

Baltic Security Studies

Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga

THE DESTINY OF THE BALTIC ENTENTE 1934 - 1940

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs

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Introduction

The Baltic Republics which obtained their political independence after World War I lost it again at the beginning of World War II as a result of aggression by the Soviet Union. The road to this aggression was prepared and cleared by the criminal agreements between Moscow and Berlin which were reached in August and September 1939. The agreements provided for the "sell-out" of the Baltic Republics, "giving" them to the USSR, which immediately began to implement its aggressive purposes. Finland did not submit to this process, and the USSR experienced unexpectedly large losses in what turned out to be a fiasco. It had unhoped-for ease in dealing with the Baltic Republics, however. In the fall of 1939 they were forced to sign military base agreements, and this led to the destruction of the three republics, providing as it did for the entry of the Soviet armed forces into their territories. Moscow concluded its program of aggression in the Baltics in the summer of 1940, occupying and then annexing into the Soviet Union the three nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. This was a tragic turning point in the lives and historical fates of the Baltic peoples. They were forcibly yanked out of European civilization and subjected to terror, repressions, deportations, genocide, the presence of occupying forces, the massive pressure of Soviet colonialism, russification, the socialist experiment, a denigration of their national dignity, and inhuman conditions of existence.

The international crisis which formed in Europe as a result of the plot between Germany and the USSR also ruled out the ability of the Baltic Republics to maintain their independence. In fact, the only thing the Baltic Republics could still do was to decide the form of execution which would be used in killing them. The Baltic Republics proved unable to honorably defend their independence, and they could not hope for any assistance from abroad. Even more, faced with ultimatums from Moscow, each of the three Baltic Republics took its own individual, isolated stand. Nothing much was left of the Baltic Entente which had been formed in September 1934. This was surprising to many contemporaries of the Balts, and it made it easier for Moscow to implement its program of aggression.

This brochure attempts to analyze the circumstances under which the Baltic Entente was formed, to demonstrate its "internal weakness" and to reveal those factors which barred it from becoming a military

union. Much attention is devoted to the Baltic policies of Europe's major powers and to the differing foreign policy orientations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania which led to differing positions on the matter of which nation was the Balts' leading enemy. Among other factors of significance in the disintegration of the Baltic Entente, an important role is played by a lack of a common economic foundation, the differing mentalities of the three Baltic peoples, and the existence of anti-democratic regimes and ambitious politicians in the three countries.

I. The Baltic States and International Security in Europe After World War I

Peace treaties signed after World War I determined a new international order in Europe. Historians usually term this the "Versailles system". The essence of this system differed significantly from the regime of international relations which existed in the old continent before 1914. In place of the "European concert", which collapsed as the major powers began to prepare for war, the League of Nations, organized at the Paris peace conference, took its place as the first universal and international organization in the history of the world. The purpose of the League was to "ensure the equal participation of all nations in adoption of decisions of an international nature"² and lead to an entirely new system of international relations. An important aspect of this work was to guarantee the security of all members of the League and to peacefully resolve all international conflicts. The League of Nations pact provided for economic and military sanctions against countries which violated international rights. One of the ideas contained in the organization's statement of purpose was combatting war by using war.

The establishment of the League of Nations was an attempt to replace the principle whereby nations defended themselves against violations of international rights (that is to say, aggression against them) with a system of "collective security"³. At the same time, a new constituent principle was proposed in the field of international relations: It was the control of power (Machtkontrolle), which could serve as a resource to strengthen international security. This idealistic principle could, however, be put into practice only if certain pre-requisites were met:

- 1) All nations which belonged to the system of "collective security" had to accept the status quo defined in the Paris peace conference;
- 2) All member states of the League of Nations had to defend this status quo, regardless of which nations might become aggressors or victims of aggression;
- 3) The concepts of "aggressor" and "aggression" had to be clearly defined in a way which would be acceptable and binding to all member states of the League of Nations⁴.

These pre-requisites could not be fully met, because member states of the League tried to avoid any further limitations on their sovereignty, and individual large countries rejected the organization as such. As a

result, the planned "revolution in foreign policy" never took place. Unexpectedly, the League of Nations proved to be a fairly weak institution. The chief reason for this was a lack of universal acceptability: the United States had refused to join⁵. The establishment of the principle of "collective security" was further hampered by the lengthy absence of Germany⁶ and the USSR⁷ from the League's roster. Given these circumstances, England and France took full control of this important instrument of international politics and could use it to their own purposes. This they did to a great extent. At the same time, however, neither London nor Paris was in any hurry to strengthen those principles in the League of Nations statutes which would have facilitated any lessening of the British and French role in international policy making.

These weaknesses in the League of Nations were particularly felt in the area of disarmament, which the League was supposed to promote as a way of increasing international security. For several reasons, these hopes suffered utter defeat. The various countries proved to have differing opinions as to the schedule and purpose of disarmament⁸. By no means were all nations convinced of the moral necessity of disarmament. They were not prepared to follow the League in declaring general disarmament as a definite and necessary goal. The impossibility of successful disarmament was further determined by the "transition period" which took hold of the world after the October Revolution in Russia, the fall of the monarchy in Germany, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the rise of the United States and Japan. European hegemony in the world only seemed to have been untouched.

The League of Nations further proved unable to resolve numerous other tasks. One example was its inability to regulate international conflicts to any satisfactory degree. The League did not fulfill expectations either in the area of becoming an institution of highest appeal, nor in the area of becoming a guarantor of peace. It failed to lessen the role of sheer power in international relations. The idea promoted by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson — that traditional policies of strength be replaced by a qualitatively new level of pan-national cooperation in the establishment of peace — remained only an idea. Between the wars the element which truly guaranteed international security in inter-war Europe, at least for a time, was the dynamic and shifting balance of powers among the major countries.

The failure of the League of Nations to carry out the tasks which it had been assigned was one of the symptoms of post-war weakness in the area of maintenance of peace⁹. Another serious failure of the Versailles system was the strict and lengthy enforcement of the division between the victors and the vanquished in World War I. This hampered any stable agreement among the European peoples and did nothing to create a necessary atmosphere of mutual trust. The nations which were defeated in World War I simply felt that they were being discriminated against. Even the gradual restoration of formal equality among nations in various areas of international relations brought no fundamental change to this situation.

Another factor which partially eliminated any possibility of establishing lasting peace after World War I was the peculiarity of some aspects of the "construction" of the Versailles system. The agreements reached at the Paris peace conference to some extent were based on the national principle¹⁰, which theoretically was favorable to the nations in the German bloc¹¹. The problem was that the main "architects" of post-war peace systematically failed to implement this principle, violating it instead, especially where Germany and Hungary were concerned¹². For example, they did not allow Germany to reincorporate the predominantly German-populated areas which had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire before 1918¹³.

This position by the leadership of the Entente nations was understandable, because otherwise Germany would have become a leading major power in Europe as early as 1919. On the other hand, however, the failure to systematically apply the national principle proved fateful, because it heightened the dynamism of the Germans and left a decidedly negative impact on the further development of international relations. In Germany, where this fact was viewed as a significant injustice, the demands of the Nazis for a "greater Germany" in which "every last German" would reside received virtually universal acclaim. The Western powers found it difficult to oppose these Nazi demands, because doing so would have meant openly denouncing the very principles which they themselves had propagated and defended.

Thus, given that Germany and Russia were insufficiently integrated into the system of international relations and, for various reasons, implacably opposed to the Versailles peace structure, many European nations devoted particular attention to the strengthening of their own security. The most active nation in this area was France, which had the strongest army in Europe at the time. France was not satisfied

with the general security guarantees which were contained in the League of Nations Pact and instead tried to strengthen its own security by establishing bilateral military and political unions. The first such agreement was signed with Poland in 1921 and was followed by similar pacts with Czechoslovakia (1924) and Yugoslavia (1927). A friendship agreement was reached with Romania in 1926. The basis for all these agreements was efforts by the countries which were involved to maintain the status quo on the continent¹⁴. Individual historians have posited that these bilateral alliances achieved quite the opposite — they destabilized the situation and lessened European security¹⁵.

The French policy of establishing unions with nations in Eastern and Central Europe was intended primarily as a shield against Germany¹⁶, whose resuscitation France did not wish to permit¹⁷. At the same time, however, French security policy did not provide for any significant role for Poland, Czechoslovakia or Romania. France felt that the best guarantee of its security was union with England and the USA¹⁸. During the Paris peace conference France had managed to draw out a promise from the Brits and the Americans that they would give France military aid in case of German aggression. Nothing came of the promise, however, because the U.S. Senate refused to ratify it¹⁹.

France's security interests were met by the so-called Geneva Protocol (the "major peace charter"), approved in the League of Nations in October of 1924. At the base of this document was the well-known French policy of arbitrage, security and disarmament. In other words, the protocol provided for a peaceful regulation of international conflicts, binding sanctions against aggressors, and limitations on armament²⁰. Under these principles, which were aimed at maintenance of the status quo as established in the Paris peace agreements, France would be able to count on British assistance in any conflict between Germany on the one side and France or any of its Central and Eastern European allies on the other. The Geneva Protocol was never ratified, however, so France had to seek other options for involving Britain in the stabilization of French security.

The Locarno Agreements signed in October 1925 became an important element in French security. The most important of these was the Rhine Pact, or the Western Guarantee Pact, which provided for the maintenance of a demilitarized zone around the Rhine (as provided in the Versailles peace treaty), and fixed promises from Germany, France and Belgium that they would not use force to

change existing borders. England and Italy undertook guarantees of the inviolability of these borders. Accordingly, the German borders with France and Belgium which were fixed in the Versailles peace treaty, were now formally recognized. None of the agreements reached at Locarno, however, guaranteed Germany's Eastern border.

The Locarno agreements were a first step in France's distancing from its allies in Eastern Europe. The importance of the bilateral unions declined noticeably on the list of French foreign policy priorities. The French military strategy underwent a gradual but irreversible change. Beginning in the late 1920s, France was concerned with nothing more than defense of its own territory, and the French were no longer ready to give effective aid to its allies in the case of conflict²¹. The French network of bilateral agreements did not include the Baltic Republics. France, however, belonged to the leading defenders of the status quo in Europe. For this reason, the "French factor", like the "British factor", had an unquestionable role in the ensuring of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian security. True, the influence of this role was frequently doubtful, and the true security of the Baltic Republics was often determined by other factors.

The Baltic Republics, as is known, belonged to the new nationally based countries whose appearance was closely tied not only to the victory of the Entente in World War I, but also to the weakening of Germany and Russia. One of the earliest and largest accomplishments in securing independence of the three nations was the signing of peace treaties with Russia. Estonia did so on 2 February 1920, Lithuania on 12 July of the same year, and Latvia — on 11 August. In this way the Baltic Republics resolved one of the most complex problems in their own region, basically ignoring the Entente policy of supporting the idea of Russia's indivisibility. As a result one serious barrier was removed from the Baltic path toward diplomatic activity and general legal recognition by other governments.

The attitude of Western nations began to change after the Baltic Republics signed their peace treaties with Russia, and especially after the defeat of Vrangel's army in November of 1920, which put an end to any Western hopes for the restoration of Russia in its earlier borders. There was no point any longer in delaying recognition of the Baltic Republics because there was no longer any possibility of using the three new countries as "a sacrifice on the non-existent Russian altar in order to gain Russian support for the West's competition with the

Germans," as the Latvian historian Edgars Andersons has vividly put it²². The Supreme Council of the Entente extended *de jure* recognition of Latvia and Estonia on 26 January 1921²³. America did the same (and also included Lithuania) on 27 July 1922. Finally, on 20 December of the same year, the governments in France and Britain announced their readiness to extend full recognition to Lithuania, as well²⁴. The delay in Lithuania's case was engendered by unsettled relations between Lithuania and Poland.

In September 1921 the Baltic Republics were accepted into the League of Nations, whose statutes provided for joint guarantees of the political independence and territorial inviolability of every member country. In essence, this meant a stabilization of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian security in the international arena and an inclusion of the three republics in the post-war system of sovereign European states.

By achieving diplomatic recognition the Baltic Republics fulfilled their first major goal — that of becoming full-fledged subjects of international justice. The diplomacy of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia now had broad opportunities to join in the common effort to strengthen peace by supporting the League of Nations and its role of arbitrator in matters of international dispute. Latvia and Estonia basically tried to utilize these opportunities, but Lithuanian foreign policy beginning in the early 1920s was most complicated, and oriented precisely toward the engendering of international conflicts. Unlike the other two Baltic Republics, Lithuania provided some very destructive elements in the area of international relations after World War I.

Given the situation in which the new Baltic Republics found themselves, it became unquestionably necessary for the three states to begin broad cooperation in political, economic and military affairs, in order that the three might join forces in protecting their independence, especially against possible yearnings by Soviet Russia which might take on an aggressive form. During the battle for independence (1918-1920), there had been sporadic and unplanned cooperation between the Latvian and Estonian military, as well as between Latvian and Lithuanian forces, but there was never any trilateral military union. Only Latvia and Estonia managed to agree on a defense union and sign the appropriate agreement on 1 November 1923. But even this Latvian and Estonian "military alliance was never quite brought to life"²⁵.

In the first half of the 1920s, efforts were undertaken to establish a "small Baltic union" (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) or else a "large Baltic Union" (the three plus Finland and Poland), but international relations in the area were influenced by factors which negated any attempt to achieve close cooperation in the Baltic region. The largest of these factors was the conflict which arose between Poland and Lithuania when, in October 1920, the Poles occupied Vilnius²⁶. For reasons of not wanting the other side to be strengthened, Poland opposed the establishment of the "small" union, while Lithuania opposed formation of the "large" union. Moreover, neither country believed that the planned Baltic Union would provide any guarantee of collective safety. Both Poland and Lithuania felt that the union should become a resource to support their divergent positions on the Vilnius question. In this manner, the Polish-Lithuanian dispute acted as a bitter magic circle to paralyze the defense system of all three Baltic Republics²⁷.

Having hopes of potentially gaining control over the territories of the three Baltic Republics, both Germany and Soviet Russia also tried to hamper Baltic cooperation. The two nations did not, however, have equal possibilities in this area. In the early 1920s, only Russia had any realistic possibility of threatening or conquering the Baltic. Germany was no longer a significant military player at the time. Berlin had to keep that in mind when it determined and then carried out its policies.

Germany's negative attitude toward the planned Baltic Union had much to do with the German foreign policy strategy and its associated tactics. Berlin was interested in seeing to it that when Germany regained her strength, there would still be possibilities to reorganize the Baltic region²⁸. German foreign policy leaders clearly understood that any formation of a bloc²⁹ which involved some of the more far-flung countries of Europe, was dominated by Poland, and was subject to British or French influence, would mean a significant strengthening of the status quo in Eastern Europe.

Soviet Russia promoted intensely destructive policies in Eastern Europe in the early and mid 1920s. A very pointed characterization of these policies is contained in a German Foreign Ministry report written on 26 November 1930. In the eyes of Germany's Auswaertiges Amt (Foreign Ministry), Moscow was trying to hamper the formation of a Baltic bloc with Poland at its head, stoke the flames of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius, weaken contacts between the small

Eastern European nations and the major powers of Western Europe and the League of Nations, and strengthen its own impact in the border countries and Finland by reaching separate agreements with each of them³⁰. It would be no exaggeration to say that Lithuania gave notable support to Russian efforts in these efforts, because Lithuania considered Poland to be her worst enemy and Soviet Russia and Germany to be her allies. From a security perspective, Kaunas' fundamental foreign policy principle — "the enemy of our enemy is our friend" — was dangerous to the Baltic Republics.

In 1926, Lithuania was the only nation in Central and Eastern Europe³¹ to accept a Soviet offer of a mutual non-aggression agreement³², thus firmly entering the orbit of Soviet politics. Moscow was hoping to use such non-aggression agreements as a way of isolating and neutralizing the nations of Eastern Europe, tearing them away from the "collective security" system set up by the League of Nations. Under no circumstances did the offer of non-aggression agreements signal any acceptance by the USSR of Baltic independence or its own statements concerning no territorial claims against Poland and Romania. The terms of the Soviet non-aggression agreements were always brief — from three to five years³³.

The situation in Eastern Europe was stabilized by the Moscow Protocol which was signed on 9 February 1929 by the USSR, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Romania. Lithuania signed on somewhat later. The protocol mandated that the terms of the Briand-Kellogg Pact — the rejection of war as a regulator of international conflicts — would take effect ahead of time in relations among the signatory nations³⁴. There can be no doubt that to some extent Baltic interests in terms of strengthening their independence against a shifting international backdrop were also served by non-aggression agreements signed by the USSR in 1932 with Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. In the context of a 1933 agreement signed by eight nations (Soviet Union, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and others) in London, which provided a definition for the term "aggression"³⁵, the non-aggression pacts provided some contour to the established security system. On the other hand, the non-aggression agreements also provided a signal of Moscow's hostile and threatening interest in the Baltic region. On 23 April 1934, less than three weeks after the signing of a protocol which extended the terms of the Soviet non-aggression pacts with the Baltic Republics through 31 December 1944, the Soviet ambassador to Rīga, S. Brodovskij,

was forced, in a conversation with Latvian Foreign Ministry General Secretary M. Valters, to admit that "the USSR cannot eliminate war as a resource for settling conflicts with the Baltic Republics"³⁶.

Despite the various elements of security guarantees which were put in place (through the League of Nations and the Briand-Kellogg Pact), Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian diplomats gained no shining successes in their attempts to strengthen their nations' independence in the 1920s and early 1930s. They failed to reach agreement on a multilateral union, and they also failed to obtain any security guarantees from the major powers. Baltic independence never gained the necessary reinsurance, and during this period its guarantor, more than anything else, was the relative balance of power between the three major powers of the Baltic region — Germany, Poland and the USSR. This balance was not, however, permanent.

It would not be entirely correct to assert that the foreign policy leadership of the Baltic Republics did not demonstrate sufficient activity in searching for and promoting possibilities to strengthen regional security. There was no shortage of excellent ideas, suggestions and initiatives, many of which were promoted in connection with the Locarno conference. The attention of diplomats from the Baltic Republics and other small nations was particularly riveted by the special principles of German-French and German-Belgian border inviolability which were suggested and approved at Locarno. These principles helped to facilitate other projects which proposed application of the same principles in Eastern and Northern Europe. In November 1925, for example, the general secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, H. Albats, suggested the establishment of an "Eastern Locarno" with Germany and Soviet Union joining together to guarantee the Baltic Republics³⁷. Another project, however, won greater international response than the one promoted by H. Albats. It was the idea of a "Baltic Locarno", promoted by the well-known Latvian social democratic leader F. Cielēns, foreign minister of the Republic of Latvia from December 1926 until January 1928. Implementation of the plan was widely discussed by its author in September 1927 in meetings with the German, French and British foreign ministers (G. Stresemann, A. Briand, and A. Chamberlain, respectively)³⁸. F. Cielēns requested that Great Britain, Germany, France and the Soviet Union reach an agreement which would guarantee the neutrality and self-determination of Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Lithuania. Recalling the reaction foreign

ministers from the major powers gave to this "Baltic Locarno" plan, F. Cielēns wrote in 1934: "First I spoke with Aristide Briand. He fundamentally agreed with the suggestion but said that Poland should certainly be added in the agreement, as a guarantor if not as a recipient of guarantees

"Then I spoke with Austin Chamberlain. I received a refusal from him. He said British foreign policy traditions provided that England undertook only such engagements as it could certainly expect to fulfill. If in signing the Locarno Agreement Britain had refused to guarantee the Western border of Poland, it had done so not only because Germany had opposed voluntary recognition of this border, but also because it felt that it could undertake no concrete obligations in the foreseeable future in areas beyond the Rhine.

"I did not receive a rejection from Stresemann, but he said that without further consultations with Berlin, he could promise nothing. Personally he thought that if other major powers — apparently he meant Russia — agreed, then German support could be obtained as well.

"There was no concrete response from the Russians — neither yes nor no. They demonstrated no interest in the project. Their attitude toward the proposal was rejection by delay"³⁹.

Along with various Eastern Locarno projects which never came to fruition because of their rejection by the major powers, a Polish plan to establish a neutral bloc of nations from the Baltic to the Black Sea (a plan which was vague and insufficiently specific) also remained on the drawing board. On the face of it, the proposal was natural and inescapable, given that it would have created a Polish-dominated union of all the nations in the region. That would have been a way to fill the Eastern and Central European power vacuum which was created by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, and by the weakened state of Russia and Germany. New countries in the region (including Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) would receive certain protection against the aggression of the major powers.

On the other hand, in the 1920s and early 1930s, Warsaw had no realistic opportunity to implement its ideas. They were made impossible first of all by Poland's economic and military weakness. Poland had difficulties in extending even minimal assistance of any type to its smaller neighboring countries. Economically Poland itself was largely dependent on trade ties with Germany⁴⁰. Accordingly, Poland could

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not be the one nation which cemented together the entire bloc. Poland could do nothing more than promote ambitious ideas¹¹.

Other factors served to hamper Poland's hopes, as well. There was no common perception among the nations of Eastern and Central Europe as to who should be considered the major enemy. Relations among the countries were also worsened by various conflicts in their midst, and there was never any real convergence of interests among the countries. One group of nations (Latvia, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, *et al.*) promoted strict maintenance of the status quo, while others (Hungary and others) maintained that the status quo should be altered. Poland, what with its proud attempts to become a major power, as well as its border problems, ended up in the uncomfortable situation of landing somewhere between being a defender of the status quo and being a potential revisionist nation¹².

1 European Concert: After the 1815 Congress of Vienna, which reestablished the balance of powers, the five leading major powers (England, Austria, Prussia, Russia and France), which used coordinated efforts to settle matters of war and peace. Because this concert could only go as far as was permitted by the most reserved of its members, its ability to avert conflicts of interest proved minimal.

2 Bracher, K.D. *Die Krise Europas: 1917*. Berlin: Ullstein (1993), p. 31.

3 Kindermann, K.G. (Hrsg.). *Grundelemente der Weltpolitik*. Muenchen: Piper (1986), p. 311.

4 See Woyke, W. (Hrsg.) *Handwoerterbuch. Internationale Politik*. Bonn: Leske Verlag (1990), pp. 253-254.

5 Influenced by the principles of isolationism (refusal to become involved in European matters, etc.), the United States Senate on 19 November 1919 rejected ratification of the Versailles peace treaty, an integral part of which was the statutes of the League of Nations. Many American senators did not believe in the idea of the League of Nations.

6 Germany was accepted into the League of Nations in 1926 and withdrew from it in 1933.

7 The Soviet Union became a member of the League of Nations in September 1934. In December 1939 it became the only nation in the history of the League to be expelled because of its aggression against Finland.

8 During the Paris peace conference, the major powers of the Entente were able to agree on disarmament procedures which should be taken by the German bloc of nations. In other areas, European cooperation on disarmament matters was less than specific. The Disarmament conference which began its work in February 1932 was a complete failure.

9 Bracher, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

10 See Seskis, J. *Latvijas valsts izcelšanās pasaules kara notikumu norisē*. Rīga (1991), pp. 179-187.

11 The national principle required recognition of the sovereignty of large and small nationalities, along with their right to self-determination and their right to draw boundaries, where possible, along the lines of ethnic divisions.

12 This created certain circumstances which led to the crisis or even collapse of the Versailles system. Individual historians have a point in believing that the peace treaty with Germany (and other peace treaties) contained "an element of self-destruction". See Haffner, S. *Im Schatten der Geschichte*. Muenchen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (1988), p. 105.

13 In December 1918 the National Conference in Vienna proclaimed Austria to be a republic within the boundaries of Germany. The peace treaties of Versailles and St. Germaine forbade Austria's joining Germany without the approval of the League of Nations. This ban was in bald contradiction to the principle of national self-determination. As far as the largely German populated Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia was concerned, the Entente nations blocked a referendum on joining Germany in 1919.

14 Oberlaender, E. "Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den Kriegen". *Hitler-Stalin Pact 1939. Das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?*. Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag (1989), p. 23.

15 Rothstein, R.L. *Alliances and Small Powers*. London (1968), p. 223.

16 Hovi, K. "Polish-Finnish Cooperation in Borderstate Policy 1919-1922". *Journal of Baltic Studies*, No. 2., 1983, pp. 125-126.

17 Howard, M. "Introduction", *The Quest for Stability. Problems of West European Security 1918-1957*. London (1993), p. 10.

18 Hovi, K. "Security before disarmament of hegemony? The French alliance policy 1917-1927". *The Quest for Stability. Problems of West European Security 1918-1957*. London (1993), p. 119.

19 Parker, R.A. *Europa 1918-1945*. Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer

- Taschenbuch Verlag (1992), p. 18.
- 20 Krueger, P. Versailles. Deutsche Aussenpolitik zwischen Revisionismus und Friedenssicherung. Muenchen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (1986), p. 138.
- 21 Wandycz, P.S. France and her Eastern Allies 1919-1925. Westport, Connecticut (1974), p. 367.
- 22 Andersons, E. Latvijas vēsture. Ārpolitika I. Stockholm: Daugava (1982), p. 64.
- 23 By the end of 1922, 28 nations had granted de jure recognition to Latvia.
- 24 Rauch, G. von. Geschichte der baltischen Staaten. Muenchen (1990), p. 104.
- 25 Andersons, E. Latvijas bruņotie spēki un to priekšvēsture. Toronto (1983), p. 651.
- 26 The Russian-Lithuanian peace treaty (12 July 1920) and the Polish-Lithuanian agreement agreed Vilnius and its region to be a part of Lithuania. Ignoring these agreements, the Polish armed forces, led by gen. L. Żeligowski, took the Vilnius region on 9 October 1920. At first a Central Lithuanian Nation was established there, but in 1922 it was incorporated into Poland. The major powers (England, France, *et al.*) supported Poland in the Vilnius conflict, and the so-called ambassadorial conference (the Versailles agreement executive committee) adopted a resolution 15 March 1923 turning the Vilnius region over to Poland. The Lithuanian government refused to recognize this decision.
- 27 Butkus, Z. Lietuvos ir Latvijos santykiai 1919-1929 metais. Vilnius (1993), p. 14.
- 28 Kangeris, K. "Das Baltikum im Rahmen der schwedisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen in der Zwischenkriegszeit". Contact or Isolation? Soviet-Western Relations in the Interwar Period. Stockholm (1991), p. 358.
- 29 The Germans used the term "Randstaaten", or distant nations, to refer to the new countries which were established on the collapse of the Russian empire after World War I.
- 30 PAAA.-R 84613.-K 663394
- 31 In 1925 and 1926, the USSR proposed to Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Lithuania that specific bilateral non-aggression agreements should be signed.
- 32 On 9 May 1927, a non-aggression agreement between the USSR and Latvia was initialed. Latvia never signed this agreement.
- 33 Ahmann, R. "Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt: Nichtangriffs-und

Angriffsvertrag?"Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939. Das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?. Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag (1989), p. 29.

34 The Briand-Kellogg Pact was signed on 27 August 1928 in Paris. It was named for its initiators — U.S. Secretary of State F. Kellogg and French Foreign Minister A. Briand. The pact was signed by 48 nations.

35 Lithuania, which because of the Vilnius conflict did not want to sign any agreement together with Poland, signed a separate convention with the Soviet Union.

36 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 377.

37 *Brīvā Zeme*, 14 November 1925.

38 Cielēns, F. "Laikmetu maiņā. Atziņas un Atmiņas". Latvijas neatkarīgās demokrātiskās republikas laiks. Vol. II, Lidingo (1963), p. 360.

39 LVVA-1303.f.-1.apr.-68.l.-pp. 473-474.

40 Wandycz, P.S., op. cit., p. 372.

41 Nowakowski, J.M. "Joseph Beck." *Ministrowie Spraw Zagranicznych (1919-1939)*. Szczecin (1992), p. 200.

42 Geiss, J. *Geschichte im Ueberblick*. Hamburg: Taschenbuch Verlag (1986), p. 412.

II. On the Way to a Baltic Entente

The rise to power of the Nazis in Germany in January 1933 left a deep impression on the development of international relations in Europe. A period of "reevaluating values" and political reorientation began. The foreign policy line of several nations changed significantly, and unexpected possibilities of political combinations were discovered. On 28 February 1934, the general secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, V. Munters, sent an instructive letter to Latvian ambassadors abroad. In it he characterized the changes in Eastern Europe which had occurred over the previous year by the "new Germany" factor and emphasized three points: Soviet psychological and foreign policy distancing from Germany, Poland's new course, and attempts by the three Baltic countries to establish closer relations¹.

As far as the Baltic Republics were concerned, the "political changes in Germany" initially engendered differing evaluations and reactions. Latvia and Estonia were disturbed by Germany's openly declared expansionistic intentions in Eastern Europe, and in the spring of 1933, both nations renewed their call for a Baltic union². Lithuania might have had the most to fear from German aggression, given the matter of Memel (Klaipėda)³, but it "viewed the new Germany with the greatest of peace"⁴. Officially, Kaunas did not want to alter its foreign policy course. It was still hoping for support from the USSR and Germany in its conflict with Poland. In April 1933, Lithuanian President A. Smetona announced that a Baltic union would not correspond to Lithuanian interests, because it would be subject to the influence of Poland⁵.

Given this situation, Latvia and Estonia could not hope for any quick accomplishments in the formation of a Baltic union. In Latvian Foreign Ministry council meetings which took place in April 1933 under the leadership of Foreign Minister V. Salnais, very pessimistic conclusions were drawn. All participants in these meetings felt that there could be no close political cooperation with Lithuania. They believed that the major obstacle to such relations was Lithuania's exceedingly complicated foreign policy, the leading aim of which was the recovery of Vilnius. They felt that in order to reach this aim, Lithuania was trying to foster exactly that which Latvia was most eager to avoid — a conflict between Poland and Germany or Poland and Soviet Union⁶.

Even though the Foreign Ministry leadership at that time was convinced that Lithuanian "goals and efforts" could not be harmonized with Latvian and Estonian interests and, given this reality, declared Estonia to be Latvia's only true "object of [political] cooperation"⁷, the effort to win over Lithuania was not interrupted. It was continued on a diplomatic, as well as on a national level. In the spring of 1933, a number of articles appeared in the Latvian press touting a Baltic union as the most effective counterforce against the unfavorable factors which were threatening Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the wake of the Nazi rise to power in Germany and subsequent changes in the European international situation.

A similar scene was unfolding in Estonia. Using a statement first proposed by the German diplomat O. Reinebeck in a report to Berlin on 3 March 1933, the Estonian press demanded that Estonia's politicians "immediately begin to implement the idea of a Baltic bloc"⁸. Succumbing to this pressure, the Estonian government and the foreign policy commission of the Parliament (Riigikogu) discussed the matter and declared that a Baltic union was necessary⁹. At the same time, however, the Estonian politicians did not make their decision particularly forceful. On 3 May 1933, the Estonian foreign minister, A. Rei, told Latvia's ambassador to Estonia, K. Zariņš, that the Estonians had rejected the idea of foisting their recommendations on Lithuania, whose attitude toward a trilateral union was openly hostile¹⁰.

The foreign ministers of Latvia and Estonia met on 27 May 1933. Both ministers approved a resolution on the matter of Baltic unity: "The foreign ministers of Latvia and Estonia believe it to be an urgent necessity to make every effort to involve Lithuania in closer cooperation with both nations,..."¹¹.

Latvia played the active role and offered some significant initiatives in the effort to form a Baltic Entente. Beginning in the summer of 1933, the question of forming closer relations with Lithuania was constantly an important agenda item for the Latvian government. Judging from entries in V. Munters' diary, it became clear in mid-July that Lithuania, regardless of changes in the international scene, was not prepared to alter its foreign policy course and was not even willing to attend a joint conference of Baltic foreign ministers¹². Nevertheless, Latvian Prime Minister A. Bļodnieks, who actively followed events in this area, was persistent, and in an early August discussion with the Lithuanian ambassador in Latvia, J. Urbšys, he suggested that Latvia

and Lithuania should establish confederate relations of the nature Latvia already had with Estonia¹³. Bļodnieks meant nothing more than further development of bilateral relations between Latvia and Lithuania. Notes from a discussion V. Munters had with J. Urbšys on 8 August indicate that in developing bilateral relations with Lithuania, Latvia fully wanted to avoid getting entangled in the Vilnius matter¹⁴. V. Munters proposed that the process of bringing the two nations more closely together might begin with a broadening of economic contacts. J. Urbšys agreed to this proposal and went to Kaunas to inform the Lithuanian foreign policy leadership about the Latvian proposal.

At a meeting of the Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers in Tallinn on 14 August 1933, V. Munters informed the Estonian foreign policy leadership about Latvia's position on the Baltic union issue and informed the Estonians about recent activities undertaken in this respect. He emphasized that "Latvia would accept and favor any act" which would help involve Lithuania in "a common Baltic political sphere," as long as such activity did not touch on the Vilnius matter¹⁵. In V. Munters' words, such an act might be of no more than a declarative nature, but it would still have great international significance, because it would mean a change in the Lithuanian foreign policy course despite opposition from Germany and the USSR¹⁶.

The Estonian foreign minister, A. Piip, agreed with the Latvian viewpoint in principle, but suggested that Poland's position should be taken into account in forming a Baltic Union, and nothing should be done which would disturb the Poles. Latvia's representatives objected to this phrasing of the question. They believed that Latvia and Estonia must act independently, without asking for Poland's permission. They were convinced that Warsaw would not try to disrupt the unification of the Baltic Republics, because any union would bring Lithuania farther from Germany, and that would be in Poland's interests¹⁷.

Both delegations, however, felt that activities involving Lithuania should be carefully thought out. They agreed that for the time being activities should be limited to "feeling out opportunities". Latvia was assigned the task of doing so. In other words, Latvia was entrusted with an honorable mission — to lay the groundwork in Lithuania for an agreement to establish a trilateral union¹⁸.

The Latvian and Estonian strategy included the cited effort by V. Munters to expand economic ties with Lithuania. At first, this proposal did not engender any delight within the Lithuanian

government. J. Urbšys' trip did not lead to the expected result. The Latvian Foreign Ministry council noted on 13 September 1933 that J. Urbšys on returning from Kaunas "had lost all his illusions, and his activities had sunk beneath the waves"¹⁹.

Thanks to persistence on the part of the Latvian ambassador in Kaunas, R. Liepiņš, the Lithuanian foreign minister, D. Zaunius, in the end unwillingly agreed to begin trade negotiations²⁰. But these negotiations proceeded slowly, without the necessary interest on the part of the Lithuanians. During the talks, Lithuania refused to consider a number of questions proposed by Latvia, including the matter of a customs union²¹. The head of the Latvian Foreign Ministry's Western Department, L. Ēķis, was so discouraged that on 13 October 1933 he stated that the trade talks with Lithuania were "in chaos"²². A bilateral trade agreement was signed on 1 December, but it was not very significant. Close cooperation between Latvia and Lithuania was not possible due to one absent element — there was no need for either side to develop irreplaceable economic ties. It is also possible that both sides either could not, or did not want to make some of these ties irreplaceable, because traditionally both Latvia and Lithuania had been considered agricultural nations which simply would not have anything to trade with.

Early attempts by Latvia to draw closer to Lithuania met with strong reservations. Kaunas offered only minimal response to the Latvian overtures, and such responsiveness as there was came only after coaxing and overcoming of resistance. This fact was unquestionably dangerous. No union which is established with a greater or lesser element of force can hope to be stable. A clear understanding was necessary that only unified action could expand and strengthen national security. But the politicians in Kaunas frequently lacked this understanding. Most of them were carried away by their fanatical anti-Polish attitude and their dangerous game with the major powers. These factors did not allow the Lithuanians to take a clear-headed look at the situation. From the perspective of Lithuanian interests, the reservations concerning a Baltic union were quite understandable. The Lithuanians understood very well that union with small and weak nations like Latvia and Estonia would not help resolve either of Lithuania's big problems — the question of Vilnius and the matter of Klaipėda (Memel). Therefore, as long as there was any possibility to gain benefit from a competition among the major powers, Kaunas attempted to maintain

its foreign policy orientation toward Moscow and Berlin. By the end of 1933, however, the pro-German course of Lithuanian policy was more history than ongoing truth. German-Lithuanian relations were governed primarily by the question of the Klaipėda (Memel) region. If in the 1920s this region had been a matter of "joint concern" for the Lithuanians and Germans²³, then in the early 1930s it had clearly become a subject of ongoing conflict between the Germans and Lithuanians. Lithuania tried to limit the autonomy of the Klaipėda region which had been declared in the Memel Convention and accompanying statutes²⁴. And Germany was sending ever clearer signals that it was not willing to accept permanent loss of the territory.

Lithuania's unwillingness to forget its "major friends" briefly smothered Latvian activities in the formation of a Baltic union and strengthened suspicions of Lithuanian lack of faith among Latvian diplomats. The Latvian ambassador to Estonia, R. Liepiņš, expressed a strongly negative attitude against the Lithuanian foreign policy course. On 21 December 1933 he sent to Rīga a broad analysis of Lithuania's relations with its neighbors. V. Munters stated that the analysis was the best that had ever been written about Lithuania within the Foreign Ministry²⁵. R. Liepiņš' report was sent out to all of Latvia's ambassadors as an example to be followed²⁶.

R. Liepiņš' report characterized Lithuanian foreign policy as "overly hazardous." R. Liepiņš did not rule out the possibility that Kaunas had undertaken specific obligations "as concerns Moscow and Berlin"²⁷. For this reason, he suggested that the Latvian foreign policy leadership should demonstrate certain reticence in relations with Lithuania. R. Liepiņš felt that Kaunas would take an interest in a trilateral union only if "Estonia and Latvia agree to participate in its armed defense should there be a battle with Germany over Klaipėda". R. Liepiņš concluded his analysis with a warning about the lack of principles in Lithuanian foreign policy: "Have we any guarantee that on some fine day Lithuania might not reach agreement with Germany at some cost to us — exchanging Klaipėda, for example, for Liepāja?"²⁸

The first signs that Lithuania might be willing to change its negative attitude toward a Baltic union began to appear at the beginning of 1934. The basis for this change in attitude was not, however, any free will on the part of the Lithuanians. Rather, Kaunas was forced into the change by external factors which made impossible any further pursuit of an unchanging foreign policy course.

The most important of these factors was a declaration signed on 26 January by Germany and Poland in which both nations renounced any use of force²⁹. This diplomatic action threatened Lithuania with complete foreign policy isolation. It could no longer hope for German assistance in reclaiming the Vilnius region. Kaunas was placed before a fundamental choice. In the eyes of the Polish Foreign Ministry, Lithuania could choose only one of two options: give in to Germany or else reach an agreement with Warsaw in order to gain Polish support in the Lithuanian battle against Berlin³⁰.

Poland's settling of relations with Germany also notably influenced the overall situation in the Baltic region. It heightened a lack of mutual trust in Warsaw's relations with Paris and facilitated a lessening of French interest in keeping Eastern Europe as a "buffer zone," because Poland was the only more or less significant power in the region. The Lipski-Neurath³¹ agreement also tore down one of the cornerstones of Soviet foreign policy — the enmity between Germany and Poland which emanated from the national borders set down in the Versailles agreement³². The German historian G. von Rauch has written that the 26 January 1934 agreement (given that Moscow viewed tensions between Germany and Poland as an unalterable fact of life) shattered the basic principles of Soviet foreign policy even more than the Nazi rise to power in Germany had done³⁴. Moscow had no alternative but to pursue a careful new course of seeking new opportunities in foreign policy. It had to abandon its old, revisionist course which was aimed squarely at the Versailles system. Now the USSR became a formal defender of the status quo and took an official stand in favor of the policies of collective security. This reality-dictated change in attitude did not, however, alter Moscow's political interests (facilitation of global revolution through the use of war, acquisition of new territories, etc.). Accordingly, the influence exerted by the USSR on development of international relations was never a stabilizing one.

The situation which was developing around the Baltic Republics also meant small adjustments to the Latvian and Estonian foreign policy strategy. Renewed efforts were made to establish closer relations among all three nations, because activities by the USSR and Germany, as well as heightened pressure in the entire region, made such cooperation ever more vital. Not wishing to become helpless pawns in major power politics, Latvia and Estonia began to demonstrate a greater willingness to undertake new mutual obligations, even at the cost of slightly diminishing

individual political sovereignty. A particularly important role in further development of relations between the two countries was played by ongoing broadening of the Latvian and Estonian union. In addition to having already signed some 50 different agreements, conventions and protocols³⁶, Latvia and Estonia on 17 February 1934 not only extended its November 1923 union agreement, but also signed a new pact which provided for regular meetings of the Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers to coordinate foreign policy. Both sides agreed to establish a permanent council to coordinate legislation in Latvia and Estonia. The agreement further provided for cooperation between the diplomatic representations of both nations abroad and between the delegations of both countries at international conferences. Lithuania, too, found it possible to join in the 17 February agreement³⁸. This was an extremely significant step. A month later, in a letter to diplomats abroad, V. Munters characterized this as a major accomplishment for Latvia and a confirmation that Estonia had taken a strong stand in favor of a Baltic union³⁷.

Minutes of a meeting between the Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers (from 16 to 18 February 1934) show that the two sides held slightly different views on the Lithuanian matter. For instance, the Baltic department director of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, E. Vīgrabs, stated that Lithuania still had not "paid any greater attention to closer ties with Latvia and, apparently, other Baltic nations"³⁸. Estonia's deputy foreign minister, H. Laretei, however, took issue with the comment, noting that Lithuania's official circles were beginning to pay greater attention to tidying up relations with Latvia and Estonia. H. Laretei felt it necessary to continue all efforts to maintain and support friendly relations with Lithuania, especially by strengthening cooperation in the area of culture. In the political sphere, however, H. Laretei suggested a different strategy: refrain from any excessive initiatives, display a certain reservation in order that the Lithuanians themselves might take the critical steps³⁹. Latvian Foreign Minister V. Salnais fully agreed with this suggestion⁴⁰. General secretary V. Munters in his diary he made a terse but meaningful notation: "Political reservations toward Lithuania. Good results. The Lithuanians are making advances"⁴¹.

The first serious "advance" by Lithuania was arguably a speech made by Foreign Minister D. Zaunius on 24 February 1934, Estonian independence day. Two days later the speech was published in the Kaunas newspaper *Lietuvos Aidas*⁴², and attracted the attention of

many foreign diplomats. Their response was, of course, varied. The German ambassador to Kaunas, E. Zechlin, for example, believed that D. Zaunius' speech did not suggest any reorientation of Lithuanian foreign policy. On 28 February 1934 he reported to the leadership of the Auswaertiges Amt that Lithuania was still basically opposed toward a trilateral Baltic union⁴³.

It seems, however, that the German diplomat was not right. In his speech, D. Zaunius said that small nations are not always wise to seek the protection of major powers and that it would be safer for them to unite with similar nations⁴⁴. Based on news received from Kaunas at the Latvian Foreign Ministry, the German ambassador to Rīga, G. Martius, reported to Berlin on 2 March that Lithuania's foreign minister was now prepared to participate in the establishment of a Baltic union⁴⁵. This did not, however, mean that Lithuania was not placing its own interests at the forefront of these discussions. Lithuania wanted to strengthen its own international position with the help of the trilateral union and to secure support for its stand on such matters as the Vilnius and Memel questions⁴⁶.

After 24 February 1934, the Baltic union became a realistic possibility. V. Munters, in two instructive letters to diplomats abroad (on 28 February and 21 March), pointedly referred to the establishment of a Baltic union as the first of four Latvian foreign policy goals⁴⁷. He had no doubt that Lithuania's position on the matter had changed. He felt that Kaunas was forced into a reorientation of policy because it could no longer sustain its "horizontal game" between Moscow and Berlin, because after the worsening of relations between Germany and Soviet Union, there was no longer any "horizontal power line Moscow-Berlin"⁴⁸. On the other hand, V. Munters felt that German pressure on Lithuania was increasing and was touching on Kaunas' vital interests, threatening "to make the Klaipėda region an even more difficult problem than Vilnius (which in fact Lithuania does not control)"⁴⁹.

V. Munters also felt, however, that there were still a number of "underwater icebergs" on the route to a Baltic Entente. In his 21 March circular he wrote that the main obstacle was Lithuania itself, which "is still trying to 'maintain balance' among all the Scillas and Haribdas and to hold on to Klaipėda, Vilnius, and its current rulers." Accordingly, his letter continued, "before this conviction disappears, there is no hope to attract Lithuania, or at least no hope which is not seen by Zaunius as being useful in his foreign policy game"⁵⁰.

V. Munters also did not rule out the possibility that Estonia's position might complicate establishment of a Baltic union. Comparing Riga's policies with Tallinn's, he noted several nuanced differences: 1) Estonia wanted to establish relations with Finland, and only reticence on the part of the Finns was leading the Estonians to pay greater attention to Latvia. 2) Estonia was supporting maximum cooperation with Poland, without any reservations. 3) Estonia was completely indifferent to the Lithuanian question⁵¹.

On 25 April 1934, Lithuania proposed closer cooperation with Latvia and Estonia⁵². This proposal coincided with Germany's rejection⁵³ of a 28 March proposal by the USSR to jointly guarantee Baltic independence⁵⁴. The two diplomatic events also were closely connected politically, because Berlin's rejection of the Russian offer strengthened suspicions in the Baltic countries about Germany's policies⁵⁵. In a discussion with the German embassy secretary in Kaunas, A. Mohrmann, in mid-April, D. Zaunius expressed concern that Germany was rejecting M. Litvinov's⁵⁶ proposal only because it did not want to guarantee Lithuanian independence⁵⁷.

On 7 and 8 May 1934, Latvian and Estonian delegations jointly considered Lithuania's proposal and agreed to use it as a basis for further negotiations. During the meeting, broad discussion evolved concerning the Klaipėda (Memel) question. The results of this discussion were important and favorable to Lithuania. V. Munters and H. Laretei agreed that German activity in the Klaipėda region might also threaten Latvia and Estonia. Thus, long before the signing of a Baltic Entente agreement, it was stated that the Klaipėda (Memel) matter might not be an obstacle in expanding cooperation with Lithuania⁵⁸. V. Munters wrote in his diary that now Klaipėda was of "vital interest"⁵⁹ to the Baltic Republics. (It might be added that beginning in 1935 the Latvian and Estonian position gradually changed again, returning to the view that the Klaipėda matter was a problem for Lithuanian foreign policy only.)

After Latvia and Estonia responded to Lithuania's 25 April proposal, and Lithuania submitted a second memorandum on 29 May, concrete negotiations were begun with the aim of establishing a Baltic Entente. An important role in these negotiations was taken by the first trilateral meeting, which took place in Kaunas from 7 to 9 July 1934. Lithuania was represented by the new foreign minister, S. Lozoraitis, who, in contrast with the pro-German D. Zaunius, promoted a "firm stand" against Germany and supported further integration of the

Klaipėda (Memel) region into the Lithuanian nation or, to put it another way, the "Lithuanization" of the region. S. Lozoraitis did not rule out the possibility that Poland's support might be necessary to achieve these goals⁶⁰.

V. Munters reported that participants at the Kaunas meeting found four documents on the table: the 17 February agreement, the 25 April memorandum, the Latvian and Estonian response, and the second (29 May) memorandum⁶¹. During the negotiations it was decided that the three nations would sign a new agreement, rather than simply have Lithuania join the 17 February agreement⁶². The negotiations did not, however, dot all the i's. The issue of the Latvian and Estonian position concerning the Vilnius matter remained unresolved. Because Rīga and Tallinn had no analogous foreign policy problems, they rejected Kaunas' proposal that where the "specific problems" of signatory countries were concerned, the other nations involved should at least take a favorably neutral stand⁶³. Understanding that the Latvian and Estonian position would not change, Lithuania did not try to force the issue. Therefore, when the three nations met again, in Rīga on 29 August, they could initial a Latvian-Lithuanian-Estonian agreement on understanding and cooperation. It was signed on 12 September in Geneva and took effect on 3 November⁶⁴.

The Geneva agreement was signed for a period of ten years and provided that the Baltic Republics would convene trilateral foreign ministers' conference at least twice a year to coordinate foreign policy and mutual diplomatic affairs. Paragraph 5 of the agreement stated that closer cooperation must be established among the diplomatic and consular representatives of the three Baltic nations. A special clause added that Lithuania's "specific problems" would be viewed as an exception to the general rule of cooperation and diplomatic assistance⁶⁵. A confidential protocol which was signed along with the agreement made this last clause more concrete, stating that only the Vilnius issue was a "specific problem" under the definitions of the agreement⁶⁶. Accordingly the position taken by Latvia and Estonia in May on the Klaipėda issue was reaffirmed now.

The establishment of the Baltic Entente meant an institutionalization of foreign policy cooperation in the Baltic region, which undoubtedly was a coup for the diplomatic efforts of all three nations. The Baltic Entente was one of three multilateral unions which were established in Eastern and Central Europe between the two world wars.

Unlike the Small Entente⁶⁷ and the Balkan Pact⁶⁸, the Baltic alliance was not meant as a counterforce to another nation in the region. For this reason, it was never an obstacle to the establishment of broader cooperation which would help strengthen security throughout Eastern and Central Europe.

Latvian historian E. Dunsdorfs has written that the Geneva agreement was a "fairly significant foreign policy event" in the first year of the Ulmanis dictatorship⁶⁹. One could agree with this fairly reserved judgment, adding that the establishment of the Baltic Entente was in keeping with the general foreign policy orientation held by Latvia. A memorandum composed by the German ambassador to Latvia, G. Martius, on the occasion of his recall to Berlin in September 1934, stated that the Ulmanis government viewed it as critically important that Latvia "belong to the West and be a well regarded member of the League of Nations"⁷⁰.

The Baltic Entente could have been a significant entity, were it not for the "internal weakness" which was caused by Lithuania's "specific problems". An ideal outcome, of course, would have been a Polish and Lithuanian agreement before or shortly after the Baltic agreement on understanding and cooperation. In such an event, the Baltic Entente could have been expanded (by broadening it or transforming it into a military alliance), it could have become a real factor of stability and security in the region, forming a force which major powers in the area would have to deal with. It seems that this possibility existed in the international situation of the day.

But there was no compromise between Poland and Lithuania. The internal weakness of the Baltic Entente was not reduced, which logically leads to this question: Were there alternatives to the union in the early 1930s? Theoretically, the possibility of establishing an alliance with France could not be ruled out. In September 1933, the ambassador in Paris, F. Cielēns, suggested that a proposal be extended to France to reach a friendship agreement with Latvia⁷¹. The former Latvian President G. Zemgals, too, expressed a favorable opinion of establishing closer ties with France. In an interview with the newspaper *Sevodnja* on 13 September, Zemgals announced that Latvia should join France and the USSR in their efforts against Germany. When V. Munters objected to this statement as a "harmful" attack against Germany, G. Zemgals said that 50% of Latvia's residents agreed with him⁷².

There was no realistic possibility of an alliance with France, however. Latvia's foreign policy leadership did not so much as seriously consider such an option, though the Foreign Ministry did hope, rather baselessly, that should it become necessary, France would extend political or military support. The prominent French politician E. Herriot attempted to foster these illusions when he visited Rīga in September 1933. Asked by Prime Minister A. Bļodnieks whether in a "difficult moment" Latvia could "hope for direct and real support from France", Herriot gave a "clear and definite affirmation"⁷³. This unquestionably gave new hope to Latvia's diplomats. On 18 September 1933, the director of the Western Department at the Latvian Foreign Ministry, L. Ēķis, wrote to the Latvian ambassador in Warsaw, O. Grosvalds: "If we know what Herriot's policies mean in French politics, then we can truly be grateful to note these facts and can count on them in our practical policies and our development of relations with other nations"⁷⁴.

In the spring of 1934, the general secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, V. Munters, emphasized that the Baltic Republics must try to strengthen their security "with the support of other nations," calling such attempts "passive security policy". In his view, the only truly realistic hope emanating from such a policy was the development of an agreement guaranteeing the status quo (an Eastern Locarno)⁷⁵. But attempts by Latvian diplomats in Berlin, Paris and London to sound out the situation yielded no optimistic results. The major powers did not want to undertake any serious obligations.

One probe was conducted in late April 1934 by the Latvian ambassador to London, K. Zariņš. In a meeting with the director of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office, L. Collier, Zariņš directly asked whether the British government would be willing to guarantee Latvian independence. Collier responded that the "matter had not been discussed in the government, but he personally felt that if such a proposal were to come through the League of Nations with the support of all the major nations, then His Majesty's government would sign such a declaration as well"⁷⁶. Trying to explain what he felt a declaration of that nature might include, L. Collier said that it would not, of course, be similar to the Locarno agreement, which said that "England must take to arms when necessary", but would only note the determination of the signatory powers to guarantee Baltic independence, without providing for any concrete obligations⁷⁷.

L. Collier's remarks did not represent any new wave in British thinking. England was interested in the survival of the Baltic Republics, but not sufficiently so to promise energetic and effective action should the independence of the republics be threatened. This was not a secret to Latvia's and Estonia's diplomats. For example, the Estonian ambassador to London, O. Kallas, meeting with K. Zariņš on 2 May 1934, noted that he had not even bothered to ask L. Collier whether "England would be willing to declare our independence, because previous discussions have already shown that the Brits are not willing to go further than they did in Western Locarno"⁷⁹.

During the establishment of the Baltic Entente, a serious alternative was an alliance among Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Evidence of this is given by the results of a visit paid by Finnish Foreign Minister A. Hackzell to Riga on 8 and 9 December 1933. Finland and Latvia agreed to broaden cooperation between the two nations, agreeing to "a) exchange regular visits by the foreign ministers; b) order the ambassadors of both nations to maintain closer contacts; c) maintain close contacts between the general headquarters of Latvia and Finland; d) coordinate action before major international conferences; e) establish press relations, mutual visits by editors, and a press entente"⁷⁹.

But a meeting between Latvian Foreign Minister V. Salnais and A. Hackzell on 17 and 18 January 1934 in Helsinki led to both nations returning to the stage in their relations which had existed prior to the Finnish foreign minister's visit to Riga. Finland's attitude toward broader contacts with Latvia and Estonia had become more reserved. This was dictated by Finland's increasing orientation toward Scandinavia. The Finns also were displeased by Latvia's efforts to establish a union with Lithuania. In March 1934, high-ranking Helsinki diplomats warned Latvia that this could "scuttle all the attempts to draw nearer to Finland"⁸⁰.

Had an alliance been formed with Finland, Latvian and Estonian security would still not have been significantly strengthened, because there would have been little hope to real Finnish military support in times of need. It must also not be forgotten that Finland had only one potential enemy (the USSR) to contend with, not two enemies, as Latvia had. Moreover, in the area of foreign policy, an alliance with Finland could have created certain complications for Latvia, as it would have made maintenance of a position of neutrality more difficult. The

alliance would naturally have been pro-German.

Furthermore, an alliance with Finland (the Northern direction) would more closely have followed Estonian, not Latvian thinking, because the Latvians did not consider themselves to be Scandinavians. Even though Latvia viewed Lithuanian foreign policy quite negatively, the Latvian people nevertheless deeply sympathized with the Lithuanians, viewing them as a "brother nation". As far as the Finns were concerned, Latvians viewed them with respect, but certain reticence.

1 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 409.

2 Sīpols, V. Dzimtenes nodevība. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība (1963), p. 27.

3 After World War I, the Memel (Klaipėda) region was separated from Germany. European diplomatic circles viewed this region as a possible compensation to Lithuania if it would waive its right to Vilnius. On 18 February 1923, the ambassadorial conference decided that the Memel (Klaipėda) region should be incorporated into Lithuania.

4 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 401.

5 Andersons, E. Latvijas vēsture. Ārpolitika I, p. 265.

6 LVVA-2574.f.-3.apr.-3024.l.-p. 6.

7 Ibid., p. 12.

8 PAAA.-R 31264.-S.198.

9 LVVA-2574.f.-3.apr.-3032.l.-p. 436.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. - p. 400.

12 Ibid. - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 7.

13 Ibid. - p. 19.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3020.l.-p.14.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. - p. 15.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 36.

20 Ibid. - p. 51.

21 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 439.

22 Ibid. - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 51.

23 Ruffmann, K.H. "Deutsche und litauische Memelpolitik in der

- Zwischenkriegszeit. Ein Vergleich". *Nordost Archiv* 1993, H.2.-S. 220.
- 24 The Memel Convention was developed by the council of the League of Nations and was signed in May 1924 by the major victors of World War I (England, France, *et al.*) and by Lithuania. It recognized Lithuanian sovereignty over the Memel region and specified autonomy for the region in the areas of legislation, jurisdiction, governance and finances. Together with a separate statute which governed relations between the region and the Lithuanian state, this convention formed the internationally judicial basis for the special status of the region.
- 25 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-83.l.-p. 332.
- 26 *Ibid.* - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3032.l.-p. 23.
- 27 *Ibid.* - p. 30.
- 28 *Ibid.* - p. 31.
- 29 Lossowski, P. "Das Wilna-Problem in der polnischen Aussenpolitik 1918-1939". *Nordost Archiv*, 1993.-H.2.-S. 292.
- 30 Žepkaite, R. "Die fehlende Hauptstadt: Litauens Politik im Zeichen der Wilnafrage". *Nordost Archiv*, 1993.-H.2.-S. 309.
- 31 J. Ļipkis: the Polish ambassador to Germany.
- 32 K. von Neurath: the German foreign minister.
- 33 Pistohlkors, G. "Der Hitler-Stalin-Pact und die Baltischen Staaten". *Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939. Das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?*. Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag (1989), p. 84.
- 34 Rauch, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- 35 LVVA-2574.f.-3.apr.-3032.l.-p. 49.
- 36 Valdības Vēstnesis, 28 March 1934.
- 37 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 402.
- 38 *Ibid.* - p. 415.
- 39 *Ibid.* - p. 416.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.* - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 101.
- 42 PAAA.-R 31277.-E 495355.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.* - E 495361.
- 46 Žalys, *op cit.*, p. 79.
- 47 LVVA-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 411.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.* - p. 403.

- 51 Ibid. - p. 401.
- 52 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3067.l.-p. 49.
- 53 Germany rejected the Russian (Soviet) proposal in mid-April of 1934.
- 54 Dokumenti vnešnej politiki SSSR.-T.XVII.-M.: Nauka, 1971,-s. 787.
- 55 Myllyniemi, S. Die baltische Krise 1938-1941. Stuttgart (1979), p. 16.
- 56 M. Litvinov — the Russian (Soviet) People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs.
- 57 Documents on German Foreign Policy.-Series C.-Vol.III-London (1959), p. 267.
- 58 Zālys, V. "Das Memelproblem in der litauischen Aussenpolitik (1923-1939)". Nordost Archiv. - 1993.-H.2.-p. 262.
- 59 LVVA-2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 128.
- 60 Žepkaite, op. cit., p. 309.
- 61 LVVA-2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 140.
- 62 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3064.l.-p. 17.
- 63 Ibid. - p. 21.
- 64 Ibid. - 3067.l.-p. 49.
- 65 Valdības Vēstnesis, 26 September 1934.
- 66 LVVA-2574.f.-3.apr.-3279.l.-p. 90.
- 67 The Small Entente was formed in 1921 and 1922 and was basically a defense union among Chechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania against Hungary. These nations feared Hungarian revisionism, because they had, as a result of the Triannon peace agreement received territory which had earlier been under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- 68 In February 1934, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania and Turkey signed the Balkan Pact, which was aimed against possible revisionism on the part of the Bulgarians.
- 69 Dunsdorfs, E. Kārļa Ulmaņa dzīve. Ceļinieks. Politikāis. Diktators. Mocekļis. Stockholm, Daugava (1978), p. 374.
- 70 PAAA.-R 84613.-S.3.
- 71 Ibid. - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 40.
- 72 Ibid. - p. 56.
- 73 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 444.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid. - p. 404.
- 76 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3065.l.-p. 303.
- 77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 437.

80 Ibid., p. 402.

III. The Baltic Entente and the Policy of "Collective Security" in Europe

In the spring of 1934, the most important matter on the Latvian foreign policy agenda was the formation of a Baltic Entente. This was considered to be the most significant resource available to strengthen the security of all three nations. In the 21 March instructive letter mentioned above, V. Munters told Latvian ambassadors abroad that "the only active and fully acceptable work which we can perform in order to strengthen our security is to facilitate the idea of a Baltic union". In his view, the union would become "the only definite guarantee" to protect the independence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. V. Munters felt that if the Baltic Republics did not join forces, sooner or later they would become the "objects"² of major-power policy.

Of course, the foreign policy leadership of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia did not exclude other methods of strengthening Baltic security from their calculations. For example, V. Munters stood for the implementation of a "passive security" policy to go alongside the "active security" policy of forming a Baltic Entente. The "passive security" policy envisioned efforts to use the assistance and support of other countries to strengthen Baltic security³. There were not, however, many choices to draw upon in this area. Baltic diplomats thought that only a few Eastern Locarno proposals, or possibly the idea of an Eastern Pact were more or less realistic.

The idea of an Eastern Pact took on a particularly significant position in European relations in 1934 and 1935. There were several possible variations to this idea. The most important of these was a proposal agreed in principle (but not in detail) by L. Barthou and M. Litvinov in July 1934. Barthou, the French foreign minister, sent this proposal to the Brits on 27 July⁴. It contained three sections: an agreement on regional mutual assistance, an agreement on mutual assistance between France and the USSR, and a general act. The agreement on regional mutual assistance envisioned participation by the USSR, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland and the Baltic Republics. All of the nations would guarantee the inviolability of borders and would extend assistance to those signatory nations which fell victim to unprovoked aggression. Under the terms of the French-Soviet agreement, France would have become the guarantor of the Eastern Pact, while Soviet Union would have undertaken this role for

the Locarno Agreement. The general act provided that the USSR would enter the League of Nations and addressed the obligations and rights held by other signatory nations in relation to the League⁵.

The Eastern Pact was primarily responsive to the interests and ambitions of France and Soviet Union⁶. But were relations between the USSR and Germany to worsen, the pact could have a certain positive importance in securing peace in Eastern Europe. The Baltic Republics understood this, and therefore viewed the Eastern Pact as a possible factor in strengthening security. True, the policies of the three nations were not exactly identical in relation to the pact. In details, the policies differed considerably. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, it might be added, determined their attitude toward the French and Soviet proposal in the summer of 1934, before the legal formation of the Baltic Entente. After the union was formed, the three nations discussed and "evened out" their positions on the matter within the union framework. In terms of Baltic cooperation, this was a commendable effort.

The official position taken by Latvia in relation to the Eastern Pact was expressed in some detail on 16 July 1934, when the Foreign Ministry sent another instructive letter to the Latvian ambassadors abroad. The letter, signed by V. Munters, said that given the official French announcement, which provided that the pact would take effect only after the USSR joined the League of Nations, Latvia generally "has no objection to this combination". The document went on to say that Latvia thought it important that at least two principles be observed: the equality of all signatory nations in terms of the political requirements and form of their participation; and the harmonizing of the pact with the fundamental ideas of the League of Nations. Completely unacceptable to Latvia, however, was any situation under which the planned security system might be turned into an instrument to oppose any specific nation (concretely in this case — Germany)⁷.

In his letter, V. Munters expressed surprise at the fact that in discussions up to that point, the motives of the proposed pact had not been formulated adequately. He wrote that diplomats from all nations agreed that the pact would strengthen security in Eastern Europe, but at the same time they were avoiding any statement to the effect that increasing tension in the area was due to the worsening of relations between the Soviet Union and Germany. It was precisely from this perspective that V. Munters issued a sharp condemnation of the position

taken by the USSR which he felt was using its fear of a German attack and its belief that the Baltic Republics would be the staging ground for such aggression as a reason to make the independence and inviolability of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia the object of the proposed Eastern Pact. The general secretary of the Foreign Ministry informed his ambassadors that implementation of such ideas would mean "placing this agreement on a crooked foundation from the very beginning". The letter clearly and specifically stated that Latvia rejected attempts by the USSR to make Latvia's desired security agreement the centerpiece of the pact. V. Munters believed that the key element of the pact was not enurement of the status of the Baltic States, but a betterment of relations between the USSR and Germany achieved with the help of the Baltic Republics (the form of the agreement)⁹.

Analyzing the structure of the proposed Eastern Pact, V. Munters devoted special attention to the planned Soviet - French "mutual guarantees, which would bind the Locarno Agreement with the Eastern Pact." He concluded that this would lead to a "peculiar situation", because "the French guarantee of the Eastern Pact would be given in bilateral connection to the USSR." Of course Munters could not and did not consider this option, where "the USSR would be the bridge ... through which the Eastern Pact would receive" supplementary French guarantees, to be the best possible option. He wrote that "this matter is most delicate and requires extensive thought"⁹.

At the close of the letter V. Munters accented the thought that mutual assistance obligations would be binding only to signatory nations involved in the pact. This meant that if Germany declined to participate, Latvia would have no right to assistance from other countries in the event of a German attack. If that were the case, his letter said, the pact would have to be turned into a defensive pact, aimed against Germany, if it would have any significance in terms of *Realpolitik*. This, in turn, would not be in keeping with the ideas of strengthening security in Eastern Europe. V. Munters emphasized that the French and the Czechs understood this very well, but the Russians did not, and this meant that it was still possible that an agreement could be struck without the involvement of Germany. The Latvian ambassadors were informed that their government would not longer be interested in a pact if one of the planned signatory nations refused to accept it¹⁰.

Other documents (the duty logs of department heads at the

Latvian Foreign Ministry, reports from ambassadors, *et al.*) indicate that Latvian diplomats, faced with fairly scanty information about the proposed Eastern Pact, worried about the many questions which remained open concerning the mechanism of mutual assistance. In mid-July 1934 the Foreign Ministry received a report from O. Grosvalds (the ambassador in Warsaw) which stated: "The main danger to Russia's neighboring countries lie in the fact that eventually they will have to let the Red Army onto their territory"¹¹. Notes made by V. Munters indicate that he agreed with this assessment¹². Moreover, he believed that utilization of mutual assistance obligations (should they take effect automatically in the case of aggression, without the sanction of the League of Nations) would threaten rather than facilitate peace and stability in Eastern Europe.

Lithuania, unlike Latvia, adopted a relatively more welcoming position as regarded the idea of an Eastern Pact. This testified to the great influence wielded by Moscow on Lithuanian politics. At the same time, however, Kaunas attempted to promote its own terms, which demonstrated that Lithuania credited itself with a greater role in European international relations than was actually the case. In July 1934, for example, the Lithuanian government ordered ambassador P. Klimas in Paris to announce to the French government that Kaunas would not like to see any provisions in the planned agreement which would legitimize the existing Polish-Lithuanian border¹³. Observing this activity, the director of the fourth division of the Auswaertiges Amt, R. Meyer, wrote to the German ambassador to Lithuania, E. Zechlin, that Lithuania's approach to the Eastern Pact was rather high-minded¹⁴. R. Meyer felt that among the reasons for which the pact was being promoted, Lithuania's concerns had absolutely no significance¹⁵.

Estonia had lesser sympathies toward the proposed Eastern Pact than did Latvia and Lithuania. In July 1934, J. Seljamaa discussed the proposal with Polish Foreign Minister J. Beck and offered some assessments which could be interpreted in a number of ways. What followed was a "small provocation" by Polish journalists, leading to the impression that Estonia was supportive of Warsaw's rejection of the Eastern Pact¹⁶. In a 7 August letter to O. Grosvalds, the Latvian ambassador to Poland, V. Munters characterized the situation by writing: "The Polish press smiled with satisfaction, the Russians were angry, the Estonians lambasted their minister, the Germans were happy that a wrench had been thrown into the French-Russian political

game, the Lithuanians were upset, and the Rīga diplomats asked whether the Latvian and Estonian positions had been coordinated¹⁷.

The Latvian foreign policy leadership decided to "clear up the whole matter in one fell swoop"¹⁸. The ambassador in Soviet Union, A. Bilmanis, was authorized to suggest to J. Seljamaa, who was in Moscow at the time, that Latvia and Estonia give a joint favorable reply to the Soviet proposal that an Eastern Pact be signed. The Estonian foreign minister agreed to this suggestion, and on 29 July 1934, both diplomats declared to M. Litvinov that Latvia and Estonia favored "the idea of an Eastern European regional mutual assistance pact". At the same time, however, this declaration was tempered by one logical exception: "Given that there is no agreement text at this point, Latvia (Estonia) reserves the right to propose necessary amendments and additions on receipt of the pact"¹⁹. A few days later, a similar declaration was submitted to the government of the USSR by the Lithuanian foreign minister, S. Lozoraitis²⁰.

The Estonian action surprised several German diplomats. They interpreted the 29 July declaration by Bilmanis and Seljamaa to be an alteration of Tallinn's position. All explanations and excuses by the Estonian foreign minister were to no avail. A counselor at the German embassy in Moscow, F. von Twardowski, met with Seljamaa on 30 July 1934 and afterward reported to Berlin that M. Litvinov had succeeded in convincing the Estonian foreign minister to take a favorable stand toward the idea of the Eastern Pact²¹.

On returning to Tallinn, J. Seljamaa met with the German ambassador to Estonia, O. Reinebeck, who also expressed confusion over Estonia's unexpectedly positive attitude toward the Eastern Pact. In a letter to the Auswaertiges Amt dated 2 August 1934, he sought answers to the question of why Seljamaa had given J. Beck and M. Litvinov such very different answers. O. Reinebeck was convinced that the explanation lay in the character of the foreign minister: in person he was very pleasant, unfavorably tended toward direct decisions, unable to evaluate complicated matters, but his political wisdom was expressed in efforts to keep good relations with all parties as long as possible, and seem to agree with any and all partners while still maintaining an escape route at all times. The German diplomat concluded his letter with the significant conclusion that Seljamaa's position in the government was weak and that all the most important decisions were taken by the president, who was very reserved in his attitude toward

the plans of M. Litvinov and L. Barthou²².

Individual Baltic diplomats, including E. Krieviņš, wrote their memoirs after World War II and posited the thesis that the Eastern Pact proposal (supplemented with ideas from the British) which was submitted to the German Auswaertiges Amt in July 1934 by the British ambassador to Berlin, E. Phipps, corresponded with the vital interests of the Baltic Republics and "was the only offer of guarantees by the major powers which could be taken seriously" by Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the interwar period²³. This viewpoint is not, however, easy to accept without some reservations. It appears that the careful and reserved attitude demonstrated by Latvia and Estonia toward the Eastern Pact in the summer of 1934 was logically connected to the geopolitical situation of the Baltic Republics — mistrust in Soviet Union, and close historical, economic and cultural ties with Germany. In order to use "necessary deliberation"²⁴ in relation to this matter, Latvia and Estonia sought to avoid supporting unilateral policies which were aimed at another country. Even French diplomats recognized the justification for Latvia's motives and emphasized that Latvia's position in no way implied Latvian kowtowing to Germany or any "germanophile" attitude among the Latvian people²⁵.

Germany's position was the key question in the matter of the Eastern Pact²⁶. Germany felt that the proposed agreement was a Soviet-French instrument to be used against Germany. On 8 September 1934, the German government announced that it would not take part in any collective agreement which provided for mutual assistance obligations, because it did not wish to become drawn into foreign conflicts²⁷. Emphasizing that it gave priority to bilateral agreements, Berlin said it would be ready to sign a multilateral agreement if it contained only obligations of non-aggression and consultation²⁸. Poland gave a similar reply²⁹, stating at the end of September that it would not participate in the Eastern Pact (without Germany) and emphasizing that it already had non-aggression agreements with the USSR and Germany³⁰.

In the period between the autumn of 1934 and the spring of 1935, several important changes appeared in European negotiations concerning the Eastern Pact. These changes were caused by overall changes in the international situation, as well as steps taken by the major powers to improve their own positions. The Baltic Republics continuously tried to keep informed about major power plans and the essence of any possible changes. On 22 November 1934, for exam-

ple, the Baltic department director of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, E. Vīgrabs, asked several Latvian diplomats (M. Valters, O. Grosvalds, L. Sēja) to investigate reports in the European press that new activities were being planned in connection with the proposed Eastern Pact, possibly with the aim of altering the content of the pact, eliminating the principle of guarantees and keeping only non-aggression obligations intact³¹.

At the first conference of foreign ministers to take place under the aegis of the Baltic Entente, in late November and early December of 1934, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania reaffirmed their positive attitude toward the idea of an Eastern Pact³². A week later, on 11 December, the Latvian foreign policy leadership received from the French and Soviet ambassadors to Rīga a protocol³³ agreed by P. Laval³⁴ and M. Litvinov on 5 December 1934. In it, both sides agreed to foreswear any negotiations which could lead to an agreement that would undermine the preparation and signing of an Eastern Pact³⁵. In order that all three Baltic Republics might give an identical response to this overture, the Latvian government, which favored joining in the protocol, wanted to coordinate the matter with Lithuania and Estonia³⁶. Kaunas gave its agreement, but Tallinn delayed giving a final answer until the first part of January 1935, when, in connection with the Saar plebiscite³⁷ and the French-Italian agreement³⁸, the overall political situation in Europe changed significantly. The Latvian Foreign Ministry believed that the moment had passed because of these changes and that the new circumstances would make illogical any response to the French and the Soviets concerning possible joining in their protocol³⁹.

In January 1935, the Latvian ambassador in Tallinn, R. Liepiņš, received an order from the Foreign Ministry to inform the Estonians of Latvia's position⁴⁰. The ambassador reported back to Rīga on 22 January 1935, saying that the Estonian deputy foreign minister, H. Laretei, had received this information with great satisfaction and open relief, stating that at a time when "the situation in the Eastern Pact matter changes day by day" and "Litvinov is already accusing Laval of failing to observe the 5 December agreement", the Baltic Republics would be wise to stand aside and take on the role of simple observers for the time being⁴¹. In a confidential circular to Latvian ambassadors on 30 January 1935, V. Munters wrote that "[H. Laretei's] behavior confirms that the Estonians had purposely delayed their response in order to sabotage the entire effort"⁴². On the

other hand, V. Munters did not discount the possibility that the Estonians had simply misunderstood the situation which had been established on 11 December, and for this reason the Baltic Republics had missed the chance to promote themselves as having equal positions in negotiations about the Eastern Pact⁴³. It seems that the first of these two possibilities is the correct one. The Estonians once again were demonstrating their fairly reserved and quite chilly attitude toward the Eastern Pact. Given the influence wielded by Germany and Poland over Estonian foreign policy, no other scenario was plausible.

Baltic diplomats cheered a communique from England and France on 3 February 1935, in which the two nations expressed their support for an Eastern Pact in the context of resolving Eastern European security problems⁴⁴. Although it was already clear that the Eastern Pact was starting to lose its purpose, all three Baltic Republics decided to undertake diplomatic activities which would demonstrate their faith in the idea of a pact. In March 1935, Baltic ambassadors submitted joint declarations to the British and French foreign ministries in which the Baltic Republics expressed admiration for the British and French course toward strengthening security in Eastern Europe⁴⁵. There is no doubt that this step increased the prestige of the Baltic Entente in the international arena and confirmed the attempts by Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to be political players, actively participating in all matters which touched on security in Eastern Europe.

Several new proposals concerning an Eastern Pact were issued in the spring of 1935, at a time when Germany's policies of armament were causing severe concern in Europe⁴⁶. On 6 April, the USSR proposed to the Baltic Republics that an Eastern Pact be struck without the participation of German and Poland⁴⁷. In connection with this proposal, the Latvian government ordered its ambassadors in France and Britain to learn more about the attitude of those two countries to the Russian proposal. In a report which was received in Rīga on 8 April, the embassy in Paris emphasized that France was not recommending that Latvia hurry to sign the proposed agreement⁴⁸. England's recommendation was less specific and emphatic. In an official letter from K. Zariņš to Prime Minister K. Ulmanis, we read that in late April the British Foreign Office informed the Latvian ambassador that the Soviet proposal had been discussed in a special meeting, chaired by deputy minister R. Vansittart. At the meeting the Brits had come to "a unanimous conclusion" that they could give no concrete rec-

ommendation to the Baltic Republics in the matter of the Soviet proposal, because they were not familiar with the "text of the proposal". At the same time, however, participants at the meeting concluded that "His Majesty's government would not oppose the signing of the proposed pact, if it were done within the confines of the League of Nations and provided for the possible later joining of Germany and Poland"⁴⁹. Not wanting to worsen relations with Germany and Poland and fearing an overly hasty decision on so important a matter (one which could jeopardize their policy of neutrality), Latvia and Estonia took a reserved and waiting attitude toward the new Soviet proposal, choosing to implement a policy of delay concerning a final answer⁵⁰. This time Lithuania, too, did not upset the "common front". It did not hurry with a "positive reply" but rather expressed a willingness to coordinate its position with that of Latvia and Estonia⁵¹. In mid-April 1935, representatives of the Baltic foreign ministries (V. Munters, H. Laretei and J. Urbšys) agreed that the matter of the Eastern Pact and the Soviet proposal would be discussed at the second Baltic Entente foreign ministers conference, scheduled to begin on 6 May⁵². The Soviet Union interpreted this to mean that the Baltic States were refusing to accept their proposal⁵³. In a discussion with Lithuania's permanent delegate to the League of Nations, P. Klimas, which took place on 17 April, M. Litvinov expressed dissatisfaction and deep regret concerning the "negative answer" from the Baltic Republics. He went so far as to suggest that he had coordinated his proposal to Latvia and Lithuania with France, which had undertaken to guarantee the inviolability of the Baltic Republics if they joined an Eastern Pact which did not involve Germany and Poland⁵⁴.

Germany, too, joined in the diplomatic game surrounding the Eastern Pact. On 12 April 1935 it informed London that it was ready (alongside its existing bilateral non-aggression agreements) to sign a multilateral agreement which would not have any mutual assistance obligations at its base, but instead would promote non-aggression, arbitration and consultative obligations (an Eastern non-aggression pact)⁵⁴. The goal of this announcement was to avert joint Western sanctions against Germany at the Stresa conference on major Western powers (England, France, Italy). Such sanctions were possible because Germany had violated the terms of the Versailles treaty in the area of demilitarization.

In May 1935 the USSR signed mutual assistance agreements with France and Czechoslovakia. Several Latvian diplomats were less

than enamored by this. They felt that Paris had betrayed the Baltic Republics. The Latvian ambassador to France, O. Grosvalds, perhaps stated these feelings most accurately. On 4 May 1935, he wrote to K. Ulmanis: "As far as France is concerned, one cannot deny that at this point it did not take the Baltic Republics into account when formulating its plans. In this respect, a break has taken place. We have been left 'at the side of the road'. It is not yet clear whether that is or is not advantageous to us, and this question is open to debate"⁵⁵.

At the cited second conference of Baltic Entente foreign ministers, the decision was taken to avoid any new agreements which could be interpreted as the Baltic Republics taking a stand in favor of one or another of the major powers⁵⁶. Latvia, however, was upset by an agreement on maritime affairs signed by Germany and Britain on 18 June 1935⁵⁷ and began to seriously consider the possibility of "participating in the Eastern Pact without Germany and Poland". This matter was discussed with particular alacrity at the second conference of Latvian ambassadors, which took place in late June and early July of 1935. Several diplomats (V. Munters, A. Bilmanis, et al) expressed support for a mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union, naively hoping that the final result might be a comprehensive collective agreement⁵⁸. Accordingly, the ambassadorial conference signaled a movement by Latvia toward Moscow within the confines of its policy of neutrality. Before coming to a final decision on the matter, however, Latvia's foreign policy leadership sought to clearly learn Germany's position — its attitude toward the Eastern Pact now that the Streza conference was past.

On 7 July 1935, V. Munters met with the German ambassadors to the Baltic Republics, E. Schack, O. Reinebeck and E. Zechlin. The discussion dealt with the matter of the Eastern Pact, and the general secretary informed the German diplomats that "the ambassadorial conference took no decisions concerning an agreement with Russia". E. Schack telegraphed Berlin that V. Munters would particularly welcome a German initiative which would let him avoid signing an agreement with the USSR. The German ambassador stated that V. Munters had accented the thought that Latvia would have to take a decision on the matter sooner or later and that a very realistic possibility was the Baltic Republics' joining in the Soviet-French security system⁵⁹.

The discussion was also recounted to the Auswaertiges Amt by the German ambassador to Kaunas, E. Zechlin. In a letter to the

deputy director of the fourth department, V. von Grundherr, he noted that V. Munters felt that Latvia would eventually have to adopt the same position on the matter of the Eastern Pact as Czechoslovakia had already done. E. Zechlin wrote that although V. Munters was probably quite sly and tended toward anti-German feelings, it nevertheless seemed that this remark was not based on tactical considerations⁶⁰.

E. Zechlin feared the possibility of Latvia's becoming entangled in the Soviet-French front, because it would gladly be followed by Lithuania, leaving a completely isolated Estonia with no choice but to follow the example set by Riga and Kaunas. For this reason, the German ambassador was convinced that Berlin must do something to avert this chain of events. He believed the best (and only) resource to be the offer of bilateral non-aggression agreements to Latvia and Estonia. The ambassador felt that this would "resolve another problem", as well. Latvia and Estonia would be further separated from Lithuania, which would lead to the Lithuanian isolation so very much desired by Berlin⁶¹.

The leadership of the Auswaertiges Amt did not fully share E. Zechlin's opinion, but it joined the diplomatic game nevertheless, choosing a strategy which had a "carrot and stick" approach. On 9 July 1935, the state secretary, B. von Buelow, sent E. Schack a telegram in which he asked the diplomat to seek out V. Munters and "renew discussions of the Eastern Pact." The instruction was to inform V. Munters⁶² of Germany's negative attitude toward collective pacts, emphasize that Berlin had no aggressive intentions toward Latvia, and indirectly offer an arbitration agreement with Germany. At the same time, however, B. von Buelow recommended that the ambassador explain to V. Munters how dangerous Latvia's joining in the French-Soviet front would be. The telegram concluded with this text: "The form of the discussion must be such that the Latvians see certain positive possibilities and are restrained from hurried decisions concerning the Soviet front, but at the same time that we are not bound to anything except the possibility of signing an arbitration agreement"⁶³.

The German policy of "temptation and threats" at first left no significant impact on the Latvian position. To some extent, however, it did lessen the readiness of Riga's foreign policy leadership to sign a mutual assistance agreement with the USSR. As an ally of Estonia, Latvia could not ignore Tallinn's distinct rejection of bilateral guarantee agreements between the Baltic States and Moscow. German diplo-

mats in the Baltic did not doubt that Estonia would be the one to block the inclusion of the Baltic Entente into the Soviet political sphere of influence and would avert any thought of the Entente's submitting to Soviet demands. On 5 October 1935, E. Schack informed the leadership of the Auswaertiges Amt that Latvia, in observing the Estonian position, would manage to avoid Soviet pressure, and that the Baltic States would not sign any agreement with Moscow "a la Tschechoslowakei"⁶⁴.

The Soviet Union also did not maintain an unyielding position in the matter of the Eastern Pact. The "collective security" policy which it promoted was actually an attempt to create an anti-German bloc. After the French-Soviet mutual assistance agreement was signed, Moscow's interest in the Baltic Republics diminished considerably, even though it continued actively to oppose an increase in Polish and German influence in the region. Estonian Foreign Minister J. Seljamaa was to some extent correct when he, meeting with M. Litvinov in July 1934, concluded that the Soviet foreign affairs commissar viewed the Eastern Pact as much less valuable than an agreement with France which would ensure assistance from Paris to Moscow⁶⁵.

Apparently the Latvian and Lithuanian foreign policy leadership too, despite their fear of Germany, understood that their security would not be increased to any great extent by bilateral mutual assistance agreements between the Baltic Republics and the USSR (the bilateral form of an Eastern European security pact), nor by any of the various Eastern Pact options, should any of these options be implemented. In either event the Baltic Republics would be better protected against the West (Germany) than the East (the USSR). Given the geographic situation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, and given Moscow's expansionistic tendencies, it appeared that the Eastern Pact could not protect Latvia against Soviet aggression should international complications arise in Eastern Europe.

The conflict between Italy and Abyssinia which arose in October 1935 completely overshadowed the problem of the Eastern Pact. In a letter to Latvian ambassadors on 28 October 1935, V. Munters noted that the Eastern Pact was gradually being forgotten⁶⁶. A similar conclusion was drawn at the third foreign ministers conference of the Baltic Entente, which took place in December 1935: "Plans for an Eastern Pact are no longer significant"⁶⁷. At the beginning of 1936, the importance of Eastern Pact plans in the broader context of internation-

al relations was almost negligible. Despite this fact, the Latvian and Lithuanian foreign policy leadership for a short time continued to defend the idea of an Eastern Pact. On 28 May, for example, V. Munters wrote an article for the newspaper *Brīvā Zeme* in which he supported the concept of "indivisible peace" and, consequently, the necessity of an Eastern Pact⁶⁸. It was characteristic for him that he tied this necessity to Germany's failure to observe international agreements. The German ambassador in Rīga, E. Schack, informed the Auswaertiges Amt on 29 May of his conclusion that V. Munters' thoughts reflected mistrust and fear of a Germany which was regaining its strength. These fears, wrote the ambassador, had been increasing since 7 March⁶⁹ among Latvia's political leadership⁷⁰.

The faith of the Baltic Republics in a system of collective security was also demonstrated at the fourth foreign ministers conference of the Baltic Entente, which took place in May 1936. All participants agreed that international relations in Europe must be founded on the principles of collective security and "indivisible peace". At the same time they expressed a negative attitude toward agreements which would touch on the interests of the Baltic Republics but would be signed without the participation of the three states⁷¹. During the debate, Estonia's representatives suggested that Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations statutes, which provided for sanctions against aggressors, might be limited or even repealed, but they did not take a strong stand in this matter just yet⁷².

At the fifth foreign ministers conference of the Baltic Entente (9 and 10 December 1938), the ministers reaffirmed their trust in the League of Nations⁷³, which was already suffering a considerable crisis and whose influence was waning. On the other hand, it was in the fall of 1936 that participation of the three Baltic Republics in the League of Nations took on an entirely different quality. In October the Latvian representative (V. Munters) was elected to a three-year, non-permanent term on the Council of the League. There can be no doubt that this fact signified the growing international prestige and authority which the Baltic Republics had enjoyed after forming their joint foreign policy alliance in the fall of 1934. K. Ulmanis said at a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on 13 October 1936 that "this event first of all demonstrates faith toward our foreign policy line and recognizes our tactics. I would like to add that a very significant role in this policy and these tactics has been played by the establishment of the Baltic Entente"⁷⁴.

At the time when V. Munters began to work in the Council of the League of Nations, the small countries of Europe were rapidly losing faith in the authority and effectiveness of the organization. The authority of the League of Nations was damaged by the failure of the disarmament program, its inability to avert acts of aggression and war, its repeal of sanctions against Italy⁷⁵ and other decisions. Of course, attempts were made to renew the prestige of the Geneva institution. Much talk was devoted to the idea of changing the statutes of the League of Nations. A plenary session of the League which assembled in the fall of 1936 considered this idea, as did the fifth foreign ministers conference of the Baltic Entente in December of that year. All three Baltic representatives emphasized their support for the League of Nations and said that the pact of the organization should be amended in order to strengthen it⁷⁶. Debate also frequently touched on the matter of the Baltic Entente's neutrality.

The League of Nations pact, which was essentially meant to fight war with war, pretty much eliminated the possibility of neutrality. In April 1937, foreign minister V. Munters noted that "our belonging to the League of Nations and our geographic location may impose different obligations on us than neutrality"⁷⁷. But Baltic diplomats did not put much credence in such a possibility. As late as the summer of 1935, speaking at the second conference of Latvian ambassadors, the permanent delegate to the League of Nations, J. Feldmanis, said that the organization's "weapons of peace are nothing more than appeasement and friendly pressure on nations in conflict." He felt that given the reinterpretation of the League of Nations pact, any nation could remain neutral except in the case that an aggressor was identified. But J. Feldmanis added that every nation has the right to a sovereign decision concerning which side is the aggressor and accordingly, a country could forever maintain neutrality by stating that it could not decide which side was the attacker⁷⁸.

Many Baltic diplomats in the 1930s were deeply sympathetic to the idea of a guaranteed neutrality. They believed that the most advantageous solution would be to declare the Baltic Republics as permanently neutral within the context of the League of Nations. This would mean that the major powers would guarantee permanent neutrality for Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. They would keep the protection of the League of Nations but would be free of obligations to participate in undertakings under Paragraph 16 of the League's

statutes. The reality of politics in the 1930s, however, made such an ideal option impossible.

At a time when the idea of neutrality was becoming increasingly popular in some nations, and the failure of the League of Nations to protect the security of member nations was becoming ever more glaringly obvious, the attitude held by the Baltic Republics toward this organization slowly began to change. The faith in the League of Nations which had been an immovable element of Latvian and Estonian foreign policy gradually lessened. The leaders of the Baltic Republics went so far as to criticize the work of the League of Nations and express doubts about the idea that the primary factor in ensuring peace might be the collective security principles expounded by the organization. The Balts gave an increasingly important role in ensuring their independence to bilateral agreements.

The attitude held by the Baltic Entente toward the League of Nations was influenced by Germany, Poland and the Scandinavian countries. German had left the League of Nations in October 1933 and did not wish to allow the strengthening of the organization, because this might have helped consolidate the countries of Europe, thus reducing possibilities of opposition to the Versailles system. The Scandinavian countries, hoping that their geographic location would prove to be an advantage, did not want to be bound by Paragraph 16 of the League's statutes and wished to maintain neutrality in the event of war in Europe⁷⁹.

In discussions such as the one V. Munters had with Swedish Foreign Minister R. Sandler during the latter's visit to Rīga in June 1937, one of the major questions was reform of the League of Nations pact. R. Sandler told the Latvian foreign minister that the Swedish population, in connection with the events in Abyssinia, was worried that "Paragraph 16 places an unduly heavy burden on Sweden". He said Sweden would like to interpret the paragraph as saying that "neither the offer of military assistance, nor the permission of free passage for another country's armed forces would occur automatically, but only with Sweden's agreement". But he added that "this unilateral interpretation is not universally accepted, even though the other Scandinavian countries, as well as Switzerland and Belgium, basically agreed with it." R. Sandler wished to learn Latvia's views on the matter, although he did not offer any concrete proposals⁸⁰.

V. Munters apparently understood that Sweden's antipathy to Paragraph 16 signaled its wish to be freed of moral obligation to

extend assistance to the eternally threatened Baltic Republics should war break out there. He answered R. Sandler by saying that the Latvian government was refraining from discussions about interpretation of Paragraph 16 on grounds that the Latvian population would see this as "a weakening of the significance of the League of Nations and of international security". On the other hand, he added that in fact it was not possible that Latvia might extend military assistance or let another army pass through its territory without specific agreement by the Latvian government⁸¹.

Germany, too, whose negative attitude toward Paragraph 16 was easy to understand (in the event of war, the paragraph could lead to a coalition of many nations against the aggressor), placed a certain amount of diplomatic pressure on Estonia and Latvia. In June 1937, for example, the Latvian ambassador to Berlin, H. Celmiņš, met with the director of the Auswaertiges Amt's political department, E. von Weizsäcker and his assistants, V. von Bismarck and V. von Grundherr. H. Celmiņš reported to V. Munters on 12 June 1937 that the German diplomats spoke kindly of Latvia's political relations with Germany and recommended that all three Baltic Republics "stick together, observe strict neutrality and protect their borders"⁸². The diplomats added that Germany, even though it did not recognize the League of Nations, had no objections to Latvia remaining as a member of the League, but that it felt that Latvia should demand reform of the organization, especially repeal of Paragraph 16, on grounds that it did not facilitate peace but, on the contrary, facilitated disharmony and war⁸³.

The sixth meeting of Baltic Entente foreign ministers convened in early July 1937 in Kaunas and discussed Swedish Foreign Minister R. Sandler's position and proposal concerning Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations statutes. No decision was taken on this matter⁸⁴. A certain chilling could be detected in the Baltic attitude toward the League of Nations, but no suggestion was made that the three should distance themselves from the group.

Within the Baltic Entente, the first to take a strong stand against Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations was Estonia, which submitted to German and Polish influence. Officially Tallinn tried to get Latvia and Lithuania to follow its example. On 15 June 1938, V. von Grundherr informed German diplomats in Warsaw, Moscow, Kaunas, Rīga and Stockholm that Estonia had, at the eighth Baltic Entente foreign ministers conference which had concluded a few days earlier,

recommended that all three nations publish a declaration on distancing themselves from Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations⁸⁵.

Historical literature reports that Lithuania was not ready to agree to the Estonian proposal, while Latvia avoided a direct answer⁸⁶. The minutes of the foreign ministers meeting on 11 June 1938 show that after an announcement by the Estonian foreign minister, K. Selter ("Estonia's government has taken a final decision to declare that it does not consider itself bound by Paragraph 16 and will not permit transit of armed forces"), V. Munters said: "The only possibility is a war between Russia and Germany, and then we have to know on which side we will stand. Our view has always been that military sanctions are not mandatory, but the pact makes financial and economic sanctions mandatory"⁸⁷.

Several diplomatic documents testify that the views of the three Baltic republics on the matter of Paragraph 16 were not fully coordinated. One of these documents is an official letter sent by the director of the political and economic department of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, A. Stegmanis, to the Latvian ambassador in Warsaw, M. Valters. It contains broad information about a meeting between V. Munters and the Polish ambassador to Riga, F. Charwat, on 24 August 1938. F. Charwat asked the Latvian foreign minister three questions: "1) Has the Baltic Entente decided to propose in Geneva that a discussion of Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations pact be initiated; 2) Has the Baltic Entente planned to make any declarations in Geneva concerning the cited paragraph; 3) Would the Baltic Entente consider it useful to develop a coordinated position with Poland should a discussion about Paragraph 16 begin in Geneva"⁸⁸. V. Munters' reply was clear and simple. He said he could not speak for the Baltic Entente, but "according to current reports, the Baltic Republics have no intention of making any declaration in Geneva concerning Paragraph 16, but they will, I believe, coordinate their views on this matter". V. Munters added that "should an extensive discussion begin concerning Paragraph 16", then "theoretically, of course, it is possible [that] we, too, will ... have to consider declaring our views." At the close of the discussion he reminded F. Charwat that during the visit by Polish Foreign Minister J. Beck to Riga (13-15 July 1938), Polish and Latvian views on Paragraph 16 were basically coordinated⁸⁹. In this way V. Munters indirectly admitted Warsaw's great impact on Latvia's policies concerning the League of Nations.

Other documents (an informative letter from A. Stegmanis to Latvian ambassadors in Paris and Warsaw dated 10 October 1938) indicate that even upon arriving for the 19th Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1938, the Baltic Republics had not decided on their future course of action. The head of France's delegation, J. Paul-Boncourt met several times in Geneva with the representatives of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and tried to discourage them "from the idea of making a declaration on the matter of Paragraph 16"⁹⁰. J. Paul-Boncourt did not receive any clear answer. V. Munters, for example, said only that "Latvia does not wish to be overly hasty in this matter". On the other hand, the foreign minister suggested that it was very important for the League of Nations to be aware of Latvia's views "on the matter of the sanctioning paragraph"⁹¹.

The Baltic delegations in Geneva also held discussions among themselves. The first meeting took place on 12 September 1938 at the Latvian embassy. K. Selter announced that Estonia was intending to submit a declaration on Paragraph 16 to the Estonian parliament only in October⁹². A few days later, however, he was expressing a different view, telling the Latvian and Lithuanian foreign ministers that Estonian public opinion was pressing for a declaration in Geneva. For that reason, he had already asked to be included in the list of speakers at the plenary session of the Assembly⁹³. Given this fact, Latvia and Lithuania were left with no other option than to try to coordinate the texts of the declarations⁹⁴.

Along with several other nations, Latvia and Estonia took the decisive step on 19 September 1938 (Lithuania did so three days later). Despite certain differences in their formal motives, the main thing in all three Baltic declarations was a refusal to be bound by the obligations cited in Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations pact concerning mandatory assistance to other League of Nations members threatened by external enemies. In declaring Latvia's right to absolute neutrality, V. Munters remarked: "The experience gained in applying economic and financial sanctions in one instance, not using any sanctions in some other instances, the discussions of the 28-man committee⁹⁵ and declarations from several delegates in this plenary session lead me to conclude that the system of sanctions, given current conditions, is one which is of a non-automatic character. For this reason, the Latvian government reserves the right to determine in each separate instance whether and to what extent it is able to apply the rules of Paragraph 16

of the pact⁹⁶. At the same time V. Munters expressed support for the principle that an attack on a member nation of the League of Nations "should be considered something which will affect all members of the League of Nations"⁹⁷. That, of course, was nothing more than an empty promise to maintain trust in the ideals of the League of Nations.

The change in Baltic policy toward the League of Nations was dictated by the specific international situation of the day and by the atmosphere of mutual distrust which had been established in the late 1930s. It was a response to the weakness of the Geneva organization, its inability to secure overall peace and guarantee the security of member nations under the existing circumstances of nations arming themselves with ever greater effort. The Baltic Republics were not convinced that if they remained faithful to Paragraph 16, other nations would come to their aid in defending their independence. They did not wish to become involved in conflicts among the major nations, because Germany and Italy were no longer members of the League, and the Geneva organization could take decisions aimed at these two countries.

Many small and medium sized European states took a political line similar to that of the Baltic Entente. Despite this fact, however, the Baltic declarations cannot be considered to have been a decision taken with foresight. Refusal to observe Paragraph 16 served to weaken the authority and importance of the League of Nations⁹⁸. Moreover, Paragraph 16 was the "only international guarantee upon which [Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania] could call in the event of a foreign attack"⁹⁹. By submitting to the wishes of Great Britain, Germany, Scandinavia and Poland, the Baltic Republics willingly and unnecessarily waived this guarantee, finding themselves unable to defend their declared neutrality¹⁰⁰. Moreover, the 19 September declarations significantly devalued one of the fundamental elements of Latvian and Estonian foreign policy — cooperation with the League of Nations — and unquestionably created better conditions for the two major aggressors of the 1930s, the Soviet Union and Germany.

In the fall of 1938, all three Baltic Republics actively developed laws on neutrality. The necessity for such laws arose from the declarations the three had submitted to the League of Nations 21st Assembly, stating that in the event of conflict, they reserved the right to remain neutral and not participate in any sanctions. A meeting of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian foreign ministry representatives was called on 2 and 3 November 1938 to discuss coordination of special

laws of neutrality (the neutrality laws of Scandinavian nations, which had been approved in May 1938, were used as a basis for the Baltic proposals)¹⁰¹. The meeting approved a joint text, which in turn was approved by the next meeting of the Baltic foreign ministers on 18 November 1938¹⁰².

The neutrality laws took effect in Latvia and Estonia in December 1938 and in Lithuania in February 1939. The laws spoke to what the nations would do in the event of war and reaffirmed that the Baltic Republics viewed neutrality as the best way to preserve their independence. Adoption of the laws signified a movement by the three from relative to absolute neutrality.

Historical literature often contains sharp criticism of the Baltic move toward neutrality. The Moscow author V. Sipols, using a class-based principle in his evaluations, has unjustifiably compared this move with capitulation to Germany and termed it a betrayal of the interests of the Latvian people¹⁰³. The American historian E. Andersons has also generally rejected the policies of neutrality, arguing that by hiding behind a screen of neutrality, the Baltic Republics "could only become an unwilling object of major power agreements". He believed that "a more realistic security would have come from joining one or another major power grouping and hoping for the best"¹⁰⁴.

Of course the Baltic Republics were too loyal to the idea of absolute neutrality. In times of international crisis, neutrality could not in and of itself be a saving factor. Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian diplomats lacked the necessary skills to convince other nations to respect and guarantee this neutrality. The most important task thus remained undone. The fact is that in 1939, the Baltic Republics were less protected than ever against a possible attack from the aggressive major powers. The blame for this rests with the diplomats of the three nations, because they often took a wait-and-see approach and behaved in a passive manner, waiting for the further development of events. They had forgotten that preventive diplomatic activity would have been possible with the aim of neutralizing or paralyzing a potential aggressor (especially the USSR). That would at least have permitted the mobilization of all possible political forces against such an aggressor.

In the spring of 1939, the international situation facing Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia became most critical. Tendencies appeared in

the policies of the major nations which were openly dangerous to the Baltic Republics. Hitler's decision to military resolve the "Polish problem", Stalin's lack of interest in defending Poland, and England's inability to effectively come to the aid of Poland and the Baltic Republics — all this led to a situation where the USSR and Germany could realistically begin to implement their purposes in the Baltic. No matter what policies Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia chose at this point, they could no longer hope for full maintenance of independence. The Baltic Entente was internally weak and often a union only on paper, and as such it could not do much to save the day.

The Baltic Republics took the position that neutrality must be maintained, but their prestige and their hopes to maintain independence were weakened by notable exceptions to this general policy. Diplomats and journalists from several nations accused the Baltic Republics of a crass change in political direction in October 1939 (here we are speaking of the mutual assistance agreements between the Soviet Union and Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania), when the USSR, helping Germany, amputated Baltic sovereignty not just *de jure* but *de facto* as well. For example, on 20 November 1939, the ambassador in London, K. Zariņš, reported to Rīga that the British press, writing about the Baltic Republics, often used baseless terminology such as "nations of serfs", "limited sovereignty", etc. K. Zariņš wrote that in speaking with Baltic diplomats, British journalists were saying that it was difficult to explain "our current behavior". He wrote that the journalists were attributing the following approach to the Balts: "Back in the discussions with Moscow [spring and summer of 1939/I.F., A.S.], when we were offered a joint British, French and Russian guarantee, we — all the Baltic Republics, including Finland — brashly declared that we needed no assistance, that we were able to defend ourselves and that our first enemy would be the first nation to cross our borders. Now, however, the three Baltic Republics had not only let a foreign army into their countries..."¹⁰⁶

Of course the Baltic Republics were in a no-escape situation after Stalin and Hitler reached their agreement in the fall of 1939. The slavish obeisance to the demands of the USSR can also be interpreted as a desperate attempt by Baltic foreign policy leaders to save their formal independence at all costs. It is also possible that they were hoping for new and unexpected changes in the international situation, changes made possible by the confused manner in which the major powers were establishing their mutual relations.

- 1 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-402.lp.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 London generally took a positive and supportive attitude concerning this Eastern Pact proposal. It rejected, however, the first variation on the idea of the Eastern Pact which was proposed by the USSR at the end of 1933 and which did not provide for German participation in the pact. The Brits believed that implementing this proposal would mean creating of an anti-German alliance (to some extent repeating the situation which existed before World War I).
- 5 See Počs, K. Francijas ārpolitikas galvenie virzieni 30. gadu pirmajā pusē. Rīga: University of Latvia (1992), p. 62 et al.
- 6 With the help of the Eastern Pact, the French wished to involve Russia in European politics so that German activities aimed against the Versailles system might be curtailed. L. Barthou wished to achieve closer relations between the USSR and Poland, which could have a negative impact on Germany's plans. L. Barthou's policies were an influential resource against Hitler's political strategy.
- 7 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3065.l.-p. 26.
- 8 Ibid. - p. 27.
- 9 Ibid. - p. 28.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid. - p. 6.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Akten zur deutschen auswaertigen Politik (hereafter ADAP). 1918.-1945.-Serie C.-Bd. III1-Goettingen: Ruprecht (1973), s. 259.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 336.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3066.l.-p. 224.
- 20 Ibid. - 3067.l.-p.89.
- 21 ADAP.-Serie C.-Bd.III1.-S. 263.
- 23 Krieviņš, E. "Viņās dienās". Austrālijas Latvietis. Melbourne (1966), p. 170.
- 24 Vīgrabs, J. "Valsts tapšana un starptautisko attiecību izveidošana". Latvija divdesmit gados. Rīga: Pagalms (1938), p. 47.
- 25 LVVA.-2574.f.-3. apr.-3066.l.-p. 339.

- 26 Krieviņš, E., op. cit. p. 171.
- 27 Rauch, G., op. cit., p. 170.
- 28 Sīpols, V. Pirmskara politiskā krīze Eiropā. 1933-1939. Rīga: Liesma (1976), p. 64.
- 29 Latvian diplomats frequently repeated that the only country which enthusiastically agreed with the French-Soviet plan was Czechoslovakia. The ambassador to Warsaw, O. Grosvalds, in seeking to uncover the reasons for this enthusiasm, reported to K. Ulmanis (on 16 July 1934) that Prague was expecting certain benefits from the Eastern Pact because it had no common border with the Soviet Union and did not "know the Russian mentality" well enough. (LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3065.l.-p. 9.)
- 30 Rauch, G., op. cit., p. 170.
- 31 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3066.l.-p. 101.
- 32 Ibid. - 3067.l.-p. 160.
- 33 P. Laval — the French foreign minister.
- 34 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3066.l.-p. 549.
- 35 Dokumenti vnešņej politikī SSSR. -T.17.-Moscow: Nauka (1971), p. 725-726.
- 36 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3066.l.-p. 549.
- 37 Under the Versailles peace treaty, the Saar region was separated from Germany and placed under the control of the League of Nations for 15 years. On 13 January 1935, a plebiscite was held among the residents of the region concerning its future status. 90.36% of the residents voted to rejoin Germany, while 8.81% said the status quo should be maintained and 0.40% favored joining France. (LVVA.-1303.f.-1.apr.-68.l.-p. 526.)
- 38 On 7 January 1935 Italy and France reached an agreement on colonies. Many diplomats erroneously thought at that time that with this agreement Italy had fully joined the "anti-revisionist group of major powers."
- 39 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3066.l.-p. 549.
- 40 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 282.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p. 199.
- 45 Ibid. - 1303.f.-1.apr.-68.l.-p. 536.
- 46 In March 1935 Germany declared that it would no longer observe

the prohibition contained in the Versailles treaty against Germany's formation of a military aviation unit, implemented a general draft and began the establishment of a massive army.

47 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3067.l.-p. 87.

48 Ibid. - p. 84.

49 Ibid. - p. 54.

50 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 260.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid. - p. 261.

53 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3067.l.-p. 64.

54 Ibid. - p. 66.

55 Ibid. - 1303.f.-1.apr.-68.l.-p. 543.

56 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3067.l.-p. 38.

57 With this agreement, Germany received the right to build up a Navy at 35% of the strength of the British fleet. Undoubtedly this was a diplomatic coup for Germany, and several European nations viewed it as an unpleasant surprise. Politicians from many countries were convinced that Germany would now become a determining factor in the Baltic Sea. These feelings dominated in Latvia, as well.

58 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p. 183.

59 ADAP.-Serie C.-Bd.IV1.-S. 218.

60 PAAA.-R 84613.-E 613808.

61 Ibid.

62 This assignment was carried out by E. Schack on 11 July 1935. (ADAP.-Serie C.-Bd.IV1.-S.417.)

63 ADAP.-Serie C.-Bd.IV1.-S.218.

64 PAAA.-R 31278.-E 495656.

65 ADAP.-Serie C.-Bd.III1.-S.272.

66 LVVA.-1313.f.-1. apr.-92.l.-p. 386.

67 PAAA.-R 84404.-S.7.

68 *Brīvā Zeme*, 28 May 1936.

69 On 7 March 1936, Germany invaded the Rhine demilitarized zone. This meant a unilateral violation of the Versailles and Locarno agreements.

70 PAAA.-R 104627.-S.8.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid. - p. 49.

73 Andersons, E., *Latvijas vēsture...*, p. 544.

74 LVVA.-1307.f.-1.apr.-308.l.-p. 219.

- 75 War broke out between Italy and Ethiopia in October 1935. The League of Nations declared Italy to be the aggressor and implemented the economic sanctions which were mandated by Paragraph 16 of the League's statutes. These sanctions were repealed, however, in July 1936, and this was unquestionably a violation of the League's principles.
- 76 Andersons, E., op. cit., p. 544.
- 77 Trešais gads. 1936.15.V-1937.15.V. Rīga: Leta (1937), p. 267.
- 78 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-pp., 214-216.
- 79 Andersons, E., op. cit., p. 678.
- 80 LVVA.-2570.f.-1.apr.-449.l.-p. 9-10.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Ibid. -2574.f.-4.apr.-6781.l.-p. 16-17.
- 83 Ibid. - p. 17.
- 84 Ibid. - 3.apr.-3144.l.-p. 61-13.
- 85 PAAA.-R 104589.-385434.
- 86 Zemīte, L. Tautu Savienība un Latvija. 1930.-1939. Rīga: University of Latvia (1992), p. 92.
- 87 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3267.l.-p. 4.
- 88 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 24.
- 89 Ibid. - p. 25.
- 90 Ibid. - p. 7.
- 91 Ibid. - 2574.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 7.
- 92 Ibid. - p. 9.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Ibid. - p. 10.
- 95 The Assembly of the League of Nations established a "28-man committee" in October 1936 and gave it the assignment of designing proposals for reform of the League of Nations pact.
- 96 Piektais gads. 1938.15.V-1939.15.V. Rīga: Leta (1939), pp 218-219.
- 97 Ibid. - p. 219.
- 98 Sīpols, V., op. cit., p. 150.
- 99 Andersons, E., op. cit., p. 22.
- 100 Feldmanis, I., Stranga, A., Virsis M. Latvijas ārpolitika un starptautiskais stāvoklis (30. gadu otrā puse). Rīga: Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts (1993), p. 160-161.
- 101 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3266.l.-pp. 146-147.
- 102 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 2.
- 103 Sīpols, V., op. cit., p. 165.
- 104 Andersons, E., op. cit., p. 23.
- 105 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3067.l.-p. 1-2.

IV. The Baltic Entente and the Major Powers

The Baltic Entente failed in the 1930s, and this was largely due to the peculiarities of the existing system of international relations. The system was largely characterized by hegemony and therefore largely limited the possibility of small-nation unions functioning successfully. The Baltic Republics were repeatedly subjected to the pressure of the major powers in its region. Soviet Union, Germany and Poland all operated energetically and even rudely to protect their own interests. The battle for influence among the competing major powers was both a test and a burden for the Baltic Entente. One can objectively say that it was hard for them to become a significant influence in an area of the world which the major powers, incomparably superior in military and political strength, were trying to take over or at least subject to their influence.

None of the three major powers was interested in true cooperation among the Baltic Republics. Each of them had its own, detailed view of the Baltic Entente. These views became evident even during the formative phase of the Entente. Of course, this was difficult to see from the very start, and for this reason it seems that the Baltic diplomats were a bit hasty in expecting greater opposition from the major powers than was actually the case. We can be certain of this if we take a look at the detailed instructive letter which was sent to Latvian diplomats abroad on 21 March 1934 and which was authored by the general secretary of the Foreign Ministry, V. Munters. Expressing his views on the possible roadblocks the Baltic Republics might face in establishing a Baltic Entente, he wrote: "There will be opposition from three major powers which are interested in this issue — Germany, Poland and the USSR, because Lithuania's involvement with Latvia and Estonia would certainly strengthen its positions and would let it escape the game of combinations in which it has been inextricably involved to this point. That would lead to the possibility of maintaining some stability in Eastern Europe. Germany is most interested in this right now, but earlier it was also viewed favorably by the USSR".

The major powers in the Baltic Sea region understood that that the planned union among Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania would have no significance in terms of *Realpolitik*. For this reason they did not believe it to be mandatory for them to take any steps to block the formation of the Baltic Entente at any cost. On the other hand, of course,

the major powers (excepting the USSR, which adopted a specific strategy) tried to something to disturb the establishment of the Entente. Germany and its diplomats, at least, had such a purpose, which was evidenced, if by nothing else, then by a meeting of the three German ambassadors accredited in the Baltic Republics in Tartu in August 1933. The Latvian Foreign Ministry received information from the acting head of the embassy in Estonia, J. Gilberts, saying that the participants in the meeting "had noted the growing French influence in the Baltic Republics and attempts by the French to facilitate a union among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania"². Considering how best to combat this French influence and paralyze France's efforts to establish a Baltic union, the German diplomats concluded that the most pressure "must be placed on Lithuania, and efforts must be made to prevent its joining a union of the three Baltic Republics"³. It must be added that this strategy soon proved inappropriate. Toward the end of 1933, Lithuanian-German relations deteriorated, which changed the relations between Kaunas and its neighboring countries, impacted on its political organization and later led to a gradual reevaluation of the German and Polish factors and their significance in Lithuanian foreign policy.

The first discussions about the formation of a Baltic Entente were most worrisome to Poland. It feared that Latvia and Estonia, in forming a union with Lithuania, would agree to support its position on the Vilnius matter. In that way Warsaw would lose the handicap and freedom of operations in putting pressure on Kaunas which it had gained through the 26 January 1934 non-aggression pact with Germany. V. Munters wrote that Poland, which in the spring of 1934 had been fairly certain of a settling of relations with Lithuania "would be unpleasantly surprised" if this "would pass it by, at least in the way which it is currently imagining"⁴.

Extensive activity by Polish diplomats was engendered by Lithuania's 25 April memorandum. On 2 May 1934, the Polish ambassador to Rīga, Z. Beczkowicz, visited Prime Minister K. Ulmanis to report that "Poles view Baltic consolidation favorably, but it would be difficult to take a favorable stand on the current proposal, given the lack of relations with Lithuania"⁵. A similar Polish step was taken in Tallinn on the same day, and this cast some fear into the hearts of Estonian politicians⁶. This appears to have been the major reason why J. Seljamaa and H. Laretei decided in haste to make a trip to Warsaw⁷.

The Polish diplomats tried to convince the Latvians and Estonians that it would not be in their interests to improve relations with Lithuania. For example, V. Munters' journal contains this entry for 18 May: "Z. Beczkowicz visited me for an hour. Friendly. Went on and on about the Lithuanian matter. Closer relations with Lithuania would automatically mean worse relations with Poland⁸. On 24 May, a similar warning was given to the Latvian ambassador to Warsaw, O. Grosvalds, by Polish Foreign Minister J. Beck, who emphasized that Poland's relations with Latvia and Estonia would worsen if they reached an agreement with Lithuania and joined in Lithuania's complaints concerning Vilnius. After this discussion O. Grosvalds expressed doubt about the wisdom of signing an agreement with Lithuania while it had not normalized relations with Poland⁹. It should be noted that these doubts were justified and should have been considered seriously. It does, however, seem that at the time there was no chance to regulate Polish-Lithuanian relations in a way which would satisfy both sides.

As far as Soviet Union was concerned, then in 1934 it was no longer formally opposing the formation of the Baltic Entente. Reports from many diplomats note this change in attitude. On 10 January 1934, for example, the German ambassador in Moscow, R. Nadolnij, reported the leadership of the Auswaertiges Amt that Moscow's attitude toward its "near abroad" was undergoing a fundamental change: where earlier Moscow had been fully convinced that the policy of "divide and conquer" must be used to hamper cooperation among the Baltic Republics, then now "this group of nations in Russian eyes has become a possible protective bastion against aggressive national socialism which must be defended and maintained"¹⁰.

Similar statements are found in other sources, as well. The Latvian consul general in New York, A. Lūje, reported to Rīga on 31 January 1934 that he had spoken with the Eastern European department head of the U.S. State Department and had been told the following: "The USSR has changed its policies toward the Baltic Republics to the extent that it no longer wishes to oppose a bloc or union among the three Baltic Republics. The USSR even wants to facilitate the formation of such a union so that the Baltic Republics would be a sufficiently strong barrier against Germany"¹¹. Finally, half a year later, the Latvian ambassador in Moscow, A. Bīlmanis, also recognized the change in Soviet attitudes toward the Baltic Republics.

He wrote that "contrary to the practice of the last several years", the USSR was now viewing the closer relations among Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania as "something of a peace-strengthening factor"¹².

These remarks from various diplomats are often used in historical literature to posit that the USSR had a favorable attitude toward the agreement of 12 September 1934¹³. At first glance this text, found in an historical work, seems to be incontrovertible: "Germany tolerated the Baltic Entente, but the Soviet Union welcomed it"¹⁴. But, no matter how extensive these evaluations might be, they still appear to be somewhat oversimplified. They do not answer the question of what type of Baltic Entente Moscow wished to see established, nor do they speak to the issue of whether the USSR facilitated the eventual collapse of the union or whether it actually was willing and able to strengthen it.

The Soviet Union did not maintain a strongly determined and unchanging policy toward the Baltic Entente. It agreed to the formation of the union in the hopes that it would maintain the orientation and direction which appeared to dominate at the time of its establishment. Moscow believed the Baltic Entente to have something of an anti-German tendency. It was with good reason that a directive from the Soviet Foreign Commissariat which was received by the Soviet ambassador to Latvia, S. Brodovskij, on 27 August 1934, the expected agreement among Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia was judged to be "with more positive elements than negative ones"¹⁵.

In the summer and fall of 1934, Soviet diplomatic circles widely believed that the formation of the Baltic Entente would facilitate a positive attitude by all three nations toward the Eastern Pact, which the USSR actually intended not as a pact of collective security, but rather as an anti-German alliance. At the same time however, Moscow did not eliminate the possibility that as events developed, the Entente could come under the influence of Germany and Poland. The Baltic Republics were sternly warned about this possibility. They must not permit themselves to be drawn into the nets of the "imperialist powers"¹⁶.

An important element in the plans being developed by the USSR was Lithuania, which had pro-Russian tendencies and orientations. With its help, Moscow hoped to stabilize its influence in Riga and Kaunas¹⁷. M. Litvinov hoped that Lithuania's participation in the Baltic Entente would neutralize Estonia's and Latvia's leanings toward Germany and Poland¹⁸. Lithuania could not, of course, perform such a

function, and in this respect, Kaunas' benevolence gave Moscow nothing. It was not within Lithuania's powers to change Estonia's pro-German and pro-Polish foreign policy, nor to overcome its negative attitude toward the USSR. Latvia took a neutral position during this time. Rīga's "pro-German attitude" was all in the imagination of the Soviets.

The tactical game being played by the Soviet Union in Kaunas was implemented by Ambassador M. Karskij. An important task for him was to facilitate a worsening of relations between Lithuania and Latvia/Estonia. He was also ordered to foster anger in Kaunas against Poland and Germany. Lithuania's ambassador in Rīga, V. Vīleišis, noted on 17 February 1935 that Lithuania's bad relations with Germany were in Russia's interests¹⁹. Latvia's ambassador in Kaunas, meanwhile, noted on 20 January 1936 that foreign policy difficulties for Lithuania (and Latvia) usually improved M. Karskij's mood²⁰.

In early 1936 Moscow's worries about a growing Polish influence in Latvia increased. V. Munters' late-March visit to Warsaw led to true nervousness in Moscow, including suspicions that Poland might improve relations or even become formally involved in the Baltic Entente (*sic!*)²¹. The USSR had no other choice than to stop trying to highlight Kaunas' pro-Russian policies and implement a different strategy instead. M. Karskij was recalled to Moscow in December. His successor, B. Podolskij, received instructions to facilitate the cooperation of the Baltic Republics²².

In the second half of the 1930s Baltic policies of the USSR became increasingly active. Externally these policies were displayed as Soviet interest in the unity of its three small neighbors. In January 1936, for example, Soviet Marshal M. Tuhachevskij, in London, urged the Estonian army commander J. Laidoner to develop military cooperation with Lithuania. J. Laidoner was not, of course, influenced by these comments²³. He believed that there were no objective pre-requisites in place for military cooperation between Estonia and Lithuania. If Estonia's foreign policy was characterized by its lack of trust in the USSR and its good relations with Germany and Poland, then Kaunas' course was unquestionably pro-Soviet, and Lithuania did not know how to come to any agreement with the other major powers.

In April 1936, the army headquarters commanders of the three Baltic Republics were invited to the May 1 parade in Moscow. They received these invitations two weeks before the next regular meeting

of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian foreign ministers. By doing this, the Russians tried to create the impression that the entire Baltic Entente was trying to orient itself toward Moscow²⁴. Naturally this caused some concern in Rīga and Tallinn. Even the deputy director of division IV at the Auswaertiges Amt, V. von Grundherr, felt it necessary to inform the German ambassadors in Eastern Europe that this "Russian trick" was, for Latvia's and Estonia's governments, "most unwelcome"²⁵. Nevertheless, the two governments did not reject the Soviet intrusive invitation. Latvia, which at the time was more subject to Soviet intrigues than was Estonia, was in this event forced to accept the undesirable invitation precisely because of what Estonia did²⁶. The Estonians had decided to send their delegation to Moscow with consulting with Latvia. Accordingly, Rīga had no choice but to follow Tallinn's example (at least that is what V. Munters claimed in an instructive letter to Latvian ambassadors on 27 April 1936)²⁷.

Moscow was not interested in true cooperation among Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Soviet policies (special favoritism to Kaunas) weakened the Baltic Entente, even though this was not the major factor in the alliance's inescapable weakness. Until 23 August 1939, while the German and Polish factor was still in place, the Soviet Union did not accomplish much in its battle against Berlin's influence and could not decisively influence the situation in the Baltic.

As far as Poland was concerned, it had two lines of policy concerning the Baltic Entente in the mid-1930s. First of all the Poles wished to see to it that within the alliance, Latvia and Estonia would put pressure on Lithuania in matters of interest to Poland. Kaunas was supposed to be made more pliable in the matter of Vilnius and in other matters. These efforts did not, however, lead to their expected results. In December 1936 the director of the Eastern department in Poland's Foreign Ministry, T. Kobyłanski, concluded that Latvia's position was not sufficiently pro-Polish, and Lithuania was not ready to give in²⁸. Warsaw's attitude toward the Baltic Entente became even more negative, and its policies began to be dominated by another line of thinking which did not discount the possibility of disturbing cooperation among Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

In order to weaken the already weak Baltic Entente, Poland effectively turned to Estonia. The strategy of favoring Tallinn gave unexpectedly successful results, because the actual leaders of Estonian foreign policy (the generals J. Laidoner and N. Peek) deeply

sympathized with the Poles and were most susceptible to their flattery²⁰. The political circles of both countries began to ever more frequently discuss the matter of "special relations" between Estonia and Poland which negatively influenced the situation in the Baltic Entente. After meeting with T. Kobylanski on 16 December 1937, the Latvian ambassador to Poland, M. Valters, reported to Riga that the director of the Eastern department viewed the Baltic Entente unfavorably, was most sharply inclined against Lithuania, harbored suspicions of a pro-Soviet line in Latvia, and was playing a tactical game of acting as Estonia's protege and demonstrating happiness over strained relations between Latvia and Estonia, always taking Tallinn's side in any dispute²⁰.

An important question concerns whether Poland objectively could strengthen the Baltic Entente after March 1938, when it forced a renewal of diplomatic relations with Lithuania²¹, thus eliminating a fundamental obstacle to Warsaw's relations with one of the Entente's member nations. Historical literature includes information that in the summer of 1938 Poland appeared to be most eager to become a member of the Baltic Entente, but this step was opposed by Latvia, which feared becoming dependent on Poland and Estonia²². It appears that these claims are not, however, truly representative of Poland's political views. The official newspaper *Gazeta Polska* displayed a different viewpoint in July 1938. Detailing the government's views concerning the Baltic Entente it wrote that Poland would remain faithful to the principles of its foreign policy — bilateral relations — and would maintain a separate stand concerning each member nation of the Baltic Entente²³. From Poland's perspective this strategy was undoubtedly more advantageous, because it could utilize very good relations with Estonia and good relations with Latvia, and try to develop relations with Lithuania, too. Joining the Baltic Entente would engender opposition from the USSR and Germany, but would give little to Polish security. The situation of the day gave no real Baltic Entente support to Poland in case of war with Germany or the Soviet Union.

The worsening of Poland's international situation and the growing strain in its relations with Germany facilitated a change in Warsaw's attitude toward the Baltic Entente at the end of 1938. Now it was interested to see that the Baltic alliance was strengthened and survived. But Poland no longer had sufficient resources to ensure a consolidation of the Baltic Entente. The historian A. Prazmovska writes that

Poland's foreign policy status in early 1939 was unenviable: all of its neighbors either feared Germany or were increasingly coming under its influence, or else they feared Berlin and were unable to develop a sufficiently independent policy³⁴.

Poland's abilities to influence the situation in the Baltic Sea region were fundamentally reduced by the collapse of the relative balance of powers among Poland, the USSR and Germany in Eastern Europe. This became readily obvious after the Munich conference in the fall of 1938. This situation was most dangerous to the Baltic Republics, because a balance of power among its three large neighboring states was the main objective factor ensuring the independence of the three nations. The Latvian foreign policy leadership was well aware of this fact. In a discussion with J. Beck on 28 October 1938, the Latvian ambassador to Warsaw, L. Ēķis, stated that a strong Poland was in Latvia's interests³⁵.

At a time when the balance of powers was irreversibly swinging in Germany's favor, its abilities to strengthen its influence in the Baltic grew considerably. As far as Estonia was concerned, it was carefully following Berlin's interests as early as the mid 1930s. After the Munich conference, Latvia followed Estonia's lead in this respect. On 6 June 1939, the director of department IV of the Auswaertiges Amt, V. von Grundherr, noted: "The growing influence of Greater Germany led Latvia approximately a year ago to audit its position toward Germany, and today it has implemented a true policy of neutrality"³⁶.

Germany broadly used Estonia as a weapon to implement its aims in the Baltic. Berlin's abilities to influence Tallinn were facilitated by the blind faith Estonia's military leadership put in Germany's worthless promises and flattery. K. Selter, too, favored a decidedly pro-German course of action after he became Estonia's foreign minister in the spring of 1938. German diplomats were well versed in his "weaknesses" and suggested that the Auswaertiges Amt take advantage of K. Selter's great ambitions in order to promote Germany's interests³⁷.

Berlin did not like the Baltic Entente, and it tried to facilitate the weakening of the alliance. German diplomats were ordered to achieve Estonia's splitting away from the group, and then use Estonia to attract Latvia to a pro-German course of action, as well as to isolate Lithuania. At the beginning of 1938, the German ambassador to Tallinn, H. Frohwein, met with Gen. N. Reek to discuss ways of influencing Latvia to take a strong anti-Soviet stand. In mid-1938, the view

began to dominate at the German Foreign Ministry that Estonia could be used to force Latvia into closer relations with Germany³⁸. On 29 October of the same year, V. von Grundherr informed the Estonian ambassador to Berlin, K. Tofer, that Germany would like to see the leadership of the Baltic Entente come into Estonian hands as quickly as possible³⁹.

Unlike the major powers in the Baltic Sea region, England and France at least verbally supported the Baltic Entente and favored its strengthening. Paris and London had no objection to making the tripartite alliance into a military union. So, for example, information from the Latvian ambassador to England, K. Zariņš, contained in his report to K. Ulmanis on 13 February 1936, indicated that Lithuanian Foreign Minister S. Lozoraitis, while in London for the funeral of King George V, had asked the British foreign secretary, A. Eden, how England would feel about a Baltic military union. A. Eden responded that the English government would favor such a union, because then the situation of the Baltic Republics "would be much more secure, and they would not have to fear every external wind"⁴⁰.

Such support had little true impact, however, England did not wish to undertake any obligations. In February 1936, for example, the British Cabinet of Ministers rejected a memorandum from the director of the Foreign Office Northern Department, L. Collier, which proposed policies in the Baltic Republics which would oppose the strengthening of Germany's political and economic influence there⁴¹. Another fairly significant indicator was a list prepared by the Foreign Office in 1937 which set out those nations which had priority in receiving weapons from Britain. Estonia was in 12th place on the list, Latvia in 13th and Lithuania in 14th (first place belonged to Egypt, second to Afghanistan and third to Belgium)⁴². This list clearly indicated British priorities. The Baltic Republics could hope for nothing. In May 1937 V. Munters was in London and noted that the Brits did not wish to provide weapons to the Balts and were even beginning to refuse sales of iron, steel and coal⁴³. It was clear that the Baltic Entente, which was subject to bitter internal disagreements and quarrels, could be strengthened only by active and pointed policies by France and Britain in the Baltic, with those two countries undertaking true political and military obligations. This option was, however, ruled out by the insignificant place taken by the three small countries in British and French foreign policy priorities. England had politically distanced itself from Eastern Europe as far

back as the 1920s, while France, which viewed its allies in the region (Poland, Czechoslovakia, *et al.*) as nothing more than a "distant Maginot line"⁴⁴, paid scant attention to the Baltic Republics. It was no accident that Paris was the one which in the spring and summer of 1939 was prepared to leave the Baltic Republics to the fates and "hand them over" to the Soviet Union with all the consequences which would emanate from such a move. England, however, for a short time longer tried to play the role of a selfless defender of the Baltic Republics, in order to keep this advantageous myth alive and maintain the traditional image which it had sought to establish all throughout the interwar period.

It might seem a bit ancillary here to touch on the issue of Japan's policies in the Baltic area in the 1930s. After World War I, Japan became a new arrival in the club of large nations. The Japanese felt that being considered a small nation was tragic, so they were relieved to find themselves no longer considered a small country. But Japan's foreign policy was not realistic. Deviously violating the principles of the League of Nations, Japan became an aggressor, was ejected from the League, and came close to diplomatic isolation.

This was the context in which Japan developed its policies concerning the small nations of Europe. Japan viewed these countries as pawns in its foreign policy game. On 23 December 1936, Japan's charge d'affaires in Latvia, Makoto Sakuma, was promoted to the title of authorized minister, and in February 1937 he was appointed, at the same rank, to Estonia and Lithuania as well. Japan viewed the Baltic Republics through the prism of its hostile relations with the USSR. This policy could not give anything to Baltic security — on the contrary, it could only reduce it.

Japan's ambassador to Vienna, Masauki Tani, wrote to Tokyo on 5 November 1937, saying that all of the nations which neighbored the USSR, excepting Czechoslovakia and China, were dreaming of the liquidation of the USSR. The Japanese became hostage to this idea when they were forming their policies, and any Japanese activity drew rapid and preventive counteractivity from the Soviets.

For example, as soon as Japan developed the idea of ensuring its political and military interests in Europe under the guise of cultural agreements, the USSR gravely warned the Baltic Republics against such pacts⁴⁵. In the 1930s, Japan mainly tried to use the Baltic

Republics as a base for spying against the Soviet Union. The mutual relations of the three Baltic Republics in the context of the Baltic Entente held little interest for Japan. All in all, Japan was a completely insignificant factor in Baltic security policy.

- 1 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.,-p. 403.
- 2 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3032.l.-p. 285.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 403.
- 5 Ibid. - 2630.f.-1.apr.-5.l.-p. 126.
- 6 Ibid. - p. 128.
- 7 Ibid. - p. 132.
- 8 Ibid. - pp. 134-135.
- 9 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-93.l.-p. 101.
- 10 PAAA.-R 31276.-E 495171.
- 11 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3065.l.-p. 395.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Myllyniemi, S., op. cit., p. 17; also Rauch, G. von, op. cit., p. 174; and Sīpols, V., op. cit., p. 85.
- 14 Feldmanis, et al, op. cit., p. 18.
- 15 Sīpols, V., op. cit., p. 86.
- 16 *Pravda*, 1 September 1934.
- 17 Rauch, G. von, op. cit., p. 174.
- 18 Žalys, V., op. cit., p. 85.
- 19 LVVA.-2630.f.-1.apr.-8.l.-p. 34.
- 20 Ibid. - 2575.f.-8.apr.-66.l.-p. 504.
- 21 Ibid. - 2574.f.-3.apr.-3104.l.-p. 82.
- 22 Ibid. - 2575.f.-15.apr.-95.l.-p. 68.
- 23 Ibid. - 8. apr.-40.l.-p. 240.
- 24 PAAA.-R 84404-p. 2.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-92.l.-p. 194.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid. - 95.l.-8. lp.
- 29 Ibid.- 83.l.- 159.lp.
- 30 Ibid. -95.l.-pp. 270-273.
- 31 Taking advantage of an incident on the Lithuanian-Polish line of demarcation in the Vilnius region, the Polish government on 17 March

1938 presented Lithuania with an ultimatum and forced it to agree to the renewal of normalized diplomatic relations between the two countries. With this maneuver Lithuania effectively repudiated any claims to the Vilnius region.

32 Andersons, E. *Latvijas bruņotie spēki...*, p. 677.

33 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3172.l.-p. 130.

34 Prazmovska, A. *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front*. Cambridge (1987), p. 177.

35 LVVA.-2585.f.-8.apr.-85.l.-p. 418.

36 PAAA.-R 29973.-I 89697.

37 *Documents on German Foreign Policy. 1918-1945-Series D, Vol. 5*. London (1953), p. 466.

38 Crowe, D. *The Foreign Relations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 1938-1939*. Athens, Georgia (1974), pp. 120-121.

39 *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945-Series D, Vol 3*. London (1953), p. 482.

40 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3125.l.-p. 101.

41 Kaiser, D., *op. cit.*, p. 172.

42 *Ibid.* - p. 182.

43 LVVA.-2575.f.-8.apr.-78.l.-p. 37.

44 Rothstein, L.R. *Alliances and Small Powers*, p. 228.

45 Momose, H. "Japan's Policy Toward Small States Between the Two World Wars". *The Study of International Relations*. Tsudu College (1989), No16, p. 125, 127, 133; The Soviet Charge d' Affaires A. Hirschfeld warned V. Munters on October 29 1937 not to sign with Japan the Convention on Culture.- LVVA.- 2575.f.- 8.apr.- 78.l.- 14.lp.

V. The Baltic Entente and Scandinavia

The Scandinavian countries had little interest in the Baltic Entente, and the role Scandinavian policies played in the disintegration of the Entente was quite insignificant. During a visit to Finland in April 1937, Latvian Foreign Minister V. Munters remarked that Denmark and Norway were fully uninterested in the Baltic situation and that relations were developing only with Sweden and Finland'. For this reason, it is logical to review only the policies of these two nations.

Latvian and Estonian officials in the mid-1930s frequently supported closer political ties with Sweden². On a practical level, however, this proved impossible, because it was entirely contrary to the foreign policy course which had been developed by Stockholm. Beginning in 1933, the Swedes displayed a policy of open disinterest in the Baltic Republics, and they took many steps to make this policy clear to outsiders. Political contacts with Baltic diplomats were narrowed considerably, and discussions with them avoided, wherever possible, any political subjects³. Sweden developed relations with Latvia and Estonia very cautiously, trying to avoid any step that would complicate affairs or engender a negative response in the USSR. The Swedes tried to explain and justify their policy of disinterest by saying that they were opposed to the authoritarian regimes in Latvia. This was true. Neither Sweden nor Finland approved of the dictatorships of K. Ulmanis, K. Pats and A. Smetona. In August 1937, for example, Finnish Foreign Minister R. Holsti was asked by his Estonian counterpart, F. Akel, whether "closer cooperation between the Baltic countries and the Scandinavian countries" was possible and responded clearly and definitely: "None of the Scandinavian nations did not consider closer cooperation with the Baltic Republics to be possible. The reason — they say we are dictators. In this respect they see no difference between the individual Baltic Republics. They say all three are the same"⁴.

The "Scandinavian dreams" which were rife among Baltic diplomats did not influence them sufficiently to make them completely lose touch with reality. Many Baltic diplomats were quite objective in evaluating Stockholm's policy. For example, Latvia's ambassador to the Scandinavian nations, P. Sēja, noted in the summer of 1935 that Sweden, of course, was interested in the survival of independent Baltic states, but a political union among the countries with the aim of

ensuring the status quo in the Eastern part of the Baltic Sea was "unthinkable in the near future"⁵. F. Akel made similar remarks at the seventh conference of the Baltic Entente foreign ministers. He remarked that the Estonians "had only friends" in Sweden, but official Stockholm wanted nothing to do with any political cooperation with Estonia⁶.

In distancing itself from the Baltic Republics, Sweden tried to avoid any international obligations which were applicable to the Baltic countries. One such obligation was Paragraph 16 of the League of Nations statutes. In 1937, Swedish Foreign Minister R. Sandler was the first (!) to start diplomatic maneuvers aimed at persuading the weak and unprotected Baltic Republics to disclaim the sanctions-related paragraph⁷. At first this Swedish pressure was met by opposition. Latvia, and to a lesser extent Estonia, rejected the idea. But the "Scandinavian dreams" (as well as suggestions from other nations) took their toll. In 1938 the Baltic Republics decided on a course of self-isolation, disclaimed the paragraph in question, and declared absolute neutrality. The Swedes, who had no interest in the fate of the Baltic Entente, had done their "dirty work". The Estonians interpreted these events as demonstrating that the Baltic Republics had observed "solidarite nordique" (this was a phrase used by Tallinn diplomat A. Piip in November 1938)⁸. One can only wonder at the Estonians' enchantment with this idea.

On the eve of World War II, and in the early phases of the war, Sweden at first avoided and then, on 9 October 1938⁹, rejected the idea of exporting arms to the Baltic Republics. The Swedes felt that reducing or even banning the export of weapons would serve as a resource to limit any conflict in the Baltic Republics in terms of the geographic area it covered¹⁰. Clearly this position damaged Baltic security and made it easier for Moscow to implement its aggressive policies. The Swedes believed that the Soviet Union was the main potential claimant of Baltic territory, and they thought of the Soviets as Sweden's major potential aggressor. But Swedish military headquarters did not believe that their territory would be directly threatened if the Soviet armed forces were to occupy the Baltics¹¹.

Until the end of 1935, Finland could not really decide whether to consider itself a Baltic country or to orient itself to Scandinavia. The Finns did, however, take a fairly dim view of Latvia's and Estonia's cooperation with Lithuania. Helsinki's policies had a *de facto* effect in

separating Lithuania away from Latvia and Estonia. The Lithuanian ambassador to Tallinn, B. Dailide, informed R. Liepiņš in January 1935 that S. Lozoraitis, on returning from Helsinki, had concluded that there should be no more discussions with Finland concerning political relations¹². The Finns felt that Lithuania's orientation was excessively pro-Soviet, anti-German and anti-Polish. They were especially afraid of possible military cooperation between Latvia and Lithuania. For this reason, the very active Finnish ambassador in Rīga, E. Palin, used his personal friendship with V. Munters to persuade the foreign minister that such a relationship should not be established. In a discussion on 11 February 1935, E. Palin emphasized that Lithuania was facilitating the possibility of greater Soviet influence in the Baltic¹³.

Rīga's policies toward Finland were not unchanging. In the first half of the 1930s, Latvia's foreign policy leadership believed that one of its obligations was to secure closer political ties between Latvia and Finland. At the same time, however, it was quite clear that there could be no hope for early success in these efforts, because there were several objective factors which were pressing the Finns to demonstrate a chilly attitude toward closer ties with the Baltic Republics. Sweden's policies, for example, intervened in the process of developing better political ties between Latvia and Finland, as did Helsinki's foreign policy orientation and Finland's relatively isolated geographic position. Even among Latvia's diplomats the view held sway that Finland was in a more secure situation than were the Baltic Republics and that it was not as tempting to Russia as were Latvia and Estonia with their ports. Closer political cooperation between Latvia and Finland was also hampered by the fact that the two nations had different opinions concerning the extent to which they were threatened. Finland felt threatened only by the Soviet Union, while Latvia felt threatened both by the USSR and by Germany.

Several Rīga diplomats felt that Latvia's chosen strategy hampered Latvian-Finnish relations. In June 1934, the Latvian ambassador in Helsinki, V. Sūmanis, wrote to K. Ulmanis that "our friendship with Finland has been offered in a way that one would offer old bread — whether in the proper place or not in the proper place". V. Sūmanis added that the strategy was a policy of an outstretched hand, which had created that impression in Helsinki that Latvia's friendship was guaranteed even if Finland undertook no obligations¹⁴.

According to V. Sūmanis' information, Latvia changed this strategy in May 1934, implementing a very different strategy which was

characterized by a cool attitude on the part of the Latvians and a presentation of the image that Latvia was not really all that interested in close political cooperation with Finland. An important element of this strategy, for example, was a series of articles in the Latvian press which emphasized that given the situation with Karelia, which was a popular issue among Finnish young people, Latvia did not wish to get involved in close political cooperation in Finland, because this might drag Latvia into a conflict with the USSR¹⁵.

An unexpectedly harsh attitude toward Finland was displayed by V. Munters when he spoke at the second conference of Latvian ambassadors in 1935. In his speech he said that Finland was traditionally considered a nation which could join the Baltic Entente. But V. Munters fully discounted this possibility. He said the idea was made impossible by Finland's "Scandinavian dreams" and by the fact that "in the major problem, Germany-Russia, it has a very definite stand — for the former and against the latter"¹⁶.

Unlike Latvia, Estonia had great hopes for closer ties with the ethnically related Finns. This was reflected in Tallinn's economic policies, as well. On 2 September 1937, Estonia and Finland signed a trade agreement which for the first time did not include Estonia's "Baltic clause" — a clause which until that time had been included in all Baltic trade agreements. Hoping that a distancing from the Baltic Entente would strengthen its ties with Scandinavia, the Estonian government demonstratively turned away from trade cooperation with Latvia and Lithuania. On 27 December 1937, in Kemer, V. Munters held a private meeting with Estonian Foreign Minister F. Akel, who raised the question of trade talks with Latvia. F. Akel invited a Latvian delegation to Tallinn in January 1938, but added that Estonia would have to coordinate its position with Finland. V. Munters wrote to the ambassador to Estonia, E. Krieviņš, on 4 January 1938 and was justified in noting: "To first reach an agreement and then ask Finland's permission for the agreement to take effect, that is not acceptable to the Latvian government"¹⁷.

Estonia paid particular attention to the development of military contacts with Finland. In July 1938, the commander of the Finnish army, H. Österman, visited Estonia to discuss the protection of the Bay of Finland and its shores. H. Österman wished to consider this matter from a military and technical aspect, but the Estonians wished to

attach a political significance to the question, as well. H. Österman rejected this idea, saying that it would not correspond with Finland's foreign policy orientation¹⁸. Nevertheless, Finland's military leadership continued contacts with Estonia, but these did not lead to practical military cooperation. In September 1938, a representative of Finland's general headquarters, Maj. Ingelius, visited Estonia and met with Col. R. Maasing. In their discussion, the two men discussed possible joint operations by and information exchanges between the navies and coast guard units of both nations. Had there been cooperation between the Finnish coastal artillery unit (the Makiluoto battery, which was situated on Finland's Cape Porkkala) and the Estonian batteries at Naissar and Aegna, this could have been of great strategic significance. Such cooperation could have posed a serious threat to the Soviet navy. But this military cooperation was never implemented. The Finnish military headquarters was forced to keep in step with the Scandinavian orientation which had dominated in Finland since 1935, and so it began to devote ever less attention to Estonia. As has been noted by the Finnish author M. Turtola, "the joint defense of the world's strongest coastal fortresses was not organized"¹⁹.

In 1939 the Estonians began to understand that the Scandinavian countries did not wish to see "overly close ties between Finland and Estonia" (this formulation was stated by the Latvian ambassador to the United States, A. Bīlmanis)²⁰. They tried, albeit slowly, to rid themselves of any illusions concerning cooperation with Finland. On 12 June 1939, the Latvian ambassador in Tallinn, V. Sūmans, reported to the Foreign Ministry that "... all types of arguments are being sought to somehow patch together cooperation between Estonia and Scandinavia"²¹. On 15 June V. Sūmans was already reporting that K. Selter had come to an important conclusion: "Attempts to find political harmony with Finland have yielded such results that he would rather not repeat the effort"²². Despite all this, the Estonians continued to maintain certain hopes of cooperation with Finland until September 1939.

Alongside the "Scandinavian dreams" of the Baltic Republics, Estonia's special approach to Finland (that of an ally without any union) reflected a certain inferiority complex among the Baltic peoples. Orientation by one Baltic Republic toward another was considered almost beneath the country's honor, while Scandinavia was considered to be worthy of admiration. Hopes that there might be

closer ties with the nations of Scandinavia were not destroyed even in the face of the Scandinavians' distinctly egoistic (to put it mildly) policies which were characterized by a deep lack of concern about the fate of the Baltic Republic. Frequently these unfounded hopes led to inappropriate foreign policy decisions in Latvia²³ and Estonia, and objectively this was a disintegrating factor for the Baltic Entente, if a relatively unimportant one.

1 LVVA.-2575.f.-8.apr.-78.l.-p. 77.

2 At the second meeting of Latvian ambassadors in the summer of 1935, for example, the general secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, V. Munters, recommended that Latvia seek friends in those places where it could hope for "non-partisan friendship" — England and Sweden. V. Munters said Latvia must implement "the policy of neutral friendship, but not the policy of defensive friendship." LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p. 124.

3 Kangeris, op. cit., p. 360.

4 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3148.l.-p.101.

5 Ibid.,-3079.l.-p.77.

6 Ibid.,-3146.l.-p.79.

7 Ibid.,-2570.f.-1.apr.-449.l.-pp. 9-10.

8 Ibid.,-2575.f.-8.apr.-79.l.-p.48.

9 In September and October 1939 the Baltic Republics signed mutual assistance agreements with the USSR.

10 Kangeris, op. cit., p. 360.

11 Ibid.,-p. 362.

12 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3102.l.-p.13.

13 Ibid.,-2630.f.1.apr.8.l.-p.32.

14 Ibid.,-2574.f.-3.apr.-3065.l.-p.147.

15 Ibid.,-3079.l.-p.69.

16 Ibid.,-p.125.

17 Ibid.,-1313.f.-1.apr.-128.l.-p.70.

18 Ibid.,-2575.f.-15.apr.-101.l.-p.46.

19 Turtola, M. "Aspects of Finnish-Estonian military relations in the 20s and 30s - The Baltic in International Relations". Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Uppsala (1988), p. 108.

20 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-2991.l.-p.26.

21 Ibid.,-4.apr.7435.l.-pp.57-58.

22 Ibid.,-3.apr.-3262.l.-p.75.

23 For example, Norwegian Ambassador Michalet visited V. Munters on 30 August 1938 and suggested that the Baltic Republics should join with the nations of the Oslo group (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium and Luxembourg) in asking the major powers to limit armaments. Latvia's government agreed with this suggestion and adopted a decision concerning the necessity for Latvia to establish closer relations with the Oslo group, even though this was not possible in practice. LVVA.-2575.f.-8.apr.-79.l.-p.191.

VI. The Role of the Baltic Entente in the Foreign Policy of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia had both common hopes and divergent hopes where the Baltic Entente was concerned. All three nations were interested in strengthening their security and independence. They were intrigued by the idea that by uniting forces they could achieve an increase in their influence and prestige in European policy. They also hoped to use the union to reach better solutions in difficult matters of closer relations among themselves, although in practice the usefulness of the alliance proved rather small and limited. None of its major purposes was achieved in the face of international crisis. The Baltic Entente turned out to be weak and helpless. It did not save, nor could it save Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia from destruction. The Baltic Republics became victims of Soviet aggression.

Each of the Baltic Republics assigned the alliance a different level of importance in the system of foreign policy priorities. Similarly, the three had differing views concerning the necessity and usefulness of strengthening the Baltic Entente. These views were basically determined by several factors, both objective and subjective. Baltic cooperation was hampered by no sense of unity, by different geopolitical considerations in the region, by differing interpretations of the international situation and differing foreign policy orientations, by uneven relations with the major powers and uneven attitudes toward potential enemies. Moreover, many of the true leaders of the Baltic foreign policy agenda were not fully right for the job. They were not always able to correctly determine the true priorities of their national interest, and one more than one occasion, their attitude toward a neighboring country was dictated by emotions, sympathies and antipathies. This was true, for example, of V. Munters and J. Laidoner. The ambitions of the two men left a very negative impact on relations between Latvia and Estonia. The situation was also complicated by the enmity other Estonian political leaders felt toward V. Munters. At a meeting of the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers on 16 April 1936, when V. Munters was being considered for the post of foreign minister, K. Ulmanis noted that Estonian Foreign Minister J. Seljamaa had said that "there would be no friendship with V. Munters at the head of the Foreign Ministry". If this conclusion was drawn by the foreign minister of an ally, then V. Munters' work needed a detailed evaluation, even if Seljamaa's remark was one-sided. Nothing of the sort happened, however. Relations between Ulmanis and Munters were of a fully

unprecedented character, and so there could be no serious audit of the foreign minister's performance².

In the mid to late 1930s, it was Latvia which paid the greatest attention to the Baltic Entente. Latvia defended the idea that mutual trust among the Baltic peoples should be strengthened. Speaking at the second conference of Latvian ambassadors, V. Munters said that the main objective of the Baltic Nations should be to "cement friendship as broadly as possible [among the Baltic Republics], facilitate mutual acquaintanceship, education, mutual respect, because the slogan of our cooperation can be a sufficient program if we add the thesis of joint defense against Germany and Russia and our mission of neutrality on the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea"³.

Of course at the same time V. Munters had no sympathies for Estonia's foreign policy direction, and he could not find the necessary pre-requisites for Estonian and Latvian cooperation. He stated that the Baltic Entente's "internal cohesion is still not strong"⁴. Speaking of the internal situation in the alliance in the summer of 1935, V. Munters stated: "Lithuania with two serious problems and a strong orientation toward Moscow, which realistically is poorly justified. Estonia with its pathological mania about Poland and its entirely calcified doctrines in foreign policy, led by an army commander [J. Laidoner - I.F., A.S.], and also full of eternal jealousy and carelessness, with some kind of mystic plan about "Drang nach der Daugava" and a peculiar orientation toward Finland. And us — the country which has to maintain balance among all three and which faces all the pressure from nations which are dissatisfied with the independent policies of the Baltic States, including, sometimes, our allies, the Estonians"⁵.

V. Munters was supported by all the other Latvian diplomats in his conviction that the Baltic Entente should be strengthened. The ambassador in London, K. Zariņš, for example, was convinced that the Baltic Entente must become not just a political, but also an economic and military union. Zariņš felt that in order to achieve this, Latvia and Estonia must first prod Lithuania into normalizing relations with Germany and Poland. He urged both nations to put pressure on Lithuania in this respect, to make the Lithuanians understand the seriousness of the situation and comprehend that a conflict with Poland over Vilnius could be fateful for all three Baltic Republics⁶.

The effort expended by Latvian diplomats to strengthen the Baltic Entente could not be doubted. This was recognized by numerous

neutral observers, including the German ambassador in Rīga, E. Schack. In the annual report he prepared for the Auswaertiges Amt, he offered the foreign policy analysis that in 1935 Latvia had tried in every way to emphasize the importance of the Baltic Entente, in order to increase the influence of the Baltic Republics in European politics. E. Schack felt that Latvia was openly angling for the leading role in the union⁷.

In the next years, too, trust in the Baltic Entente was a cornerstone in Latvian foreign policy⁸. Latvia devoted definite attention to the bettering of relations with its partners in the alliance. In the case of Lithuania this was difficult without facilitating the resolution of its "special problems", so Latvia was active in this area, as well. E. Schack reported, for example, that in the two conferences held by Baltic Entente foreign ministers in 1937, V. Munters tried to convince S. Lozoraitis that Lithuania should steer a moderate course and avoid any activities which might be interpreted as attempts to "lithuanianize" the Memel region. V. Munters was worried about a possible downturn in relations between German and Lithuania which could leave a negative impact on Latvia and the Baltic Entente⁹.

As far as Lithuania was concerned, the Baltic Entente played no great role in its foreign policy, because it could not hope for Latvian and Estonian support in its efforts to resolve the matter of Vilnius. Given that Poland was a large country, Estonia systematically defended Warsaw (Kaunas' enemy number one) in the Polish-Lithuanian conflict which the Latvian ambassador to Poland, M. Valters, had characterized as being in "a stage of chronic illness"¹⁰. Latvia was somewhat pushy in offering its own assistance in settling the Lithuanian-Polish conflict, but it, too, took a position which was advantageous to Poland — recognizing the territorial status quo which placed Vilnius in Poland¹¹. Lithuania's major goal in the Vilnius matter was to get Poland to admit that the question was still open for discussion¹². In the mid-1930s, the Lithuanians were still not ready to disclaim the fanatical slogan, "We will not rest without Vilnius!"

Lithuania briefly sought refuge in the Baltic Entente after finding itself disappointed in the speculative game of politics which involved establishing friendship with major countries with conflicting interests. Kaunas expected its alliance partners to be forthcoming in carrying out what had been promised, but instead it found avoidance and even improper action. Neither Estonia nor Latvia wanted to keep in force

the agreement of May 1934 which stated that Germany's activities in the Klaipėda (Memel) region might threaten Latvia and Estonia, too. As the international situation deteriorated, both countries distanced themselves from the position which had been coordinated among them earlier. The first signs that Latvia and Estonia were again treating Memel as an foreign policy problem only for Lithuania came at the second conference of Baltic Entente foreign ministers, which took place in Kaunas in May 1935¹³. Considerably later, in November 1937, the Estonian ambassador to Lithuania, O. Õpik, told S. Lozoraitis frankly that Estonia was not prepared to offer any advice to Lithuania on the Memel question, because the Geneva agreement did not provide for cooperation in the area of "specific problems". S. Lozoraitis objected to this formulation, saying that if Klaipėda was attacked, Lithuania would "fight to the end" in the resulting war with Germany. The Estonian ambassador coolly responded that if that were to happen, "no nation would do so much as lift a finger to help Lithuania"¹⁴.

In the mid-1930s, the "German factor" began to pose a serious threat to Klaipėda (Memel) and to Lithuanian independence. The time was rapidly approaching when Berlin would be able to use its growing military strength and international influence to "reclaim Klaipėda" (in the words of the Latvian ambassador in Lithuania, K. Sēja)¹⁵. Faced with this situation, Lithuanian Foreign Minister S. Lozoraitis concluded that more energetic efforts were needed to settle relations with Poland so that the country's intolerable foreign policy tension would abate somewhat. On 18 April 1935 he submitted a memorandum to President A. Smetona which contained the principles for an agreement with Poland and set out a new security conception for Lithuania. The memorandum stated that the Lithuanians were not prepared militarily or diplomatically to wage two battles at once — the effort to regain Vilnius and the effort to protect Klaipėda (Memel)¹⁶. Lithuania's earlier strategy concerning Poland (refusal to establish diplomatic relations, international protests, etc.) had not worked out, and the Vilnius question was gradually losing its significance in international politics. So S. Lozoraitis recommended that the "Polish factor" be reintegrated into Lithuanian foreign policy and used as a resource against Germany. S. Lozoraitis felt that it would be enough to request only one concession from the Poles: the admission that the two countries had not settled their territorial disputes. S. Lozoraitis felt that the strategy would be useful to Lithuania not only in the battle over Klaipėda (Memel), but

also in the sense that it would give a new impulse in the "Vilnius matter"¹⁷.

S. Lozoraitis had a conception of foreign policy which was qualitatively different from the one held earlier by A. Valdemaras¹⁸. A. Valdemaras had supported the search for agreements with Moscow and Berlin which could be used against Poland. Without a doubt, the new Lozoraitis policy was more appropriate for the situation of the day. But A. Smetona rejected S. Lozoraitis' initiative¹⁹, and the recommendation was never put into practice. Lithuania continued its efforts to play the major powers off against one another, and its foreign policy continued to be deformed. The force which could counter the growing threat from Germany was never found, nor could it be found. When the inevitable occupation of Klaipėda finally happened, Lithuania was a shining example of isolation. For this, it could "thank" its alliance partners, as well as Moscow.

Even after the establishment of the Baltic Entente, the priority in Lithuanian foreign policy remained relations with the Soviet Union. This tradition had its roots in the early days of Lithuanian independence and could not be overcome. Since 1926, Lithuania had had special relations with the USSR in the form of a "gentleman's agreement" which included the provision that Kaunas would keep Moscow informed about its foreign policy. On 22 May 1931 Lithuania promised to inform the Soviet Union about all matters concerning its relations with the Baltic Republics. After the Geneva agreement was signed, the Lithuanians went a step further, making the surprising announcement that it considered its "gentleman's agreement" with Moscow to be more important than the agreement with Estonia and Latvia²⁰. On the one hand, this reflected Lithuania's unfounded hopes that the USSR would support it in its conflict with Poland and Germany, but on the other hand, it also signified the low esteem in which the Lithuanians held the Baltic Entente. This leads to the question of why the alliance was necessary at all if that was one partner's approach to it from the very beginning.

Moscow's influence over Lithuanian foreign policy continued to have a deforming effect. The Soviet Union tried to create the impression in Kaunas that in the event of a conflict with Poland, the USSR would come to Lithuania's aid. President A. Smetona believed these promises, and this strengthened his resolve to oppose any agreement with Warsaw. But when in March 1938 Poland submitted an ultimatum

to Lithuania, demanding that diplomatic ties be established, Moscow did very little on Kaunas' behalf. In fact, the only advice which came from Moscow was that the Lithuanians should accept the Polish overture. On 22 March the Latvian ambassador in Lithuania, L. Sēja, reported to Riga that Soviet prestige was diminishing in Kaunas²¹. Russia experienced a serious diplomatic defeat which led to a reduction in its influence. Meeting in Kaunas in October 1938, Lithuania's ambassadors decided to discontinue the country's foreign policy orientation toward Moscow, moving instead to draw closer to Latvia and Estonia and improve relations with Poland²². The very pro-Soviet Lithuanian ambassador in Moscow, T. Baltrušaitis, was recalled²³.

The Baltic Entente played an even lesser role in Estonia's foreign policy than it did in Lithuania's, though in the first years after the Geneva agreement was signed, Tallinn stated its official view that the union should be strengthened. During the time that J. Seljamaa was at the head of the Foreign Ministry, Tallinn's policies were not "anti-Baltic", nor were they aimed at keeping conflicts among the Baltic Republics alive. J. Seljamaa did not often submit to the "unofficial foreign policy leader" in Estonia, J. Laidoner, and was viewed by Latvian diplomats as a "fierce defender of close cooperation among the Baltic Republics"²⁴. As a former ambassador to Kaunas, J. Seljamaa was well aware of Lithuania's complicated foreign policy situation and tried to maintain correct relations with Lithuania²⁵. Naturally, he was not happy with Lithuania's "specific problems" or with the deterioration of German-Lithuanian relations over Lithuanian policies in the Klaipėda (Memel) region. In the summer of 1935, the Latvian ambassador to Tallinn, R. Liepiņš, wrote about the Estonian attitude toward the strengthening of the Baltic Entente, concluding that the Estonians, "unlike Lithuanians, will not want to undertake any new obligations until a *modus vivendi* is found in the Vilnius and Klaipėda questions"²⁶.

In May 1936, F. Akel became Estonia's foreign minister. Latvia's diplomats characterized him as a "great polophile and germanophile"²⁷ who always spoke of the 12 September agreement "with negative criticism and even hidden sarcasm"²⁸. At a meeting with the Latvian ambassador to Germany half a year before he ascended to the minister's chair, F. Akel stated that "the Baltic Entente was already dead" and that "nothing could come of it"²⁹. F. Akel came to this conclusion early in 1936, when only three conferences of foreign ministers had taken place. It is clear now that he never believed in the idea of the

Baltic Entente, at least in the form which it took in September 1934. F. Akel did not feel that close relations among Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were possible as long as Lithuania had unsettled relations with Germany and Poland²⁹. This was not an illogical conclusion.

F. Akel's foreign policy credo was that a small country needed "friends — big and powerful friends"³¹. Basing his work on this policy, F. Akel achieved some results. While he was foreign minister, the role played by Germany and Poland in Estonia's foreign policy orientation increased. A clear priority in this system was given to Germany, because the Estonians viewed Poland as just a German ally. This pro-German orientation was determined by Estonia's considerations in the areas of security, economics and ideology, and it was most unsatisfactory to Latvia. The German ambassador to Riga, E. Schack, reported that in 1937, Latvia followed the development of German-Estonian relations with a great deal of mistrust. The Latvians were particularly suspicious about such events as the arrival of the German cruiser "Leipzig" in Tallinn and the participation of Estonian officers in German military maneuvers³².

In the second half of the 1930s, disharmony in the Baltic Entente increased considerably. Voices began to be heard in Estonia which called for an end to cooperation, and this led to an irreversible deterioration in relations between Latvia and Estonia. The military alliance between the two countries collapsed, too. In 1937, Estonia's military headquarters, without consulting Latvia, drew up new mobilization plans which did not provide for Estonian assistance to Latvia in the event of a German attack and discounted any Latvian assistance to Estonia in case of aggression from the USSR. In short, the military alliance which had existed at least on paper up to that time was now essentially destroyed³³. In 1938, Gen. J. Laidoner met with the American ambassador in the Baltic Republics, J. C. Wiley, and restated the well-known truth: if war broke out, it was doubtful that so much as one Estonian military unit would wish to go to Latvia's aid³⁴. The American Latvian historian E. Andersons has blamed Estonia's military leadership for this state of affairs, writing that "Estonia's phenomenal military strategy experts failed to understand that by destroying the military entente between the two nations, they were actually hastening the path of the Baltic Republics, including their own, to hell"³⁵. Another American author, however, wrote that among the three Baltic Republics, it was precisely Estonia which had the most realistic foreign policy³⁶.

This issue cannot be viewed unequivocally. The Estonian military command had definite arguments against cooperation with Latvia. One of these was that in the 1930s, Estonia's military and political leadership came to the conclusion that Estonia's main enemy was the USSR. Latvia was viewed as an uncertain ally in opposition to the Russians. Three Estonian colonels affiliated with the Abwehr, R. Maasing, V. Saarsen and L. Jakobsen, stated this view frankly, remarking that if the Russians were to enter Latvia, Latvia would welcome them with open arms (the position of the Estonian colonels was also noted in a memorandum issued by the German Foreign Ministry on 8 November 1938, which stated that Latvia's army was the weakest link in Baltic defense and was more anti-German than anti-Soviet in orientation)³⁷. If in the mid-1930s the Estonians had felt that Latvia was an insufficient ally, now they began to view their neighbor as an unsafe and untrustworthy ally. It is true that there were some pro-Soviet leanings in the Latvian army, but the Estonians exaggerated these, and their position was not correct.

Latvia and Estonia had differences in opinion in other areas, as well. Important foreign policy questions were not always coordinated between the two countries, and this often led to dissatisfaction on the part of one ally. In January 1938, for example, V. Munters offended the Estonians by rushing to become the first Baltic foreign minister to raise a toast to "the king of Italy and emperor of Abyssinia", thus recognizing the occupation of Abyssinia. V. Munters had discussed the Abyssinian matter in September 1937, during the annual session of the League of Nations, and both F. Akel and S. Lozoraitis had agreed with him that the occupation of Abyssinia would have to be recognized. Neither F. Akel nor S. Lozoraitis wished to hurry in this respect, however. They wanted to wait until the major powers recognized the occupation first. But V. Munters wanted to draw attention to himself by going ahead with the recognition, and this displeased both his colleagues³⁸.

The Baltic Entente was not up to resolving any of the important crises which arose during its existence. The alliance demonstrated absolute helplessness in March 1938, when the Polish-Lithuanian conflict began. At the end of 1938, the Entente suffered an unmistakable political collapse after Estonian Foreign Minister K. Selter began a concerted effort to tear down the already weak union. K. Selter proposed postponing the ninth conference of Baltic Entente foreign

ministers, which was scheduled to meet in Kaunas on 19 December³⁹. This step was not without its purpose. The Estonians supported Germany's pressure on Lithuania in the matter of Klaipėda, and they did not want to listen to Lithuanian complaints at the conference. Tallinn's activities were also influenced by jealousy over V. Munters' admirable activities in visiting London, Copenhagen and Berlin. On 23 December 1938, the Latvian foreign minister wrote to the ambassador in Tallinn, V. Sūmanis, that "Estonia's attitude and behavior in this matter [the postponement of the conference — I.F., A.S.] contains a certain amount of political timidity, but it also has some elements of intrigue"⁴⁰. This analysis was not, of course, surprising to V. Sūmanis. Two weeks later he reported to Rīga: "One thing which is now fully clear is that the biggest reason for the postponement was that the Estonians wanted to make a statement against the Latvian foreign minister, i.e., his propaganda trip. The idea and wish to 'hit' the Latvian foreign minister has persisted fairly broadly here"⁴¹.

The result of Estonia's inflexible and short-sighted policy was that at the beginning of 1939, cooperation among the Baltic Republics were basically gone. The situation which had developed in advance of the postponed ministerial conference was characterized very well by the A. Stegmanis, the director of the Foreign Ministry's political department. On 2 January 1939, in an official letter to the ambassador in Belgium, M. Valters, he listed three factors which were hampering Baltic cooperation: "1) Lithuania's foreign policy problems: Vilnius (much less now than before) and Klaipėda (much more now than before), which do not directly touch both other countries and in which neither Latvia nor Estonia wishes to become involved; 2) Estonia's erroneous conception about the Finnish-Scandinavian orientation which has been artificially created, is without any visible results, and leaves the Baltic Entente on the back burner. A significant example of this tendency is Estonia's intention to propose at the next conference of Baltic foreign ministers that the number of regular conferences be reduced; 3) A certain rivalry among the three Baltic Republics or, to put it more precisely, the hidden dissatisfaction in Estonia and Lithuania about Latvia's supposed better position"⁴².

The ninth conference of Baltic Entente foreign ministers finally assembled in Kaunas on 1 February 1939, but it achieved nothing other than to demonstrate that the alliance was essentially defunct. With some difficulty, the ministers prepared a "completely insignificant"

(according to the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*) joint communique⁴³. At a time when true unity was necessary, the Baltic Republics found themselves distanced from one another, with no serious political or military cooperation, covered by on-paper neutrality, without any allies. Moreover, each of the three republics not only did not strengthen, but actually weakened the already shaky international situation of the others. At least as far as Latvia was concerned, this conclusion was stated by V. Munters in a circular to Latvia's ambassadors which was dated 26 April 1939: "Maneuvering among the three neighbors, each of which views the others with mistrust, the common border with the USSR, the very short distance between Germany's territory and ours, unclear policies in the North, an unstable situation to the South, the German minority ... - all these circumstances, when taken together, justify our call for strong nerves, clear vision, and a firm mind"⁴⁴.

The collapse of the Baltic Entente occurred against a background of decreasing international security in Eastern Europe. After Germany annexed the Klaipėda (Memel) region in the spring of 1939, new elements became visible in major power politics which were clearly dangerous to the Baltic Republics. Hitler's decision to resolve the "Polish problem" by military means, Stalin's disinterest in defending Poland, and England's inability to offer effective assistance to Poland and the Baltic Republics — all these factors facilitated the onset of a situation where the aggressive intentions of the USSR and Germany in the Baltic Republics could realistically be carried out. No matter what policies Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia adopted now, they could not really hope to maintain their full independence.

The fate of the Baltic Republics was sealed in negotiations between the Soviet Union and Germany, which closed on 23 August 1939 with a non-aggression pact which included an integrally important secret protocol on the division of spheres of interest. Finland, Latvia and Estonia (and, after 28 September, Lithuania) were "turned over" to the USSR. Given the rapidly changing international situation and the war which had already begun in Europe, the Soviet Union moved forward carefully, and its occupation of the Baltic Republics was conducted in several stages. Baltic diplomacy was not up to dealing with this almost hopeless situation. The foreign policy of the three nations began to be dominated by an element of inevitability and a movement along the "horizontal line" to the East. The most surprising actions were taken by the Estonians, who reoriented themselves with

unexpected speed and demonstrated their willingness to go along with the flow and attach themselves to the strongest force. The Estonian historian I. Magnus has written that in September 1939, J. Laidoner and K. Selter did not want any more contacts with Latvia and Lithuania and were prepared to become a protectorate of the USSR, ready to sign an agreement on military bases and with no thought of opposition⁴⁵. Apparently the disappearance of the "German factor" (the Estonian government was aware of the secret talks between the Soviet Union and Germany) restored the "slave syndrome" in Estonia's politicians and reestablished the "czarist officers complex" in the nation's military leadership. Latvia's leading circles were similarly afraid of the Soviets and were also ready to capitulate.

In September and October 1939, the USSR forced the Baltic Republics to sign mutual assistance agreements which liquidated any foreign policy neutrality held by the three countries and which began the process of their destruction by permitting the entry of the Soviet armed forces into Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Moscow's shameless actions, crude pressure and bald threats were countered by each Baltic Republic separately. The Baltic Entente's total helplessness and inability to function during a serious crisis were revealed again. There were objective factors at the base of this helplessness. International politics at that time was clearly dominated by nothing more than brute force. A small country had trouble offering any effective assistance to another small and weak country.

In the fall of 1939 and the spring of 1940, the necessary pre-requisites for Soviet aggression in the Baltic Republics were in place, and the Soviets were just waiting for the right moment to implement the occupation. At this time, however, an apparent "renaissance" of the Baltic Entente emerged. The alliance had rid itself of Lithuania's "specific problems"⁴⁶, and the new foreign minister of Estonia was A. Piip, a man who was a supporter of Baltic cooperation and who had co-authored the 1923 agreement between Latvia and Estonia. Tallinn called for a new conference of Baltic Entente foreign ministers⁴⁷. A conference was held in December 1939, but neither it, nor another conference held in March 1940 adopted any significant decisions. The meetings had no particular political importance.

- 1 LVVA.-2630.f.-1.apr.-10.l.-p.52.
- 2 Feldmanis, et. al., op. cit., p. 100.
- 3 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p.127.
- 4 *ibid.*-p. 121.
- 5 *ibid.*-p. 122.
- 6 *ibid.*-p. 202.
- 7 PAAA.-R 84404.-p. 6.
- 8 *ibid.*-R 102395.-p.12.
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-96.l.-p.546.
- 11 Feldmanis, et. al., op. cit., p. 108.
- 12 Žiugžda, R. Lithuania and Western Powers. 1917-1940. Vilnius: Mintis Publishers (1987), p. 166.
- 13 Žalys, op. cit., p. 262.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 263.
- 15 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p. 86.
- 16 Žalys, op. cit., p. 264.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 A. Valdemaras was Lithuania's prime minister from 1926 to 1929.
- 19 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-94.l.-p. 269.
- 20 Žiugžda, op. cit., p. 144.
- 21 LVVA.-2575.f.-15.apr.-102.l.-p. 338.
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 Tarulis, op. cit., p. 97.
- 24 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3166.l.-p.305.
- 25 LVVA.-2575.f.15.apr.-83.l.-p. 233.
- 26 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3079.l.-p. 114.
- 27 *ibid.*,-3116.l., p. 326.
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 LVVA.-2575.f.-8.apr.-40.l.-p. 20.
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 *ibid.*, p. 202.
- 32 PAAA.-R 102395, p. 10.
- 33 It was completely destroyed on 7 June 1939, when both Latvia and Estonia signed non-aggression agreements with Germany.
- 34 LVVA.-2575.f.-8.apr.-40.l.-p. 298.
- 35 Andersons, Latvijas bruņotie spēki..., p. 654.
- 36 Crowe, op. cit., p. 127.
- 37 Rauch, op. cit., p. 202.

- 38 Feldmanis, et. al., op. cit., p. 83.
- 39 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3125.l.-p. 218.
- 40 Ibid. , p. 199.
- 41 Ibid., p. 166.
- 42 Ibid., 4.apr.-7679.l.-p. 181.
- 43 Ibid.-3.apr.-2648.l.-p. 11.
- 44 Ibid.-4.apr.-7679.l.-p. 199.
- 45 Feldmanis, et. al., op. cit., p. 373.
- 46 The first paragraph of the secret protocol attached to the Soviet-German agreement of 23 August 1939 provided for recognition of Lithuania's interests in the Vilnius region. When the Soviets attacked Poland, they occupied Vilnius on 19 September 1939. On 10 October of the same year, when Lithuania and the USSR signed their mutual assistance agreement, Lithuania was forced to accept Vilnius as a "present" from Moscow.
- 47 LVVA.-2574.f.-4.apr.-3217.l.-p. 152.

VII. Factors Which Caused the Disintegration of the Baltic Entente

There are several definite pre-requisites to the establishment of a strong and effective union among two or more nations. The prominent Czechoslovakian politician E. Beneš was right on the money when he said that nations can cooperate closely only if they feel threatened by a single entity¹. The Baltic Republics never had a unified conception of their greatest threat or their main enemy. In Latvia, for example, political leaders in the 1930s believed that the nation's independence would sooner or later be threatened by expansionism from Germany or the USSR. There were certain differences of opinion among them, but these focused largely on the question of which of the two major powers was a greater threat to Latvia. Understandably then, this issue — "whether Latvia's 'enemy number one' is Germany or the Soviet Union" (this formulation was by diplomat A. Stegmanis)² — took center stage at the second conference of Latvian ambassadors. The full range of opinions was offered in this forum (the Latvian ambassador in Berlin, E. Krieviņš, felt that Germany posed the most significant threat to Latvia, while the ambassador in Moscow, A. Bīlmanis, proposed the USSR as "enemy number one")³. In the end, however, the ambassadors took a decision which had specific elements of compromise. E. Krieviņš has written in his memoirs that "in the end we agreed that we had two enemies number one"⁴. The Latvian population at large, until 1939, considered Germany to be the major enemy.

Documentation from the Latvian Foreign Ministry of the time also reveals materials which speak to the reasons Latvia felt threatened by Germany and the Soviet Union. This was clearly evidenced in an important report from the Latvian ambassador to Germany, H. Celmiņš, to Prime Minister K. Ulmanis on 28 March 1936. The document flatly stated that the USSR (Russia) and Germany were the only enemies of Latvia which could, in the near or long term, threaten the independence of Latvia: "Soviet Russia because of its ideas of world revolution, and because of Latvia's ports and rail lines; Germany because of its territorial ambitions to the East and because it considers the Baltic Republics as a front-line for German culture in the East; and Russia and Germany together threaten Latvia because Latvia might become the battleground for their 'final battle'"⁵.

Unlike Latvia, Estonia took a more unequivocal stand in the mat-

ter of defining its enemy. The leading politicians in Tallinn did not doubt that the only nation threatening Estonian independence then and in the future was the USSR. They did not feel that there was particularly significant danger coming from Germany. The Latvian ambassador to Tallinn, R. Liepiņš, speaking at the second ambassadorial conference in the summer of 1935 stated: "Estonia considers Russia to be its first and major enemy. Russia's attempts to draw closer to the Baltic Republics are seen as opportunism. Danger from Germany is more distant for Estonia. One might say that the danger is at 75% for Lithuania, 50% for Latvia, 25% for Estonia and non-existent for Finland". It is important to note that this evaluation was not just academic in nature. Taken together with other considerations, it could have an impact on pending political decisions. As early as December 1933, R. Liepiņš analyzed Estonia's approach to its potential enemies and concluded with a good deal of foresight that Latvia probably could not hope for Estonian assistance in the event of war with Germany⁷.

Lithuania felt that the largest threat to its independence was Poland and, to a lesser extent, Germany, but it viewed the USSR as a friend and ally. These differences in assessing external threats weakened the Baltic Entente, but they could not be avoided. Each of the three Baltic Republics truly was in a different situation: Poland, for example, threatened Lithuania but not Latvia or Estonia. Soviet Union, in turn, was the major enemy of Latvia and Estonia but, while Poland existed, could not doubt the independence of Lithuania. Where Germany is concerned, until the late 1930s it was not a serious military factor in Europe and posed no real threat to any of the Baltic Republics. At the end of the 1930s, however, it was Lithuania which felt the German threats most actively because of the Klaipėda matter.

The Baltic Entente did not become a military union, and so it did nothing to really strengthen the security of its member nations. None of the Baltic Republics viewed the Entente as an entity which could strengthen their national security. Instead, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania all tried to deal with threats from one major country by appealing for assistance from another major country. Lithuania, for example, thought of the USSR as something closely approaching a formal ally all the way until March 1938. Estonia had no formal agreements with Germany and Poland, but still hoped for Berlin's military assistance against the USSR. Latvia, too, concluded in 1935 that it should sign a mutual assistance agreement with Moscow, but this did

not happen because of disinterest on the part of the Soviets. Beginning in 1938, the dominant view in Latvia was that alliances with major powers were inadvisable during times of peace because "... then one can quickly lose one's freedom of action"⁸

The Baltic Entente was also weakened by the fact that it had no economic foundation. All three republics had fairly similar economic structures, and they were more competitors than partners in matters of foreign trade. The director of the trade department at the Estonian Foreign Ministry, G. Meri, spoke to a meeting of businessmen on 3 May 1940 and emphasized that before September 1939, trade among the three Baltic Republics had been insignificant, and their economic structures had been independent one from the other⁹. It was not until the eve of the 1940 occupation that economic cooperation among the Baltic Republics enjoyed a delayed period of intensification¹⁰. Throughout the 1930s, the possibilities of establishing common economic policies were not utilized.

Another factor which helped to disintegrate the Baltic Entente was the fact that Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians had different mentalities. The three Baltic Republics did not have a common history or a common destiny, and so they could not establish any feeling of unity. The Baltic union was not a matter of the heart for the Baltic people, because they were fairly estranged from one another¹¹. Only after the catastrophe of 1940 did the phrase "the common Baltic destiny" come into circulation, and it was used retroactively to describe earlier phases in Baltic history. The Balts themselves, however, never really felt any common historical identity¹².

The Estonian leader K. Pets met with Latvian ambassador E. Krieviņš on 3 February 1936 and remarked that the characters and temperaments of the Latvian and Estonian people were too divergent¹³. These historical differences were heightened even more by the authoritarian Ulmanis regime. Some ideologists of the regime tried to imbue the Latvians with a messianic duty to "lead humanity into a new phase of history"¹⁴. This messianic ideology led to many publications which minimized the historical role of other peoples, including the Estonians. A good example of this line of thinking was provided by an article by J. Lapiņš, "The History and Unity of the Baltic People", which denigrated the Finnish tribes as "barbaric, undeveloped cannibals" who (and this included the Estonians) were to blame for the fact that the Balts could not create a "world empire which would rule in

the place of Russia"¹⁶. These types of comments had direct political consequences. J. Lapiņš' article was received with understandable disgust in Estonia, and this led to a wider gulf in Estonian-Latvian relations¹⁶.

Another element which heightened the lack of unity caused by the Baltic people's historical, political and economic histories was the personal animosity which existed among Latvian and Estonian political and military leaders. The influence of personal considerations on politics is inescapable in any society, but in dictatorial regimes it takes on a larger significance and can sometimes become critically important. On April 2, 1934, shortly after the coup by K. Pets, V. Munters remarked that K. Pets did not trust K. Ulmanis¹⁷. This mistrust evolved over the years to become first dislike and then contempt which K. Pets did not bother to conceal. The most negative fallout for Latvian-Estonian relations, however, was caused by the almost grotesque hatred of V. Munters which was held by several Estonian political and military leaders. K. Ulmanis met with the general secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry on 15 April 1936 and remarked that the Estonian military attache in Latvia, V. Saarsen, would happily see V. Munters hang¹⁸. The next day the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers considered V. Munters' nomination to become foreign minister, and K. Ulmanis announced that J. Seljamaa had stated that as long as V. Munters was at the head of Latvian foreign policy "there will be no friendship"¹⁹. The hatred of V. Munters only increased during the time of Seljamaa's successors, F. Akel and K. Selter.

This raises the question of why V. Munters was allowed to stay on in the position when it was clear that he was hampering the development of relations between Estonia and Lithuania. There was no shortage of candidates for the Foreign Ministry in the mid-1930s. Ambassadors M. Valters, E. Krieviņš and V. Sūmans, as well as Transportation Minister B. Einbergs²⁰ would all have been more acceptable to Estonia. But K. Ulmanis' sympathies lay with V. Munters.

1 Rothstein, op. cit., p. 141.

2 Stegmanis, A. *Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas. // "Neatkarīgā Latvija": - kāda tā bija.* Rīga: Avots (1987), p. 163.

3 Krieviņš, E. *Viņās dienās.* Melbourne: Austrālijas Latvietis (1966), p. 163.

- 4 Ibid.
- 5 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3063.l.-p.275.
- 6 Ibid.-3079.l.-p. 149.
- 7 Ibid.-2575.f.-15.apr.-83.l.-p. 341.
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- 10 Gore, I., Stranga, A. Latvija: neatkarības mijkrēslis. Okupācija. Rīga: Izglītība (1992), pp. 94-95.
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- 18 Ibid.-10.l.-p. 50.
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- 20 Ibid., pp. 15 and 50.

Conclusion

There is a particular myth which the Balts have tried to maintain since 1940. It is that right before the Baltic Entente collapsed in late 1939 and early 1940, the three member states tried to cooperate more closely, draw nearer to one another, etc.¹ Is there any basis for this allegation? On the surface, it may have appeared to the casual observer that there was, indeed, a brief period of closer integration before the alliance's death, but no such conclusion can be drawn after a more serious analysis. The last conference of the Entente, from 14 to 16 March 1940, was, indeed, clogged with a large number of matters, including the upcoming "Baltic Week" in Tallinn in June, the "Baltic People's Friendship Congress", *et al.*². But the conferences of firefighters and pharmacists which were planned for "Baltic Week" had no significance in terms of the Baltic Entente as a political formation. The firefighters might just as well have sought friendship with their German colleagues. From the perspective of the alliance, there were only two important matters. One was a proposal by Lithuania to harmonize the 12 September 1934 agreement with "new circumstances" — i.e., to finally sign a trilateral military convention³. Latvia and Estonia did not want to do this. Such a convention was not really possible at a time when the three Baltic Republics were essentially protectorates of the USSR. If this step had not been possible in 1934, then it certainly was not possible in 1940. The second issue was the Vilnius matter. At the 10th conference of foreign ministers Lithuania asked that Latvia and Estonia recognize the attachment of Vilnius to Lithuanian territory. Both countries resisted this recognition on grounds that Lithuania's acceptance of Vilnius from the USSR was not in keeping with the country's stated policy of neutrality, nor was it lawful. At the 11th conference, too, this matter was not resolved to Lithuania's satisfaction⁴. Officially, Latvia and Estonia never did recognize Vilnius' having been joined to Lithuania.

Other matters at the 10th conference were completely insignificant and were all issues which did not require a Baltic Entente but could have been resolved at the level of bilateral diplomatic contacts.

Preparations for the occupation of the Baltic Republics demonstrated that there was no Baltic Entente. In June 1940, each of the three republics hoped to escape this fate on its own, with no consideration for its neighbors. In May 1940, the USSR initiated the

occupation with Lithuania, staging several small incidents ("kidnaping" of Soviet soldiers by Lithuania). On 25 May, V. Molotov crudely accused Lithuania's ambassador in Moscow, L. Natkus-Natkevičius of Lithuanian "provocations" against the USSR. On 28 May, *Pravda* published an attack against Estonia for its sympathies toward England. The Soviet strategy was quite simple, and it cannot be called particularly devious. When pressure was implemented against Lithuania and Estonia, Latvia was left alone. Even more, on 1 June, the Latvian war minister, Gen. K. Berķis, went on a surprisingly long visit to Moscow. This demonstrates not so much Soviet strategy than the position of the Balts themselves. First of all, any complaint by the Soviets led to an immediate readiness to fulfill all of the Soviet wishes, even ones which had not yet been stated. On 30 May, Estonia's ambassador in Kaunas, J. Lattik (K. Pets' son in law) returned to Lithuania from a trip to Tallinn and informed the Latvian ambassador, L. Sēja, that after the *Pravda* article, K. Pets was thinking about sacking Foreign Minister A. Piip, who had the reputation of an anglophile and who might be unacceptable to the Russians⁵.

On 5 June, the Russians presented Latvia with an urgent demand to admit 300 so-called "free-workers" for jobs at Soviet bases. Latvia immediately agreed to issue 384 visas at no charge⁶. There is serious reason to believe that the "free workers" were actually charges of the NKVD and their purpose was to create mass disturbances in Latvia in advance of the Red Army's entering the country. On 9 June in Moscow, V. Molotov complained to the Lithuanian prime minister about Baltic cooperation which could be turned against the USSR. But at the Rīga airport on 12 June, on his way home from Moscow, A. Merkys informed V. Munters that Molotov "did not concretely demand an end to Baltic cooperation, though that could be understood"⁷. Merkys was immediately ready to "understand" something which had not been stated. In his discussion with V. Munters he announced that he would not attend "Baltic Week" in Tallinn (!). One is left with the impression that the Soviet Union was convinced that the Baltic Republics would not oppose the invasion, so there was no need for any especially brutal steps against them prior to 15 June. L. Sēja filed a significant report on 11 June, noting that Soviet complaints against Lithuania were quite petty: the disappearance of a few Red Army conscripts, the arrest of some girlfriends of Russian soldiers, etc. L. Sēja concluded that Russia would lose nothing by staging a larger

provocation, even at the cost of some of its soldiers' lives". If this did not actually happen, then it is possibly because the Russians did not see any need to trouble themselves with any larger incident.

Secondly, Soviet pressure on Lithuania in May and June did not create any sympathies in Estonia and Latvia. Even more, the pressure created the surprising conviction in Tallinn and Riga that Lithuania's fate would not be visited on them. June 1940 clearly illustrated the uselessness of the Baltic Entente. When the deputy commissar of the Soviet Defense Ministry, A. Loktionov, arrived in Riga on 11 June, Munters had what he later termed "friendly discussions" with him. Loktionov easily created the impression that Lithuania was guilty of kidnapping Soviet soldiers but that the Soviet Union had no complaint against Latvia or Estonia. Munters invited A. Loktionov to visit Latvia again in July and make a closer inspection of "our country".

The appeasement of the Soviet Union took on grotesque aspects. June 1940 demonstrated how distant from one another were the three anti-democratic regimes of the Baltic Republics.

From 15 to 17 June, the USSR occupied the Baltic Republics. Even then, the Balts permitted several serious errors:

- 1) None of the three anti-democratic regimes established governments in exile abroad which would have permitted for the juridical continuity of the Baltic Republics. This demonstrated the limitations of the Pets, Ulmanis and Smetona regimes which could not rise above the interests of their own narrow cliques.

- 2) None of the Baltic governments submitted so much as a formal protest to the Soviet Union, to say nothing of any kind of symbolic resistance. Pets and Ulmanis did not even leave their countries in the hope that they could come to an agreement with the Soviet emissaries, A. Višinskij and A. Zdanov. Only A. Smetona fled Lithuania, and this can be seen as a spontaneous form of protest.

- 3) Actions taken by K. Ulmanis and K. Pets in June and July of 1940 made the implementation and protection of Soviet occupation policies easier. Both former dictators formally approved of the establishment of "people's governments". Even today this approval complicates the Baltic fight for international recognition of the fact that the Baltic Republics were occupied in 1940.

- 4) The anti-democratic regimes in the Baltic Republics facilitated the implementation of the Soviet Union's hegemonistic policies, because the regimes were unpopular among broad swathes of the Baltic

populations, especially among ethnic minorities. The Soviet Union took advantage of this fact. The experience of the Baltic dictatorships suggests that it was precisely the anti-democratic regimes which turned Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into weak states which were far less ambitious and far less protected against external aggression than were democratic countries.

1 This idea is contained in virtually every example of Baltic (and not only Baltic) literature about the theme. See, for example, Misiunas, R.I., Taagapera R. *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940-1980*. Los Angeles: University of California Press (1983), p. 17. Also Andersons, E., *Latvijas vēsture. Ārpolitika...*, p. 372.

2 For more about this conference, see Gore, I., Stranga, A. "Latvija: neatkarības mijkrēslis. Okupācija. 1939. gada septembris-1940. gada jūlijs"..., pp. 86-89.

3 LVVA.-1474.f.-2.apr.-81.l.-p. 3.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5 *Ibid.*-2574.f.-3.apr.-3291.l.-p. 11.

6 *Ibid.*-2570.f.-3.apr.-1254.l.-p. 40.

7 V. Munters filed a report on his discussion with A. Merķis on 12 June 1940, from 11:40 to 12:50. LVVA.-2575.f.-14.apr.-5.l.-pp. 566-567.

8 LVVA.-2574.f.-3.apr.-3291.l.-p. 637.

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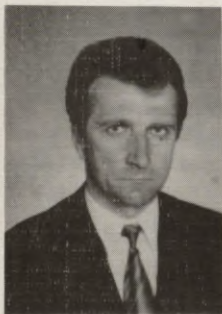


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Baltic Security Studies

The brochure *The Destiny of the Baltic Entente. 1934-1940.* attempts to analyze the circumstances under which the Baltic Entente was formed, to demonstrate its "internal weakness" and to reveal those factors which barred it from becoming a military union. Much attention is devoted to the Baltic policies of Europe's major powers and to the differing foreign policy orientations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania which led to differing positions on the matter of which nation was the Balt's leading enemy. Among other factors of significance in the disintegration of the Baltic Entente, an important role is played by a lack of a common economic foundation, the differing mentalities of the three Baltic peoples, and the existence of anti-democratic regimes and ambitious politicians in the three countries.



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