

ESTONIA, LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND THE EASTERN PACT PROJECT

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The Locarno spirit did not survive the revival of right-wing German nationalism from 1930. Proposals in 1934 for an “eastern Locarno” pact securing Germany’s eastern frontiers foundered on German opposition and on Poland’s insistence that her 1920 territorial gains from the Soviets should be covered by any western guarantee of her borders. After concluding a trade agreement with Russia on January 11, 1934, as a first step, the French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou, suggested a so-called Eastern Locarno, a pact of mutual guaranty in which the Soviet Union and Germany, as well as the smaller nations of East Central Europe would participate. When this plan, too, rejected by Germany, regarded with suspicion by Poland and never clearly defined, had to be abandoned, on May 2, 1935, France did indeed sign a mutual assistance treaty with Russia after sponsoring her admission into the League. But she delayed its ratification and her example was followed only by Czechoslovakia which also allied herself with the Soviet Union on May 16 of the same year.

In the middle of the 1930s the politicians and diplomats of the Baltic states encountered a serious diplomatic problem in the shape of the so-called Eastern Pact, also known as the Mutual Guarantee of the Eastern Locarno project. Soviet historians have claimed that the Eastern Pact project clearly demonstrated Moscow’s peace-promoting policies and its wish to expose aggressors of fascist bent to the whole world. They also have declared that at the time the Soviet government was ready to assist the Baltic states and that the Eastern Pact would have assured the security of these states totally. The failure of the Eastern Pact being concluded was blamed on the recalcitrance of Germany, France, Poland, Great Britain and even Estonia and Latvia.¹ Contemporary Russian historical literature treating the foreign policy of the Baltic states between the wars has not paid much attention to the Baltic states foreign policy. A few Russian historians have covered the Soviet-

¹ See **Sīpols, V.** Teise maailmasõja eelõhtul. Tallinn, Eesti Raamat, 1978, 40, 70; **Сиполс В.** Тайная дипломатия. Буржуазная Латвия в антисоветских планах империалистических держав 1919–1940 гг. Рига, Лиесма, 1968, 217–240; **Pesti, M.** Rahvuslik reetmine “rahvusluse” sildi all. (Kodanliku Eesti välispoliitikast aastail 1934–1940.) Tallinn, Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1960, 52; **Vihalem, P.** Eesti kodanluse üleminek Saksa fašismi teenistusse. Tallinn, Eesti Raamat, 1971, 13–14.

Baltic relations only as a sub-issue of the Soviet foreign policy.² In the Baltic states' historiography sufficient attention has been paid only to the planned Eastern Pact and the foreign policy of the Soviet Union but not to the standpoint of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Therefore it would be necessary to study the subject in a wider context and specifically how the Baltic states were influenced by the international preparations for the Pact.

In this article the following questions will be examined: first, the emergence of the idea of the Eastern Pact and the position taken by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with respect to this pact will be considered; second, since the Soviet membership in the League of Nations became a reality because of haggling around the Eastern Pact, Estonian's position in this matter will be of interest and therefore will be studied; third, the attempts of Germany and Poland to wield anti-pact pressure on the Baltic states will be investigated.

INITIAL NEGOTIATIONS FOR EASTERN PACT

The plans for an Eastern Pact appeared on the political horizon of Europe in two stages. So far the Baltic states had striven for an international guarantee of their sovereignty based on the statutes of the League of Nations. This guarantee was also related to the concept of Eastern Locarno which in its turn had been created with the signing of the Locarno Treaty in 1925.

At this point it would also be beneficial to recall the initialising of three groups of agreements in October 1925 held at Locarno conference, signed on December 1, 1925 in London. These Locarno agreements included: first, the so-called Pact of Rhine in which Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy granted mutual guarantees to the valid borders at the time, while Great Britain and France stood as guarantors for French-German and German-Belgium borders; second, the arbitration agreement between German, France, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In addition, France signed a mutual aid agreement between itself, Poland and Czechoslovakia whereas the arbitration-agreement between Germany and Poland-Czechoslovakia was not included in the Pact of Rhine. Thus the borders of Germany and Poland-Czechoslovakia were not guaranteed – Locarno agreements covered the security of the established foreign policy system in the Western direction only leaving the Eastern part of the continent to look at its security issues on their own volition.

At that time the goal of the Eastern Locarno represented the reconciliation between Germany and Poland as well as an assurance of security to the Baltic states.

The first stage of the proposed pact, started in 1925 by three outstanding diplomats from the Baltic region, advanced comprehensive designs for establishing

² See e.g. Белоусова З. С. Советский Союз и европейские проблемы: 1933–1934. – Вопросы истории, 1999, 10, 50–61.

an Eastern Pact, principally induced by the fears of Baltic people of the Soviet power in close neighborhood. In fact in November 1925, Professor Rafael Erich, the leader of Finnish delegation to the League of Nations, advanced a plan of the so-called Northern Locarno: it was essential to secure the signature of the Soviet Union to the agreement, as it should guarantee the borders of the Baltic states and Finland. Since at this time the Soviet Union was not a member of the League of Nations, according to Professor Erich it was up to Great Britain, France and Germany to convince the Soviet Union that, the League of Nations wished to preserve the peace in the whole world.³

In December 1925 also Hermanis Albats, the General Secretary of Latvian Foreign Ministry, proposed stretching the concept of the Locarno Treaty to include also Eastern Europe. Albats recommended establishing the Eastern Locarno Pact in three separate stages: first, to create an alliance with Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Poland participating; second, to conclude a guarantee agreement with the Soviet Union; and finally to sign a guarantee agreement between the Baltic states, the Scandinavian countries, the Soviet Union and Germany.⁴

In March 1927 Fēlikss Cielēns, the social-democratic Foreign Minister of Latvia recognizing the insufficiency of the planned non-aggression treaties with the Soviet Union, in his turn suggested a plan to the other Baltic states according to which two separate groups of states, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and if possible also Lithuania on the one side, and Great Britain, France, Germany and the Soviet Union on the other side would conclude a pact which would recognize the *status quo* in the Baltic region once more and in addition also would deliver the necessary guarantees to the Baltic states. Cielēns did not include Poland in relation to his proposed treaty nor did he specifically exclude it from joining the pact.⁵ Finally, on September 17, 1927, Cielēns presented his idea of the Eastern Locarno Treaty to the Council of the League of Nations.

All these plans for establishing the Eastern Locarno failed because of the indifference of the League of Nations in the matter and because of the opposition of the Soviet Union to it. Indeed, at that time Ivan Lorents, the Soviet envoy in Riga, had declared at the Latvian Foreign Ministry that the Soviet government would consider any concrete steps taken to form the Eastern Locarno as an anti-Soviet act.⁶ In fact, the Soviet diplomats, while standing on the sidelines, the Soviet

³ **Höltje, C.** Die Weimarer Republik und das Ostlocarno-Problem 1919–1934. Würzburg, Holzner-Verlag, 1958, 2–4; **Korhonen, K.** Turvallisuuden pettäessä. Suomi neuvostodiplomatiassa Tartosta talvisotaan, II. 1933–1939. Helsinki, Tammi, 1971, 118.

⁴ **Сиполс В.** Тайная дипломатия, 136; **Rodgers, H. I.** Search for Security. A Study in Baltic Diplomacy, 1920–1934. Archon Books, 1975, 48–49.

⁵ See Valdības Vēstnesis, March 27, 1927; Political Information of the Estonian Foreign Ministry to envoys posted abroad, April 30, 1927. Eesti Riigiarhiiv (Estonian State Archive), Tallinn (ERA) 957-13-12, 2; Vaughan to Austen Chamberlain, March 8, 1927. Public Record Office, Foreign Office. London (PRO FO) 419/16; **Rodgers, H. I.** Search for Security, 59–71.

⁶ Lorents' report, April 2, 1927. Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation), Москва (AVPR) 0150-19-31-1, 162–163.

Union not being a member of the League of Nations, did their very best to foil the efforts of all states involved. Also Great Britain, France and Germany were not in favor of guaranteeing the Baltic states. Thus in the 1920s and also 1930s many British politicians openly warned the representatives of the Baltic states against the cooperation and alliance with Poland, stating that it was impossible to defend and preserve Polish-German and Polish-Soviet borders in any future military conflict.⁷ The ambiguous and slightly resentful opposition to the pact of Great Britain was notable also in the 1930s.

As the opposing forces succeeded in their endeavors, plans for establishing the Eastern Pact were shelved for the next seven years. The second stage of the effort started in 1934, instigated primarily by the Soviet Union and France for their individual but totally different reasons: France because of its growing sense of isolation in the European political community and the Soviet Union egged on by its desire to cause political mayhem in the Baltic region, and thus bringing these states to the increased dependency on itself. Also this diplomatic campaign did not carry fruit because of the constant squabble between the states involved and because of the clever countermoves of the opposing Germany and Poland.

But now to the detailed examination of available facts, known events and moves, as well as countermoves carried out by individual participants in the political and diplomatic battles fought around the issues of the Eastern Pact.

The proposal for the establishment of the Eastern Pact emerged at the beginning of 1934 and was directly tied to Hitler's rise to power in 1933; the formation of Four Power Pact; Germany leaving the League of Nations; the failure of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva; and finally the normalization of German-Polish relations.

Resulting dissatisfaction over the induced uncertainty about the political situation in Europe was especially strong in France. In the fall of 1933 Maxim Litvinov, the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, together with the Soviet ambassador Valerian Dovgalevski met Joseph Paul-Boncour, the French Foreign Minister. The subject of discussions was concluding a regional mutual assistance pact for Eastern Europe. On December 28 1933, Dovgalevski informed Paul-Boncour that the Soviet Union was willing to conclude a regional mutual assistance pact which would include the Soviet Union, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, the Baltic states and Finland.⁸ In February 1934 the negotiations for concluding the Eastern Pact broke off because of the fall of Prime Minister Édouard Daladier's government. On March 28, 1934 the new French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou approached the Soviets about resuming discussions for Eastern Pact again.⁹ At

⁷ **Tomaszewski, J.** Position of Poland in Inter-War Central Europe in Conceptions of Politicians. – *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 1983, 47, 113; Markus's report, September 28, 1934. ERA 957-12-551, 221–224.

⁸ Документы внешней политики СССР 1933, Т. XVI. 1 январь–31 декабря 1933 г. Москва, 1970 (ДВП), 876.

⁹ Rozenberg to Litvinov, March 28, 1934. – In: ДВП, Т. XVII. 1 январь–31 декабря 1934 г. Москва, 1971, 220–221.

the end of April he repeated his request for continuing discussions because the French had discovered that the Soviet Union had tried to improve its relations with Germany by proposing the so-called Baltic Protocol.¹⁰ Consequently the French government concluded that in the developing situation with the normalization of relations between Germany and Poland in the focal point and efforts of the Soviet Union to keep the Rapallo era alive, France could find itself in the state of isolation.

On April 28, 1934, Alexis Legér, General Secretary of the French Foreign Ministry, informed the Soviet representative in Paris about the possible participation of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and also the Baltic states in the regional non-aggression and mutual assistance pact. Participants of the pact were obligated to provide mutual aid and refrain from aggression against any of its imminent neighbors. Legér also suggested that France and the Soviet Unions should conclude a bilateral mutual assistance pact, while excluding the Baltic states from the possible help from France in case of their becoming victims of aggression.¹¹ Legér justified his refusal to include the Baltic states in the guarantee with the reluctant and dismissive attitude of the French public toward these states.¹²

By May 1934 the Soviet government had recognized that the era of Rapallo had come to an end. Consequently on June 3 at the Conference of Disarmament in Geneva Litvinov came up with the new scheme for the Eastern Pact. He disclosed new kinds of agreements and declarations composed by the Soviet Union which would enable the Great Powers to guarantee the independence of small states. This announcement of Litvinov restarted the first round of negotiations regarding the Eastern Pact. Litvinov and the French Foreign Minister Barthou had met on May 18 in Geneva, on which occasion one of the subjects discussed had been the French guarantee to the Baltic states. At first Barthou's reaction to Litvinov's proposal was uncertain. He understood, first that the Eastern Pact was to provide an unifying link between the new eastern security system and the existing western security system based on the Locarno Treaty, and second, that the Soviet Union would guarantee the Baltic states and France in its turn the Soviet Union. Therefore the Baltic states would benefit indirectly from the guarantee of France to the Soviet Union – a circumstance at variance with the French foreign policy notion of creating the Eastern Pact.¹³ Consequently, on June 6 Barthou informed Litvinov,

¹⁰ Referring to the fears in Moscow, caused by the announcements of the Nazi leadership concerning Eastern Europe, Litvinov handed the draft protocol to Rudolf Nadolny, the German ambassador in Moscow on March 28, 1934. The protocol's introductory section spoke of the need for maintaining peace in Eastern Europe, while stressing the point that the independence of the Baltic states, previously a part of the Russian empire, should be secured politically and economically. The proposal asked for two countries to sign the protocol, obligating them to honor the independence and inviolability of the Baltic states, to avoid actions that could directly, or indirectly, endanger those states, and to allow other countries to join the protocol, if they wished to do so.

¹¹ Rozenberg's telegram, April 28, 1934. – In: ДБII, T. XVII, 309–310.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ДБII, T. XVII, 340; Documents diplomatiques français 1932–1939, 1-er ser T, VI, 497.

that the French government having on previous day discussed the matter of a guarantee to the Baltic states, had decided to give up the idea.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the French government according to Barthou agreed to support the proposed Eastern Pact, if it contained the regional agreement of mutual aid in which the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland and the Baltic states participated.

Information concerning the negotiations about the Eastern Pact, initially based on rumors, reached the governments of the Baltic states in the spring of 1934. First, on June 1 Litvinov introduced general information about the planned Eastern Pact and the attitude of France toward it, to Foreign Ministers of Estonia and Lithuania and also to Jūlis Feldmanis, the Latvian representative to the League of Nations. The Commissar of Foreign Affairs declared that France had initiated the idea of the Eastern Pact, that Germany intended to annex the Baltic states, that the French did not want to guarantee the Baltic states because of their extremely unfavorable location and circumstances, because they certainly would require help in case of an aggression against them. Neither Feldmanis nor Julius Seljamaa, the Foreign Ministers of Estonia, gave the proposal with a negative or an affirmative answer. The Lithuanian Foreign Minister immediately agreed to the proposed scheme whereas the Finnish Foreign Minister Antti Hackzell stated promptly that Finland would not be interested in joining the pact.¹⁵

On June 7, 1934 the French government invited Germany to take part in the Eastern Pact. On the same day the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs ordered its envoys in Kaunas, Riga and Tallinn to inform the Baltic governments about the Eastern Pact and about the ongoing negotiations to bring it to life. Envoys were to be notified that the plan had been initiated by France and that the Baltic states could participate in the proposed pact on voluntary basis only. The Soviet representatives were to avoid detailed explanations of the matter. But if Baltic representatives were interested in the ongoing negotiations, the Soviet envoys were instructed to stress the fact that not the Soviet Union but France had initiated the plan and that concluding the Eastern Pact without the participation of the Baltic states would make matters easier for the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Mikhail Karski, the Soviet envoy in Kaunas was initially advised also against informing the Lithuanian government that France, taking into account the Polish-Lithuanian relations, was unwilling to guarantee the Baltic states, including Lithuania, and was unwilling to accept any financial or material obligations in the region.¹⁷ It seemed as if the Soviet Union did not wish the Baltic states to take part in the Eastern Pact but at the same time tried to avoid expressing this openly to the states in questions.

¹⁴ Litvinov's telegram, June 6, 1934. – In: ДБП, Т. XVII, 375.

¹⁵ **Sīpols, V.** Teise maailmasõja eelõhtul, 45; **Selén, K.** Genevestä Tukholmaan. Suomen turvallisuuspolitiikan painopisteen siirtyminen Kansainliitosta Pohjoismaiseen yhteistyöhön 1931–1936. Helsinki, Otava, 1974, 106–107; **Korhonen, K.** Turvallisuuden pettäessä, 47.

¹⁶ Stomonjakov to Karski, June 7, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-2, 76–82; Ustinov to Stomonjakov, July 9, 1934. AVPR 010-9-47-179, 35.

¹⁷ Stomonjakov to Karski, June 7, 1934. AVPR 0151-24-48-2, 76–82.

The reaction of Estonia and Latvia to the Eastern Pact is explained in reports of the Soviet envoy in Tallinn Aleksei Ustinov. When he informed Foreign Minister Seljamaa about Litvinov's proposal in Geneva, Seljamaa became alarmed about the new political situation on the international arena. According to Seljamaa the changed international circumstances would require changes of fundamental principles in the Estonian foreign policy: whether to go with Great Britain while still paying attention to Germany's views, or to side with France while taking the wishes of the Soviet Union into account.¹⁸ On July 3 Seljamaa disclosed the position of the Estonian government regarding the Eastern Pact to Ustinov: if Germany and Poland decline taking part in the pact, Estonia is not interested in it either, and anyway Estonia in its calculations intends to take also the views of Great Britain into consideration.¹⁹ Two days later Vilhelms Munters, General Secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, informed Stefan Brodovski, the Soviet envoy in Riga, that the Eastern Pact without Germany's participation would constitute an anti-German league and therefore would be unacceptable to Latvia. Brodovski interpreted the Munters' declaration as a sign of the Latvian government's pro-German position: "The stand of the Latvian government in this matter underlines the fact that in case of a war with Germany, Latvia will not fight on our side. This position was, and still is, the basis of foreign policy of every Latvian government."²⁰

On June 27 the French government finally informed also the British Cabinet about the plans for the Eastern Pact. In the view of French political leadership Great Britain should be one of the guarantors of the pact. The draft formula for the Eastern Pact, presented to the British government, consisted of three separate sections: regional mutual assistance treaties, Soviet-French mutual assistance pact, and general or guarantee agreements. According to this plan the Soviet Union was to guarantee France and France the Soviet Union against any attack by Germany. The system of regional mutual aid treaties were to include the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland and the Baltic states. The proposal also foresaw the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations. In case of an international conflict and if the aggressor happened to be one of the members of the pact, the rest of the membership was supposed to start mutual consultations following the directions of Articles 10 and 16 of the League of Nations' statutes. Article 10 obligated each memberstate to recognize, and honor, the territorial integrity and independency of all states. In addition Article 10 called for starting negotiations for the support of all victims of the aggression. Article 16 declared the aggressor an enemy of all memberstates and obligated all members to apply economical and military sanctions voted by the Council of the League of Nations against a given aggressor. In case of military sanctions all memberstates were obligated to let the assisting military units pass through their territories.

¹⁸ Ustinov to Litvinov, June 19, 1934. AVPR 010-9-47-179, 24.

¹⁹ Ustinov's report, July 6, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 43.

²⁰ Brodovski to Litvinov, July 10, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-76, 68.

Continuing the story of the Eastern Pact, in the first half of July 1934 the French Foreign Minister Barthou visited London with totally unexpected results: on July 12 Great Britain announced its readiness to support the conclusion of the Eastern Pact but only on condition that Germany would participate on equal terms with the Soviet Union and France and that France would guarantee Germany in case of an attack by the Soviet Union, all guarantees being mutual. If these conditions were accepted, Great Britain would be willing to recommend the pact to Germany, Italy and Poland.²¹ Additionally London requested that the notion of creating a bloc of states which will stand against another state or bloc of states should be avoided. Thus it seemed that regardless of the declared unofficial opposition of the Foreign Office to the Eastern Pact the British government had decided to keep its position in the midst of European political machinations so that its word in all circumstances could be heard loud and clear. But the opposing view regarding the newly established line of British foreign policy was probably best expressed by Anthony Eden, the Lord Privy Seal, when he stated that Great Britain did not intend to extend its obligations, taken on by the Treaty of Locarno, to these parts of Europe which did not interest Great Britain.²²

Comparing the situation in the summer of 1934 to that of the mid 1920s, the attitude of the Western nations toward Balticum had essentially not changed. Great Britain, although supporting the conclusion of the Eastern Pact while demanding inclusion of Germany, in substance declined to assume any responsibilities regarding the Baltic states and Finland.²³ In the spring and summer of 1934 Paris viewed the Baltic League²⁴ as a part of the Eastern Pact. On June 14, on the request of his government, the French envoy in Riga told Munters that France welcomed the conclusion of the regional agreements in Eastern Europe in the framework of the League of Nations' statutes, which later would develop into a wider regional pact.²⁵ This meant that the Baltic states should not join the Eastern Pact singly, but as a Baltic bloc. It is not certain whether the French initiated the idea or whether it was prompted by the Lithuanians. According to Juozas Urbšys, the Head of Political Department of Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, this subject had been discussed in the corridors of the League of Nations during the Conference of Disarmament in the presence of Litvinov, Barthou and all the Baltic diplomatic representatives. The French believed that the existence of the Eastern Pact would

²¹ ДБП, Т. XVII, 467.

²² ДБП, Т. XVII, 467; Memorandum by the Estonian legation in London, October 12, 1934. ERA 957-14-2, 102-103.

²³ See Hjelt's report, July 14, 1934. Suomen Ulkoasiainministeriön Arkisto (Archive of the Finnish Foreign Ministry), Helsinki (UM) 7/B Itä Locaron paktihanke, I.

²⁴ On September 12, 1934, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (the Baltic League) was concluded in Geneva. This treaty concerned itself only with diplomatic and political collaboration, regardless of the fact that the crucial issue linked to the Baltic League was the desired military unity among the three countries.

²⁵ Memorandum by Urbšys, June 19, 1934. Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives), Vilnius (LCVA) 393-7-1557, 518; see also Kiss' report, February 27, 1934. Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian State Archive), Budapest (OL) K63-1934-3/810.

make it easier for the memberstates to help other neighboring states involved in any possible conflict. Notably, Lithuania lacked a common border with the Soviet Union. Ristelhueber, the French envoy in Kaunas, talking with Urbšys in the summer of 1934 stressed that in case the Baltic League were formed to be united with the Eastern Pact, Lithuania, through the other Baltic states, would also become an immediate neighbor of the Soviet Union.²⁶

But also France, although approving of the creating of the Eastern Pact, and even the Baltic League, refused to accept the responsibilities regarding the Baltic states. It was understood in Estonia that France was not interested in becoming involved in a conflict with the Soviet Union and Germany on account of the Baltic states. Apparently France encouraged the Baltic states to join the Eastern Pact only for the purpose of granting passage of the Soviet troops through their territories in case of war. Therefore the attitude of Estonian Foreign Minister Seljamaa was hostile toward France, as one of the initiators of the Eastern Pact idea. He did not hide his feelings from the Soviet envoy, who was pushing for creation of the Eastern Pact: "France, unlike Great Britain, has considered the Baltic states from the moment of their birth as a temporary and detrimental phenomena which prevents France from recovering its money loaned to the Czarist Russia. France looks at Estonia as a part of the former province of Pskov."²⁷

Both Germany and Poland immediately commenced active diplomatic operations to foil the plans of creating the Eastern Pact. The ideology of Hitler-Germany called for the revision of the Versailles Treaty and for the subsequent growth of Germany at the expense of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Therefore Germany in principle opposed all kinds of multilateral agreements. Consequently the *Auswärtiges Amt* warned Estonia against joining the Eastern Pact. On June 8 Friedrich Akel, the Estonian envoy in Berlin, reported to Tallinn: "Russia is not a part of Europe. We cannot come to terms with Russia, as all plans which indicate making friends with Russia are absolutely unacceptable to Germany."²⁸

Similarly the Polish government was alarmed about France getting closer to the Soviet Union. Warsaw did not wish to militarily assist the Soviet Union or Germany. Poland declined to permit German as well as Soviet troops entering its territories, even if this invasion was made in aid of Poland against an external aggression, principally because both benefactors had territorial demands against Poland. Poland feared that once the assisting military units were in the country, they would refuse to leave when requested to do so. Another reason for Poland to decline the offer of alliance was the fear that its membership in the Pact might restrict the freedom of action in Polish foreign policies and transform the country into a tool in the hands of other states and thus letting the Soviet Union become powerful judge in Middle- and Eastern European matters. Furthermore Poland was

²⁶ Memorandum by Urbšys, July 25, 1934; Klimas' report July 18, 1934. LCVA 393-7-1557, 374, 451.

²⁷ Ustinov's report, July 8, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 43.

²⁸ ERA 957-12-380, 47.

not interested in aiding Lithuania and Czechoslovakia in any possible manner because of its own territorial claims against Czechoslovakia and because the ongoing conflict with Lithuania about Vilnius. Consequently Warsaw viewed the plans for the Eastern Pact as Soviet Union's Machiavellian move against its neighbors.²⁹ Already in April 1934 Marshal Piłsudski informed the visiting French Foreign minister Barthou that the relations between Poland and Germany had improved which intimated that Poland did not intend to bind its fate to France's increasingly declining political fortunes.³⁰ All these circumstances created a paradoxical situation: although Poland recognized the danger Germany represented to its independence, it still joined Germany in opposition to the plans for creating the Eastern Pact project.

On July 23, 1934 the Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Józef Beck, coming from his visit to Riga, arrived in Tallinn. This event was interpreted by the Soviet press as Poland's attempt to retain its influence over Latvia and Estonia, and to prevent their joining the Eastern Pact.³¹ This view was proven correct by Beck's talks with Seljamaa. According to Beck concluding the pact as prescribed by the Soviet Union and France would mean forming an anti-German alliance, a circumstance preventing to guarantee peace in Eastern Europe. Consequently Beck invited Estonia to contract a bilateral non-aggression pact with Germany. After returning to Warsaw, Beck informed the diplomats of Great Britain, France and Germany that he had done nothing to damage their political plans for Eastern Europe, but he advised them not to treat Estonia and Latvia in a supercilious manner. According to Beck Estonia and Latvia only feared falling under the control of the Soviet Union. At the same time the Polish press declared that the official attitude of Estonia and Latvia toward the Eastern Pact was identical to that of Poland.³² Poland also attempted to influence the policies of Estonia and Latvia toward the Eastern Pact through its economical and trade policies. At the end of July, 1934 the director of one of the Polish armament companies arrived in Tallinn for business deals. In August a Polish delegation of leading industrialists visited Riga for the same purpose. On their agenda were various orders to Estonian and Latvian factories. In case of Estonia the *Ilmarine* plant owned by the Head of Government Päts and his financial group, by the Commander-in-Chief General Johan Laidoner and by the financial magnates brothers Puhk, were offered attractive contracts.³³

²⁹ See **Wandycz, P. S.** *The twilight of French eastern alliances, 1926–1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from Locarno to the remilitarization of the Rhineland.* Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1988, 347–369; See also **Beck, J.** *Final Report.* New York, R. Speller, 1957, 69–70.

³⁰ **Морозов С. В.** *Польско-чехословацкие отношения 1933–1939. Что скрывалось за политикой «равноудаленности» министра Ю. Бека.* Издательство Московского Университета, 2004, 149.

³¹ *Izvestija*, July 28, 1934.

³² **Budurowycz, B. B.** *Polish-Soviet relations 1932–1939.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1963, 58.

³³ Special report by NKVD to Jagoda, September 9, 1934. Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaal (Estonian State Archive Branch), Tallinn (ERA(F)) 138-1-54, 146.

VISITS TO MOSCOW

The plans for establishing the Eastern Pact, instigated by the Soviet Union and France, were received by the intended participants in a different fashion in each case, depending on each partner's interests. Next the behavior and actions of each individual nation will be examined in detail.

First, the Soviet Union and its actions with respect to the Eastern Pact will be examined. In connection with the negotiation of extending the non-aggression pacts in force the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs considered inviting Baltic Foreign Ministers, respectively Seljamaa, Kārlis Ulmanis and Dovas Zaunius, to Moscow. However, this plan did not realize.

On May 23–24 Seljamaa and his deputy Heinrich Laretei had visited Warsaw, after which the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs raised the question of Estonian and Latvian Foreign Ministers coming to Moscow. But the *coup d'état* in Latvia on May 15 caused doubts in the minds of Soviet authorities who assumed that the invitation forwarded to Ulmanis would be declined. In a letter of June 21 to Stalin, Litvinov asked for Stalin's consent to invite only Seljamaa and the new Lithuanian Foreign Minister Stasys Lozoraitis to Moscow. Litvinov pointed out that in connection with the Eastern Pact the policies of the Baltic states were of utmost importance to the Soviet Union. He justified the need of invitations by explaining that although Seljamaa had agreed to visit Moscow in connection with the negotiations of extending the non-aggression pact he had traveled to Warsaw instead, where he had mentioned his impending visit to Moscow. Litvinov also drew attention to the impact the two visits would have on the government of Ulmanis, seemingly slipping into the wake of Germany.³⁴ Subsequently, on June 26 the Politbureau agreed to Litvinov's proposal to invite Seljamaa and Lozoraitis to Moscow.³⁵ At the end of July the question of Ulmanis' visit to Moscow was raised again, but Riga refused to bite the bait. Instead Bīlmanis, the Latvian envoy in Moscow, informed the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs that Ulmanis did not intend to visit any foreign countries, not even Estonia, ever.³⁶

Thus the Estonian Foreign Minister Seljamaa and the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Lozoraitis visited Moscow at the end of July 1934. Apparently the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs had provided guidelines for the Soviet press to be followed in reporting Seljamaa's visit. Therefore the Soviet press stressed the good-neighborly relations between Estonia and the Soviet Union: it stated that the Soviet initiative for assuring peace in Eastern Europe had found resonance in Estonia, and claimed that the visit of an Estonian Foreign Minister will lay the foundation for deepening friendly relations with all Baltic states.³⁷ Indeed,

³⁴ Litvinov to Stalin, June 21, 1934. AVPR 010-9-47-179, 28.

³⁵ Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (Russian State Archives of Social and Political History), Москва (RGASPI) 17-162-16, 107. See Baltrušaitis' telegram, July 11, 1934; Memorandum by Lozoraitis, July 14, 1934. LCVA 383-7-1566, 74, 76a.

³⁶ Memorandum by Litvinov: Conversation with Bīlmanis, July 29, 1934. AVPR 010-9-47-179, 75.

³⁷ Guidelines to the Soviet press by the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (Undated). AVPR 030-12-15-18, 47; see also Izvestija, July 28, 1934.

according to the Soviet press Estonia had through the past 14 years been a true friend of the Soviet Union and had worked together with the Soviet Union to defend the peace in Eastern Europe. The fact that in Moscow Seljamaa was also received by Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal Head of State and a previous resident of Estonia, signified the importance of the visit particularly by underlining the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Estonia. Seljamaa talked with Litvinov on July 28–29. His notes as well as the report of the Latvian envoy in Tallinn sent to Riga concur with Litvinov's views and conclusions regarding Seljamaa's visit. Litvinov remarked on German threats aimed at the Soviet Union and the Baltic states, on rumors about the agreement between Poland and Germany, and about the future of the Baltic states – all rather disquieting issues. In addition, Litvinov also covered the following subjects: the Soviet Union having always considered Estonian-Polish political and military relations with mistrust, Lithuania having agreed to join the Eastern Pact, and France and the Soviet Union being willing, and capable, of establishing the Eastern Pact even without the participation of Poland, Germany and the Baltic states.³⁸ While alluding to issues presented above, but not proposing a concrete plan for the Eastern Pact, Litvinov nevertheless demanded a firm answer in the matter from the Estonian government – whether it was for or against the Pact. Seljamaa wavered in his answer, implying that the National Socialism was becoming less aggressive, that Estonia did not wish to become involved in world politics, and that Estonia would join the Eastern Pact only if Germany and Poland also participated.³⁹ In his memorandum about the talks with Seljamaa Litvinov reported that he had tried to apply direct pressure on Seljamaa: “I pointed out to Seljamaa that the use of word “if” is an insufficient term in the diplomatic exchange of ideas and inquired about his reservations and conditions in the matter... I stressed our right to get a direct answer from Estonia.”⁴⁰ In an attempt to prove Estonia's friendliness toward the Soviet Union, Seljamaa, acting in the name of Head of State Konstantin Päts, invited Litvinov to visit Tallinn.⁴¹

Based on the proclamations of July 29 by Seljamaa and Bīlmanis, the Latvian envoy in Moscow, *Izvestija* published a statement of TASS, entitled “The Idea of Regional Eastern Mutual Assistance Pact Takes Another Step Forward”. The article spoke about Estonian and Latvian governments having declared their favorable stand to the idea of a regional Eastern Pact, in which the Soviet Union, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states would participate. Nevertheless Estonia and Latvia had reserved their right to examine the details of the proposed project, and to make necessary changes and improvements if required.

³⁸ Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversations in Moscow), June 28–29, 1934. ERA 4940-1-2, 17–21; Liepiņš' report, August 6, 1934. Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (Latvia State Historical Archives), Rīga (LVVA) 2575-11-51, 98–101.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Memorandum by Litvinov (Conversation with Seljamaa), August 29, 1934. AVPR 010-9-47-179, 89–75.

⁴¹ Ibid., 89.

Lozoraitis arrived in Moscow on August 1, 1934. Like Seljamaa, he was received with pomp and circumstance. At the same time TASS released an announcement which claimed that the alarming international situation required collective efforts from all Eastern European states, and therefore both Lithuania and the Soviet Union desired to partake in the planned agreement.⁴² The Lithuanian Foreign Minister immediately supported the idea of the pact, but at the same time raised the question about the relations between Lithuania and Poland. Lozoraitis claimed that Lithuania could not sign the agreement as proposed because this means that Lithuania would give up its right to regain Vilnius.⁴³ It seemed likely that Lithuania wished to somehow compensate for its losses in the foreign policy field: in May 1934 the Soviet government had renounced the so-called Chicherin note⁴⁴ which had promised Vilnius to Lithuania. This interpretation seems to be supported by the demand of Lozoraitis in Moscow that the issue of Vilnius would be included in the Eastern Pact agreement. At the same time Kaunas did not seem to completely eliminate the possibility of normalizing its relations with Poland.

The final communiqué of Litvinov-Lozoraitis meeting did not include the conditions of Poland's and Germany's participation in the Pact. This seemed to indicate that Kaunas supported the idea of the Eastern Pact unconditionally, not taking the positions of Estonia and Latvia into account. In reality, Lithuania planned to utilize its agreement to join the Eastern Pact as an anti-Polish demonstration at the same time to convince the public opinion of Lithuania that allusions about the isolation of Lithuanian foreign policy were groundless. Lithuania feared that isolating itself from the Eastern Pact would mean losing the Soviet support in the matter of Vilnius and Memel for good.⁴⁵ At the same time Lithuania's agreement to join the Eastern Pact unconditionally furtively declared the concept of Baltic solidarity, a subject excessively discussed during the summer of 1934 by the press of all three Baltic states, null and void. This caused dissatisfaction and critique regarding Lithuanian politics among Estonian diplomats.⁴⁶

Regardless of the condition set by Estonia and Latvia that also Germany and Poland join the planned pact, the Soviet press, while covering the visits of Seljamaa and Lozoraitis, began to distort the viewpoints of Estonia and Latvia by claiming

⁴² *Izvestija*, August 3, 1934.

⁴³ Memorandum by Lozoraitis, August 22, 1934. LCVA 383-1-1566, 5. Harry Holma, the Finnish envoy in Paris, reporting his conversation with Petras Klimas, the Lithuanian envoy in Paris, confessed not having believed his ears when Klimas announced that Lithuania intended to join the Eastern Pact. Klimas had repeated his statement at least twice, and in a particularly categorical manner. See Holma's report, June 29, 1934. UM 7B Itä-Locarnon paktihanke, I.

⁴⁴ The note issued on the day of conclusion of the Soviet-Lithuanian Non-Aggression Pact by Georgi Chicherin, Commissar of Foreign Affairs declared Vilnius an occupied territory.

⁴⁵ Memorandum by Lozoraitis, August 22, 1934. LCVA 383-1-1566, 5. On July 19 Baltrušaitis, the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, advised Lozoraitis to use the declaration of Litvinov in anti-Polish propaganda, in reference to the Peace Treaty of 1920 and to Chicherin's note attached to the Non-Aggression Pact of 1926, which denied Vilnius' belonging to Poland. See LCVA 383-7-1566, 62–63; Lozoraitis to Baltrušaitis, August 20, 1934. LCVA 383-7-1566, 2.

⁴⁶ Ivalo's report, August 9, 1934. UM 7B Itä-Locarno I.

that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had joined other supporters of the Eastern Pact – France, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. According to the Soviet press Estonia and Latvia had begun to support the idea of the Eastern Pact. But only seemingly! In reality, the condition that both Germany and Poland should also be included in the pact, only meant that Estonia and Latvia retained an undecisive position in the matter. But Litvinov achieved his goal in case of Lithuania. All in all, the seeming approval of the Eastern Pact by Estonia and Latvia and the agreement of Lithuania to join the pact, provided additional fuel for the Soviet propaganda machine.⁴⁷

In fact, visits of Seljamaa and Lozoraitis had primarily been planned by the Soviet government as clever moves in their propaganda campaign. Thus Litvinov's view that the Eastern Pact could be established without including the Baltic states became mirrored in the position of Soviet foreign policy at the time. The Soviet government did not wish to go too far with its anti-German policies – in reality it had already reached its goal by publishing the declarations of Seljamaa, Alfrēds Bīlmanis and Lozoraitis with some alterations considered sufficient at the time. Finally, on August 5 Litvinov ordered his envoys in the Baltic capitals to cut off all further discussions regarding the Eastern Pact. The following excerpt from his instructions dispatched to Riga states: "The announcement of Bīlmanis satisfies our needs completely and therefore discussions of the matter with the Baltic states should temporarily be stopped."⁴⁸

Next the position assumed by Germany with respect to the issue of the Eastern Pact will be considered. As expected, the declarations made by Seljamaa, Bīlmanis and Lozoraitis in Moscow raised questions at *Auswärtiges Amt*. Probably to the officials and experts of this venerable institution it seemed difficult in the middle of European political and diplomatic crises to react with sufficient force and successfully to the campaign, undertaken by the Soviet government for the benefit of the proposed Eastern Pact.

It was clear that the German diplomatic representatives paid close attention to how Estonian authorities reacted to the issue of the Eastern Pact. For example Otto Reinebeck, the German envoy in Tallinn, after analyzing the wavering and ill-defined statements of Seljamaa in Moscow, held Seljamaa only partly accountable for his pronouncements, believing that Seljamaa for the most part was only repeating the directives of the Head of State. He concluded for this reason that Seljamaa was not able to present his own views, that surely Päts alone decided all important political issues, and that he presently thought it advisable to keep the Litvinov-Barthou plan in his back pocket.⁴⁹

On August 2 Seljamaa officially informed the Estonian press about his trip to Moscow. According to him the Estonian government did not intend to give up its

⁴⁷ See *Izvestija*, August 4, 1934.

⁴⁸ AVPR 010-9-40-76, 78.

⁴⁹ Reinebeck's telegram, August 1, 1934. Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP) 1918–1945. Series C (1933–1937). The Third Reich: First Phase. June 14, 1934–March 31, 1935, Vol. III. Washington, 1959, 279–280.

present foreign policy direction or its principles regarding the country's security. Nevertheless Seljamaa declared that Estonia viewed the Eastern Pact project in a positive light, and would announce its position in the matter only after the list of participants and the exact conditions of the agreement had been made public.

Seljamaa's visit to Moscow and the negotiations for establishing the Eastern Pact, incited interchange of ideas concerning recent events that were also reflected in the writings of the Estonian press. Positions were taken both for as well as against the idea of the Eastern Pact. The paper of the Estonian liberal nationalists *ERK*⁵⁰, referring to the increased armament rate the neighboring Soviet military forces wondered whether the peace campaign of the Soviet Union was not only a deceptive move used by its author to lull unsuspecting neighbors to sleep. *ERK* recommended to also keep a safe distance from Germany, not considered as dangerous as the Soviet Union. Instead *ERK* advised the government to cooperate with Great Britain, Finland and the Scandinavian countries.⁵¹ The centrist *Päeva-leht* in its opinion articles preferred the Eastern Pact to individual bilateral treaties propagated by Germany and Poland. The nationalistic *Postimees* concluded that the cooperation between France and the Soviet Union will create a pre-war atmosphere in Europe. Nevertheless, the newspaper recommended joining the Eastern Pact because of its seemingly being a factor in a peaceful international political activity.⁵² Both *Postimees* and *Rahva Sõna*, the organ of the Estonian socialists, deplored the fact that on March 12, 1934 the *coup d'état* executed by Päts had eliminated the Parliament's foreign policy committee, a circumstance that presently allowed the Foreign Minister, or perhaps the Head of State behind him, to conduct the policies of his own making.⁵³ *Postimees* also opined that following the Polish recommendations in the matter of the Eastern Pact, would mean ending its independent foreign policy and thereby accepting foreign influences for leading Estonia's actions outside its borders. Socialist *Rahva Sõna* warned that accepting Poland's views related to the Eastern Pact, seemingly influenced by the German interests, would cause a critical break in Estonia's foreign policy and create a danger of entering a political vacuum.⁵⁴ In general terms also the socialists' organ was favorable to the idea of the Eastern Pact: "Eastern Locarno in cooperation with Hitler's Germany would create a weapon which with the help from Hitler himself could be directed at the head of insane German fascism. Eastern Locarno without Hitler's Germany would represent a steel cage which eventually would contain the aggressive and quarrelsome German fascist imperialism."⁵⁵ On August 21 *Rahva Sõna* returned to the subject of the Eastern Pact with a changed and somewhat wavering position: "Robbers in paper chains are still a little less dangerous than the robbers totally free."

⁵⁰ Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi – Estonian Nationalists Club.

⁵¹ **Kulmar, E.** Idapaktist ja Eesti välispoliitikast. – In: *ERK*, 7/8, 1934, 126.

⁵² *Postimees*, July 30, 1934.

⁵³ *Postimees*, July 27, 1934.

⁵⁴ *Rahva Sõna*, August 3, 1934.

⁵⁵ *Rahva Sõna*, July 31, 1934.

On September 8, 1934 the *Auswärtiges Amt* delivered a memorandum to the states intending to take part in the Eastern Pact. This message stated that Germany did not intend to join the multilateral security arrangements as long as Germany was denied the right to arm itself. Instead it stood ready to conclude bilateral treaties with all interested parties. As the Polish position became clear, on September 27, Poland in its turn issued a memorandum to France stating that Poland was refusing to join any kind of multilateral security system if Germany was not part of it, and that it also refused to assume any responsibilities concerning Lithuania and Czechoslovakia, countries still involved in unresolved territorial conflicts with Poland.⁵⁶ Prior to the afore-mentioned memorandums, the positions of Germany and Poland had been coordinated. In fact Konstantin von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, wanted Poland to become an ally of the *Reich* by proposing that Poland, standing shoulder to shoulder with *Reich*'s common defense of Europe against the East, and having resolved the question of the Polish Corridor by yielding to Germany, would be marching against the Soviet Union together with Germany.⁵⁷

By aligning itself with Germany in regard of the Eastern Pact Poland tried to appear as a defender of the Baltic states. In fact, during their visit to Warsaw in the fall of 1934 Nikolai Reek, the Chief of Estonian General Staff, and Colonel Richard Maasing, the Chief of II Department of General Staff, were assured by the Polish authorities that Poland intended to prevent the expansion of both Germany and the Soviet Union, and would defend the sovereignty of the Baltic states aggressively.⁵⁸

The French position in the matter of the Eastern Pact started to shift after the assassination of the French Foreign Minister Jean Louis Barthou and the Yugoslavian King Alexander in Marseille in October 1934. This tragic event signified the end of the first phase negotiations for establishing the Eastern Pact. Pierre Laval, the successor of Barthou, although continuing negotiations with the Soviet Union, at the same time commenced to draw nearer to Germany and Italy.

SOVIET UNION JOINS LEAGUE OF NATIONS

In September 1934 the Soviet Union became a member of the League of Nations, supported by France, Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente. It is impossible to underestimate the importance of this event which granted the Soviet Union a voice in the politics of Europe. In the past Soviet attitude toward the League of Nations had been ordained by Lenin's views, and was rather superior

⁵⁶ See Meri's report, October 13, 1934. ERA 957-14-22, 88; Stomonjakov to Karski, October 7, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-79, 170. The text of the Polish memorandum. DGFP, Series C, III, 446-449.

⁵⁷ Lipski's report, August 27, 1934. Документы и материалы по истории Советско-Польских отношений 1933-1938, Т. VI, 218.

⁵⁸ Ustinov's report, November 12, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 84.

to it. Lenin had called the League a union of bandits and robbers nations where among members mutual violence, spurred by greed, was the norm.⁵⁹ As late as in the beginning of the 1930s the Soviet Union viewed the League of Nations as an off-spring of the Versailles Treaty, as an instrument for plotting anti-Soviet wars, and as an organ of international imperialism through which the Great Powers put their machinations and secret deals into effect.⁶⁰ The idea of the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations had first appeared on the international agenda in connection with the negotiations held for forming the Eastern Pact at the end of 1933 and had continued evolving in the course of the negotiations.

On September 15, 1934 on the initiative of the French Foreign Minister Barthou, thirty members of the League of Nations, among others also Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, dispatched a telegram to Litvinov requesting the Soviet Union to enter as a member state. The Soviet government acquiesced to the request by agreeing to fulfill all responsibilities outlined in Article 1 of the League of Nations' statutes, but at the same time expressing reservations concerning many other articles. On September 18 the General Assembly of the League of Nations voted the Soviet Union into its fold. From this point on the Soviet Union became a defender of *status quo* in Europe with a slogan "Peace is indivisible!" on its masthead.

How did the Baltic states react to the Soviet Union joining the roster of the League of Nations? Ludvigs Sēja, the Head of Administrative-Juridical Department of Latvian Foreign Ministry, had already declared in August 1934, that the entrance of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations was welcomed by Latvia.⁶¹ Also a number of Estonian politicians assured the Soviet envoy that the friendship between France and the Soviet Union was preferable to that of Germany and the Soviet Union.⁶² Also Lithuania was happy about the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations, hoping that as a member the Soviet Union would obstruct Poland's efforts to unfavorably influence the issue of Vilnius in the League's Council and General Assembly.⁶³ At the same time, some individuals in the Baltic states feared that because of Germany and Japan leaving the League of Nations, the Soviet Union might secure for itself a too powerful position. For Estonia and Latvia, but particularly for the minds of their military establishments, the changing of Soviet position in the foreign policy field meant upsetting the balance between the Great Powers' forces and thus causing the insecurity in the position of the Baltic states, because of the need to allow the Soviet troops march through the Baltic territories on the basis of Article 16 of the League of Nations' Covenant.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Морозов Г. И. Лига Наций: взгляд через полвека. – Вопросы истории, 1992, 2–3, 163.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Morshtyn's report, October 8, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-76, 100.

⁶² Ustinov's report, September 27, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-39-7, 74.

⁶³ Karski to Stomonjakov, October 7, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-79, 175.

⁶⁴ See Palin's report, January 14, 1935. UM 5C/16.

From sentiments prevailing in the Baltic states during the fall of 1934, two conclusions can be drawn: on the one hand the end of the Rapallo era, particularly in Eastern Europe, including in Estonia, where cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union had been considered unhealthy to the security of small border states, caused a certain sense of relief. But on the other hand it was recognized that the enmity between Germany and the Soviet Union could also create an adverse situation for the border states by possibly becoming the battlefields for the two hostile Great Powers.

The press organs of the Latvian authoritarian regime dedicated favorable commentaries to the event of the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations. The most glorifying article of the Latvian press appeared in *Rīts*, a newspaper established after the *coup d'état* of Ulmanis.⁶⁵ Contrary to Latvian newspapers, the Estonian press published sharply critical articles that reminded readers of earlier attitudes of the Soviet government toward the League of Nations, pointing out that the Soviet Union had now joined the band of thieves and robbers of nations. The Estonian press wondered what would be the next undertaking of this powerful country. Recalling the liquidation of Georgia's independence, Estonian newspapers did not expect that the Soviet Union becoming a member of the League of Nations would change its character nor its foreign policy principles.⁶⁶

DEBATES ABOUT EASTERN PACT IN 1934–1935

The state of European politics from the end of 1934 to 1935 was characterized by the phenomenon of two separate groups of states being formed, and by the perpetually ongoing strife between the two groups. One cluster of states was led by Germany, whereas the opposing bloc, consisting principally of France, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, were drawing ever closer to each other. Both groups, struggling to reach their specific political objectives, tried to fortify the positions of their respective factions by attempting to draw East European states into their particular folds.

The questions of security and the plan of the Eastern Pact became the principal subjects at the First Conference of the Baltic League Foreign Ministers, held in Tallinn from November 30 to December 2 1934. Munters, General Secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, stressed the need of the Baltic states to preserve their neutrality and to avoid affiliating themselves with any kind of bloc-politics. Although in principle he spoke of readiness to join the Eastern Pact, he made this step conditional to the participation of Germany and Poland. The Estonian Foreign Minister Seljamaa's view concerning the matter of East European security was

⁶⁵ *Rīts*, September 13, 1934.

⁶⁶ *Postimees*, September 19, 1934; see also *Postimees*, September 25, 1934; *Rahva Sõna*, September 25, 1934; *Vaba Maa*, September 12, 18, 21, 22, 1934; *Vaba Sõna*, September 21, 1934; *Kaja*, September 19, 21, 22, 25, 1934.

pessimistic. He argued that Europe was facing new tensions as well as an arms race, and therefore the Baltic states should pursue their respective foreign policy goals independently. If the views of Estonia and Latvia concerning the Eastern Pact coincided, then Lozoraitis, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, was unconditionally supportive of the pact claiming that Lithuania did not make its joining the pact conditional to Germany's and Poland's participation.⁶⁷ In the matter of the Eastern Pact Lozoraitis had attuned his position to that of the Soviet Union. In fact, before leaving Kaunas for Tallinn, he had promised the Soviet envoy to influence Estonian and Latvian counterparts in joining the Eastern Pact and to make sure that at the conference the final position concerning the pact would be positive.⁶⁸

Thus, regardless of differing opinions among the participants, the final communiqué of the conference underlined the benevolent attitude of all three states toward the project of Eastern Pact and toward the related problems. It also spoke of the readiness of the Baltic states to ensure peace and to continue the cooperation among themselves, initiated on September 12, 1934.⁶⁹ However, whereas the Baltic press covered the conference of their Foreign Ministers in a positive light and vowed allegiance to the Baltic solidarity, the reports of foreign representatives as well as foreign press viewed the results of the conference critically and pointed out the differences in opinions and discords in foreign policy questions spread among the Baltic states. Thus Hjalmar Palin, the Finnish envoy in Riga, when analyzing the actions of the Baltic League, found that the league formed on September 12, 1934 was not as strong as its official spokesmen had tried to make it.⁷⁰ At the same time the German press warned Estonia and Latvia against committing themselves to an alliance with the Soviet Union and also advised to keep a distance from Lithuania.⁷¹

On December 5, 1934 Litvinov and Laval contracted the so-called French-Soviet protocol. In this document both partners pledged themselves not to enter into any kind of negotiations which would prevent them from signing the Eastern Pact. A few days later Czechoslovakia joined the protocol as the third partner. The creation of the protocol was essentially caused by mutual distrust: Paris suspected Moscow of trying to reach an agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany through the negotiations for the Eastern Pact, while Moscow feared that France intended to utilize the same negotiations for the normalization of French-German relations.

On December 11 the Soviet envoys in the Baltic capitals informed the governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia of the newly created protocol. The

⁶⁷ Minutes of the Conference of the Baltic Foreign Ministers in Tallinn, November 30 to December 1, 1934. ERA 957-14-72, 23–25.

⁶⁸ Karski to Stomonjakov, November 30, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-79, 193.

⁶⁹ Resolutions of the First Conference of the Baltic Foreign Ministers (Undated). ERA 957-14-72, 103.

⁷⁰ Palin's report, February 23, 1935. UM 5C/16.

⁷¹ See National Zeitung, December 6, 1934. Berliner Tageblatt, December 29, 1934.

Lithuanian government announced its readiness to join immediately. Also Munters, the General Secretary of Latvian Foreign Ministry, informed Moscow of Latvia's willingness to become a part of the protocol.⁷² Consequently the Latvian press became flooded with self-congratulatory articles welcoming the occasion that the Soviet Union and France had bothered to inform Latvia of their action. The newspapers pointed out that the Great Powers considered the Baltic League of such an importance in the world politics that the international problems could no longer be solved without the cooperation of the Baltic states or against their wishes. Thereafter the Latvian press expressed readiness of the Latvian government to immediately sit down at the negotiation table. It also declared in the name of Lithuania and Estonia that all three Baltic states favor the conclusion of the Eastern Pact.⁷³

To demonstrate its real support of the Eastern Pact, the Latvian government invited Litvinov to visit Riga on his return trip from Geneva to Moscow. But the Soviet government declined the invitation on the grounds that the visit of Georgi Chicherin, the Peoples' Commissar of Foreign Affairs, to Riga in 1925 had not so far been reciprocated and that Latvian Foreign Ministers Voldemārs Salnais, and later Ulmanis had not found time to visit Moscow on earlier occasions.⁷⁴ Possibly at this particular time Ulmanis and Munters, facing three political objectives, began playing a diplomatic game: the first objective required demonstrating that Latvia truly accepted Soviet peace overtures, the second consideration dealt with recommendation of Feldmanis, the Latvian representative in the League of Nations, that the Latvian government should join the Protocol on the grounds that by taking this step Latvia would become in political terms an equal partner of the Great Powers and consequently its opinions would be taken into account by the Soviet Union and France,⁷⁵ and the third objective was to acquire a seat in the Council of the League of Nations which would permit Latvia to partake in the grand politics of Europe. Latvia's leadership believed that by demonstrating its pro-Soviet position it would be compensated by the Soviet Union by supporting the candidacy of Latvia for a council seat at the League of Nations.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the Latvian government did not want to join the French-Soviet Protocol before having reached an accord with other Baltic states in the matter.⁷⁷

The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was somewhat surprised by the request of Munters. Consequently the matter was discussed at the very highest level of the Soviet political establishment. Litvinov consulted with Stalin, Voroshilov and Molotov to decide how far the Soviet Union should go in the manoeuvre involving

⁷² Brodovski's report, December 19, 1934. AVPR 0150-30-62-7, 122–115.

⁷³ See e.g. *Brīvā Zeme*, December 12, 1934. About the reaction of the Latvian press see also Palin's report, December 17, 1934. UM 5C/16.

⁷⁴ Morshtyn to Litvinov, March 11, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-59, 64; Brodovski's report, December 19, 1934. AVPR 0150-30-62-7, 122–115.

⁷⁵ See **Sīpols, V.** *Teise maailmasõja eelõhtul*, 54.

⁷⁶ Brodovski's report, December 19, 1934. AVPR 0150-30-62-7, 115.

⁷⁷ See **Sīpols, V.** *Teise maailmasõja eelõhtul*, 54.

the Baltic states. Litvinov wrote to Stalin, about the answer to be given to Munters: “Regardless, we must take into account the possibility of all three Baltic states joining the project of the Eastern Pact [...] On the other hand, the Baltic states joining the protocol would narrow our capability to manoeuvre. Also, it is not exactly pleasant to keep a country like Latvia, possibly an agent of Poland and Germany, informed about our negotiations with France and Czechoslovakia. I recommend avoiding direct answers to the enquiries of Latvia, while at the same time pointing out our differences with Latvia with respect to the Eastern Pact.”⁷⁸

Considerations presented by Litvinov to Stalin were not made known to the Soviet envoys in Tallinn and Riga. The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, in instructing envoy Ustinov how to answer the inquiries of Estonians, declared the proposal of Munters to join the Litvinov-Laval Protocol a plot of espionage instigated by the Germans or by the Poles. The Commissariat argued that Germans and Poles intended, by using Munters in their deceptive plans, to find out the details of Soviet foreign policy, secondly that Estonia and Latvia might not participate in the protocol at all even if Moscow pleaded with them to join them in the effort. Consequently Ustinov was ordered to inform the Estonians that he had not as yet obtained necessary instructions from Moscow.⁷⁹ Later, the suitable answer having been approved by Stalin, Ustinov announced in Tallinn without any further diplomatic pussyfooting that Moscow did not expect an answer from Estonia regarding the French-Soviet Protocol. The Latvian government, by now aware of Ustinov’s statement in Tallinn, had to be appeased. Thus Brodovski, the Soviet envoy in Riga, told Munters that Ustinov’s statement was understandable since the Soviet government had not wished or proposed to Estonia to join the protocol, although the Soviets would have welcomed any kind of declaration by the Baltic League about securing peace in Eastern Europe.⁸⁰ The spinning of the issue of Litvinov-Laval Protocol gave the first sign of the Soviet government’s intentions to manipulate the Baltic states as pawns in the ongoing diplomatic game of chess – in its efforts to achieve the grand political goals of the Soviet Union without the Baltic states. Of course, it was a completely different matter whether Tallinn and Riga possessed enough perspicacity to see through the rhetorics and machinations of the Soviet government.

BALTIC DEMARCHE IN PARIS AND LONDON

Already at the end of January it was known in Estonia that the failure to establish the Eastern Pact would initiate an attempt to create a comparable pact without Germany and Poland joining. On February 1, 1935 the Deputy Foreign Minister Laretei evaluated various options open to Estonia in a rapidly changing

⁷⁸ Litvinov to Stalin, December 16, 1934. AVPR 010-9-40-76, 118–119.

⁷⁹ Stomonjakov to Ustinov, December 15, 1934. AVPR 0154-27-38-2, 94–95.

⁸⁰ Brodovski’s report, December 19, 1934. AVPR 0150-30-62-7, 125.

European politics. He argued that the participation of Estonia in an international security system without Germany and Poland would damage its relations with Poland and undermine Estonian-German economic and trade relations. In Laretei's vision the strengthening of Lithuanian position in the Baltic League, as well as the postponement of settling the Vilnius issue definitely would bring about the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union and France – in the worst case the splitting up of the Baltic League while in the best case the weakening of Baltic political cooperation beyond repair.⁸¹

On February 1–3, 1935 Pierre Flandin, the Prime Minister of France, and Pierre Laval, the Foreign Minister of France, visited London. The communiqué of the meeting, published on February 3, disclosed an extensive plan for reconciliation between contending parties involved in European politics. To calm down the Soviet Union and to placate Germany, the communiqué called upon states intending to join the Eastern Pact to conclude bilateral non-aggression treaties instead. According to the published plan France and Great Britain pledged to collaborate in defense of the European peace and to convince the neighbors of the Soviet Union that no aid will be forced on them against their will.

Germany reacted to the French-British communiqué on February 14. It welcomed the conclusion of the so-called Air-Locarno treaty, but declined to join the Eastern Pact in all its proposed combinations. However, Germany was keenly interested in concluding different bilateral non-aggression pacts with selected individual states. It interpreted the French-British proposal as a political maneuver with the Great Powers as partners: France intending to prevent the return of the Rapallo era and Great Britain seemingly not believing in the possibility of the Eastern Pact being activated and therefore lending its support to French allies only half-heartedly.

London's commentary nevertheless seemingly propped up the French self-serving position. In reality, the Foreign Office did not believe the efficacy of the proposed guarantee system. British diplomats did not hide their position in the matter from the envoys of the Baltic states.⁸² For example at the beginning of February August Schmidt, the Estonian envoy in London, wrote to the Estonian foreign ministry that the Foreign Office did not consider the mutual assistance treaty covering Eastern Europe feasible. In Schmidt's opinion the political situation in the Baltic region was very complicated indeed. He personally did not believe in the value of a system of non-aggression treaties proposed by Germany which Great Britain seemed to support.⁸³ By observing the Estonian public opinion in the matter, the editorials of larger Estonian newspapers provided an overview of Estonian political notions. Basically the Estonian press expressed doubt about the successful utilization of plans preferred in London. The leading journalist and

⁸¹ Laretei's unpublished diary, February 1, 1935. BA Laretei, 9; see also Circular of the Estonian Foreign Ministry to envoys posted abroad, April 2, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 89.

⁸² Collier to Torr, March 16, 1935. PRO FO 371/19398, N 866/575/59.

⁸³ Schmidt's report, February 5, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 47–48.

opinion-maker Harald Tammer feared that the Baltic states would soon have to decide which side of the international combination to join. He did not favor the choice of becoming united with the Soviet Union-France led alliance because of the threatening possibility of the Soviet military units arriving on Estonian territories on the pretext of offering assistance against an external aggressor, and at the end of the conflict refusing to return but continue occupying the whole region. Also in Tammer's opinion the choice of favoring the German-Polish combination was not in the interest of the Baltic states either because it would put them into the camp of Soviet enemies and therefore should be avoided at all cost.⁸⁴ On the other hand, an editorial in *Postimees*, entitled "Fight for Space in the East", recalled Alfred Hugenberg's memorandum⁸⁵ and the doctrines of Rosenberg, expressing an opinion that the communiqué from London offered no new options to the Baltic situation. The editorial stressed that Germany opposed all treaties that would tie its hands in Eastern Europe, and warned the Estonian government and other Baltic states against the bilateral non-aggression pacts offered by Germany.⁸⁶

On February 19, 1935 Lozoraitis, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, dispatched his government's instructions to his diplomatic representatives abroad starting with an assertion that the Eastern Pact project as written will not succeed because of the opposition by Germany and Poland. Further, he stressed that security in Eastern Europe being of utmost importance to the whole continent, and therefore also to Lithuania, and that any wavering in related negotiations would be equally damaging to all three Baltic states. In addition Lozoraitis, referring to the fact that all three – France, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union – having started mutual consultations for establishing suitable security systems in the region found only two possible choices for the Baltic states to follow: first, the Baltic states would refuse joining any of the proposed alliances and subsequently would stand alone in the crises spreading around them, facing a powerful aggressor; second, the Baltic states would join one of the offered alliances already firmly established. Thus debating the issue, he recommended for other Baltic states to make inquiries in Moscow to find out under what conditions the Baltic states would be admitted to the planned Eastern Pact. He asked the Lithuanian diplomatic representatives in

⁸⁴ *Postimees*, March 1, 1935.

⁸⁵ Namely, in London on June 12, 1933, Hugenberg, the German Minister of Finance and Agriculture, participating in the Conference of World Economy, handed a prepared memorandum to journalists interviewing him at the opening of the conference. Hugenberg proposed that Germany's pre-World War colonies should be returned to it, and that also territories in Eastern Europe should be granted to the Reich, where "people without land" could establish new colonies and living spaces. The British and also French press interpreted this memorandum as Germany's wish to colonize Poland, the Baltic states and the western part of the Soviet Union. See Unsigned memorandum, June 14, 1933. DGFP, Series C, Vol. I, 562-5567. About memorandum by Hugenberg see **Heineman, J. L.** Constantin von Neurath and German Policy at the London Economic Conference of 1933: Backgrounds to the Resignation of Alfred Hugenberg. – *Journal of Modern History*, 1989, **41**, 2.

⁸⁶ *Postimees*, March 1, 1935.

Estonia and Latvia to confidentially determine the reactions to his proposals by these governments.⁸⁷ In the present research it has been discovered that Lozoraitis had dropped some points included in his first draft according to the above described instructions. These points were: that a suitable moment for arranging the security-guarantees to Lithuania had arrived, and that even with only one of the Baltic states signing the treaty this step would be useful, and important, to the Baltic region as a whole.⁸⁸ With this discarded statement Lozoraitis indicated the readiness of Lithuania to join the France-Czechoslovakia-Soviet Union camp for common alliance. Therefore it appears that Lozoraitis, and Lithuania, attempted to start the formation of a mutual assistance pact even before the Soviets presented the French with their respective proposal.

On February 23 Jonas Vileišis and Bronius Dailide, the Lithuanian envoys in Riga and Tallinn respectively, raised the Lozoraitis question in Latvian and Estonian foreign ministries: “What is the official policy of each country with respect to approaching the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia for concluding pacts of mutual assistance if case the proposed Eastern Pact falls through?” Lithuanian envoys offered in the name of Lozoraitis the proposition that all Baltic states declare their readiness to conclude a new pact together with the three named powers. The Estonian foreign ministry considered the proposed initiative premature, also declaring this step not being in harmony with Estonia’s traditional foreign policy, that instead of a straightforward treatment of foreign policy issue proposed perhaps deceptive political machinations and maneuvers were inadvisable, that Estonia preferred to use regular diplomatic channels in all its dealings with foreign powers, and finally that in principle all alliances with foreign states should be avoided. The conclusion of Estonia’s answer indicated that the joining of the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia in an alliance would also damage Estonia’s foreign and trade relations with Germany and Poland, and therefore would be unacceptable to Estonia in its leadership’s view. Indeed, a day earlier, on February 22, Foreign Minister Seljamaa’s circular dispatched to his foreign representatives had again stated clearly the official Estonian stand regarding the Eastern Pact issue: Estonia either cannot or does not wish to choose sides in the struggle between contending foreign powers because it does not desire to become the object of any foreign state’s approval.⁸⁹

In Riga Munters, General Secretary of Latvian Foreign Ministry, answering the Lithuanian envoy’s inquiry said the question was very important, that the subject being obscure enough, time should be taken to prepare the answer, and that consequently he intended to discuss the matter with Ulmanis, the Prime and Foreign Minister. Finally at the end of discussion Munters stated with utmost clarity that Latvia did not wish to be drawn into politics which sought to isolate Germany from the rest of European community. Then he offered his own solution

⁸⁷ LCVA 383-7-1512, 23–24.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 27–28.

⁸⁹ ERA 1587-1-101, 6.

to the problem: to replace Lozoraitis' proposal with a political offensive executed by all Baltic states simultaneously in London and Paris where they would deliver a clarifying démarche, asking the Western superpowers to speed up diplomatic moves started in their February 3 communiqué. This proposition of Munters received the stamp of approval from the Estonian government and consequently even from the recalcitrant Lithuanian government who was forced to agree to participate in the united Baltic effort in Paris and London.⁹⁰ However, the Estonian government raised some objections to certain Lithuanian expressions in the démarche text, such as "mutual assistance", because it did not wish to tie its hands with any complicated new issues nor any combinations thereof.

Subsequently consultations between the three Baltic governments, lasting a few weeks, resulted in an agreement stipulating that the envoys of the three Baltic states would separately present identical diplomatic messages in Paris and in London.⁹¹ On March 9 Estonia's, Latvia's and Lithuania's envoys presented collaboratively their respective declarations at the *Quai d'Orsay* in Paris, and on March 13 at the Foreign Office in London. The message delivered by the Estonian envoy stressed the need for ensuring peace in Eastern Europe, and expressed hope that the substantial influence wielded by the British government in laying a foundation for peace would be forthcoming for the benefit of this particular region. Furthermore, the Estonian declaration asked the Great Powers to keep the Baltic states informed about the content of agreements touching upon their sovereignty, in order to provide the Baltic states the opportunity to put forward their opinion in the matter.⁹² Despite the Baltic states having reached the understanding about the content of their joint message, the Lithuanian declaration contained two forbidden terms: "Eastern Pact" and "mutual assistance" – which Estonia in its declaration had avoided from using in order not to give the impression that Estonia supported a specific treaty. Estonia really only wished to demonstrate its formal agreement with the underlining principles of the French-British communiqué, but not with the concept of the Eastern Pact.⁹³ In conclusion the declarations in London and Paris in the middle of March 1935 clearly demonstrated the weakness and disorganization of the Baltic diplomatic cooperation. Even Estonian diplomats were forced to come to this conclusion.⁹⁴

It turned out that the French information agency Havas had forwarded the Baltic demarché delivered in Paris in the wording of the Lithuanian message. On March 10 Havas stated that Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian envoys had in the

⁹⁰ Vileišis' report, February 22, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1770, 20–21.

⁹¹ Schmidt's report, March 1, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 64–67; Strandman's report, March 4, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 61. Laretei to Schmidt and Strandman, March 5, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 57.

⁹² Laretei to envoys posted abroad, March 15, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 79–80; Simon to Torr, March 13, 1935. PRO FO 371/19398, N 1284/575/59.

⁹³ See Schmidt's report, March 1 and 13, 1935 and Remark by Laretei (Undated). ERA 957-14-20, 64–67, 81–85.

⁹⁴ See Laretei to envoys posted abroad, March 15, 1935 and Strandman's report, March 11, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 76, 78; Hynninen's report, March 30, 1935. UM 7/B Itä-Loconon paktihanke.

name of their respective governments congratulated the government of France on its success in the ongoing negotiations with Great Britain, it also referred to the communiqué of February 3 and to the interest the Baltic states had shown for the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact.⁹⁵ Fearing that Berlin and Warsaw would interpret the announcement of Havas as an anti-German and anti-Polish proclamation, the Estonian foreign ministry hurriedly declared that Estonia had not taken a stand regarding the proposed agreement, and that it had not changed its attitude toward the project of the Eastern Pact. But Soviet diplomats, basing their views on the Lithuanian version as forwarded by Havas, thus supporting their own vision of the issue, claimed in Berlin that all three Baltic states, having overcome their hesitations now supported the idea of the Eastern Pact, as well as the multilateral mutual assistance aspirations.⁹⁶

The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs viewed the demarché of Estonia and Latvia, both allies of pro-Soviet Lithuania, in Paris and London as a shameful anti-Soviet diplomatic game. After the March demarché in Paris and London, Foreign Minister Seljamaa informed Ustinov, the Soviet envoy once more that an Eastern Pact without the guarantee of Western powers or with a French guarantee only, would be of no interest to Estonia. Seemingly, Moscow finally understood that it could not get Estonia and Latvia to join the Eastern Pact, regardless of the applied pressure. This point is proven by an excerpt from Litvinov's letter to the Soviet envoys in Riga and Kaunas: "Seljamaa's last statement clearly verifies that Estonia has retreated from its position in the matter as put forward by Seljamaa himself during his visit to Moscow last year."⁹⁷

In February 1935 Moscow had discovered that Estonian and Latvian governments had warned the Lithuanian political leadership concerning its too close relations with the Soviet Union and had stated that this circumstance might eventually destroy the cooperation between the three Baltic states. As a result of this piece of information the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs ordered its envoy in Kaunas to warn the president, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Lithuania against any machinations of Munters, indicating Moscow's opinion of him as a henchman of German fascists and as a spreader of Polish influence in Balticum.⁹⁸

The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs instructed its envoy in Riga on March 7 to inform the Latvian government that the Soviet Union was considering the possibility of concluding an agreement with France without the participation of the Baltic states.⁹⁹ Interestingly at the same time when Moscow was urging the Estonian government to take a stand regarding the Eastern Pact, Paris did not move

⁹⁵ See Torr's telegram, April 10, 1935; Memorandum by Dodds, April 10, 1935. DBFP, Second Series, Vol. XVII, 852–853.

⁹⁶ Meri's report, March 25, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 86.

⁹⁷ Krestinski to Karski, March 17, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-61, 6; Litvinov to Brodovski and Karski, March 27, 1935. AVPR 05-15-58-108, 7.

⁹⁸ Stomonjakov to Karski, February 26, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-61, 4.

⁹⁹ Litvinov to Brodovski, March 7, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-58, 5.

in this matter at all.¹⁰⁰ Therefore the Estonian political leadership suspected that France intended to surrender the Baltic states to the Soviet Union. Consequently Foreign Minister Seljamaa repeatedly remarked to the Soviet envoy that the passivity of the French indicates their lack of interest in the Eastern Pact and that in reality they are ready to “lease” the Baltic states to the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹ Envoy Ustinov reacted to Seljamaa’s statement with his own humor: by accusing Estonians of being petty bourgeoisie – “this is a political version expressed by the petty bourgeoisie – if we continued our friendship with Germany then eventually we might “present” it with Balticum as a gift, or in case of our continuing friendship with France we might receive Balticum as a gift from the French.”¹⁰²

In fact the attitude of Tallinn and Riga in regard of the Eastern Pact had not changed at all during the first months of 1935. But at this point differences between official and unofficial views in the matter should be pointed out. Unlike Poland and Finland, both openly opposing the Eastern Pact, Estonian and Latvian diplomats continued to announce to the world that they welcomed the idea of the Pact which would include the Soviet Union, Poland, the Baltic states and Germany. But the Estonian authorities fully understood that with the aid of Poland’s recalcitrancy the notion of the Eastern Pact would come to nought. This position was justified by the argument that one of the goals of the Soviet Union and France was under certain conditions to open the territories of border states to Soviet troops.¹⁰³

MOSCOW’S PROPOSAL

On Saturday March 16, 1935 the world was hit by a surprising news: Hitler had decreed a law which introduced obligatory military service for all male citizens of Germany, thus increasing the size of German army to 36 divisions – roughly half a million men. This action marked the end of military restrictions placed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty, the beginning of a new armament race and a notable change in the grand politics of Europe. At the same time Tallinn became aware of talks between Great Britain and Germany in naval matters. Eventually they agreed to a British-German naval treaty that set the German navy tonnage to one third of that of the British navy.

Georg Meri, the councillor of the Estonian legation in Berlin, in his secret report to the Estonian Foreign Ministry and the General Staff commented on the decree of March 16 and on the German plans for re-armament and predicted that

¹⁰⁰ **Champonnois, S.** The Baltic States as an Aspect of Franco-Soviet Relations 1919–1934. A Policy or Several Policies? – In: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia, 8. Symposium organized by the Center for Baltic Studies. October 12–14, 1989. University of Stockholm. Eds. J. Hiden, A. Loit. Uppsala, 1991, 411.

¹⁰¹ Ustinov to Litvinov, March 26, 1935. AVPR 0154-28-40-3, 102.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See Palin’s report, January 14, 1935. UM 5/C16.

the Baltic Sea was becoming a German lake as the militarily powerful Germany would be able to prevent the British-French navy from entering and passing through the Danish Straits. According to Meri, Germany would turn into a militarily super-powerful state within the next five years.¹⁰⁴

But at the same time it was not unknown to Tallinn, Riga and Kaunas, that also the Soviet Union was in full swing of strengthening its war machine. The Baltic states, as well as the rest of Europe understood that the steps taken by Germany and the speedy re-armament of the Soviet Union meant the end of the respite of post-World War era. In fact experts in the foreign policy field soon predicted that the pre-war system of leagues and alliances was going to return before long.

These world shaking events did not go unnoticed in Estonia or in other Baltic countries. The Estonian newspaper *Vaba Maa* in its March 18 issue aptly declared that “Versailles collapsed! Germany continuing the race of rearmament!” Contrary to the Estonian press announcements, the Latvian newspapers dealt with the March 16 decree rather discreetly with the related editorials and expressions of opinions almost totally absent. The only noteworthy commentary in the Latvian press appeared in *Rīts* on March 27, which stated that since Latvia could not prevent Germany from taking objectionable steps in its rearmament program, Latvia should be satisfied with only observing the course of world events impartially.¹⁰⁵

The restoration of obligatory military service in Germany and the drawing close of German and Polish interests and policies prompted Moscow to continue propagating the Eastern Pact. Already on March 22 Elmar Kirotar, the councillor of Estonian legation in Moscow, was questioned by the officials of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs about conclusions the Estonian government had drawn regarding the German March 16 decree and about Estonia’s reactions to an imminent aggression by Germany. A few days later also Colonel-General August Kork, an Estonian and Head of Soviet Military Academy, asked Kirotar the same questions.¹⁰⁶

At an extraordinary meeting, held in the second half of March 1935, the Estonian government discussed the changes in the international situation, including Moscow’s intrusive foreign policy operations in Balticum. No written records of the discussions held on this occasion are available, but a report written by Reinebeck, the German envoy in Tallinn, describes his conversations with Foreign Minister Seljamaa on the subject. According to Seljamaa the Commander-in-Chief Laidoner had declared harshly that it was only the Soviet Union that threatened Estonia, because it desired to take over of the ice-free port of Tallinn, and consequently the most important duty of each Estonian soldier would be fighting against bolshevism in all its different forms. Seljamaa had added that the Minister of Finance Karl Selter and the Minister of Agriculture Nikolai Talts had supported

¹⁰⁴ Meri’s report, April 4, 1935. ERA 957-14-10, 27–28b.

¹⁰⁵ Jakutis’ report, April 4, 1935. LCVA 929-2-1030, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Kirotar’s report, March 30, 1935. ERA 957-14-171, 1–3.

Laidoner's viewpoint. Selter and Talts had stressed the economic aspect of the issue: Germany as a market for Estonian agricultural products was irreplaceable. No agreement was reached by the meeting: the Minister of Interior and the Deputy Head of State, Karl Einbund, saw also Germany as an enemy of Estonia. In addition Seljamaa, commenting to Reinebeck on the meeting described above, foresaw two power centers being formed in Europe – in London and in Moscow – adding that if the Berlin-Warsaw axis strengthened further, and if some kind of *modus vivendi* in relations with France were found by the Baltic states, the choice for Estonia would not be difficult.¹⁰⁷

On April 3, 1935 the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs informed its ambassador in Paris that the Soviet government was ready to conclude a mutual assistance agreement with France, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states participating, but without Germany and Poland. Consequently on April 6, the Soviet envoys accredited to Tallinn, Riga and Kaunas proposed to the respective governments to conclude a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. They requested speedy answers to their proposal by April 9 while admitting that their proposals were only unofficial to be followed by official offers on some later date.¹⁰⁸ This new proposal by the Soviet Union did not come as a total surprise. Already earlier Soviet representatives accredited in Paris and London had alluded to the possibility of an Eastern Pact with only the Soviet Union, France, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states participating.¹⁰⁹

The Foreign Minister of Estonia, Seljamaa, reacted negatively to this offer from the very beginning. In his preliminary answer to the Soviet envoy he made Estonia's response dependent on that of Latvia and stressed Estonia's wish to retain its neutrality as well as normal relations with all other states. Nevertheless, Soviet envoy Ustinov continued to push Seljamaa into officially declaring Estonia's stand in regard of the mutual assistance pact.¹¹⁰ The reaction of the Latvian government to the Soviet proposal was identical to that of Estonia, while stating that the "actions of Estonia and Latvia should be similar and coordinated". A few days later the Estonian and Latvian governments announced that Moscow's proposal will be debated on May 6–8 in Kaunas at the Baltic League's Foreign Ministers Conference.¹¹¹

On April 8 another extraordinary meeting of the Estonian government was called to discuss the proposal of the Soviet Union. No detailed information has been found about discussions, and standpoints taken by specific members of the government, at this particular meeting. On the next day, April 9, Seljamaa informed

¹⁰⁷ Reinebeck's report, March 30, 1935. NA II RG-242, T-120, R-3507, E632382.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversation with Ustinov), April 6, 1935; Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversation with Liepiņš), April 6, 1935. ERA 4940-1-2, 57–58; Memorandum by Lozoraitis, April 8, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 56; Baltrušaitis' report, April 11, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Čarneckis' report, December 21, 1934. LCVA 383-7-1557, 51.

¹¹⁰ Ustinov's report, April 16, 1935. AVPR 05-15-112-112, 63, 67.

¹¹¹ Brodovski's report, April 17, 1935. AVPR 05-15-59-108, 96–98.

Ustinov about the position taken by the Estonian government: before making the final decision, Estonia wishes to consult with Latvia and Lithuania. After listening to Seljamaa, Ustinov referred once more to the aggressiveness of Hitler's Germany and demanded a quick positive answer to the Soviet April 6 proposal. Seljamaa reacted to the remarks of Ustinov with assurance that a treaty without Germany's participation would probably lead to war, and that Estonia would not want to become involved in international politics on behalf of any Great Power.¹¹² Subsequently, the stand taken by Latvia in the matter was identical to that of Estonia.¹¹³ On the other hand the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, although also declaring his intention to consult with other Baltic states, announced that Lithuania supported the idea of the Eastern Pact even without Germany and Poland and was totally in favor of the principle of mutual assistance.¹¹⁴ All foreign representatives accredited to Kaunas were informed about the stand taken by the Lithuanian government in the matter.¹¹⁵ Several Lithuanian diplomats like Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the envoy to the Soviet Union, and Petras Klimas, the envoy to France, encouraged the Lithuanian government to conclude the proposed mutual assistance pact.¹¹⁶

To find out Berlin's attitude toward the proposal, Seljamaa informed the envoy Reinebeck about the Soviet proposal already on the next day, on April 10.¹¹⁷ Germany offered a proposal to counter the Soviet diplomatic move. Two days later Reinebeck informed Seljamaa that the *Reich* opposed Paris-Moscow plans but was willing to conclude bilateral, if necessary even multilateral, non-aggression agreements with all East European countries provided that all participants agreed to withhold assistance to an aggressor state.¹¹⁸ Under the term of "aggressor state" the Germans meant the Soviet Union. On April 6, the same day when the Soviet Union had proposed establishing a mutual assistance pact, Akel, the Estonian envoy in Berlin, had provided an account of his conversation with Richard von Meyer, Head of Eastern Department of *Auswärtiges Amt*, to his government. Meyer had stated categorically that Germany firmly opposed the principle of mutual assistance, that Estonia should not affiliate itself with pro-Soviet and anti-German Lithuania, and that nobody should have doubts about the expansionist military intentions of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁹

¹¹² Ustinov's report, April 16, 1935. AVPR 05-15-112-112, 63, 67; see also Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversation with Ustinov), April 9, 1935. ERA 4940-1-2, 63–64.

¹¹³ Brodovski's report, April 7, 1935. AVPR 05-15-59-108, 98.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversation with Liepiņš), April 6, 1935. ERA 4940-1-2, 57–58; Liepiņš's report, April 6, 1935. LVVA 2575-8-38, 242–245; Lozoraitis to Baltrušaitis, April 7, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 59.

¹¹⁵ Zechlin's telegram, April 14, 1935. DGFP, Series C, Vol. IV, 21. Preston's report, April 16, 1935. PRO FO 371/19386, N1993/19/59.

¹¹⁶ Klimas' report, April 12, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 38.

¹¹⁷ Reinebeck's telegram, April 7, 1935. DGFP, Series C, Vol. IV, 20.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum by Seljamaa (Conversation with Reinebeck), April 9, 1935. ERA 4940-1-2, 60.

¹¹⁹ ERA 957-14-10, 30–31b; see also Circular of the Estonian Foreign Ministry to envoys posted abroad, April 12, 1935. ERA 1587-1-101, 14–15; Schmidt's report, April 25, 1935. ERA 957-14-167, 34.

Poland in its turn had taken certain steps already prior to the Soviet government's proposal for establishing the Eastern Pact by trying to influence the foreign policy actions of both Estonia and Latvia. Warsaw did not doubt whom to label as "enemy number one", clearly it was the Soviet Union. It seems that political pressure was applied against Estonia and Latvia at the end of February and in the beginning of March 1935 when General Janusz Gąsiorowski, the Chief of Polish General Staff, visited Riga, Tallinn, and Helsinki. The official announcement of the visit denied that it had any political meaning but instead represented only a courtesy visit reciprocating earlier visits to Warsaw of Estonian and Latvian Chiefs of the General Staff. Only the newspaper *Kurier Poranny* the organ of Marshal Pilsudski's camp, hastened to declare that "only Poland is able to defend Balticum from foreign aggressors".¹²⁰ The subjects of discussions, particularly in connection with the Soviet Union-France-Czechoslovakia pact, held in Riga and Tallinn by General Gąsiorowski have remained unknown. But some references made in the Estonian press, for example in *Vaba Maa*, allow to presume that the proposed Eastern Pact and its variations were on the agenda of the talks held in both Baltic capitals. *Vaba Maa* in its lead article dedicated to Gąsiorowski's visit commented that proceeding from the historical percepts the passing of foreign troops through one's territory should not be an unsolvable problem.¹²¹ Meanwhile, on April 6 Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, invited Miķelis Valters, the Latvian envoy in Warsaw, to his office and tried to convince him that the Eastern Pact had already expired. Beck also demanded Latvia to cease paying attention to any retrenched version of the dead pact. In addition to political pressure, Poland also attempted to apply economical levers to influence the policies of Estonia and Latvia concerning the issue of the Eastern Pact.¹²² On March 28 the Polish-Estonian trade agreement was signed in which Poland offered Estonia relaxed custom-regulations and assigned improved quotas to a number of Estonian wares and materials allowed to be imported to Poland.¹²³

Considering the part Germany was playing in the Eastern Pact question in Estonia, the following should be of interest. It is difficult to determine to what extent the viewpoints of Berlin influenced Estonia's attitude toward the proposals of the Soviet government in the spring of 1935. Estonia's stand in relation to its eastern neighbor, not very trusting in the first place, could hardly be changed by the views of Berlin.

On April 10–11, 1935 representatives of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian foreign ministries met in Riga to discuss the proposal of the Soviet Union and the

¹²⁰ Circular of the Estonian Foreign Ministry to envoys posted abroad, March 15, 1935. ERA 957-14-13, 18; *Vaba Maa*, February 28; March 5, 1935; *Päevaleht*, March 5, 1935.

¹²¹ *Vaba Maa*, March 6, 1935.

¹²² **Stranga, A.** Latvia and the Baltic Policies of the USSR, Poland and Germany in late 1930s. Part I: Competition among the USSR, Poland and Germany 1934 to 1938. – *Latvias Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 1993, 11, 11.

¹²³ Circular of the Estonian Foreign Ministry to envoys posted abroad, March 15, 1935. ERA 957-14-13, 18; *Postimees*, March 29, 1935.

security question of the Baltic states. The discussions of this meeting are recorded in the diary of Laretei, the Estonian Deputy Foreign Minister, and in the memorandum of Urbšys, Head of Political Department of Lithuanian Foreign Ministry. The described points of view clearly demonstrate the difference between the opposing camps in the Baltic community. Munters, the Latvian representative at the meeting, announced that Latvia's government, having joined the supporters of February 3 communiqué, was not going to prevent the Soviet proposal from becoming a reality. Munters also stated that Latvia could not relate to Poland in a similar manner it associated itself with Germany's interests and that Latvia would sooner or later become a victim of German aggression, and that Latvia would never permit Soviet troops enter its territory. Analyzing the Soviet proposal, Munters pointed out that it had been compiled in ambiguous form with a purpose to gain a better prospect for the conclusion of the French-Soviet mutual assistance pact. On the other hand Urbšys stated that concluding a mutual assistance pact would after all provide a certain kind of guarantee and therefore Lithuania would be ready to sign such an agreement. In his turn Laretei stressed that in reality no direct threat coming from Germany could be detected, that Germany was primarily interested in Austria and South-Eastern Europe, that Germany was willing to conclude a non aggression agreement with the Baltic states, Lithuania included, that if Lithuania signed a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union, the latter would eventually not be able to assist it, that Poland, Latvia and Estonia would not permit the Soviet troops to pass through their territories in order to support Lithuania, and finally that helping Lithuania from air would be insufficient, perhaps impossible. In Laretei's view agreeing with the Soviet proposal to form an anti-German bloc would aggravate the Baltic states' relations with Germany and Poland.¹²⁴ Interestingly, during the recess of the conference in Riga the Polish legation tried to prevent Estonians and Latvians from agreeing to the Soviet plan, and to foil the intentions of Lithuanians. Only on one point was unanimity with Lithuanians reached: the Soviet government was to be informed that the issue of joining the mutual assistance pact was going to be discussed at the May 6 meeting of Baltic Foreign Ministers.¹²⁵ In general, the views of Estonia and Latvia were opposed to those of Lithuania, although Estonia and Latvia differed in their individual attitudes toward a possible German aggression.

At the same time also Great Britain, France and Italy became enmeshed in the matter of the Eastern Pact. British, French and Italian prime and foreign ministers met on April 11–14 in Stresa where the following subjects were discussed: the violation of the Versailles Treaty was condemned; the support of Austrian sovereignty and of the Locarno Pact was endorsed; it was decided to continue ensuring security of Eastern Europe; the plan for the formation of the Eastern Pact

¹²⁴ Laretei's unpublished diary. Conversations in Riga, April 11, 1935. BA Laretei, 9; Memorandum by Urbšys: Meeting of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian representatives in Riga, April 10–11, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 40–45; see also Torr's telegram, April 13, 1935. PRO FO 371/19398, N1896/575/59.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

was put aside, because of strong opposition displayed by Germany and by Poland. At the time of the Stresa Conference Germany announced its readiness to conclude bilateral non-aggression treaties with its eastern neighbor-states, while at the same time German diplomats had stated orally that Lithuania was not included in the group of neighbors mentioned in their statement. This standpoint showed that Germany did not wish to assume any obligations concerning the Baltic region. A few days later the Council of the League of Nations condemned the member states that had introduced laws requiring military restraint while at the same time not penalizing Germany for its rearmament programs. Also it seemed that the Western powers had somehow created a “peace front”, specifically against Germany. However, even this constrictive instrument ceased to exist already in October 1935, when Italy commenced its aggression against Abyssinia.¹²⁶ Meanwhile the political events in Europe developed quickly. On April 17 Litvinov and Laval met in Geneva and agreed in principle to conclude the proposed mutual assistance pact.

After the discussions held recently in Riga by the Baltic foreign policy experts, and after the conclusion of the Stresa Conference, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian envoys in Great Britain raised a question at the Foreign Office about the British government’s view of the Soviet Union’s proposal.¹²⁷ Plausibly with this diplomatic move the Baltic states hoped to make the British government initiate an effective argument that the Baltic states could use in justifying their rejection of the Eastern Pact. Available documents prove that officials of the Foreign Office pondered the question raised by Baltic diplomats thoroughly. On the one hand the British officials argued that since London had given its blessing to France and the Soviet Union drawing close, it would be inconsistent, and wrong, to react negatively to the April 6 proposal of the Soviets regardless of the fear that the new treaty might move the Baltic states into the Soviet camp. But on the other hand, the British authorities believed that if only four participants signed the treaty, the Soviet proposition to the Baltic states would mean a contract between a group of mice and an elephant. It was concluded that the proposed mutual assistance pact would introduce a Soviet protectorate over the Baltic states and provide the Soviet Union with the right of passage for their troops to the Balticum whenever they decided to claim that the independence of these states was being jeopardized.¹²⁸ The official answer, delivered on May 1 to August Schmidt, the Estonian envoy in London, by Laurence Collier, the Head of Baltic and Scandinavian Department of the Foreign Office, was a disappointing surprise to the Estonian Foreign Ministry as it proved the attitude of Great Britain toward the fate of the Baltic states to be totally indifferent. Collier announced that the British government would find

¹²⁶ See **Taylor, T.** *Munich: the Price of the Peace*. New York, Vintage Books, 1979.

¹²⁷ Memorandum by Collier, May 1, 1935. PRO FO 371/19399, N 2137/575/59; Balutis’ telegram, May 1, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 9.

¹²⁸ Memorandum by Baxter, April 24, 1935; Memorandum by Dodds, April 25, 1935; Memorandum by Sargent, April 26, 1935. PRO FO 371/19399, C3251/55/18.

it difficult to protest the conclusion of mutual assistance agreements by East European states. He added that it was the business of the Baltic states themselves to determine whether or not they should assume contractual responsibilities through named agreements, and that the British government did not wish to tie itself with any kind of mutual assistance arrangements in Eastern Europe.¹²⁹

Pacts Between the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia

On May 2, 1935 the Mutual Assistance Pact between France and the Soviet Union was signed in Paris. The fourth clause of the treaty's appendix mentioned also the Baltic states and declared that their plan to establish the Eastern Pact was still alive. At the time of the signing the pact Laval, the French Foreign Minister, and Vladimir Potjomkin, the Soviet representative, stressed in their speeches that the *entreprise diplomatique* should be the preferred means for all states who sincerely wished peace.¹³⁰ Soon after, on May 16, the Mutual Assistance Pact between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia was concluded. But on June 1 Litvinov asked the Soviet ambassador in Paris to recommend the *Quai d'Orsay* to forward a memorandum to the *Auswärtiges Amt* urging resuscitation of the Eastern Pact idea with the participation of the Soviet Union, Poland, Germany, France, Czechoslovakia and those Baltic states who wished to join.¹³¹ It appears from Litvinov's declaration that the Soviet government wished to conclude the pact with the Baltic states as suggested at earlier times. At the same time various memorandums of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs stressed that taking into account the present political situation any reason to render special attention to Estonia and Latvia was lacking.¹³²

The question of bringing the Baltic states into the system of the Eastern Pact continued officially to be in focus of the Soviet government during the spring and summer of 1935. But in the fall of the same year the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs removed the subject from its agenda.

On May 2 and 16 the concluded mutual assistance pacts between the Soviet Union and France and between Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia only touched upon the military conflicts in Europe and only in case the victim-state was one of the participants in the agreement, while not influencing the earlier treaties of France with other states. All this meant that a Soviet-Polish conflict would not activate the *casus foederis*' clause. Of course, each concluded alliance would contribute to

¹²⁹ Memorandum by Collier, May 1, 1935. PRO FO 371/19399, N 2137/575/59; see also Schmidt's report, May 3, 1935. ERA 4940-1-2, 75.

¹³⁰ ДВП СССР, Т. XVII, 309–310; see also Natkevicius' report, May 4, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1700, 4–5.

¹³¹ ДВП СССР, Т. XVII, 362.

¹³² See Stomonjakov to Morshtyn, June 7, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-58, 17; Morshtyn to Stomonjakov, June 21, 1935. AVPR 05-15-59-108, 119.

the security of the continent. But they all remained artificial creations of a multitude of individual political and economic interests – the mosaic of different nations and their states who all had their own different interests and political goals. The matters were further complicated by the fact that all three partners contained forces which opposed the concluded alliances and tried to use these for their own benefit only. Lacking unity in the described alliances was partially determined also by different domestic political situations, as well as any further political developments coming along in each national entity. The French government delayed for almost a year before ratifying its treaties, because the French military leadership was lacking a desire for cooperating with the Soviet military. Namely in 1936 the Soviet government started its frightening season of repression and killing of selected victims, among others prominent and most experienced generals of the Red Army – a circumstance that made the French generals uncertain of the quality of Soviet military leadership in the approaching battles.

In the historical investigation of the pre-war situation in Europe and the machinations of each of the Great Powers, the Soviet historians found that this period represented an era of Soviet efforts to create peaceful conditions on the continent while at the same time France was only playing a vile political game – the French government had concluded its three treaties to bring itself closer to Germany.¹³³ This post-war evaluation of the pre-war situation made by the Soviet historians was highly biased in Soviet favor. The fact that the Soviets played a similar double-game for the same reason was obviously ignored by the Soviet historians intentionally. This is clear from the contacts between the Soviet and German officials found in documents stored at various archives. For example David Kandelaki, the leader of Soviet trade delegation, meeting in the middle of July 1935 with Hjalmar Schacht, the President of the *Reichsbank*, told him that Stalin and Molotov wished to improve the relations with Germany.¹³⁴ Subsequently also Marshal Tukhachevsky, the Deputy Commissar of War, in discussing matters of mutual interests declared to the representatives of the German embassy in Moscow that different ideologies should not prevent cooperation between their two countries. According to Tukhachevsky their cooperation could dictate peace to the whole world.¹³⁵ As a matter of fact, Georg Meri, the councilor of Estonian legation in Berlin, had only a couple of days before the Kandelaki-Schacht meeting reported to Tallinn that the German military leadership did not share the hostility of their political standard-bearers toward the Soviet Union but worried about the deterioration of relations between the two countries – it was obviously yearning for the return of the Rapallo era.¹³⁶

¹³³ See **Sīpols, V.** Teise maailmasõja eelõhtul, 62–63; **Шейнис З.** Максим Максимович Литвинов: Революционер, дипломат, человек. Москва, Издательство политической литературы, 1989, 335.

¹³⁴ Memorandum by Schacht, July 15, 1935. DGFP, Series C, Vol. IV, 453–454.

¹³⁵ Schulenburg's report, October 28, 1935. DGFP, Series C, Vol. IV, 778–779.

¹³⁶ Meri's report, July 13, 1935. ERA 957-14-172, 46.

Nevertheless, a completely new situation in European politics was created by the Soviet Union which entered for the first time ever into a military alliance with two European states on the basis of the League of Nations' Covenant. In respect of talking about the concluded agreements, another important event has to be considered. In the summer of 1935 the international communist movement gave its blessing to the concluded mutual assistance pacts of the Soviet Union. The Comintern's VII Congress declared the formation of an anti-fascist popular front, also presenting its political agenda.

Treaties with France and Czechoslovakia meant a continuous growth of the Soviet influence in European politics and in the geographical and legal conditions therein. If the Soviet Union would want to aid its allies in case of war with Germany without being sanctioned by the League of Nations, it would be confined only to the war in the Baltic Sea. Also for the Soviet Union conducting an air-war, particularly above Latvian and Lithuanian territories, would prove unrealistic and inefficient without these countries' prior agreement which at this time was not available. Similarly, the employment of its land armies would require their marching through the southern part of Latvia, also through Lithuania, Poland and Roumania. Considering the possibility of naval war and assuming that the German navy would try to use the coast of Estonia and Latvia and the islands in the Baltic Sea as its strongholds, the Soviet Union, in order to forestall the German invasion, would have to occupy Estonia or request on the basis of Article 16, the right to march through the territories of the Baltic states.

The pacts of the Soviet Union with France and Czechoslovakia caused confusion in Estonia and Latvia but did not come as a total surprise – they were expected. Already in August 1934 Foreign Minister Seljamaa, referring to his visit to Litvinov, suggested to the Latvian envoy in Tallinn that if the Eastern Pact came to nothing, a pact between France and the Soviet Union would be signed instead – an agreement that would radically influence the position of the Baltic states.¹³⁷ In his turn Munters, the General Secretary of Latvian Foreign Ministry, in the ongoing muddle still supported the idea of the Eastern Pact. In an interview printed in *Segodnja's* May 9 issue he declared that all states interested in maintaining the *status quo* in Eastern Europe should join the Eastern Pact.

On the other hand a memorandum, compiled by the Finnish Foreign Ministry, analyzing the sentiments prevalent in the Baltic states after the signing of the Soviet-French mutual assistance agreement claimed that the populations in all three states believed in an eventual occupation, either by Germany or the Soviet Union, as the final outcome of the current political struggle: "Faith in the future has also disappeared because nobody can build hopes on Poland in the Baltic question [...] Concerning Great Britain nobody believes that this country would lift even its little finger if the sovereignty of the Baltic states became an issue."¹³⁸ The same Finnish memorandum also reflected on the difference between Latvia

¹³⁷ Liepiņš' report, August 6, 1934. LVVA 2575-11-51, 98–102.

¹³⁸ Unsigned memorandum to Palin, Erich, Hynninen and Vuorimaa, May 16, 1935. UM 12 L Viro.

and Estonia in relation to their individual attitudes toward Germany and the Soviet Union: “Initially the communist ideology of the Soviet Union seemed to have prevented the neighboring nations expressing a desire to join it. But after the Soviet Union had joined the League of Nations and after France had concluded a military alliance with it, this fear seemed to disappear. Particularly the Latvian businessmen and industrialists, and not necessarily only the Jews, were now expressing an unconcealed desire for dependency on the Soviet Union, but only for the reason of financial profits expected from the political transformation in the region.¹³⁹ Also the observations made by Captain Uno Larsson, the Swedish navy attaché to the Baltic states are illuminating: “The holding on to the independence in the continually changing situation in Eastern Europe continues to be as a burning question in the Baltic states as never before: Lithuania timidly swimming in the wake of the Soviet Union whereas Estonia and Latvia attempt to appear more independent and creative in their approach to the issue. The Baltic states do not expect assistance from anywhere: they do not have any hopes regarding Poland. France is faraway and incapable of providing any aid military or otherwise. Great Britain is not interested in the Baltic states – the British military attaché here in Riga announced recently that although Great Britain will shed a tear on the grave of the Baltic states, it would not do anything to prevent the burial of their independence. Therefore the Baltic states have only two alternatives – to become incorporated either by the Soviet Union or by Germany. And it seems obvious that they are going to choose the worst of these two possibilities – the Soviet Union.”¹⁴⁰ Captain Larsson’s opinion was clearly correct, particularly in retrospect, in the case of Latvia, Lithuania and partly Estonia – the latter’s military leadership decidedly opposing the last mentioned undesirable choice. Related to the matter, the views of Brodovski, the envoy of the Soviet Union in Riga, expressed in his report to Litvinov written two days after the conclusion of the Soviet-France mutual assistance agreement are enlightening. “At the beginning the signing of the Soviet-French mutual assistance agreement produced some dissatisfaction. This was caused by the fact that France, indirectly also Great Britain, had not guaranteed the integrity of Latvia and had thereby ignored the interests of all three Baltic states in respect of military aid to and from the Soviet Union. The outcome of this situation was that in order to offer military assistance to France the Soviet troops, one way or another, would have to pass through the Baltic territories.”¹⁴¹

The attitude of the Lithuanian government in the matter of the Soviet-French and Soviet-Czechoslovakia mutual assistance pacts was different from those of the Estonian and Latvian governments. The Lithuanian Foreign Minister Lozoraitis had already declared before the signing of the Soviet-French treaty to the Soviet envoy in Kaunas that allowing the Soviet troops to reach the borders of Germany was of utmost importance. Also that France should assume some responsibility

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Unsigned memorandum, May 9, 1935. KA EK VALPO I, 698.

¹⁴¹ Brodovski to Litvinov, May 11, 1935. AVPR 05-15-59-108, 100.

with respect to the well-being of the Baltic states as a compensation for their permission to allow the passage of Soviet troops through their territories in order to aid France.¹⁴² When in the winter of 1936 the French parliament had ratified the Soviet-French agreement, Lozoraitis viewed this event positively: "...the international situation required individual mutual assistance guarantees to prop up the general policies of the League of Nations. It seems that nobody should have any doubts in the matter."¹⁴³ But to expose the confusing international situation to a sharp public opinion, eventually Tallinn and Riga asked the Soviet diplomats to clarify how the Soviet Union would be able to assist France and Czechoslovakia if it did not have common borders with the state that might become an aggressor. The Baltic officials wondered if the Red Army had to march through the small Baltic states in order to reach the borders of Germany. The Soviet representatives were unable to answer this question in a satisfactory manner. At the beginning various naïve explanations were put forward: that the pact served the purpose of peace and that the issue of troop-transit was only an embarrassing theoretical question.¹⁴⁴ As the questions did not stop coming, the Soviet diplomats were finally forced to turn to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs for guidance. Consequently Litvinov advised his representatives that the matter involved France and the Soviet Union only and nobody else. He judged the questions raised by Estonians and Latvians strange, and even impertinent: "We are not obligated to answer Latvia from whom we seek agreement to the transit of our military units and airplanes. As this question would primarily interest France, Latvians should approach the envoy of France with this question."¹⁴⁵

On May 6–8 1935, the Second Conference of Baltic League's Foreign Ministers was held in Kaunas. Estonia was represented by its Foreign Minister Seljamaa, Latvia by Munters, the General Secretary of Latvian Foreign Ministry, and Lithuania by the Foreign Minister Lozoraitis. Before the opening of the conference, the foreign ministers of Estonia and Latvia were taken by surprise by Lozoraitis who announced that on May 4 the Soviet government had retracted its proposal to the Baltic states for participation in the mutual assistance pact because the Baltic states had not immediately accepted the proposal.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently the Soviet proposal was no longer examined at the meeting. Estonia and Latvia promised to assist Lithuania in its negotiations for concluding a non-aggression pact with Germany. They promised not to sign a treaty with Germany without including Lithuania in the deal, thus hoping to prevent Lithuania from drawing closer to the Soviet Union. Lozoraitis was persuaded to promise that Lithuania would discuss all foreign policy questions with Estonia and Latvia, and would not sign any

¹⁴² Memorandum by Lozoraitis, April 12, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1770, 6.

¹⁴³ Memorandum by Lozoraitis, March 6, 1936. LCVA 383-7-1894, 236.

¹⁴⁴ Brodovski to Berjozov, May 20, 1935. AVPR 05-15-59-108, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Litvinov to Brodovski, July 4, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-58, 15.

¹⁴⁶ Ustinov's report, May 24, 1935. AVPR 05-15-112-112, 79–80; Memorandum by Seljamaa, May 21, 1935. ERA 957-14-181, 32; Lithuanian Foreign Ministry to Baltrušaitis, April 29, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1673, 13.

agreements with the Soviet Union without consulting the other Baltic states.¹⁴⁷ The communiqué of the conference contained contradictory statements. On the one hand, the participants noted that the attempts to conclude a collective security pact had, not ceased and that by joint effort the desired goal could still be reached. But on the other hand the communiqué declared that the Baltic states had declined to join any kind of political alliances or blocks, offered by various European powers.

After the conference Seljamaa informed Ustinov, the Soviet envoy, that the Baltic states were orienting toward the League of Nations and were also drawing closer to each other in order to secure their sovereignty. At the same time Seljamaa worried about the German press which according to him had started to distort the true political situation in the Baltic region, appraising the Estonian foreign policy actions incorrectly.¹⁴⁸ In the spring 1935 *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi Party newspaper, had published several articles devoted to the foreign policies of the Baltic countries. These articles criticized Lithuania and highly praised Estonia while at the same time calling upon the Baltic states to develop closer political and economic relations with the *Reich*. For example, the April 19 issue of this newspaper expressed hope that “the childish fear” of Germany’s *Drang nach Osten* would ebb and that both Latvia and Estonia would finally recognize *Reich*’s true nature for peace, and the need to develop excellent economic relations with Germany.

Considering the above presented background information, it must be asked whether the Soviet Union truly and honestly looked for the participation of the Baltic states in the Eastern Pact and for the conclusion of mutual assistance pacts with them? Or, on the contrary, played some kind of deceptive diplomatic games with the innocent, weak and powerless dwarfs for its own secret reasons? Available archive materials answer this question quite clearly: the Soviet government used its so-called “Baltic Card” to take part in the game of Grand Politics. This aspect of Soviet foreign policy operations was exemplified by the correspondence between Karski, the Soviet envoy in Kaunas, and the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs during the spring and summer of 1935. Respective memorandums record continuous readiness of the Lithuanian government to become a member of the proposed mutual assistance pact thrust at it by the Soviet envoy. It should be added that the Soviet envoys were often not aware of the true goals of their own government, but most of them believed in the integrity of the instructions received from Moscow and therefore performed their duties in good faith. At first the

¹⁴⁷ Reinebeck’s report, May 7, 1935. NA II RG-242, T-120, R-3507, E632470; Preston’s telegram, May 9, 1935. PRO FO 371/19399, N 2381/575/59; see also **Anderson, E.** *The Baltic Entente 1914–1940 – Its Strength and Weakness.* – Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia, 3. The Baltic in International Relations between the Two World Wars. Symposium organized by the Centre for Baltic Studies. November 11–13, 1986. University of Stockholm. Eds. J. Hiden, A. Loit. Uppsala, 1988, 83.

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum by Seljamaa, May 21, 1935. ERA 957-14-181, 33; see also Ustinov’s report, May 25, 1935. AVPR 05-15-112-112, 79.

Commissariat of Foreign Affairs did not react to Karski's memorandums but eventually after repeated inquiries from Karski it was forced to state its views in the matter. The Commissariat's August 11, 1935 instructions to the legation in Kaunas clearly admitted the Soviet government's principled stand against concluding the mutual assistance pact and is enlightening: "You wish that we could offer to the Balts, or even inform them in writing, of our readiness to establish a mutual assistance pact. That, however, would not benefit us at all but would tie our hands with the obligation to help the Balts if and when Germany or Poland attacks them. If, however, such an attack took place the Soviet Union could, if necessary and also if advantageous, offer voluntary aid to the victims of aggression [...] It is incomprehensible to us why we should pre-emptively tie our hands."¹⁴⁹ In reality the Soviet envoys in Tallinn and Riga never incited the Commissariat to continue its efforts to establish the mutual assistance pact. Consequently, there was no reason to inform these Soviet diplomats about correspondence between the Commissariat and Karski. Instead, the instructions of the Commissariat to Tallinn and Riga legations only continued to accuse the Estonian and Latvian governments, with the assistance of Germany and Poland, of the collapse of the Eastern Pact project.¹⁵⁰ "We have unrefutable evidence that all discussions about Estonia's and Latvia's readiness to join the Eastern Pact have been only clever and deceptive maneuvers of Ulmanis, Munters, Laidoner and Pāts to mislead the Soviet Union. We know now that Estonia and Latvia decided already in the early stages of the project that they will not join under any circumstances. Obviously the Germans and Poles were able to convince both governments that the Eastern Pact would be useless without the right of Soviet Army to enter the Baltic states who by then had recognized that this right given to Soviet troops would sooner or later mean the death blow for the independence of the Baltic states. This interpretation of the effects of the pact on Balticum is by now so generally and firmly settled that nobody even bothers to re-examine the issue."¹⁵¹

The Soviet government considered peace with the capitalist world a temporary compromise only and was convinced that the latter would attempt by using military means liquidate the new state of peasants and workers together with the prevailing socialist order.

The intentions and state of the Soviet military planning is provided by a memorandum sent to the Soviet State Plan (Gosplan) in April 1930 dealing with the character of the coming war, and with the tasks to be faced. As for the part of memorandum touching the Baltic states, a following scenario in case of the European war was considered: the Soviet Union would be attacked by Poland and by a coalition led by it. This coalition would consist of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Roumania, with possible support from Sweden. Lithuania was expected to fight on the side of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless the author of the memorandum

¹⁴⁹ AVPR 051-26-49-2, 85–87.

¹⁵⁰ Stomonjakov to Ustinov, September 16, 1935. AVPR 0154-28-40-2, 23.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

supposed that the bourgeois sector of the Lithuanian society, fearing revolution, would quite likely move over to the enemy camp. It was further assumed that the above coalition under Poland's leadership would deploy an army of approximately 5 million men. Presumably this coalition would be materially supported by Great Britain, France and Italy, with armaments supplied by the Czechoslovakian war industry. Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece and Germany were not expected to support the enemies of the Soviet Union. The total length of the war front in Europe was estimated to extend approximately 3000 kilometers: against Finland 1500, Estonia 170, Latvia 210, Poland 800 and Roumania 320 kilometers. The Soviet Union foresaw two powerful military attacks by the Red Army for defeating the coalition forces in Estonia, both starting in Narva: one directed over Tallinn toward Haapsalu in order to prevent Finland and Sweden from joining the ensuing land battle, and the other one moving over Valga to Riga. In addition the plan also contemplated the invasion of Estonian northern coast by the Soviet naval forces. It was estimated that it would take about two days to defeat the coalition forces in the Balticum.¹⁵² The author of the memorandum suggested that the Baltic states should be Bolshevized immediately after the invasion and conquest by the Red Army, whereas Finland and Sweden should be hit by such a strong blow that they would only be able to fend off the attack. The author foresaw the political difficulties rising in case the Baltic states would decline joining the Polish coalition and would declare themselves neutral: "At this point the precedent of Belgium should be remembered and dependence on the actual political circumstances should be kept in mind."¹⁵³ In this context the author's apprehension was justified: at the outbreak of the First World War Germany, one of the guarantors of the Belgian neutrality, had presented an ultimatum to Belgium for the right of the German military forces to pass through the country. But Belgium rejected the ultimatum because it did not wish to violate its neutrality. Subsequently, Germany's attack against Belgium turned the public opinion of the whole world against Germany. But the vision of a Polish-led coalition was of theoretical nature only, constructed by the Soviet political and military planners, and had no realistic foundation in fact. In reality the imagined coalition of states could be formed only if the Red Army had attacked the borderstates first.

In the NKVD dossier of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevski, the former Deputy Commissar of War and Navy, a handwritten outline concerning the coming war was found. Marshal Tukhachevski, politically repressed in 1937, drafted the document entitled "The Plan for Defeat" in jail. Of course, it dealt with the defeat of Germany and its allies. It is quite likely that Tukhachevski, a former passionate

¹⁵² A memorandum concerning the character of the coming war and the foreseeable problems of defence, presented to the Chairman of the Defence Sector of Soviet State Plan, April 4, 1930. RGAE 4372-91-1271, 29-10; see also **Samuelson, L.** Soviet Defence Industry Planning. Tukhachevski and Military-industrial Mobilisation 1926-1927. Stockholm, Stockholm Institute of East European Economies, 1996, 111-116.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

supporter of the Rapallo Treaty, wished to prove to Stalin his irreplaceability as a military theoretician. In his outline he speculates that in the coming war Germany would fight together with Poland against the Soviet Union, that in the coming war Germany, in order to establish a base for attacking the north-western Soviet Union and Leningrad, would immediately attempt to occupy the Baltic states, while expecting that Finland would allow the German troops enter its territory.¹⁵⁴ According to Tukhachevski the Red Army could forestall Germany's planned actions by destroying the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian armies and occupying these states thus moving the action of war to enemy's territory. Tukhachevski also touched upon the operations of the Soviet navy and assessed its actions, proceeding from the navy harbors of Kronstadt and Luga, as extremely difficult in case of war. That was another reason for having to occupy the Baltic states: "The navy needs harbors in the open sea. All suitable ports are located in Estonia and in Latvia, specifically in Tallinn, Riga, Ventspils and Liepāja."¹⁵⁵ In conclusion, Tukhachevski assumed that the Baltic neutrality, even if defended, would not last more than two weeks – a dangerous situation viewed from the position of Soviet political-military planning.

On March 24, 1938, General Boris Shaposhnikov, the Red Army's Chief of General Staff, sent a strategic plan for the future operations of the Red Army to Marshal Voroshilov for his evaluation. The Soviet Military Council, after discussing its contents, approved it on November 13, 1938. This plan speculated on the possible magnitude of Germany's military manpower and available equipment technique. Shaposhnikov concluded that the Soviet Union ought to be prepared to fight in Europe simultaneously with Germany, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, and in the Far East with Japan, and that it had to be capable of delivering a destructive blow on all enemies right at the beginning of the war. Also this strategic plan foresaw quickly pushing the military operations onto the Baltic territories by occupying the navy bases in Estonia and Latvia, thus securing the supremacy of the Soviet navy on the Baltic Sea.¹⁵⁶

MUTUAL POLITICAL CONVERGENCE OF GERMANY AND POLAND IN 1934–1935

The political project of the Eastern Pact, proposed by the Soviet Union and France, had caused the drawing closer of Germany and Poland. This proposal also introduced diverse speculations with respect to the possibilities of cooperation between the two countries. At the beginning of 1935 the continuing process of

¹⁵⁴ 1937. Показания маршала Тухачевского. – Военно-исторический журнал, 1991, 8, 46–47.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 9, 60.

¹⁵⁶ **Захаров М. В.** Генеральный штаб в предвоенные годы. Москва, 1989, 125–131; see also **Leskinen, J.** Vaiettu Suomen silta. Suomen ja Viron salainen sotilaallinen yhteistoiminta Neuvostoliiton varalta vuosina 1930–1939. Helsinki, Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1997, 388–391.

conciliation, of mutual understanding, and also of cooperation in Eastern Europe were widely discussed. On January 22 Hitler talking with Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, raised the question of danger approaching from the east. He directed the attention of the ambassador to the ongoing military preparations in the Soviet Union and warned that a day might come soon when both countries were forced to defend each other against Soviet aggression. A few days later the infamous Hermann Goering, President of *Reichstag* and the commanding general of German airforce, spent a few days in Poland on a hunting trip. During this unofficial visit Goering and Polish representatives met and discussed matters of common interest that usually could not be done through normal diplomatic channels. In the course of these secret talks Goering introduced the idea of “crusade” against bolshevism and the Soviet Union. In his enthusiasm he even went so far as to offer Ukraine to Poland while claiming the North-Western Russia for Germany. Further, he predicted that in case Poland declined his generous offer, later a new division of Poland might occur as a result of the German-Soviet political-military collaboration.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently on February 5 Lipski reported about his new discussions with Hitler, who had repeated Goering’s offer, to Warsaw. Hitler had stated that the German expansion with Polish consent in the east would deliver Ukraine into the Polish sphere of interest, whereas the North-Western Russia would be claimed by the Germans. As for Lithuania, Hitler asserted that Germany was ready to make certain concessions to Poland on condition it agreed to Hitler’s plans.

News about the further strengthening of the German-Polish combination reached Tallinn through the memorandums of Estonian envoys almost instantly. This information brought serious doubts about the real intentions of the Polish government. This caused deepening suspicions supported by the remarks made by Soviet diplomats who for example treated Goering’s “hunting trip” and his pushing the German-Polish friendship idea as an attempt to create a pro-German bloc and a subsequent alliance. At the end of January Otto Strandman, the Estonian envoy in Paris, wrote about his discussions with his Soviet counterpart who had stated that Germany, Poland and Japan had concluded a triple agreement with attacking the Soviet Union in mind.¹⁵⁸ Also Hans Markus, the Estonian envoy in Warsaw, had heard rumors that Germany had requested surrendering the Polish corridor in trade for the permission to Poland to occupy Lithuania. In the view of Markus, because the Poles assured him that the German-Polish relations had not progressed past the existing non-aggression treaty, these rumors reflected only odd ideas of certain political quarters. He recommended the Estonian authorities not to take these rumors seriously, at least not yet.¹⁵⁹ Also in the opinion of Valters, the Latvian envoy in Warsaw, the idea of closer relations between Germany and

¹⁵⁷ **Budurowycz, B. B.** Polish-Soviet relations 1932–1939, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Strandmans’ report, January 29, 1935. ERA 957-14-3, 43; see also Schmidt’s report, February 5, 1935. ERA 957-14-20, 48.

¹⁵⁹ Markus’ report, April 4, 1935. ERA 957-14-176, 3.

Poland presented a prominent political issue only in the Polish political circles, but he doubted that it would be utilized by the government's official policies.¹⁶⁰ Other Estonian and Latvian diplomatic memoranda expressed opinions that Poland would not dare to join Germany in its political escapades, specifically in its *Drang nach Osten* projects.

Nevertheless, the idea that Germany and Poland together might occupy certain territories in the east was reflected in the press of both countries. In February 1935 the *Völkischer Beobachter* of the German Nazi party, published a serialized article *Politische Kräfte im Osten*. This article expressed the following thoughts: that the year 1918 had not brought a final solution to Eastern Europe and that Poland could not take advantage of the Soviet-Japan conflict in the Far East to end the supremacy of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. This newspaper also proposed that since Poland lacked sufficient strength in political as well as in economic terms, it should seek assistance from Germany which was also interested in solving the East-European problem.¹⁶¹ Similar thoughts were found also in Estonian press.¹⁶² Soon the Polish press reacted to the publication of the afore-mentioned article series in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. The idea of a German-Polish collaboration was supported by some Polish political circles. In the *Seim* Dmytro Łewycki, the leader of UNDO¹⁶³ group demanded the initiation of active participation of government in "the ongoing re-organization of Eastern Europe." And *Czas*, a conservative newspaper, published in Krakow and standing close to the government, supported the idea of Poland's drawing closer to Germany and collaborating with it, going as far as to publish a list of territories Poland should take over from the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁴

The aggressive articles in the Polish press did not remain unanswered by the Soviets. On April 20, 1935 *Pravda* and *Izvestija*, borrowing informational material from one of the French provincial newspapers, presented the official viewpoint of Soviet political leadership in the matter. The columns of both Soviet newspapers suggested that the information offered by the French papers had become available because of the secret German-Polish agreement concluded on April 20, 1935. According to this information presented by the Soviet press, Poland had promised to reconcile its foreign policy moves with those of Germany while guaranteeing the free passage of German troops through its territories in case of a looming military crisis in the region. To counter the Polish pledge, Germany had vowed to defend the Polish borders against any aggression.

In Poland various books being published were also propagating the mutual approach of Germany and Poland. At the beginning of 1935 *System polityczny Europy a Polska*, a scandalous book by Władysław Studnicki was published, and

¹⁶⁰ Valters' report, January 18, 1935. LVVA 2575-15-94, 631.

¹⁶¹ *Völkischer Beobachter*, February 3; February 4; February 13; February 15, 1935.

¹⁶² *Vaba Maa*, February 25, 1935.

¹⁶³ Ukraińskie nacionalno-demokratyczne objednannia – National Democratic League of Ukraine.

¹⁶⁴ **Budurowicz, B. B.** Polish-Soviet relations 1932–1939, 82.

in 1937 *Miedzy Niemcami a Rosja*, a book by Adolf Bochenski, appeared. These books did not represent the ideas of any particular Polish political party, but the ideas of the authors presented in these two books influenced the public opinion in Poland, particularly its conservative circles, to a notable degree. Studnicki had worked in the Polish foreign ministry in the 1920s and was now a well-known publicist, known for his pro-German and anti-Czechoslovakian views. It was rumored, because his book had appeared under the tutelage of a pro-government publisher, that it had been supported by the Polish foreign ministry. The Germans appreciated this book so highly that they published it also in the German language.¹⁶⁵ In this book Studnicki recommended an amputation of the Soviet Union in the west, south and east for the sake of security in Europe. To accomplish this operation Studnicki asked Poland, first, to forget the injustices committed against it by Germany, second, to renounce its alliance with France, third, to join Germany in a pact, and fourth, to instantly attack its eastern neighbor when it stumbles into a military conflict with Japan. In addition to the mentioned goals, he also suggested the Anschluss of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, which he foresaw as the first steps in creating the so-called Middle-European bloc. His book also examined the birth of independence of the Baltic states and their relations with Poland. Concerning Balticum, he expressed the following ideas: first, militarily weak Estonia and Latvia with their long eastern borders could not become the allies of Poland in a war against the Soviet Union, second, he considered the neutrality of the Baltic states in any approaching military conflict an impossible posture because the Soviet Union would ignore it and attack these countries without further ceremony. He also characterized the sense of independence of these states as feeble, with the Latvian social democrats being naïve stooges of Bolsheviks, but considered it at least advisable to prevent the Baltic states from coming under the influence of the Soviet Union. In describing the economic relations of the Baltic states with Germany, Studnicki noted that Germany and Poland should be united in defending the Baltic states against any aggressor. He concluded that the Baltic states should draw nearer to Poland and Germany, should economical terms bind themselves tighter to these countries, and finally should eliminate all underground forces that are craving for the invasion from the east.¹⁶⁶

At this time the German publishing industry and press were expressing similar recommendations to the Baltic states: *Der deutsch-polnische Ausgleich*, a pamphlet published in 1934 by E. von Reibnitz, concluded that neither Germany nor Poland could remain indifferent to the events in the Far East and in the Soviet Union, and that to counter the danger emanating from bolshevism, an alliance between Germany and Poland should be created. He recommended that Ukraine and Lithuania should be delivered to Poland while Germany would absorb the Polish corridor, Danzig, Upper Silesia, Pommerania and Poznan.

¹⁶⁵ Studnicki, W. *Polen im politischen system Europas*. Berlin, E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1936.

¹⁶⁶ Studnicki, W. *System polityczny Europy a Polska*. Warszawa, Gebetner i Wolff, 1934.

In its turn the Estonian press reacted to the critical articles in the *Völkischer Beobachter*'s February 1935 issues and to the book of Studnicki with some trepidation. For example the Estonian liberal newspaper *Vaba Maa* appraised both publications as a re-introduction of Alfred Rosenberg's ideology concerning the division of Eastern Europe into respective zones of interest.¹⁶⁷ But somewhat later *Vaba Maa* remarked that Studnicki did not represent any recognized political party but only himself as an individual.¹⁶⁸ The Estonian socialists' organ *Rahva Sõna* defined its position with a rhetorical question: "What to believe about the new course of Poland?" The journalistic answer to this question was probably the most apt analysis of the Polish foreign policy: "Alliances between nations and states are created and smashed with equal regularity – they appear and the disappear at monthly or even at weekly intervals [...] This process is simply a giant poker game in which each participant hopes to make some profit at the expense of his neighbor. This game is dangerous because instead of winning it, one can lose it with equal ease..." The paper concluded that Warsaw's clever game with Berlin could turn out to be excessively damaging for the Baltic region. It also recognized that as a result of the ongoing political struggle the influence of Poland had been considerably reduced in the Baltic region.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, the fears expressed in the Estonian public opinion did not slip by unnoticed by the local Polish diplomats who noted it in their diplomatic memoranda: "Concerning our reputation in the Baltic states, our collaboration with Germans has already for one-and-half years been locally a source of political irritation, and fears. The French and Czechoslovakians have skillfully exploited these anxieties which are constantly discussed in the Estonian press."¹⁷⁰

Clearly the new direction of the Polish foreign policy has caused some surprise as well as misunderstanding, particularly among the foreign diplomats accredited to Warsaw. It has been covered in the foreign press and because of the ideas promoted by Studnicki's book it has given rise to some nervousness in Latvia and also in Lithuania.¹⁷¹ Perhaps the comments of Richard Vreeman,¹⁷² Director of the State Police made in the spring of 1935 to Jerzy Radomski, deputy Polish Military attaché: "How about the Germans? Estonians feel sympathy toward the Poles, but presently their trust in them has disappeared. Poland's political positions are similar to those of the Baltic German upper ranks."¹⁷³ In his report to the Polish foreign ministry Radomski blamed the Soviet legation in Tallinn for disseminating anti-Polish propaganda in Estonia – a representative of the Soviet Union had

¹⁶⁷ *Vaba Maa*, February 25; February 26, 1935.

¹⁶⁸ *Vaba Maa*, March 4, 1935.

¹⁶⁹ *Rahva Sõna*, April 10, 1935.

¹⁷⁰ Radomskis' report, March 29, 1935. Центр хранения историко-документальных коллекций (Historical-Documental Collection Holding Center), Москва (TsHIDK) 308-12-159, 2.

¹⁷¹ See Shipp Riiast, March 8, 1935. US National Archive I. Washington, D.C. (NA I) RG-165, M-1508, R-10, 007.

¹⁷² Later Veermaa.

¹⁷³ Radomskis' report, March 29, 1935. TsHIDK 308-12-159, 2.

bought more than ten copies of Studnicki's book in Polish and had distributed these to local Polish-speaking individuals for perusal and dissemination among the local population, while at the same time starting the translation of the book into Estonian.¹⁷⁴ Coincidentally the Polish politicians and diplomats were spreading rumors in Moscow and Kaunas that Poland had signed a military alliance with Estonia and Latvia in order to foil the plans for the Eastern Pact, and to intensify the stress in the Baltic community, and thus to reduce the effects of regional cooperation. In fact, some politically known individuals in Moscow believed that many rumors spread in Moscow came directly from the local Polish embassy.¹⁷⁵

To get an inkling of the moods prevailing in the Baltic states in 1935, reading the memoranda of Otto Reinebeck, the German envoy in Tallinn, is recommended for the description of the situation in Estonia during the February-March period: "Uncertainty and fear in respect to German political goals related to the East since the rising of nazis to power are ruling the Estonian society stealthily, but with a sure hand. The phenomenon of mistrust has become a particularly notable symptom of these times. When trying to determine the reasons for its occurrence, then sooner or later the issue of floating rumors that are spread almost instantly comes up. The rumors that Germany after having solved the Saarland problem, will next take care of the Memel question and then tackle the issue of Balticum as a whole, always seem to find a grateful ear. Finally, the book of Władysław Studnicki and the notorious article-series of *Völkischer Beobachter* has provided some additional fodder for Estonian distrust. Thus Estonian newspapers keep stressing the importance of the Anschluss of Austria by Germany, the creation of new borders between Poland and Hungary, the division of Czechoslovakia between Germany, Poland and Hungary, the creation of the Hungarian-Roumanian union for the governance of Transylvania, Germany's giving up the demand for Polish corridor..."¹⁷⁶

Also Jaan Tõnisson, a well-known Estonian politician and editor of *Postimees*, analyzed in his editorial titled "Requirements for Domestic Policies in Light of Foreign Policy Conditions and Demands" the danger of Germany meddling in the affairs of the Baltic countries. He pointed out that the *Völkischer Beobachter* propagated the German-Polish friendship and close relations at the expense of the Baltic states and thereby disclosed the political goals of the *Reich*. Therefore no reason existed which would stop the nazi-Germany pursuing its East European ambitions at the expense of the Baltic states: "It is clear that the intentions and plans of Hitler-Germany's main political organ becoming involved in the "Space of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Dailide's report, April 5, 1935. LCVA 383-7-1649, 20; Stomonjakov to Ustinov, March 5, 1935. AVPR 0154-28-40-2, 9; Ustinov to Stomonjakov, March 8, 1935. AVPR 0154-28-40-3, 103; Litvinov to Brodovski, April 5, 1935. AVPR 05-15-108-58, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Reinebecks' report, March 9, 1935. US National Archive II. College Park, Maryland (NA II) RG-242, T-120, R-3507, E632462-E632469.

Balticum” mean actual danger to all Baltic states, including Estonia.”¹⁷⁷ In addition Tõnisson also raised the question about Estonia’s ability to defend itself against the threat. In his opinion the answer rested on the democratic administrative rules and laws of the state and not on personal ideologies and actions of politicians and military persons in power.¹⁷⁸

The rumors about the drawing closer of Germany and Poland grew in the summer of 1935. Namely Colonel Beck, the Foreign Minister of Poland, visited Berlin at the beginning of July, providing fuel for continuing the rumors which, however, may also have been launched by the Soviet press. For example *Pravda*, with reference to the disclosures in the French press, announced that the object of Beck’s discussions in Berlin had been the division of Lithuania simultaneously with the question of exchange of Danzig for Memel.¹⁷⁹

The improved relations between two European superpowers, Germany and Poland, did not go unnoticed in the capitals of the Baltic states. For example, Georg Meri, the councilor of the Estonian legation in Berlin, raised the question of Beck’s visit and its goals at the *Auswärtiges Amt*. Also Markus, the Estonian envoy in Warsaw, made similar inquiries to Beck himself. Neither official received adequate replies to their queries. Beck tried to convince Markus of the peaceful attitudes of Germany, while Meri informed Tallinn about the rumors that Hitler had proposed to Poland to conclude a pact with Germany similar to the one signed between France and the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁰ This rumor turned out to be true: Hitler had said to Beck that the relations between Poland and Germany should be “insured”, and keeping in mind the common peril, both countries should establish a state of *Freundschaft* to counter the threatening external aggression. Therefore the final official communiqué of the meeting spoke of “far-reaching mutual understanding” of issues concerning the special interests of both countries, regardless of Beck’s promise that Poland will never become a “simple tool of Soviet policies.”¹⁸¹

In closing, it seems correct to assume that the Estonian press – with the appearance of Studnicki’s book and *Völkischer Beobachter* articles – had already drawn the necessary conclusions about the state of European politics in the year of 1935. Therefore it can be claimed that Goering’s “hunting trip” in Poland, the discussions in the press about German-Polish relations, and the collaboration in the East had also strongly influenced the foreign policy of the Baltic states, particularly that of Estonia whose foreign policy fundamental principles, and objects, were radically re-defined in the process.

¹⁷⁷ Postimees, March 2, 1935.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Pravda, July 8, 1935.

¹⁸⁰ Markus’ report, July 23, 1935. ERA 957-14-176; Meris’ report, July 13, 1935. ERA 957-14-10, 58.

¹⁸¹ See Memorandum by Lipski, July 3, 1935. Документы и материалы по истории Советско-Польских отношений, Т. IV, 1933–1938, 272–274; **Budurowycz, B. B.** Polish-Soviet relations 1932–1939, 75.

CONCLUSION

The story of the Eastern Pact, taking place on the European political arena in the 1920s and 1930s, was a long, confusing and tortuous affair which at the end did not accomplish anything positive. It only caused a general diplomatic brawl across the Eastern and Central Europe.

The proposal to conclude the Eastern pact gave the Baltic states a choice to orient either toward the Soviet Union and France or toward Germany and Poland, or to stay neutral. Lithuania had almost immediately declared the Eastern Pact unconditionally acceptable and was ready to sign a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. Estonia and Latvia were willing to join the pact on condition that Germany and Poland would also participate. It was of course possible to answer negatively there and then, but Estonia and Latvia tried to manoeuvre and play along with Moscow, showing appreciation for Soviet offers. At the same time Finland had assumed a stand against the Eastern Pact at the very start. Finnish diplomats in Tallinn and Riga pointed out that joining the pact would eventually obligate the Baltic states to open their borders to the Red Army. In this context it should be pointed out that this time Finland did not recognize the danger coming from Germany. It should also be stated that Estonia's and Latvia's standpoints regarding the Eastern Pact may partly have been influenced by the desire to calm down public opinion in their own respective countries realizing that their populations were well aware of the approaching danger from Germany.

If in 1927 the Latvian Foreign Minister Felikss Cielēns and also some Estonian politicians had wished for a multilateral guarantee covering their independence and security, Estonia and also Latvia were working against the idea in the 1934–1935 period. If the Soviet Union would become a member of the League of Nations, a German attack against Poland would open the borders of East European states for the Red Army to march through. On the other hand, according to an alternative view of international political developments entertained by France, the conclusion of the Eastern Pact would make Finland and the Baltic states entirely dependent either on Germany or on the Soviet Union and Poland. Finally, in case Germany's collaboration with the Soviet Union determines the borders of their respective zones of interest, the Polish guarantee would become worthless. If the Soviet Union, however, would attack the small border states, Germany would become their defender, whereas France would have no right to attack Germany. Therefore under certain circumstances the Soviet Union could occupy the Baltic states under the pretext of defending their sovereignty. In conclusion, from the standpoint of the Baltic states' desiring to secure their independence, the idea of the Eastern Pact was totally meaningless and unacceptable.

What did the Soviet Union actually aspire to achieve with the project of the Eastern Pact? Several possible objectives might be worth looking into. For example, Walter Krivitsky, the Soviet resident in Western Europe, has argued in his memoirs that the Eastern Pact was simply a political maneuver of the Soviet government. He called the Eastern Pact a game of Stalin played with Hitler to make

him recognize the need for the continuing of the Rapallo policies. But this might be a rather one-sided explanation. Russian historian Z. Belousova views the situation of the year 1934 in a wider scope and finds that the participation of the Soviet Union in European diplomatic maneuvers provided the Soviets with a chance to appear as an equal to the Great Powers in the interwar period, thus raising the esteem of the Stalinist leadership. But Belousova concludes that Moscow understood from the very beginning that the Eastern Pact, including France, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, the Baltic states and Finland in addition to the Soviet Union would not work and was an unachievable pipedream as it in fact turned out to be. The Soviet Union benefited from the circumstance that as the Soviet propaganda machine was fed with issues concerning the Eastern Pact, the Soviet Union was able to demonstrate its role as a defender of peace and small nations.

When the Soviet Union asked the Baltic states to join the mutual assistance pact, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was fully aware that Estonia and Latvia would reject the offer. This point is proven by the analysis of numerous memorandums, sent to Moscow by Soviet legations in Tallinn and Riga in 1934 and in the early 1935.

In conclusion, the plans for collective security failed, not because of the rejection of the idea by one or another small nation, but primarily because of the persistent antagonism between the Soviet Union and Germany on the one hand, and between France and Great Britain on the other hand. The dictatorial states, spurred on by egoistic goals, strove to change the prevailing *status quo* established by the Versailles Treaty, whereas the Great Democratic Powers continued to display inconsistency and impotence in their efforts to retain, and revive, the *status quo*. All the above presented ideological and political factors jointly caused the failure of the infamous Eastern Pact.

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EESTI, LÄTI, LEEDU JA IDAPAKTI KAVA

Magnus ILMJÄRV

Üks keeruline, palju kõneainet tekitanud probleem, mille ees seisid Balti riikide diplomaadid 1930. aastate keskel, oli nn Idapakti või Ida-Locarno kava. Nõukogude ajalooteaduses väideti, et Nõukogude välispoliitika kaasaminek Idapakti kavaga demonstreeris ilmekalt kogu maailmale Nõukogude Liidu rahupoliiti-

kat ja et Idapakti kava realiseerumine oleks täielikult kindlustanud Balti riikide julgeoleku. Idapakti nurjumises süüdistasid Nõukogude ajaloolased Saksamaad, Prantsusmaad, Poolat, Inglismaad, aga ka Lätit ja Eestit.

Artiklis on vaadeldud Idapakti kava üleskerkimist, Balti riikide suhtumist sellesse ja Nõukogude Liidu ettepanekusse sõlmida vastastikuse abistamise leping. Üheks uurimisobjektiks on ka see, kuidas suhtusid Saksamaa ja Poola Balti riikide võimalikku Idapaktiga ühinemisse.

1925. aasta oktoobris toimunud Locarno konverentsil oli parafeeritud kolm lepingute gruppi: Reini Pakt – Inglismaa, Prantsusmaa, Saksamaa, Belgia ja Itaalia andsid vastastikku garantii hetkel kehtivatele piiridele, kusjuures Inglismaa ja Prantsusmaa esinesid Prantsuse-Saksa ja Saksa-Belgia garantidena. Reini Pakti täiendasid arbitraažilepingud Saksamaa, Prantsusmaa, Belgia, Poola ja Tšehhoslovakkia vahel. Lisaks sellele sõlmis Prantsusmaa Poola ja Tšehhoslovakkiaiga vastastikuse abistamise lepingu. Kuid Saksamaa arbitraažilepinguid Poola ja Tšehhoslovakkiaiga ei seotud Reini Paktiga. Saksamaa piiri Tšehhoslovakkia ja Poolaga ei garanteeritud. Seega garanteeris Locarnos välja kujundatud süsteem julgeoleku ainult Lääne-Euroopas, aga mitte Ida-Euroopas.

Idapakti kava kerkis üles 1934. aasta algul ja see oli otseselt seotud nende sündmustega, mis toimusid 1933. aastal: Hitleri võimuletulekuga, Nelikpakti allakirjutamisega, Saksamaa lahkumisega Rahvasteliidust, Genfi desarmeerimiskonverentsi ebaõnnestumisega ja Saksa-Poola suhete normaliseerumisega. 1933/34. aastal said Idapakti kava algatajateks Nõukogude Liit ja Prantsusmaa. Idapakti kava nägi ette regionaalse multilateraalse vastastikuse abistamise pakti sõlmimist, milles pidid osalema Nõukogude Liit, Prantsusmaa, Tšehhoslovakkia, Saksamaa, Poola, Balti riigid ja Soome. Kuid Prantsusmaa ei nõustunud Balti riike garanteerima juhul, kui neist saanuksid agressiooni ohvrid.

Saksamaa ja Poola alustasid kohe aktiivset diplomaatilist tegevust Idapakti kava nurjamiseks. Auswärtiges Amt hoiatas Balti riike Idapaktiga ühinemise eest. Poola ei soovinud võtta endale Nõukogude Liidu või Saksamaa sõjalise abistamise kohustust. Poola polnud nõus laskma Nõukogude Liidu või Saksa vägesid oma territooriumile isegi siis, kui olnuks tegemist abiga vaenlase sissetungi korral. Varssavis oldi veendunud, et abistajad ei lahku pärast seda, kui vajadus abi järele on lakanud olemast. Ka Poola välispoliitika püüdis mõjutada Eestit ja Lätit Idapakti kavale vastu tegutsema. Vaatamata sellele et Poola nägi Saksamaas ohtu maa iseseisvusele, tegutses ta koostöös Saksamaaga Idapakti kava vastu.

Kui Läti välisminister Felikss Cielēns ja ka mõned Eesti poliitikud olid 1927. aastal soovinud saada suurriikidelt multilateraalset garantiid, siis 1934/35. aastal töötasid Eesti ja Läti sellele vastu. Nad püüdsid manööverdada, teatades, et juhul kui Saksamaa ja Poola keelduvad Idapaktis osalemast, ei paku pakt neile huvi. Leedu oli valmis Idapaktiga ühinema ja sõlmima Nõukogude Liiduga ka bilateraalset vastastikuse abistamise lepingu. 1934. aastal esilekerkinud Idapakti kava ei olnud Saksamaa ja Nõukogude Liidu vahele jäävatele riikidele soodne. Olukorras, kus Nõukogude Liit sai Rahvasteliidu liikmeks, andnuks Saksamaa kallaletung Poolale või Prantsusmaale Nõukogude Liidule võimaluse kasutada piiririikide terri-

tooriime läbimarsiks. Ka Tallinnas ja Riias mõisteti, et Balti riikde territooriumile sattunud Nõukogude väed ei pruugi siit enam lahkuda. Idapakti kaval polnuks seega Balti riikide julgeoleku kindlustamise seisukohalt erilist tähendust.

Mida taotles Nõukogude Liit Idapakti kavaga? See oli Nõukogude valitsuse diplomaatiline manööver, mille eesmärgiks oli panna Saksamaad mõistma Rapallo poliitika jätkamise vajadust. Nn Balti kaart oli Nõukogude valitsusele vajalik suupoliitiliseks manööverdamiseks. Idapakti kavast sai toitu ka Nõukogude propaganda, mis sai näidata, et Nõukogude Liit on rahu ja Balti rahvaste kaitsja. Kuid oleks ülekohtune väita, et ainult Nõukogude valitsus soovis Idapakti abil manööverdada. Seda soovisid teha ka Inglismaa ja Prantsusmaa. Prantsusmaa ei nõustunud andma Balti riikidele mingit garantiid. Inglismaa ei soovinud, et Prantsusmaa ja Nõukogude Liit sõlmiksid vastastikuse abistamise pakti, ja andis seepärast Idapakti kavale õnnistuse. See võimaldas rahustada ka Inglismaa avalikku arvamust, mis nõudis, et ohjeldataks Saksamaa agressiivsust. Prantsusmaa soovis Idapakti kavaga avaldada Saksamaale survet, et korraldada temaga oma suhted. Idapakti kavast kokkuvõtet tehes tuleb tõdeda, et see näitas ilmekalt Euroopa, eriti Ida-Euroopa riikide suhtumist oma ning teiste riikide julgeolekusse ja riikidevahelisi vastuolusid. Kollektiivse julgeoleku poliitika nurjus, kuid seda mitte ühe või teise väikeriigi – Eesti ja Läti – soovimatuse tõttu sellega ühineda, vaid eeskätt diktatuuririikide Nõukogude Liidu, Saksamaa, aga ka Prantsusmaa ja Inglismaa vastuolude tõttu.