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## 'It is all the fault of Lithuanian provocateurs...'. Annexation of Lithuania by USSR in Summer 1940 as Described in Diplomatic Documents and Propaganda Materials

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*'Wszystkiemu winni są litewscy prowokatorzy...'. Aneksja Litwy przez ZSRR latem 1940 r. w świetle dokumentów dyplomatycznych i materiałów propagandowych*

### ABSTRACT

The research problem addressed in this paper is the issue of the process of the accession of the Republic of Lithuania to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940 and the political context of this event. There is much historical and political controversy nowadays around the history of Kremlin politics in 1939–1941, but recently the subject of annexation of Lithuania has not been discussed, and the issue of relations and diplomatic relations between the two countries has not been described in detail in Polish historiography so far. The research question was formulated as follows: why, in spite of the October 1939 Mutual Assistance Treaty, did Moscow decide to change the status quo and directly annex the neighbouring country, disregarding the considerable number of alternative scenarios and extensive possibilities of controlling Lithuania's policy? The research was conducted by analysing the documents of the diplomatic services of both countries (among which diplomatic correspondence occupies a special place), the then Soviet press from the point of view of the propaganda message used, as well as using memoiristic sources. As a result of the conducted research, no definite reasons for initiating the process of annexation of Lithuania by the USSR were defined, but a number of factors that may have a significant impact on the Kremlin's move were revealed. These include the successes of the Third Reich in the Second World War at that time, which, according to Moscow, could threaten the position of the USSR in the Baltic States and the achievements made, as well as the Kremlin's far-reaching imperial plans and the search for borders in the region.

**Key words:** 1940, Lithuania, Soviet Union, Third Reich, independence, annexation, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Mutual Assistance Treaty, Antanas Smetona, Juozas Urbšys, Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov

Incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union<sup>1</sup> in 1940 – the act of ‘liberation’ from Antanas Smetona’s regime and the will of joining the great Union of the Soviet States expressed in elections by the freed nation – constitutes an example of bloodless annexation of a neighbouring country through both diplomatic blackmail and mechanisms imitating peaceful democratic procedures and imitating support of the population. The event was also a part of a larger intrigue of Soviet diplomacy in order to quickly incorporate independent Baltic republics: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Annexations of these countries are poorly grounded in Polish collective awareness, usually perceived as just one of the episodes of World War II. In reality, such annexation was a several-months-long political process without a pre-established course, which depended on the political situation in Europe in any given moment. They also constitute a case study describing the dogmas of USSR’s foreign policy in the time of Stalinism.

Starting from the provisions of Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and signing by Lithuanian authorities of a Mutual Assistance Treaty with USSR on 10 October 1939 began the process of gradually increasing dependence of Kaunas from its eastern neighbour. Under that treaty, then-Polish Vilnius, constitutional capital city of Lithuania<sup>2</sup>, was taken in September 1939 by the Red Army and granted to Lithuanians by the Kremlin in exchange for allowing the Soviet troops to remain stationed within borders of the Lithuanian country. For the following ten months, Lithuania, at the price of restrictions in foreign policy resulting from the agreement with Moscow, tried to remain independent in spite of the war raging in Europe. Paradoxically, it was a time of peace and relatively independent internal policies. The period ended on 25 May 1940 when the Lithuanian government received a letter from Kremlin with accusations regarding serious infringements of the provisions of the treaty, including kidnappings of Red Army soldiers from garrisons stationed in Lithuania. Shortly afterwards, in the night of 14 to 15 June during a meeting in Kremlin, the People’s Commissar (narkom)<sup>3</sup> of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

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<sup>1</sup> The preferred Polish form of ‘Soviet Union’ used in the study is ‘Związek Radziecki’ rather than ‘Sowiecki’. Both forms are equally prevalent in modern Polish literature, often used as synonyms, sometimes for signalling personal opinions and viewpoint of an author towards a given topic whereas it is regarded that the latter expression suggests a negative attitude of a writer to USSR. Therefore to avoid the impression of political bias and to maintain objectivity of the study it was decided that the adjective ‘radziecki’, a direct translation of the word ‘советский’, will be used as a proper form.

<sup>2</sup> The actual capital city of Lithuania, due to ‘Polish occupation’ of Vilnius was Kaunas, treated as a ‘temporary capital city’.

<sup>3</sup> The People’s Commissar (rus. *народный комиссар*), so called narkom (rus. *нарком*) – a function corresponding to the role of a minister in the USSR.

the USSR, Vyacheslav Molotov, gave an ultimatum to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juozas Urbšys, requesting a change of the government to a pro-Soviet one and allowing the Red Army free entry into the country. Supported by the accusations regarding the breach of the provisions of the Mutual Assistance Treaty the ultimatum was accepted. The country stripped of its independence was incorporated into the Soviet Union already in August 1940.

The research question addressed in this article is: why did Kremlin decide to change the status quo and directly annex Lithuania in spite of the treaty of October 1939 and extensive capabilities of controlling its policies due to having multiple military bases in that country, which effectively intimidated and paralysed the Lithuanian authorities? It leads to a follow-up question: did the events of the early period of World War II directly affect the decision of USSR to incorporate Lithuania? Finally: how was the annexation conducted, what were the political and legal stages and how were they disguised as democratic choice?

Current findings allow us to set forth a thesis that the decision of incorporating Lithuania was taken mostly due to the fall of France which could threaten USSR's influence in the region of the Baltic States. Furthermore, the annexation of Lithuania allowed greater support of the western flank of the Soviet Union, the border with Germany along the Neman River and – in broader context – restitution of authority over territories lost in World War I. This falls within the general policy of USSR in Central and Eastern Europe implemented in years 1939-1940, oriented on extending the influence of Kremlin on the entire region, as well as execute interim geopolitical goals: extensive access to the sea and control over the borders of the Third Reich in face of the war. This is in conflict with the version of events promoted in Soviet historiography, which mentions securing western borders of USSR as a primary goal of Joseph Stalin's efforts, implementation of the demands of the working and peasant classes of the Baltic republics and changes in the political system via a bottom-up peaceful revolution<sup>4</sup>.

Foreign policy of USSR regarding Lithuania, Baltic states and the general area of Central-Eastern Europe in late 1930s and early 40s is a topic already covered in Polish and foreign literature, especially in the 1980s and 90s when documents of Soviet diplomacy were gradually being revealed,

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<sup>4</sup> Example reference in this context: *Historia dyplomacji 1939–1945*, vol. 4, eds. A.A. Gromyko et al., Warszawa 1982, p. 143; И.К. Кузьмичев, *Борьба Советского Союза за мир и безопасность против распространения фашистской агрессии (апрель 1940 – июнь 1941г.)*, 'История СССР' 1974, 1, p. 29; С.Ю. Норейкене, *Советско-литовские культурные связи 1920–1940 годов*, 'Вопросы истории' 1976, 12, p. 130.

disclosed and studied. The basis of this study is made of the analysis of the published documents of diplomatic services of both countries – bilateral and internal, as well as the agreements concluded between them. The research also encompassed Soviet daily press in order to examine the propaganda aspect of the annexation of Lithuania (newspapers 'Pravda' and 'Izvestia'), which the Kremlin intended to spread among the public and abroad, as well as memoirist materials.

The publication should be treated as a study of the inefficiently conducted neutrality politics in face of imperial politics and annexation of the smaller country as a result. In context of today's politics in former USSR territories, Lithuania's annexation seems similar to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, which gives it a timeless meaning.

#### DIPLOMATIC COERCION

As a result of the agreement of the Third Reich and USSR defined in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (23 August 1939)<sup>5</sup> and German–Soviet Frontier Treaty (28 September 1939), under which Central-Eastern Europe was divided into areas of influence, with Lithuania and other Baltic states on the Soviet side<sup>6</sup>. The The Second Republic of Poland was divided into the two powers, whereas Vilnius, during interwar period constituting a disputed issue between Kaunas and Warsaw, became a part of Soviet territory after the invasion of Poland by the Red Army. On 10 October 1939, a *Treaty on the handover of Vilnius and Vilnius County and mutual assistance between the USSR and Lithuania* was signed on the initiative of the Soviets. Under the treaty, the parties agreed to mutual military assistance in the event of invasion of Lithuania or the USSR through Lithuanian territory. It also obliged the parties to not sign treaties against each other with third countries. Furthermore, 20,000 Red Army soldiers were relocated to Lithuanian territory. Lithuania received territorial spoils in form of Vilnius and a part of its former Vilnius Voivodeship<sup>7</sup>. Similar treaties

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<sup>5</sup> *Договор о ненападении между Германией и Советским Союзом*, in: *Документы внешней политики, 1939 год*, vol. XXII, книга I, Москва 1992, p. 631 [hereinafter: ДВП 1939, кн. I]; *Секретный дополнительный протокол*, in: ДВП 1939, кн. I, p. 632.

<sup>6</sup> *Германо–Советский договор о дружбе и границе между СССР и Германией*, in: *Документы внешней политики, 1939 год*, книга II, Москва 1992, p. 134 [hereinafter: ДВП 1939, кн. II]; *Доверительный протокол*, in: ДВП 1939, кн. II, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Договор о передаче Литовской Республике города Вильно и Виленской области и о взаимопомощи между Советским Союзом и Литвой*, in: ДВП 1939, кн. II, p. 175; *Конфиденциальный протокол*, in: ДВП 1939, кн. II, p. 175.

(without handing over any territories) were earlier concluded with Latvia and Estonia. Despite no such intentions, a part of the public opinion and historians regarded the signing of the agreement with the USSR as a Soviet protectorate over Lithuania<sup>8</sup>, which was even formulated into a saying: 'Our Vilnius, Russian Lithuania'<sup>9</sup>.

Until late spring of 1940 Soviet-Lithuanian relations were good but conducting independent foreign policy by Lithuania was very limited and the awareness of the presence of the Soviet troops only strengthened that dependence. Although the reclamation of Vilnius was depicted as a great diplomatic success, Lithuanian authorities did not move there, including president Smetona, who believed that he 'would become a hostage' of the USSR as soon as the Red Army enters the country<sup>10</sup>. Although the Baltic Entente, a political alliance of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (and military alliance between Estonia and Latvia) established in 1934, still existed, it did not have any political significance. There were also attempts of secret contacts with German authorities regarding the establishment of a potential protectorate as defence from the Soviet Union<sup>11</sup> – with little effect because the Third Reich respected the division of influence in Europe as agreed in Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and in 1939 was promised a correction of Lithuanian-German border in the Suwałki Region<sup>12</sup>.

When in spring 1940 several disappearances and desertions of Red Army soldiers from Lithuanian garrisons were reported, no diplomatic crises broke out. The escape of Red Army soldier called Butaev, who died during the attempted arrest by Lithuanian police, was such a particularly spectacular case. Although for a long time no negative signals regarding these events had come from the Kremlin, a Soviet accredited representative<sup>13</sup> in Lithuania, Nikolai Pozdnyakov, expressed an opinion that the death of the Red Army soldier was a murder committed by Lithuanian police officers<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> A.E. Senn, *Lithuania 1940. Revolution from Above*, Amsterdam–New York 2007, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> A. Eidintas, A. Bubmblauskas, A. Kulakauskas, M. Tamošaitis, *Historia Litwy*, Vilnius 2013, p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kastory, *Złotowrogie sąsiedztwo. Rosyjska polityka wobec europejskich państw ościennych w latach 1939–1940*, Kraków 1998, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> *Tajny dodatkowy protokół*, in: *Białe plamy. ZSRR–Niemcy 1939–1941*, Vilnius 1990, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> The accredited representative (rus. *полномочный представитель*); so called. *polpred* (rus. *польпред*); representative of the USSR foreign service, holding the rank of an envoy.

<sup>14</sup> 1940 г. мая 16, Каунас – Письмо Н. Г. Позднякова В. Г. Деканозову относительно истории с мявшим командиром Бутаевым, in: *СССР и Литва в годы второй мировой войны. т. I: СССР и Литовская Республика (март 1939 – август 1940 гг.)*, Сборник документов, eds. A. Каспаравичюс, Ч. Лауринавичюс, Н. Лебедева, Vilnius 2006, p. 516.

## WORRIES OVER THE SPOILS

In spring 1940, Nazi Germany began achieving spectacular successes in the war against Allies, taking over Denmark, Norway, Benelux countries and France. A particularly momentous event was the conquest of Paris. The successes of Hitler disrupted the implementation of Stalin's scenario of a lengthy and exhausting conflict in Western Europe which, as written by Sławomir Dębski<sup>15</sup> or Piotr Łossowski<sup>16</sup>, threatened the Soviet interests in the Baltic states. A. Dongarov and G. Peskova put forward a thesis that in order to protect his interests Stalin had to move his troops and administration into the Baltic States under the threat from Germany of a potential revision of areas of influence or country borders<sup>17</sup>. Mikhail Meltyukhov also notes that the task was facilitated due to the fact that at the time Great Britain and France were busy with military activity in their own territories which meant that the right-wing powers in Lithuania lost their allies<sup>18</sup>. An interesting point is brought up by Alfred Erich Senn, who said that the first plans of the annexation of Lithuania were developed in 1939 but were delayed due to the conflict with Finland and tarnished international reputation of the USSR<sup>19</sup>. There were also hypotheses saying that the occupation of the territory of the western neighbour constituted a part of preparations for the upcoming war with the Nazi Germany in the near future – it was meant to facilitate military operations in East Prussia<sup>20</sup>.

It is also worth noting that the official Soviet historiography justified the takeover of Lithuania by the USSR. They claimed that it was done as a result of a revolution, social movements and the right-wing government sabotaging benevolent gestures of the USSR. As early as in June 1940, such theses were present in messages to Moscow by polpred Pozdnyakov, who claimed – against facts – that as early as in October 1939 Lithuanian 'right-wing circles' did everything to disrupt peaceful cooperation and create an anti-USSR movement<sup>21</sup>. The 'fascist' government allegedly rejected the

<sup>15</sup> S. Dębski, *Między Berlinem a Moskwą. Stosunki niemiecko-sowieckie 1939–1941*, Warszawa 2003, p. 253.

<sup>16</sup> P. Łossowski, *Tragedia Państw Bałtyckich 1939–1941*, Warszawa 1990, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> А.Г. Донгаров, Г.Н. Пескова, *СССР и страны Прибалтики*, 'Вопросы истории' 1991, 1, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> М. Мельтюхов, *Прибалтийский плацдарм (1939–1940 гг.). Возвращение Советского Союза на берега Балтийского моря*, Москва 2014, p. 616.

<sup>19</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> B. Sokolov, *The Soviet Policy Towards the Baltic States in 1939–1941*, in: *Northern European Overture to War, 1939–1941: From Memel to Barbarossa*, eds. M.H. Clemmensen, M.S. Faulkner, Leiden–Boston 2013, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> И.К. Кузьмичев, *op. cit.*, p. 29.



peaceful attitude of the Soviet leadership, in opposition to the oppressed masses<sup>22</sup>. The safety aspect regarding Germany was also being brought up. Therefore, the 'worker masses' supposedly supported the claims of the USSR contained in a letter of 15 June<sup>23</sup>.

A certain prelude to the events of the following weeks comprised an article in a Soviet daily newspaper 'Izvestia' of 16 May, which claimed that on the basis of invasion of the Benelux countries by the Germany the neutrality of small countries in the face of conflict against a major power is impossible, because they cannot defend their positions, especially in the case of the empires turning against each other<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, between 18 and 25 May, a total of 100 tanks and 250 trucks were transferred from Vilnius to Gaižiūnai, which could have been regarded as demonstration of force<sup>25</sup>. The West was also sceptical towards the neutral policy of the Baltic States – for instance, the deputy undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, Sir Orme Sargent, said that the existence of the Baltic States forms a no man's land which could be used for the purpose of attacking the USSR<sup>26</sup>.

#### CONTROLLED CRISIS

The case of missing Red Army soldiers was used as a pretext for exacerbation of relations between the neighbours by the Kremlin. On 25 May 1940, the government of the Soviet Union issued a diplomatic note to the government of Lithuania, accusing it of hostile action taken against the Red Army stationed in Lithuania and the USSR in general. Lithuanian leaders were accused of kidnapping Soviet soldiers, detaining them and torturing them for information about troop movements. The Kremlin requested the practice to be ceased, the soldiers returned to their bases and the offenders punished<sup>27</sup>. The note mentioned the case of Butaev's suicide, the information on two other soldiers – Nosov and Shmavgonyets – who were allegedly abducted by persons protected by Lithuanian authorities and used to organise anti-Soviet provocations<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *Historia dyplomacji*, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> *Война расширяется*, 'Известия' 16 V 1940, 111 (7183).

<sup>25</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> A. Kastory, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> 1940 г. мая 25, Москва – Заявление В. М. Молотова в связи с исчезновениями красноармейцев Носова и Шмавгонца, in: СССР и Литва, p. 525.

<sup>28</sup> *Note of the Soviet Government to the Lithuanian Government*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression against Lithuania*, ed. B.J. Kaslas, New York 1973, p. 176.

On the next day, the minister of Foreign Affairs, Juozas Urbšys immediately offered full support in the investigation, asking for the personal data of the allegedly kidnapped Red Army soldiers and their respective units<sup>29</sup>, and on 28 May a commission for solving the case was appointed in Kaunas<sup>30</sup>. In spite of that, two days later 'Izvestia' still published an article informing about provocations on part of the Lithuanian government<sup>31</sup>. Due to tense political situation on 30 May, Urbšys appointed ambassadors in the event of establishing the government abroad: Stasys Lozoraitis (Rome) as the Head of Diplomacy, Petras Klimas (Paris) as his deputy and Jurgis Šaulys (Bern) as the second deputy<sup>32</sup>.

In the following days, the Soviet authorities disclosed the data regarding the missing soldiers but they did not match those contained in the note – e.g. it mentioned the name Pisarev instead of Nosov<sup>33</sup>. On 30 May another name, Shutov, was revealed<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, Moscow sent Aleksandr Loktionov, Deputy Narkom of Defence, to investigate the case<sup>35</sup>. The investigation proved fruitful shortly after it began as Shmavgonyets was found as early as on 26 May. He reported to the command that on 18 May he was abducted and kept in an unknown house for seven days, being denied food and water for some time. On 25 May he was supposedly taken beyond city limits and released<sup>36</sup>. Pisarev, lost on 24 May, in turn, was found three days later and gave a similar testimony<sup>37</sup>. Shutov's fate remained unknown<sup>38</sup>. Narkom Molotov, in a message of 30 May also mentioned the case of Butaev and doubts regarding his suicide<sup>39</sup>. The Lithuanian authorities were concerned that the soldiers

<sup>29</sup> 1940 г. мая 26, Каунас – Заявление Правительства Литвы Правительству СССР в ответ на заявление В. М. Молотова Л. Наткевичюсу 25 мая, in: СССР и Литва, p. 526.

<sup>30</sup> 1940 г. мая 26–30, Каунас – Дневник Н. Г. Позднякова за период с 26 до 30 мая, in: СССР и Литва, p. 527.

<sup>31</sup> В Наркоминделе, 'Известия' 30 V 1940, 123 (7195).

<sup>32</sup> Telegram of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, Urbšys, to Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions Abroad, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 180.

<sup>33</sup> 1940 г. мая 26–30, Каунас – Дневник Н. Г. Позднякова за период с 26 до 30 мая, in: СССР и Литва, p. 528.

<sup>34</sup> 1940 г. мая 30, Каунас – Памятная записка Ю. Урбшису о переговорах с Н. Г. Поздняковым и заместителем наркома обороны А. Д. Локтионовым 25 и 27 мая, in: СССР и Литва, p. 531.

<sup>35</sup> P. Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie w latach przelomu 1934–1944*, Warszawa 2005, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> 1940 г. мая 30, Москва – Сообщение НКВД СССР о провокационных действиях литовских властей, in: СССР и Литва, p. 529.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 530.

<sup>38</sup> 1940 г. июня 6, Москва – Сообщение Л. Наткевичюса Ю. Урбшису о беседе с В. М. Молотовым 4 июня, in: СССР и Литва, p. 560.

<sup>39</sup> *Communique of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., Molotov*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 185.



were only questioned by Soviet investigators and the testimonies were published in press while Lithuanians had no access to the found soldiers. P. Łossowski therefore theorised that the government in Moscow wanted to avoid potential inconsistencies in testimonies which could reveal the provocation<sup>40</sup>. In 1965, Juozas Brazinskas, the General Prosecutor of the District Court in Vilnius and representative of the Ministry of Justice by the commission investigating the disappearances of the Soviet soldiers, spoke regarding the character of the abductions in an article. He stated that Butaev was probably bait for Lithuanian authorities which were supposedly misled by the Kremlin into trying to extract information about movements of the Red Army but he decided to run away, or he was convinced to do so by Western intelligence services and that he definitely was not murdered. The disappearance of Pisarev and Shmavgonyets were allegedly entirely a Soviet provocation. He also noted that the report of the investigation commission was sent to Moscow and was unavailable at the time<sup>41</sup>. A Lithuanian historian, Sigitas Jegelevičius, brought up the opinion regarding Butaev of Bronius Aušrotas, a former employee of Lithuanian military intelligence, who claimed that the Lithuanian intelligence services attempted to recruit the Red Army soldier as an informant but he severed contacts with them<sup>42</sup>.

From 2 to 5 June 1940, Lithuanian Police detained 272 people who could have had a connection with the abduction of the Red Army soldiers but no signs of anti-Soviet activity were found. The protection of Soviet bases was also reinforced<sup>43</sup>. In spite of that, the Soviet authorities were not satisfied with the actions of the Lithuanians. A particularly anti-Lithuanian attitude can be seen in the correspondence of polpred N. Pozdnyakov, who accused Smeton's government of trying to hand the country over under German protectorate. In a telegram from Moscow of 2 June he suggested bringing more Red Army troops into the republic<sup>44</sup>. It was he whom A. E. Senn indicated as an originator of increasing the military presence of the USSR later on<sup>45</sup>. Lithuanian secret police of Saugumas, in turn, speculated in their report whether the actions of Moscow are a result of the increased

<sup>40</sup> P. Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie*, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> *What Were Moscow's Accusations Against Lithuania?*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 204.

<sup>42</sup> S. Jegelevičius, *Dzieje Litwy Wschodniej w latach 1939–1940 w litewskiej historiografii*, in: 'Studia Podlaskie', vol. 8, Białystok 1998, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> 1940 г. июня 2, Каунас – Телеграмма Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД о событиях в Литве, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 538.

<sup>45</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

influence of the Lithuanian Communist Party (Lith. *Lietuvos komunistų partija*; LKP)<sup>46</sup>. Meanwhile, British diplomats, as reported by P. Łossowski, informed Kaunas as early as in 3 June that the actual goal of Kremlin was Sovietisation of Lithuania<sup>47</sup>. At the same time, the Soviet embassy informed Moscow about any signs of fraternisation of the government in Kaunas with Germany<sup>48</sup>, the scope of German agency in the government was also being reported by i.a. Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, the future Prime Minister<sup>49</sup>. An official of the embassy, V. Syemyonov, accused the authorities in Kaunas of duplicity, sabotaging the agreement of 10 October 1939 and covert coordination of the anti-Soviet activity with Latvia and Estonia. As an example he mentioned i.a. delays in construction of the barracks for the Red Army<sup>50</sup>. Lithuanian authorities, unaware of the activity of Soviet diplomats, continued their investigation, informing Moscow about its progress<sup>51</sup>.

In early June 1940, certain movements of the Red Army occurred, which may have indicated preparations for operation in the Baltic States. On 5 June, forces stationed in their territories were excluded from the group of Leningrad, Kalinin and Belarusian military districts and subordinated directly to the vice-narkom Loktionov<sup>52</sup>. There were also rumours (denied by 'Izvestia') that they moved to the German-Lithuanian border<sup>53</sup>. On 4–7 June, military manoeuvres were being conducted on the Soviet side of the border, which were interpreted by historian Boris Sokolov as preparations for the annexation of Lithuania and potential war with Hitler in summer 1940<sup>54</sup>. At the same time TASS agency officially assured that the relations between Moscow and Berlin are good<sup>55</sup>. They also devoted efforts into justifying taking further action against Lithuania. On 2 June, the head of TASS agency, J. Hawinson, pointed out the existence of the Baltic Entente.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>47</sup> P. Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie*, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> 1940 г. июня 3, Каунас – Обзорная записка в НКВД СССР временного поверенного в делах СССР в Литве В. С. Семенова о внешней политике Литвы, in: СССР и Литва, p. 545.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 548.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 553.

<sup>51</sup> 1940 г. июня 4, Москва – Памятная записка Л. Наткевичюса, переданная В. М. Молотову, относительно мер, принятых литовскими властями для усиления безопасности советских воинских контингентов в Литве, in: СССР и Литва, p. 556.

<sup>52</sup> 1940 г. июня 3, Москва – Приказ наркома обороны С. К. Тимошенко No. 0028 о переподчинении с 5 июня всех воинских частей, находящихся на территории стран Балтии, непосредственно наркомату обороны, in: СССР и Литва, p. 539.

<sup>53</sup> В.К. Волков, *Советско–германские отношения во второй половине 1940 года*, 'Вопросы истории' 1997, 2, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> В. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> В.К. Волков, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Although N. Pozdnyakov clearly informed in March that there is no military alliance between Lithuania and the remaining Baltic states, it was decided that he should be used against Kaunas stating that it was the real nature of the English-French influence in the 'Pribaltic' region<sup>56</sup>. Russian authorities, according to B. Sokolov, delayed the operation of taking over Lithuania until the conclusion of military operations in France – it would have been risky for the USSR before that moment<sup>57</sup>. On 5 June, the Kremlin suggested to the Lithuanian Prime Minister Merkys that he should visit Moscow in order to prove friendly relations of his government with the USSR<sup>58</sup>.

The visit of the Prime Minister took place on 7 July. On that occasion narkom V. Molotov brought up further allegations against Lithuania, accusing it of policies hostile towards the USSR. He began from criticising anti-Soviet caricatures and articles in Lithuanian newspapers, stating that the Minister of Internal Affairs K. Skučas and A. Povilaitis must have known about the abductions of the Red Army soldiers and bear responsibility for it<sup>59</sup>. He claimed that Butaev did not commit suicide but was murdered<sup>60</sup>. He demanded the Lithuanian Prime Minister to take decisive action and dismissed the aforementioned politicians<sup>61</sup>. On 9 June, he accused Lithuania of an even graver matter, namely the entering of an anti-Soviet alliance, which was in conflict with the provisions of the agreement of 10 October 1939. The Narkom invoked the alleged entry of Kaunas into a military pact with the remaining countries of the Baltic Entente in December 1939 and hiding that matter from Moscow. Prime Minister Merkys denied the allegations, mentioning the removal of the third point of the agreement on the Baltic Entente regarding 'specific political issues', not subject to the doctrine of cooperation<sup>62</sup>, which occurred at the time, during the 10th Baltic Conference – as said by Prime Minister

<sup>56</sup> P. Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie*, p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> B. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> 1940 г. июня 5, Каунас – Протокол заседания Совета Министров Литовской Республики, in: СССР и Литва, p. 558.

<sup>59</sup> 1940 г. июня 7, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Прием наркоминделом тов. В. М. Молотовым литовского премьера Меркиса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 564.

<sup>60</sup> 1940 г. июня 8, 02:00, Москва – Шифротелеграмма премьер-министра А. Меркиса и Л. Наткевичюса в МИД Литвы о переговорах с В. М. Молотовым 7 июня, in: СССР и Литва, p. 572.

<sup>61</sup> 1940 г. июня 8, 03:00, Москва – Шифротелеграмма А. Меркиса и Л. Наткевичюса в МИД Литвы о предстоящей беседе с В. М. Молотовым, in: СССР и Литва, p. 573.

<sup>62</sup> *Treaty of Good Understanding and Co-operation, signed at Geneva, September 12th, 1934, and Declaration of the same Date, 'League of Nations – Treaty Series' 1934–1935, 44, 3540*, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20154/v154.pdf>, p. 97 [accessed on: 22 V 2019].

Merkys, it also involved Vilnius<sup>63</sup>. He also denied entering into a military alliance with the rest of the Baltic States<sup>64</sup>.

After the meeting with V. Molotov, A Merkys returned to Kaunas for consultations with the government and president. A. Smetona decided to dismiss two aforementioned officials<sup>65</sup> but in reality it took place as late as on 14 June<sup>66</sup>. They were not put on a trial<sup>67</sup>. There were discussions held on potential actions which could appease the Kremlin, changing the Prime Minister was taken into consideration, who was to be replaced by gen. S. Raštikis, until April 1940 the Commander of the army<sup>68</sup>. Meanwhile, the president tried to convince the Soviet government by mail that the relations between Lithuania and the USSR are good and that his country does not conspire with other countries<sup>69</sup>.

#### MOLOTOV'S ULTIMATUM

Introduction of the Soviet system in Lithuania was explained in later official historiography as a result of the revolution of the worker masses, who wanted closer relations with the USSR. In reality, it was the result of an ultimatum issued in the night of 14 to 15 June 1940 by narkom W. Molotov during the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juozas Urbšys at the Kremlin. The meeting was also attended by ambassadors: Nikolai Pozdnyakov and a Lithuanian – Ladas Natkevičius, the head of Soviet diplomacy accused the government of Lithuania of being unwilling to honour agreements under the Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 10 October 1939, establishing an alliance with Latvia and Estonia against the USSR, and repressions against their own citizens. He commented on the clarification attempts that '(...) you should have acted, not exchange

<sup>63</sup> 1940 г. июня 11, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём председателя Совета Министров Литовской Республики г. Меркыса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 585.

<sup>64</sup> 1940 г. июня 9, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Запись беседы В. М. Молотова с А. Меркысом', in: СССР и Литва, p. 574.

<sup>65</sup> 1940 г. июня 11, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём председателя Совета Министров Литовской Республики г. Меркыса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 580.

<sup>66</sup> 1940 г. июня 14, 14 час., Москва – 'Из дневника В. Г. Деканозова. Приём министра иностранных дел Литвы Урбшиса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 593.

<sup>67</sup> 1940 г. июня 11, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём председателя Совета Министров Литовской Республики г. Меркыса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 582.

<sup>68</sup> 1940 г. июня 12, Москва – Шифротелеграмма Ю. Урбшиса в МИД Литвы о ходе переговоров в Москве и их перспективах, in: СССР и Литва, p. 586.

<sup>69</sup> Letter of President Smetona of Lithuania to M. I. Kalinin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 181.

pleasantries. The Lithuanian government apparently did not realise the gravity of the situation'. He also accused him of responsibility for the 'abduction' of the Soviet soldiers in the preceding weeks he also 'sympathised with' the civilian services – Lithuanian citizens employed at the Soviet garrisons whom the Lithuanian police also supposedly questioned and put in concentration camps. Narkom demanded the following actions to be taken: arresting and putting on trial the Minister of Internal Affairs, Kazys Skučas and the head of the security service, Augustinas Povilaitis – the ministers who were earlier blamed for the disappearance of the Red Army soldiers, formation of a new government which would be able to implement the provisions of the Treaty of 10 October and establishment of free access to the territory of Lithuania for the Red Army for the purpose of enforcing the provisions of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance<sup>70</sup>. Regarding the change of the government, Molotov said directly that its composition had to be consulted with the government in Moscow, mentioning his deputy, Vladimir Dekanozov<sup>71</sup>, either directly or via the Soviet embassy. Regarding the comment of J. Urbšys, mentioning the lack of legal grounds for trial of the two mentioned ministers, the head of Soviet diplomacy answered with complete sincerity that: 'they have to be arrested and brought to court, and appropriate charges can always be found. Soviet lawyers can even help you with that after familiarising themselves with the Lithuanian code.' Molotov announced that the Kremlin awaits the answer until morning, and that the lack of the abovementioned would mean the execution of the ultimatum. He also stated that 'it is all the fault of Lithuanian provocateurs such as Skučas and others', who 'are not just the enemies of the Soviet Union but also Lithuania itself'<sup>72</sup>. He also said that the Red Army would enter Lithuania regardless of the decision of the Lithuanian government<sup>73</sup>.

The government in Kaunas did not have the resources to fight. According to estimates, Lithuanian armed forces counted about 28 thou-

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<sup>70</sup> 1940 г. июня 14, 23 часа 50 минут, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём председателем Совнаркома Союза СССР и наркоминделом тов. В. М. Молотовым министра иностранных дел Литовской Республики г. Урбшиса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 599.

<sup>71</sup> J. Urbšys, *Lithuania and the Soviet Union 1939–1940: The Fateful Year. Memoirs by Juozas Urbšys*, ed. Sigita Naujokaitis, 'Lituanus – Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences', 34, 2 (Summer 1989), [http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89\\_2\\_03.htm](http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_2_03.htm) [accessed on: 22 V 2019].

<sup>72</sup> 1940 г. июня 14, 23 часа 50 минут, Москва – 'Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём председателем Совнаркома Союза СССР и наркоминделом тов. В. М. Молотовым министра иностранных дел Литовской Республики г. Урбшиса', in: СССР и Литва, p. 597.

<sup>73</sup> P. Łossowski, *Tragedia Państwa*, p. 28.

sand<sup>74</sup>. The number was only marginally larger than Red Army forces already stationed in the country. The Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian army – gen. Vincas Vitkauskas and his predecessor Stasys Raštikis decided after the ultimatum that armed resistance and human casualties would not have been worth it. Alfonsas Eidintas theorises that they did not want to fight the USSR in fear of conflict with their potential ally in the future<sup>75</sup>. It also needs to be noted that the USSR was already preparing for the operation by establishing hospitals for the wounded and camps for prisoners and – most likely – also organising sabotage groups in Lithuanian cities<sup>76</sup>. Prime Minister A. Merkys also intended to avoid armed resistance while President A. Smetona thought otherwise<sup>77</sup>. In the end the ultimatum was accepted and the government was dismissed. The candidacy of gen. S. Raštikis was proposed once again (V. Vitkauskas would have become the Minister of War) but Molotov opposed the candidacy<sup>78</sup>.

Notable in the issue of the invasion of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union seems the sequence of introducing regular forces into these countries. In autumn 1939, signing of the mutual assistance treaties was being conducted north to south, starting from Estonia. The events of June, in turn, began from the ultimatum issued to Lithuania<sup>79</sup>, and only then the Soviet forces entered Latvia and Estonia. This was apparently caused by Stalin's uncertainty regarding the security of territorial spoils from Nazi Germany<sup>80</sup>, as well as the intention of creating a staging ground for a potential future war with the Third Reich<sup>81</sup>.

#### AFTER ACCEPTING THE ULTIMATUM

As a result of complying with the demands of the Kremlin, the structure of the government was significantly changed. The most significant was the escape of President Antanas Smetona to Germany which led to his position

<sup>74</sup> Вооружённые силы Литвы 1939–1940 гг., 'Руниверс.ру', [http://www.runivers.ru/doc/d2.php?SECTION\\_ID=6370&PORTAL\\_ID=6369](http://www.runivers.ru/doc/d2.php?SECTION_ID=6370&PORTAL_ID=6369) [accessed on: 22 V 2019].

<sup>75</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 211.

<sup>77</sup> P. Łossowski, *Tragedia Państwa*, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>79</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> P. Łossowski, *Tragedia Państwa*, p. 26.

<sup>81</sup> М. Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина. Советский Союз и борьба за Европу: 1939–1941*, Москва 2000, <http://militera.lib.ru/research/meltyukhov/index.html> [accessed on: 22 V 2019].



being temporarily taken over by the Prime Minister Merkys<sup>82</sup>. In his memorandum, the German ambassador in Kaunas, Erich Zechlin, noted that the head of the Lithuanian state escaped across the border to East Prussia<sup>83</sup>. The president allegedly carried orders for garrisons in Marijampolė and Tauragė to cross the German border armed and ready<sup>84</sup>. However, Smetona did not formally resign from the position of the head of the state, which led the government to claim that the president renounced his position<sup>85</sup>. Smetona, staying in bordering city of Eydtkuhnen (nowadays Chernyshevskoye in Kaliningrad Oblast)<sup>86</sup>, received help from the ambassador in Berlin, Kazys Škirpa in receiving asylum in the Third Reich<sup>87</sup>. Kept together with 17 other people, Smetona allegedly openly expressed pro-German views<sup>88</sup>.

As per demands of the Kremlin, ministers Skučas and Povilaitis were arrested during their preparations to escape across the border to East Prussia<sup>89</sup>. The aforementioned decision, according to A. E. Senn, was not ordered by Dekanozov but Merkys and it is the Prime Minister whom the historian blames for the first actions at the highest political levels<sup>90</sup>. It is worth noting that if the testimonies of E. Zechlin are true, the Soviet commissars allegedly entered all government offices in Kaunas<sup>91</sup>.

### RED ARMY ENTERS LITHUANIA

First operations involving the entry of the Red Army troops began as early as on 15 June at about 15<sup>92</sup>. The progress of the operation was supposedly reported to i.a. gen. V. Vitkauskas, with whom the future

<sup>82</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>83</sup> *Memorandum by the German Minister in Kaunas, Zechlin, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 226.

<sup>84</sup> *Memorandum of an Official of the German Foreign Ministry on a Communique of the German Supreme Military Command, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 217.

<sup>85</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>86</sup> *Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department of the German Foreign Ministry, Woermann, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 219.

<sup>87</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>88</sup> 1940 г. июля 13, Каунас. – Памятная записка дикпурьера Ю. Юргиниса В. Креве–Мицкевичюсу о результатах его пребывания в Берлине и знакомстве с положением дел в литовской миссии, *in: СССР и Литва*, p. 681.

<sup>89</sup> *The U.S. Minister in Kaunas, Norem, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 215.

<sup>90</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> *Memorandum by the German Minister in Kaunas, Zechlin, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 226.

<sup>92</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

distribution of troops was discussed<sup>93</sup>. The entry was mostly orderly though there were several incidents, including shots fired at the border post near Alytus<sup>94</sup>, the execution of policeman Aleksas Barauskas in the village of Ūta near Varėna<sup>95</sup>, or the arrest of policeman Jonas Aleknavičius near Eišiškės<sup>96</sup>. On 18 June, at one of the border crossing, the Lithuanian Coat of Arms – Vytis (pol. Pogoń, blr. Pahonia) was destroyed<sup>97</sup>. The operation took about 24 hours<sup>98</sup>. The Lithuanian army, as ordered by gen. Vitkauskas, did not resist<sup>99</sup>. On 17 June, Narkom of Defence of the USSR, marshal Semyon Timoshenko suggested to the Political Bureau of Soviet Communist Party that the Red Army should establish control over the border with East Prussia as soon as possible, disarm the armed forces of the Baltic republics and establish the Baltic Special Military District with headquarters in Riga<sup>100</sup>. In the next few days the forces of the Red Army took over Latvia and Estonia<sup>101</sup>. Generally the area of the Baltic States was occupied by a total of 500 thousand soldiers<sup>102</sup>. Soviet press reported that the armies were enthusiastically welcomed by the local population, who celebrated the overthrow of the oppressive bourgeois regime<sup>103</sup>. Soon after the entry of the Red Army, the new government

<sup>93</sup> 1940 г. июня 15, 12 час. 30 мин., Москва – ‘Из дневника В. М. Молотова. Приём тов. Молотовым министра иностранных дел Литвы Урбшиса и литовского посланника в Москве Наткевичюса’, in: СССР и Литва, p. 604.

<sup>94</sup> 1940 г. июня 15, Каунас – Шифротелеграмма Э. Тураускаса в Миссию Литвы в Москве о нападении красноармейцев на литовский пограничный пункт и расправе со старшим полицейским А. Бараускасом, in: СССР и Литва, p. 610.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 611.

<sup>96</sup> 1940 г. июня 15, Каунас – Шифротелеграмма Э. Тураускаса в Миссию Литвы в Москве относительно похищения красноармейцами полицейского Й. Алекнавичюса, in: СССР и Литва, p. 612.

<sup>97</sup> 1940 г. июля 1, Каунас. – Нота МИД Литовской Республики Полпредству СССР по поводу случая сброса литовского герба с пограничного столба при переходе 18 июня советскими войсками литовской границы, in: СССР и Литва, p. 568.

<sup>98</sup> 1940 г. июня, ночь с 15 на 16, Минск. – Выписка из боевого приказа командования БОВО войскам 3-й и 11-й армий и 16-му особому стрелковому корпусу о занятии территории Литвы, in: СССР и Литва, p. 617.

<sup>99</sup> 1940 г. июня 15, Каунас – Из приказа командующего Литовской армией генерала В. Виткаускаса о соблюдении вежливости в отношении воинских частей СССР, вводимых на территорию Литвы, in: СССР и Литва, p. 610.

<sup>100</sup> 1940 г. июня 17, Москва. – Записка С. К. Тимошенко в Политбюро ЦК ВКП(б) и СНК СССР в связи с вводом советских войск в Прибалтийские республики, in: СССР и Литва, p. 624.

<sup>101</sup> *The U.S. Charge D’Affairs in Estonia, Leonard, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 214.

<sup>102</sup> *Memorandum by the Assistant Chief of Division of European Affairs of the U.S. State Department, Henderson*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 232.

<sup>103</sup> *Прибытие частей Красной армии в Литву*, ‘Известия’ 17.06.1940, 138 (7210).

of Lithuania ordered the seizure of the property of those who fled the country<sup>104</sup>.

On 17 June, V. Dekanozov, already as a special envoy of the Kremlin in Lithuania<sup>105</sup>, ordered the change in the structure of the government. However, the real power remained in the hands of Dekanozov himself, as well as Pozdnyakov and the NKVD chief deputy – Vsevolod Merkulov. The legality of the actions of the Soviet representative and the deputy head of diplomacy was justified by the flight of president Smetona<sup>106</sup>. In the next few weeks A. Merkys, J. Urbšys and A. Voldemaras were taken to the USSR. It is worth noting that shortly after the seizure of the Baltic States, a meeting between Dekanozov and his counterparts in Latvia and Estonia – Andrey Vyshinsky and Andrey Zhdanov took place in Riga for the purpose of coordinating actions in 'their own' countries<sup>107</sup>.

Interestingly enough, in contacts between Soviet and German diplomats a different version of events was maintained, namely, that the takeover of Lithuania was meant to end the French and English schemes. It was also noted that the actions of Kaunas could turn Germany and the USSR against each other<sup>108</sup>. On 18 June, Molotov congratulated the German Secretary of the State, Ernst von Weizsäcker on the success of the Third Reich in France while informing that the Soviet activity in Lithuania was motivated by the intention of bringing the mistrust between the two countries to an end<sup>109</sup>. On 23 June, the TASS agency denied the reports which stated that Red Army troops are being concentrated on the Lithuanian-German Border, adding that nothing will tarnish the good relations established by the non-aggression treaty of 23 August 1939<sup>110</sup>. German diplomats were curious as to why the USSR decided to carry out the operation exactly in June 1940. It was well-known in Germany that the accusations regarding the military alliance of Lithuania with Latvia and Estonia are false, suggesting that the problem could have lied in Lithuanian-German economic contacts<sup>111</sup>. German ambassador in Moscow, Friedrich-Werner von der Schulenburg claimed that the Soviet authorities wanted complete control over the Baltic

<sup>104</sup> Мероприятия литовского правительства, 'Известия' 07.07.1940, 155 (7227).

<sup>105</sup> *Ambassador Schulenburg do MSZ Niemiec*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 177.

<sup>106</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>107</sup> P. Łossowski, *Tragedia Państw*, p. 39.

<sup>108</sup> *Беседа наркома иностранных дел СССР В. М. Молотова с послом Германии в СССР Ф. Шуленбургом*, in: *Документы Внешней Политики, 1940 год*, vol. XXIII, книга I, Москва 1995 [hereinafter: *ДВП 1940*, кн. I].

<sup>109</sup> *The German Ambassador in Moscow, Schulenburg, to the State Secretary of the German Foreign Ministry, Weizsäcker*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 225.

<sup>110</sup> *Сообщение ТАСС*, in: *ДВП 1940*, кн. I, p. 363.

<sup>111</sup> *MSZ Niemiec do Ribbentropa*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 175.

States before the potential end of the war in Europe stating that these countries will soon be incorporated into the USSR<sup>112</sup>. However, as written in a memorandum on 26 June by Kazys Škirpa, no reaction from the Third Reich was to be expected in relation to the situation because the Baltic States were not a part of Berlin's political goals<sup>113</sup>.

### THE SUMMER SOVIETISATION OF LITHUANIA

The 'reforms' in Lithuania led to deep transformations in executive power. Prime Minister Antanas Merkys was dismissed and replaced with a leftist and pro-Kremlin journalist, Justas Paleckis, while Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, Dean of the Department of Humanities of the University of Vilnius (formerly Stefan Batory University) was appointed as his deputy and head of diplomacy. Both actively cooperated with Soviet diplomats and services for an extended period of time, though the latter gradually became more critical towards the actions of Moscow as the Sovietisation of the country progressed<sup>114</sup>. The position of the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of National Defence was given to Gen. Vincas Vitkauskas, Head of the Ministry of Justice – Povilas Pakarklis, Finance and Communication – Ernestas Galvanauskas, Internal Affairs and Agriculture – Matas Mickis, Health – Leonas Koganas<sup>115</sup>.

Due to the provisions in the constitution, Prime Minister Paleckis became an acting head of the state, whereas Krėvė-Mickevičius served as the deputy head of the government. Actual power, however, was still in the hands of Dekanozov. The new head of the government was under complete control of the Kremlin, an example of which can be illustrated by the order issued to Paleckis regarding the request for assistance from the USSR in securing the border with Germany<sup>116</sup>. Anyway, the ambassador of Lithuania in Berlin described how polpred Pozdnyakov, controlled by Dekanozov, delivered guidelines to the government<sup>117</sup>. The head of the National Defence and Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Vincas Vitkauskas completely submitted to the

<sup>112</sup> *Ambasador Schulenburg do Sekretarza Stanu Weiszäckera*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 188.

<sup>113</sup> 1940 г. июня 26, 18 часов, Берлин. – 18 часов, Берлин. – Меморандум К. Шкирпы министру иностранных дел и генеральному секретарю МИД Литвы, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 651.

<sup>114</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>115</sup> 1940 г. июня 17, Каунас. – Памятная записка МИД Литовской Республики Полпредитву СССР в Литве о составе нового Правительства, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 626.

<sup>116</sup> А.Г. Донгаров, Г.Н. Пескова, *СССР и страны Прибалтики*, p. 45.

<sup>117</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

Soviet authority, on 19 June he declared that the army shall support the new government<sup>118</sup>. Actions of the USSR were met with approval of Lithuanian communists expressing a view that the occupation of Lithuania by the USSR was necessary in order to improve the chances of Kaunas (and Moscow) against Germans who were supported by bourgeois<sup>119</sup>.

In the early period after the transformation the new leadership of the state and Soviet 'advisors' tried to justify their actions by intending to overthrow the dictatorship of A. Smetona<sup>120</sup>. Later it was claimed that 'the revolution' was supposedly initiated by the people<sup>121</sup>. It was said that the Baltic republics had to be set free from bourgeois and capitalist rule and changed into a forward defence point of the USSR<sup>122</sup>. Antanas Sniečkus said on 13 July that the Soviet Union would allow the people to bring the 22-year rule of reactionists to an end<sup>123</sup>. It was declared that Lithuania would maintain normal relations with all countries, including the friendship with the Soviet Union which was in alliance with Kaunas. Dissolution of the Seimas and new elections were also announced<sup>124</sup>. The announced reforms were meant to serve 'the political transformation of a system which used to be against the interest of the people'<sup>125</sup>.

Meanwhile, Dekanozov worked on strengthening the Communist party in Lithuania<sup>126</sup>. Political prisoners were gradually being released<sup>127</sup>, LKP was legalised on 26 June<sup>128</sup>, and shortly after the Komsomol as well<sup>129</sup>. The problem of the Communists lied in how difficult it was to prove a bottom-up revolution with the participation of the LKP while its leader, Antanas Sniečkus, spent the last few months in prison. Apart from that, the party was decimated

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145.

<sup>119</sup> 1940 г. июня 15, Паневежис – Сводка Паневежского окружного отделения государственной безопасности и криминальной полиции о настроении населения в связи с советское–литовскими переговорами, in: СССР и Литва, p. 613.

<sup>120</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>121</sup> A. Chubarian, *Soviet Foreign Policy, September 1939 – June 1941, or a Special Kind of Neutrality*, in: *Neutrality in History: Proceedings on the Conference of Neutrality organized in Helsinki 9–12 September 1992 under the auspices of the Commission of History of International Relations*, ed. J. Nevakivi, Helsinki 1993, p. 288.

<sup>122</sup> А.Г. Донгаров, Г.Н. Пескова, СССР и страны Прибалтики, p. 44.

<sup>123</sup> *Excerpts from a Speech by the First Secretary of the Central Comitee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Sniečkus*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 236.

<sup>124</sup> 1940 г. июня 18, Каунас. – Заявление и.о. президента Литовской Республики премьер–министра Ю. Палецкиса, in: СССР и Литва, p. 630.

<sup>125</sup> Декларация литовского правительства, 'Известия' 20 VI 1940, 140 (7212).

<sup>126</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>127</sup> Освобождение политических заключенных, 'Известия' 20 VI 1940, 140 (7212).

<sup>128</sup> Декларация литовского правительства, 'Известия' 27 VI 1940, 146 (7218).

<sup>129</sup> Декларация литовского правительства, 'Известия' 30 VI 1940, 149 (7221).

by purges and conflicted regarding the composition of the government and the absence of Sniečkus in it. On 17 June, the head of the Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov sent a message to the activists of the LKP stating that in order to establish people's democracy the communists should not enter the government, but instead organise in cities and villages. He also ordered the activists should obey Dekanozov. A. Sniečkus received the position of the head of Saugumas, the secret police, as 'consolation'. He took up the leadership of the party only on 14 August but he remained a major member of the Communist Lithuania until 1974<sup>130</sup>. Before Communists officially seized power, as reported by Andrzej Kastory, there were confiscations of private property, people were removed from their apartments under the pretext of 'removing the enemy of the people', and representatives of local governments and public officials were being dismissed<sup>131</sup>.

During the transitional period, namely, in early July 1940, the Lithuanian society was of the opinion that the independence of the country would be maintained<sup>132</sup>. Members of the new people's government and the Communist party even thought that Lithuania would formally become an independent state, though under control of the USSR<sup>133</sup>. Meanwhile, the Sovietisation of the country progressed at a rapid rate. A telling sign of that was the stationing of Soviet border service soldiers on the German border as early as in 22 June<sup>134</sup>. The media authorities were quickly changed: ELTA agency and 'Lietuvos Aidas' newspaper<sup>135</sup>, and several other titles were shut down until the end of the month<sup>136</sup>, shortly afterwards the Communist paper 'Darbo Lietuva' became an official government authority<sup>137</sup>. Also ordered were administrative reforms – as early as on 19 June the government officially announced purges in offices and the will to replace the current officials with 'patriots'. Introduction of free healthcare and higher education were also announced<sup>138</sup>, Ministry of Labour was established<sup>139</sup>. Agricultural reform was announced as well,

<sup>130</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>131</sup> A. Kastory, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>132</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>133</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>134</sup> 1940 г. июня ранее 22, Москва – Каунас. – *Запись разговора по прямому проводу В. М. Молотова с В. Г. Деканозовым и Н. Г. Поздняковым о курсе лита, А. Вольдемарасе и замене литовских пограничников советскими*, in: СССР и Литва, p. 638.

<sup>135</sup> Новые назначения в Литве, 'Правда' 20 VI 1940, 170 (8216).

<sup>136</sup> Мероприятия литовского правительства, 'Известия' 30 VI 1940, 149 (7221).

<sup>137</sup> Новый официоз литовского правительства, 'Правда' 16 VII 1940, 196 (8242).

<sup>138</sup> Мероприятия литовского правительства, 'Известия' 21 VI 1940, 141 (7213).

<sup>139</sup> Воззвание литовского министерства труда, 'Известия' 5 VII 1940, 153 (7225).



the implementation of which began in August 1940<sup>140</sup>. Changes involved also foreign affairs – in early July the Baltic states withdrew from treaties forming the Baltic Entente (Lithuania did that on 3 July)<sup>141</sup>, and on 7 July the Concordat with the Vatican was revoked<sup>142</sup>. After the elections to the People's Seimas, the nationalisation of banks was conducted<sup>143</sup>.

Transformation also reached the Army of Lithuania – the establishment of People's Army's was announced<sup>144</sup>, which would not 'fight the nation' like during Smetona's times and that it would be politically active. What is more, introduced in the army were political commissars (politruks)<sup>145</sup>. On 11 June, the activity of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (šauliai) was suspended as well<sup>146</sup>. Changes would also involve economic matters. In June, the Kremlin already issued an order for the introduction of the rouble on equal terms to the litas<sup>147</sup>. However, this solution was met with the protest of minister E. Galvanauskas, therefore it was not introduced. The minister was removed from the office on 5 July<sup>148</sup>. Ultimately the litas was replaced by the rouble on 25 March 1941<sup>149</sup>.

Also worth noting are the first actions regarding cultural and national policies. On 28 June, the authorities of Soviet Communist Party issued an order to organize in the Baltic states the radio broadcasts in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian languages<sup>150</sup>. In July, 'Truzhenik' newspaper was introduced, which was based on an earlier title, 'Krasnoye Znamya'<sup>151</sup>. What is interesting, the new government declared departure from

<sup>140</sup> Литва сегодня, 'Правда' 12 VIII 1940, 223 (8269).

<sup>141</sup> Эстония расторгла 'Договор единодушия и сотрудничества' между Эстонией, Латвией и Литвой, 'Известия' 2 VII 1940, 150 (7222); Расторжение военно-оборонительного союза между Латвией и Эстонией, 'Правда' 2 VII 1940, 182 (8228); Аннулирование Литвой 'Договора единодушия и сотрудничества', 'Известия' 4 VII 1940, 152 (7224).

<sup>142</sup> Мероприятия литовского правительства, 'Известия' 7 VII 1940, 155 (7227).

<sup>143</sup> Национализация банков в Литве, 'Известия' 26 VII 1940, 171 (7243).

<sup>144</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>145</sup> Реорганизация литовской армии, 'Известия' 4 VII 1940, 152 (7224).

<sup>146</sup> Мероприятия литовского правительства, 'Известия' 14 VII 1940, 161 (7233).

<sup>147</sup> 1940 г. июня 19, Каунас. – Шифротелеграмма министра иностранных дел Литвы В. Креве-Мицкевичюса А. Наткевичюсу, in: СССР и Литва, p. 635.

<sup>148</sup> 1940 г. июля 5, 23 час. 45 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма В. Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД СССР о решениях, принятых на заседании Совета Министров Литовской Республики, in: СССР и Литва, p. 662.

<sup>149</sup> H. Wisner, *Litwa i Litwini: szkice z dziejów państwa i narodu*, Olsztyn 1991, p. 210.

<sup>150</sup> 1940 г. июня 28, Москва – Пункт 13 протокола No. 18 решений ЦК ВКП(б) 'О радиопередачах на литовском, латышском и эстонском языках', in: СССР и Литва, p. 655.

<sup>151</sup> 1940 г. июля 10, 18 час. 50 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова В. М. Молотову о мероприятиях по организации избирательной кампании в Литве, in: СССР и Литва, p. 672.

chauvinism against Poles<sup>152</sup>, while the election platform, Union of the Working People of Lithuania, promoted friendship and common goals of all nations inhabiting Lithuania<sup>153</sup>.

#### ELECTIONS TO THE PEOPLE'S SEIMAS

As announced by the new government, on 1 July the order of 27 June on dissolution of the Seimas was published<sup>154</sup>, and on 5 July the government set a date of parliamentary elections to the People's Seimas, as early as on 14 July<sup>155</sup>. On the same day, the head of diplomacy, Krėvė-Mickevičius, who tried to delay the elections for as long as possible<sup>156</sup>, submitted a request for dismissal from the position but it was suspended. The decision of the minister most likely was related with his meeting with Molotov on 30 June in Moscow during which he learned about the annexation plans of his country by the USSR. Narkom of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: 'Russian tsars, starting from Ivan the Terrible, marched towards the Baltic Sea not because of personal ambitions but the needs of the state and Russian nation. It would be inexcusable if the Soviet Union did not make use of the opportunity which might never repeat. The Soviet leaders decided to incorporate the Baltic States into the family of Soviet republics'. Molotov also emphasised the lack of justifications for the existence of neutral countries and noted that Germany accepts the actions regarding Lithuania<sup>157</sup>. Many years later, Krėvė-Mickevičius wrote that upon the arrival of the Red Army the independence of Lithuania became fiction<sup>158</sup>.

On the same day, a new law regarding parliamentary elections and composition of the Central Electoral Commission was adopted<sup>159</sup>. Over

<sup>152</sup> P. Łossowski, *Litwa a sprawy polskie 1939–1940*, Warszawa 1982, p. 327.

<sup>153</sup> *Обращение группы 'Союз трудового народа Литвы' к литовскому народу*, 'Известия' 11 VII 1940, 158 (7230).

<sup>154</sup> М. Мельтюхов, *Прибалтийский плацдарм*, p. 529.

<sup>155</sup> *Выборы в литовский Сейм*, 'Известия' 6 VII 1940, 154 (7226).

<sup>156</sup> *1940 г. июля 5, 7 час. 30 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В. Г. Деканозова в НКВД СССР о переговорах с Ю. Палецкисом и В. Креве-Мицкиевичюсом*, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 659.

<sup>157</sup> A. Kastory, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>158</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>159</sup> *1940 г. июля 5, 7 час. 30 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В. Г. Деканозова в НКВД СССР о переговорах с Ю. Палецкисом и В. Креве-Мицкиевичюсом*, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 659.

the next few days district and regional commissions were established<sup>160</sup>. It was determined in the Kremlin that the new legislative authority would comprise 79 members (1 per each 35 thousand inhabitants). Dekanozov and Pozdnyakov's telegram to the authority in Moscow contained the proportional composition of the future Seimas: up to 40 Communists, 5 Komsomolets, 35-38 non-partisans. What is interesting, the proportions were also determined by job (13-15 machinery workers, 23-25 peasants, 4 soldiers, 21 representatives of intelligentsia, 18 officials) and by nationality (65 Lithuanians, 5 Poles, 5 Jews, 2 Russians, 2 Latvians). Women were also included – 8 in the new Seimas<sup>161</sup>. Candidates were placed in a list named Union of the Working People of Lithuania (Lith. *Lietuvos liaudies darbo sąjunga*), because LKP did not have a list of its own. Most of them were associated with the Communist and leftist movement<sup>162</sup>. One of them was the Minister of National Defence, Gen. Vitkauskas<sup>163</sup>.

The short campaign included regularly organised meetings at workplaces and demonstrations in cities. Press articles covered meetings of workers, peasants and soldiers, as well as greetings from the assemblies of Lithuanian emigrants in i.a. the USA<sup>164</sup>. Dekanozov and Pozdnyakov also informed the Kremlin about the demonstrations<sup>165</sup>.

Election to the People's Seimas was held on Sunday, 14 June 1940. An important element of providing legitimacy of the voting conducted under Kremlin's control was keeping the attendance high. The head of the police in Marijampolė, Jurgis Glušauskas, mentioned 13 years after the elections that the voting was supervised by NKVD officers who were backed up by the military. They also had orders to bring people to polling stations and those who would remain at home were threatened with displacement<sup>166</sup>. In spite of that, due to shortages in equipment and constant rain which washed

<sup>160</sup> 1940 г. июля 9, Каунас – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД СССР о мероприятиях по организации избирательной кампании в Литве, in: СССР и Литва, p. 667.

<sup>161</sup> 1940 г. июля 7, 13 час. 15 мин., Каунас – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД СССР о будущем составе нового Сейма, in: СССР и Литва, p. 665.

<sup>162</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>163</sup> *List of Delegates Elected by the People's Seimas to Present the Petition for Incorporation to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 244.

<sup>164</sup> Приветствия литовцев, латышей и эстонцев, живущих в США, 'Известия' 11 VII 1940, 158 (7230).

<sup>165</sup> 1940 г. июля 7, 13 час. 30 мин., Каунас – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова И. В. Сталину и В. М. Молотову о митинге в Каунасе, in: СССР и Литва, p. 666.

<sup>166</sup> *The Lithuanian Minister in Washington, Žadeikis, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 230.

roads out<sup>167</sup>, according to Glušauskas, the attendance rate was between 5 and 15% of eligible voters<sup>168</sup>. Even Prime Minister Paleckis had to admit that it ranged between 16 and 18%. Due to that fact, the voting was extended until the following day<sup>169</sup>. The result was 'phenomenal', the attendance was drastically improved – e.g. in Panevezys (106%) or in Biržai (123%)<sup>170</sup>. On national scale it was at 99%<sup>171</sup>. The official result indicated the victory of the Union of the Working People of Lithuania with 99.2% of votes<sup>172</sup>.

### THE FIRST SOVIET REPUBLIC AND ANNEXATION

The first session of the newly elected People's Seimas was planned to be held on 21 July<sup>173</sup>. After the commencement of the session, two laws were approved: the adoption of a Soviet political system in Lithuania and a request to the USSR for inclusion of the country to the Union. These decisions were approved unanimously<sup>174</sup>. The topic of incorporation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union entered the public discourse shortly after the elections and the 'victory' of the Communists. The establishment of a Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) was proclaimed as early as on 21 July, the appropriate declaration was signed by Justas Paleckis as Prime Minister and acting President and Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius as the deputy head of the state<sup>175</sup>. At the same time, the parliaments of Latvia and Estonia issued similar declarations. From that moment the Soviet press devoted a lot of attention to the three new Soviet republics, writing about them as if they were already a part of the Soviet Union. They also published congratulations both to the representatives of the authorities as well as workplaces in the entire USSR<sup>176</sup>.

<sup>167</sup> 1940 г. июля 14, 22 час. 30 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова И. В. Сталину и В. М. Молотову о выборах в Сейм, in: СССР и Литва, p. 684.

<sup>168</sup> *The Lithuanian Minister in Washington, Žadeikis, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 230.

<sup>169</sup> G. Błaszczyk, *Litwa współczesna*, Poznań 1992, p. 108.

<sup>170</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>171</sup> *The U.S. Minister in Kaunas, Norem, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 233.

<sup>172</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>173</sup> *The U.S. Minister in Kaunas, Norem, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull, in: The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 233.

<sup>174</sup> 1940 г. июля 21, Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова и Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД СССР об итогах первого дня работы 'Народного Сейма', in: СССР и Литва, p. 692.

<sup>175</sup> *Resolution of the People's Seimas of Lithuania*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 240.

<sup>176</sup> Трудящиеся Советского Союза выражают готовность принять в свою семью Литовскую, Латвийскую и Эстонскую Советские Социалистические Республики, 'Правда' 23 VII 1940, 203 (8249).

The process of formal incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and areas of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (as SSR of Moldova) was conducted on the 7th Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Each country was incorporated on a separate day. In Lithuania's case, the Delegation of the People's Seimas submitted an appropriate request to the Supreme Soviet on 3 August<sup>177</sup>. On the same day they considered and approved the request while ordering the election of members of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union from the LSSR and the correction of borders with Soviet Belarus<sup>178</sup>. These are the circumstances in which Lithuania lost its independence<sup>179</sup>. This step was somewhat announced – i.a. on 26 June the USSR refused granting permission on resettlement of Lithuanians from bordering areas of Belarus<sup>180</sup> – apparently the action was considered unnecessary. It is worth noting that the session of the Soviet on 1 August began with Molotov's lecture on foreign policy of the Soviet Union in which he praised the success of the 'peace and neutrality' politics of the Kremlin and the victory over 'bourgeois' rule of the Baltic states by the People in 'free' elections. Also notable is the following statement regarding the increase of the population of the country by 23 million people and regarding also the people of Western Belarus and Ukraine: 'It should be highlighted that 19/20 of the population was previously a part of the USSR but they were forcefully seized in the moment weakness of its military by imperialist countries of the West. Now those people are reunited with the Soviet Union'<sup>181</sup>. Prime Minister Paleckis also addressed

<sup>177</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>178</sup> *Закон Союза Советских Социалистических Республик*, in: *ДВП 1940*, кн. I, p. 472.

<sup>179</sup> It is worth noting that the annexations of the Baltic states were conducted shortly one after the other, and in the last stage they were well coordinated in time. Similarly to Lithuanian agreement of 10 October 1939, USSR signed one with Estonia on 28 September and Latvia on 5 October 1939. Those also implied the establishment of Soviet military bases on the territory of these countries. The Red Army entered Latvia and Estonia on 16 June 1940, as in Lithuania's case – after giving an ultimatum to governments of Riga and Tallinn. Rigged parliamentary elections in these countries were held on 14-15 July. Final annexation of the republics took place on 5 August (Latvia) and 6 August (Estonia), also during the 7th Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The process was also coordinated with the incorporation of Romanian Bessarabia to the USSR which was taken on 28 June 1940 by the Red Army after giving an ultimatum by the Kremlin to Bucharest, and which was finally incorporated into the Soviet Union on 2 August, after the establishment of Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

<sup>180</sup> 1940 г. июля 26, Москва. – *Записка Л. П. Берии относительно желательности отменить решение Политбюро ВКП(б) от 23 мая 1940 г. об эвакуации граждан литовской национальности из приграничных областей БССР с оформлением на ней соответствующего решения Политбюро ЦК ВКП(б) от 29 июня (пункт 118 протокола No. 19)*, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 704.

<sup>181</sup> *Седьмая Сессия Верховного Совета СССР 1–го созыва. Внешняя политика Советского Союза. Доклад–Председателя Совета Народных Комиссаров и Народного Комиссара Иностранных Дел тов. В. М. Молотова на заседании Верховного Совета СССР 1 августа*

the time of the civil war after the speech about the formal incorporation of Lithuania, stating: 'The expression of the will (of the free Lithuanian people who wanted a federation with free people of the tsarist Russia – author's note) was the establishment of Soviet Lithuania in December 1918 and then the Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Republic (...) but the forces of Lithuanian reactionism united with Mensheviks, traitors of socialism, and assisted in various imperialist interventions, extinguished the young Soviet Republic'<sup>182</sup>. That way the Communist leaders accentuated the 'historic necessity' and 'reclamation of historic order'. Over the next month accredited facilities to the government in Kaunas were ordered to cease activity before 25 August<sup>183</sup>. Soviet authorities also noted that Lithuanian visas would expire<sup>184</sup>. There was a certain exception for a German facility – some employees of the embassy in Kaunas could remain in the city in order to carry out consular duties in the process of resettlement of Germans<sup>185</sup>. Nikolai Pozdnyakov noted that it is necessary to make sure that the archives and property of Lithuanian facilities are seized by the USSR<sup>186</sup>. Final incorporation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union occurred on 26 August 1940<sup>187</sup>.

One of the last regulations was the final demarcation of Lithuanian and Belarusian territories. It was decided that Soviet Lithuania would be granted new territories, including towns: Druskininkai (Druskienniki), Švenčionėliai (Nowe Świeciany), Adučiškis (Hoduciszki), and parts of regions: Astravyets (Ostrowiec), Ashmyany (Oszmiana), Pastavy (Pastawy) and Svir (Świr)<sup>188</sup>. That way territories which could not be negotiated in the period between winter 1939 and spring 1940 were obtained, though the agreement was ultimately modified for the benefit of Belarusian Soviet Republic anyway. Nevertheless, the border disputes between Lithuania and Belarus (mostly involving Adučiškis) were finally regulated only in years 1994–1996<sup>189</sup>.

1940 года, 'Известия' 2 VIII 1940, 177 (7249).

<sup>182</sup> Речь исполняющего обязанности Президента Литовской Республики, премьер-министра тов. Ю. Палецкис, 'Известия' 4 VIII 1940, 179 (7251).

<sup>183</sup> *The Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Thurston, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 249.

<sup>184</sup> *The Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Oumansky, to the Acting U.S. Secretary of State, Welles*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 253.

<sup>185</sup> *The German Ambassador in Moscow, Schulenburg, to the German Foreign Ministry*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 307.

<sup>186</sup> 1940 г. августа 3, Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ Н. Г. Позднякова в НКВД СССР относительно процедуры извещения аккредитованных при Литовском правительстве миссий и консульств о прекращении их деятельности, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 718.

<sup>187</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>188</sup> *Гісторыя Беларусі*, ed. Ю. Казаков, Мінск 1996, p. 384.

<sup>189</sup> M. Sobczyński, *Zmiany polityczne, terytorialne i spory graniczne w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej po 1989 r.*, in: *Studia nad geopolityką XX wieku*, ed. P. Eberhardt, Warszawa 2013, p. 214.



Diplomats remaining outside Lithuania at the time of the aforementioned activities were gradually joining in protest against the actions of the pro-Soviet government. The strongest was sent on 21 July by an envoy in Berlin, Kazys Škirpa. He accused the government of unconstitutional activity, letting Soviet forces into the country and falsifying the elections. Regarding the Seimas voting of 21 July he stated that the peace agreement with the Soviet Russia of July 1920 on recognising complete independence and sovereignty of Lithuania by the Bolsheviks was breached, and similarly the pact of non-aggression of 1926, its extensions of 1931 and 1934, and the Mutual Assistance Treaty of 10 October 1939<sup>190</sup>. Therefore, he intended to give a protest note to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An official of the Ministry, Ernst Woermann, noted that the protest of the Lithuanian ambassador is his personal initiative with which he does not intend to lead to deterioration of relations of Kaunas and Berlin but he does not want to remain idle in face of the events in his homeland. Škirpa wanted to publish the appeal in German media but Woermann dissuaded him from that intention. The ambassador also informed him that he sent a protest telegram to Kaunas. Similar action was conducted by ambassadors of Latvia and Estonia<sup>191</sup>. Two days later, a message came from Lithuania stating that Škirpa is no longer an ambassador and that his citizenship will be withdrawn<sup>192</sup>. The consequently former representative of Kaunas bid farewell to his country and position in a rather unusual way – first by refusing to hand over the embassy building to Soviet representatives and before he was taken away by the German police he flew a Lithuanian flag so high up that only firefighters were able to remove it<sup>193</sup>. German authorities allowed Škirpa to stay in Germany with his family<sup>194</sup>. Later, one emigration centre was established, with his and other former diplomats' contribution – the Lithuanian National Committee<sup>195</sup>. The former ambassador in Berlin himself also formed his own party<sup>196</sup>. A protest similar to Škirpa's was conduct-

<sup>190</sup> *Ambasador litewski do Ribbentropa*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 193.

<sup>191</sup> *Memorandum MSZ Niemiec*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 196.

<sup>192</sup> 1940 г. июля 23, 14 час. 45 мин., Каунас. – Телефонограмма по ВЧ В.Г. Деканозова в НКВД СССР о заявлении К. Шкирпы о намерении Правительства Литвы лишить его гражданства, in: СССР и Литва, p. 698.

<sup>193</sup> *The German Ambassador in Moscow, Schulenburg, to the German Foreign Ministry*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 308.

<sup>194</sup> *Memorandum MSZ Niemiec*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 194.

<sup>195</sup> *Resolution of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Conference in Rome*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 315.

<sup>196</sup> *The Charter of the Lithuanian Activist Front*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 316.

ed by Povilas Zadeikis in embassy in Washington<sup>197</sup>. The diplomat conducted his activity also after the war to bring attention to the matters of Lithuania, including on the UN forum<sup>198</sup>.

After the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR, its army was disbanded and transformed into Red Army troops: 29th Territorial Rifle Corps, 179th and 184th Rifle Divisions. The strength of Red Army was reinforced by about 16 thousand Lithuanians – privates and officers<sup>199</sup>. Some of them suffered repressions later on<sup>200</sup>. The commander of the 29th Corps was the Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian army – General V. Vitkauskas<sup>201</sup>. During the war with Germans, desertions and murders of Lithuanian commanders occurred, a part of the army was destroyed due to combat – as a result, only about 2000 remained in the aforementioned units after the Red Army abandoned Lithuania on 26 June 1941. On 23 September they were disbanded and on 18 December a new unit was formed – 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division<sup>202</sup>.

Also worth noting are the actions of the Kremlin serving to take over Lithuanian state property located abroad in the moment of the started annexation process. On 12 July financial reserves were transferred to the Central Bank of the USSR<sup>203</sup> but some money, e.g. in the United States, could not be recovered. Due to the incursion of Soviet troops and illegal actions of Moscow the government of the USA refused to transfer Lithuanian savings<sup>204</sup>, even after the protest of Paleckis's government<sup>205</sup>. Americans explained that they cannot conduct illegal activity – and transferring money to the invader would have been illegal<sup>206</sup>. Great Britain, similarly

<sup>197</sup> *Note of the Lithuanian Minister in Washington, Žadeikis, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 305.

<sup>198</sup> *Note of the Lithuanian Minister in Washington, Žadeikis, to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Pearson*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 400.

<sup>199</sup> *Литовцы в Красной Армии, 'Историческая правда', 19 X 2015*, <http://www.istpravda.ru/pictures/1245/> [accessed on: 22 V 2019].

<sup>200</sup> J. Wojtkowiak, *Polacy i Litwini, oficerowie Armii Czerwonej w latach 1922–1941. Słownik biograficzny*, Warszawa 2015, p. 79.

<sup>201</sup> *Литовцы в Красной Армии*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>203</sup> A. Eidintas et al., *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>204</sup> 1940 г. июля 20, Москва. – Вербальная нота Совнаркома СССР, вручённая зам. наркома иностранных дел С. А. Лозовским поверенному в делах США в СССР У. Торстону и переданная по ВЧ Н. Г. Позднякову для сведения, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 689.

<sup>205</sup> 1940 г. июля 20, Москва. – Проект ноты МИД Литвы, который следовало вручить американскому посланнику, переданный по ВЧ из НКВД СССР, in: *СССР и Литва*, p. 691.

<sup>206</sup> *Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Thurston, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Hull*, in: *The USSR–German Aggression*, p. 236.

to the USA, also refused to relinquish the funds<sup>207</sup>. Western countries never recognised the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR though their matters stopped being critical rather early<sup>208</sup>. Third Reich in turn maintained a position that they do not have financial obligations towards the LSSR, activity of customs offices was ceased and goods were confiscated<sup>209</sup>. Apart from that, Germans recognised the incorporation of the Baltic republics as an internal matter of these countries and took no particular action<sup>210</sup>. Apart from their intentions to incorporate the region of Marijampolė into the Third Reich.

### GERMAN PART OF LITHUANIA

The last chapter in the process of incorporation of Lithuanian into the USSR was explanation of the question regarding south-eastern regions of the country, as the Third Reich was interested in incorporation of the area. They began discussion on that as early as in June 1940<sup>211</sup>, while the claims of their own country were officially brought up again by Minister Ribbentrop on 13 June. Vyacheslav Molotov, during his conversation with ambassador Schulenburg, supported his counterpart, recognised the right of the Third Reich to that land but asked for postponement of the claim due to the current political situation and the need of resettlement of Lithuanians inhabiting the area<sup>212</sup>. Finally, in August 1940, the Kremlin informed in a memorandum that the territory exchange is not possible, instead offering money compensation of 3,860,000 dollars in gold (which constituted half of the sum which the USA paid Russia for Alaska!) over two years, also in form of goods<sup>213</sup>. Discussions regarding the amount to be paid to Germany by the USSR spanned over the following 6 months, propositions amounted to even 13 million dollars<sup>214</sup>. An agreement was

<sup>207</sup> 1940 г. июля 21, Лондон. – Из дневника И. М. Майского. Из выступления зам. министра иностранных дел Великобритании Р. Батлера, in: СССР и Литва, p. 693.

<sup>208</sup> C. Gerrard, *The USSR and the Baltic States at the End of World War II: the View from London*, in: *The Sovietization of the Baltic States, 1940–1956*, ed. O. Mertelmann, Tartu 2003, p. 43.

<sup>209</sup> P. Łossowski, *Kłajpeda kontra Memel. Problem Kłajpedy w latach 1918–1939–1945*, Warszawa 2007, p. 208.

<sup>210</sup> А.Г. Донгаров, Г.Н. Пескова, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>211</sup> A. E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>212</sup> Беседа наркома иностранных дел СССР В. М. Молотова с послом Германии в СССР Ф. Шуленбургом, in: *ДВП 1940*, кн. I, p. 434.

<sup>213</sup> *Ambassador Schulenburg do MSZ Niemiec*, in: *Białe plamy*, p. 200.

<sup>214</sup> A. E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

reached only on 10 January 1941 when it was settled that the resignation from the claim to a part of Lithuanian territory would cost the Soviet Union 7.5 million dollars in gold (or 31.5 million Reichsmarks) in proportion of 1/8 in non-ferrous metals (over three months), the rest in gold (within the following month). The agreement allowed the Border Treaty between these countries to be signed on the same day<sup>215</sup>. Paradoxically, the sums received by Germany allowed them to finance preparations for 'Barbarossa' operation against the USSR the very same year<sup>216</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

With current knowledge and available sources we cannot completely confirm that the precise plan of seizing the Baltic republics, including Lithuania, existed before their annexation nor determine the factual causes leading to the initiation of the process. Therefore, the research question lacks a definite answer. The predominant opinion in literature focusing on that topic is that the situation on the western front of World War II and concerns over the western borders of the Soviet Union are linked as a catalyst of the invasion of the Baltic States by the USSR. It seems that imperial ambitions and border revision was a long-term goal but not as important as securing what was already acquired by the Soviet Union by 1940. The goal was achieved through blackmail, introduction of Soviet troops into Lithuania and other Baltic States so that it would be possible to stage a coup imitating democratic procedures and free elections by directly tampering with the composition and activity of the executive authorities.

The history of Lithuania in 1940 is an example of the failure of the neutrality politics in the face of war and intrigues of great powers. A certain paradox, as noticed by George Kennan, is that the first countries to be incorporated into the USSR were the ones which established normal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union<sup>217</sup>. Annexation of Lithuania was handled in a way that made it appear as a legal and voluntary decision of the nation to join the USSR. Reconstruction of the executive authority was forced, new elections and campaign were conducted hastily. P. Kierończyk points out the fact that the Lithuanian society thought until the end that the incorporation of the country to the USSR would not happen, after each phase it was believed that it was the end of Soviet activity. Apart from that, the government was

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<sup>215</sup> *German–Soviet Secret Protocol*, in: *The USSR–German*, p. 288.

<sup>216</sup> S. Dębski, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>217</sup> A.E. Senn, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

being staffed with people not affiliated with Communist activism, which also strengthened the propaganda message<sup>218</sup>. Also worth noting is the fact that the subject of joining the USSR appeared in the election campaign and press only after announcing the result of the elections – while the election campaign only mentioned transformation of Lithuania into a socialist country. Nevertheless, as elected in free voting – because it was carried out after the flight of Smetona and the national government – the People's Seimas on behalf of the Lithuanian people 'willingly' asked to be incorporated into the USSR as another Soviet republic. Repetition of this scheme in Latvia and Estonia provides a full scale of the bloodless operation of the Soviet conquest of the Baltic countries.

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<sup>218</sup> P. Kierończyk, *Aneksja Litwy przez ZSRR w roku 1940 jako element współczesnej dyskusji politycznej i prawnej*, 'Studia Iuridica Toruniensa' 2014, 14, p. 91.

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#### STRESZCZENIE

Problemem badawczym poruszonym w niniejszej pracy jest zagadnienie procesu przyłączenia Republiki Litewskiej do Związku Radzieckiego latem 1940 r. oraz kontekst polityczny tego wydarzenia. Współcześnie wokół historii polityki Kremla w latach 1939–1941 istnieje dużo kontrowersji historycznych i politycznych, niemniej w ostatnim czasie w polskiej historiografii temat aneksji Litwy nie był poruszany, a zagadnienie relacji i zależności dyplomatycznych między obydwoma państwami nie było dotąd wyczerpująco



opisane. Pytanie badawcze sformułowano następująco: dlaczego, mimo obowiązywania Układu o przyjaźni, współpracy i pomocy wzajemnej z października 1939 r., Moskwa zdecydowała się na zmianę status quo i bezpośrednią aneksję sąsiedniego państwa mimo znacznych alternatywnych szerokich możliwości kontroli polityki Litwy? Badanie przeprowadzono analizując opracowane dokumenty służb dyplomatycznych obydwu państw (wśród których szczególnie miejsce zajmuje korespondencja dyplomatyczna), ówczesną prasę radziecką pod kątem stosowanego przekazu propagandowego, a także wykorzystano źródła memuarystyczne. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań nie zdefiniowano jednoznacznych przyczyn zapoczątkowania procesu aneksji Litwy przez ZSRR, natomiast ujawniono szereg czynników mogących mieć znaczący wpływ na takie posunięcie Kremla. Należą do nich zarówno sukcesy III Rzeszy w II wojnie światowej w tym czasie co, zdaniem Moskwy, mogłoby zagrozić pozycji ZSRR w krajach bałtyckich i osiągniętym zdobyczom, jak również dalekosiężne plany imperialne Kremla i dążenie do rewizji granic w regionie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** 1940, Litwa, Związek Sowiecki, III Rzesza, niepodległość, aneksja, Pakt Ribbentrop-Mołotow, traktat o wzajemnej pomocy, Antanas Smetona, Juozas Urbšys, Józef Stalin, Wiaczesław Mołotow

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