transit, this stance primarily concerned Latvia.

Finally, new Moscow attitudes towards the Baltic States were formed under the influence of the overture negotiations of the USSR with Poland and Germany. In the autumn of 1924, the NKID held an internal discussion on the possibility of the 'general agreement' with Poland. This would have involved the 'rectification of borders,' including the Lithuanian renunciation of claims for Vilnius, and the creation of a common Soviet-Lithuanian border (not to mention the 'compensation' for the USSR in Eastern Galicia). The real partition of the Baltic region into Soviet and Polish spheres of influence would have been an inevitable consequence of such an agreement.[25] The attractiveness of this 'Polish outline' was restrained by the coldness of Warsaw and by the hot insistence of German diplomacy, which, at the end of 1924, was seducing Moscow with an agreement on the partition of Poland (or, its 'reduction to the ethnographic borders'). Soviet leaders, refusing to negotiate with Germany on that topic, tried to initiate the anti-Polish cooperation of two Great Powers in the Baltic region. As a result, the main direction of Soviet policy, along with putting economic pressure on Latvia, was aimed at keeping the uncompromising position of Lithuania towards Poland. The Soviet objective was to paralyze any efforts to establish a Baltic cooperation in frame of a Large or Small Baltic union. From the beginning of 1925, Germany became the natural partner of the USSR in the Baltic region, whereas Poland became the main enemy.

### **Competition with Poland: 1926–33**

The signing of the Locarno agreements in December 1925 that guaranteed the Western border of Germany, made the international position of Poland and the Baltic States complicated. Simultaneously, it paved the way for a new Moscow foreign policy, and Soviet leaders made some additional adjustments to its Baltic policy specifically. Despite its unwillingness to engage in multilateral commitments, in the spring of 1926, the Politburo allowed the NKID to ask Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia about their position regarding the conclusion of a collective (fourfold) pact. This initiative was aimed at attracting Baltic sympathies to Moscow, while, at the same time, detaching them from Poland. Thus, the USSR could appear as the main guarantor of the independence of the Baltic States. However, at the preliminary stage of the negotiations, the undesirable consequences of such a step were already revealed in Moscow. Fearing a dependence on the Soviet Union, Riga and Tallinn were forced to seek the harmonization of their actions with Warsaw and Helsinki. Moreover, they agreed on the basis of the proposed treaty with the USSR in the joint Latvian-Estonian-Finnish memorandum. Thus, Moscow had to limit its policy to more traditional methods of *divide et impera*, that were already outlined in the decision of the Politburo in 1925.

First of all, the Soviets made an attempt to split a single Baltic front by proposing to Latvia a large-scale economic cooperation that took into account the important strategic position of Latvia. In fact, Riga was put into the focus of such states as Britain, France, Poland and Germany, which turned it into one of the centres of intelligence against Soviet Russia. In addition, Moscow hoped to use the contradictions between the Poles and the Latvians. At the same

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time, Moscow hoped to use the special relationship with the main political forces of that country – the Latvian Social Democratic Party and the Farmers Union.

This attempt had partial success. The Latvian government responded with satisfaction to the proposals for the development of trade and economic ties, and proceeded to the negotiations of the bilateral warranty agreement, which was prepared by the parties in August 1926. From its side, Moscow kept its promise. In November 1927, it signed the trade agreement advantageous to Riga. Later Boris Stomonyakov, a member of the Collegiums of NKID, explained to Stalin the significance of this action: 'Although using this agreement we did not achieve the orientation of Latvia on the USSR, nevertheless by concluding this agreement we undoubtedly have driven a wedge between Latvia and Estonia... and prevented the formation of the Polish-Baltic alliance.' [26] Indeed, the mutual understanding between Moscow and Riga after the signing of an agreement of such importance reached such a level, that it allowed Latvia's Envoy Karlis Ozols to claim: 'both States should be ready to respond by weapon to Poland's invasion of Lithuania. Poland would sit quietly only if it would know that the USSR and Latvia would respond to its expansion with armed force.' [27] Since 1926, Moscow noticed that 'the open joint and demonstrative conferences of the Baltic States with Poland ceased.' Moreover, the deterioration of Soviet-Polish relations (especially after the return to power of Jozef Pilsudski in Warsaw in 1926) and 'military alert' of 1927 in the Soviet Union urged Latvia and even Estonia to show a reserved attitude toward Polish advances.

Another direction of Soviet policy after 1925 was oriented towards the cultivation of relations with Lithuania, whereas Germany was also interested in the strengthening of Kaunas's anti-Polish position. Although, while Lithuanian politicians had serious hopes for normalization of relations with Poland, Moscow could achieve little and after paying a considerable political price. On 28 September 1926, after more than a year of delays, the Soviet-Lithuanian Treaty of friendship and neutrality and a secret 'gentleman's agreement,' that provided for exchange of confidential information, were signed. The agreement was accompanied by a note of the People's Commissar Georgy Chicherin (1918–30), which manifested the USSR's support for Lithuanian claims to the Vilnius (Vilna) region. These agreements had 'fatal significance for Polish-Soviet relations.' [28] Baltic neighbours of Lithuania even suggested that the Soviets would soon establish a protectorate over it. However, the time of blooming relations between Moscow and Kaunas was short. The December 1926 coup of *Tautininkas* Party (Union of Lithuanian Nationalist) headed by Antanas Smetona and Augustinas Voldemaras (supported before by the USSR in their struggle against the followers of the Polish-Lithuanian compromise) unexpectedly led to the cessation of political contacts with Moscow until the summer of the following year (the exchange of confidential information was resumed only in 1929). The main conflicts with Lithuania were resolved after the recall of the arrogant Soviet Envoy Sergey Alexandrovsky (who was replaced by Alexander Arosev). Moscow declared its 'interest in the consolidation of the internal situation in Lithuania' and promised to restrain the activity of the Lithuanian Communists (who had to go deep underground under the pressure of repression). [29] The actions of the new Lithuanian authorities disturbed Moscow only in one, important aspect – the adventurism of Prime Minister Voldemaras (1926–29) could have provoked an armed Lithuanian-Polish conflict which would call for Soviet participation. In the summer of 1928, Soviet diplomacy led Voldemaras to believe that in such a situation, the USSR would stay neutral.

No significant changes occurred in relations between the USSR and Estonia. The development of Soviet-Latvian economic relations fuelled the interest of the Estonian business community. However, as Tallinn oriented its foreign policy primarily on Warsaw, the USSR agreed to conclude the trade agreement with Estonia only in the autumn of 1929. Its entry into force coincided with the beginning of the global economic crisis and with the revision of the general foreign trade priorities of the USSR. Thus, the bilateral trade volume declined sharply. Finally, the use of economic levers for the strengthening of influence in Estonia became impossible for Soviet diplomacy.

Moscow tried to change the balance of forces in the Baltic States, established by the end of 1928, using an unusual peace initiative. Soviet diplomacy belatedly announced the accession to the treaty for renunciation of war as a tool of national policy (the Briand-Kellogg Pact), tried to use it for the demonstration of its role in smoothing the tensions between Lithuania and Poland. At the same time, Moscow did not yield to Warsaw's insistence that the USSR should engage in negotiations with all its Western neighbours. In December 1928, the actual head of NKID, Litvinov proposed Warsaw and Kaunas sign a special Protocol on the early coming into force of the Briand-Kellogg Pact. The 'loyal' Lithuanians, however, informed the Latvians of that plan, whereas the Poles informed the Baltic States.

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Eventually, Moscow faced such an unwanted 'united front' of Poland and the Baltic States, as it was in 1926–27. Polish diplomacy skilfully cooled Soviet-Latvian relations in spring and summer of 1928. At this moment, Moscow, keeping confidence that Latvia 'remains the state, that in comparison with our Western neighbours mostly does not fit into the program of the creation of the united front against us,'[30] did not pay due attention to the signs of change in the foreign policy sympathies of Karlis Ulmanis, the leader of the largest Latvian party.[31] The Poles, undertaking rapid diplomatic manoeuvres, were successful in getting around Moscow and the result of Litvinov's initiative turned out opposite to what he had hoped for. On 5 February 1929, the USSR, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania signed the Moscow Protocol (which stipulated the immediate entry into force of the Briand-Kellogg Pact). Lithuania joined only a few months later.

This actual defeat motivated the Kremlin, on the one hand, to provoke the artificial aggravation of relations with Poland, and, on the other, to re-evaluate the results of its ten years of relations with the Baltic States. It became obvious that neither the policy of economic investment ('we have been spending 15 million rubles [per year] in Latvia only. And have not bought Latvia')[32] nor the economic pressure on Estonia brought political benefits. The election of Otto Strandman to the presidency in the summer of 1929 was a prelude to the further strengthening of political contacts between Estonia and Poland. However, Moscow was so tired of the vagaries of Voldemaras that its dismissal in September 1929 and the advent of the politicians that allowed compromise with Warsaw, was not perceived as a serious loss for Soviet diplomacy.

The global economic crisis and the turn of the USSR to rapid industrialization forced Soviet leaders to save monetary resources, whereas manufacturers in the Baltic States were forced to pursue sharply reduced Soviet orders. Therefore, although economic cooperation between the USSR and the Baltic States was minimized, the placing of Soviet order in the Baltic States was turned into an effective political tool. During the negotiations in 1931–32, the Soviets conditioned the prolongation of the trade agreements with Latvia with a list of political conditions (the main condition was the closing of Russian émigré organizations).[33] However, while the Soviet demands were fulfilled, Moscow resigned to sign the promised contract and to increase the transit volumes. At the same time, Soviet economic bodies took additional (and quite successful) efforts to switch export-import flows to the ports of the USSR.

By the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet policy in the Eastern Baltic region came to a standstill. The fatalistic tones, which the leaders of the First Western department of NKID used for describing of existing situation, illustrate it well. In a report concerning the Baltic Union, it was stated that the Baltic States were 'obsessed by the fear of social danger ... of violent Sovietization, which, in their views, the USSR inevitably will attempt to realise.' These officials saw in the alliance of the Balts and the Poles something predetermined by the laws of history: 'As the date of the anti-Soviet war comes closer, more neighbouring States want to rally around Poland.'[34] In this situation, the USSR allegedly had no other choice than to await the commencement of cataclysm.

At the same time, the supreme Soviet leadership was inclined to extract internal political dividends from bad relations with the Baltic States. In September 1930, looking for the arguments for the one-and-a-half increase of the wartime army, Stalin put forward a thesis about the need to deploy 'at least 150–160 infantry divisions' that were necessary to ensure the 'defence of Leningrad and of the right-bank of Ukraine.' While Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Poland would not establish an alliance, as Stalin explained to his associate Vyacheslav Molotov, 'they would not fight with the USSR. So, as soon as they would ensure the alliance – they would start a war (and would find a cause).'[35] These views were repeated by Soviet propaganda in different variants.

Paradoxically, the USSR found a way out of the impasse in its relations with the Baltic States thanks to Poland. In August 1931, Warsaw actually proposed to renew Polish-Soviet negotiations over the conclusion of a non-aggression pact. The insistence of Stalin, who urged the NKID as well as the members of the Politburo to overcome 'a petit-bourgeois conviction of "anti-Polonism"' and be guided by the 'indigenous interests of the revolution and socialist construction,' together with the pressure of France, that refused to continue negotiations with the Soviets in the case of ignoring the Polish initiative, forced Soviet diplomacy to revise the basis of the attitude of the USSR towards the neighbouring Western States.[36] The results were not long in coming: implementing the Warsaw demand, Moscow, simultaneously with the resumption of Soviet-Polish negotiations, made a similar proposal to Riga and Tallinn (as well as to Helsinki and Bucharest).

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In February and May 1932, Latvia and Estonia signed the treaties of non-aggression with the USSR. Then, they signed the conventions on conciliation procedure. Thus, their ruling elites were to a large degree satisfied by obtaining legal guarantees of non-aggression, which the USSR previously granted to other states (for example, to Lithuania). Riga and Tallinn saw the conclusion of these treaties as, at least, a temporary abandonment of efforts to isolate the Baltic States that could be a prelude to their Sovietization. However, the treaties that the USSR concluded with Latvia and Estonia objectively weakened the interest of these states in the military and political cooperation with Poland. That, in turn, encouraged Soviet diplomacy to formulate new tactical tasks.

### **Towards the protectorate: 1933–39**

The shaping of the new Soviet policy in the Baltic States was primarily determined by pan-European processes, which were intensified by the hastened corrosion of the Versailles territorial-political system. The growing ambitions of Germany to have a new role in Europe and the desire of Britain and France to transfer these ambitions through a peaceful and controlled revision of the Versailles system (that was reflected in the negotiation on the pact of four Western Powers in spring-summer 1933) posed an immediate threat to all East Central European States. In April 1933, Latvia, worried by the establishment of the National Socialist regime in Germany, proposed to convene a conference of the Baltic States with the participation of the USSR. Several weeks later Lithuania put forward the idea to all Baltic States to sign a Protocol to define aggression (this definition was contained in Soviet proposals at the Conference on disarmament in February 1933).

Soviet diplomacy, taking advantage of these initiatives (and of the similar wishes of Turkey, Czechoslovakia and Romania), took the first decisive step towards participation in the pan-European security system. In early July 1933, a series of Conventions for the definition of aggression (with participation of Baltic States) were signed in London. Lithuania, dissatisfied with the participation of Poland in the London conventions, concluded a separate agreement with the USSR a few days later.

The Soviet-Baltic rapprochement in spring-summer 1933 was developing in the context of Moscow's research into anti-German cooperation with Poland. In July 1933, the personal representative of Stalin, Karel Radek, the chief of the Bureau of International Information of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, made an unprecedented visit to Poland. During the discussions with representatives of Pilsudski, both sides announced their intentions to withdraw from the competition and to coordinate their activities in the Baltic region. Radek even offered the Poles the opportunity to 'take Lithuania' as payment for possible concessions on other questions. He promised that the Soviet Union would react to such a step with full understanding. This offer was a kind of provocation. The Polish government cautiously reacted to the offers of the Kremlin that, in fact, outlined the division of the Baltic region on the Polish and Soviet spheres of influence.

The Soviet offers to Poland that concerned the Baltic States, were partly motivated by the desire to prevent the normalization of Polish-German relations. After autumn 1933, relations between Poland and Germany entered into a more constructive phase: they started a discussion about a non-aggression agreement. This did not go unnoticed in Moscow. At the same time, the Soviets observed the strengthening of the German influence in Latvia and Estonia. The prospect of the Polish-German reconciliation caused fear in the Baltic States and motivated them to seek the parallel normalization of relations with the new Germany. Germanophobia began to compete with traditional public fears of Soviet expansion.

The NKID sought innovative approaches because, as Stomonyakov wrote, 'currently you can never be sure in anything and, right now more than ever, bias regarding political concepts can only hurt the correct assessment of a situation and of good decision making.'<sup>[37]</sup> In this situation, the People's Commissar Litvinov took an initiative, aimed to attract Poland's cooperation for a new Soviet role in the Baltic region. In mid-December, the Soviets proposed that Poland conclude a joint declaration that should express the bilateral interest of both states in the preservation of the independence of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. According to Litvinov, the Baltic States should not know about the Soviet-Polish Declaration until the approval of its content. Therefore, Polish diplomacy (not without reasons) regarded the proposal of the USSR as aimed at the establishment of a common protectorate over the Baltic States. Despite the persuasions of Litvinov, Warsaw requested the opinion of the Baltic States themselves. That resulted in



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the leakage of information (historians still have no agreement about its circumstances) and the inevitable discredit of the Soviet initiative.

At the same time, at the end of December 1933, the Kremlin authorized the Soviet-French negotiations on the conclusion within the League of Nations of 'regional' agreements on mutual protection from the Germany aggression (involving Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland). The Soviet position in respect to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia was explained in the report of M. Litvinov during the session of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on 29 December 1933: 'We watch not only the phenomena, that represent the external danger of these countries, but also the development of internal political processes, which may contribute to the loss or weakening of their independence'[38]. The Soviet state had never before allowed itself such a frank statement about special interests and consecutive 'rights and responsibilities.' The speech of the Commissar caused confusion in Riga and Tallinn. Voldemars Salnais, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia (1933–34), who was coming back home via Leningrad, rejected the offer to visit Moscow.

Thereupon, on 17 January 1934, the Politburo adopted the detailed resolution about the Baltic region, which included the implementation of a series of political, economic and 'socio-cultural' activities regarding each of the Baltic countries. The Soviet leadership staked mostly on international-political factors, demonstrating extraordinary moderation in financing the orders in the Baltic States (moreover, Moscow refused to sign any long-term economic agreements).[39] The cooperation with Poland was not mentioned in the resolution; regardless of the outcome of the Polish-Soviet consultations, Moscow was determined to exploit new opportunities to strengthen itself in the Baltic region.

The Polish-German agreement on the non-use of force in bilateral relations (signed on 26 January 1934) finally buried the idea of a joint Soviet-Polish declaration. However, it caused serious anxiety for Lithuania and Latvia, which both feared the prospect of remaining alone. Moscow responded to the changed situation with a series of successful political actions in the spring of 1934. First, Soviet diplomats offered to make, with Germany, a common statement about the respect for sovereignty and non-interference into the internal affairs of the Baltic States. Berlin's refusal only enforced the image of the USSR as the only defender of the independence of the Baltic States. This issue also became the theme of the Soviet-French negotiations on regional agreement (the 'Eastern Locarno') in April-May 1934. There, Litvinov tried to obtain Paris's guarantee for the Baltic States in case of a German attack. In June, the French government finally rejected the opportunity to expand their commitments to the Baltic States. Thus, these activities by Moscow should had convinced Baltic politicians and public opinion that, due to the position of Warsaw, Berlin and Paris, their hopes to preserve independence should be connected mainly with Soviet patronage.

Second, on the initiative of the USSR, the duration of its bilateral non-aggression pacts with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was prolonged for ten years (until 1945).[40] The appropriate protocols were signed in early April, before a similar Soviet-Polish action. The willingness of the Baltic States to accept the Soviet offer gave Moscow the confidence that 'during the roll-call of the states interested in the preservation and strengthening of peace,' they 'will also always respond "yes sir!" ... in unison with the Soviet government.'[41]

The era of Polish dominance in the Baltic region in fact came to the end, but the time for active German penetration into the region had not yet come. A 'window of opportunity' was opening in front of Moscow who hastened to use it. Soviet diplomats demonstrated outstanding ingenuity – in small[42] initiatives and in great ones too – including the rejection of the late 1920s-early 1930s axiom of the inadmissibility of any forms of integration of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Keeping 'the maximum prudence,' Soviet diplomacy embarked on a path of encouragement and even the coordination of these processes. It even invited the heads of the military ministries of all Baltic States to Moscow.

Domestic politics in the Baltic States slowed the Soviet-Baltic rapprochement although it did not particularly alarm Moscow. Soviet circles reacted to the long-awaited state coup in Estonia by Konstantin Päts on 12 March 1934 almost with empathy (moreover K. Päts beforehand inquired about the attitude of Moscow concerning such perspective). Also, the Soviets, demonstrating loyalty to the Lithuanian authorities, notified President Antanas Smetona (1926–40) of the preparation of the military takeover (which, taking place in early June, failed). The putsch, carried out by Karlis Ulmanis on 15 May in Latvia, partly worried the Soviet diplomats that were involved in the

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development of domestic politics.[43] Of course, they worried not only about the dictatorial aspirations of an old acquaintance, but about his pro-German sympathies, which were now improper. Generally Moscow succeeded in fulfilling its promise to carefully 'watch over domestic political processes.'

At the same time, Moscow expressed concerns that, despite the favourable international context, there was almost no positive dynamics in the relations between the USSR and the Baltic States (the relations 'stand still and... they are weak or almost absolutely not influenced by such facts as the existence of a non-aggression treaty, the rise of German aggressiveness, the strengthening of the international position of the USSR and our admission into the League of Nations').[44] When the series of political upheavals stopped by the middle of summer, the heads of the Baltic diplomatic agencies received an invitation to Moscow. The first official visits to Moscow of the Foreign Ministers of Estonia and Lithuania took place in July and August of 1934.

The talks between the Soviet and Lithuanian Foreign Ministers Maxim Litvinov and Stasys Lozoraitis on Lithuania's role in the Baltic Union were particularly confident: the difficult international situation of Kaunas highlighted its dependence on the Soviet Union,[45] whereas tensions with Poland and Germany since the early 1930s guaranteed that the future Baltic Union will not become an instrument of Polish or German politics. The treaty of conciliation and cooperation between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, signed in Geneva on 12 September 1934, was the result of the dedicated efforts of Moscow. Formally, this treaty was opened for the accession of third states. However, the demand of consensus actually eliminated the extension of the Baltic Entente (as the new formation became called). That allowed Soviet leaders to make an unprecedented step: in February 1935, they completely removed their objections to the conclusion of a military alliance between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.[46]

In parallel, the USSR temporarily succeeded in improving its relations with Latvia. Ulmanis's government was trying to provide a more independent policy on the assumption that, in this situation, the major powers would fail to agree behind the backs of the Baltic States.[47] This tactic was interpreted in Moscow precisely as blackmail, based on exaggerated beliefs about the USSR's interest in relations with Latvia. Soviet diplomats considered that 'Latvians...became too spoilt with our policy of rapprochement,' they do not understand the 'generous attitude towards them and interpret it as a sign of weakness.' The means aimed to 'correct' Riga's behaviour (the restriction of the Soviet orders, the publications in British press about the anti-Semitism of the Latvian government)[48] testified to the inability of Moscow to rearrange the partnership. For the USSR, the tactic of a reciprocal blackmail of Ulmanis was risky. Nevertheless, Soviet pressure and the sudden belief of Ulmanis in the threat of a Soviet-Polish-German détente refreshed the Sovietophilia in Riga. In December 1934, the chief of staff of the Latvian army, General Mārtiņš Hartman (Hartmann) began to inquire about the opportunities of buying planes and tanks in the USSR.[49] Simultaneously, the Ministry of Internal Affairs closed some of the Russian émigré organizations (e.g. the Fraternal society of the former Russian servicemen, etc.). In this context, Moscow typically reduced the staff of its diplomatic missions in the Baltic States in late 1934 – the first half of 1935 (probably, Moscow believed that the time came not only to cut down its expenses for corruption of politicians, but also the salaries of the diplomats). The NKID believed that it could already look through K. Ulmanis and Vilhelms Munters ('these two slyboots') and it cared less about Lithuanian politicians.

The Baltic States loyally responded to the wishes of the USSR expressed during the Soviet–French campaign for the foundation of a regional system of collective security. Therefore, Soviet diplomacy calmly perceived the attempts of Tallinn to play an active role in negotiations on Eastern Locarno as well as the demarches of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in favour of providing security in East Central Europe. While the USSR signed the treaties of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia in May 1935, the desire to establish a common regional system of security evaporated. Although the idea of the Eastern Pact (then the pact of non-aggression and consultation) – involving the participation of the Baltic States, Germany and Poland – remained on the agenda of international negotiations until the spring of 1936.

At the conference of the Foreign Ministers of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in May 1935, the interest of these states in the system of collective security was confirmed. Actually, this conference indicated the drift of the political circles of the Baltic States towards the conclusion of agreements of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. In June, Riga informed allied Estonia about its desire to conclude a Soviet-Latvian treaty, similar to the Soviet-Czechoslovak and

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the Franco-Soviet one.[50] After signing the Anglo-German naval agreement in mid-June that annulled the restrictions on the building of the German Navy and strengthened the international position of the *Reich*, the Baltic States desire to rely on the USSR increased.

On 10 July, Latvia transmitted a proposal to conclude a bilateral mutual assistance pact to the Soviets. However, there was no answer.[51] The reasons for the unwillingness of the Soviet leaders to extend a system of mutual assistance pacts on the Baltic States was revealed by Stomonyakov, the Deputy of the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs. Responding to the initiative of the Soviet representative in Lithuania to propose the Soviet-Baltic mutual assistance treaty,[52] Stomonyakov explained that, 'such a Pact, giving us materially nothing, or almost nothing, would one-sidedly tie our hands to the commitment to provide material aid in case of an attack on them by Germany or Poland. When such an attack happens, we could, if we would deem favourable, assist them with our help.'

The desire of Moscow to retain a free hand in the policy towards the Baltic States inevitably led to a weakening of its newfound influence. First, the lack of international guarantees pushed all Baltic States to develop contacts with Germany, the only force able to counterbalance the Soviet influence in the region. This trend gained momentum in 1936. Especially clearly, it manifested itself in Estonia, where public opinion was previously marked by anti-German sentiment. For example, the government of Tallinn refused to support Riga in limiting the travels of the 'Hitler youth' to the Baltic States.[53] Second, Soviet policy created the impression that Moscow pursued the goal to expulse from the Baltic States all forces that could prevent their absorption by the Soviet Union. The American Ambassador to Moscow, William Bullitt, compared the mood in the Baltic missions in Moscow to the expectations that prevailed at Athens and Thebes in the time of Philip of Macedon. 'Yes, said the commander of the Estonian army to the Soviet minister, the USSR is not going to encroach the independence of Estonia. However, he continued, the Soviet Union would broaden due to the 'natural course of things.'[54] Similar considerations motivated Estonia to refuse a unilateral Soviet guarantee. According to Heinrich Laretei, the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, this guarantee would be a precondition for the exclusive dependence of Estonia on the USSR.[55] As a result, Soviet-Estonian relations, that were never especially warm, steadily worsened.

However, the main attention of Moscow was still focused on Kaunas. The Soviet diplomats feared that the catastrophic situation with the Lithuanian economy created the favourable atmosphere for the activity 'of the German and Polish agents' and the overthrow of the A. Smetona's Sovietophile regime (indeed, Lithuanian authorities consistently sought to sign the agreement on mutual assistance with the Soviet Union). After the replacement of the leadership of the Estonian Foreign Ministry and the appointment of the pro-German oriented Friedrich Akel to the post of Minister in the early summer of 1936, it became apparent that Lithuania had to forget about the development of cooperation within the Baltic Entente. Thus, Kaunas openly raised the question of a bilateral treaty with the Soviet Union and renewed requests for the sale of weapons and military equipment (the detailed draft of the agreement was officially turned over to the Soviet trade representative in Lithuania in September). At the same time, the interest in the development of contacts with the Soviet Union also intensified in the Defence Ministry of Latvia.

In 1936 and 1937, the Soviet and Baltic top militaries exchanged official visits. First, the Chiefs of General Staffs of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia went to Moscow (they visited the May-Day parade in 1936). After, in the late winter of 1937, Marshal Alexander Egorov, the Chief of the Soviet General Staff, made a return trip to the Baltic States. The nature of this unprecedented visit for the relations between the USSR and the neighbouring states remained largely unclear. Marshal Egorov was forbidden to discuss military supplies from the USSR to Latvia and Lithuania (though the NKID hoped this directive might be subsequently revised). The presidents of Latvia and Lithuania abstained from the meeting with the Marshal. General Johan Laidoner recommended to the participants of the 23 February 1937 parade in Tallinn [23 February was celebrated as the Red Army Day in the USSR], organized in honour of the arrival of Egorov, to march not as soldiers, but as free citizens.[56] However, Moscow appreciated the information that after the visit of Egorov Latvia's Minister of War, General Jānis Balodis, 'became a clear Sovietophile.' In a speech to the graduates of the Higher Military School in May, 1937, Balodis claimed that despite the system in the USSR being different, which Latvia did not accept, in the situation of a war, Latvia should go along with the Soviet Union.[57]

The content of the negotiations between Egorov and Baltic political and military leaders, or, at least, its context, was

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undoubtedly determined by two factors: on the one hand, by a growing popularity of the ideas of international neutrality in the Baltic States and, on the other, by the discussions in Moscow about the role of the Baltic States in its military-political planning. Soviet military experts, at least since the early 1930s, regarded the neutrality of the Baltic States in the case of war as an unpleasant circumstance that might complicate the use of their territories by the Red Army. The Defence Sector of the Soviet State Planning Committee, analysing scenarios of future war, believed that 'the Estonian army would closely coordinate its actions with activity of the Finnish and Swedish armies and would participate in joint actions against Leningrad, and Latvia would try to 'force Lithuania to join the Polish-Latvian coalition using the armed influence.' From the point of view of the Soviet offensive strategy, it would be 'much worse, if they (the Baltic States) in the beginning of the war would declare neutrality. Thus, in accordance with the concrete political situation either at the beginning or during the war, we should perform on them the same operation,' that Germany performed in 1914. Therefore, regardless of the position the Baltic States would take at the beginning of the military conflict, 'Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia should be quickly defeated and Sovietized.'<sup>[58]</sup>

The Soviet strategic plan for the war in the West that operated in the first half of the 1930s put the defeat of the Polish state as its main goal under the assumption that 'Finland, Estonia and Latvia, most probably, would remain neutral, at least for the first period of the war..., that Poland will not have time to occupy Lithuania before our Western front will start its offensive.' The transformation of Germany ('allied to Poland') into the 'main organiser of the anti-Soviet intervention' led Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Deputy of the People's Commissar for Defence, to the conclusion that 'Lithuania can be easily occupied by German-Polish forces during the first days of war,' and then 'Germany, by threatening Riga, could influence the position of Latvia and get the aviation base for regular raids on Leningrad and Kronstadt.'<sup>[59]</sup> In the beginning of 1936, Stalin and Molotov began to publicly speak about the 'borders on credit' – meaning the possible German use of the Baltic territory for aggression against the Soviet Union.<sup>[60]</sup> On the other hand, Soviet militaries had no scruples to explain that in a case of war they did not intend to respect the sovereignty of the Baltic States.<sup>[61]</sup> The governing body of the Red Army (probably in 1936 or at the beginning of 1937) elaborated a plan for the 'repetition of Belgium,' but 'the government' refused to confirm it.<sup>[62]</sup>

Reflecting on these trends, Soviet diplomacy reacted extremely negatively and sentiments for Baltic States' proclamation of constant neutrality intensified in 1936–37. Thus, talking with Kaarel Eenpalu (Einbund), the influential companion of K. Päts, the Soviet Polpred (ambassador) in Tallin Alexey Ustinov said: 'Inaction... during our tense era of the struggle for peace is actually a blow to the system of the collective security and is equal to the support of aggressor, whereas the "neutrality" is therefore such inaction in favour of the aggressor.'

The demand of Moscow for the Baltic States to make a public choice in favour of Germany's foes as well as its reluctance to assume any obligations of protection of the Baltic States's sovereignty – as well as the deepening of the détente with Lithuania and Latvia – indicated a growing crisis in Soviet foreign policy and in the relations between the Kremlin and military leaders. The unleashing of 'the great terror' in the autumn of 1936, partly determined by these general political contradictions, also affected Soviet Baltic policy. On the other hand, the disgust caused in the Baltic States by news about state red terror, destroyed illusions about the goals of the Kremlin and about its reliability as a partner.<sup>[63]</sup> Wide ostentatious gestures (in June 1937, the Latvian Foreign Minister Vilhelms Munters was honoured to meet Stalin) could not change this situation. It was obvious that Moscow was unable (or unwilling) to assist the Baltic States in obtaining effective international guarantees, or to assume clear political commitments. The Baltic Entente, whose belated establishment promised the strengthening of the position of the Baltic States in their cooperation with the Soviet Union, was perceived (from the end of 1937) as a burden even by such enthusiasts of the Baltic cooperation as K. Ulmanis. The USSR was losing political initiative in the region, which it undoubtedly possessed in 1933–34. The dynamic and multifaceted policy of Germany was weaning the competition for the dominant influence in the region. This situation was aggravated by the killings of the eminent Soviet diplomats, who for fifteen years were involved in the formation and conduction of Soviet foreign policy in the Baltic region.<sup>[64]</sup>

Following Estonia, Latvia also began to incline to extend cooperation with the Germans. Soviet diplomats often called this tactic the policy of 'equilibrium' between Germany and the Soviet Union – 'one iota to the right, one iota to the left.'<sup>[65]</sup> In practice, for instance, it prevented President Ulmanis from responding to the newly arrived Soviet polpred to Riga, I. Zotov, who, during the presentation of his credentials in December 1937, expressed desires to develop contacts between military ministries.

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The political closeness of the USSR and Lithuania also quickly betrayed the past. In March 1938, using the international crisis following the *Anschluss* of Austria, the Polish government delivered an ultimatum to Lithuania. Warsaw demanded the restoration of full diplomatic and consular relationships, what actually meant Lithuania's refusal to retain its claims on Vilnius and its surroundings. Previously, the support of these pretensions had always been regarded by Moscow as corresponding to its own interests regardless of any problems which witnessed the history of the Soviet-Lithuanian relations. In March 1938, Soviet diplomacy was slow to intervene in the Polish-Lithuanian conflict. When further ignoring it became impossible, Moscow confined itself by a 'weak move' in relation to Poland and advised the Lithuanian government to 'yield to the violence' (the 'international community,' as Litvinov declared to the Envoy, Jurgis Baltrushaitis 'would not understand the Lithuanian refusal').

In total, the influence of Moscow on the outcome of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict was very small and mostly manifested in the promotion of Poland rather than in protecting the interests of its client.[66] Not surprisingly, the USSR's influence reduced in Lithuania after its capitulation. As the new Soviet Envoy stated in August 1938, the wide horizons were opened 'before Germany in Lithuania. It dominates there in the full sense of the word.' The *polpred* could not offer any leverage measures on Kaunas, except commercial ones. However, the competition with the Germans or the British in this sphere had obviously been meaningless (only five percent of Lithuanian exports went to the USSR).[67] When in March 1939, Germany demanded Klaipeda (Memel), Kaunas did not think about the appeal to the USSR. From the main political partner of the Soviet Union, Lithuania rapidly turned into the weakest link of Soviet policy in this region (this evolution explains why Moscow consented to place Lithuania into the German sphere of influence in August 1939).

The Soviet positions, in comparison with 1933–1934, were severely weakened, and the fear of the Baltic States being absorbed by Germany was the USSR's only trump card. Moscow could no longer think about the restoration of Soviet influence in the Baltic States, or say anything about its dominance without the consent of the other Powers. Its main efforts at the end of 1938 through mid-1939 were focused on the 'big politics.' During these months, the diplomatic moves of the Soviet Union regarding the Baltic region were repeating the actions which were envisaged five years ago, but the accents were placed differently. The main focus was placed not on the appeal to Poland to cooperate in the protection of the Baltic States's independence,[68] but on the inclusion of the Baltic theme into the agenda of negotiations with Western Powers.

After the British gave their guarantees to Poland and Romania, Moscow decided to talk to the Balts in a firm tone. On 28 March 1939, Commissar Litvinov, referring to rumours about the German-Estonian treaty on the passage of German troops through the territory of Estonia, handed the Estonian Envoy a note. It expressed the inadmissibility for the USSR of German predominance in the Baltic region (the same note was sent to the government of Latvia). The Commissar's speech sounded like an unequivocal request for the exclusive interests of the Soviet Union in the territory of these two States: 'Any agreement, "voluntary" or imposed under external pressure, which would bring a diminution or limitation of the independence and autonomy of the Republic of Estonia, and which would assume the political, economic or otherwise domination of a third state, would grant it any exclusive rights and privileges...would be recognized by the Soviet government as intolerable and incompatible with the assumptions and the spirit' of the peace treaty and the non-aggression treaty.[69]

The persistent attempts of the Baltic States to find a protector in London or Paris were unsuccessful. The Western Powers did not want to charge them with new heavy obligations. In April and May, the Soviets handed Britain and France two proposals to provide a joint guarantee of the Baltic States. After those unsuccessful moves, the new head of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov (1939–49) made known the reaction of the Western powers in his public speech: Britain and France 'do not say anything about their assistance to the three states on the North-Western border of the USSR, which may be unable to defend its neutrality in case of an attack by aggressors.'[70]

Latvia and Estonia, disappointed with the policy of neutrality as a way to protect their independence (despite the fact that the Baltic Entente announced its commitment to neutrality during its conference in February 1939), signed the non-aggression pacts with Germany on 7 June. Thus, Moscow faced a dilemma of how to preserve its position in the region. There were only two possibilities – to wage war on Germany or to make an agreement with it. At the same

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time, Berlin felt that a compromise with the USSR could be achieved in the area of the 'solution of the Baltic problem.' On behalf of the Germans, the head of Italy's Foreign Ministry hinted to the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* that the possibility of providing the joint Soviet-German 'guarantees' to the Baltic States existed.[71] So, Moscow received a proposal to recall its own similar initiative, done in March 1934. However, this time, the proposal could not satisfy the USSR without the inclusion of the 'real' content in these guarantees.

On the other hand, Soviet negotiations with Britain and France opened considerable scope for freedom of action in the Baltic States for the USSR. During these negotiations, the Soviets referred to the need for action against 'an indirect aggression.' [72] The breadth of its interpretation, proposed by the USSR, alarmed Western partners. In August 1939, Moscow suggested that Britain and France should demand a temporary occupation of several ports and islands in the Baltic Sea. At the same time, the Soviet Baltic fleet 'in order to protect the independent Baltic States' should be based on Åland, Moonsund, in Hanko, Haapsalu, Pärnu, Heinaste and Libau together with the united squadron.[73] Actually, the Soviets proposed a joint protectorate of the three powers.

Yet, Germany could offer something more. The Kremlin, which was intolerant of any attempts of the Baltic States to keep neutrality 'during our tense era for the struggle for peace,' agreed to take the position of benevolent neutrality favouring the aggressor in the emerging world war. The Soviet-German secret protocol, signed on 23 August 1939 by Molotov and Ribbentrop, contained the radical and extremely beneficial to the USSR decision:

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and USSR.

After signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Moscow asked Latvia and Estonia to open negotiations on a trade agreement, which these states tried to conclude in vain during the previous decade. The Soviet-Estonian negotiations ended within a few days and the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs received an invitation to visit the Soviet Union in order to sign the trade agreement. However, during the meeting with Molotov on 24 September, he heard the shocking demand to conclude with the USSR a military alliance or a treaty on mutual assistance, which would give to the USSR rights to have the Navy and Air Force strongholds and bases on the Estonian territory. For the moment, Moscow also refused to finalize the trade agreements with Tallinn. On 25 September, the German Ambassador in Moscow was informed that 'the Soviet Union will immediately proceed to the solution of the Baltic States problem.' [74] Three days later, a new secret Protocol was signed in Moscow that modified the boundaries of the spheres of influence between the USSR and Germany. The territory of Lithuania, as well as the territories of all other Baltic States, were located within the Soviet sphere of interest. On 28 September, the Soviet-Estonian Treaty of mutual assistance was signed, and soon the USSR signed similar treaties with Latvia (5 October) and Lithuania (10 October).

Additional events were not long in coming. Already in early September, Soviet representatives formulated the 'true desires of the masses of workers' of the Baltic States. The polpred in Riga supposed that these desires were aimed to 'make Latvia a Soviet State and attach it to the USSR as the 12th of the Republic.' [75]

### Conclusion

Initially, there were favourable preconditions for the relations of Soviet Russia with the Baltic States (they were perhaps more favourable than the relations of the USSR with its other neighbors along the Western border – Poland, Romania and Finland). Moscow, on the one hand, and Riga, Tallinn and Kaunas, on the other, were objectively interested in the political and economic interaction.

The conditions for the 'divorce' of 1920 did not give reasons for the serious mutual claims (such as, for example, the fate of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands in Soviet relations with Poland, the fate of Bessarabia in relations with Romania or the fate of Eastern Karelia in relations with Finland). The Russian minority did not cause any problems in the bilateral relations. The predominance of anti-Soviet sentiment in the Russian community of the Baltic States protected it from the active intervention of Moscow.[76] The Soviets just occasionally paid attention to the position of

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the Russians (like during land reform in the Republic of Lithuania and Estonia's resettlement of fishermen from the coast of lake Peipsi and Pihkva to the shore of the Baltic sea, etc.), and the interest in teaching the Russian language was determined only by the desire to facilitate and conduct propaganda. Until 1934, Soviet foreign bodies avoided arguments about national or racial community. Therefore, for example, they were more interested in the potential use of the Polish minority in Latgale than in the possibility of an appeal to the Russian diaspora. In the early 1930s, Moscow hosted several trains with Jewish families from Lithuania, while it denied return permission to Russian peasants.[77] The inertia of this approach prevailed until 1940. While Moscow advertised the 'reunion' of Ukrainians and Belarusians on the ruins of the Polish State, the 'Russian card' was not played in relations with the Baltic States. On their part, the Baltic States (unlike, for example, Finland) also demonstrated the utmost restraint regarding the protection of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national minorities in the USSR.

Ideological differences and subversive Communist activity had no significant impact on inter-state relations between the USSR and the Baltic States. This circumstance was partly caused by the extremely small memberships of the Baltic Communist parties (which, sometimes, had only dozens of people). Moreover, as Soviet methods of collectivization and industrialization became well-known in the Baltic States (thanks to the permeability of the boundaries), it diminished the attractiveness of the socialist experiment and Moscow was not sure about the appropriateness of expenditures for the pro-Soviet periodicals publication. At the same time, the Russian theatre, painting, literature as well as innovations in Soviet public education elicited great interest in the Baltic States. Thus, in the 1920s-early 1930s, cultural relations were quite intensive.[78]

Finally, the basis for durable inter-state relations was the objective interest of the USSR in the conservation of the zone of independent Baltic States. The very existence of this was a natural buffer that protected the territory of the USSR from the threats of the Great Powers – whether that was Britain in the 1920s or Germany in the 1930s. Similarly, the young Baltic States were acutely aware of the need for regional cooperation as the main protection against manipulation by the major European powers that sought to overcome deep divisions generated by the results of the World War. But these requirements were rarely embodied in joint political action, as it was during the conclusion of the London conventions about the definition of the aggressor in 1933.

Generally, the facilities of coexistence between Russia and the independent Baltic States during the interwar period were lost or reversed. Soviet-Baltic relations were constantly evolving from crisis to crisis. Not forgetting about the impact that political instability had on bilateral relations in the Baltic States, or about the trends of the 'original Patriarchal nationalism,' adventurism and corruption, which affected the part of the national elites, it should be stated that the primary responsibility for their development is certainly on the Soviet side.

From the mid-1920s until late-1930s, the Soviet Union tried vainly to play the Great Power role in the Baltic region. Ridiculing the provincialism, dependence and corruption of the neighbouring small states, Moscow tried to treat them as proverbial 'banana republics' – thereby discrediting their opinions and destroying sincere hopes for mutually beneficial cooperation (this was especially apparent during the Soviet-Latvian negotiations on the extension of the trade agreement in 1931–32). Simultaneously, Soviet leadership failed to use the 'negative capital' – a genuine fear in the Baltic States of resurgent state power and the Communist ideology of new Russia. The use of this fear could have been an important precondition for the establishment of lasting political relations and conditions of compromise. Instead, Moscow preferred to spend its 'negative capital' on the petty bullying of the Balts for the sake of closing small emigrant societies and achieving such little goals.

The Soviets did not understand what they wanted in the Baltic region. A hierarchisation of goals and objectives, and an adequate assessment of their own capabilities and resources was not conducted. In the early-1930s, the Soviet Union was forced to renounce its plans to force the Baltic States to turn away from Poland and negotiate with Moscow one by one, from positions of weakness. The non-aggression pacts opened a short era of Soviet-Baltic détente. However, the emergence of a real military threat not only motivated the Baltic States (especially Latvia and Lithuania) to look for rapprochement with the Soviet Union, but also provoked a desire in Moscow to shy away from taking on any obligation which could hamper its diplomatic manoeuvres. In the mid-1930s, despite the fact that the Soviet Union had an army of one million and the largest number of tanks in the world, it was afraid to 'compromise' itself by selling Lithuania cavalry checkers. As a result, the USSR failed to fulfil the first commandment of a Great

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Power – to act in accordance with its own interests and support the weaker states that respect those interests. The USSR influence in the Baltic region in the late-1930s was undermined by Soviet policy itself. Nonetheless, the USSR acquired power over a stubborn Estonia, a constructive Latvia and a friendly Lithuania from the hands of Berlin despite its own ruined Baltic policy.

*\*Translated by Raisa Barash*

## Notes

- [1] John Hiden and Thomas Lane (eds.), *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992, 1 (the statement of a British diplomat D. Gregory).
- [2] Alfred Ioffe, 'Mirnye peregovory mezhdru Rossiei i Litvoi.' 9 May 1920 // Arhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiisoky Federacii (hereafter, AVP RF). F.151, op. 3, d. 9, l. 60. Moscow, Russia.
- [3] The main articles of import to Soviet Russia through the Baltic countries in 1920–1921 were the soles of army boots, chemicals, aircrafts (illegally purchased in Estonia) and rifles (provided by Sweden on account of the tsar's orders).
- [4] Vladimir Lenin, *Neizvestnye dokumenty*. 1891–1922. Moskva: Rosspen, 1999, 358.
- [5] The modern historian begins his essay devoted to foreign policy of the Baltic States with the claim that 'historically they have always been a part of the Western European cultural tradition,' but he acknowledges that the current national identity was 'definitely' born by fifty years of the 'Soviet experience.' See: Romuald J. Misiunas, 'National Identity and Foreign Policy in the Baltic States,' in: *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New Independent States of Eurasia*, edited by S. Frederic Starr. London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994, 93–4. Even in the mid 1930s the statesmen of the Baltic States preferred to use during their joint conferences the Russian language (not French which was generally accepted in contemporary international practice).
- [6] *Istochnik* 1 (2001): 58. It is clear therefore the predictions of the beginning of 1921 that 'the next step of the Bolsheviks will be an attempt to strengthen the place of arm on the shores of the Baltic seaside' (Mikhail I. Rostovcev, *Politicheskie stati*. Sankt-Peterburg: S. Petersburg UP, 2002, 178).
- [7] Ivan I. Kostyushko, *Materialy 'osoboi papki' Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) po voprosu sovetsko-polskih otnosheniy. 1923–1944*. Moskva: Institut slavyanovedeniya RAN, 1997, 13–14. Already in summer, 1921, on the initiative of the head of the NKID G.V. Chicherin, the Central Committee of the RCP(b) recommended 'to the Communists of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to exercise the greatest diligence in both foreign and domestic policy, taking into account... that currently it is impossible to talk about military aid to them from the RSFSR' (Lenin, *Neizvestnye dokumenty*, 447–9).
- [8] Aleksey Chernyh, 'Doklad Ya. S. Ganeckomu.' 20 April 1922 // AVP RF. F. 0135, op. 5, p. 106, d. X, l. 19.
- [9] Konstantin Yurenev, 'Doklad Ya. S. Ganeckomu.' 7 June 1922 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51798, l. 67–69.
- [10] Viktor Kopp, 'Letter to S. A. Aralov' 3 (8) November 1923 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51798, l. 98.
- [11] Taking into account the general attention to the German event, this agreement was supposed to give the form of the Protocol on freedom of transit.
- [12] Yakov Ganetsky, 'Pismo K.K. Yurenevu'. 15 June 1922 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51797, l. 52.
- [13] Zigfrids A. Meierovics, 'Pismo S.I. Aralovu'. 8 August 1923 // AVP RF. F. 150, op. 6, p. 15, d. 18, l. 21.



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- [14] Semen Aralov, 'Pismo K.A. Krzheminskomu'. 2 June 1924 // AVP RF. F. 028, p. 1, d. 37, l. 2.
- [15] Spravka upolnomochennogo NKID pri SNK BSSR. 28 August 1925 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 176, d. 51874, l. 13; B.I. Kantorovich, 'Pismo A.S. Chernyhu'. 31 August 1925 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 176, d. 51874, l. 14.
- [16] Of course, such 'investments' did not always result in the desired dividends. For example, the leader of the Latvian farmers Karlis Ulmanis, to the dismay of Moscow, 'traveled abroad' spending Soviet gold but shielding it away from the fulfillment of his promises.
- [17] Yakov Ganetsky, 'Pismo K.K. Yurenevu'. 9 November 1922 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51797, l. 104.
- [18] Konstantin Yurenev, 'Doklad Ya.S. Ganetskomu'. November 1922 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51799, l. 78.
- [19] The heads of diplomatic and foreign trade departments Ya. Ganetsky sincerely did not understand why the Baltic countries needed naval forces. On the decision of Riga to begin its creation, he responded with the tactless joke: 'I am ready to send to the Latvian government my sincere congratulations on this occasion. Now Latvia will eventually become a great power' (AVP RF. F. 04, op. 25, p. 172a, d. 51799, l. 87).
- [20] Even at the beginning of 1924, the plenipotentiary minister in Kaunas continued to believe that without Vilnius and without the borders with the USSR, Lithuania 'has no precondition for the independent economic existence' (Ivan Lorents, 'Pismo V.L. Koppu', 4 February 1924 // AVP RF. F. 04, op. 27, p. 183, d. 52017, l. 24).
- [21] 'The Point of view of NKID' is that 'this conference has not decisive importance' (Semen Aralov, 'Pismo A.S. Chernyhu', 14 April 1925 // AVP RF. F. 028, op. 3, p. 6, d. 1, l. 158).
- [22] Grant M. Adibekov (et al.), *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Evropa : resheniya "osoboi papki", 1923–1939*. Moskva: Rosspen, 2001, 75–77. Even in the resolution approved by the Politburo they talked not even about possibility, but about the supposed 'fact' of the formation of the Baltic Union.
- [23] Materials of scripted correspondence between the NKID and its foreign missions (*polpredstva*), 1920–21 // AVP RF. F. 028, op. 1, d.1, l. 244.
- [24] In the USSR there were plans to fill the missing industrial potential of Estonia (that was motivated also by the desirability of forming of national proletariat), but under the influence of growth of the anticommunist sentiments, Moscow in 1923 abandoned plans to promote the industrialization of Estonia.
- [25] Ivan Lorents, 'Doklad V.L. Koppu', 14 August 1924 // AVP RF. F.04, op. 27, p. 184, d. 52021, l. 45–47; Ivan Lorents, 'Dokladnaya zapiska (prilozhenie k dokladu V.L. Koppu ot 31.12.1924)', 30 December 1924 // AVP RF. F.04, op. 27, p. 184, d. 52021, l. 72–82.
- [26] Boris Stomonyakov, 'Zapiska I.V. Stalinu', 14 April 1932 // AVP RF. F. 09, op., 7, p. 55, d. 5, l. 28.
- [27] Boris Stomonyakov, 'Zapiska besedy s K. Ozolsom', 2 December 1927 // AVP RF. F. 09, op., 7, p. 55, d. 5, l. 104.
- [28] Stanislaw Gregorowicz, *Polsko-radzieckie stosunki polityczne w latach 1932–1935*. Wrocław: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1982, 26–27.
- [29] Boris Stomonyakov, 'Zapiska besedy s Yu. Baltrushaitisom', 13 April 1927 // AVP RF. F. 09, op., 7, p. 55, d. 5, l. 175–176. The leadership of the Polish-Baltic Lender-Secretariat of the IKKI characterized the head of the Lithuanian state as follows: 'Bloody Smetona (a drunkard and speculator) actually turned into Nazi petty monarch with the unlimited rights' ('The current moment and the objectives of the Communist Party of Lithuania', 20 June 1928 //

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Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenniy Arhiv Sotsialno-Politicheskoy Istorii (hereafter, RGASPI). F. 495, op. 61, d. 13, l. 402.

[30] Ivan Lorents, 'Doklad S.S. Aleksandrovskomu,' 4 August 1928 // RGASPI. F. 0150, op. 21, p. 41, d. 34, l. 115.

[31] Two thousand dollars, paid then to K. Ulmanis were considered as 'just grease' (N.N. Kulyabko, 'Doklad B.S. Stomonyakovu,' 27 May 1928 // RGASPI. F. 0150, op. 21, p. 41, d. 34, l. 26). Ulmanis was trying to blackmail Moscow, demanding to pay the additional amounts and buy one newspaper of the Peasant Union. The Soviet side agreed to pay in exchange for a receipt (Ulmanis gave it), but refused to buy a newspaper.

[32] Boris Stomonyakov, 'Pometa na doklade I.M. Maiskogo ot 25.4.1932' // RGASPI. F. 0135, op. 15, p. 131, d.1, l.52.

[33] It is not clear whether this requirement was determined by the assault towards the non-influential Russian organizations or if it was seen as a demonstration lesson that should be taught to the 'Balts'.

[34] Nikolai Raivid, 'Dokladnaya zapiska M.M. Litvinovu "K voprosu o Baltiyskom soyuze",' 14 January 1932 // AVP RF. F. 05, op. 12, p. 86, d. 68, l. 1,6.

[35] L. Kosheleva (edit. et al.), *Perepiska I.V. Stalina s V.M. Molotovym. 1925–1936*. Moskva: Rossiya molodaya, 1995, 209.

[36] Oleg N. Ken and Alexander I. Rupasov, *Politbyuro TsK VKP(b) i otnosheniya SSSR s zapadnymi sosednimi gosudarstvami (konec 1920–1930-h gg.). Problemy. Dokumenty. Opyt kommentariya. Ch. 1. 1928–1934*. Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiski dom, 2000, 248–56, 258–66, 268–72.

[37] Boris S. Stomonyakov, 'Pismo S.I. Brodovskomu,' 27 December 1933 // AVP RF. F. 0150, op.28, p.60, d.2, l.151.

[38] *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (hereafter, *DVP SSSR*). T. 16, 789. In April 1933, at a closed conference of the Latvian Social-Democrats, where the Estonian socialists were invited, A. Bushevic, promising to initiate the armed uprising of workers against those who would push his state on the path of a violation of neutrality, expressed the hope that the Soviet Union might reject its still 'indifferent' Baltic policy and intervene in the affairs of Latvia. The plenipotentiary minister Alexey Svidersky did his best to clear the transcript from such 'distortions' of the Soviet intentions (Magnus Ilmjärv, *Häälētu alistumine: Eesti, Läti ja Leedu välispoliitilise orientatsiooni kujunemine ja iseseivuse kaotus: 1920. aastate kekspaigast anneksioonini*. Tallinn: Argo, 2004, 216).

[39] Ken and Rupasov, *Politbjuro*, 414–24.

[40] It is interesting that Moscow refused to accept the Latvian wish to extend the non-aggression pact forever, because 'the documents, signed forever used to lose its value due to the fact that the mind becomes accustomed to them' (L.E. Berezov, 'Zapis besedy s latviyskim poslannikom Alfredsom Bilmanisom,' 22 March 1934 // AVP RF. F. 0150, op. 30, p. 62, d. 6. L. 26).

[41] *DVP SSSR*. T.17, 234 (the authors italics).

[42] One of the original friendly proposals was, for example, to grant the Latvian army 'on the basis of reciprocity of some accommodation for sick officers in the sanatoriums of the southern coast of the Crimea and the Black Sea coast' (I.M. Mortyshin, 'Doklad L.E. Berezovu,' 10 November 1934 // AFPRF. F. 0150, op. 30, p. 62, d. 9, l. 18).

[43] Contemporary Latvian researchers could not yet establish with sufficient certainty, whether the representatives of Soviet mission in Riga helped K. Ulmanis or his political opponents.

[44] I.M. Mortyshin, 'Doklad B.S. Stomonyakovu,' 21 October 1934 // AFPRF. F. 0150, op. 30, p. 62, d. 3, l. 31.

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[45] Before the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Stasys Lozoraitis (1934–38) came to Moscow, the Politburo approved military supplies to Lithuania and agreed to sell cavalry swords, etc. (Protocol No 11 of the Politbyuro TsK VKP (b) meeting (“special”) on 5 August 1934 // RGASPI. F. 17, op. 162, p. 49, d. 16, l41). However, the subsequent negotiations brought no results.

[46] B.S. Stomonyakov, ‘Pismo M.A. Karskomu,’ 26 February 1935 // AVP RF. F. 0151, op. 26, p. 49, d. 2, l. 15.

[47] Aivars Stranga, ‘Russian and Polish Policies in the Baltic States from 1933 to 1935,’ in: *The Baltic States at Historical Crossroads. Political, Economic and Legal Problems in the Context of International Cooperation on the Doorstep of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, edited by Talavs Judins. Riga: Latvian Academy of Sciences, 1998, 433.

[48] The calculation was based on the consideration that some of the oil, a key product of the Latvian exports to Britain, was bought by the ‘Jewish’ firms.

[49] S.I. Brodovsky, ‘Doklad B.S. Stomonyakovu,’ 12 December 1934 // AVP RF. F. 0150, op. 30, p. 62, d. 3, l. 5.

[50] Tallinn negatively responded to these shifts in Latvian politics. However, Moscow also received information about the differences among the Estonian leadership (A.M. Ustinov, ‘Dnevnik,’ 30 July 1935 // AVP RF. F. 0154, op. 28, p. 40, d. 6, l. 118.

[51] Stranga, ‘Stranga, ‘Russian and Polish Policies’, 435–6.

[52] The plenipotentiary minister M. Karskyi believed that a proposal to conclude pacts of the mutual assistance would not be accepted by Latvia and Estonia, but the fact that the Soviet initiative itself would cause a positive public response.

[53] The growing interest of Estonians in Russia should be fairly noted. In accordance with the data of the plenipotentiary representation by the spring 1936, the wish to learn Russian among the students in Tartu reached such a scale that in this small town more than a hundred people earn money by giving private Russian language lessons.

[54] A.M. Ustinov, ‘Zapis besedy s J. Laidonerom’, 25 Avril 1936 // AVP RF. F. 0154, op. 29, p. 42, d. 8, l. 66. After the coup in Estonia in 1934, the Commander in Chief Johan Laidoner and the Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Reek supported idea of the revision of the ‘pessimistic’ defensive doctrine and for giving it ‘activity’ (the transfer of military actions onto the territory of the USSR, etc.). This change was associated with the deepening of military cooperation with Germany (Jari Leskinen, *Vaiettu Suomen silta: Suomen ja Viron sotilaallinen yhteistoiminta Neuvostoliiton varalta vuosina 1930–1939*. Helsinki: Finish Historical Society, 1997). Estonia was the only Baltic State that preferred not to seek military materials from the USSR, but chose to buy them in Germany and Sweden.

[55] Ustinov, ‘Dnevnik. Beseda s H. Lareteem,’ 15 May 1935 // AVP RF. F. 0154, op. 29, p. 42, d. 8, l. 93–4.

[56] V.H. Gallienne to E. Monson (Riga), 1 January 1937 // Public Record Office (hereafter, PRO). FO/371/21106/N1517.

[57] S.I. Brodovski, ‘Dnevnik’ 21 May 1937 // AVP RF. F. 0150, op. 34, p. 71, d. 6, l. 46.

[58] N. Snitko, ‘Doklad ‘O haraktere buduschey voinu i zadachah oborony,’ 4 Avril 1930 // Rossiyskiy gosudrastvennyj arhiv ekonomiki. F. 4372, op. 91, d. 91, l. 29–11.

[59] M. N. Tuhachevski, ‘Doklad K.E. Voroshilovy,’ 25 February 1935 // Rossiyskiy gosudrastvennyji voennyi arhiv ekonomiki. F. 33987, op. 3, d. 400, l 226–7.

[60] *DVP SSSR*. T. 19, 106–7.

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[61] Skaife, military attaché to Lord Chilston, Moscow, 23 April 1936 // PRO. FO/371/20349/N2290.

[62] '1937. Pokazaniya marshala Tuhachevskogo', *Voenno-istoricheski zhurnal* 8 (1991): 48.

[63] In the summer of 1937, the Soviet plenipotentiary minister in Estonia reported about the unprecedented 'unbridled campaign against the Soviet Union' that was unfolding after news about the suicide of the high-ranking Soviet military official Yan Gamarnik, and was assuming the 'hyperbolic dimensions after the publication of the prosecutor's decision about the upcoming trial over Tukhachevskiy etc. on 11 June. The thesis that 'no one now will have desire to contact such an insolvent partner, as the USSR' was noted particularly (A.M. Ustinov, 'Doklad M.M. Litvinovu,' 18 June 1937//AVP RF. F. 0154, op. 30, p. 44, d. 13, l. 24–5.

[64] During 1936–38, there were four heads of the 1st Western department of NKID. In addition, the Deputy people's Commissar (previously a member of the Board of NKID), who since 1926 supervised the Baltic direction, B. S. Lomonaco, was arrested after a suicide attempt in the summer of 1938. He was executed in 1941. Lomonaco's fate was shared by polpreds in Latvia (Brodovsky) and in Lithuania (Karskiy). Sabine Dullin, *Des hommes d'influences: Les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe 1930–1939*. Paris : Payot, 2001, 334–7.

[65] I.S. Zotov, 'Dnevnik,' 3 December 1937//AVP RF. F. 0150, op. 34, p. 71, d. 6, l23.

[66] Sergey Z. Sluch, 'Gitler, Stalin i genezis chetvertogo razdela Polshi,' in: *Vostochnaya Evropa mezhdru Gitlerom i Stalinym. 1939–1941*. Moskva: Indrik, 1999, 93–96.

[67]

'Stenogramma soveschaniya u zamnarkomata t. Potemkina,' 14 August 1938// AVP RF. F. 05, op. 18, p. 146, d. 111, l. 33–9. These changes led to a sharp decline of Russian language teaching in Lithuania, the preference was given to English and French languages.

[68] A new proposal about this problem was passed using military channels, but not diplomatic ones (Sluch, 'Gitler, Stalin i genezis, 135, 161).

[69] Külle Arjakas (ed.), *Ot pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa do dogovora o bazah: Dokumenty i materialy*. Tallinn: Periodika, 1990, 17.

[70] *SSSR v borbe za mir nakanune vtoroi mirovoi voiny (sentyabr 1938 – avgust 1939): Dokumenty i materialy*. Moskva: Politizdat, 1971, 428.

[71] Ingibor Fleischhauer, *Pakt: Gitler, Stalin i iniciativa germanskoj diplomatii. 1938–1939*. Perevod s nemeckogo. Moskva : Progress, 1991, 143.

[72] 'The phrase 'indirect aggression' refers to the action upon which any of the listed States [of the Baltic region] agrees under the threat of the use of force by another power or without such a threat and which causes the use of the territory and forces of this state for aggression against it or against one of the causes the loss by the state of independence or violation of its neutrality' (*SSSR v borbe za mir*, 487).

[73] *SSSR v borbe za mir*, 575–6

[74] *SSSR–Germaniya. 1939. T.1. Dokumenty i materialy o sovetsko-germanskih otnosheniyah s aprelya po oktyabr 1939*. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1989, 106.

[75] *Ot pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa*, 26.

[76] Only in the 1930s the Baltic States started to realise that 'some [ Soviet] propagandistic agencies' had pursued

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'different policies' than the NKID. For example, these USSR agencies demonstrated an increased interest in some Russian organizations of a fascist trend in Estonia (like '*Young Russia*', which, in accordance with the statement of K. Eenpalu, was conducting the 'increased agitation... in the border zone, supporting the Soviet Russia and praising Stalin's national policy, and encouraging, in a case of war, not to use weapons against the USSR' (A.M. Ustinov, 'Dnevnik,' 3 March 1936// AVP RF. F. 0154, op. 29, p. 42, d. 8, l. 39–40.

[77] Since 1933, Comintern matured the idea of deploying by the Communist party of Estonia of the struggle for the rights of the Russian population of the Pechersk region ('even' right up to secession). The emergence of this idea, however, was determined not so much by the beginning of the 'nationalization' of foreign policy of the USSR, but many by the traditional Communist rigorism: each section of the Comintern should protect national minorities (for example, Polish section should protect the German minority) up to the collapse of the state.

[78] About the activities of the All-Soviet society for cultural relations with foreign countries in the Baltic States see at: Magnus Ilmjärv, '*Juunivalitsuse moodustamisest Leedus, Lätis ja Eestis ning Nõukogude Liidu kultuuridiplomaatiast*', *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* 4 (2000): 104–44.

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