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Zenonas Butkus **Soviet Instigation of Revolution  
in Germany in 1923 and  
the Block of Peace of the Baltic  
Countries and Poland**

(Vilnius University – Vilnius, Lietuva)

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## Introduction

The widespread stereotype that, purportedly, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, re-established or newly-established after the First World War, did not intensify security and stability because they were involved in strong mutual conflicts and to some extent that was why the new war struck each and all, is still sticking out. George David Lloyd, the architect of the Versailles system, was of the following opinion: “The resurrected nations rose from their graves hungry and ravening from their long fast in the vaults of oppression, [...] they clutched at anything that lay within reach of their hands – not even waiting to throw off the cerements of the grave”.<sup>1</sup> He also added that the new nations turned into “even larger

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<sup>1</sup> G. D. Lloyd, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, Vol. 1, London 1938, p. 314.

imperialists than England or France, larger even than the United States”.<sup>2</sup> The circulation of this version was triggered by the Polish-Lithuanian conflict that hindered formation of an effective union of the Baltic countries.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this conflict and its international consequences, Poland and its northern neighbours – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – contributed considerably to the preservation of peace and stability in inter-war Europe. It was they who obstructed probably the most obvious attempt of the Soviet Union at the export of revolution in 1923, that is, they refused transit of the Red Army to Germany where this army basically had to enhance the Germans’ rising revolutionary movement. In this article our aim is to examine this refusal of the Baltic countries and Poland to let the Red Army pass and Soviet instigation of revolution in Germany as such.

As is well known, after the Bolsheviks seized power and established themselves in Russia, they basically remained the supporters of the so-called global permanent revolution and maintained that the communists’ success in backward agrarian Russia was just the first step towards the inevitable triumph of their power across the world. It was understandable that global revolution would only become reality when it took place in an industrial country of modern economy, Germany, which, having merged with Bolshevik Russia, would cause the breakthrough and the path from capitalism to socialism would be irrevocable. Thus the key to the global revolution was hiding in Germany and it could be turned, because having lost the war and experiencing yet unseen post-war difficulties, this country was ripe for the cause, and the maturity could be consolidated because export of revolution and a revolutionary war in the name of progress was justified. Even Red Army soldiers more than half of whom were still illiterate were learning not Russian but Esperanto, in Latin alphabet, as this language was seen as the language of global revolution. Comintern, the organisation established by the Bolsheviks in 1919, was to concern itself directly with preparation and execution of the revolution; its programme was formulated primarily on the basis of Russian and German communist

<sup>2</sup> Cited from: R. Lopata, *Tarptautinių santykių istorija*, Vilnius 2001, p. 129–130.

<sup>3</sup> On this conflict and creation of the Baltic union see: P. Łossowski, *Stosunki polsko-litewskie w latach 1918–1920*, Warszawa 1966; idem, *Konflikt polsko-litewski 1918–1920*, Warszawa 1996; K. Počs, *Sanitāra kordona valgos*, Rīgā 1971; A. Skrzypek, *Związek Bałtycki. Litwa, Łotwa, Estonia i Finlandia w polityce Polski i ZSRR w latach 1919–1925*, Warszawa 1972; R. Žepkaitė, *Dėl Pabaltijo valstybių sąjungos (Baltijos Antantės) kūrimo 1919–1925 m.*, “Lietuvos istorijos metraštis” 1984, Vilnius 1985, and others.

parties. The Fourth Congress of Comintern in 1922 declared that “each proletarian state has the right to a red revolution”.<sup>4</sup>

German communist were not shaking off the role of the revolution ice-breaker assigned to them. In as early as 1918 they were already publishing the newspaper “Weltrevolution” and were spurred by the Bolsheviks to intensify their activities that were crowned by the November Revolution of 1918. At its outbreak, on 4 November, the German authorities were forced to deport the entire Soviet embassy from Berlin for their open support of the revolutionaries. Although official diplomatic relations were disrupted, unofficial ties remained. They were saturated with revolutionary Bolshevik content that most intensively manifested itself through the Baltic countries and Poland; for example, the revolutionaries’ journeys to Moscow and back via Riga used to be paid for in Latvian money.<sup>5</sup>

The Soviets also made efforts to direct social unrest in Germany in 1920–1921 along the Bolshevik lines. However, the most intense revolutionary inspiration of a scale yet unseen was undertaken after Germany and the Soviets signed the Treaty of Rapallo on the Easter morning of 16 April 1922. The treaty not only fully restored the diplomatic relations between the two countries but also laid foundations for their rapprochement. One could say that the rapprochement started transforming itself into cooperation, with extremely strong involvement of the military and political fields. The cooperation was not incidental, of course. Bolshevik Russia needed new technologies, weapons, and military specialists that Germany had. Military cooperation between the two countries lasted from 1920 and political cooperation was consolidated by the said Treaty of Rapallo.

While forcing military-political cooperation with Germany, Bolshevik leaders made sneaky and treacherous attempts to ruin its social-political order. Interestingly, in admitting the duality of their policy, Soviet diplomats would immediately seek excuses and claim that traditional relations between the states were still their priority. With this duality gaining momentum, in spring 1923, the chief of Soviet diplomacy Georgy Chicherin once said to Germany’s ambassador in Moscow that German-Russian governmental relations were more important than “the revolutionary explo-

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<sup>4</sup> Cited from: В. Сироткин, *Вехи отечественной истории. Очерки и публицистика*, Москва 1991, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП(б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы*, Москва 2004, p. 127.

sion”.<sup>6</sup> However, very likely the majority of Bolshevik leaders held different views. To them, the deniers of the “old values”, maturing “the revolutionary explosion” was not something morally impossible; on the contrary, it seemingly was a single-minded policy. With regard to Germany, dual Soviet policy was probably most prominently cultivated in 1923. On the one hand, having extorted a friendship pact in Rapallo only a year before, the Soviets further strengthened bilateral relations, especially military co-operation; on the other hand, they worked hard on inspiring a revolution that was ruining the country’s sovereignty.

In discussing such inspiration, which reached a scale yet unseen in 1923, we will also attempt to clarify how and why Lithuania and other Baltic countries, along with Poland, managed to withstand the pressure of their huge Eastern neighbour, the USSR, and refuse transit of the Red Army that was to be dispatched to assist German revolutionaries. Such would be the two-fold (analysis of two great powers and the role of the Baltic region) objective of this study. Tackling this theme is stimulated by a rather weak level of its investigation. The traces left by the work of the Soviet historian Maria I. Orlova, in which she idealised the Bolsheviks’ “assistance” to the German proletariat seeking to shake off class exploitation have not been obliterated yet.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary Russian historians who in one way or another touched upon the theme of the article in works of a more general nature seem to dispose of this idealisation only to some extent; they avoid revealing the range of inspiration and are prone to justify it or even regret that it failed.<sup>8</sup> In historiography of Poland, Latvia, or Finland, this theme is addressed only episodically, and as for Germany, it remains in the shade of the Treaty of Rapallo and accentuation of positive aspects of bilateral relations.<sup>9</sup> In Lithuania, this theme has not been addressed at all.

<sup>6</sup> *Akten zur Deutschen auswärtigen Politik* (hereinafter ADAP). 1918–1945, Serie A 1918–1925, Bd. VII, p. 372–375.

<sup>7</sup> М. И. Орлова, *Революционный кризис 1923 г. в Германии и политика коммунистической партии*, Москва 1973.

<sup>8</sup> See: В. Л. Черноперов, *Дипломатическая деятельность В. Л. Копна и подготовка большевиками “германского октября” в 1923 г.*, Иваново – Н. Новгород 2006; А. Рупасов, *Гарантии, безопасность, нейтралитет. СССР и государства – лимитропы в 1920-х – начале 1930-х гг.*, Санкт-Петербург 2008, p. 64; В. А. Зубачевский, *Политика России в отношении восточной части Центральной Европы (1917–1923 гг.): геополитический аспект*, Омск 2005, p. 197.

<sup>9</sup> П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, Москва 1974, p. 175; W. Materski, *Polska a ZSRR 1923–1924. Stosunki wzajemne*

The fragmentary nature of historiography becomes even more prominent when it is compared to the fairly well preserved sources that reflect inspiration of the German revolution from outside. Most of them are kept in the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation and in the German Foreign Ministry Archive.<sup>10</sup> The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History also contains informative documents.<sup>11</sup> Since it is a former party archive, it keeps materials of the two major institutions that worked towards this inspiration: the Comintern and the Politburo. The latter, of course, guided the former, and they both became the headquarters of the preparation of the export of revolution. Use was also made of the archives of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.<sup>12</sup> Recently, some articles close to the present theme have appeared and collections of documents have been cited.<sup>13</sup> Even the shorthand minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of 21 August 1923, when the date of the start of the revolution was set have been publicised (so far, only the shorthand notes of this particular meeting seem

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*na tle sytuacji politycznej w Europie*, Wrocław 1981, p. 140; A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, Rīga 2000, p. 148; M. Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe*, Frankfurt am Main–Berlin–Bern–New York–Paris–Wien 1999, p. 440; A. Andere, *Die deutsche Rappalo-Politik. Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen 1922–1929*, Berlin 1960; G. Rauch, *Die Baltischen Staaten und Sowjetrußland 1919–1939*, “Europa – Archiv” 1954, No. 9; K. Hildebrand, *Das Deutsche Reich und die Sowjetunion im internationalen System 1918–1932. Legitimität oder Revolution?*, “Frankfurter Historische Vortage”, Wiesbaden 1977; G. Rosenfeld, *Sowjetunion und Deutschland 1922–1933*, Berlin 1984.

<sup>10</sup> The Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации, hereinafter *AVPRF*), f. 0151 (Lithuanian reference office), f. 0150 (Latvian reference office), f. 0154 (Estonian reference office), f. 030 (First Western department), f. 04 (Chicherin’s secretariat), f. 05 (Litvinov’s secretariat), f. 028 (Adolph Joffe’s collection), f. 06, and others. Part of the declassified documents of collection 04 have been digitalised and are available online: <http://1917.mid.ru/archives/avprf/sekretariat-g-v-chicherina>. The Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, hereinafter *PAAA*).

<sup>11</sup> The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Russian: Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, hereinafter *RGASPI*), f. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Lithuanian Central State Archives (Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas, hereinafter *LCVA*); Latvian State Historical Archive (Latvijas Valsts Vēstures arhīvs, hereinafter *LVVA*); Estonian State Archives (Eesti Riigiarhiiv, hereinafter *ER*).

<sup>13</sup> *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы*, Москва 2004; *Коминтерн и идея мировой революции. Документы*, Москва 1998; *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Европа. Решения “особой” папки. 1923–1939*, Москва 2001.

to have survived).<sup>14</sup> A collection of documents on bilateral German-Soviet relations that contains almost inaccessible materials from the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation is also valuable.<sup>15</sup> We also used the already cited multi-volume publications of sources reflecting foreign policy of both great countries<sup>16</sup> and a collection of documents dealing with Polish-Soviet relations.<sup>17</sup> As for memoir sources, mention should be made of the reminiscences of the Soviet diplomat and secret agent Grigory Besedovsky, who was probably the first to defect to the West.<sup>18</sup> The press of the two powers and the countries located between them is accessible, so multifaceted sources from different countries that complement and sometimes adjust one another create conditions for examining the above-mentioned phenomenon of inspiration and assessing it in a broader context of the international situation.

### The Nature and Motifs of Revolutionary Inspiration

Taking advantage of the suddenly worsening social and economic situation of Germany following the occupation of Ruhr by France and Belgium in January 1923 (when inflation reached unprecedented heights, when one dollar cost over four trillion Deutschmarks and printing shops could not catch up with money printing yet workers were not paid their wages, and when almost all economic activity froze and plundering of shops began in cities),<sup>19</sup> the Soviets radically intensified their propaganda and other sorts of revolutionary actions. On 27 January, the Politburo, which actually was the highest organ of power of the USSR, decided to allot 100,000 golden roubles to “striking German workers”.<sup>20</sup> Half a year later the amount rose

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<sup>14</sup> “Назначить Революцию в Германию на 9 Ноября”, „Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Москва – Берлин. Политика и дипломатия Кремля. 1920–1941. Сборник документов в трех томах*, Москва 2011, т. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Документы внешней политики СССР*, Москва 1962, т. 6, 8; *Akten zur Deutschen auswärtigen Politik*. 1918–1945, Serie A 1918–1925.

<sup>17</sup> *Документы и материалы по истории советско-польских отношений*, Москва 1965–1966, т. II–IV.

<sup>18</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Париж 1930; Москва 1997 (new edition).

<sup>19</sup> Communication of the Lithuanian ambassador in Berlin of 6 November 1923, LCVA, f. 671, ap. 1, b. 4, l. 71.

<sup>20</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 334, l. 4.

to one million golden Deutschmarks.<sup>21</sup> The representatives of the German authorities, who were rather confused by this, were explained, insolently and demagogically, that this was assistance to the German leadership to overcome the country's social problems.

The true nature of this assistance is demonstrated by the fact that almost at the same time, on 11 July, the Communist party of Germany ruled by the Politburo via the Comintern declared that preparations had to be made for armed struggle for seizure of power.<sup>22</sup> Such a step encouraged the Bolshevik leaders to tone up their activity, except that their opinions diverged at once when that party decided to organise an “anti-fascist day” with massive demonstrations on 29 July. Many of them liked the slogan, “shoot ten fascists for one killed communist”,<sup>23</sup> but Joseph Stalin and his brother-in-arms Karl Radek, who was active in Germany, had doubts whether the emerging Nazis, who fought fiercely against the French administration in occupied Ruhr, had to be made the key target of the communists.<sup>24</sup> It was explained that, unlike the workers of Russia, the power-seeking German proletariat did not have an ally in the peasantry and therefore the workers had to invoke at least the “petty bourgeoisie” represented by the Nazis. Therefore there was no need to antagonise them and finding a *modus vivendi* was a better alternative. The Social Democrats were the true rivals of the communists; meanwhile, the Nazis could help to rally the German public and direct its wrath against the Triple Entente countries. Even Genadii Zinoviyev admitted at a Politburo meeting that German communists should respect national motifs.<sup>25</sup> It has been found that ten times more of Bolshevik literature was directed against social democracy than against fascism.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, d. 374, l. 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Die Rote Fahne” 12.07.1923.

<sup>23</sup> Л. Г. Бабиченко, *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б), Коминтерн и события в Германии в 1923 г. Новые архивные материалы*, “Новая и новейшая история” 1994, № 2, p. 126–127. Sometimes it is indicated that only two or five fascists were to be shot for one killed communist (*Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы*, p. 154, 166).

<sup>24</sup> They became popular when they started cutting the braids of French soldiers' German girlfriends.

<sup>25</sup> *Старая площадь*, “Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> See: G. Mitrulevičius, *Lietuvos socialdemokratijos ideologinė-politinė raida 1914–1919 metais*, Vilnius 2017, p. 70.

It was during the Ruhr crisis that the contacts between the communists and the Nazis were struck. The most scandalous was Karl Radek's speech at the 3rd extended plenary session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern when he called Leo Schalgeter, a German officer killed in Ruhr by the French on 23 May 1923, as a martyr and a hero who had fought the imperialism of the Triple Entente and German capital. He also added that the communist party had to search for contacts with nationalist-thinking individuals because the majority of them were working people.<sup>27</sup> Genadii Zinovyev and Nikolai Bukharin, who called for delivering a strong blow on the Nazis, disliked such an attitude, but Stalin welcomed it by pointing out that fascists were weak in Germany; he succeeded in entrenching his opinion. Even then Zinovyev insisted that there was no triumvirate and only "Stalin's dictatorship" (Rus., *net nikakoi troiki, a iest' diktatura Stalina*).<sup>28</sup> Relations between the Nazis and communists in Ruhr even found their reflection in drawings of that time depicting a Red Army soldier marching with a Reich soldier.<sup>29</sup> Valter Krivitskii, a Soviet secret agent and a member of this "contradictory fraternity", wrote: "For the first time in my life I saw communists fighting shoulder to shoulder with nationalist terrorists [...]. With all means in our power we supported German nationalists [fighting] the French in Ruhr area and in Ruhr".<sup>30</sup>

Worsening of the social-political situation in Germany in July-August (massive strikes, resignation of Wilhelm Cuno's government, the communists' declared aim to seize power and start a civil war) encouraged the Bolshevik elite to inspire and, one could say, organise an armed coup in Germany in actual military and political measures and to prepare the Red Army for invasion. The members of the Politburo were recalled from their holidays. A decision was reached at numerous meetings of this body of power, at a special plenary session of the Bolshevik Central Committee, and at the forums of the Comintern to mobilise financial resources of the Soviet state, the accumulation of which had started with the transition to the new economic policy (NEP) and with improving foreign trade; to muster all party, political, military, intelligence, and diplomatic potential for the purpose of triggering a revolution in Germany, seizing and keeping the

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<sup>27</sup> Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы, p. 158.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> В. Л. Черноперов, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> В. Г. Кривицкий, *Я был агентом Сталина*, "Вопросы истории" 1992, № 1, p. 88.



power in this country, connecting the new Soviet state with the USSR in a way that would lead to formation of “invincible military base” and the centre of global revolution would move from Moscow to Berlin. It would finally result in the “United States of Europe” or even in the “Union of European and Asian Soviet republics”.<sup>31</sup>

To accomplish tasks of such grandiose proportion, a special commission of leaders was formed that included Grigorii Zinovyev, Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Karl Radek, and Georgy Chicherin. Shortly, another group of Bolshevik leaders (which also included Radek) was dispatched to Germany to coordinate the actions of the coup. He had to lead the inspired revolution and very likely was to become the leader of communist Germany (this is testified by the Soviet diplomat and secret agent Grigorii Besedovskii<sup>32</sup>); and although it seems that no specific decree regarding this issue had been finally approved, a decision was made to increase the funding of the coup leadership by 500,000 gold roubles.<sup>33</sup> In addition, a reserve fund of 200 million gold roubles was accumulated for “assistance to revolutionary Germany”.<sup>34</sup>

Numerous teams of Soviet military specialists, party workers, and secret agents were sent to Germany to assist in buying, hiding, and distribution of weapons (machine guns and canons were also accumulated, while the tanks transported to Russia were to be repaired and brought back to Germany to the rebels). These teams had to organise the units of revolutionaries, the so-called “hundreds” of which there were close to a thousand and which, according to different calculations, united from 100,000 to 250,000 fighters.<sup>35</sup> The hundreds would be merged into divisions of 5000 men each; secret training of these units and manoeuvres were practised at night-time, a network of secret agents was formed in the army, police, public institutions, and political parties. German units of Tcheка (secret police) were formed and there was also the terrorist group “Т” for liquidation of “traitors”, “provocateurs”, or other unsuitable individuals; political

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<sup>31</sup> *Старая площадь*, “Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5, p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Париж 1930, 135; Москва 1997, p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> А. Г. Бармин, *Соколы Троцкого*, Москва 1997, p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Москва 1997, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Soviet historiography would give a smaller number (М. И. Орлова, *op. cit.*, p. 308), and the leaders of German communists would provide a bigger one (*Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы*, p. 250).

murders aimed at demoralising the Reichswehr.<sup>36</sup> The “T” group had even decided to kill General Hans von Seeckt, who was of pro-Moscow orientation,<sup>37</sup> and only “at the last moment” the individuals aware of this managed to revoke the decision.

The Soviet leadership was not only organising the coup in Germany, but also specified its precise date. As has been mentioned above, it had to start on 9 November,<sup>38</sup> on the fifth anniversary of the November Revolution. However, there were quite a number of Bolsheviks in the leadership who realised that communist power in Germany would not survive without direct armed interference of the Soviet Union. Early in August, Leon Trotsky was charged with a task to form “the second Red Army” named after the Comintern that would consist of 200,000 horsemen. Military preparations were in full swing. Demobilization was recalled and partial mobilization was launched. Divisions from Siberia were deployed along western borders of the USSR. The Baltic navy was also charged with tasks. The Politburo formed a separate commission of seven people to coordinate these preparations, which included, among others, Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, and Kliment Voroshilov.<sup>39</sup> The Soviet public was also prepared for the invasion of Germany. At one of universities, Stalin declared that students were purportedly inclined to “throw books aside” and leave for Germany to raise a revolution.<sup>40</sup>

## In Search of Paths of “Assistance” to the Invasion

The epic of the German revolution was facing a major issue: how should the Red Army be deployed to Germany, in what ways and via which routes? Seemingly, Trotsky had prepared a draft resolution on a prompt leap of the red cavalry via Poland, but his colleagues were not willing to start a war. They were getting ready for it, yet desired it to be seen as a “defensive

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<sup>36</sup> В. Г. Кривицкий, *Я был агентом Сталина*, p. 86–89.

<sup>37</sup> *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы*, p. 289.

<sup>38</sup> “Назначить Революцию в Германию на 9 Ноября”, „Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5, p. 138.

<sup>39</sup> Л. Г. Бабиченко, *Политбюро ЦК РКП (б), Коминтерн и события в Германии в 1923 г. Новые архивные материалы*, “Новая и новейшая история” 1994, № 2, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

war". Explanations were formulated to the effect that if a revolution took place in Germany, neighbouring capitalist countries – first France, then allied Poland, possibly also Romania, and even the Baltic and other countries (with strong backing from England, of course) – would not tolerate it, interfere, and the French army would invade Berlin. In such an inevitable case, the Soviets would come to Germany's defence and then the war would become "defensive"; it would be an adequate response to the aggression of the capitalist countries. Germany's actions would also be understood as national liberation struggle. Such was the propaganda scenario the actual and ultimate aim of which was the entrance of the Red Army into the territory of Germany.

Trotsky, Zinovyev, Bukharin, and even Chicherin and Maksim Litvinov each had their own military visions, but it was Stalin who was the first to formulate them in the most explicit manner. In his notes of 19 August to Zinovyev's theses "On the approaching revolution in Germany and the tasks of the Russian Communist Party", he emphasised that everything had to be done to prevent thinking that the revolution "was dictated by" and "inspired from" Russia. Most importantly the communist had to "keep the power seized" as "the workers' revolution in Germany very likely implies a war of France and Poland against Germany". Among other things, the general secretary of the Bolshevik party argued:

The revolution in Germany and our assistance to the Germans with food, weapons, people, and the like mean Russia's war against Poland and possibly against other *limitrofy*,<sup>41</sup> because it is obvious that without a victorious war at least against Poland we will not succeed in delivering food and also in maintaining communication with Germany (to expect that with the revolution taking place in Germany Poland will remain neutral and provide us with a transit possibility through the Polish corridor and Lithuania is to expect a miracle; the same can be said about Latvia and even more so about England, which will block the access by sea. We must make preparations for a war, make serious and ma-

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<sup>41</sup> In imitation of the terminology of the Roman Empire, when *limitrophe* states (Lat. *limes* – "border area" + Gr. *trophos* – "feeding") referred to border areas that had to sustain the imperial troops deployed there, that was how Russia and frequently Germany called the Baltic and other countries that used to be part of Russia but had re-established their independence or become newly independent after the First World War. This term was used in Russian historiography.

ny-sided preparations because the question will arise about the existence of the Soviet Federation and the fate of the global revolution in the nearest period.<sup>42</sup>

These notes were basically supported by other members of the Politburo, at a meeting two days later, where Zinoviev's theses amended by Stalin's notes were approved.<sup>43</sup> Admittedly, almost each participant at the meeting tried to enrich the document with their own observations. Zinoviev, the author of the theses, argued that the revolution in Germany implied a war "90%", that the Poles might really lay claims to "East Silesia", and that diplomacy had to be used against them and at the same time make preparations for a war.<sup>44</sup> Karl Radek also pointed out that a war was "historically inevitable", but a respite of some months could be possible after the revolution during which Soviet diplomats, the Comintern, military and other agents should be active.

Still, the biggest concern of what the easiest way was for the Red Army to reach Germany remained. Almost all approaches to Germany were analysed. Geographically, Chicherin's view was the broadest. He deliberated that it could be possible "to consolidate Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia" or trigger an uprising in those countries; it would be harder to affect Hungary, but easier to do it in Romania, because its favour could be won by recognising Bessarabia as part of it. Another way would be to organise an uprising in Bessarabia (not difficult at all) and then march to Bucharest. It could also be possible to spark "movements in Algiers, Abyssinia, and Tripoli" and, in general, to direct unrest to Africa; the colonies would be mobilised and "armies of blacks would move on to occupy Germany". What could Poland be offered to let at least foodstuff pass its territory? And what about Latvia? Purportedly, the Latvians are scared of the Soviets and their fear would grow even stronger with the approaching "events in Germany". Here actions should be based on fear and the threat of war. Estonia is in an identical situation.

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<sup>42</sup> "Назначить Революцию в Германию на 9 Ноября", „Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5, p. 117–118.

<sup>43</sup> As has been mentioned, the meeting of the Politburo of 21 August was special in that it was the only meeting the shorthand protocol of which has survived. Possibly, that there were no such protocols for other meetings, or they have not been found yet; however, very likely they are still hidden.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120–121.

These were not just abstract deliberations. Actual military plans of the breakthrough were also designed, except that the Bolshevik leaders could not decide about the direction of the main offensive. First of all, the military leadership worked out a plan foreseeing a breakthrough via southern Poland, Romania, and then through Czechoslovakia. In such a case plans were laid to organise an uprising in East Galicia and taking advantage of the situation to “incidentally” invade Czechoslovakia, trigger a revolution there with the “participation of two-three” Bolshevik divisions and after that to form “a Red Army of Czechs and Slovaks”.<sup>45</sup> Such was the plan for opening a corridor to “Soviet Germany”. The plan was introduced to Zinoviev and Stalin, but the latter criticised it pointing out that it was “problematic”, while the central question was under what cover the soldiers should be mobilized preserving external peacefulness at the same time”, at least “external defensiveness”.<sup>46</sup>

Not long after, very likely at Stalin’s initiative, a decision was arrived at to choose a different direction of the main blow: to push forward through the so-called Vilnius corridor and reach East Prussia along the Lithuanian-Polish border. This direction was confirmed by the above-mentioned diplomat and secret agent Besedovskii, who pointed out that in the autumn of 1923 Red Army corps and primarily the cavalry were massively mustered at Poland’s eastern border with Lithuania.<sup>47</sup> Presumably, Vladimir Lenin, who was already gravely ill at the time, was also informed about these measures.<sup>48</sup>

That the Vilnius corridor or even the Baltic countries and Poland were the priority direction for the deployment of the Red Army is demonstrated by Stalin’s speech at the above-mentioned meeting of the Politburo on 21 August. He said:

We must strengthen our [forces] in the limitrophe states. The communist of these nationalities must be rallied and transferred there. To us, a small distance of a common border with Germany is necessary and highly important to us. Attempts must be made to rip out (Rus., *sorvat*) one of the bourgeois limitrophe

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<sup>45</sup> Политбюро ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и Коминтерн 1919–1943. Документы, р. 172.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Москва 1997, р. 83.

<sup>48</sup> В. Л. Черноперов, *op. cit.*, р. 49.

states and create a corridor to Germany. This must be ready for the moment of the revolution. It is not yet clear how to do it, but this issue must be tackled.<sup>49</sup>

Although they planned the deployment of the Red Army via the Baltic countries and Poland, the Soviets did not want a war against them: they tried to reach an agreement, to secure, in diplomatic ways, their permission for the transit of troops resorting to the possibility of transit as foreseen in peace treaties and to references to neutrality. It goes without saying that there also were threats and attractive proposals of cooperation. At the said meeting, Stalin noted that “the diplomatic game is of great significance at the moment”.<sup>50</sup> The resolution of the Politburo of 22 August committed Soviet diplomatic corps to create favourable international conditions for the German revolution.<sup>51</sup> Simultaneously, Zinovyev’s theses foresaw that “an extremely dangerous” war was against Poland, Romania, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia might break out.<sup>52</sup> Obviously, priority was given to diplomacy. In attaining the set objectives, the Politburo did not confine itself to talks with the envoys via usual diplomatic channels. The task set to Soviet diplomacy was formulated in the following way: to neutralise the Baltic countries and ensure free communication between the USSR and Germany across their territories.<sup>53</sup>

## **A Diplomatic Mission for Military Intervention**

To negotiate the transfer of the Red Army, the mission of Viktor Kopp, an extremely well known and influential diplomat, was dispatched to the Baltic countries and Poland in October 1923. It was not incidental that he was selected for such a mission. As a former ambassador in Berlin, he had a good understanding of Germany’s internal and international situation, revolutionary networks, as well as the situation in the Baltic countries – he used to have much contact with Juozas Purickas, the envoy of Lithuania in

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<sup>49</sup> “Назначить Революцию в Германию на 9 Ноября”, „Вестник архива Президента Российской Федерации” 1995, № 5, p. 124.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> AVPRF, f. 0150, op. 19, t. 35, d. 39, l. 25.

Berlin. Upon his return to Moscow, Kopp was offered a leading position at the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs where in July 1923 he was charged with the supervision of Soviet policy with the Baltic countries and Poland. He took advantage of this circumstance to hide the real objectives of his mission and declared that the aim of the visits was to check and inspect Soviet diplomatic representations in the area. On 4 October, Litvinov wrote to the members of the Politburo that Kopp would be “the only one” who could hide “the real aims of the visit from the whole world (and Germany)”; he could announce he was checking representations “subordinate to him”, starting from Helsinki, continuing in Tallinn, Riga, and Kaunas, and finishing in Warsaw.<sup>54</sup>

Another important factor was that close relations between the diplomatic commissariat and the highest power, the Politburo, were maintained through Kopp, especially in handling personnel issues. Finally, as Trotsky’s friend of many years, he had his trust and therefore hopes were harboured that the zeal of the ideologue of the global revolution to invade Germany through Poland and the Baltic countries could be cooled down: since his friend would be in charge, more trust should be placed on diplomacy. In short, quite possibly the Red Army could reach Germany without a war and brimming with fresh energy. The only apprehension was that because of their engagement in fighting against the Baltic countries or the Poles Soviet armed forces might be late in reaching Germany.<sup>55</sup>

During his preparation for visits to the Western neighbours, Kopp explored the ground through the usual diplomatic channels trying to find out to what extent those neighbours were inclined to sign agreements on the transit of the Red Army. Drafts of possible agreements were prepared in which the passage of the troops was to be masked under various formulations of transit and neutrality. Some concessions were also foreseen. For example, the plan was to pay Poland at least some of the money that had not been paid but owed according to the Peace treaty (5–8 million gold roubles).<sup>56</sup> However, Polish politicians could not be tempted because they realised that in case Germany was Sovietised, their own country would

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<sup>54</sup> RGASPI, f. 359, op. 1, d. 4, l. 163–164.

<sup>55</sup> *Красная Армия придет в Германию с запозданием*. Публ. Л. Бабиченко, “Источник” 1995, № 2.

<sup>56</sup> В. Л. Черноперов, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

be encircled by the Bolsheviks.<sup>57</sup> On the eve of Kopp's visit this was confirmed by Leon Trotsky, who claimed in a public speech that if Poland decided to be a barrier, it would find itself in the pliers of Russians and Germans, so the only way for it was to be a bridge.<sup>58</sup>

The Soviets were hoping that, wronged by Poland, Lithuania, would be the easiest one to attract to their side. In as early as 24 September, Viktor Kopp contacted Ivan Lorents, Moscow's new ambassador in Kaunas. He was the secretary in the negotiations between the Soviets and Poland in Riga; after that he worked in the Soviet representation in Warsaw and thus had a good grasp of the Polish-Lithuanian dispute.<sup>59</sup> The new ambassador was instructed to find out Lithuania's reaction to the German revolution and possible actions of Poland – whether it would obey the Bolsheviks' directives or, like in 1920, “will sit on two chairs”.<sup>60</sup> The task was accomplished conscientiously. On 6 October, Lorents informed Kopp that Lithuania would maintain neutrality with regard to the “German events”, and, in the case of a Soviet-Polish conflict, it would take a stand against Warsaw only if the Red Army emerged victorious. This did not satisfy Moscow and it intended to use the carrot and stick approach, that is, to threaten Lithuania with losing not only Vilnius but also Klaipėda, but that it could protect its vital interests by being friendly towards the Soviets.<sup>61</sup>

It was not this “probing” but Bolsheviks' other “undiplomatic” actions that complicated and, possibly, postponed the planned visit. Joseph Stalin's interview to the German communist newspaper “Die Rote Fahne” on 10 October seriously undermined the masking of the inspiration of the German revolution. In it, Stalin emphasised that the emerging revolution in Germany would become more significant than its Russian analogue six years before.<sup>62</sup> Three days after this interview, a powerful explosion shook the fortress of Warsaw Citadel, which, according to Besedovskii, was organised by “bomb specialists” of Soviet intelligence acting under the dip-

<sup>57</sup> П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, p. 175.

<sup>58</sup> В. Л. Черноперов, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> Chicherin's note of 10 August 1923 to Stalin and other members of the Politburo with regard to the appointment of Ivan Lorents ambassador in Kaunas, RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 2, l. 47.

<sup>60</sup> Kopp's letter of 24 September 1923 to Lorents, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 27, t. 182, d. 55, l. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Lorents's communication of 6 October 1923 to Kopp, *ibidem*, d. 52, l. 23–24.

<sup>62</sup> „Die Rote Fahne” 10.10.1923.



lomatic cover.<sup>63</sup> Terrorist methods were aimed at sparking irreconcilable struggle between Poland's political forces (by creating the impression that these forces were killing one another's members), at causing chaos and thus stopping its interference in Germany's invasion.

Preparations for Kopp's visit were discussed in detail at the meetings of the Politburo on 11 and 18 October. On 18 October, the final decision regarding the dispatch of this diplomat to the Baltic countries and Poland was made; among other things, the resolution read that "considerable economic concessions" could be promised to Latvia for its support for Soviet policy.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Stalin did not give his full approval to the visit at the meeting. He wrote the following explanatory note to his colleagues during it: "I think we should stop probing the Poles and start probing the Latvians. The Latvians can be frightened, cornered, and the like. The Poles need to be isolated, they will have to be fought (Rus. *pridetsia bit'sia*).<sup>65</sup> There is no way we will sound them out without revealing our cards. Kopp [must be] detained. The Poles [must be] isolated. The Latvians [must be] bought (and frightened). Romania [must be] bought. And [we should] wait with the Poles".<sup>66</sup>

About seventeen years later, Stalin's prediction proved right, but not when it was formulated. Viktor Kopp's first stop was Latvia where he arrived on a decisive day, 23 October, when a communist uprising started in Hamburg. The following day he met the Latvian prime minister and foreign minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics,<sup>67</sup> who at the very start of the talks asked his guest what the concentration of Russian armed forces at Latvia's western borders meant and provided actual data at once. The prime minister pointed out he had verified information to the effect that "Russians are very actively moving and concentrating" their army in the region of Polotsk. The fact that several days before Sergei Kamenev, commander-in-chief of the Russian army, arrived in Sebez at the border with Latvia via Polotsk in a special staff train where he inspected the areas along the border. Bu-

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<sup>63</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, p. 85–89.

<sup>64</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 388, l. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Underlined by Joseph Stalin.

<sup>66</sup> RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 25, l. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Edgars Andersons and Rihards Treijs indicate inaccurately that the meeting took place only on 26 and 27 October, see: E. Andersons, *Latvijas vēsture 1920–1940. Ārpolitika*, Vol. 1, Stockholm 1982, p. 91; R. Treijs, *Latvijas diplomātija un diplomāti (1918–1940)*, Rīgā 2003, p. 128–129.

dionny's cavalry divisions were moved from the Caucasus to the north-west of Russia and Siberian divisions were marching to the western areas.<sup>68</sup>

When enumerating these facts, Meierovics was confident because close at hand he had the reports of his war minister and the chief army staff that contained reliable information about massive movement of the Russian troops in the direction of the western border that had started in the second half of September. Budionny's horsemen had been seen in Drisa district, new artillery and infantry units that even had pontoon bridges appeared near Polotsk, and on 15–16 October, the train of Sergei Kamenev ran in the Latvian border area (via Polotsk to Sebezh and then in the direction of Pskov). Three days later, quartermasters appeared to fit premises for the deployment of new units.<sup>69</sup> These changes were really prominent because at the end of 1922 Russians had only four cannons at the border with Latvia.<sup>70</sup>

So it was not Stalin's envoy that cornered the Latvians but the other way round: the Latvians did it to Kopp with their accurate military information that the guest did not even attempt to deny; he even admitted that the information provided by the Latvians was "correct".<sup>71</sup> Kopp made excuses that the purpose of army concentration was "moral" support to the "German proletariat". However, he also pointed out that this demonstration was aimed at encouraging "one neighbouring country or another" to exercise caution and abstain from actions against the "German revolution". The guest, thus, appeared to be issuing threats in his attempts to counter-attack and launch an offensive. He spoke of the purposes of his country in a covert manner masking them with a made-up tale. He explained that the independence of the Baltic countries recognised by the Bolsheviks had become a factor in the international arena and that the Bolsheviks realised that a war against these countries might trigger "a global fire". England would be neutral at first, but if the whole continent of Europe started becoming communist, it would interfere. However, Russia did not want a war.

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<sup>68</sup> Telegram of 24 October 1923 of the Latvian Foreign Ministry to the country's embassies in Paris, London, Warsaw, Berlin, Rome, Kaunas, Helsinki, and Moscow; the ministry's communication of 25 October 1923 to the embassies and consulates in Stockholm and New York. LVVA, f.1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 192–193, 194.

<sup>69</sup> Communication of the war minister to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 199–200.

<sup>70</sup> A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> Communication of the Latvian Foreign Ministry of 25 October 1923 to all embassies and consulates of the country in Stockholm and New York, LVVA, f.1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 194.

Still, Kopp predicted that with the communists consolidating their positions in Germany, France would impose a blockade against it. Therefore the connection between Germany and Russia by sea would be disrupted. What is more, France would force Poland and the Baltic countries to block the connection between Russia and Germany by land as well. In such a case, Russia would be completely deprived of the possibility to render “moral and material support to the German proletariat”.<sup>72</sup> Russia would never accept that and if it happened “Russia would be forced to fight its way to Germany”. Thus, in as early as 1923, the Soviet envoy was implementing Stalin’s idea and threatening the Latvians. There is some reason in the historiographical fact that Kopp declared to Meierovics that the Soviet Government would treat the involvement of the Baltic countries in “the economic blockade of Germany” as *casus belli*<sup>73</sup> except that it was done in a rather soft, let us say, “diplomatic” form.

Having made this threat, the guest explained eagerly that he was fulfilling a noble mission of avoiding a war. A war could be avoided if Russia and the Baltic countries signed a guarantee pact that would consist of three parts: (1) Latvia would guarantee its “désintéressement” in the eventual changes in Germany, (2) connection between Russia and Germany remains unchanged irrespective of possible events in Germany, and (3) Latvia and Russia commit not to attack each other.<sup>74</sup>

Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics replied that in the evening of the same day (24 October) he was leaving for Tallinn to a pre-planned conference, therefore he would give his answer upon his return to Riga and consultations with his government and the parliament. In his turn, Kopp said he was leaving for Kaunas on that same evening, and then for Warsaw, but he had doubts whether Poland would accept his offer. Seemingly, Poland wanted to invade Higher Silesia, Gdansk, and East Prussia, and that would mean “a general war”.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 196.

<sup>73</sup> П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, p. 177; В. Л. Черноперов, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Telegram of 24 October 1923 of the Latvian Foreign Ministry to the country’s embassies in Paris, London, Warsaw, Berlin, Rome, Kaunas, Helsinki, and Moscow, *LVVA*, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 192–193; *Документы внешней политики СССР*, т. 8, p. 775–776.

<sup>75</sup> *LVVA*, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 193.

That was how the discussed conversation developed, at least according to the Latvian sources. It seems that Kopp was prone to boast about the results of the visit. The telegram sent to Chicherin on Kopp's instruction on 24 October reads that "the Latvian government had officially declared" it would maintain complete neutrality with regard to "the events in Germany", even if it would be pressured by England or France, or if Poland interfered in those events; neutrality would imply that Russia would have a connection with Germany through Latvia and also that Latvia would sign the proposed pact if the Soviets committed themselves not to attack it.<sup>76</sup> Based on the testimonies of Polish diplomats, the historian Prokhor Olshansky argued that Meierovics was not so accommodating: he told Kopp that even if the Soviets tried hard, they would not succeed in breaking the solidarity of the Baltic countries.<sup>77</sup>

Possibly that was why Kopp made a rather unexpected observation in an interview for the press: he said he did not object to the Baltic union as long as it would not be directed against Moscow. It was a considerable concession, but very likely made for tactical considerations. His public speaking was full of manipulation and propaganda. In the interview, he categorically denied the concentration of the Soviet army along the Latvian border and accentuated Moscow's possible concessions to the Baltic countries. He promised to sign a trade treaty with Latvia, to return the removed cultural valuables, to grant forest concessions promised in the Peace Treaty, to increase transit through the port of Ventspils, to equip a grain elevator<sup>78</sup> there, and so on. At the time of the visit discussed, Russia returned a large part of the library of Riga Polytechnic Institute to Latvia that the latter had been asking in vain for three years.<sup>79</sup>

Despite these concessions and even more tempting promises, Kopp had to leave Riga without any realistic guarantees of the transit of the Red Army. Negotiations on this issue continued through usual diplomatic channels and were quite tense at times. Kārlis Ozols, the envoy of Latvia to Moscow, wrote in his memoir that as the Latvians refused the passage of

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<sup>76</sup> AVPRF, f. 04, op. 60, t. 446, d. 58581, l. 46.

<sup>77</sup> П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, p. 178.

<sup>78</sup> "Известия" 27.10.1923, RSPIA, f. 325, op. 2, d. 27, l. 137–143; "Latvijas Kareivis" 25.10.1923.

<sup>79</sup> A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, p. 149.

“the Russian army to Germany”, Viktor Kopp told him in a straightforward manner that “if you do what you wish and keep closing and opening your door, it might jump out of its hinges” (Rus. *vyskochit' iz sharnirov*).<sup>80</sup>

Kopp did not travel to Tallinn from Riga, probably because Leonid Stark, the Russian ambassador to Estonia, informed him in detail about the attitude of the Estonian government with regard to “possible events in Germany”. It had resolved to maintain neutrality and “resort to defensive tactic”. During the visit discussed, Stark arrived in Riga where Kopp directly instructed him on how to continue negotiations with the Estonian government. Upon his return to Tallinn, Stark also put forward a proposal to the government to sign a pact of neutrality and non-aggression pact similar to the one proposed to Riga.<sup>81</sup> However, the Estonians were not in a hurry to assume risky obligations either.

In Kaunas, the second stop of his visit, Kopp was expected by politicians that were somewhat more interested in his proposals. Since Lithuania did not have a border with Russia, they were less intimidated by the invasion of its army. Lithuanian military institutions were often sceptical and mistrustful of the information supplied by Latvian military services about the regroupings of the Soviet army along Russia’s western border with Latvia and even about its concentration at the Vilnius corridor,<sup>82</sup> although Latvian information of this kind seem to be more reliable than Lithuanian, which, for example, reported that in summer 1921, “the Kremlin itself” had fed on potatoes alone for weeks and weeks.<sup>83</sup>

Although Lithuanian politicians did not feel the danger of the Bolsheviks as acutely as their neighbours, they did not intend to undertake the obligation of allowing the passage of the Russian army through their territory. However, these politicians were entertaining an idea to use Kopp’s proposals for raising the vitally important issue of Vilnius, which seemed to be buried under the Treaty of Riga of 1921 and under the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors of 15 March 1923 that recognised Poland’s eastern borders. Hopes were rising that with a new agreement the Soviets could confirm the validity of the Peace Treaty of 12 July, which recognised

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<sup>80</sup> К. Озол, *Мемуары посланника*, Москва 2015, p. 172.

<sup>81</sup> Leonid Stark’s telegram of 26 October 1923 to Kopp and Chicherin, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 60, t. 446, d. 58581, l. 47.

<sup>82</sup> LCVA, f. 929, ap. 2, b. 544, l. 182–184.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, l. 184.

Lithuania's control of Vilnius and other eastern territories. There also were expectations that this agreement would recognise Lithuania's control of Klaipėda Territory that had just been incorporated into Lithuania.

Kopp, however, was more concerned with German and not Lithuanian interests. He brought a draft pact to Kaunas that emphasised not territorial integrity of Lithuania but that of Germany, that is, one of its provisions read that Lithuania refused its claims to the lands of East Prussia, to "German Tilsit".<sup>84</sup> Still, Kopp's quite optimistic reports about his negotiations with the Lithuanian prime minister and foreign minister Ernestas Galvanauskas were reaching Moscow. The telegram of 25 October to Chicherin (copies sent to the members of the Politburo) read: "Lithuania will react to internal changes in Germany with total neutrality (Rus. *absolutno neutral'no*) and will not violate territorial borders. We are guaranteed the possibility of economic connection with Germany as transit routes cross Lithuania. [...] In the case of our conflict with Poland, Lithuania guarantees at least friendly neutrality to us".<sup>85</sup> Later Kopp wrote that, purportedly, the Lithuanians not only accepted his proposals but expanded them to "the idea of a military union".<sup>86</sup> A rumour was even spreading among diplomats that permit for the passage of the Red Army through the territory of Lithuania had been secured in Kaunas.<sup>87</sup>

Based on the Lithuanian sources, we can maintain that Galvanauskas did not grant any concessions or guarantees and only agreed to negotiate on many of them. A decision was reached to draft a pact of mutual guarantees and neutrality in Moscow and in Kaunas. In general, Kopp's meetings with Galvanauskas were not a path strewn with roses. Like in Riga, he threatened Kaunas that restrictions on "the freedom of transit" will be treated as *casus belli* by Moscow.<sup>88</sup>

Kopp's last stop was Warsaw, where he stayed from 28 October to 6 November. In historiography, it is often approached as the climax of his visits and is broadly discussed with only a fleeting mention of his other stops. Even Besedovskii, who personally witnessed this visit, was incorrect to claim that from Riga, Kopp "travelled directly to Warsaw bypassing

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<sup>84</sup> AVPRF, f. 04, op. 60, t. 27, d. 55, l. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, t. 446, d. 58581, l. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, op. 27, t. 182, d. 55, l. 16.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, d. 52, l. 74–75.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, op. 32, t. 213, d. 52573, l. 17.

Kaunas”.<sup>89</sup> Although he did not press such ultimate demands as in Riga, here he had the longest talks and was given probably the clearest negative answer.<sup>90</sup> He was told that transit was an economic category and that no official document could contain “political hints” to “internal affairs of other nations”. Poland did not and would not interfere into internal affairs of other countries and it could not support the interests of the USSR in inspiring revolution in Weimar Republic.<sup>91</sup> Facing such information, the Politburo decided on 3 November “to suspend temporarily” the probing of Poland and to break off “transit negotiations”<sup>92</sup> with it, although Kopp tried to resuscitate them for another three days.

Such persistence could possibly be explained by the fact that in Warsaw he was searching for a possibility of a secret agreement on the passage of the Red Army through the Polish territory, to be exact, through the Vilnius corridor under its control. He tried to convince the Poles that this action would not pose any danger to Poland as it would only last about three days. Only “several units of Soviet cavalry” would be redeployed; military materials would be transported in sealed railway cars that Polish officials would not be allowed to inspect, but they would follow the agreed routes. It would be presented as an “arbitrary” action to the world, for which neither Soviet nor Polish governments would be responsible, but the latter would be generously compensated for it. Poland would be immediately compensated for the damages incurred during the march, transit routes “to the Middle and Far East” across the vast territory of the USSR would open to it, and it would recover the yet unpaid money (30 million gold roubles) that the USSR owed Poland according to the Peace Treaty. Finally, it would be given “the freedom of action” in East Prussia.<sup>93</sup>

Poland rejected such proposals but the Soviets continued manipulating with them and brought up the card of East Prussia. He played the East Prussian card with the Poles, yet, as has been mentioned above, he claimed to their potential allies – Latvians, for example – that Poles themselves had territorial intents in Germany; that Germany was also intimidated by those

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<sup>89</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Париж 1930, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> *Документы и материалы по истории советско-польских отношений*, т. IV, p. 249.

<sup>91</sup> Telegram of 2 November 1923 to Chicherin and members of the Politburo, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 60, t. 446, d. 58581, l. 71.

<sup>92</sup> Protocol of the Politburo meeting of 3 November 1923, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 390, l. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Г. Беседовский, *На путях к термидору*, Париж 1930, p. 139–140.

intents, and that a rumour had been circulating to the effect that Poland and Lithuania had agreed to divide East Prussia between them; therefore it was not incidental that Kopp suggested that Lithuania should waive its claims to Tilsit and added that the Poles would be resisted if they attempted to invade Germany. The most interesting moment is that the Bolshevik leaders deliberated that when Germany became communist it might have “to cross its own Brest”, that is, just like revolutionary Russia it might have to forgo some of its territories for a while. They presumed that a temporary loss of East Prussia might be even useful, because as a region under landlords’ rule it might not adapt to revolutionary Germany and might even become a peculiar “German Vendée”.<sup>94</sup>

### Prospects of Western Support

A frequent explanation of the refusal of Poland and the Baltic countries to accept Kopp’s proposals is that Western countries, first of all France and England, were closely monitoring his visit and actively encouraged them to reject Kopp’s proposals by drawing out the negotiations and avoiding agreements. Soviet and to some extent contemporary Russian historiography explains that rejection of Moscow’s proposals was dictated by the pressure from the West.<sup>95</sup> It should be pointed out that Soviet diplomats denied it. Ivan Lorents, the Soviet ambassador in Kaunas, carried out a special investigation into the matter and on 11 December informed Kopp that Lithuania was not obedient to the Triple Entente.<sup>96</sup> It can be argued that the neighbours of the Soviet Union formed and maintained a barrier to its expansion in a serious and responsible manner – possibly, even more responsibly than the Western countries. For example, prior to Kopp’s arrival, Poland requested France to send its military squadron to Gdansk for demonstration purposes.<sup>97</sup> The efforts of Latvia to direct the Westerners’ attention to the aggressive intents of the USSR were particularly consistent.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibidem, p. 141.

<sup>95</sup> See: П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, p. 179; В. Л. Черноперов, *op. cit.*, p. 100, 110, 113, 157, etc.

<sup>96</sup> AVPRF, f. 04, op. 27, t. 183, d. 52, l. 121.

<sup>97</sup> П. Н. Ольшанский, *Рижский договор и развитие советско-польских отношений 1921–1924*, p. 181.



After Kopp's visit to Riga Z. A. Meierovics appealed to the governments of England, France and Italy asking them for their prompt answers to three questions: (1) could they warn Russia against concentrating its troops at the Latvian border and against attacking Latvia, (2) what would they do and what support would they render in case Russia attacked Latvia after all, and (3) what position would they take if, attacked by Russia, Latvia would appeal to the League of Nations for assistance.<sup>98</sup>

Latvian diplomats found it very difficult to extort answers to these questions. The representatives of the three said countries in Riga deferred giving clear answers, while it took the Latvian envoys in London, Paris and Rome countless visits to the foreign ministries of those countries to receive loose answers. There were delays and prevarication, as well as reiterated explanations to the effect that the allies, the countries of the Triple Entente, had to reach an agreement; however, heads of states or other politicians were busy with other matters. Meanwhile, Latvian diplomats would be sent to and fro from one office to another. This is verified by detailed reports and activities of Latvian envoy Georgs Bisenieks in London, Oļģerds Grosvalds in Paris, and Miķelis Valters in Rome during this important period.<sup>99</sup>

Albeit not too clear, the answers were understandable. From 7 November onwards, French diplomats explained to Grosvalds on a number of occasions that they could not issue any warnings or advice to Russia as France did not maintain diplomatic relations with it. As for the second question, the answer would be similar: since the USSR was rather weak from the military point of view, it could not attack anybody and thus Latvia was not facing the threat of an attack.<sup>100</sup> And in general, Latvia could not expect any military assistance as it had not entered into any military union with France. It was different in the case of Poland that had signed a union treaty and if Germany attacked Poland, the French would redeploy its divisions across the Rhine. However, when Grosvalds asked what would happen if the Soviets attacked Poland, he received a fairly straightforward answer that "active military assistance" was foreseen only in the case of a German, and not a Russian attack; if the latter launched an aggression, Warsaw

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<sup>98</sup> Sometimes these three issues are merged into two, see: *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1918–1939*, Series 1, Vol. 23, London 1981, 993.

<sup>99</sup> See: LVVA, f.1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 73–133, etc.

<sup>100</sup> Grosvalds's report of 7 November 1923 to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 66–68.

would receive assistance in military supplies, loans, and officers' missions, like in 1920.<sup>101</sup>

During further talks, French diplomats promised, after all, that in case the Bolsheviks attacked Latvia, it would be rendered assistance in military supplies and instructors would be sent, but that would be the maximum it could expect. The English gave a very similar answer (they promised sending weapons), just like the Italians (who gave their word they would not remain indifferent, while Benito Mussolini – he was already in power – boasted to the Latvian envoy he had made the Soviets understand that Latvia had to be left in peace), except that the answer of the latter took the longest. It was only the third question to which all three Western countries gave a positive answer. They promised Latvia all possible assistance that it was entitled to as a member of the League of Nations. In one of his reports, Grosvalds formulated a pessimistic conclusion to the effect that not a single Western country would help the Latvians against Russia.<sup>102</sup> Admittedly, he managed to extort a promise that if the Latvians and the Poles requested, the French military squadron would reach the Baltic Sea,<sup>103</sup> while Bisenieks was making plans with British generals to form a 100,000-strong Latvian army with the help of armaments from that country.<sup>104</sup> However, it basically remained at the level of considerations. The French prime minister Raymond Poincaré replied that the squadron of his country would not move to the Baltic Sea as it was a superfluous matter.<sup>105</sup> Actually, the Westerners maintained the attitude that the Baltic countries and Poland had to form military unions and reach agreements on joint defence. There were problems here as well. It transpired that in their plans of defence, the Poles had not foreseen protecting their northern territories against Russia; they were even planning to retreat from Vilnius. They were of the opinion that the Vilnius corridor was not suitable for military operations.<sup>106</sup> Lithuania, which was in the rear, was not trusted. Bisenieks wrote to Meierovics that in case of danger from the East, Lithuania might “turn its arms against

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<sup>101</sup> Grosvalds's communication of 10 December 1923 to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 79–80.

<sup>102</sup> Grosvalds's reports of 7 and 19 November 1923 to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 66–68, 73–74.

<sup>103</sup> Grosvalds's communication of 27 October 1923 to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 53.

<sup>104</sup> Bisenieks's communication of 27 October 1923 to Meierovics, *ibidem*, lp. 107.

<sup>105</sup> A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, p. 154.

<sup>106</sup> LVVA, f.1313, apr. 3, l. 30, l. 106.

Poland” while the Soviets on their way to Germany might either “trample Lithuania” or even win it over to its side.<sup>107</sup>

### **Flexibility and Fortitude of Galvanauskas and Meierovics**

Despite mistrust and without guaranteed assistance of the Western countries, the Baltic countries and Poland refused Russia the “revolutionary transit” to Germany. Even after Viktor Kopp’s visit, when German revolutionary spirit started dwindling, they were still hoping for a new and stronger communist wave, for, seemingly, main forces had not yet been committed to the struggle. Decisions of the Politburo of 3 and 11 November instructed that “with the events in Germany being possibly delayed”, military preparedness should not weaken and the Red Army had to “grow bigger”.<sup>108</sup> Concentrated at the Vilnius corridor and at the borders with Latvia and Poland, the soldiers and in particular their commanders and communist propagandists could not reconcile themselves with the prospect of retreating without reaching revolutionary Berlin. According to the reminiscences of the Bolshevik figures who had been in the border areas, the desire to be in Berlin “was mad” and there was a belief that it would be followed by a “fundamental historical breakthrough”<sup>109</sup> for which Kopp was paving the path with his visits to Riga, Kaunas, and Warsaw.

Under such circumstances, the western neighbours of the USSR were further forced to sign the Soviet “non-aggression and guarantee” pact talks over which extended to the last months of 1923 and early 1924. Negotiations were separate with each Baltic country. The apex of negotiations was directed at Lithuania hoping that having just annexed Klaipėda and eager to repossess Vilnius and ensure protection against Poland’s possible attack, it would take the Bolsheviks’ bait. These proposals were partially supported by Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Lithuania’s envoy in Moscow. In his communications to Kaunas, support is sometimes voiced very emotionally. He wrote that rejection of proposals might “really” mean “the hour of the last cross” to Lithuania.<sup>110</sup> On

<sup>107</sup> Grosvalds’s communications of 28 October and 14 December 1923, *ibidem*, lp. 94, 104.

<sup>108</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 391, l. 2.

<sup>109</sup> For example, see: М. Гус, *Безумные свастики*, Москва 1973, p. 28, 30.

<sup>110</sup> Jurgis Baltrušaitis’s communication of 22 December 1923 to Ernestas Galvanauskas, LVCA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 86.

Moscow's side, the proposals was extremely actively pushed forward by Chicherin and, of course, by their initiator Kropp. In the communication of 28 December 1923 to Ernestas Galvanauskas, Baltrušaitis wrote: "Kopp would not leave me in peace; I have to hide from him. I strongly advise that the protocol is signed [...]"<sup>111</sup>

What was there to sign? As many as three draft protocols had been prepared, except that the first was a direct outcome of the protocol proposed during the talks, and the second and the third seemingly had to take Lithuania's interests into account. The second protocol was a military convention of the USSR and Lithuania that had to be signed by the general staffs of both countries and which foresaw joint or coordinated action in the case of "military complications" with Poland. The convention probably had to be signed in secret. The third document was a political treaty of a broader scope that consisted of six articles of which the first three seem to be of the greatest importance. The first article foresaw that in the case of a Soviet-Polish military conflict the parties should act in agreement according to the foreseen convention of their general staffs. In the second article, Moscow committed itself to return Vilnius and other territories discussed in the treaty of 12 July 1920 to Lithuania "as soon as military circumstances enable it". Finally, according to the third article Lithuania should promise not to enter into any agreements with Poland without coordinating them with the USSR in advance.<sup>112</sup> These drafts were approved both by the Council of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Politburo at the meeting of 13 December 1923; the latter, it should be admitted, adjusted the third document by indicating that state subordination of Vilnius region should be determined on the basis of the nations' right to self-determination.<sup>113</sup> It goes without saying that this correction downgraded the concessions to Lithuania.

However, it was not so much this amendment that stood in the way of the implementation of the prepared agreements as the stance of Moscow, which demanded that the first document – basically the one prepared by Kropp – should be signed, and only then the turn of the others would come.

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<sup>111</sup> Baltrušaitis's communication of 28 December 1923 to Galvanauskas, LVCA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 82.

<sup>112</sup> Documents of 13–14 December 1923 that Viktor Kopp prepared for members of the Politburo, RGASPI, f. 325, op. 2, d. 27, l. 109.

<sup>113</sup> Protocol of the Politburo meeting of 13 December 1923, *ibidem*, f. 17, op. 3, d. 390, l. 2.

The protocol consisted of three provisions. According to the first one, the parties had to commit themselves “not to interfere into Germany’s internal affairs and not to hinder one another in maintaining economic relations with Germany irrespective of possible changes in its internal order”. The second provision read that Lithuania should undertake the obligation “not to violate Germany’s territorial integrity” and should permit “free transit of the USSR to and from Germany”. According to the third provision, the parties “guarantee favourable (amiable) neutrality to one another in case one of them is attacked by a third country”. Here, favourable neutrality is understood as follows: the said third party would not receive any assistance (even indirect), while transit to and from the country attacked would be permitted irrespective of the cargo.<sup>114</sup>

The protocol, thus, concentrated exclusively on Soviet interests. All three provisions basically duplicated one another and were aimed at all sorts of transit through Lithuania leaving it without any safety-catches whatsoever. For this reason Galvanauskas could not make up his mind to sign it although Soviet diplomats, often backed by the Lithuanian envoy Jurgis Baltrušaitis, kept urging him to do that. To Ivan Lorents, Moscow’s ambassador in Kaunas, Galvanauskas pointed out that recognition of unlimited transit was “extremely dangerous” to Lithuania as it would give a precedent to Poland to let its goods pass through Lithuanian territories,<sup>115</sup> and this could not happen before Vilnius returned to its lawful owner.

In a letter to Baltrušaitis, the prime minister gave even more detailed explanations:

the draft protocol proposed by Mr. Kopp is very useful to the USSR. Meanwhile, it offers practically nothing to Lithuania. Here I fail to understand [...] protection of Germany’s interests. By proposing such a protocol, the USSR would like to shoot too many birds: (a) to secure free transit, “inclusive of all goods and under all political circumstances”, which means that Lithuania should permit the passage of military supplies and the troops in case Germany and the USSR were at war with somebody [...]. (b) Lithuania would maintain neutrality in case the

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<sup>114</sup> The texts of the protocol in Lithuanian and Russian survived in the archives of Lithuania: Baltrušaitis’s telegram of 5 December 1923 to Galvanauskas, LCVA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 89–90; the text in Russian: *ibidem*, l. 79–80.

<sup>115</sup> Lorents’s communication of 4 January 1924 to Kopp, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 27, t. 183, d. 52017, l. 4–5.

USSR were at war [...], this is totally impossible. (c) There are no guarantees that the USSR will not attack the Latvians and the Estonians. Lithuania cannot allow these states to be annihilated by the USSR.<sup>116</sup>

It is a clear assessment of the document that does not require any comments.

In addition, Ernestas Galvanauskas clearly indicated his own position resulting from the assessment of the document:

By signing the protocol we would not contribute to keeping peace, only to the encouragement of the USSR to lead adventurous policy, to the involvement of Lithuania in a war, and to the ruin of our state. For this reason this protocol [...] must be re-edited entirely differently [...]. With regard to the USSR, it is important for us (1) to check our borders as determined by the treaty with Moscow and the borders with Germany [...]. The USSR must guarantee these borders to us [...]. (2) We must work out a detailed convention regarding transit [...]. (3) Until the question of Vilnius is not resolved, there can be no Soviet transit through the lands of Lithuania (administered by Poland). In addition, the issue of neutrality must be discussed jointly with the Estonians and the Latvians.<sup>117</sup>

We can see thus that the attitude of the Lithuanian prime minister was independent and matched the country's interests. He did not yield to persuasions or even threats of either Viktor Kopp or other Soviet diplomats. On 14 January 1924, Baltrušaitis communicated to Kaunas that the Soviets would not recognise Klaipėda for Lithuania *de jure* and would not help the country to regain Vilnius *de facto* without “a framework treaty”.<sup>118</sup> Utterly baffled as to how to influence Galvanauskas, they decided to invite him to Moscow and corner him. Jurgis Baltrušaitis telegraphed on 15 February: “[the Soviet] authorities would be genuinely pleased about your visit to Moscow as it would create conditions for the speediest resolution of all issues to the benefit of both parties”.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Galvanauskas's communication of 3 January 1924 to Baltrušaitis, LVCA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 72.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, l. 73–74.

<sup>118</sup> Baltrušaitis's telegram of 14 January 1924 to Galvanauskas, *ibidem*, l. 57.

<sup>119</sup> Baltrušaitis's telegram of 15 February 1924 to Galvanauskas, *ibidem*, l. 30.

Today one is truly surprised at Galvanauskas's ability to defend Lithuania's interests in such complicated circumstances. Not only he resisted Moscow's dangerous witchcraft, but at the same time he made efforts to find agreement with the neighbours in the north, Latvia and Estonia, and to consolidate the return of Klaipėda to Lithuania at the international level. These three issues were closely related. As for the recognition of Klaipėda, the Soviets urged the prime minister to negotiate not with the Western countries that had won the war but with the neighbouring powers, Germany and the USSR. It was not incidental that the Politburo considered the said agreements with Lithuania on 13 December 1923: several days later a meeting of the Council of the League of Nations was to be held at which Galvanauskas had to decide whether to accept the solution of the Klaipėda issue proposed by this organisation. On 17 December, the issue was passed into the hands of Norman Davis. Galvanauskas did not take the bait of the Politburo and accepted the procedures of Western institutions.

It was a fundamental decision regarding orientation, West or East. The prime minister was not alone in making such decisions. The West-oriented decision was encouraged by the public meeting that took place at Kaunas University on 23 October and the conference of diplomats of 25 November.<sup>120</sup> Therefore the strict attitude of the conclusion of this new synthesis should possibly be open to debate: "Galvanauskas's straight course to the West was leading to a deadlock as it did not give the Lithuanians any clear perspective, either in Klaipėda, where efforts had to be made to resist German competition, or even more so in Vilnius that was dominated by the Poles".<sup>121</sup> It should be noted that the path chosen by the then prime minister was difficult and complicated because even when a revolution was being inspired in Germany, the German diplomats sustained their interests in a common policy with Moscow and in "cooperation" with it regarding activities in the Baltic countries. An indicator of that, for example, is the communication of Franz Olsnausen, the German ambassador to Lithuania, to Berlin on 9 October 1923.<sup>122</sup> Possibly, a good grasp of such processes or at least intuition did not leave space for different choices. After all, the ways out proposed by Moscow and the agreements it attempted to thrust

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<sup>120</sup> *Lietuvos istorija. Nepriklausomybė (1918–1940)*, Vol. 10, Part 1, Vilnius 2013, p. 424.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 431.

<sup>122</sup> ADAP. Serie A: 1918–1925, Bd. VIII, p. 462–467.

upon discussed above, which Ernestas Galvanauskas criticised with reason, were much more dangerous.

Latvia and Estonia, to whom Kopp proposed a protocol similar to that of Lithuania, saw that danger. Kopp negotiated with each country separately thus trying to divide them. Recommendations of the foreign ministry of Latvia called for resistance against this line and suggested that the Baltic countries should jointly negotiate the protocol.<sup>123</sup> However, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, was not inclined to approve such talks. On 28 December, he wrote to Galvanauskas: “I very strongly advise you to sign the protocol without waiting for the Latvians and the Estonians in case there had been plans to coordinate the matter with the attitudes of Riga and Tallinn”.<sup>124</sup> Several days before, this piece of advice was worded in an even more emotional way: “I advise against any connection of our attitude with the tactic of the Latvians and against any coordination of your steps with either Riga or Tallinn”.<sup>125</sup> Such views of our envoy in Moscow no longer appear unambiguous when we see that at the same time he suggested influencing Latvia and making it sign the document discussed. In one of the cited letters, he instructed the prime minister of his country to “try influence the Latvians as much as possible so that there are at least some results from Russia’s proposal”.<sup>126</sup>

Nonetheless, these suggestions did not have a noticeable effect on Galvanauskas’s position. He was inclined to discuss both a joint position on the issue of Klaipėda and the proposal of the Soviets with the northern neighbours and tried to found a tripartite Baltic union with them. On 7 October 1923, Galvanauskas went on a special visit to Riga and visited Tallinn as well.<sup>127</sup> His suggestion to both neighbours was that a conference of foreign ministers of the three Baltic countries should be held in Kaunas in mid-December. As the date of the conference kept being postponed, on 3 January 1924 Ernestas Galvanauskas wrote to Jonas Aukštuolis, the representative of Lithuania in Riga, that “coordination of relations with the

<sup>123</sup> Note of 27 November 1923 of the Latvian Foreign Ministry to Karlis Ozols, ambassador in Moscow, LVVA, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 20.

<sup>124</sup> Baltrušaitis’s note of 28 December 1923 to Galvanauskas, LVCA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 82.

<sup>125</sup> Baltrušaitis’s note of 11 December 1923 to Galvanauskas, *ibidem*, l. 84.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*, l. 85.

<sup>127</sup> Z. Butkus, *Lietuvos ir Latvijos santykiai 1919–1929 metais*, Vilnius 1993, p. 91; X. Арумязь, *За кулисами Балтийского союза*, Таллин 1966, p. 212.



USSR could also be clarified” at the conference in Kaunas and added an imperative, “pass this opinion of mine to Mr. Meierovics”.<sup>128</sup>

Such coordination had premises as the head of Latvian diplomacy was not less suspicious of Kopp’s protocol than his Lithuanian counterpart. The protocol offered to Latvia was slightly expanded: it included the fourth provision according to which the USSR, taking the “accurate meaning” of the Peace treaty into account, guaranteed total “inviolability” of the territory of Latvia “within its current borders”.<sup>129</sup> This was some sort of bait to our northern neighbour. Nonetheless, it could not swallow it as the other provisions of the protocol were a great hindrance, in particular the third article that committed Latvia to maintain neutrality in case there was a war between the Soviets and some third country. Any Baltic country and Poland, too, could have become this third country. Therefore Latvia could not maintain neutrality if the Soviets attacked its southern or northern neighbours.

Probably the most interesting episode in the history of Viktor Kopp’s proposals is that the Latvians grasped their essence and not only rejected them but also exposed them by disclosing their actual purposes. This was done by Z. A. Meierovics, the undisputed leader of diplomacy of the Baltic countries, who took over the diplomatic initiative from Kopp and proposed calling a broad international conference to discuss the matters of his protocol and to outline the guidelines of peace-keeping policy in Eastern and Central Europe. How was this idea born? During his talks with the head of Latvian diplomacy on 24 October, it was definitely a cold shower to the Soviet emissary when he was told that Latvia could offer guarantees regarding non-interference in Germany’s internal affairs and transit to that country “irrespective of changes in its order” not to Russia, but to Germany, with which Latvia could even sign a corresponding declaration. Raising the question from a different perspective exposed the Bolsheviks’ scheming: they were aiming at “changes of order” in Germany, while Germany itself did not desire them and did not need any agreements.

Hit by such a simple and ingenious proposal, Kopp tried to suppress it and not to mention it. However, Meierovics did not forget it and after less than a month he spoke of it again – this time it was a diplomatic initiative to call an international conference of the Baltic countries, Poland, the USSR,

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<sup>128</sup> Galvanauskas’s note of 3 January 1924 to Aukštuolis, LVCA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 71.

<sup>129</sup> The protocol intended for the Latvians survived not only in Latvian (LVVA, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 191), but also in Lithuanian (LCVA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 504, l. 56–57) archives.

and Germany in Riga to consider Moscow's proposals and more general issues of peace keeping.<sup>130</sup> In principle, this initiative did not appear to be entirely new. A tradition of regular conferences with the aim of founding a large (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland) and a small (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) Baltic unions had already been evolving. At last the Russian delegation also participated at the meeting of the Baltic countries and Poland that was held on the eve of the Genoa Conference. The conference of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which had been proposed by Galvanauskas and postponed many times, took place in Kaunas from 19 to 22 May 1924; the conference of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland, promoted by Poland, was held on 16–17 February in Warsaw. The conference in Riga proposed by Meierovics did not materialise, mostly because the USSR refused to take part in it.

It was not done in a straightforward manner, because in such a case it would have had to take of the halo of the “apostle of peace” and admit that there had been other aims than the ones declared. However, taking part at the conference proposed by the Latvians seemed to be more dangerous than the refusal to participate. Soviet diplomats would admit that running into the German delegation at a conference might cause various surprises and the situation might become unacceptable to them.<sup>131</sup> To evade the conference in Riga, the Soviets raised formal and impracticable conditions: for example, they demanded that the Baltic countries signed Kopp's protocol before the conference and without planned considerations of it. Lithuania in particular was actively urged to do that. The Soviets promised to protect its interests at the conference if due to Poland's participation it could not take part at it.<sup>132</sup>

Failing to achieve results through such manoeuvres, on 19 January 1924 the Soviets serviced an official memorandum to Latvia in which they openly declared they refused to participate in Riga conference as it was “of no political relevance” to them.<sup>133</sup> The conference was not relevant to Moscow

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<sup>130</sup> Meierovics's letter of 27 November 1923 to Ozols, LVVA, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 190–191; Semion Aralov's telegram of 5 December 1923 to Kopp, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 60, t. 446, d. 58581, l. 85.

<sup>131</sup> А. Рупасов, *Гарантии, безопасность, нейтралитет. СССР и государства – лимитропы в 1920-х – начале 1930-х гг.*, p. 64.

<sup>132</sup> Kopp's letter of 29 December 1923 to Lorents, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 27, t. 182, d. 55, l. 35.

<sup>133</sup> The Soviet memorandum served to Z. A. Meierovics on 19 January 1923, LVVA, f. 1313, apr. 3, l. 30, lp. 187–188.

at all, because the revolutionary potential in Germany was waning. Viktor Kopp admitted that the speed “of the diplomatic offensive in the Baltic region should be slowed down”. As for the Baltic countries, they not only blamed Moscow for the conference that had not taken place, but voiced some self-criticism as well. On 12 February, for example, the foreign ministry of Latvia sent a letter to all its envoys abroad that included the following: “Had the Baltic countries been united, the Russians would have been forced to admit that they did not care about universal peace in Eastern and Central Europe and that they had other aims”.<sup>134</sup> This, of course, was a reference to the rivalry and competition between the countries as to which of them would be the first to organise a conference. Galvanauskas wanted it to be held in Kaunas, Z. A. Meierovics proposed Riga, and the Poles thought Warsaw was the best place for it.

Although dragging the schemes of Soviet politics into broad daylight with the help of the conference had failed, they were discussed. For example, the press of the Baltic countries pointed out that the demand of “free transit” to Germany was masking the Bolsheviks’ aspiration to render armed assistance to the German communists in seizing power and to violate the borders of the Baltic countries.<sup>135</sup> It is not clear why the Latvian historian Aivars Stranga considers the aims of convening the conference in Riga Meierovics’s mistake.<sup>136</sup> Although the conference did not take place, the idea was meaningful from the point of view of diplomatic tactics as it exposed dangerous manoeuvres of the eastern neighbour.

## The Outcomes of Viktor Kopp’s Mission and His Proposals

First and foremost it is clear that Kopp failed to extort commitment of the Baltic countries and Poland to allow transit of the Red Army to Germany. The conclusions of 7 November formulated by the German foreign ministry admitted that the mission discussed did not provide the German communists with expected assistance.<sup>137</sup> Still, all this had a certain impact on

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<sup>134</sup> Note of 12 February 1924 of the Latvian Foreign Ministry to the ambassadors abroad, *ibidem*, lp. 177–179.

<sup>135</sup> See: “Jaunākās Ziņas” 4.12.1923.

<sup>136</sup> A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, p. 153.

<sup>137</sup> ADAP, Serie A: 1918–1925, Bd. VIII, 605.

international politics. The Polish historian Wojciech Materski maintained that Kopp's diplomatic mission brought Latvia and Estonia closer to Lithuania and created a distance in their relations with Poland.<sup>138</sup> We could not confirm prominent shifts along these directions. However, we must agree with Materski when he says that the visit discussed encouraged Latvia and Estonia to enter into a bilateral union treaty, although attempts have been made in historiography to refute it. Even Marko Lehti, a researcher in the field of relations between the Baltic countries, holds the view that Kopp's mission did not directly influence the conclusion of the Latvian-Estonian union on 1 November because he handed his proposals on free transit and the non-aggression pact at the end of that month.<sup>139</sup> Yet these proposals had been submitted prior to the visit; during the visit itself, from 24 October, they had been demonstrated in the manner of an ultimatum and with much zeal in Riga and Kaunas.

Meierovics, who left for Tallinn immediately after his meeting with Kopp, must have felt the danger of the threat from the eastern neighbour breathing down his neck. In an interview for the press, he said very clearly that German-Soviet orientation posed a threat to the security of Latvia and Estonia, and that the agreement of 1 November would enhance security, which was of great importance "in the context of unrest in Germany".<sup>140</sup> The conference in Tallinn, which started on 25 October, was held in the shadow of the Soviet threat. Both parties, especially the Latvians, were prepared to make concessions and eliminate long-lasting territorial disputes and arguments regarding compensation of damages for the support that the Estonians lent to the Latvians during the wars of independence. The Latvians dropped their claims to Ruhnu Island that they had been demanding for many years as they wanted to have at least one island in the Baltic Sea, bearing in mind the fact that the Estonians had as many as 817 of them. They also undertook the commitment to pay 30 million marks to Estonia assigning them to the relatives of the Estonians who had perished on the Latvian territory. After these disputes had been adjusted, Latvia and Estonia signed as many as six agreements on 1 November, and the most important among them was the treaty of defence. According to it, in the case of

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<sup>138</sup> W. Materski, *Polska a ZSRR 1923–1924. Stosunki wzajemne na tle sytuacji politycznej w Europie*, Wrocław 1981, p. 140.

<sup>139</sup> M. Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe*, p. 440.

<sup>140</sup> "Сегодня" 2.11.1923.

aggression, both countries would render political, diplomatic, and military assistance to each other. It foresaw that in the case of a war, both countries would muster a joint 300,000-strong army.

It was a serious union that could expand both in the north and in the south. The union should also be seen as a resolute act demonstrating that neither of the two countries would yield to the Soviet dictate signalled by Viktor Kopp's mission. The solidarity of the new allies helped them in resisting the agreements on "free transit" and neutrality that Kopp tried to thrust upon them.

Although the Baltic countries resisted Soviet temptations and threats and refused transit of the Red Army to Germany, the germ of revolution was probably bleeding into their territories. Extensive diplomatic correspondence between Kaunas and Moscow about air traffic between Russia and Germany over the territory of Lithuania can serve as an example. These flights were in charge of the joint German-Soviet airline "Deruluft".<sup>141</sup> The most frequent flights were from Moscow to Berlin via Königsberg and Daugavpils. Lithuania demanded compliance with the flying rules it had established and an inter-state agreement on this issue. Moscow abstained and kept postponing the signing of the agreement. In particular, it was displeased by the demand that the aircraft crossing the territory of Lithuania should land in Kaunas and be subjected to Lithuanian inspection. It insisted that the airport in Kaunas was too poor and quite dangerous for landing. Lithuania kept making concessions and agreed not to check the couriers of the Soviets, its diplomatic pouches, and sealed diplomatic packages, and just demanded landing in Kaunas; otherwise, it threatened to open fire on the planes. On 16 October 1923, for example, Lithuania's note to the Soviet embassy read that Soviet planes started "systematic violations" of the established rules.<sup>142</sup> It was happening on a regular basis. A letter of the Ministry of National Defence to the foreign minister pointed out that such acts "humiliate the prestige" of the Lithuanian authorities and were highly detrimental to the country's defence.<sup>143</sup>

It is quite likely that the planes carried revolutionary literature, money, the revolutionaries themselves, and, possibly, weapons. The note of 8 Octo-

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<sup>141</sup> *Москва – Берлин. Политика и дипломатия Кремля 1920–1941. Сборник документов в трех томах*, т. 1, p. 50.

<sup>142</sup> Note of 16 October 1923, LCVA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 389, l. 23.

<sup>143</sup> Note of 21 July 1923 to the minister of foreign affairs, *ibidem*, l. 142.

ber 1923 of the chief of the General Staff to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reads:

Enclosing some samples of communist leaflets, I must inform [you] that their distribution is periodically observed in locations which are along the air link between Königsberg and Moscow. Since according to the available information such proclamation leaflets and newspapers are published in Russia (Smolensk) and their appearance in Lithuania coincides with the flights of Deruluft aircrafts, it suggests that Bolshevik agents are taking advantage of the most convenient conditions of the airline company – uncontrolled flying as transport of communist literature.<sup>144</sup>

The leaflets carried on the aircrafts not just promoted the cause of communism but intentionally instigated a revolution in Germany. One of them, called “A proletarian revolution is nearing in Germany”, read: “The Deutschmark has been falling headlong [...]. Bloody fight is inevitable in Germany”. Lithuania also was “favoured” with literature of this sort. One of the issues of the *Kareivių tiesa* (Soldiers’ Truth) of 1923 referred to the propaganda of the opposition forces: “Christian Democrats appoint the traitor Galvanauskas the prime minister [...]. Not only the *Krašto balsas* (Voice of the Country) writes that [...] Lithuania must become Poland’s colony [...]. The *Lietuvos žinios* (News of Lithuania) even write that the Triple Entente is about to appoint a Polish commissar for Klaipėda [...]. Galvanauskas sold the Nemunas River and the port of Klaipėda to the Poles”.<sup>145</sup>

Such attacks were aimed not only at disturbance of the internal order but also attempted to change Lithuania’s political orientation by turning Lithuania against Poland and placing it on the Moscow-Berlin axis. Similar attempts were made in respect of other Baltic countries. The Bolshevik leadership was also trying to learn from the failure in Germany. Aleksei Shtrodakh, a military advisor to the German communist party and a graduate of the General Staff Academy, emphasised in his report to the Comintern of 11 February 1924 that “the German revolution cannot materialise without the assistance of the Red Army” and “a direct border with Germany” was necessary for that. According to him, there “have been and will be” excuses for a revolution there, but “the experience of the recent years”

<sup>144</sup> Note of 8 October 1923 to the minister of foreign affairs, *ibidem*, I. 146.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, I. 147–148.

shows that it will not succeed without the Soviets' direct assistance (and a direct border).<sup>146</sup> Although first of all he called for concentrating forces for the Sovietisation of Poland, but the same danger was threatening the neighbouring Baltic countries with Comintern-subsidised local communist parties. Estonian communists seemed to set the example of such activity. On 14 October 1923, they attempted demonstrations in Tallinn, Tartu, and Narva, with the slogan "Long live the revolutionary working class of Germany! We are waiting for Soviet Russia's assistance to the German revolution".<sup>147</sup>

This activity was like a prophesy and a reminder that communists could attempt seizing power in Estonia, too, where Soviet assistance would not be obstructed by the borders of intervening countries. On 1 December 1924, a communist putsch organised by emissaries from Moscow took place in Tallinn, but Estonians managed to nip it in the bud and the putschists did not stay in power long enough to call the Red Army to help. After that the export of global revolution to the West stopped until the Second World War.

## Streszczenie

### **Sowieckie podżeganie do rewolucji w Niemczech w 1923 r. oraz blokada pokoju krajów bałtyckich i Polski**

Polska i kraje bałtyckie w 1923 r. odmówiły zgody na przemarsz przez swoje ziemie Armii Czerwonej, którą ZSRR usiłował przerzucić do Niemiec w celu wywołania rewolucji. Zakłada się, że po inwazji bolszewików na terytoria krajów bałtyckich w 1919 r. i wszczętej w 1920 r. wojnie z Polską największa próba eksportu rewolucji sowieckiej odbyła się w 1923 r., kiedy bolszewicy usiłowali zainspirować przewrót komunistyczny w Niemczech. Planowano tam przerzucić skoncentrowaną przy wschodniej granicy ZSRR 100-tysięczną Armię Czerwoną w nadziei, że kraje bałtyckie i Polska nie wyrażą sprzeciwu i zezwolą na jej przemarsz do Niemiec. Inspiracja była imponująca. Wsparcie bolszewików nie było ograniczone jedynie do pomocy finansowej dla niemieckich komunistów i wysyłania rewolucyjnej literatury. Organizowano setki rewolucyjnych jednostek wojskowych, dostarczano broń, wysyłano kadre partyjną i specjalistów z zakresu

<sup>146</sup> *Коминтерн и идея мировой революции. Документы*, p. 448–450.

<sup>147</sup> Cited from: A. Stranga, *Latvijas – Padomju Krievijas miera līgums 1920. gada 11. augustā*, p. 148.

sztuki wojennej. Na wzór radzieckiej Komisji Nadzwyczajnej została też utworzona grupa terrorystyczna do likwidacji niewygodnych osób. W przypadku pomyślnego przebiegu wydarzeń i udanego przewrotu w Niemczech zamierzano związać rewolucję z ZSRR i rzeczywiście przekształcić ją w światową.

Przywódcy bolszewików musieli jednak rozstrzygnąć podstawowe zagadnienia: w jaki sposób przerzucić swoje siły zbrojne do Niemiec oraz jak pokonać „barierę”, którą tworzyły państwa powstałe po I wojnie światowej? Z początku powzięto zamiar, by maszerować przez Rumunię i Czechosłowację, ale tego planu nie zaaprobował Józef Stalin. Zdecydowano więc uderzyć przez tzw. korytarz wileński i wzdłuż litewsko-polskiej granicy dotrzeć do niemieckiej enklawy – Prus Wschodnich. Dążono przede wszystkim do tego, żeby Armia Czerwona dotarła do Niemiec na czas bez wywołania konfliktu międzynarodowego oraz by dysponowała jeszcze pełnym potencjałem bojowym. Dlatego też została podjęta decyzja o pertraktacjach z Polską i krajami bałtyckimi w sprawie uzyskania pozwolenia na przemarsz Armii Czerwonej przez terytorium tych państw.

W tym celu do Łotwy, Litwy i Polski została wysłana z misją dyplomatyczną delegacja, na czele z wpływowym bolszewikiem Wiktorem Koppem. Delegacja prosiła o przemarsz wojska przysłaniała mitem obrony. Istniała możliwość rewolucji w Niemczech, którą prawdopodobnie będzie próbowała stłumić Ententa i wtedy ZSRR będzie zobowiązany udzielić niemieckiemu proletariatu „moralnej i materialnej” pomocy. Wszystkim trzem państwom Kopp proponował podpisanie umów gwarancyjnych, mających zapewnić przejście sił zbrojnych ZSRR do Niemiec bez jakichkolwiek utrudnień.

Nie zważając na różnicowane pozycje w stosunku do Moskwy, zarówno rząd Zygryda Anny Mejerowicza, jak i Ernesta Galvanauskasa oraz władze Polski nie uległy ani kuszącym propozycjom, ani groźbom i zdecydowanie odrzuciły sugestie Koppa. Taką postawę prezentowała także Estonia, która swą odmowną odpowiedź wysłała typowymi kanałami dyplomatycznymi. Kraje bałtyckie i Polska podjęły decyzję samodzielnie, bez deklaracji pomocy ze strony Anglii i innych państw wschodnich, nawet gdy te ostatnie odmówiły przekazania Moskwie *démarche*. W taki sposób kraje bałtyckie i Polska znacząco przyczyniły się do powstrzymania sowieckiej interwencji zbrojnej i do unicestwienia planów ZSRR na przeprowadzenie światowej rewolucji, która groziła zarówno Niemcom, jak i całej Europie. Podżeganiu do przewrotu nie uległa również większa część społeczeństwa Niemiec, zatem wielkie rewolucyjne plany ZSRR nie doszły do skutku.

Groźba wkroczenia Armii Czerwonej na terytoria krajów bałtyckich i Polski oraz zagrożenie eksportu rewolucji w nieznacznym stopniu zjednoczyło te cztery państwa. Na powstałe niebezpieczeństwo odpowiednio zareagowały Łotwa i Estonia, zdołały one przezwyciężyć spory terytorialne i 1 listopada 1923 r. zawarły sojusz obronny, na mocy którego zobowiązały się do udzielania pomocy politycz-



nej, dyplomatycznej i wojskowej. Jednak sąsiednie państwa południowe i północne zwlekały z dołączeniem do tego sojuszu aż do okupacji 1940 r.

## Summary

### **Soviet Instigation of Revolution in Germany in 1923 and the Block of Peace of the Baltic Countries and Poland**

Following the 1919 invasion of the Baltic countries and the 1920 war against Poland, the Bolsheviks' most flagrant attempt at the export of revolution was their venture to inspire a communist coup in Germany, with the redeployment of the 100,000-strong Red Army that had been concentrated at the western borders of the USSR with the hope that the Baltic countries and Poland would permit its transit to Germany without objection. The inspiration was of a grandiose scale. The Bolsheviks' assistance was not limited to just financial support to German communists and revolutionary literature sent to them: military revolutionary units, "the hundreds", were organised, military and party specialists were dispatched to Germany, and even a terrorist group for killing "inconvenient" individuals was formed on the example of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission. Had the coup in Germany succeeded, the country would have been connected with the USSR and after that the revolution would have spread globally.

However, the Bolshevik leaders were facing a question of immense importance: how to redeploy their army to Germany and how to overcome the "barrier" of the new countries that had emerged after the war. The initial plan was to push through Romania and Czechoslovakia, but when Joseph Stalin rejected it, the decision was made to direct the main offensive through the so-called Vilnius corridor and to reach East Prussia along the Lithuanian-Polish border. To ensure that the Red Army reached Germany in time not battered, without losses, full of energy, and without causing an international conflict it was resolved to negotiate the transit of the Red Army with Poland and the Baltic countries. For this purpose, a diplomatic mission of the influential Bolshevik Viktor Kopp was dispatched to Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, which masked the request for transit under a defence tale: purportedly, the Triple Entente might attempt suppression of the possible revolution in Germany, in which case the Soviets would have to render "moral and material assistance" to the German proletariat. Viktor Kopp proposed that all three countries he was visiting should sign pacts of guarantees that foresaw unhindered transit of the Soviets to Germany in case of "possible events" in that country.

Although the governments of Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics and Ernestas Galvanauskas and the Polish authorities occupied different positions towards Moscow, they unambiguously rejected Kopp's proposals and did not yield either to

his threats or tempting concessions. Estonia assumed an identical position and communicated its negative response through traditional diplomatic channels. The Baltic countries and Poland arrived at this decision independently, without England or other Western countries promising them direct assistance or even refusing demarches to protest Moscow's actions. In this way they made a weighty contribution to averting Soviet military intervention, to the disruption of the schemes of global revolution that were threatening Germany and the whole of Europe. The larger part of the German public did not succumb to the inspirations of the coup and thus the Soviet grand inspiration of a revolution did not materialise.

The danger of the export of revolution, the threat of the intervention of the Red Army in the Baltic countries and Poland did not bring much unity to these countries. Only Estonia and Latvia responded to the threat in a more adequate manner when, having overcome territorial and other disputes, they concluded a defence union on 1 November 1923 and undertook the commitment to lend political, diplomatic, and military assistance to each other. However, none of their northern or eastern neighbours joined this union before the Soviet occupation of these countries in 1940.

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