

# Precarious Roads to Recognition: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 1917–1922

*James Montgomery Baxenfield*

Tallinn University, School of Humanities, Institute of History,  
Archaeology and Art History, Narva mnt 29, 10120 Tallinn;  
bxnfield@tlu.ee

*Kevin Rändi*

Tallinn University, School of Humanities,  
Narva mnt 29, 10120 Tallinn;  
kevin.randi@tlu.ee

**Abstract.** This article introduces the special issue marking the centenary of de jure recognition extended to the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian governments by the United States in July 1922. The concept of self-determination – which opened up further roads for Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians in pursuit of independence after the First World War – became closely associated with President Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points speech of 1918. However, it was not predetermined that the Baltic nations would receive recognition, or that they would seek sovereign statehood. For a time, the notion of autonomy within a larger federation of states, more closely resembling the imperial structure that had dominated the European political landscape for centuries, was not merely a competing idea, but for some a preference. As notions of self-determination developed into the pursuit of diplomatic recognition, the February Revolution of 1917 and the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 became markers for a transition from federative ideas to national independence.

**Keywords:** recognition; self-determination; Baltic states; World War I; Paris Peace Conference; International Law; Public Relations; diplomatic relations

## INTRODUCTION

Both in political and legal terms, the twentieth century could rightfully be called “the century of self-determination.”<sup>1</sup> The concept of self-determination has its roots in the history of political philosophy, among thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1773–1803), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872). The same thinkers also contributed to the idea of recognition.<sup>2</sup> Around the time of the First World War, both the idea of self-determination and recognition practices came to be associated with the political principles of Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), the 28th President of the United States of America (US).<sup>3</sup> On 8th January 1918, Wilson presented his famous Fourteen Points speech to Congress with the aim of bringing the US into the First World War for the purpose of ending the conflict. Self-determination, the term so much associated with Wilson’s political thought, is not present in the speech. However, a month later, Wilson pointed out that “self-determination” was to become “an imperative principle of action” in concordance with the idea that people should be “dominated and governed only by their own consent.”<sup>4</sup>

- 1 P. Hilpold. Self-Determination and Autonomy: Between Secession and Internal Self-Determination. – *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 2017, 24, 302–335.
- 2 For a comprehensive study of the history of the concept of recognition in Europe, see: A. Honneth. *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas*. Trans. J. P. Ganahl. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021.
- 3 There is some evidence that Wilson was influenced by Mazzini (a proponent of cosmopolitan patriotism), turning liberal internationalism into a doctrine of foreign policy. As stated explicitly in his essays, such as, “The European Question” (1847) and “Principles of International Politics” (1871), Mazzini saw the link between democracy and national self-determination as the recipe for the peaceful international order for Europe’s future. However, for Mazzini, nation was a non-essentialist and socially constructed phenomenon that presents a certain democracy-achieving function in a given historical situation, but it would not be the ultimate endpoint of overall progress. See: S. Recchia, N. Urbinati. *Introduction: Giuseppe Mazzini’s International Political Thought. – A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations*. Ed. by S. Recchia, N. Urbinati. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009, 3. The best evidence of influence is perhaps Wilson’s own remarks at the monument of Mazzini in Genoa, Italy, 1919. See: W. Wilson. *Remarks at the Monument of Mazzini in Genoa, Italy*. – *The American Presidency Project*. <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-monument-mazzini-geoa-italy>>, accessed 23rd August 2022. G. Mazzini. *The European Question: Foreign Intervention and National Self-Determination. – A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations*. Ed. by S. Recchia, N. Urbinati. Trans. S. Recchia. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009, 193–198; G. Mazzini. *Principles of International Politics*. – *Ibid.*, 224–240; S. Recchia. *The Origins of Liberal Wilsonianism: Giuseppe Mazzini on Regime Change and Humanitarian Intervention. – Just and Unjust Military Intervention*. Ed. by S. Recchia, J. M. Welsh. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, 238, 241–242.
- 4 W. Wilson. *Address of the President of the United States Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1918*. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1918Supp01v01/d59>>, accessed 10th July 2022.

Recent historiography concerning diplomatic recognition of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian republics explores a myriad of aspects, underscoring the vibrant and perennial interest in the phenomenon within the broad field of Baltic Studies. Many of these aspects are touched upon in this special issue, though a few highlights from recent years are demonstrative of scholarly research transcending the restrictive boundaries of national histories. For one, despite the predominant focus on peace-making and diplomacy, there is a growing acclimation to the idea that violence played an important role during the events of recognition. As Tomas Balkelis argues in his *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923*, violence was not a mere historical background of Lithuania’s state-formation, but something more constitutive for peoples, policies, and institutions; even suggesting that Lithuania “became a sovereign state, more than anything else, through its ability to wage war.”<sup>5</sup> The latter highlights that re-examining phenomena as extensive as state-formation and recognition is a multifaceted task that scholars will continue to excavate and debate.

Turning attention towards the US, a contributing author to this special issue, Ēriks Jēkabsons, examined US-Latvia relations in his extensive 2018 monograph *Latvijas un Amerikas Savienoto Valstu attiecības 1918.–1922. gadā*. Systematically distinguishing and examining the stages of diplomatic recognition, Jēkabsons emphasises that, having recently exited its policies of isolationism, the US grew to be prominent in Latvia’s hopes for gaining recognition.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the monograph explores humanitarian aspects, including damages done to Latvia where the US played a significant and mitigating role. Sharing the themes of this issue and their impact on Latvia in the past and in the present, *The Centenary of Latvia’s Foreign Affairs: Global Thought and Latvia* is another noteworthy reminder of how these concepts have stayed relevant in the case of the Baltic states.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere, considering the rising global influence of the US at that time, re-visiting US-Baltic relations would not be complete without paying tribute to this year’s *Ameerika sajand: USA ja Eesti subete sada aastat*. The contributing scholars capture US-Estonian relations in the

5 T. Balkelis. *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, 1–2, 163.

6 Ē. Jēkabsons. *Latvijas un Amerikas Savienoto Valstu attiecības 1918.–1922. gadā*. Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, Rīga, 2018.

7 *The Centenary of Latvia’s Foreign Affairs: Global Thought and Latvia*. Ed. by A. Sprūds, V. Ščerbinskis, K. Bukovskis. Latvian Institute of international affairs, Rīga, 2020. On national self-determination and alternatives to statehood in Latvia, see: G. Apals. *Self-determination and Latvia*. – *Ibid.*, 9–33.

context of global history, covering extended periods of time.<sup>8</sup> While the book demonstrates what relations with the US have meant for Estonia in the past, the final discussion underlines the importance of continuing to investigate the value of these relations and their different aspects. As Kaarel Piirimäe discusses, one way to understand the importance of the US and its relations to Estonia is to consider a future where the US (which is important for the security of Estonia in the present day) ceases to be a centre of influence, and the so-called “American Century” comes to an end.<sup>9</sup> While this vision is no doubt undesirable, Piirimäe considers this future, projected from the present day, for the purpose of demonstrating the historical contingency of such international phenomena that we could be taking for granted by perceiving them to be universal. This contemplation is emblematic of how, from their beginnings, international relations have remained precarious.

Revisiting the early years of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian state-formation, and in a similar vein to ideas presented in *Ameerika Sajand*, this special issue explores the uncertainties and possibilities of the past. In endeavouring to provide an insight into complex events that unfolded a century ago, a variety of perspectives as well as regional voices could be fitting for the task. By bringing together a small group of ‘Baltic’ scholars, with different backgrounds and interests, this special issue attempts to achieve such a historiographical illumination by examining episodes that explore the theme of recognition.

## BETWEEN POLITICS, PROPAGANDA, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Of the many needs facing would-be nations seeking recognition following the First World War, establishing stable foreign relations (particularly with the Allies) was tangible to a lifeline. The Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian political elite faced particular difficulties in this respect because of the circumstances in which they found themselves. By the Armistice, the entire territory of the Baltic Sea’s eastern littoral was under German occupation, and the region was in severe lack of material and financial means. An aspect not to be overlooked was that these nations were practically unknown to many foreign statesmen,

8 Ameerika sajand: USA ja Eesti suhete sada aastat. Toim. K. Piirimäe, M. Kuldkepp. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2022; K. Piirimäe. Sissejuhatus. – Ibid., 10.

9 K. Piirimäe. Ameerika sajand ja Eesti. – Ibid., 304

even though their respective intelligentsias were scattered across the globe – a logistical problem in itself when attempting to build a new state. Gaining control as the German war machine began to collapse, they had neither administrations nor militaries, and German troops remained the strongest military force in the region. Compounding this situation, German troops were still in control of radio facilities and actively hindering attempts at communicating with the Allies. Under such conditions it was difficult to contact, let alone convince the Allies of their aspirations, and they were sometimes perceived as potential German puppet states.<sup>10</sup>

The precarious situation of these fledgling nation-states made it difficult to obtain passports and diplomatic credentials. For example, due to the apparent ties with Germany, the Lithuanian delegation in Versailles primarily consisted of Lithuanian-Americans who could travel, along with émigrés residing in western Europe.<sup>11</sup> According to Alfred Erich Senn (1932–2016), recruiting representatives also posed a problem for Lithuanians because the intelligentsia was relatively small, largely educated at Russian universities, and thus lacking in knowledge of the diplomatic languages of English and French. As such, the Lithuanian-Americans were a great help in addressing problems of language. However, the lack of finances and resources, in addition to underqualified and inexperienced representatives led to the Lithuanians conducting affairs in a way that the Allies found unprofessional.<sup>12</sup> Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian delegations faced similar conditions in Versailles and their work was essentially limited to developing informal contacts as they were not admitted as principal nations.<sup>13</sup> Rather, despite divisions within and between the three nations concerning cooperation, they were placed together in a Baltic group.

In this new political landscape that emerged after the Great War, international political and diplomatic practices transformed overnight. Representatives of would-be states entered into unfamiliar territory and began to engage in new and innovative forms of political propaganda to make their aspirations heard. Sometimes these activities took place far away from the territories being claimed, such as in the

10 A. E. Senn. The Formation of the Lithuanian Foreign Office, 1918–1921. – *Slavic Review*, 1962, 21, 501–504.

11 A. Gerutis. Independent Lithuania. – *Lithuania 700 Years*. Ed. by A. Gerutis. Manyland Books, New York, 1969, 145–162; Ē. Jēkabsons. The Genesis of Latvian Statehood in 1918–1919 and the Main Issues of Latvian-Lithuanian Relations in the Early Stage of Independence. – *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 1999, 4, 143–146; Z. Kiaupa. The History of Lithuania. *Baltos lankos*, Vilnius, 2002, 302–315.

12 A. E. Senn. The Formation of the Lithuanian Foreign Office, 503–505.

13 *Ibid.*, 503.

US, involving people who seemingly had little to do with the issue of diplomatic recognition. The latter was, in part, directly related to émigré communities that had established themselves in the US, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century. Members of these communities had acquired legal citizenship prior to the First World War and, while few politicians may be concerned with the solitary voices of immigrants, more can become deeply invested in the wants of sizable voting blocks, especially when elections are on the horizon.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the interest of US businessmen and entrepreneurs – piqued at the potential economic prosperity to be found with new trading partners in Europe – is not to be underestimated.<sup>15</sup>

The Baltic group was not successful in obtaining full diplomatic recognition, either collectively or independently. Among other things, without formal recognition, loans could not be obtained in order to improve their situation through conventional political and diplomatic practices. This situation resulted in members of delegations seeking the assistance of foreign professionals. In the case of the Lithuanians, this led to a curious undertaking in the form of a public image campaign conducted by two pioneers of the emerging field of Public Relations: Carl R. Byoir (1886–1957), and Edward L. Bernays (1891–1995). This novel episode succinctly illustrates the changing international political landscape in the wake of the First World War.

By the time the US entered the First World War, Lithuanian-Americans had fractured into three distinct political factions: the conservative Catholics, the secular Nationalists (liberals), and the Socialists.<sup>16</sup> Recognising that internal conflict was hindering their common cause, Catholic and Nationalist factions resolved to work together in pursuit of independence. To this end, a joint Lithuanian-American Executive Committee was founded, leading to the formation of a joint Lithuanian National Council in America (LNC), established in 1918. This bipartisan endeavour effectively acted as an unofficial legation to the US, until the formal creation of a Lithuanian Embassy in 1922.<sup>17</sup>

14 For an account of how Lithuanian-Americans became a significant voting demographic in the US, and the obstacles they faced, see: G. Hartman. *Building the Ideal Immigrant: Reconciling Lithuanianism and 100 Percent Americanism to Create a Respectable National Movement, 1870–1922*. – *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1998, 18, 36–76.

15 G. Hartman. *Dollars, Diplomacy, and Dignity: United States Economic Involvement in Lithuania, 1914–1940*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1997, 28, 154–156.

16 C. R. Jurgėla. *Lithuania and the United States: The Establishment of State Relations*. Lithuanian Historical Society, Chicago, 1985, 47–54. For an overview of political factionalism within the Lithuanian-American community, see: A. Kučas. *Lithuanians in America*, 89–139.

17 C. R. Jurgėla. *Lithuania and the United States*, 80–81; R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta: Lietuvos įvaizdžio kampanija JAV 1919 metais*. Bonus animus, Vilnius, 2008, 12–13.

By the end of the First World War, the notion of establishing a Latvian-Lithuanian state was a prominent feature of Lithuanian-American campaigning for independence. The idea that a “union between both kindred nations” was considered “not only possible, but highly desirable” was not uncommon among prominent figures of the Lithuanian-American community.<sup>18</sup> The clearest examples of this can be found within the publications of the LNC. The texts this organisation published prior to the Paris Peace Conference (and distributed to politicians and diplomats around the world) often appealed for a “Confederation of Latvia and Lithuania”, on the basis that the Lithuanian race was composed of “Lithuanians proper, Samogitians, [and] Letts”, incorporating Latvians into projections of a Lithuanian state.<sup>19</sup> A publication presented to Wilson and other US delegates at the Paris Peace Conference noted that “Lithuanians and Letts are people of the same race,” and their languages “differ no more than various German dialects of south and north.”<sup>20</sup>

Already before the Great War, Jonas Šliūpas (1861–1944), a prominent figure of the Lithuanian national awakening, had written extensively about his idea of a ‘Lithu-Lettic’ republic in Lithuanian-American periodicals. With the outbreak of war, in what was purportedly “the first complete, albeit brief, account of the history of Lithuania in the English language,” Šliūpas wrote that through “the good offices of the United States of America and other neutral liberty-loving nations, the Lithuanians hope to attain freedom for the Letto-Lithuanian race.”<sup>21</sup> Šliūpas is often depicted as a solitary proponent of a Latvian-Lithuanian state. However, as the aforementioned publications of the LNC indicate, leading figures within the Lithuanian-American community were at the very least well-disposed to the idea. Even before the outbreak of conflict in Europe, in 1911, Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitas (1880–1951) founded the Lithuanian Information Bureau in Paris to circulate news about the political goals of Lithuanians.<sup>22</sup> In the first memorandum distributed

18 T. Norus, J. Zilius. *Lithuania’s Case for Independence*. B. F. Johnson, Publishing, Inc., Washington, DC, 1918, 93.

19 First quotation from *Ibid.*, 45; second quotation from J. J. Bielskis. *Lithuania: Facts Supporting Her Claim for Reestablishment as an Independent Nation*. The Lithuanian National Council, Washington, DC, 1918, 6.

20 Quotations from A. Jusaitis. *The History of the Lithuanian Nation and their Present National Aspirations*. The Lithuanian Catholic Truth Society, Philadelphia, 1918, 89; R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta*, 15.

21 First quotation, J. Szlupas. *Lithuania in Retrospect and Prospect*. The Lithuanian Press Association of America, New York, 1915. Publisher’s Note: *Ibid.*, 4; second quotation: *Ibid.*, 96.

22 J. Gabrys-Paršaitis. *Tautos sargyboj. Versus aureus*, Vilnius, 2007, 9; Z. Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, 308; R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta*, 12–13; A. E. Senn. *The Activities of Juozas Gabrys for Lithuania’s Independence, 1914–1920*. – *Lituanus*, 1977, 23, 16.

by this initiative it is overtly stated that “*The Lettons (Latvian)*, of whom there are about two millions [...] belong to the Lithuanians, considered from an ethnological standpoint.”<sup>23</sup>

Following the Paris Peace Conference, the LNC engaged the services of Byoir in order to develop a positive image of Lithuanians and garner support for recognition of their independence. Essentially, Byoir undertook a PR campaign to familiarise the American public with the Lithuanian people and their current situation, primarily utilising the US national and regional presses. Articles were prepared for the campaign, presenting various aspects of Lithuania in an effort to endear its inhabitants to the US public. Although Byoir oversaw the campaign, he hired Bernays to manage its day-to-day operations. Later known as the Father of Public Relations, Bernays had worked under Byoir in the Foreign Press Bureau of the Committee for Public Information (CPI).<sup>24</sup> During the course of the Lithuanian image campaign, Byoir and Bernays implemented practices developed at the CPI, informed by the ideas of Bernays’ maternal uncle – Sigmund Freud (1856–1939).<sup>25</sup>

It was determined that the US public would play an important role in the process of acquiring diplomatic recognition of an independent Lithuanian state.<sup>26</sup> In order to arouse both popular and official interest, a comprehensive study of Lithuania was made from materials that were readily available. Interest categories were identified that had US counterparts: business, clothing, food, history, music, politics, religion, sciences, sports, technology, transportation, etc. Subsequently, the US media was flooded with content targeted to specific interest groups.<sup>27</sup> The campaign sought to identify communities whose “crystallized opinion” would be beneficial in obtaining recognition for Lithuania.<sup>28</sup> The logic at the core of the campaign was simple: to feature the Lithuanians in US news for several weeks in order to constitute them as a group whose

23 J. Gabrys. A Memorandum upon the Lithuanian Nation. Imprimerie de la Cour d’Appel, Paris, 1911, 5. The text in question was intended to be presented at the First Universal Races Congress on 26th–29th July 1911 in London. Although the text was distributed in English, French, and German, whether or not this presentation ever took place, either officially or unofficially, is unknown. See: E. Demm. The Propaganda of Juozas Gabrys for Lithuania before 1914. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1990, 21, 121–130.

24 S. M. Cutlip. Lithuania’s First Independence Battle: A PR Footnote. – *Public Relations Review*, 1990, 16, 14.

25 E. L. Bernays. *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of a Public Relations Counsel*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1965, 450; R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta*, 22–23, 34–37.

26 E. L. Bernays. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. Boni & Liveright, New York, 1934, 24–25.

27 *Ibid.*, 25–26; C. R. Jurgėla. *Lithuania and the United States, 184–188*; A. Kučas. *Lithuanians in America, 173–174*.

28 For a detailed overview of the course of the campaign, see: R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta*, 34–45.



aspirations could no longer be ignored.<sup>29</sup> Themes that would appeal to the American ideals of liberty and freedom were touched upon in each article. For example, Lithuania was referred to as a bulwark against Bolshevism, whose people were endeavouring to obtain recognition in accordance with the principle of self-determination espoused by Wilson. The campaign – later described as “advertising a nation to freedom” – played its part in drawing attention to the situation of Lithuania and helped to achieve recognition.<sup>30</sup> Years later this method would come to be known as the segmental technique, and Bernays described the Lithuanian image campaign as one that embodied most of the technical and psychological aspects of public relations.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, this anecdotal account of a Lithuanian image campaign encapsulates many of the themes explored in this special issue, highlighting the diversity of actors and interactions.

The content of this Lithuanian image campaign had their own nebulous origins that have been hinted at above. Among the principal sources for the Byoir-Bernays campaign were the first comprehensive English-language texts written by Lithuanians, such as the aforementioned publications of Šliūpas and the LNC. It was from these texts that much of the information for the 1919 Byoir-Bernays campaign was gleaned; some articles composed of rephrased and edited sections.<sup>32</sup> Although seemingly absent from the campaign, close scrutiny of the articles betrays instances where the idea of a Latvian-Lithuanian state once featured. The notion that during the “reconstruction that ought to take place, after the signing of the Treaty of Peace, it is hoped that the Catholic Letts may be incorporated with Lithuanians in a new, free state” is subtly in the background.<sup>33</sup> At once this is indicative of the intense dynamic developments within international relations during this period, along with their often makeshift characteristics.

While the image campaign was effective, the disparity in information regarding the relationship between Latvians and Lithuanians is often considerable, particularly where territory and population are concerned. Nevertheless, there is acknowledgement of an emerging Latvian nation-state, distinct from Lithuania. Within the campaign there is growing sentiment that “Letland, or Latvia, as it is called, is not

29 E. L. Bernays. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 27.

30 *Ibid.*; C. R. Jurgéla. *Lithuania and the United States*, 197.

31 S. M. Cutlip. *Lithuania's First Independence Battle*, 15; E. L. Bernays. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 24.

32 R. Misiūnas. *Didi maža tauta*, 24–25.

33 *The American Press on Lithuania's Freedom*. Comp. by P. Molis. *Tautos Fondas*, Brooklyn, 1920, 15.

part of Lithuania,” and that if a uniting of the two nations were to “take place [it] will depend, not on the desire of the Lithuanians for this union, but on the disposition of the Letts, either Catholic or Protestant.”<sup>34</sup> Even within the earlier publications of Šliūpas and the LNC that were more assertive regarding the prospect of a Latvian-Lithuanian state, a change of attitude can be observed during the course of the Great War. As the closing line of the book given to Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference indicate, space was being made in Lithuanian-American mental geographies for an independent Latvian state: “The ideal of the future of the Lithuanians is a complete, united Lithuania, a free Lithuania; if possible, in confederation with the equally independent and undivided Lettland.”<sup>35</sup> This was no doubt a response to an increase in rallying calls for an independent Latvia following the February Revolution of 1917.

The campaign was predominantly conducted through the US national and regional presses, though periodically found its way into international media. Although a seemingly novel episode on the surface, it is illustrative of a significant juncture in international politics. Moreover, it represents a noteworthy step along the road to US recognition of the Baltic states as, indirectly, it introduced the American public to not only the situation of Lithuanians, but also Latvians (and, to a lesser extent Estonians). Furthermore, the idea of establishing a Latvian-Lithuanian state was so prominent at the close of the Great War that foreign policy-makers were affording it consideration. For example, an extensive brief, written by Šliūpas, had found its way into the Congressional Record of the US Senate at the behest of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (1850–1924). Elsewhere, within the intimate papers of Colonel Edward M. House (1858–1938), trusted advisor to Wilson, a confidential memorandum concerning the future of the Baltic provinces concludes with an extract of a letter, again written by Šliūpas. The letter describes how within the region “the best solution to all concerned would be the establishment of the Lithuanian-Lettic Republic” and its inclusion within the memorandum indicates the potential this idea had to influence redrawing the map of Europe.<sup>36</sup>

34 First quotation: *Ibid.*, 101, reproduced from *Albany Argus* (25th May 1919); second quotation: *Ibid.*, 17, reproduced from *The Columbiad* (1919).

35 A. Jusaitis. *The History of the Lithuanian Nation*, 107.

36 Quotation from “Memorandum on the Baltic Provinces”, 17th May 1918, from Sterling Library, Yale University, Edward M. House Papers, Box No. 151, Folder No. 7029, copy located at Aušrininko dr. Jono Šliūpo archyvas Vilniaus universitetas Šiaulių akademijos Informacijos centras, FI-74, 138–145; John Szlupus, M. D., “Independence of Lithuania and Lettonia” – Congressional Record – Senate, 29th August 1918, 9, 623–9,624, copy located at Aušrininko dr. Jono Šliūpo archyvas Vilniaus universitetas Šiaulių akademijos

The notion of a Latvian-Lithuanian state is only one example of a plurality of ideas concerning the future of the Baltic nations, émigré or otherwise. Similar initiatives can be found among Estonians and Latvians counterparts (not to mention other European nations) and are by no means peculiar to the Lithuanian case. Modern national identities were still emerging, less defined than they became in subsequent decades. Moreover, as there was little evidence to suggest that it was even possible for small independent nation-states to survive on their own, considerable attention was given to the idea of forging larger states through federative relationships between nations, both within and without the national movements themselves.<sup>37</sup> Propaganda and the emerging field of public relations became instrumental in circulating the confluence of ideas about how territory would be divided and political borders drawn.

In 1935, Byoir credited Wilson as being the real architect of American propaganda during the First World War. This is because he had the vision to set up a means by which to disseminate his ideas: the CPI.<sup>38</sup> Bernays remarked that the “CPI was constructed overnight and in the face of bitter and continuous attack from Republicans and others who feared the potential power of a Government propaganda agency.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the task of creating the CPI fell to George Creel (1876–1953), a journalist and loyal supporter of Wilson. He was appointed to lead what would soon become known as the ‘Creel Committee’ shortly after the US entered the Great War. The CPI was organised with one sole purpose in mind: to unite US public opinion about their state’s entry into the war, and to promote Wilson’s peace aims abroad.<sup>40</sup>

At the beginning of the First World War, having promised to remain neutral, the US stayed true to its policy of isolationism with regards to conflicts in Europe. Ostensibly, isolationism had been a standard policy of the US since it was established.<sup>41</sup> The policy to avoid conflict in Europe was further endorsed by Wilson in 1916 when he was elected for a second term, having run his campaign under the slogan: “He kept us out of war.” At the end of May of the same year,

Informacijos centras, F1-123, 2–3.

37 A. Wivel. *Small States in Europe*. – Handbook on the Politics of Small States. Ed. by G. Baldacchino, A. Wivel. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2020, 101.

38 S. M. Cutlip. *Lithuania’s First Independence Battle*, 13.

39 E. L. Bernays. *Biography of an Idea*, 155.

40 S. M. Cutlip. *Lithuania’s First Independence Battle*, 13; C. R. Jurgėla. *Lithuania and the United States*, 56.

41 During the French Revolution, the first President of the US, George Washington (1732–1799), asserted that involvement in foreign affairs and joining sides with either France or Britain could potentially harm the US and place them under the influences of Europe. See: F. M. Ryan. *Abandoning American Neutrality: Woodrow Wilson and the Beginning of the Great War, August 1914–December 1915*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, 11.

however, his tone in terms of foreign relations had changed: “What affects mankind is inevitably our affair as well as the affair of the nations of Europe and of Asia.”<sup>42</sup> As Scott M. Cutlip (1915–2000) noted, “Creel faced an enormous task for which there were no blueprints, [and] no precedents”.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the techniques that he and his team at the CPI developed would be instrumental in helping to realise the potential of the emerging field of public relations, beyond the narrow scope of advertising. Subsequently, individuals like Byoir and Bernays, using and improving these techniques, harnessed them to effect significant changes within both international politics and law.

### FROM SELF-DETERMINATION TO DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION

The First World War is a profound historic juncture in both international politics and law. Its immediate aftermath and legacy changed the face of not only Europe, but of the world map as a whole. Pursuant to the Allied victory, the catch phrase for modern statehood was self-determination. However, examining the specifics of self-determination at the beginning of the twentieth century does not necessarily clarify the concept in present-day usage. Rather, it discloses a further challenge for academics concerning the history of world politics during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, despite the challenging notion, self-determination in the context of the First World War, its aftermath(s), and Wilson’s idealism remain important aspects in the *de jure* recognition of the Baltic states by the US (and even by Soviet Russia). Thus, it was not a well-formed idea or the principle of self-determination that helped to shape diplomatic relations and lead to acts of recognition, but the ambiguity of the concept. The contributions to this issue show how the undefined and debatable character of Wilson’s notion was not a universal principle upon which Baltic decision-makers could simply rely. The actual distribution of the right to self-determination raised questions about who really had the right to extend recognition, which is a problem that both predates Wilsonian idealism and continues after it has dissipated. For example, between 1816–2016, at least 400 groups desired for independence, and only a small number of ethnic groups were

42 W. Wilson. Address to League to Enforce Peace at Washington. – Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson. Ed. by A. B. Hart. University Press of the Pacific, Honolulu, 2002, 122.

43 S. M. Cutlip. Lithuania’s First Independence Battle, 13.

recognised and welcomed into international society and the family of nations.<sup>44</sup> The latter underscores that the act of diplomatic recognition by established (and stable) foreign entities lies at the core of modern statehood. On the other hand, the notion of self-determination, what it meant for those seeking recognition, and what it came to mean during the course of the twentieth century has much broader international significance.

Scholars have pointed out that what Wilson meant, at least in practice, was actually the idea of self-government.<sup>45</sup> However, the presentation of the notion of self-government under the term self-determination could have been seen as a practical solution in appealing to the masses. With growing international support for socialism in the wake of the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, where Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) was vigorously endorsing the principle of self-determination, the political ideas of both Wilson and Lenin seem to have shaped international politics from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards. However, historiography that tries to combine the political thought of the two leaders – at times similar, yet dichotomous – into a single narrative is something of which to be wary. Lauri Mälksoo has stated that the Bolsheviks did not propagate the idea of the right of peoples to self-determination based on a liberal democratic stance.<sup>46</sup> Others have argued that Lenin’s understanding of self-determination lay closer to the desires of the people and what the concept could imply; yet they wanted to hear it from Wilson.<sup>47</sup> Either way, it is important to acknowledge that the Bolsheviks had their own agenda.<sup>48</sup> *The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* of 1917 (the document that presents the Bolsheviks’ idea of self-determination) while declaring the right of the peoples of Russia to secede and declare independence as nations,

44 R. D. Griffiths. Dynamics of Secession and State Birth. – Routledge Handbook of State Recognition. Ed. by G. Visoka, J. Doyle, and E. Newman. Routledge, London, 2020, 138–147.

45 T. Throntveit. Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2017, 250; A. Lynch. Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of ‘National Self-Determination’: A Reconsideration. – Review of International Studies, 2002, 28, 424.

46 L. Mälksoo. The Soviet Approach to the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination: Russia’s Farewell to Jus Publicum Europaeum. – Journal of the History of International Law, 2017, 19, 200–218.

47 B. Olschowsky. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Woodrow Wilson on the Self-Determination of Nations. – Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War. Ed. by B. Olschowsky, P. Juskiewicz, J. Rydel. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin, 2021, 163.

48 For an analysis as well as a comparison of Lenin and Wilson’s idea of self-determination, see: R. A. Knudsen. The Fight Over Freedom in 20th- and 21st-Century International Discourse: Moments of ‘Self-Determination’. Springer, Cham, 2020. Also, see: B. Olschowsky. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Woodrow Wilson on the Self-Determination of Nations. – Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War, 149–170.

was tactical and transitory in nature, the purpose of which was to gain more support for the Bolsheviks.<sup>49</sup> Lenin hoped that granting the right of self-determination and the right to secede would result in the opposite: a greater union of states.<sup>50</sup>

The foreign policy laid out in Wilson's Fourteen Points was intended to bring about everlasting peace following the First World War, outlining a roadmap to international and democratic order. While the Fourteen Points seemed to imply the idea of self-determination of peoples to a certain extent, it does not explicitly mention it, let alone in terms of *national* self-determination; the latter based upon notions of common lineage, language, and other perceived ethnic markers.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the outcome of this principle of self-determination came to indicate both hope and dissatisfaction for emerging nations all over the world. That is, regardless of Wilson's conception of self-determination, representatives of the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania quickly discovered the disillusionment of the principle. In 1919 they attended the Paris Peace Conference with hopes of acquiring recognition of the independence they had declared the previous year. By the close of the conference, they had achieved something more than autonomy, but less than independence: *de facto* recognition.

Although effectively operating as states within international society, the status of *de facto* recognition can at times be viewed as a limbo of non-recognition. However, that is not the case. Gaining *de facto* recognition from existing states is an important step in the process of state-building, though provisional and offering no guarantees. Concerning the Baltic nations, there was no consensus among the Allies as to what course of action to follow in the region. While the British favoured recognition in order to expand their trade prospects, the French supported the idea of re-establishing a great Polish state that would incorporate Lithuania. Meanwhile, the US adhered to the idea of the

49 Ibid.; R. A. Mark. National Self-Determination, as Understood by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. – *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 2008, 13, 21–39.

50 V. I. Lenin. The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/oct/16.htm>>, accessed 15th September 2022. Lenin writes here: "We demand freedom of self-determination, *i.e.*, independence, *i.e.*, freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we want large states and the closer unity and even fusion of nations, only on a truly democratic, truly internationalist basis, which is inconceivable without the freedom to secede."

51 O. Arens. Wilson, Lansing ja Hoover: Ameerika välispoliitika ja Eesti riigi tekkimine. – *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2006, 10, 61; T. Throntveit. The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination. – *Diplomatic History*, 2011, 35, 446.

indivisibility of Russia in the hope of a White Russian victory over the Red Bolsheviks.<sup>52</sup>

While de facto recognition was obtained, attempting to define this status is often problematic, and it can be difficult to draw distinctions between the theoretical and actual practices of the international community. Fundamentally, it is highly debatable and legally problematic how existing states should welcome newcomers, or even whether they should.<sup>53</sup> Without appealing to any particular theory of state recognition, the contributors to this special issue look back at aspects of the recognition of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the first step towards which was de facto. That is to say, within the international community, there was acknowledgment that the question of statehood in the Baltic region had been raised and could no longer be ignored. Nevertheless, this important step was but one of many towards de jure recognition, a status to which provisional governments that competently managed the affairs of their states hoped to be elevated. However, in 1919, the future of the Baltic states was closely linked with the Russian Problem, which overshadowed the Baltic Question.<sup>54</sup>

Endeavouring to preserve the integrity of Russia in hope of a White victory was only part of what influenced the Allies' interactions with emerging states in eastern and central Europe. Notwithstanding efforts to check the spread of Bolshevism, it must be borne in mind that at the end of the First World War, there was little evidence to suggest that it was even possible for small independent states to survive on their own. Statesmen of the larger Allied states could be considered as having a duty of care towards the inhabitants of the disintegrating European empires, or to at least ensure that the states established after the conflict had a chance to survive and not draw the continent back into a state of war.<sup>55</sup> Part of the reluctance to extend recognition immediately to all who asked was whether a small nation-state – some of little more than a million inhabitants – even stood a chance of maintaining their own economy, not to mention provide for their own defence, or contend with other

52 A. Kučas. Lithuanians in America. *Encyclopedia Lithuanica*, Boston, 1975, 179.

53 G. Visoka, J. Doyle, E. Newman. Introduction: Statehood and Recognition in World Politics. – *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*, 3.

54 See, for example, J. A. Trapans. The West and the Recognition of the Baltic States: 1919 and 1991. *A Study of the Politics of the Major Powers*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1994, 25, 153–173.

55 While Allied governments had differing views, this notion of a duty of care is demonstrated even in respect of the matter of the economic viability of Germany. For detailed accounts of the challenges and considerations that faced Allied peacemakers, see: M. MacMillan. *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*. J. Murray, London, 2001; M. MacMillan. *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*. Random House, New York, 2002.

responsibilities of statehood at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such trepidations were also felt by those seeking recognition, which in turn encouraged the consideration of federative state structure. Prior to the Great War, the modern nation-states that largely predominate the landscape of eastern and central Europe in the present day – constructed along so-called ethnic lines – were very much a novelty. Empires had been the mainstay for centuries. As such, it is not surprising that federative ideas lingered on among the political elite of emerging states in eastern and central Europe, particularly as successful examples of such configurations were to be found among Western countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, and the US.

The idea of self-determination that has, at least in principle, been observed in politics from the early twentieth century onwards may seem like a simple matter at first sight: a group of people conceive of themselves as a nation, declare their independence, and lay claim to territory on the grounds of their right of self-determination. But, without recognition, such claims might come to naught. An issue of an academic journal themed around the event of the US recognition of the Baltic states would imply that there is a clear (and perhaps global) definition of what recognition means. Alas, no such definition exists, let alone a consensus about the criteria and stakes of recognition beyond that of sovereignty (in itself a term subject to debate and revision).<sup>56</sup> For Wilson, self-determination did not have meaning apart from being a slogan to be used for bringing about peace through democracy.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, in scholarship on matters of statehood, much about the phenomena of self-determination and recognition, along with the connection between them in the context of international law, remains a topic of significant debate. Unclear definitions and a lack of consensus in itself indicates that the “recognition of states has played and continues to play a crucial role in shaping world politics.”<sup>58</sup>

In the present, *de jure* recognition generally denotes a legal act under international law. States that have recognised another *de jure* accept without legally subtracting from the thought that the other has a government that effectively controls the state. Nevertheless, concerning US recognition of the Baltic states, it was perhaps the posthumously

<sup>56</sup> See: M. Lehti. Sovereignty Redefined: Baltic Cooperation and the Limits of National Self-determination. – *Cooperation and Conflict*, 1999, 34, 413–443.

<sup>57</sup> E. Medijainen. Self-Determination, Wilson and Estonia. – *Diplomaatia*, 2018, 173/174 <<https://icds.ee/en/self-determination-wilson-and-estonia/>>, accessed 23rd August 2022.

<sup>58</sup> G. Visoka, J. Doyle, E. Newman. Introduction: Statehood and Recognition in World Politics, 3.



published monograph of Albert N. Tarulis (1906–1964) that moved the question from the permanency of the act to consider whether it could have been a conditional one, as the matter of an indivisible Russia seemed to loom over these questions.<sup>59</sup> With the understanding of *de jure* recognition today, the process may have played out more smoothly. Nevertheless, the challenge of restructuring the world at that time caused delays. Just as Creel had no blueprints to garner US citizens' support for entry into the First World War, after the conflict had ceased, the peacemakers similarly had no concrete guidelines to redraw the map of the world, or decide upon which nations would receive recognition. Representatives hoping to obtain recognition for the self-declared republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were guided by the notion of self-determination. However, as already mentioned, to Wilson this was rather an idea referring to the freedom of people to choose the way to govern themselves.

Wilson's endpoint for peace and democracy was reminiscent of Mazzini, who thought that it was not independence, but that "the future Europe of peoples will be united through a new type of federation, which will avoid both the anarchy of absolute independence and the tyrannical centralization that results from conquest."<sup>60</sup> If not formulated in these precise terms, similar concerns about the distribution of political power were widespread at the end of the Great War and, as such, there was an abundance of federative notions, not least in Wilson's idea to form a League of Nations. Nevertheless, federative notions were not limited to international organisations envisaged by the world powers, there was a simultaneous proliferation of such ideas from within the emerging nations themselves, to which the Baltic region was no stranger. Aside from the abovementioned notion of a Latvian-Lithuanian state, there were ideas of federative formations consisting of Finns and Estonians; Estonians and Latvians; Finns, Estonians, and Latvians, etc., along with calls for larger regional entities. Perhaps the most well-known was the Baltic League envisioned by Estonian diplomats Ants Piip (1884–1942) and Kaarel Robert Pusta (1883–1964).<sup>61</sup> However, it was not Šliūpas'

59 A. N. Tarulis. *American-Baltic Relations 1918–1922: The Struggle Over Recognition*. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 1965.

60 G. Mazzini. *Toward a Holy Alliance of the Peoples. – A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, 126.

61 See: M. Lehti. *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe: Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 1999; T. Lundén. *The Dream of a Balto-Scandian Federation. – Baltic Worlds*, 2019, 12, 21–28; E. Medijainen. *The Baltic Question in the Twentieth Century: Historiographic Aspects. – Public Power in Europe: Studies in Historical Transformations*. Ed. by J. S. Amelang, S. Beer. PLUS-Pisa University Press, Pisa, 2006, 113–114; J. Šliūpas. *Lietuvių-latvių respublika ir Šiaurės tautų sąjunga*. Svenska Andelsförlaget, Stockholm, 1918. Such federative ideas lingered on into the subsequent decade, for example, in the

Lithu-Lettic Republic, or Piip and Pusta's Baltic League that found itself at the centre of a supranational federation of states, rather, it was Wilson's idea to form a League of Nations which was seen as the best vehicle for peace and prosperity. Even though the US did not sign the Covenant of the League of Nations, Wilson won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919 for his role as the principal architect of the initiative. Although, the British Prime Minister at the time of the Paris Peace Conference, David Lloyd George (1863–1945), remarked that it was Mazzini, rather than Wilson, who was “the father of the idea of the League of Nations.”<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, while the ideas of Mazzini (and related thinkers) may help clarify Wilson's conception of self-determination and democracy and international relations, the notion's context in relation to diplomatic recognition remains ambiguous.

Moreover, different acts of recognition are still a contentious matter in the present day. They are far from being simply emancipatory in themselves as both war and peace can result in the birth or death of a state.<sup>63</sup> Today, self-determination involves not only an idea or political principle, but is taken as a right in matters of international law. Its implementation (in addition to its definition) remains a challenge not only for historians, but also scholars of international law and international relations. For example, the legal norm has not been able to justify the secession of Kosovo to claim its statehood.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, while the ideas of recognition and self-determination discussed in this issue primarily concern the events that led to the independence of the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the same terms are currently employed by the Kremlin in order to justify aggression against Ukraine.<sup>65</sup> Given the unregulated character of international law, including the right to self-determination, it is not surprising that it has been used to justify acts that are far from peaceful.

idea of establishing a Balto-Scandinavian Federation, which Edgar Anderson described as an echo of Šliūpas' notion of a Union of Northern Nations, see: E. Anderson. *Toward the Baltic Union, 1920–27*. – *Lituanus*, 1966, 12, 2, 30–56 <[http://www.lituanus.org/1966/66\\_2\\_03Anderson.htm](http://www.lituanus.org/1966/66_2_03Anderson.htm)>, accessed 2nd September 2022.

62 D. Mack Smith. *Mazzini*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996, 221.

63 G. Visoka, J. Doyle, E. Newman. *Introduction: Statehood and Recognition in World Politics*, 3.

64 T. Jaber. *A Case for Kosovo? Self-Determination and Secession in the 21st Century*. – *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 2011, 15, 926–947.

65 *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, “Document (with annexes) from the Russian Federation setting out its position regarding the alleged ‘lack of jurisdiction’ of the Court in the case”. See paragraph 17 in International Court of Justice, March 7, 2022. <<https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/182/182-20220307-OTH-01-00-EN.pdf>>, accessed 21st September 2022; and, see: Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 24th February 2022. <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>>, accessed 21st September 2022.

The latter notwithstanding, there have recently been several emerging approaches that aim to address scholarly knowledge of these concepts, and their development. Two competing theories concerning the phenomenon of recognition and its meaning(s) are found in the context of international law: constitutive and declarative. Both are criticised for understanding current state-formation, partly because international law does not encompass the whole knowledge base related to recognition (and related terms).<sup>66</sup> Historical perspectives on these matters are important, as can be seen in the quite recent ‘turn to history’, or ‘historiographical turn’, that has taken place in international law scholarship. The latter blends the research profiles of historians and lawyers, encapsulating both the macro-histories of legal matters as well as the regional, local, and micro-histories more commonly associated with history writing.<sup>67</sup> These regional histories are especially fruitful ground for indicating further need to explore Baltic perspectives. Besides these explorations of issues and practices related to recognition, criticism has arisen for literature on the recognition of states aiming to dismantle the narrow understanding of recognition and its Western focus.<sup>68</sup> These are only some of the developments that indicate the problems concerning the understanding and theorisation of the concept of recognition are as relevant today as they were 100 years ago.

The century of self-determination has not been smooth in terms of recognising entities according to a concrete principle or criteria. Indeed, it is at times hard to discern whether recognition took place according to any given rules. Practical reasons, as opposed to moral ones, together with the decisions by major powers appear to have been the main impetus behind international law and recognition since the very

66 There are, in general, two schools of thought on recognition in international law scholarship, codified across different documents in the past. They aim to explain how the act of recognition relates to the creation of states. Constitutive thought claims that a state comes into existence through the act of recognition, i.e. recognition is what constitutes an entity being a state. Declaratory thought, on the other hand, refers less to the act of recognition and focuses on the criteria for considering an entity as a state, i.e. entities with certain qualities exist as states, whether recognised or not. The latter is known for being the foundation for “The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States” of 1933. For more about the criticism of both theories, see, for example: J. Crawford. *The Creation of States in International Law*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006.

67 T. Skouteris. *The Turn to History in International Law*. <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199796953/obo-9780199796953-0154.xml>>, accessed 23rd August 2022. See: M. Koskenniemi. *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870–1960*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; L. Mälksoo. *Russian Approaches to International Law*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

68 G. Visoka. *Statehood and Recognition in World Politics: Towards a Critical Research Agenda*. – *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2022, 57, 133–151; *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*.

beginning of such practices.<sup>69</sup> Having emerged from the ruins of imperial Russia and declared independence in 1918, the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian nations entered a new phase of existence. However, this was far from the end of their pursuit of sovereign independence. While institutional bodies were acknowledged as de facto national authorities, the states were not yet fully admitted into the family of nations and their futures were far from secure. Moreover, at this historic juncture, the respective national histories of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were still developing; as can be seen in the abovementioned publications of Lithuanian-Americans. Individuals, groups, and political institutions were preparing structures and systems to contend with the future during a time when the past was not yet written. For a time, the notion of autonomy within a larger federation of states, more closely resembling the imperial structure that had, for better or worse, been the mainstay of the European political landscape for centuries was not only a competing idea but, in particular circles, a preference. As such, the period between the February Revolution of 1917 and the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 denotes a transitional period during which federative notions were overtaken by the idea of national self-determination and independence.

### RECOGNITION: DE FACTO AND DE JURE

This special issue of *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* marks the centenary of US de jure recognition of the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Although the timeframe of this issue encompasses the period of state-formation in the Baltic region from 1917 to 1922, its specific focus does not only revolve around the idea of establishing sovereign states. It places Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the context of diplomatic relations, initially as de facto entities and later as de jure subjects of international law. Even without the centenary, the topic of recognition is regularly discussed in recounting events of the First World War, the Second World War, and the re-independence of the Baltic states in 1991, to name but a few instances. International recognition is a crucial aspect in the history of statehood and diplomacy; in the case of the Baltic states, this convention secured not only their independence, but their continuity following annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940. However, although

69 M. Fabry. *The Evolution of State Recognition*. – Routledge Handbook of State Recognition, 59–70.

recognition after the First World War can be seen as the beginning of a rugged yet successful story of continuity for Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian democratic statehood, there is a mirror story of Baltic non-recognition issues, most apparent during the period stemming from Soviet annexation during the Second World War until the restoration of the three republics.

The latter notwithstanding, this anniversary presents a timely opportunity to revisit this landmark achievement of early statehood. However, not only the events that led to the *de jure* recognition of the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania by the US are important. The notion of self-determination, what it meant for those seeking recognition, and what it came to mean during the course of the twentieth century has much broader international significance. Recognition, both provisional *de facto* and legal *de jure*, remains an essential element of international law. The scope of scholarship on the topic is enormous, and the Baltic states are one of the most frequently mentioned cases in broader historiography and studies (including within international law) as successful cases of secession. Given the more than precarious rather linear development, there is ongoing examination of the prevalent role of the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in relation to the matter of recognition. With the overlapping histories of the three adjacent republics, it is inevitable that research and studies overlap, intersect, and expand the academic discussion. Collaboration in this respect is a scholarly boon as, despite the geographical proximity of the three states, linguistic divides can at times present obstacles. With the latter in mind, this special issue brings together a small group of scholars from across the Baltic states to explore the history and concept of recognition, examining a variety of events and processes on the paths of the Baltic states towards gaining recognition. Rather than being the straightforward and unified actions as they are at times presented, they involved complex networks of actors with converging, diverging, and changing agendas. In short, the routes by which legal statehood was secured were numerous, complicated, and oscillating between cooperation, collaboration, and opposition.

This themed issue endeavours to examine the actions and reactions related to obtaining political recognition of the Baltic states from the perspectives of four distinguishable communities in the region: Baltic Germans, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. The 28th July 2022 marked the 100-year anniversary of *de jure* recognition of the governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania by the US, an event widely considered to legitimise the sovereignty of the so-called Baltic states.

However, this diplomatic act occurred almost four years after these three nations had individually asserted their right to self-determination. By that time, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians had each established modern and fully-functioning democratic states. Although the act of *de jure* recognition by the US undoubtedly acquired new significance and dimensions following the annexation of the Baltic states, the purpose of this issue is not to bolster the mythology that has developed from subsequent events. Rather, the aim is to revisit this historic juncture a century later, reappraise the situation, and attempt to examine events for what they were within their own time. Contributors to the issue explore various aspects of how representatives of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian nations secured recognition, along with the diplomatic means by which they achieved this for their fledgling states. Nevertheless, these are not just stories of particularly Baltic interest, and the scope of the issue is not limited to the inhabitants of the titular nation-states that were established along so-called ethnographical principles. They map the precarious roads to *de jure* recognition that were shaped by promises made by major powers along with the conditions they laid down.

Heidi Rifk's contribution contends with the internal dynamics of the transnational Baltic German society, examining their varying responses to the recognition of Estonia and Latvia. Although citizens of the Russian Empire, Baltic Germans had retained their traditional positions as the political and professional elite of the Baltic provinces. Rifk presents different reactions from within the community, revealing another aspect to the plurality of political thought within the region. Framed around the contentious issue of land reform, her article offers an insight into how Baltic Germans changed from the privileged landowners to a minority group practically overnight. Subsequently, Eero Medijainen examines the establishment of formal relations between Estonia and the US following *de facto* recognition. By bringing Wilson's thought and politics, including the idea of self-determination, to the forefront, Medijainen investigates how Wilson's policies played out in Estonian representatives' attempts to gain recognition. The article highlights Estonia's economic, political, and diplomatic position while the US focused mainly on issues related with Russia and Germany. As such, Estonia became both a testing ground of the ideas and principles related to recognition acts as well as an unofficial, yet acknowledged, international go-between for the US and Russia. Meanwhile, Eriks Jēkabsons analyses parallel events in respect of the pursuit of Latvia recognition. While Wilson's principles themselves could not help Estonians and Latvians

achieve what was hoped for, their position, politically, diplomatically, and economically, was a crucial factor in the future of Europe. Side-by-side the articles by Medijainen and Jēkabsons provide a comparative element to the issue, before Sandra Grigaravičiūtė presents a thorough analysis of the phenomenon of recognition from the perspective of Lithuanian historiography. Grigaravičiūtė appraises various recognitions extended by the US and other states to Lithuania between 1919–1924, endeavouring to locate *de facto* and *de jure* recognition within the meanings, valuations, and contexts of international law. Finally, Eva Piirimäe brings the special issue to a conclusion with an afterword that draws together findings from across the contributing authors. Developing a dialogue between recent studies of self-determination and its application in the Baltic context, Piirimäe interprets how current scholarship frames recognition practices in Baltic history.

Judgements on events can change with the benefit of hindsight, including the way in which historical concepts and ideas are understood. This can lead to them becoming fixed relationally, and employed as unambiguous terms in everyday speech. Nevertheless, the relationship and meaning between them, at least at a conceptual level, is far from clear. Recognition, the central theme of this issue, has a history that long precedes Wilson and his political thought, as do the related themes of independence, self-determination, secession, separatism, etc. A century of national self-determinism (during which not even the meaning of the nation itself has been at all clear) might have passed, yet it is conceptually unfinished. The ongoing debates might not be only problems for present-day historians and other academics to come to an agreement. Such matters have been relevant to the general population since long before individuals like Byoir and Bernays understood that public opinion can be harnessed and brought to bear on matters of diplomacy, and are problems for which not even Wilson had a complete answer.

### *Acknowledgements*

Research for this article was supported by the Dora Plus programme with funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the Republic of Estonia. The authors would like to express their gratitude to Eva Piirimäe, and Mart Kuldkapp for their constructive feedback and suggestions while preparing this introduction. Many thanks to the editorial board of *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, in particular to Editor-in-Chief Marek Tamm, for support and guidance throughout developing this special issue.

BALTI RIIKIDE TUNNUSTAMISE  
 EBALEVAL TEEKONNAL:  
 EESTI, LÄTI JA LEEDU 1917–1922

*James Montgomery Baxenfield, Kevin Rändi*

Tänavu möödub sada aastat ajast, mil Ameerika Ühendriigid Balti riike seaduslikult tunnustasid. Käesolev artikkel juhatab sisse Acta Historica Tallinnensia teemanumbri, mis sel puhul võtab analüüsida Balti riikide tunnustamisega seotud sündmusi ja küsimusi Esimese maailmasõja ajal ja mõned aastad pärast seda. Ühe end iseseisvaks kuulutanud riigi ja selle valitsuse jaoks on teiste riikide tunnustus oluline saavutus, mida peetakse kasulikuks diplomaatias ning julgeoleku saavutamisel ja säilitamisel. Riik võib end iseseisvaks kuulutada, määratleda oma valitsusvormi kindlal territooriumil, kuid ainuüksi see ei taga õigusi rahvusvahelisel tasandil, mis omandatakse *de jure* tunnustamisega. Riikide tunnustamise praktikas ja rahvusvahelises õiguses ei ole seniajani lihtsaid küsimusi, mida ainuüksi printsiipidele toetudes lahendada saab. Balti riikide rahvusvaheline tunnustamine kujunes pikaajaliseks protsessiks, mida iseloomustasid lootused ja pettumused ning kus oluliseks mõjuteguriks olid Ameerika Ühendriigid ja nende isolatsionismi-järgne välispoliitika. Eeskätt seostub Balti riikide tunnustamine USA 28. presidendi Woodrow Wilsoni (1856–1924) ja talle omistatud vaadetega, mille eesmärk oli tagada maailmarahu ja mis muutsid enesemääratluse idee üldkehtivaks põhimõtteks. Lisaks Wilsonile levitasid enesemääratluse ideed ka enamlased, kuid teisel eesmärgil. Mõlema enesemääratluse idee valguses jäi Eesti, Läti ja Leedu riigiloome suund ebakindlaks. Mõningast lootust veel täielikult ja seadusjärgselt tunnustamata Eestile, Lätile ja Leedule tõi Pariisi rahukonverentsi tulemus, ent sellele järgnesid uued pettumused rahvusvahelisel tasandil.

Siinse sissejuhatuse eesmärk on tutvustada Balti riikide tunnustamise keerdkäike ja ebalevat teekonda aastatel 1917–1922. Sissejuhatuse põhiosa selgitab, kuidas poliitika, avalikud suhted ja propaganda said veel lahtise tulevikuga riigi kujundamisprotsessi osaks. Samuti pööratakse tähelepanu toonastele õiguslikele põhimõistetele ja avatakse inimõiguste tähendust ajaloolises kontekstis. Viimaks on sissejuhatuse eesmärk teha sissevaade teemanumbri kaastöösse, mille autorite seas on esindatud kõigi kolme Balti riigi ajaloolased.

Heidi Rifk toob esile baltisakslaste kui ühe etnilise vähemuse vaatenurga ja reaktsiooni rahvusriikide tekkele Eestis ja Lätis. Tema



artikkel osutab asjaolule, et sakslaste kogukond ei olnud ühtne, samuti ei olnud seda ka nende reaktsioon Balti riikide *de jure* tunnustamisele. Rifk toob välja asjaolud, miks nähti väljaspool baltisakslastes Balti riikide tulevikule suurt ohtu. Eero Medijainen pöörab tähelepanu Eesti *de facto* ja *de jure* tunnustamise vahele jäänud sündmustele ning Eestit, Ameerikat ja Venemaad ühendanud probleemidele, mis edendasid või pidurdasid Eesti lõplikku tunnustamist. Ēriks Jēkabsons keskendub Läti *de jure* tunnustamisele ja käsitleb tunnustamisega seotud olulisi kajastusi ja reaktsioone, paigutades need tollaste diplomaatiliste ja poliitiliste sündmuste konteksti. Artikkel osutab Ameerikale kui olulisele mõjutegurile, millele seati suuri lootusi. Sandra Grigaravičiūtē artikkel uurib Leedu *de facto* ja *de jure* tunnustamise ajaloolist konteksti, juriidilise tunnustamise tähendust ja poliitilist väärtust, alustades Saksamaa *de jure* tunnustusega 1918. aastal ja lõpetades Bulgaaria *de jure* tunnustusega 1924. aastal. Teemanumbri lõpetab Eva Piirimäe kokkuvõtlik järelsõna, mis keskendub enesemääramise idee intellektuaalsete lätete avamisele.