

Northern European Overture to War, 1939–1941

From Memel to Barbarossa

Edited by

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2013

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Northern European overture to war, 1939–1941 : from Memel to Barbarossa / edited by Michael H. Clemmesen, Marcus S. Faulkner.

pages cm. -- (History of warfare, ISSN 1385-7827 ; volume 87)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-24908-0 (hardback : acid-free paper) -- ISBN 978-90-04-24909-7 (e-book) 1. World War, 1939–1945--Campaigns--Europe, Northern. 2. World War, 1939–1945--Campaigns--Scandinavia. 3. World War, 1939–1945--Naval operations. 4. Baltic Sea--History, Naval--20th century. 5. World War, 1939–1945--Diplomatic history. 6. Europe, Northern--Strategic aspects. 7. Scandinavia--Strategic aspects. 8. Baltic Sea Region--Strategic aspects. I. Clemmesen, Michael Hesselholt, 1944- II. Faulkner, Marcus.

D756.3.N67 2013

940.54'21--dc23

2013002994

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1385-7827

ISBN 978 90 04 24908 0 (hardback)

ISBN 978 90 04 24909 7 (e-book)

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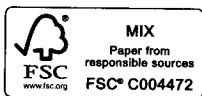
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THE LITHUANIAN REACTION TO THE LOSS OF KLAIPĖDA
AND THE COMBINED GIFT OF SOVIET "SECURITY ASSISTANCE"
AND VILNIUS

Česlovas Laurinavičius

To regard the interwar Klaipėda (Memel) and Vilnius (Wilno, Vilna) questions as problems specific to Lithuania alone would be incorrect. It would be more accurate to regard both issues, including the restoration of the Lithuanian state itself, as general symptoms of the crisis of the Versailles system. It is hardly possible to understand the reaction of the Lithuanian government and public to the Klaipėda and Vilnius questions by analysing them in isolation from the general context of the development of European political structures during the twentieth century. Arnold Toynbee was among the first to note the close connection between the Klaipėda and Vilnius questions.¹ Subsequently, Alfred Senn extensively examined this link.² Admittedly, both of these authors stress the political-diplomatic aspect of Lithuania's problems that was clear during the years following the end of the Great War. However, it appears that Lithuania's problems had deeper conceptual grounds too. Of course, we may see the main idea of the Versailles system as democratising Europe's political-state structure, but the practical implementation of such an aim came up against great difficulties. Following the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires and the foundation in their wake of a structure of nation states, the lack of a balance of power became obvious.³ Unfortunately, the new states did not become agents of stability, as one of the chief creators of the Versailles system, American president Woodrow Wilson, had hoped. The new states were simply too small and weak to stand up to reactionary pressure from imperial forces. Moreover, the civilising potential of these states was insufficient for them to be able to integrate the territories they inherited from the former empires in a democratic manner. The view that the two world wars were in fact a single

¹ A.J. Toynbee: *Survey of International Affairs 1920–1923* (London 1925).

² A.E. Senn: *The Great Powers, Lithuania and the Vilna Question* (Leiden 1966).

³ H. Seton-Watson: *Eastern Europe Between The Wars (1918–1941)* (Cambridge 1945).
J. Rothschild and N.M. Wingfield: *Return to diversity. A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II* (New York/Oxford 2000).

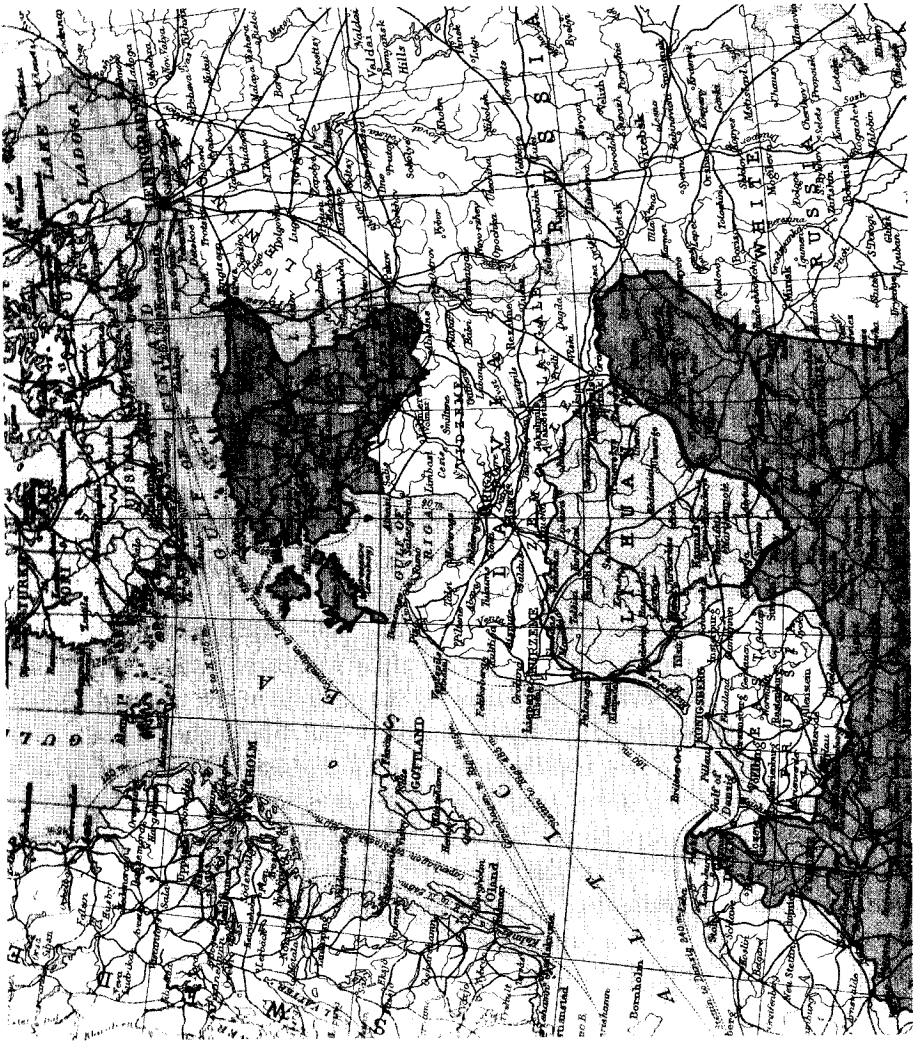


Fig. 8.1. The south-eastern Baltic Sea area in 1939.⁴

⁴ Basic map before processing from www.conflicts.rem33.

phenomenon beginning in 1914 and ending in 1945 is not without grounds. Meanwhile, the interwar period can be regarded as a sort of truce, accompanied by constant pressure and uncertainty, which was interrupted from time to time by local conflicts. In one way or another, the case of Lithuania with its Klaipėda and Vilnius questions seems to justify such a view.

The Loss of Security and Klaipėda

Lithuania's loss of Klaipėda must be seen in the context of the policy of appeasement of Germany by the Western powers. German influence and direct control of east-central Europe would be accepted at the expense of that of the Soviet Union. Lithuania itself felt the effect of the distancing of Soviet Russia from Europe when Kaunas received an ultimatum from Poland on 17 March 1938. The Soviet Union reacted relatively passively to the Polish ultimatum, for formally Poland was only demanding the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kaunas and Warsaw. However, for Lithuania this signified not only a deep moral insult but also the loss of its own strategic weight, which had allowed the country to feel more or less secure and maintain its hope in the future to fulfil its dream of regaining Vilnius as its capital.⁵

Historians have not found proof that Poland coordinated its actions with those of Germany before presenting its ultimatum to Lithuania. Whatever the case may be, objective logic reveals a correlation between the actions of Warsaw and Berlin. It was no coincidence that the day after Warsaw's ultimatum, Hitler ordered the occupation of the Memel land "as far as the River Dubysa" should war break out between Lithuania and Poland.⁶ The same day, Joachim von Ribbentrop gave the Lithuanian representative in Berlin, Jurgis Šaulys, another kind of ultimatum, namely the so-called eleven demands regarding the Memel land. State Secretary Ernst Weizsäcker presented Ribbentrop's demands in writing to Šaulys on

⁵ Algirdas M. Budreckis: Lenkų ultimatumas (The Polish Ultimatum), in *Aidai*, 1968, 4, pp. 171–77. George Sakwa: The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania in March 1938, *Slavonic and East European Review* (1977), 2, pp. 77–89. Alfred E. Senn: The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania, March 1938, *Journal of Baltic Studies* (1982), 2, pp. 65–76. Robert Vitas: The Polish-Lithuanian Crisis of 1938. Events Surrounding the Ultimatum, in *Lithuanus* (1984), 2, pp. 43–73. Jürgen Pagel: Der polnisch-litauische Streit um Wilna und die Haltung der Sowjetunion 1918–1938, in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 40 (1992) H.1, pp. 70–75.

⁶ Joachim Tauber: *Klaipėdos kraštas: tarp Lietuvos ir Vokietijos* (The Klaipėda District Between Lithuania and Germany) Rankraštis (Manuscript) (2007), p. 83.

25 March.⁷ Formally Lithuania was only required to soften its police and bureaucratic regime in the Klaipėda District and hold to the autonomous status afforded the district by international convention. However, practically, considering the rising pro-Nazi separatist movement in the Klaipėda District, the abolition of martial law and political democratisation signified the prospect of Lithuania's losing effective control of the territory. Admittedly, Ribbentrop's demands were not presented in a stern fashion and Kaunas was given as long as six months in which to comply with the demands.⁸ This was probably because Berlin had been concentrating its attention on the Sudetenland crisis since the spring of 1938. Thus Kaunas was in no particular hurry to carry out the German demands, adopting the tactic of making partial concessions in the Klaipėda District (a sort of salami tactic), thereby seeking to obtain recognition from Berlin of its borders in the form of a non-aggression pact.⁹

It should be stressed that Lithuania, while offering Germany a non-aggression treaty, at the same time maintained a more anti-German line during the Sudetenland crisis. Unlike the other Baltic countries, Lithuania was unwilling to abandon its obligations according to the League of Nations' Paragraph Sixteen until as late as September 1938. In other words, Lithuania was favourable to eventually allowing the Red Army to cross through its territory en route to aid Czechoslovakia. Foreign Minister Stasys Lozoraitis announced the suspension of Lithuania's obligations under Paragraph Sixteen only during the session of the League of Nations' Assembly on 21 September. During the summer of 1938 Lithuania also attempted to seek support from Moscow over the Klaipėda question. The Lithuanian politician Antanas Merkys visited the Soviet capital and was received by Commissar Maksim Litvinov himself.¹⁰ However, the visit produced no palpable results; Moscow merely urged Kaunas "to strengthen its struggle against fascism"¹¹ and offered no concrete support.

⁷ Lithuanian Central State Archive (LCVA), J. Šaulys's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kaunas 29 March 1938, 383/7/2048/ pp. 327–29.

⁸ Piotr Łossowski: *Klaipėda kontra Memel. Problem Klajpedy w latach 1918–1939–1945* (Klaipėda versus Memel. The Klaipėda Problem in 1918–1939–1945) (Warsaw 2007), p. 146.

⁹ LCVA. Reports from the Lithuanian legation in Berlin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kaunas 9 and 20.5.1938. 383/7/2048/ pp. 277–85, 291–96. Stasys Lozoraitis's report about his talk with Ribbentrop 25.6.1938. 383/7/1891/ pp. 22–27. Ribbentrop wrote in his diary: "I rejected references to the possibility of signing a German-Lithuanian non-aggression pact because of the poor situation in the Klaipėda district. At first, basic changes should be made there." (Tauber: *Klaipėdos kraštas*, p. 129).

¹⁰ LCVA. J. Baltrušaitis, Lithuanian minister in Moscow, report to Kaunas 24 July 1938, 383/7/1215/ pp. 201.

¹¹ Concerning the Klaipėda problem see *Правда* (Pravda), 24 July 1938.

Meanwhile, time was working against Lithuania. Berlin adopted a much harsher tone after the Munich Treaty. On 21 October Hitler restated his order of 18 March to “prepare to occupy the Memel land shortly” and on 24 November this order was confirmed once more.¹² By November 1938 Lithuania had implemented all eleven German demands and abolished martial law in the district. However, new demands continued to come from Berlin. There was condemnation of the fact that the Lithuanian police had not been removed from the Memel land, that the governor had used his powers of veto over the regional diet and that inhabitants of the region were required to serve in the Lithuanian military. Visa-free travel between the region and the Third Reich was demanded and so forth.¹³ Meanwhile Lithuanian control of the Klaipėda District became nominal.

Archival records for November and December 1938 reflect the desperate attempts made by the Lithuanian authorities to find means by which they might soften the pressure applied by Germany. The envoy in Berlin was changed: the moderate Jurgis Šaulys was replaced by the pro-German Kazys Škirpa. There was a government reshuffle: Juozas Urbšys replaced Stasys Lozoraitis as foreign minister. At the same time attempts were made to arrange a meeting with German leaders such as Ribbentrop or even Hitler himself in order to discover what the Lithuanian authorities still had to do to satisfy the Reich.¹⁴ The Lithuanian government was inclined to agree to a radical change in the Klaipėda District statutes, granting Klaipėda the status of free city along the lines of Gdańsk (Danzig).¹⁵

However the attempts of Lithuanian diplomats to gain an audience with German leaders, with whom they hoped to explain their positions and stabilise the situation more or less, were unsuccessful. According to a directive issued by the *Auswärtiges Amt*, German diplomatic tactics were as follows: to demonstrate a lack of confidence in the Lithuanians without

¹² Kazys Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos* (The Twilight of Lithuanian Independence) (Chicago, Vilnius 1999), p. 147.

¹³ LCVA. 383/7/2048/ pp. 166–69, 170–73, 179–83, 184–88, 194, 210, 211–12, 221–25.

¹⁴ LCVA. 383/7/2048/ pp. 137–39, 145, 146–47, 148–149, 150–52, 156, 157, 159, 160, 166–69, 170–73.

¹⁵ Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, pp. 117–18. In December 1938 during a conversation in Königsberg the Lithuanian consul general, L. Dymša, said that “he was authorized by his Government to clarify that Lithuania was ready to implement all German preferences concerning the Klaipėda District, even those, which were beyond the limits of the Klaipėda District Statutes, as long as Lithuanian national honour would not suffer”. During these conversations Dymša even raised the possibility that the Klaipėda District might be administered jointly by Germany and Lithuania (Tauber: *Klaipėdos kraštas*, p. 134).

revealing what exactly they wanted.¹⁶ It was hoped that after being demoralised and backed into a corner Lithuania would surrender to Berlin's will and cede Klaipėda to the Third Reich "voluntarily".

Given such a situation, two positions developed within the Lithuanian political elite with regard to the Klaipėda question. Those in power, including President Anatanas Smetona himself, drew the conclusion that Germany was seeking the eventual removal of the Klaipėda District from Lithuania. On 31 December 1938 Urbšys informed the Lithuanian consul general in Königsberg, Leopoldas Dymša, that "we favour friendly relations with Berlin while maintaining the territorial status quo. That is the final limit. After that Lithuania will defend itself to the utmost." They planned armed resistance.¹⁷ However, in reality, opposition to a German move was considered possible only if there were a chance of obtaining aid from outside. At the same time, they foresaw that it might be necessary to accept the loss of Klaipėda to keep the sovereignty of the rest of Lithuania.¹⁸

Meanwhile, opposition forces criticised the government's favoured course and put forward their own. They considered it possible to maintain links with the Klaipėda District, albeit formally, by entering a closer alliance with Germany. One of those leading this position was Kazys Škirpa, who had been Lithuanian envoy to Berlin since the end of 1938.¹⁹ Of course, Škirpa was close in his views to the pro-fascist Voldemarists. However, at the time not only radical nationalists favoured rapprochement with Germany; so did centrist Christian Democrats and even representatives of the left-wing People's Party (*liaudininkai*). They all formed a strange alliance called the "General Campaign" (*Bendras žygis*) with the basic aim of overthrowing the Smetona regime.²⁰ In their attempt, the members of the opposition gave very little consideration to the fact that an alliance with Germany would have meant joining the Anti-Comintern Pact, and implementing the Nuremberg Laws with regard to the Jews and other paraphernalia typical of Nazi order. This position on the part of the opposition appears even more paradoxical given that public opinion thus

¹⁶ Tauber: *Klaipėdos kraštas*, p. 137.

¹⁷ LCVA, 383/7/2048/ p. 3.

¹⁸ LCVA. The Decision of Lithuania's Government on 20 March 1939. 923/1/1080/ p. 46.

¹⁹ Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, pp. 127, 135. According to Škirpa, the ambassadors of Great Britain and France recommended Lithuania create closer ties with Germany.

²⁰ Gediminas Rudis: Jungtinis antismetoninis opozicijos sąjūdis 1938–1939 metais (Movement of Joint Opposition against President A. Smetona in 1938–1939), in *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis, 1996 metai* (Vilnius 1997), pp. 199–204.

far had not been pro-German. Let us say that during the Sudetenland crisis Lithuanian public sympathy was clearly with Czechoslovakia. In one way or another, opposition to Lithuanian government policy during the Klaipėda crisis was a serious factor. It should be stressed that the activities of its General Campaign coalition took effect in Klaipėda, particularly after martial law was suspended on 1 November 1938. Therefore, as the Smetona regime sought to resolve the crisis it also had to work on how to stay in power itself. In mid-December 1938 the authorities arrested a group of prominent Christian Democrats and members of the People's Party, and early the next year the so-called Case of the Thirty-three came before the courts.²¹

Meanwhile, the Klaipėda crisis reached an unexpected denouement. We should regard the visit paid by the Lithuanian foreign minister, Juozas Urbšys, to Ribbentrop on 20 March 1939 as a diplomatic error. The ultimatum presented by Ribbentrop during that visit to return the Klaipėda District to Germany was a blow to Smetona's regime. At the same time, it was also a blow to the pro-German opposition to his power. Part of the blame for Urbšys's visit to Ribbentrop was laid at Škirpa's door. As rumours spread after 10 March of plans for a "Klaipėda *Anschluss*", Škirpa received instructions from Kaunas to find out how well-founded these were. He paid the relevant visits to Reich institutions to be convinced that "the rumours are baseless" and he informed Kaunas to that effect.²² Furthermore, the *Auswärtiges Amt* issued a public denial of rumours that preparations were underway for a Klaipėda *Anschluss* but this statement was made only to foreign press agencies. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Urbšys forced Škirpa to add his own signature to the treaty with Germany besides that of the foreign minister.²³ One way or another, public dissatisfaction with the loss of the Klaipėda District was not concentrated in opposition to the Smetona regime.

Nevertheless, a few days after the Klaipėda *Anschluss*, a change in policy occurred in the international arena, which became significant. The formation of an anti-German coalition began and appeasement appeared to be at an end. In this context, the incipient General Campaign coalition

²¹ LCVA. J. Urbšys's correspondence with the Lithuanian minister in Washington, Povilas Žadeikis, 17.12.1938. 383/7/2048/ pp. 41–49. Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, pp. 130–31.

²² Pramanyti gandai apie Klaipėdą (Fictitious rumours concerning Klaipėda), in *Lietuvos aidas*, 17 March 1939.

²³ Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 145–46. Škirpa alleged that blaming him for the loss of Klaipėda was a fabrication of Smetona's government.

disintegrated at once. The Case of the Thirty-three was suspended. Representatives of the main opposition parties—the Christian Democrats and the People's Party—were invited to join the government.²⁴ As a result, Smetona's regime survived the loss of Klaipėda, and after this there was a surge of patriotic fervour in Lithuania and even national unity around the new government.²⁵ However, competition for influence continued among the various political parties.²⁶

The international aspect of the Klaipėda *Anschluss* is also worthy of attention. The threat of losing Klaipėda had arisen by the end of 1938, as elections to the regional diet approached. According to the scenario drafted by the *Auswärtiges Amt* on 25 November 1938, the annexation of Klaipėda to the Third Reich was supposed to take place immediately after the elections "on the basis of impulsive self-determination". As this scenario states, the momentum for such action was so far advanced that "only an unambiguous order from the Führer" could possibly have halted it.²⁷ It appears that such an order was issued on 28 November; that day the head of Reich Security, Reinhard Heydrich, informed Ribbentrop that "bearing in mind the general political situation any impulsive course of events in the Klaipėda District would not please the Reich".²⁸ The next day Berlin asked its envoy in Kaunas, Zechlin, how likely it was that Lithuania would surrender Klaipėda voluntarily.²⁹ From Zechlin's reply it was clear that there was scant likelihood of such an outcome since the Lithuanians "hope for guarantees from Poland and Soviet Russia".³⁰ Early in December all the relevant German structures had been informed that action in Klaipėda was being "postponed once more".³¹

It is probable that the joint communiqué issued by Poland and the USSR on 26 November 1938, confirming their mutual non-aggression pact

²⁴ For example, the detained Christian Democrat Leonas Bistras became minister of education.

²⁵ Liudas Truska: *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* (Antanas Smetona and his Times) (Vilnius 1996), pp. 350–58.

²⁶ There were rumours about the defeated pro-German plot on April 1939 in Lithuania, but documents have not been found which would confirm the fact. LCVA, 383/7/1074/ pp. 84, 119.

²⁷ Łossowski: *Klaipėda kontra Memel*, p. 157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁹ In December 1938 a number of suggestions from Riga and Tallinn for ceding the Klaipėda District "voluntarily" reached Kaunas, but Warsaw proposed Kaunas take the opposite policy of "holding on to Klaipėda". LCVA, 383/7/2048/ pp. 58, 62, 72, 73.

³⁰ Łossowski: *Klaipėda kontra Memel*, p. 159. Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 119. Incidentally, Zechlin emphasised that the Lithuanian minister in Moscow, J. Baltrušaitis, had paid a sudden visit to Kaunas on 30 November.

³¹ Tauber: *Klaipėdos kraštas*, p. 89.

of 1932, had an influence on this matter. Apparently, Berlin took some time to assess how realistic the rapprochement between Moscow and Warsaw was. Material at our disposal suggests how the Reich leaders at the time thought that because Lithuania was under pressure over Klaipėda and was disinclined to yield, it might call on Poland for assistance and the latter could be expected to act as follows: either Poland would aid Lithuania (and in this case Red Army actions might occur behind Poland's back) or Poland might demand compensation from the Reich and that would be contrary to German interests.

As pressure from the German side reduced relatively, Lithuania began to feel an ever greater interest in matters Klaipėdan from the Polish side. Lithuania was favourable to such attention from Poland. In mid-December 1938 Merkys went to Warsaw. For Merkys, Kaunas only planned a "personal" visit, but in Warsaw Merkys was welcomed with great pomp.³² Soon after this, on 22 December, a commercial treaty was signed between Poland and Lithuania. Warsaw was demonstrating its interest in transit traffic through the port of Klaipėda. From the end of 1938 and during the first months of 1939, the Polish press published many articles expressing the importance of the port in Klaipėda to Lithuania and encouragement for Lithuania in resisting pressure from Germany.³³ The impression may have formed in Lithuania that Poland was prepared seriously to become involved in the defence of Klaipėda.

Unfortunately, the reality was quite different. As it maintained a political balancing act between its powerful neighbours and had practically lost contact as an ally with the Western powers, Poland was clearly too weak for such a move in the Baltic in general and on the Klaipėda question in particular. It is likely that the then head of Polish foreign policy, Józef Beck, was inclined to pretend concern for Klaipėda in order to deflect German pressure from Polish affairs. We should bear in mind that German expansion towards Klaipėda was associated with further expansion through the eastern Baltic towards the USSR. This was the way the US State Department understood German expansion at the time,³⁴ as indeed did Europe in

³² Information about A. Merkys's visit to Warsaw, LCVA, 383/7/2014/ pp. 238–39, 241–45.

³³ Articles favourable to Lithuania appeared in *Kurjer Wilenski* on 15 January 1939, *Polityka* on 25 January, *Mały Dziennik* on 31 January, and *Gonec Warszawski* on 2 February 1939. LCVA, 383/7/1074/ pp. 380, 392–93, 422–23.

³⁴ LCVA. P. Žadeikis report from Washington to Kaunas, 17 December 1938, 383/7/2048/ p. 41.

general³⁵ and, of course, Soviet diplomats.³⁶ There are grounds for thinking that Beck's tactics of assumed concern influenced decisions made in Berlin. We cannot rule out the supposition that the German decision to occupy Klaipėda was encouraged by, among other things, the fact that during the first days of March 1939 the Polish consul recently established in Klaipėda became more active.³⁷

However, when Lithuania approached Poland immediately before the so-called Klaipėda *Anschluss* over the matter of whether it could expect military aid, Warsaw gave no positive reply. Judging from Mitkiewicz's memoirs, the chief of the Lithuanian army, Stasys Raštikis, approached Warsaw on 10 March via Polish diplomatic and military representatives in Kaunas with a proposal to form a Polish-Lithuanian military alliance, guaranteed by Soviet Russia and the Western powers. Apparently Latvia and Estonia would join such an alliance too. Although this proposal "aroused enthusiasm" among Polish representatives in Kaunas, it did not enthuse Warsaw. Back in the summer of 1938 Beck had made it known privately that he had no inclination to become involved in the Klaipėda question.³⁸

On the other hand, at that time there was no sign that the Western states would be inclined to become involved in order to halt German expansion towards Klaipėda. Indeed the opposite was the case, as Western powers informally recommended that Kaunas surrender Klaipėda to Germany. It seems that the speech given by Stalin to the party congress on 10 March 1939 served as a definitive signal to the Reich that no serious obstacles remained to further German expansion. Admittedly, dissatisfaction was expressed by the USSR over the Klaipėda *Anschluss*, but no more was done.³⁹

³⁵ The Swiss newspaper *Die Weltwoche* predicted that "Germany will not stop at Memel, because the Memelland points the way like a finger to Libau". LCVA, 383/7/1074/ pp. 161–63.

³⁶ *God krizisa. Dokumenty i materialy.* (Crises Years. Documents and Materials). T.1. (Moscow 1990), p. 106. Sbornik Dokumentov: *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T.1. SSSR i Litovskaya Respublika (mart 1939–avgust 1940 g.g.)* (USSR and Lithuania during the World War II. Vol. 1: USSR and Republic of Lithuania (March 1939–August 1940) (Vilnius 2006), p. 78.

³⁷ *Kurjer Warszawski*, 29 March 1939. Łossowski: *Klaipėda kontra Memel*, pp. 172–73.

³⁸ Leon Mitkiewicz: *Wspomnienia kowieńskie 1938–1939* (Warsaw, 1990) pp. 155–57, 185, 190–92. Piotr Łossowski: *Klaipėda kontra Memel*, p. 165.

³⁹ The message from the USSR reached Lithuania (24 March 1939) that the Soviets had decided to express dissatisfaction over the *Anschluss* of Klaipėda by boycotting Klaipėda seaport. LCVA, 923/1/1074/ pp. 211–14. SSSR - *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T.1. Dokumenty vneshney politiki. T. 22, kn 1* (Documents and foreign policy, volume 22, book 1) (Moscow 1992), pp. 75–79.

The Recovery of Vilnius

If the loss of Klaipėda was conditioned by a kind of absence of the Russian factor, then the recovery of Vilnius marked that factor's return to European politics. The guarantees proclaimed by Britain for Poland and the discussions that began between the Western powers and the USSR over an eventual coalition gave new impetus to the international status quo, including the position held by Lithuania. While the Polish envoy in Kaunas said that "Poland will not lift a finger", when Ribbentrop presented his ultimatum,⁴⁰ Kaunas was picking up favourable signals from Warsaw by the beginning of April. On 17 April 1939 the Polish envoy Franciszek Charwat presented a declaration to the Lithuanian government to the effect that in the case of German aggression towards Lithuania, Poland would provide assistance.⁴¹ Talk by Polish diplomats about the possibility for Lithuania to regain the lost Klaipėda was recorded.⁴² At the same time, signals began to come from Berlin that Lithuania might recover Vilnius. During the visit of Lithuanian Army Commander Stasys Raštikis to Berlin on 20 April 1939, German generals asked "how much Lithuanians missed Vilnius".⁴³ In general, from April 1939 Warsaw and Berlin began a strange kind of competition to see which could attract Lithuania to its side.⁴⁴

Lithuania declared itself to be neutral and attempted to maintain a balance between Poland and Germany. However, at the same time attempts can be detected in Lithuania's diplomatic actions to exploit its position to strengthen the Russian factor as Moscow returned to the European arena. We may take the project for guarantees offered to the Western powers on 17 April 1939 by Litvinov as the turning point.⁴⁵ Moreover, according to the Litvinov proposal, guarantees would be offered to "eastern European countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea that has a border with the USSR".

⁴⁰ *SSSR - Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T 1*, p. 77.

⁴¹ Leon Mitkiewicz: *Wspomnienia kowieńskie*, p. 203.

⁴² LCVA. J. Urbšys's instructions of 11 May 1939 to Lithuanian Legations, 383/7/2089/p. 46.

⁴³ Stasys Raštikis: *Kovose dėl Lietuvos. Kario atsiminimai T.1*. (Fighting for Lithuania. A Soldier's Memoirs, vol. 1) (Vilnius 1990), p. 560. On 1 May 1939 the USSR diplomat G. Astakhov in Berlin told J. Kajeckas that "now Lithuania will be able to retake Vilnius". (LCVA, 383/7/2089/ pp. 47–48). German and Russian talks about the possibility of Lithuania's retaking Vilnius were recorded in Urbšys's instruction of 11 May 1939.

⁴⁴ During the spring and summer of 1939 the German press periodically reported about the danger to Lithuania from Poland, often noting the Vilnius problem. On the other hand, Polish newspapers wrote about the danger to Lithuania from the German side. Press Review. LCVA, 383/7/1084.

⁴⁵ *SSSR - Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T 1*, pp. 80–81.

In Litvinov's cover note to Stalin it was explained why the countries offered such a guarantee were not listed by name, since in such a case they would have had to not mention Lithuania, since it had no border with the USSR and such a failure to include Lithuania in the system of guarantees would serve as a pretext for Germany to occupy the country. According to Litvinov, it would be better for the Western powers to effect the inclusion of Lithuania within the system of guarantees.⁴⁶ We might surmise that Litvinov's non-mention of Lithuania, which had no common border with the USSR, was intended not to alarm Poland.⁴⁷

It remains uncertain when the contents of this project were made plain, but clearly the very premise that the Soviet Union was making guarantees was of significance for Lithuanian diplomacy. Even though officially Lithuanian representatives strove to maintain the same position as Estonia and Latvia, namely that the guarantees were a matter for only the Baltic States to decide, unofficially Lithuanian diplomats combined different tracks including Lithuanian inclusion in the structure of guarantees being offered by Moscow.

In one case it was proposed that the Baltic States form a military alliance. As early as mid-April the Lithuanian envoy to Tallinn, Bronius Dailidė, raised this idea with the Estonian government.⁴⁸ A little later Lozoraitis did the same with the Latvian government.⁴⁹ Klimas actively propounded the same proposal among his fellow representatives of the Baltic States in Paris.⁵⁰ It may be that the idea behind the proposal came from 1934 discussions of a so-called Eastern Pact, whereby, according to the plans of Moscow and Paris, the Baltic States were supposed to become a single political-military unit. In 1939, as in 1934, the idea of a Baltic alliance did not take off, primarily because the Estonians and Latvians suspected that the Lithuanians would use such an alliance to settle the Vilnius and Klaipėda questions.

Another option was the idea of the general neutral status of the Baltic States. From the end of April 1939, Lithuanian diplomats thought that

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁷ For Litvinov's position concerning the problem of the USSR's "neighbours" see Česlovas Laurinavičius: *Protokół Litwinowa i dyplomacja Litewska (The Litvinov Protocol and Lithuanian Diplomacy)*, in *Litvano-Slavica Posnanensia. Studia Historica*. T.VIII. (Poznań, 2001), pp. 173–93.

⁴⁸ Algimantas Kasparavičius: *Lietuva 1938–1939 metais (Lithuania in 1938–1939)* (2010), p. 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 142–44.

⁵⁰ LCVA. P. Klimas's reports from Paris to Kaunas, 18 May 1939 and 17 July 1939, 648/1/30/ p. 70; 383/7/2089/ p. 34.

both the Western powers and the USSR on one side, and Germany on the other would guarantee the neutrality of the Baltic States (by analogy with Belgium).⁵¹ Furthermore, documents at our disposal would allow us to suspect that individual diplomats followed different priorities when seeking such guarantees. For example, Klimas stressed first and foremost the need to obtain guarantees from the USSR, Poland and the Western powers,⁵² while it is impossible to detect any priorities in the stance taken by the envoy in London, Bronius Balutis, on this matter.⁵³ Meanwhile, Deputy Minister Kazimieras Bizauskas and Škirpa sounded out possibilities for securing guarantees from Germany.⁵⁴ At the same time, the director of the Political Department, Edvardas Turauskas, in his conversation with the British envoy Thomas Preston on 15 June 1939 referred to the idea of general guarantees as “comical” and promoted the same position as Latvia and Estonia.⁵⁵ It may be that the different priorities adopted by these diplomats were coincidental or determined by the places where they resided. However, we cannot rule out the supposition that these priorities were influenced by the stances taken by the envoys with regard to one area of domestic political rivalry or another.

The very idea that the Baltic States could obtain international guarantees during the 1939 crisis really had no chance of fulfilment. The Latvian foreign minister, Munters, outlined such realities with sufficiently open cynicism to the Lithuanian representative, Pranas Dailidė, during a meeting in July 1939.⁵⁶ When Bizauskas, in a conversation with Zechlin, mentioned the precedent of Belgium as an opportunity for the Baltic States (he was talking about Germany’s commitment to guarantee the neutrality of Belgium in 1937), the latter clearly avoided the conversation on that topic by saying that he could not recall what Germany had promised to Belgium.

In general terms we may state that the great powers were not interested, on the whole, in the maintenance of the status quo in the eastern Baltic. Undoubtedly Germany only viewed the region as a place for strategic expansion. Sensing a threat from the eastern Baltic, the Soviet Union

⁵¹ LCVA. Report from the Lithuanian legation in Riga, 1 July 1939, 383/7/2143/ p. 43.

⁵² LCVA. P. Klimas’s report from Paris to Kaunas, 20 April 1939 and 27 June 1939, 383/7/2089/ pp. 49–50; 2143/ pp. 48–49.

⁵³ LCVA. B. Balutis’s report from London to Kaunas, 22 June 1939, 383/7/2089/ p. 40.

⁵⁴ LCVA. K. Bizauskas’s report on his conversation with Zechlin, 1 July 1939, 383/7/2089/38; K. Škirpa’s letter to K. Bizauskas 22 August 1939, 383/7/2115/ p. 84.

⁵⁵ SSSR - *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T1.*, pp. 106–07.

⁵⁶ LCVA. P. Dailidė’s (brother of B. Dailidė) report from Riga to Kaunas, 383/7/2143/ pp. 28–32.

planned to change the political situation of the region radically. On the one hand, Britain did not approve of the Soviet guarantees to the Baltic States, but on the other it would not offer those states guarantees itself—despite unclear obligations to Poland where Lithuania was concerned, it left the eastern Baltic region open to its eventual fate.⁵⁷ It should be stressed that in such a context the aims of Lithuania were also open to changes in the status quo. Therefore, we may guess that the Lithuanian diplomats themselves also used the idea of general neutral status of the Baltic States only for speculation, while having the aim of freeing Lithuania in one way or another from the diplomatic framework created for it by Poland and Germany.

Finally, there was a third way in which Lithuanian diplomats sought to exploit the Russian factor, namely a direct appeal to Soviet representatives for Lithuania to be included in the sphere of guarantees proposed by the USSR and the Western powers. On 15 May 1939 the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, Ladas Natkevičius, claimed in an interview with Molotov's deputy that, left without any guarantees, Lithuania would be "in a very dangerous predicament".⁵⁸ A few days later Natkevičius approached Potemkin on the same matter.⁵⁹ On 17 June the Lithuanian envoy Pranas Dailidė complained to the USSR's representative Ivan Zotov that without guarantees from the USSR, Britain and France, Lithuania would be left dangerously dependent on Germany and Poland.⁶⁰ Klimas expressed this same fear in his 27 June letter to Bizauskas. According to Klimas, it was essential to meet with Moscow so that Lithuania could be included in the three states' guarantees.⁶¹

The Soviet representatives reacted carefully to the Lithuanian requests. In his reply to Natkevičius, Potemkin excused himself, explaining that Britain would object to including Lithuania in the guarantee system. Apparently, according to the British, the guarantee issue could be raised only with respect to neighbouring countries.⁶² This meant that Lithuania and the USSR were affected by their old chronic problem embedded in the Treaty of Riga (5 October 1920), whereby they lost a common border, even though the Treaty of Moscow of 12 July 1920 had established their

⁵⁷ David M. Crowe, Jr: Great Britain and the Baltic States, 1938–1939, in S. Vardys and R. Misiunas (eds.): *The Baltic States in Peace and War, 1917–1945* (London 1978), pp. 110–119.

⁵⁸ SSSR – *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny*. T 1, pp. 94–96.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶¹ LCVA, 383/7/2143/ pp. 48–49.

⁶² SSSR – *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny*. T 1, p. 95.

common border. It should be stressed that the Treaty of Moscow had not been annulled in the wake of the Treaty of Riga and remained valid for Lithuania and the Soviet Union in 1939. In other words, raising the issue of whether Lithuania and the USSR were neighbours signified direct claims for territorial revision in the region.

Attempts by Lithuanian diplomats to actualise the Russian factor were made cautiously under certain circumstances and only by some of the Kaunas diplomats. We only have records of initiatives made on this matter by Natkevičius, the brothers Dailidė, Klimas and Defence Minister Kazys Musteikis.⁶³ The official Lithuanian position was the same as that of Latvia and Estonia. For example, in a conversation on 15 June with Tom Preston, Edvardas Turauskas agreed completely with the Estonian and Latvian position on the matter of guarantees, at the same time stressing the traditional peril posed by Russian imperialism with regard to the Baltic States.⁶⁴ From July, when the definition of indirect aggression made negotiations with Moscow difficult, Lithuanian diplomats became even more cautious. Even so, according to Preston, Lithuania's position regarding the guarantee issue remained favourable.⁶⁵

There are grounds to assert that the caution shown by Lithuanian diplomats regarding the guarantees issue was conditioned not only by external threats, but also by the orientation of political groupings within Lithuania itself. For various reasons, the ruling group headed by Smetona was not satisfied with the eventual rise in German or Polish influence in Lithuania and therefore it attempted to exploit the Russian factor as a counterweight to its two neighbours. Meanwhile, the Christian Democrats, apparently, would not have opposed the establishment of closer relations with Poland, while a clash of outlook made their views on Russia more reserved.

In this context, the various stances adopted by Lithuanian politicians towards the Anglo-Polish guarantee treaty, according to which provision was provided for assistance in case of direct or indirect aggression, are worth noting. The treaty was drafted on 6 April 1939. Although the treaty was confidential, it was possible to foresee that according to the concept of "indirect aggression", Lithuania was included in the area under guarantee. Thus from the correspondence of Klimas, who was close in his views to Smetona, we can determine that the "Polish guarantees" did not please

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

him. "We must have Russia as a 'contra assurance' in relations with Poland primarily and also with Germany", he wrote to Kaunas on 27 June.⁶⁶ We can detect a similar tendency, albeit not so clearly expressed, in reports from Natkevičius⁶⁷ and Pranas Dailidė.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Christian Democrat representatives held the view that the British-Polish treaty raised no problems for Lithuania. For example, in a conversation with Preston on 15 July 1939, Turauskas criticised the Soviet desire to impose their guarantees on the Baltic States and joked: "If, for example, Poland imposed its guarantees on us, we would be forced to seek a counterweight where we ought not".⁶⁹

It is likely that the Anglo-Polish treaty, as published by the *Sunday Times* in June, caused confusion within Lithuanian diplomatic circles. A little later the Soviet representative Andrei Zhdanov reacted to the *Sunday Times* article in the pages of *Pravda* ironically, writing that Lithuania had been offered guarantees without its knowledge or consent.⁷⁰ Lithuanian diplomats attempted to discover from British representatives what grounds Zhdanov had for such comments but they received no clear response. For example, when Natkevičius consulted the British envoy, William Seeds, he told him to ask William Strang. When asked, Strang replied that Zhdanov's claims were balderdash.⁷¹ After this incident, Lithuanian diplomats were given instructions not to take the initiative over guarantees for the country's neutrality.⁷² Thus we may note that the concept of "indirect aggression" had various meanings for Lithuanian diplomacy.

At the same time, the threat posed by Germany to Lithuanian sovereignty and peace in Europe as a whole acted to neutralise pro-German orientations within Lithuania. We may say that the eventual "gift" of Vilnius from Germany did not satisfy most of the Lithuanian political elite

⁶⁶ LCVA, 383/7/2143/ p. 49.

⁶⁷ LCVA. L. Natkevičius's report to Kaunas, 5 July 1939, 383/7/2143/ p. 37.

⁶⁸ P. Dailidė's report about his talk with V. Munters, 6 July 1939. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ This remark Turauskas once more brought to F. Charwat. According to Turauskas, Preston and Charwat had not made any objection. (Edvardas Turauskas: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybes netenkant—ivykiai* (1990) pp. 18, 44). But according to P. Dailidė, Munters, in conversation with him (6 July 1939), put forward the notion directly that Lithuania be transferred to Poland.

⁷⁰ A. Zhdanov: Angliyskoe i frantsuskoe pravitel'stba ne khotyat ravnovo dogovora s SSSR (The Governments of England and France do not want equal agreement with the USSR), *Pravda*, 29 July 1939, no. 178.

⁷¹ LCVA. L. Natkevičius's reports from Moscow to Kaunas, 5 and 21 July 1939, 383/7/2143/ pp. 37, 41.

⁷² LCVA. From Rome, S. Lozoraitis raised questions with K. Bizauskas concerning the guarantees and gave answers 5 July 1939, 383/7/2143/ pp. 35, 36.

and general public. Thus the Germans made quite a large amount of effort in their wish to entice the Lithuanians.

As early as 25 August the consul general in Königsberg, Dymša, was told in conversation with the Ribbentrop delegation on its way back from Moscow that “an opportunity had come for Lithuania to regain Vilnius”.⁷³ The same day, Natkevičius heard the same thought from the German counsellor in Moscow Kurt Tippelskirch.⁷⁴ On 29 August the director of the Policy Department of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, Ernst Woermann, summoned Škirpa to remind him significantly of the “pain suffered over Vilnius”. At the same time, Woermann expressed the hope that in the coming conflict Lithuania would maintain “favourable neutrality” with regard to Germany.⁷⁵ On 1 September Tippelskirch met Natkevičius again in Moscow and gave him to understand that Lithuania was “connected with Germany”.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, from the first days of the war until mid-September the German envoy in Kaunas, Erich Zechlin, and the military attaché, Emil Just, encouraged representatives of the Lithuanian government openly “to go to Vilnius”.⁷⁷ Furthermore, diplomatic persuasion was not the only tactic employed. In Lithuania it was common knowledge that military units dressed in Lithuanian uniforms and tanks with Lithuanian markings had been seen in the area around Königsberg, Insterburg, Tilsit and Klaipėda.⁷⁸ When the Lithuanians began their march on Vilnius these camouflaged German military units undoubtedly marched in the same direction across Lithuanian territory.

The efforts made by the Germans influenced certain groups of Lithuanian society. During the last days of September the general secretary of the People's Party, Jonas Statkus, openly agitated in the pages of the *Vairas* (Steering Wheel) journal for the abolition of Lithuanian neutrality.⁷⁹ Military organisations which supported the regime such as the Riflemen and Young Lithuanians openly expressed their discontent in

⁷³ LCVA. L. Dymša's report from Königsberg to Kaunas, 25 August 1939, 383/7/2149/ p. 49.

⁷⁴ LCVA. L. Natkevičius's report from Moscow to Kaunas, 25 August 1939, *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁵ LCVA. Note 29 August 1939 of Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 383/7/2089/2, p. 4.

⁷⁶ LCVA. L. Natkevičius's report to Kaunas, 1 September 1939, 383/7/2149/ p. 21.

⁷⁷ Regina Žepkaitė: *Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa 1939–1940* (A Segment of Vilnius History) (Vilnius 1990), pp. 21–23.

⁷⁸ Information about the visit of the Polish minister, F. Charwat, to the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26.08. 1939. LCVA, 383/7/2014/ p. 11.

⁷⁹ J. Statkus: *Momento reikalavimai* (Demands of the Moment), in *Vairas*, 31.8.1939, no. 35, pp. 673–74.

certain places with the failure to seize the opportunity to retake Vilnius.⁸⁰ Škirpa, seeing the unwillingness of the Lithuanian government to submit to German temptations, even began threatening to “shoot” out of despair.⁸¹ Moreover, Lithuania declared it would maintain neutrality in the German-Polish conflict only on 2 September, even though both its northern neighbours did so a day earlier.⁸² For not entirely clear reasons, Lithuania declared it had received Poland’s 28 August declaration of its respect for Lithuanian neutrality only on 31 August. Polish and British representatives in Kaunas had been very anxious about the position adopted by Lithuania during the last days of August.⁸³

However, Lithuania maintained its neutrality and all attempts by Germans diplomats and their henchmen to change the Lithuanian position failed. We have no evidence for cases where after a German attack on Poland any impulsive demands would have been made by mobs in Lithuania to “march on Vilnius”. Contemporaries asserted that Smetona and his supporters had been of the opinion from the outset of the war that Germany would lose for geo-political reasons. It is also important that Smetona had read *Mein Kampf* and entertained no illusions concerning the Nazis’ real plans. According to Smetona, maintenance of neutrality would facilitate the restoration of independence even if wartime occupation might not be avoided.⁸⁴

Of course, the decision of the Lithuanian government not to open military action against Poland was influenced by British pressure.⁸⁵ It is said that the British envoy in Kaunas, Preston, had even drafted a note declaring war on Lithuania. On the other hand, the conjuncture of domestic political rivalry also had an influence on the matter. As Raštikis claims in his memoirs, one of the aims of the proponents of the march on Vilnius was the deposition of Smetona.⁸⁶ Such an aim would not have suited the

⁸⁰ Truska: *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai*, p. 360.

⁸¹ Turauskas: *Lietuvos*, pp. 62–63.

⁸² LCVA, 383/7/2154/ p. 341.

⁸³ LCVA. Information from the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 September 1939, 383/7/2089/ 10; B. Balutis’s report from London to Kaunas, 25 September 1939, *ibid.*, 2154/ p. 210.

⁸⁴ Antanas Merkelis: *Antanas Smetona. Jo visuomeninė, kultūrinė ir politinė veikla* (Antanas Smetona. His Public, Cultural and Political Activities) (New York 1964), pp. 533–34, 679.

⁸⁵ LCVA. B. Balutis’s report on L. Collier’s démarche, 11 September 1939, 383/7/2089/ p. 3. It was supposed that the British minister in Kaunas, T. Preston, made up the note wherein Great Britain “declared war” on Lithuania.

⁸⁶ Raštikis: *Kovose dėl Lietuvos*, pp. 592.

main opposition forces (Christian Democrats and members of the People's Party) in the specific circumstances of September 1939.

It was another matter when the Soviet Union offered Lithuania Vilnius. On 12 September 1939 Bizauskas sent a telegram to London confirming the government's strict intention of maintaining Lithuanian neutrality. However, he added that "the situation would become complicated if the Russians made an offer concerning Vilnius".⁸⁷ After the Red Army crossed the Polish border, Lithuanian diplomats (Balutis in London and Klimas in Paris) began to accustom the British and French establishments in a way to the thought that the chance had been offered to Lithuania to regain Vilnius "lawfully".⁸⁸ Of course, Lithuania's position was also influenced by the muted reaction of the Western powers to the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland.

We may say that the behaviour of the Lithuanian government—from Natkevičius's first contacts in Moscow after the Red Army seized Vilnius to the signing of the so-called mutual assistance treaty—reveals its principal determination to accept the Soviet "gift". Admittedly, at first the hope was entertained that the fate of Estonia and Latvia could be avoided. This was based on the argument that Lithuania fulfilled the role of "*état-tampon*" between Germany and the USSR. We would not regard this argument as irrelevant.

It is worth noting once again that on the very first day of negotiations in the Kremlin, that is on 3 October, Stalin openly explained the essence of the Soviet-German agreement and suggested that Lithuania itself should hand over to Germany the so-called Suvalkija strip (in south-west Lithuania), which Ribbentrop had bargained for in the negotiations. In this way Stalin sought both to break the Lithuanian opposition by promising them Vilnius and to discredit Germany as "tearing away" a part of Lithuania.⁸⁹ When Ribbentrop learned about the Soviet's intention to disclose details of the secret agreements to the Lithuanians, he asked Molotov personally to refrain from doing this. When the Soviets ignored his request, Ribbentrop ordered Zechlin on 5 October to report to the Lithuanian government that it was he who in Moscow "had recommended restoring the Vilnius District to Lithuania, to which the Soviet Government gave its consent", and that the question of relinquishing the Suvalkija strip to Germany

⁸⁷ LCVA, 383/7/2089/ p. 2.

⁸⁸ *SSSR - Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T1*, pp. 194–96, 213–17.

⁸⁹ Bronis J. Kaslas (ed.): *The USSR–German Aggression Against Lithuania* (New York 1973), pp. 137–39.

was not pertinent.⁹⁰ Additionally, we could stress that the German envoy was not asked to inform Lithuania that it was to be transferred to the Soviet's sphere.

Thus some controversy over Lithuania emerged between Germany and the Soviet Union. It could be surmised that, with the information received from Ribbentrop, Lithuanian diplomats had given a basis for a stronger position against Stalin's demands. According to Zechlin's report to Berlin, Bizauskas received this information "with visible relief and asked to express the thanks of the Lithuanian Government on this score to the Reich Government".⁹¹ However, after receiving news from Berlin, the Lithuanian delegation at the negotiations in Moscow did not change its basic stance. Seeking to avoid the establishment of Soviet bases, Lithuanian diplomats practically used only one means, namely appeals to Soviet good will. Meanwhile, it was exactly this particular Lithuanian role as an "*état-tampon*" which worried the Soviets, and they hoped to counter it by locating bases in the country. Thus the Soviet stance on this issue was immovable.⁹²

It must be borne in mind that public opinion in Lithuania at large was obviously favourable to a treaty with the Soviet Union. In general, the Lithuanian negotiating position with the USSR in October 1939 reminds us of attempts to disguise Kaunas's decision to accept Soviet conditions in the face of both foreign and domestic opposition. Even before negotiations began in Moscow, discussions within the Lithuanian government approved one condition of the treaty, namely acceptance of Soviet bases on Lithuanian territory until the end of the war.⁹³ However, during negotiations the head of the Lithuanian delegation, Urbšys, sought to avoid the garrisoning of the Soviet bases and appealed to the significance of Lithuanian history and the good relations that had existed between Lithuania and the USSR. Thus the negotiating process lasted for a relatively long time, much to the annoyance of Stalin. At one point he even interrupted Urbšys rudely, commenting "You are arguing too much, young man".⁹⁴ During the negotiating process the Lithuanian position deteriorated rather than improved. While the period that Soviet garrisons would

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 143.

⁹² SSSR – *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny. T 1*, pp. 227–55.

⁹³ Turauskas: *Lietuvos*, p. 77.

⁹⁴ Juozas Urbšys: *Lietuva lemtingaisiais 1939–1940 metais* (Lithuania During the Critical Years, 1939–1940) (Vilnius 1988), p. 32. Raštikis: *Kovose dėl Lietuvos*, p. 614. Turauskas: *Lietuvos*, p. 124. Škirpa: *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 255.

be based in Lithuania in the preliminary drafts of the treaty was initially intended only to last until the end of the war, the final draft did not contain this limit. During the first days of negotiations the Soviet side presented several versions of treaties for the restoration of Vilnius and mutual assistance, later these two versions were combined into a single treaty.⁹⁵

Smetona's regime was not made to carry the political burden alone, however. Opposition representatives, the Christian Democrat Bizauaskas and their close ally Stasys Raštikis, were drawn into the negotiating process. In this way Smetona once more avoided full responsibility, this time for a treaty with the USSR. After the restoration of Vilnius in November 1939 Smetona once more reshuffled his government to weaken the position of the opposition. However, that is another story.

⁹⁵ SSSR – *Litva v gody vtoroy mirovoy voyny*. T 1, pp. 235, 237, 253–55.