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**Vilnius and Klaipėda problems in the foreign policy of Latvia
and Estonia 1934-1938**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

Vilnius and Klaipėda territorial questions were the main obstacle for deeper Baltic cooperation during interwar period. In 1934 all three Baltic states created a union called Baltic Entente. From this moment, Latvian and Estonian diplomats had to re-define their position in relation to Klaipėda and Vilnius question. The long-lasting conflicts played an important role in Estonian and Latvian foreign policy not only developing relations with Lithuania, but also in a broader regional context. The main aim is to find out how territorial questions determined Estonia's and Latvia's foreign policy. This thesis finds that the territorial problems were treated differently by Latvia and Estonia. Vilnius question was the only problem envisioned in the treaty of the Baltic Entente. Klaipėda was not defined as specific problem. However, Estonia's and Latvia's behaviour depended on their own interests. Latvians provided help through diplomatic channels whereas Estonians were much restrained. Both countries held on strict neutrality regarding Vilnius conflict. However, Latvia was actively involved in mediation attempts while they believed that conflict between Poland and Lithuania could cause German aggression. There was not found any proves of Germany and Poland direct influence on Lithuania through Latvia and Estonia. There was mistrust that prevailed among three Baltic states. Hence, specific problems seriously paralyzed any attempts of deepening Baltic Entente.

Keywords: Specific problems, Vilnius, Klaipeda, Baltic Entente, Baltic states, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania.

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INTRODUCTION

Vilnius and Klaipėda regions' territorial disputes¹ were the main problems of Lithuanian foreign policy during interwar period. The city of Lithuanian grand dukes, Vilnius was declared the capital of Lithuania in 1918. However, two years later Poland broke the treaty of Suwalkai and occupied Vilnius². Poland and Lithuania were the only neighbours in Europe that did not establish diplomatic relations at that time. It seriously aggravated security situation in the region. In the 1920s, there were attempts to create a defence union, which would encompass all countries between Germany and the Soviet Union in order to form a *cordon sanitaire*³ against these two countries. Due to Vilnius conflict, it never came into being. The situation slightly turned to positive direction in the 1930s when Nazis came into power and there were some signs indicating that the conflict can be solved. Polish and Lithuanian foreign ministers met a couple of times secretly. At the end discussions were not fruitful.

Similar conflict emerged in Klaipėda region. Lithuania acquired this piece of land in 1923. Even though Lithuania controlled the region, they had to comply with very strict Klaipėda Convention,⁴ which created serious obstacles to fully integrate the region. Germany opposed to any nationalistic step of the Lithuanian government. These were one of first attempts to threaten to the sovereignty of Lithuania. The situation rapidly worsened in 1933 when Nazis came into power. Nazis applied economic and political pressure. It became too difficult to constrain the growth of Nazism in the region. Eventually, notorious appeasement policy was

¹ Synonyms used in the research: specific questions, specific problems, territorial problems, Vilnius and Klaipėda questions.

² The treaty was signed in the town of Suwałki (Suwalkai) on 7th October, 1920. The clauses calling for territorial negotiation and an end to military actions soon were broken by Poland. Polish general L. Żeligowski, acting under secret orders from J. Piłsudski, pretended to disobey stand-down orders from the Polish military command and marched to Vilnius. The city was taken on 9th October 1920.

³ In English: Buffer zone.

⁴ International agreement between Lithuania and the countries of the Conference of Ambassadors (United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Japan) signed in Paris on May 8, 1924. According to the Convention, Klaipėda Region (Memel Territory) became an autonomous region under unconditional sovereignty of Lithuania.

also noticeable in the case of Klaipėda. In 1939, the land was peacefully handed over to Germany.

The neighbouring countries were concerned about Vilnius and Klaipėda questions. Primarily, Latvia and Estonia were interested in solving these territorial problems. Three Baltic states were natural allies due to their geopolitical situation, but Latvia and Estonia had to be cautious because Klaipėda and Vilnius questions touched upon interests of Poland and Germany. 1934 was the pivotal year to the status quo that existed since 1920s. For Lithuanians this year marked the end of manoeuvring policy between the main regional powers, when Germany and Poland signed non-aggression pact. Lithuanians automatically swung towards their natural allies – Latvia and Estonia. Three Baltic states created union called Baltic Entente. The foreign minister of Lithuania D. Zaunius was ready to make concessions regarding territorial conflicts.

Relevance of the topic and chronological boundaries. Vilnius and Klaipėda questions are well researched problems. There are several studies published regarding domestic situation of these two regions. Several historians have written articles about the main events in Klaipėda and Vilnius from the perspective of Latvia and Estonia. However, there is a lack of consistent and thorough evaluation of Latvian and Estonian positions on these two issues during 1934-1938. Historians concentrate more on crucial events such as occupation of Vilnius in 1920⁵ or Klaipėda revolt staged by Lithuanians in 1923⁶. In 1934-1938 legal status of those two regions did not change – Vilnius still belonged to Poland and Lithuania had restricted sovereignty over Klaipėda. But there was one important change in the foreign policy of the Baltic states. In 1934 was created the Baltic Entente. A strong union was important for every single of three Baltic states. Klaipėda and Vilnius questions had a big impact on the cooperation between Baltic states. Latvia and Estonia had to find the ways how to deal with Klaipėda and Vilnius so that the union could fully function and relationship with other important partners (Germany and Poland) would not deteriorate. In historiography,

⁵ E. Jēkabsons, Klaipėdas jautājums un Latvija 1923. gadā. Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls. 2002. Nr. 4. p. 56 - 89.

⁶ Ē. Jēkabsons Latvijos ir Lietuvos santykiai 1919 – 1921 metais. Lietuvos archyvai. 1999. Nr. 12. p. 96 - 114.

these issues are usually left out, because Latvia and Estonia publicly put those two conflicts together as being a matter of Lithuania [commonly used term “specific problems”].⁷ But the impact on the entire cooperation and bilateral relations of what it seems only Lithuania’s domestic problems should not be underestimated.

There is still confusion in historiography regarding “specific problems”. Some historians claim that the Baltic states agreed only that Vilnius problem has the status of “specific problems”. Thus, Latvia and Estonia were automatically obliged to help Lithuania in the case of Klaipėda.⁸ Historian A. Kasparavičius directly opposed to Z. Butkus opinion that the only problem indicated in the treaty of the Baltic Entente was Vilnius. He claims that the definition “specific problems” was used in plural form [meaning there were at least two specific problems]. Lithuania also wished to consider as specific problem only Vilnius which would imply that both Latvia and Estonia had in mind Klaipėda region as specific problems too.⁹ Others assume that, despite not mentioning Klaipėda as specific problem, it had de facto the same status as Vilnius, because in reality Latvia and Estonia did not provide any help.¹⁰ The eyewitnesses of these events seemed to considered Klaipėda and Vilnius as two specific problems.¹¹ This question contains legal importance. The Baltic treaty envisioned exclusion of mutual diplomatic and political assistance for specific questions. In other words, Latvia and Estonia (or Lithuania if Latvia and Estonia had specific problems) MUST have provided diplomatic and political assistance.

By the end of 1938 the issues related with specific problems lost their relevance. At the beginning of 1939 Hitler forced Lithuania to give Klaipėda region “Heim ins Reich”¹² Meanwhile, Vilnius was given back to Lithuania a month later when the war broke out in 1939 October.

⁷ Algimantas Kasparavičius. Lietuva 1938-1939 m.: neutraliteto iliuzijos. – Vilnius: Baltos lankos. – 2010, p.51

⁸ Zenonas Butkus, Magnus Ilmjärv. Latvijos ir Estijos požiūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1939 metais, Lietuvos istorijos studijos, Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009, p. 123.

⁹ Algimantas Kasparavičius. Lietuva 1938-1939 m.: neutraliteto iliuzijos. – Vilnius: Baltos lankos. – 2010, p.82-83

¹⁰ Ē. Jēkabsons, Klaipėda Europos dėmesio centre: 1939 metai. Žvilgsnis iš Latvijos, Klaipėda, 2013, p.169.

¹¹ D. Bukelevičiūtė. Vidurio Europos šalių požiūris į Keturių paktą ir jų konsolidacijos problemos 1933–1934 metais, „Istorija“. Mokslo darbai. 86 tomas, 2012, Vilnius. P. 31.

¹² Back home to the Reich

Historiography. Baltic states' historians have researched intensively political and diplomatic relations between Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. E. Andersons' works were important contribution to the Latvian historiography. In his view, since 1934 Lithuanians tried to approach Latvians. Political and moral help of Latvia was highly appreciated.¹³ E. Andersons gives a comprehensive review of strained German-Lithuanian relations and the role of Latvia in it. However, his conclusions were too strict, depicting Estonia the cause of Latvia's problems. He did not create a full picture of Latvian diplomacy working actively on both sides (Polish and Lithuanian) in order to reach a consensus between these two countries. On the other hand, Andersons' did not have this aim. He mainly concentrated on the broader aspect of Latvian-Lithuanian relations. In 1993 three Latvian historians I. Feldmanis, A. Stranga, M. Virsis published a study "Foreign Policy of Latvia and International situation (2nd half of the 1930s). Their work is valuable for a thorough presentation of events that happened on crucial days of March 1938, when Lithuania was compelled to accept Polish ultimatum. They wrote about huge expectations of V. Munters to make difference in Vilnius question and bring away both parties from war. They critically described his attempts to mediate between Lithuanians and Poles. The authors believed V.Munters was driven by his own ambitions and Estonians accused him of pretending to be protectors of all Baltic states.¹⁴ This thesis will concentrate on different approach. It will argue that the main impetus for Munters' mediation was his concerns about possible military actions of Germany in Klaipėda. Munters attempted to mediate between both parties a couple of times since creation of the Baltic Entente. Even if ambitions were important for V.Munters there should have been also other reasons for taking mediator's role so many times by risking your own reputation. Another Latvian historian who wrote an article about V. Munters' mediation plans is Ē. Jēkabsons. His article also contains V. Munters 1938 4th april report to Latvian envoys in foreign countries, which explains detailed V. Munters' actions during the Polish-Lithuanian border conflict.¹⁵ Ē. Jēkabsons outlined precisely the context of the Ultimatum.

¹³ E. Andersons, *Latvijas vēsture 1920-1940 Ārpolitika I d.* Stockholm 1982, p. 530.

¹⁴ I. Feldmanis, A. Stranga, M. Virsis, *Latvijas ārpolitika un starptautiskais stāvoklis: (30. gadu otrā puse)*, Rīga : Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 1993. p.120.

¹⁵ Ē. Jēkabsons, *Latvijas ārlietu ministra Vilhelma Muntera starpniecības mēģinājums Polijas un Lietuvas konfliktā 1938. gada martā*, Latvijas arhivi, 2008.

Such thorough assessment of Lithuanian foreign policy in the 1930s is still missing. So far, the best study of the “Baltic orientation” of Lithuanian foreign policy in the 2nd half of 1930s was written by A. Kasparavičius. He focuses on collective security issues in the Baltic states and gradual shift of the Baltic states from three states cooperation to neutrality. He depicted how Estonians were first to question collective security and they moved towards neutrality. A. Kasparavičius explained it through Estonia’s close ties with Scandinavian countries, failure of the League of Nations.¹⁶ A. Kasparavičius’ given explanation is correct but there was another important factor. Success of the Baltic Entente directly depended on (un)successful solution of the territorial questions. As there were more and more troubles around these questions, Estonians decided not to get entangled with it. It is not assessed the role of specific question to the whole Baltic cooperation. Even though a broader Baltic foreign policy from Lithuanian perspective is missing, a gap is partially filled with Z. Butkus and M. Ilmjärv’s article. The article primarily deals with 1939 German ultimatum to Lithuania. It also analysis late 1938 events and how the situation in Klaipėda escalated. However, the article does not encompass the period of constantly growing tension in Klaipėda when the foreign policy of Estonia was led by J. Seljamaa and F. Akel, therefore it is not really clear why did Estonia at first place became so sceptical, what was the role of Germany in it.¹⁷ The same applies to Ē. Jēkabsons’ article. It is dedicated more to the crucial events of Klaipėda in 1939 (as the title of the article suggests), giving less attention to the development of Latvian foreign policy in Klaipėda and the reasons why Latvia was one of the biggest supporters of Lithuania in Klaipėda.¹⁸ Another article that directly addresses the issues of Klaipėda and gives a lot of information about the public policy of Latvia in Klaipėda is E. Gervetauskaite’s article. She analyses Lithuanian newspaper, Lithuanian public figures to show tremendous work of the Latvian consulate in support of Lithuania. This thesis will add to that and show the hidden side of the consulate work, namely its diplomatic exchange with the ministry of foreign affairs and formation of official position.¹⁹

¹⁶ A. Kasparavičius, *Lietuva 1938-1939 m.: Neutralumo iliuzijos, Baltos Lankos*, Vilnius. 2010. p. 47.

¹⁷ Zenonas Butkus, Magnus Ilmjärv. *Latvijos ir Estijos požiūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1939 metais, Lietuvos istorijos studijos, Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009*

¹⁸ Ē. Jēkabsons, *Klaipėda Europos dėmesio centre: 1939 metai. Žvilgsnis iš Latvijos*, Klaipėda, 2013.

¹⁹ E. Gervetauskaitė *Latvijos konsulatas Klaipėdoje 1920–1940 m. Istorija / History 2016, t. 101, Nr. 1, p. 89–109 / Vol. 101, No. 1, pp. 89–109, 2016.*

Study focus: The main focus is the impact of territorial questions on Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian bilateral and multilateral relations in 1934-1938. The importance of these questions is sometimes downplayed by historians, because the treaty of the Baltic Entente signed in 1934 entitled [as it is sometimes believed] Latvia and Estonia not to take any action in this regard. But despite that, the long-lasting conflicts played an important role in Estonia's and Latvia's foreign policy not only in relation to Lithuania, but also in a broader regional context. Latvia and Estonia had to newly determine their attitude to Vilnius and Klaipėda question by signing the treaty of Baltic Entente or re-affirm their traditional policy. In one way or another, since Lithuania became officially an ally, bound by treaties, these questions could not be avoided in the Estonian and Latvian foreign policy.

Research aim: The main research aim is to find out how territorial questions determined Estonia's and Latvia's foreign policy. From this aim derive further research aim.

1. In order to find out the impact of territorial questions, one has to give a deeper explanation what was the legal status of both problems. Historians argue about the status of specific problems and there are at least a couple of contradicting theories. Through recreating thoroughly events before 1934 September 12th (signature of the treaty of Baltic Entente) *I would contribute to the existing debate and give a new perspective of the specific problem.* As the treaty envisioned it could have had huge importance of further behaviour of Latvia and Estonia in foreign affairs depending the question was considered as specific problem or not.
2. The problem of specific questions was a monumental issue which lasted for years, therefore it would be difficult to expect crucial changes over a night. It is true the situation in these both regions throughout 1934-1938 did not change – Vilnius belonged to Poland and Klaipėda – to Lithuania. But it false to think that there was ONE Latvian and ONE Estonian position regarding specific problems. Different Estonian and Latvian diplomats had different visions and those visions often collided and changed even if from the legal point of view situation did not change. *My aim would be to identify inner contradictions and agreements between Latvian and Estonian politicians how their positions evolved in order to give a full picture*

of the development of Latvian and Estonian foreign policy regarding the specific questions.

3. Poland and Germany had direct interest in Vilnius and Klaipėda, respectively. They also considered to be close partners of Latvia and Estonia. The situation of two Baltic states was difficult and required to find a good balance between two groups of interests. *I will assess how Estonia and Latvia tackled with Polish and German pressure and their interests in the Baltics and whether it result any changes in foreign policy.*
4. Since 1934 the cooperation between Baltic States was brought to a new level. The Baltic Entente emerged as a new player on the international arena. The specific questions were the pivotal object of discussions before signing the Baltic Entente treaty on 12th September 1934 and beyond it. *I will assess the impact of specific problems to the Baltic cooperation.*

Research questions:

1. **What were the main similarities and differences of Estonian and Latvian positions?** The status of specific problems did not change in the period of 1934-1938. However, separate diplomats and politicians pushed their own agenda forming pro-Baltic groups or the opposite, which led to changes of foreign policy of Latvia and Estonia.
2. **At what extent Latvian and Estonian foreign policy held on their legal obligation negotiated in the Baltic Entente treaty?** After long discussions that lasted almost one-year, Baltic countries determined definition of specific problems but as the definition happened to be vague the question is left opened how they managed to implement their obligations in reality.
3. **What was the role of Germany and Poland steering Estonian and Latvian foreign policy?** Territorial questions were not solved bilaterally. Estonia and Latvia happened to be the closest way to reach stubborn Lithuania since they were bond by

the Baltic Entente treaty. Latvia and Estonia had their own geopolitical vision and their own interests.

4. **How did Vilnius and Klaipėda problems affect Baltic states' cooperation?** The question of specific problems might have looked like it had been left behind, when three countries agreed to create Baltic Entente, but it actually always accompanied discussions that touched upon three Baltic states' relations.

Research methodology – Qualitative analysis will enable to evaluate the impact of the territorial question on Latvian and Estonian foreign policy and the Baltic cooperation. The research does not assess nor seek to explain the details regarding the Baltic cooperation, it is rather an effort to contribute to existing historiography. Secondly, when applying this method, other approaches of historians regarding “specific problems” presented in the earlier studies will be debated.

The comparative research method was employed in order to emphasize differences between Latvia and Estonia's positions. For that reason, archival material from both countries were studied, as well as, critically evaluated previous studies.

The work pays attention at possible subjectivities and interests regarding such sensible topics as Vilnius and Klaipėda questions, therefore extreme positions will be contradicted with other sources.

By analysing primary and secondary sources the researcher tried to present a consistent interpretation of Vilnius and Klaipėda conflicts in 1934-1938 from the Latvian and Estonian foreign policy perspective. Latvian and Estonian positions on Klaipėda and Vilnius questions are best reflected in historical sources. The most important sources for the research are stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives (further LCVA, in Lithuanian Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas). One of the mostly used documents can be found in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs fond (F. 383). One should mention that Lithuania already in 1934 had suspicions negotiating with Estonia and Latvia. They thought that the third party (Poland and Germany) might have exerted pressure on them. Lithuania closely followed every visit of Estonian and Latvian officials to Poland.²⁰ As relationship were based on mistrust Lithuanian

²⁰ LCVA 383.7.1575. p. 128 // LCVA 383.7.1587. p. 184

diplomats sometimes carelessly labelled Estonians and Latvians as pro-Polish or pro-German. However, the documents reveal that Lithuania hoped for a more active engagement of Latvia and Estonia in the conflict as they considered them the closest allies. But expectations more and more diverged from the reality, in which the Baltic Entente started cracking. The documents show that Lithuanian diplomats were critical to Latvia and Estonia but despite their reluctance and ignorance of their problems (as Lithuanians believed) Lithuanians considered Latvia and Estonia as natural allies. This research also refers to plentiful documents of the Political department of the Latvian ministry of Foreign Affairs (F.2574), material of Latvian Diplomatic and Consular Representation Fond (F. 2575), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Fond (F.1313), which are stored in the Latvian State Historical Archive (further LVVA, in Latvian *Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs*). Reports sent from the embassy of Latvia to Lithuania and Latvian General Consulate in Klaipėda to Riga contributed to a better understanding of Latvian state position. These documents also unfold the fact that Latvia and Estonia often had different approaches to the specific problems. Latvia had to encourage Estonian politicians to support Lithuania politically in Klaipėda.²¹ The materials from the Latvian archive were helpful in the context of understanding Estonian position, which was represented by Lithuanian sources very bias (as political conjuncture of that time required). Latvian and Estonian diplomats coordinated closely their position in the first years after creation of the Baltic Entente. Although the documents from Estonian archives were not analyzed on the volume as Latvian and Lithuanian documents, Estonian National Archive's material (further ERA, in Estonian *Eesti Rahvusarhiiv*) assisted to a better understanding of Polish and German role in Estonian foreign policy. Conversations of Polish and German diplomats with Estonian officials revealed that at first Estonia tried to balance their position neither showing support for Polish and Germany claims nor completely undermining Lithuanian claims.²² This trend was soon to be replaced by obedience of some Estonian officials.

²¹ LVVA 2575.8.36. p. 334-335.

²² ERA.957.14.10. p. 110.

Published documents were also an important source to the research. Documents of 1938 Lithuanian foreign policy reflect conversations held between Lithuanian envoy²³ P.Dailidė and Estonian officials show that Estonia in the late 1938 had a strict position and encouraged Lithuania to find a solution to Klaipėda questions as fast as possible, otherwise it would bring threat to existence and hinder development.²⁴ Historian Z. Butkus has composed a set of documents “*The Idea and Practice of Unity of the Baltic States during 1918–1940*”. Collected documents from various archives, newspapers etc. encompass reports, telegrams, instructions between envoys and governments about the creation of Baltic Entente and its activities.²⁵

Limitations of the study –Due to lack of proficiency of Estonian language the work will be mainly based on primary sources and literature written in Lithuanian, Latvian, and English, which might not give full picture or simply weaken my arguments related with Estonian standpoint.

²³ Official status of the representative coming from the Baltic states was an envoy or minister of diplomatic mission. Ambassadors were only exchanged between great powers. Eventually after the Second World War all diplomatic missions were upgraded their relations to the ambassadorial rank.

²⁴ Dokumentai, 1938: 1938 01 05-1938 12 31 / Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, Lietuvos vyriausiojo archyvaro tarnyba, Vilniaus universiteto Tarptautinių santykių ir politikos mokslų institutas ; sudarytojai ir redaktoriai Tomas Remeikis, Rūta Kuncienė, Vilnius : Akademinė leidyba, 2012

²⁵ Baltijos valstybių vienybės idėja ir praktika 1918–1940 metais: dokumentų rinkinys / sudarė Z. Butkus. Vilnius, 2008.

CHAPTER 1.HOW MANY SPECIFIC PROBLEMS WERE THERE?

Until this day historians are discussing what was actually meant behind the term “Specific problems.” Lithuanian historian Z. Butkus claims the Baltic states agreed only that Vilnius problem has the status of „specific problems “, thus Latvia and Estonia were automatically obliged to help Lithuania in the case of Klaipėda.²⁶ Latvian historian Ē. Jēkabsons agrees with Z. Butkus and states: “Only Vilnius question was determined as specific problem in the secret declaration of the treaty. Despite that, Latvian representatives this status gave also to Klaipėda question, which is clear from all their reports.²⁷ However, A. Kasparavičius has a different opinion and claims that there were two problems indicated. He based his opinion on several facts: he claims that definition “specific problems” was used in plural form and the fact that Lithuania wanted to consider as specific problem only Vilnius is a clear indication that existed two problems. This debate is important in order to make sense to Latvian and Estonian foreign policy after the Baltic Entente was created. In case one or both specific problems were not envisioned in the treaty it would be legally binding to provide diplomatic and mutual help²⁸.

Following chronological events of 1934 and using different archival material, this chapter unfolds what was debated between Latvians and Estonians and how did they perceive these two territorial problems on the eve of signing the Baltic Entente treaty.

²⁶ Zenonas Butkus, Magnus Ilmjärv. Latvijos ir Estijos požiūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1939 metais, Lietuvos istorijos studijos, Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009, p. 123.

²⁷ Ē. Jēkabsons, Klaipėda Europos dėmesio centre: 1939 m. Žvilgsnis iš Latvijos, p.169.

²⁸ First article of the Baltic Entente treaty.

1.1 Treaty of the Baltic Entente: one or two problems?

The process of negotiations was carried out under big secrecy. The most dividing question in the negotiations was future status of Vilnius and Klaipėda. The question was also sensitive because it touched upon Polish and German interests. Eyewitnesses were also confused of what had been actually on 12th September decided on the specific problems. “Latvijas Kareivis” a Latvian newspaper announced: “Trusted sources said that only Vilnius question had been included in the agreement”.²⁹ Politicians had a reason to hide the real decisions made in the meeting. If such commitments were undertaken it would suppose that Latvia and Estonia have to adjust their foreign policy according to Lithuania’s national security which might contradict third countries’ national interests.

Until 1934 Latvian and Estonian foreign policy towards these questions could be described as stable and neutral. Neither Latvia nor Estonia wanted or had to resolve Lithuania’s problems. Both countries did not put any efforts in finding solutions that Lithuania had to find itself. At the beginning of 1934 one Latvian diplomat wrote in internal correspondence: “Vilnius have become a dogma for Lithuanians and if Latvia tried to settle the conflict it would only reach the opposite result”. According to the diplomat, the conflict was successfully exploited in internal political affairs. Thus, neither Latvia nor Estonia could provide help to resolve Klaipėda and Vilnius questions.³⁰ In spite of that, both countries were eager to expand the cooperation. Latvia and Estonia were first to prolong Latvian-Estonian defence alliance on 17 February, which did not exclude possible participation of a third country. Conversations between ministers of foreign affairs of Latvia and Estonia disclosed the fact that this role was envisioned to Lithuania.³¹ In the eyes of Latvian envoy F. Cielēns Baltic union was the most important question of the Latvian foreign policy. He dreamt about defence union, though he understood concerns in Latvia. Under the circumstances of Poland

²⁹ Pēdējās ziņas // Latvijas Kareivis. 1934, September 12, p. 4. Access through Internet: http://periodika.lv/periodika2-viewer/view/index-dev.html?lang=fr#panel:palissue:/p_001_lkar1934n204|article:DIVL285|query:Vi%C4%BC%C5%86as%20Klaip%C4%93das%20Vi%C4%BC%C5%86as%20Klaip%C4%93das|issueType:P.

³⁰ V. Ziverts’ report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934 01 03 // LVVA, 2575.7.1377 p. 141.

³¹ Report to envoys about 16-18 February conference 1934 02 20 // ERA.957.13.764. p. 3.

and Germany threats it would not be clever to join forces with Lithuania.³² Vice minister of Foreign affairs of Estonia H. Laretei was ready to support Lithuanians in cultural areas, but he stayed reserved in political affairs and gave an opportunity to Lithuanians themselves to show initiative.³³

It did not take long to that moment. Minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania D. Zaunius held a speech in Tallinn in honour of the Estonian independence. He expressed a wish to draw the Baltic states closer. Latvian envoy to Lithuania L. Sēja understood the real D. Zaunius' intentions. He was convinced that Lithuania simply got trapped in its "foreign policy jungles".³⁴ Vilnius question had already lost relevance on the highest level of international community, Poland and Soviet Union signed non-Aggression pact and the whole construction of Lithuanian foreign policy collapsed. L. Sēja felt that the timing was favourable to find a solution and that more people from the ruling party in Lithuania spoke out for a closer Baltic cooperation. The pressure came from the opposition too. It was suppressed, but they gradually became more vocal and tried to reconcile with Poland.

After D. Zaunius gave first hints of possible cooperation soon he made an official statement. He handed over an *aide mémoire*³⁵ to the Latvian and Estonian governments. It contained some general directions towards cooperation. D. Zaunius did not mention in particular Vilnius and Klaipėda issues. He noted that: "Ideally members of this union should have a common understanding in all questions especially on those issues which touch upon political objectives of the members itself but in practice it would be hard to achieve [common understanding], therefore an exception should be done in particular questions".³⁶ Lithuania showed eagerness to cooperate, but without any tangible proposals. The first reactions coming from Latvia and Estonia were not satisfying Lithuanians. L. Sēja predicted that it would be hard for Lithuania to join the 17 February pact, while it had envisioned territorial

³² F. Cielēns' secret report about Polish-Russian suggested declaration regarding Baltic states' security 1934 02 15 // LVVA. 2575.11.50. p. 194.

³³ Protocol of Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers' meeting 1934 02 16-18 // LVVA 2574.3.3042 p.46.

³⁴ V. Ziverts' report regarding D. Zaunius speech in Tallinn 1934 03 01 // LVVA 2575.15.82. p. 294.

³⁵ An informal diplomatic message.

³⁶ Aide memoire of Lithuania to Latvia and Estonia // Lietuvos aidas. 1934 04 26 p.1 Access through internet: <http://www.epaveldas.lt/object/recordDescription/LNB/C1B0003846283>

integrity principle, though he advised not to be too much negative or reserved so Lithuanians would not drift towards Soviet Union even more.³⁷ This argument of losing Lithuania from influence sphere played an important role. It was not only Lithuania that blamed other Baltic countries for serving other countries' interests, but also Latvia and Estonia were certain that the Soviet Union had a tremendous influence on Lithuania. Latvia was ready to make concessions in order to minimize Soviet influence in Lithuania.

The 25th April *aide mémoire* was soon discussed between Latvians and Estonians in Riga on the highest level. Both parties stated that the content of the *aide mémoire* was too declarative, general. They clearly saw contradictions in some of the points. Lithuania's mentioned "vital interests" which were understood in relation to a third state but not as a question that touches all three Baltic states. But what if vital interests oppose two other state interests? Latvia and Estonia declared that they did not have these questions but Lithuania had Vilnius question of exactly this fashion and this might stall Latvia or Estonia's vital interests. The conclusion was that a security agreement could not be signed due to this problem.³⁸ In other words, Lithuania claimed that Vilnius question has to be solved only between Poland and Lithuania itself. However, Latvia and Estonia thought they might be dragged to this conflict because Lithuania dealing with this question in its own way may oppose to their interests. It was clearly stated that Vilnius question has to have the status of the specific problem.

Both sides had to be ready for hard negotiations, because the very definition of specific problems was not clear and there was a lot of room for international law particularities. At first, even a defence union was not out of table. The amplitude of possible outcomes varied from creating a defence union to failure. One was clear - there would be no exceptions to Vilnius problem. In the negotiations D. Zaunius was flexible. He surprisingly proposed to Latvia and Estonia to decide themselves what they wanted to consider as specific problems. He expressed understanding that they [Latvians and Estonians] probably could not solidarize in one or another question, namely Vilnius or Klaipėda territorial disputes. D. Zaunius

³⁷ L Ēķis' report on Lithuania handing over aide memoire 1934 04 29 // LVVA 2575.7.1377 p. 93.

³⁸ Director of Baltic states department Vihgrabs' report to Latvian envoy in Lithuania 1934 05 11 // LVVA. 2574.3.3064. p. 123.

preferred to find a solidary policy so at least Lithuania's interests would not be harmed.³⁹ This was one of very few cases when Klaipėda was mentioned in the discussions and this issue was not raised by Estonians or Latvians. Overall, *aide mémoire* was not well thought through or, on the contrary, D. Zaunius wanted to keep flexibility and showed readiness to step back where it was necessary. Estonian envoy K. Pusta believed it was a clever move of Lithuanians to strengthen their positions against Poland by pushing to accept article five and thus imputing on other Baltic states obligations.⁴⁰ K. Pusta went probably too far with the conclusions, but it only proves how important was Poland's role in creation of the Baltic Entente. At this stage, nobody excluded probability of defence union but it was very fast taken off the table when specific problems were discussed in details.

Estonian politicians, as well as Latvian, did keep in touch with foreign governments to discuss about the current affairs. Lithuania did not take it well. Lithuanian diplomat P. Dailidė residing in Tallinn assumed that the postponement of negotiations gave a ground to believe that these are intrigues caused by Germany in Riga and Poland in Tallinn.⁴¹ The influence of Germany was probably exaggerated. L. Sēja had conversation with the German ambassador in Riga. In this conversation L. Sēja was more concerned about A. Rosenberg's Ostpolitik's seriousness rather than Klaipėda issue. It did not seem that Germans would raise this question too.⁴² Latvian politician sensed the expansion of Nazi ideology and crawling danger which had reached Latvian borders. Estonia gave much more reasons to believe that its policy was affected by external powers, to be precise – by Poland. The fuss was caused by the visit of Estonian diplomats to Warsaw which overlapped with intensive negotiations. Lithuanian envoy to Germany reacted to this visit as a clear sign against the union.⁴³ A feverish unionist Latvian envoy A. Bilmanis considered it as a restart of Polish-Estonian flirt. He believed it was an attempt from the Polish side to delay the process “by planting a seed in Estonian minds”.⁴⁴ For many it was obvious that Estonian military staff influence had been

³⁹ L Sēja's report to general secretary V. Munters 1934 05 07 // LVVA. 2574.3.3064 p.139-140.

⁴⁰ Estonian envoy's conversation with political department of Polish Ministry of Foreign affairs director Schaetzel 1934 05 05 // ERA. 957.13.763. p. 21.

⁴¹ V. Ziverts' abstract from conversation with D. Zaunius 1934 07 11 // LVVA. 2575.7.1377 p.55.

⁴² V. Ziverts' conversation with German ambassador 1934 06 29 // LVVA. 2575.7.1377 p. 61.

⁴³ R. Liepiņš' report on Seljamaa's trip to Poland 1934 05 28 // LVVA. 2575.11.51, 478.

⁴⁴ A Bilmanis' abstract about Estonian envoy K. Tofer 1934 06 01 // LVVA. 2574.3.3064, p. 66.

growing and *aide mémoire* went through general J. Laidoner's hands which was sometimes called as a Polish-friendly politician. No doubt that the Polish government wanted to drag Estonians to their side. During the mentioned meeting Poles warned Estonians that they would be isolated with Latvians in case a union came into being. The official Warsaw expressed its concern that Lithuania could join the 17th February union and this would also implicate accession to the 1923 November defence union signed between Estonia and Latvia.⁴⁵ Probably J. Beck went too far spreading his fears. It was impossible to join to the defence union without signing a new treaty. Thus, his claims did not have any legal ground. What neither Latvians nor Lithuania knew or did not want to believe was that some Estonian politicians in those meeting showed a high degree of diplomacy. In these conversations H. Laretei acted as a counterbalance. He diplomatically reminded his Polish counterparts, that they had been constantly reminding Lithuanians about the issues, but good relations between Baltic states and Poland would be positive for both sides.⁴⁶ H. Laretei did not betray Lithuania's interest nor had an intention to do that. The same message was transmitted by the minister of foreign affairs J. Seljamaa, who told to his Baltic partners that he was, by no means, against the union but the union should not harm relations with Poland and he was not ready to interfere in Vilnius and Klaipėda questions.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, they created a bad image making these visits in the course of negotiations with Lithuania. Meanwhile, Latvia wanted to get in touch with Poland as well, but with intention to see if there was an opportunity for reconciliation. Latvians inquired if Poles would be ready to give some kind of compensations because of Vilnius and if they accepted mediation of a third party.⁴⁸ It marked the first attempts to take an active role by solving the conflict. Overall, Poland attempted to exert influence, particularly on Estonia, but at this stage Estonia managed to control the balance between Polish and Lithuanian interests. We could even speculate that Estonians contributed to a more favourable position of J. Beck who was very sceptical to the Baltic Entente but later on seemed not to make any additional obstacles.

⁴⁵ R. Liepiņš' abstract of conversation with H. Laretei 1934 05 31 // LVVA. 2575.15.130. p. 202

⁴⁶ Report on Estonian minister of foreign affairs visit in Warsaw 1934 06 01 // ERA.957.14.13. p. 5.

⁴⁷ R. Liepiņš' report on conversation with Seljamaa 1934 05 23 // LVVA. 2575.11.51, p. 493-494.

⁴⁸ R. Liepiņš' abstract of conversation with H. Laretei 1934 05 31 // LVVA 2575.7.1382. p. 55.

If the future status of Vilnius was intensively discussed topic, Klaipėda somehow was left in the background. It was mentioned before that neither Lithuania nor other Baltic states had a preconceived attitude, what were those specific problems. Maybe that was the reason why sometimes Klaipėda and Vilnius were lumped together but these were not equally treated problems. Latvian envoy to Poland J. Grosvalds said that in connection with risks to defend Lithuania independence and territorial sovereignty, he territory should be clearly defined. According to him, there were no questions about Vilnius, but also in relation to Klaipėda it should be taken certain precaution.⁴⁹ This shows that they were aware about consequences of diplomatic/military aid to Lithuania and kept the question opened. They had no twisted imagination of Germany's goodwill. Quite the opposite, on 7-8th May discussions between foreign affairs leaders of Estonia and Latvia they came to conclusion that German aggression against Klaipėda would be a danger not only to Lithuania but also to Latvia and Estonia. For that reason, they were interested that Lithuania would retain Klaipėda and this question would not hinder the cooperation.⁵⁰ H. Laretei laid out his thoughts even more precise. Even though he criticized wrong policies of Lithuania carried out in Klaipėda, he conceded that the loss of Klaipėda would mean encirclement of German jeopardy. He believed that if Germany occupied Klaipėda then Poland would be pushed to take actions in the hinterland of Lithuania and they would lose independence totally. "Because of it, Latvia's and Estonia's duty would be to support Lithuania in the conflict with Germany" – said H. Laretei.⁵¹ V. Munters shared with H. Laretei the same thought. He was determined to support in every possible way Lithuania, because "legal ground was on their side".⁵² It would be no proves to claim that Klaipėda's question somehow created obstacles. On the contrary, Germany was far away from engaging in the question of Klaipėda as much as Poland showed its interest in Vilnius. Estonia and Latvia estimated Germany's aggression to them as very probable and they saw Klaipėda's occupation as crossing the Rubicon. Of course, this question was contestable and less pro-Lithuanian diplomats had a different opinion, but at

⁴⁹ O Grosvalds' review on F. Celiens projects and suggestions 1934 03 15 // LVVA. 2575.15.93, p. 163.

⁵⁰ Z. Butkus, M. Ilmjārv, *Latvijos ir Estijos požūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1938, Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2009, p.163.

⁵¹ R Liepiņš' conversation with H. Laretei 1934 05 04 // LVVA. 2575.8.36. p. 334-335.

⁵² S. Lozoraitis' conversation with Preston regarding V. Munters' statements on aide memoire 1934 06 05 // LCVA. 383 7.1587 p. 189.

this certain point of time the main actors of Latvian and Estonian foreign policy such as V. Munters, J. Seljamaa and H. Laretei understood, even if selfishly, that the fall of Klaipėda might bring the same destiny to them.

The main meeting heads of foreign policy took place in July. It was marked with a feverish wish from the Latvian and Estonian side that Lithuania joined the 17th February pact. This could have had secret intensions since V. Munters mentioned that the pact had been concluded to coordinate more foreign policy rather than cooperation of armed forces.⁵³ It could be that Latvia and Estonia wanted to have more say to what was happening in Lithuania. J. Urbšys suspected that Permanent Council was exactly envisioned for this purpose. But as there was no clarity regarding specific questions, discussions came back to it. There was no major breakthrough made since 25th April *aide mémoire*. V. Munters referred again to Klaipėda as if it was not a specific problem, but with a potential to become one. He asked, whether a specific problem could emerge after the conclusion of treaty. J. Urbšys did not answer directly only to remind his contractors that he would wish two things: active solidarity in foreign policy and a passive solidarity in specific questions in a way that it would not harm Lithuanian interests. Any expression of solidarity on the treaty was too risky for Latvia and Estonia. For this reason, V. Munters was reluctant to mention specific question on the treaty but to define it in a separate document. Even though Lithuanians were not obtrusive, what they had been accustomed to do, they were determined to include third article about specific problems in the treaty in pursuit of Vilnius question revival. Latvians and Estonians wanted to keep away from loud statements but somehow to gain instruments of influence. Any appearance of Vilnius question on the treaty could have been misinterpreted by Poland. H. Laretei did not hide his desire to have an impact over solution in Vilnius and he blamed Lithuanians having delayed collaboration by not allowing anyone to step in the conflict.⁵⁴

⁵³ Protocol of Baltic states' governmental meeting 1934 07 07 // LVVA. 2574.3.3064, p. 3.

⁵⁴ IBIDEM, p. 19.

In the view of Lithuanians, the best definition of specific problem was: “Which with regard to this problem retains full freedom of action”.⁵⁵ However, Lithuanians had to step back and a new minister of foreign affairs S. Lozoraitis proposed a new phrasing: “It is understood that the other two contracting parties will refrain from any action likely to harm the interests of the state in the face of such a problem, which, with regard to this problem, retains full freedom of action”.⁵⁶ In other words it would put obligations on Latvia and Estonia and at the same time they would not have any reciprocal instruments of influence. This was against Latvia’s and Estonia’s interests to retain “free hands”. Mistrust was deeply rooted in Lithuania and they expected that Latvia and Estonia cannot be impartial. Lithuania had always showed discontent with interfering in domestic affairs. Lithuanian envoy in Estonia expressed his disappointment that Estonians would always defend their policy orientation and mistakes of Poland would never open their eyes.⁵⁷ The question of specific problems was not solved in the conference of Kaunas. Lithuania was asking for Latvian and Estonian political help in return giving nothing. About a month after, the question was still opened. Lithuanians persistently invited to a new conference, but V. Munters was curious to hear a new definition of specific problems. He wished to determine not only the meaning of specific problems but also exact specific problems so in the future there wouldn’t be any misunderstandings.⁵⁸

A new opportunity to finally solve the problems of specific questions opened on 29th August conference organized in Riga. Estonia and Latvia demanded such wording of specific problem that under certain circumstances they would have a right to express their opinion. Secondly both countries wanted to get guarantees that any other problems of this fashion would never come up.⁵⁹ At the end, both sides made compromises. The third article was phrased: specific problems make an exception from the commitment made in the first

⁵⁵ Original: Qui a l’égard de ce probleme conserve son entiere liberte d’action

⁵⁶ Original: il est bien entendu que les deux autres parties contractantes s’abstiendront de tout acte susceptible de nuire aux interets de l’etat se trouvant aux prises avec un tel probleme, qui a l’égard de ce probleme conserve son entiere liberte d’action.

⁵⁷ R. Liepiņš’ report on J. Beck’s visit to Tallinn 1934 07 26 // LVVA. 2575.8.36 p. 179.

⁵⁸ Report regarding Baltic union 1934 08 16 // LCVA. 383.7.1587, p.123.

⁵⁹ Baltijos valstybių vienybės idėja ir praktika 1918–1940 metais: dokumentų rinkinys / compiled Z. Butkus. Vilnius 2008 p. 510

article.⁶⁰ Both sides agreed to comply by gaining no influence on the matter and putting on themselves no obligations to provide political or diplomatic help. An essential victory was achieved by Latvians and Estonians because the parties did conclude a secret declaration, to which Lithuanians objected. In this secret declaration, J. Seljamaa, V. Munters, and S. Lozoraitis with their signatures indicated that the only specific problem was Vilnius.⁶¹

Even though both Vilnius, as well as Klaipėda, were mentioned in the context of specific problems, it is clear that Klaipėda region territory was never a subject of discussions and their status in the eyes of Estonian and Latvian politicians were different from the one agreed on Vilnius question. The usage of plural form goes back to the discussions' stage when nobody could explain how these specific questions would be defined. Latvia and Estonia were concerned about Klaipėda becoming a problem in the future, but when Lithuania asked what would they consider as specific problems the discussions swung towards Vilnius question. Another strong argument for Klaipėda not being a specific problem is the fact that Latvia and Estonia had intentions to provide help to Lithuania in this matter. They seemed to understand that if Lithuania falls Latvia and Estonia would go down too.

⁶⁰ First article: three governments promise to consult in all important questions of foreign policy and provide mutual political and diplomatic help in all international questions.

⁶¹ Baltijos valstybių vienybės idėja ir praktika 1918–1940 metais: dokumentų rinkinys, p. 518.

CHAPTER 2. TWO PHASES OF ESTONIAN FOREIGN POLICY

2.1. Pragmatic Ministry of Foreign Affairs under J. Seljamaa

Estonians have never showed a lot of enthusiasm to cooperate with Lithuanians. No exception was the period of J. Seljamaa as the head of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1933-1936). Nevertheless, he had pragmatic view in relation to Lithuania, which led to materialization of Baltic Entente in 1934. Their position was very clear what was related with Lithuania's territorial questions– it is up to Lithuania how they would like to settle the conflicts. Meanwhile, Estonia would not undermine Lithuania's positions and respect both sides of the conflicts.

Despite J.Seljamaa's very low interest to engage in the conflict, he managed to infuriate Lithuanians a couple of times with his statements in the Polish media. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania sent instruction to envoy P. Dailidė with the assignment to make remarks directly to J.Seljamaa regarding his expressed regret of complicated Lithuanian and Polish relationship.⁶² It is understandable that Lithuanians were very sensitive about their territorial questions. One could expect an emotional reaction. But when a common sense kicked in, Lithuanians understood the importance of its ally's support. Despite small scandals Lithuanian diplomats knew that J.Seljamaa would stand for both conflicting sides equally. They were aware of the case when J.Seljamaa expressed discontent with Poles while they had intervened to rapprochement process of Baltic states.⁶³ But Estonians understood emerging suspicions of Lithuania. "Päevaleht" newspaper dedicated an article about Estonian-Polish relations. They reassured that none of Estonian neighbours should worry about good Estonian-Polish relations. The ultimate goal of Estonia was to find *modus vivendi* between Lithuania and Poland without solving the problem in favour of one or another side.⁶⁴ It is the very same approach that Lithuania and Poland had been striving for some time.

⁶² J. Urbšys' instructions to Lithuanian envoy P. Dailidė 1934 08 26 // LCVA.383.7.1575 p.16.

⁶³ E. Turauskas on Estonian foreign policy 1934 06 30 // LCVA.383.7.1575 p. 128.

⁶⁴ "Estonia and Poland" 1935 03 // LVVA.2575.7.1693. p.67.

International community attentively followed the visit of the former Polish prime minister A. Prystor in Lithuania. Even though it was presented as a private visit, he met also government officials. The moderate Estonian diplomacy did not show any specific sympathy or support for any side, but simply applauded attempts of some kind of solution that both sides would accept. J. Seljamaa was certain reconciliation would be a clever step for Lithuania. At the same time, it would improve international situation. Nevertheless, it should not come at any price, especially if this price is to get down Lithuania on its knees.⁶⁵

J. Seljamaa's wish to improvement international situation had probably something to do with an old dream to create a common front against Germany and the Soviet Union, consisting of the countries lying between these two adversaries. J. Seljamaa was an experienced diplomat. In the 1920s when this idea of a broad union was being discussed he resided as envoy in both Baltic states and the Soviet Union. The only real issue which blasted this idea was the conflict over Vilnius. If he did not have in mind exact the same project, he was definitely thinking to consolidate small states and make them more resistant. In the mid of 1930s, he saw a window of opportunities to resolve the conflict. A wish of successful and peaceful settlement of the conflict he expressed directly to the Polish envoy to Estonia.⁶⁶ However, J. Seljamaa did not take on himself more responsibility and did not mediate between both sides. There seemed to be some features of possible mediation from the Estonian side. For instance, envoy J. Markus in Warsaw once asked J. Beck to tell under which circumstances relationship could be improved.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it looked more like a general interest without any intentions to take an active role. It does not look like J. Seljamaa gave to the envoy any instructions. On the other hand, Lithuania denied any interference of Estonia in the matter if it was not unconditional support. Otherwise, they would imply that it was Lithuania's domestic affair. The only thing that Lithuania could be happy about (knowing their high standards of satisfaction!) was consequential policy of Estonia. It may have not been perfect solution for

⁶⁵ R. Liepiņš' conversation with J. Seljamaa 1935 04 06 // LVVA.1313.1.92 p.104.

⁶⁶ Conversation with Polish envoy Przesmycki 1935 05 04 // ERA.957.14.174 p. 43

⁶⁷ S. Lozoraitis' conversation with ambassador Preston 1936 06 25 // LCVA.383.7.1894, p. 146.

both – Lithuania and Poland, but it also did not cause any deeper troubles in Polish-Estonian-Lithuanian relations.

Despite quite calm period in Estonian policy, the opposition to J. Seljamaa became more vocal and set against Lithuania. On August 1st 1935 Latvian envoy informed that at the Estonian foreign policy council Lithuania was attacked. J.Seljamaa attempted to keep optimistic views, but the council decided to give a clear signal to the official Kaunas that they should set in order relations with Poland.⁶⁸ It was given to understand that the blame should be put on Lithuania's shoulders. There were many occasions when Laidoner's and Seljamaa's political directions diverged. They both seemed to recognize that Lithuania was not a perfect ally but the approach was somehow different. If J.Seljamaa was thinking how to prevent spreading influence of the Soviet Union over Lithuania by tightening cooperation with them, J.Laidoner emphasized that he would better see collapse of the Baltic union than Estonia left defenceless against the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs had more and more problems to keep integrity of the common Estonian foreign policy, because other officials discredited it. Notorious J.Laidoner's speech on 3rd May 1936 said on the occasion of the Polish national day outlined Lithuanian-Polish relations one-sided. Even V. Munters expressed objection to such public utterance. The heads of foreign policy distanced from such statements. J. Seljamaa said that he was not going to solidarize with Laidoner's statements, which was probably the most diplomatic answer to what was done to his reputation. H. Laretei was not that vague to condemn Laidoner's speech. He told Laidoner's speech was well-known to the government and he could only explain that by the general 's incompetence in foreign affairs.⁷⁰

Despite several misunderstandings Vilnius question was quite clearly defined by the Estonian diplomats, whereas Klaipėda lacked unanimous opinion. The same problems emerged already in 1934 discussing what specific problems were. As it was found out earlier in the previous chapter, Klaipėda was left out from the matter of specific problems by Estonia and

⁶⁸ R. Liepiņš' report about conference of Estonian envoy 1935 08 01 // LVVA.2575.7.1693 p.15.

⁶⁹ Ilmjärv M, Nõukogude Liidu ja Saksamaa vahel Balti riigid ja Soome 1934-1940, Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, Tallinn 1993. p.16.

⁷⁰ S.Lozoraitis' conversation with H. Laretei and J. Seljamaa 1935 05 11 // LCVA.383.7.1894. p.196-198

Latvia. Thus, leaving to Estonia and Latvia freedom of action. In 1935 J.Seljamaa was quite favourable to Lithuanian positions and understood complexity of this question. He recognized Germany being common threat to Estonians, as well as, Lithuanians. He did not avoid critique to Lithuanians who would allow Germanization to take place in the region. However, intentions might have been only positive. J. Seljamaa might have fear the loss of Klaipėda. After all, he strictly declined to sign any bilateral non-aggression pact with Germany leaving Lithuania outside the treaty, which would jeopardize its security. Security guarantees of Germany was one of primary tasks of both countries' diplomats. Lithuanian envoy P. Dailidė raised the question of German military units' deployment right cross the border. J. Seljamaa avoided straight answer but told that this question should be discussed with Latvia, in case there would be any aggressive behaviour from Germany.⁷¹ Of course, the stakes were high and Estonia had to be very careful dealing with German threat, therefore they would never stand clearly on Lithuanian side. Lithuanians tried to push Estonian to show support. S. Lozoraitis in one conversation with envoy Leppik emphasized: "Estonian government signing with us the treaty of Baltic Entente knew very well our situation and our troubles. Since then nothing has changed. The Estonian government knew the situation very well."⁷² This might have been S. Lozoraitis clever reminder of Estonia's unfulfilled obligation since Klaipėda did not belong to the specific questions. But we have to take the situation in Klaipėda was unstable - there were rash improvements but also huge crisis and the danger of Germany was growing gradually. Lithuania was also partly responsible for this instability. J. Seljamaa decided better not to sharpen the situation even more he left to develop the situation in its own way. Very soon Klaipėda became de facto one of specific problems.

Despite any clear guarantees, Estonia was active through diplomatic channels. In conversations with German ambassador O. Reinebeck, J. Seljamaa expressed concerns that Germany could unexpectedly take action against Lithuania and if so, it could mean that Germany would lose trust here, as well as, anywhere else.⁷³ But on the other hand, Estonia

⁷¹ R. Liepiņš' conversation with J. Seljamaa 1935 04 06 // LVVA.1313.1.92 p. 103.

⁷² S.Lozoraitis conversation with Leppik 1935 08 28 // LCVA.383.7.1731 109

⁷³ Seljamaa's exchange of thoughts with ambassador O. Reinebeck 1935 04 03 // ERA.957.14.174. p.11

re-assured Germany that they, by no means, help Lithuania in territorial question, even if they boast about it.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, J.Seljamaa did not tolerate ungrounded insults addressed to Lithuania. O. Reinebeck complained about poorly observed Klaipėda statute, Seljamaa rebuffed these claims tauntingly: “It seems Memel German are holier than Pope himself “-referring to German anti-state activities.

The question is still left opened: how serious Estonia considered German threat? 1935 April in their opinion, there was no danger of Germany or at least a threat that they would dare to solve territorial question by using violence, while European public opinion would turn against them.⁷⁵ They believed that fair observation of the Klaipėda would contain Germany’s aggressive policy. J.Seljamaa positively assessed 1935 November elections to the Klaipėda territorial council, after which prevailed peace for some time. But they constantly heard two extremely different opinions of what was happening in Klaipėda. The first being the Soviet Union which would frighten that observation of statute would not appease Germans and Brits, who sharply criticized Lithuanians regarding this question. Seljamaa adopted the middle way amidst two. He understood that they have the same foreign policy interests as other two Baltic states and that security of one Baltic state was in interest of other two.⁷⁶ But it was little done to materialize this concept in reality by obliging themselves to help in case of German attack or simply boost cooperation in other ways. In general, Seljamaa’s moderate policy was not harmful to Lithuania, they left the things develop in their own way.

⁷⁴ F. Akel’s political remarks 1935 04 06 // ERA.957.14.10; 14.05.1934-30.03.1936 p. 31.

⁷⁵ Conversation in Riga between Munters Urbšys, V.Vileišis and Laretei 1935 04 16 // ERA.957.14.7a. p. 63.

⁷⁶ J.Seljamaa conversation with former minister of domestic affairs Žukauskas 1935 03 31 // ERA.957.14.174. p. 13

2.2. A new course of foreign policy: military circles take over

Right after J.Seljamaa left the office and F. Akel became a new minister of foreign affairs, there was a feeling that it was a turning point. Lithuanian diplomats noticed that F. Akel was under Laidoner's influence. V. Munters was also concerned about the rumours that H. Laretei was tired and he would like to go abroad.⁷⁷ Two pro- Baltic foreign policy shapers whether left or were thinking to leave the office. F. Akel wanted to calm down the partners and give an impression that nothing would change in the Estonian foreign policy. But his reassurance and actions were different. Once he would confirm commitments for Baltic states but the next day, he would not promise any help until Lithuania reconcile with Poland. He would also repeat Laidoner's position that Estonia should sacrifice only for Estonia and Latvia.⁷⁸

A new problem emerged in the Estonian foreign policy. It lost consistency and there was hard to say who was in charge. It is doubtful that F. Akel represented his own position. Personally, he seemed to claim that he values good relations with Poland but denied Baltic-Polish alliance. Publicly he sent completely different message and spoke to one Estonian newspaper for expansion of the Baltic Entente.⁷⁹ P. Dailidē himself noticed that F. Akel does not value special relations with Poland. According to him F. Akel questioned Poland's readiness to help in the case of war. He personally seemed to advocate for a better Polish-Lithuanian relationship, meaning entering diplomatic relations, with no sacrifices being made (meaning Vilnius question should be left opened). But the problem was that F.Akel did not have freedom of action. He admitted that he has to respect sympathies to Poland, especially its military circles.⁸⁰ And these mutual sympathies manifested in various forms. For instance, Latvian envoy in Warsaw was amazed by the fact that on Estonian Independence Day celebrations 1936 prevailed military character which manifested through predominantly military personnel among the audience.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Lithuanian envoy's conversation with V. Munters 1936 05 30 // LCVA. 383.7.1863. p. 134-135.

⁷⁸ Discussions of Lithuanian Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers 1936 08 26 // LVVA.2575.8.77 p. 150.

⁷⁹ L. Sēja report to V. Munters on various issues 1936 07 06 // LVVA.2575.8.67 p. 86.

⁸⁰ P. Dailidē conversation with F. Akel 1936 08 19 // LCVA.671.1.51, p.61-62.

⁸¹ M. Valters' recollection of Estonian Independence Day celebrations in Warsaw 1936 02 24 // LVVA.2575.8.66 p. 249

F. Akel most probably relied on military circles following their instructions. He did not have any personal attachment to Poland, he was a diplomat not a military officer. His last residing place had been Berlin before he was called off from Berlin and became foreign minister. Instead of adoring Poland, the rumours were spreading that he had developed good relationship with Nazi party leaders, such as A Rosenberg and G. Leibbrandt. In relation to that, British ambassador in Riga 1936 May 16 feared Estonia would fall under German influence.⁸² According to Latvian historian E. Andersons, the whole Ministry of Foreign Affairs apparatus was replaced by pro-Polish and pro-German individuals.⁸³ This included chief of military headquarters N. Reek, Estonian envoy to Lithuania O. Öpik. The later in his memoirs wrote that Klaipėda was a German city.⁸⁴ Before leaving Lithuania to become vice-minister he told that his primary task would be to compel Lithuania to agree with German terms.⁸⁵ Another prominent pro-German person was envoy in Berlin K. Toffer. In German correspondence he was described as a sincere admirer of the Führer and national socialism.⁸⁶ Germans were looking for means how to exert influence on Lithuania through Estonia. Germany felt that Estonia could be that Trojan horse, which would help to disintegrate the whole Baltic cooperation and drag country by country to German sphere. Newspaper "Postimees" wrote: "Berlin with pleasure observed escalation of Lithuanian domestic situation, therefore it is no surprise that German diplomacy attempt in Northern neighbours[Estonia] discredit their confidence in Lithuania in order to weaken Baltic union".⁸⁷ Germans internal correspondence confirm usage of pressure against Lithuania in order to fulfil demands that the Memel statute be observed, especially abolition of the state of martial law and withdrawal of the Lithuanian political police.⁸⁸ K. Tofer seemed to have

⁸² Ilmjärv M, Nõukogude Liidu ja Saksamaa vahel Balti riigid ja Soome 1934-1940, p. 29.

⁸³ Andersons E. Latvijas vēsture 1920-1940: ārpolitika I., 1982, Daugava. P.545.

⁸⁴ Butkus Z, Ilmjärv M. Latvijos ir Estijos požiūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1939 metais. p. 126

⁸⁵ IBIDEM.

⁸⁶ Documents on German foreign policy 1918-1945, series D (1937-1945), Volume V Poland; The Balkans; Latin America; the smaller powers 1937 June – march 1939, Washington, 1953 p. 480.

⁸⁷ "Current events in Lithuania" 1936 07 28 // LCVA.383.7.1636 p. 138.

⁸⁸ Documents on German foreign policy 1918-1945. p.487.

no objections to full observation of the statute from the German side [although they were not one of signatory states⁸⁹ of the statute].⁹⁰

The more Germany pressured Lithuania, the more engaged was Estonia in Klaipėda. The new foreign minister K. Selter had surprising proposals, which did not appear as a sincere provision of help. He did not think anymore, as it was accepted in Estonian foreign policy, that Germany put in a dangerous position Estonia, but from that moment Lithuania increased threat to Estonia and other small states by the lack of compliance with Germany. Conversations between Lithuanians and Estonians left an impression that Estonian advocated to Germans rather than sincerely helped both parties to solve the conflict. Estonians delivered Germans' message that they would not put any obstacles regarding transportation and promised extremely unbelievably good conditions – “We will build golden bridges” – told K. Selter to the Lithuanian partners.⁹¹ Additionally, to that, K. Selter kindly offered his mediation but it was hard to believe his honesty. He told directly in advance that Lithuania has two ways – to leave the situation as it is or come forward with an offer to Germans and finally solve this issue. In both scenarios K. Selter leaned to the idea that Lithuania would lose sovereignty they have over Klaipėda, but in the case of the second scenario it would be possible to get back the money invested in Klaipėda, get economic privileges, build a new sea port in Šventoji, and stabilize the situation.⁹² Even if K. Selter seriously believed to improve situation, Hitler had made his decisions already sooner and the negotiations would have been a bluff. Hitler had issued 21st October 1938 a new military directive for takeover of Memel, which stated the military should prepare for the seizure of Memel.⁹³ Germany was exerting pressure not only threatening direct military almighty but also appealing to “common sense” through allies, which might have worked even as a better persuasive mean, because Lithuania did hand over Klaipėda peacefully without military intervention. Does it mean Estonia was a German puppet? It would be correct to say that Estonia sought after its

⁸⁹ Countries which signed Klaipėda convention - United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Japan.

⁹⁰ *IBIDEM*. p.481.

⁹¹ P. Dailidė report to J. Urbšys on conversation with K. Selter 1938 12 13 // LCVA.383.7.2048 p. 74.

⁹² *IBIDEM* p. 74-75.

⁹³ Crowe David M, *The Baltic States and the great powers: foreign relations 1938-1940*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 75-76.

own interests, their primary interest was securing peace in its region and if the price was appeasement that was a small price to pay. Of course, Germans themselves emphasized Estonia's friendliness to them.⁹⁴ However, no direct links of influence on Lithuania through Estonia were found.

The main strategist who was behind all of the Estonian policy since around 1936 was J. Laidoner. According to the information that Lithuanians disposed there were two persons who had decisive political role in Estonia – K. Päts and J. Laidoner. The latter was mostly interested in the foreign policy behind the scenes. “J. Laidoner gave instructions to Estonian press how to reflect on foreign policy of other countries”- , wrote one of the diplomats.⁹⁵ J. Laidoner being from military circles and with very restricted diplomatic experience did not have very clear and integral view of foreign policy on which other countries could rely. From time to time, he was called polonophile, but the sources told to Lithuanian diplomats that it was a common position among elder military personnel to have a lot of sympathies for Poland and especially their military circles, but his political thinking leaned toward England.⁹⁶ V. Munters had hard time as well to understand Laidoner's thinking. He evaluated him as a person who had peculiar opinions in some question and these opinions were not quite clear, because he did not know what he wanted.⁹⁷

Mostly Lithuanians were enraged by J. Laidoner's undiplomatic statements that put Lithuania in difficult position. Without any consultation with his partners or his own diplomatic service, he openly gave interviews to the media about Lithuanian-Polish relations. Estonian envoy J. Markus tried to clarify to his Latvian counterpart M. Valters that they should not make a lot of thoughts about Laidoner's speeches, while they are too military, straight and undiplomatic.⁹⁸ One of a colourful example of his “performances” was given interview to “Journal de Geneve“. He openly condemned Lithuania for a failure to establish good relations with Germany and Poland. He expressed a wish to finally fix these relationships. The remarks

⁹⁴ Documents on German foreign policy 1918-1945, p.513.

⁹⁵ V. Gustainis report on domestic and foreign policy of Estonia 1937 04 07 // LCVA.671.1.51 p. 85-86.

⁹⁶ IBIDEM. p.86-87.

⁹⁷ S. Lozoraitis conversation with V. Munters 1936 09 07 // LCVA.383.7.1894 p.89

⁹⁸ M. Valters conversation with Estonian envoy to Poland 1936 05 19 // LVVA.2575.7.1900 p. 131

were noticed by the Lithuanian diplomatic service. At the audience with envoy Leppik, S. Lozoraitis noted that Laidoner's statements could be understood as if it was Lithuania's fault that relationship with Poland and Germany go in this way.⁹⁹ Leppik counterattacked instantly by saying that the Estonian society had gradually more and more concerns about Lithuania's relations with the neighbours and that at some extent paralyzed the cooperation between Baltic states. S. Lozoraitis did not give up easily explaining his truth. He came back to this question once more 6 months later when he met J. Seljamaa. Foreign minister of Estonia totally agreed with S. Lozoraitis opinion and told confidentially that after the last interview of Laidoner given in Helsinki he mentioned at the cabinet meeting that the interviews of this nature are not welcomed.¹⁰⁰ J. Laidoner obviously crossed all diplomatic lines by raising sensitive questions publicly and exceeded his competences of being a military person, despite his high rank. The last drop was Laidoner's arrogance when Lithuanians wanted to present state decorations to the general but he refused to accept them. At this tense atmosphere, neither A. Smetona nor Lozoraitis visited 20th year celebration of Estonia's independence in Kaunas. This did not resemble Seljamaa's moderate position which in reality did distinguish from J. Laidoner's but his undiplomatic behaviour might have given different impression. Seljamaa used various instruments to push Lithuania and Poland towards a settlement of the conflict but it would be instruments of diplomatic nature.

⁹⁹ S. Lozoraitis conversation with Leppik 1935 08 25 // LCVA.383.7.1731 p. 108.

¹⁰⁰ S. Lozoraitis report of conversation with Ulmanis and J. Seljamaa 1935 12 13 // LCVA.383.7.1731 p. 33

2.3. From Baltic Entente to neutrality?

Since creation of the Baltic entente prevailed two opinions of the cooperation which were closely related with the territorial problems of Lithuania. The first group of moderates were in favour of a closer cooperation between Baltic states and they led the process of implementation of this idea. Meanwhile, the second group was formed by military officers, diplomats who leaned towards Poland and Germany. They sceptically referred to the Baltic union. There was also another categorization described by Estonian journalist Taklaja. He divided these two groups into younger and elder generations. The former being supporters of the union with Latvia and Lithuania and the latter, who sceptically referred to cooperation. In his opinion, the society was in favour of this union, but it could be more effective if domestic situation in all countries stabilized.¹⁰¹ He clearly meant the specific questions saying that the success of the unity was closely dependent on these territorial questions. Estonian envoy to Lithuania said it directly that Estonian society looking with a great unrest at the conflicts and it would be wrong to think it does not make any impact on Baltic cooperation.¹⁰² Hence, the impact of specific problems to the whole cooperation did not pass unnoticed.

In 1934 the moderates were still in power. They found solution how to balance between specific problems and closer cooperation. They chose to lay aside the problems for the future and try to build on what was the best at the given situation. The prevailing consensus in the media and on political level was that the impact of Baltic states separately on international arena is weak, but together they would have more leverage to push its agenda.¹⁰³ However, it was not that easy to reach consensus inside the country. There was opposition that pulled stronger to Polish and German side. One evident example of it was previously mentioned Seljamaa's ride to Warsaw.¹⁰⁴ According to envoy R. Liepiņš, it was organized under someone's influence.¹⁰⁵ Even though the names were not given away there were rumours

¹⁰¹ Report on various issues V. Gustainis 1937 04 07 // LCVA.671.1.51 p. 87.

¹⁰² Conversation about J. Laidoner's interview 1935 08 24 // ERA.957.14.166. p. 23

¹⁰³ "Results of Baltic states conference" 1936 05 12 // LCVA.383.7.1860 p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Page 11.

¹⁰⁵ Phone call conversation between R. Liepiņš and V. Munters 1934 05 17 // LVVA.2575.7.1382 p. 65.

that J. Laidoner was interested in the 25th April *aide mémoire* and he was the first to make clear gesture that Estonia did not abandon friendship with Poland. Despite Laidoner's pro-Polish orientation (as many of his time politicians called him) it would be too strong to call Laidoner an agent of Poland or Germany. He was a pragmatic military person not a diplomat, therefore he concentrated on the current situation rather than preparing a long-term vision. He was not a person who would seek after common denominators with other countries. He counted pragmatically that Lithuania's problems contain much more danger than benefit. It was a weak alternative against aggressive Germany and the Soviet Union. Had not Lithuania had deep problems Laidoner probably would have been interested in a deeper cooperation. After all he had hopes and conversations with Latvian general J. Balodis about reviving defence union.¹⁰⁶ But it was doomed to fail while countries had cultural and economic disputes. The result-oriented J. Laidoner's point of view manifests in his statement that "the union had not reached any noteworthy results".¹⁰⁷ Of course it only deepened the crisis and enraged the partners. In 1936 may the official Kaunas sent *aide mémoire* quoting Laidoner's words: "We have to admit that in reality batic unity as such does not exist. There is only a treaty of a limited cooperation, but this cooperation has not been fruitful so far."¹⁰⁸ Thus, the crisis spreaded to the diplomatic level.

H. Laretei believed that Baltic entente strengthens the whole region. If Vilnius question was successfully solved, a broader front against Germany and the Soviet Union could be formed. Laretei was afraid of possible changes of Estonian society opinion, which could push Estonia to conclude non-aggression pact without Lithuania if they did not move forward in relationships with Poland and Germany.¹⁰⁹ In one of his interviews to "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" he depicted situation grim. He stated that the Baltic Entente cannot be real and lively, because one of the members has two questions.¹¹⁰ But it did not mean that Laretei was on the same page with J. Laidoner. Even Lithuanian envoy in Riga had an impression of H.

¹⁰⁶ M. Ilmjärv, *Nõukogude Liidu ja Saksamaa vahel Balti riigid ja Soome 1934-1940*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ Lozoraitis conversation with H. Laretei and J. Seljamaa 1936 05 11 // LCVA.383.7.1894 p. 198.

¹⁰⁸ Aide memoire remise a M. Laretei 1936 05 08 // LCVA.383.7.1894 199.

¹⁰⁹ R. Liepiņš' conversation with H. Laretei 1935 05 29 // LVVA.2575.7.1693 p. 24.

¹¹⁰ J. Urbšys writes about H. Laretei interview 1935 05 19 // LCVA. 383.7.1731 p.143.

Laretei as a big protagonist of the Baltic Entente.¹¹¹ Moreover, H. Laretei was concerned about losing societies' support, after which even the moderates would be compelled to change their attitude and lean more to Pro-German, pro-Polish wing.

The society sympathized to the unity. "Uus Eesti" newspaper saw importance in the cooperation, because complicated times had come.¹¹² In another published article about Lithuania-German relations in Klaipėda they wrote: "We could ask ourselves why all this matter for us Estonians and Latvians if all of this is Lithuania's business. However, we all three concluded a treaty we are all interested that all three signatory states would have good relationship with other states. Good relationship helps to strengthen mutual cooperation, but conflicts of one participant have a huge impact on the whole cooperation and other signatory states."¹¹³ Newspaper "Päevaleht" in one of 14th October articles analysed Russian-German relationship and the situation of the Baltic states. The newspaper came to conclusion that Estonia had to stick to the Baltic Entente.¹¹⁴ But the longer territorial problems lasted, the more vocal became voices who proposed different orientation of Estonian foreign policy. The fuss was caused by I. Tõnisson's article in the journal "Akadeemia". He proposed that Estonia should turn to Scandinavia, while the Baltic Entente do not bring any useful results. The article favoured neutrality. Otherwise Estonia would be dragged to Russian-German conflict.¹¹⁵ He also counted probability of German or Soviet attack to every Baltic state. He was sure that there was a very weak possibility that Germany would attack Estonia, whereas the Soviet threat was considered with high probability. The understanding that reliance on Lithuania, which had two territorial problems, was not sufficient to ensure Estonia's security against growing threat of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Germany posed very little direct danger, according to Estonian leaders. "XX amžius" depicted the article of Tõnisson as delusional. According to them, it was wrong to think that "the big neighbours would bite a piece of Lithuania or Latvia and would leave Estonia intact".¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ First impressions of Lithuanian envoy in Riga 1938 01 04 // LCVA.671.1.54 p. 160.

¹¹² "Riga conference – what was discussed" 1935 12 05 // LCVA.383.7.1732 p.163.

¹¹³ "Riga conference – what was discussed" 1935 12 05 // LCVA.383.7.1732 p.165.

¹¹⁴ Short translations of international press 1937 10 // LCVA.383.7.1997 p. 77.

¹¹⁵ P. Dailidė report to S. Lozoraitis about article in "Akadeemia" 1937 10 20 // LCVA.671.1.51 p.118.

¹¹⁶ "Is Baltic Entente a threat to Estonia" 1937 10 13 // LVVA. 2575.8.72 p. 494.

The territorial questions of Lithuania were the main obstacle to strengthen and develop further the Baltic cooperation. J. Seljamaa as well as J. Laidoner expressed the same idea but in a different manner – solving territorial questions was crucial for the Baltic entente. Despite all hardships, Estonians did not betray the unity between Baltic States and refused to sign bilateral non-aggression treaties between Germany and Estonia without incorporating Lithuania in it.¹¹⁷ However, the Baltic Entente appeared to have its limits. J. Laidoner was keen to cooperate as far as it does not contradict Estonia's interests. Lithuania saw security in multilateral cooperation, because they could not withstand the pressure of Germany or Poland alone. But Vilnius and Klaipėda conflicts contributed substantially that the Baltic Entente would not develop further. That being said, the arguments proving that specific problems led directly to neutrality are too weak.

¹¹⁷ J. Seljamaa's conversation with German ambassador Reinebeck 1935 10 10 // ERA.957.14.174. p. 110

CHAPTER 3. SPECIFIC APPROACH OF LATVIAN DIPLOMACY TO THE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Activities of Latvian diplomacy proves the fact that there was only one specific problem – Vilnius question. The events in Klaipėda were perceived differently and Latvian diplomats were more eager to discuss about emerging issues in Klaipėda. It was a result of two factors: Latvia, as well as Lithuania, feared any military actions of Germany. Secondly, Latvia considered Baltic unity as the most important. There was no reason to sacrifice relationship with Poland but Latvia shared a lot of views with Lithuania regarding Germany aggression. Lithuania felt they would have backing in Klaipėda. The understanding on both sides that: “No Lithuania meant no Latvia and vice versa” was deeply rooted among many politicians and diplomats. This strongly drew both countries together and laid the foundations for a good cooperation in the framework of bilateral and Baltic cooperation. Of course, both specific questions were important and they both were an integral part in any discussions about the future of the Baltic unity. However, Latvia treated Klaipėda question with more flexibility than Estonia even though the means they used were limited to diplomacy. Thus, Latvia neither fully supported Lithuania (what would be expected from the real ally) nor ignored the problem fully.

Similarly like Estonia, Latvians took a neutral stance on Vilnius issues. In spite of that, there were significant differences in the meaning of “neutrality”. “Neutral stance” did not imply indifference, quite an opposite. 1934-1938 Latvian diplomacy was engaged in the processes in Vilnius and discussed about them with both sides. Yet it was quite far from the real mediation, but there were enough signs referring that Latvia would take this role with pleasure. Latvians enjoyed Lithuanians’ trust. Some Lithuanian diplomats even understood why Poland was such important country for Latvia. According to them, Poland earned a lot of thankfulness in Latvia due to historical help, but they would not notice that Latvians would try to push Lithuania towards Poland. Poland was also content with Latvians, they thought they could use Latvian mediation in order to force Lithuania to reconciliation.

As it was already mentioned, Latvians were active participants in the conflict and one of the main requirements to Lithuanians was more transparency and clarity in these specific issues. This might sound odd but Lithuanians did not have clear policy regarding Vilnius except aspirations to get it back. But the reality was that international situation was changing and the problem of Vilnius became obsolete in the eyes of international community. There were new challenges and Vilnius was an obstacle that did not allow to tackle with them. Moreover, Lithuania dealt with much stronger states such as Poland which would not give up its demand without getting something in returning. Latvia understood it and demanded clarity of Lithuania's further actions, especially when it comes to discussions about conclusion of non-aggression pacts and the Eastern pact.¹¹⁸ V. Munters considered as "necessary and inevitable" that Lithuanians would express formal position and acquaint them with their intention in both questions. V. Munters added that unclear position could be damaging to the Baltic solidarity.¹¹⁹ The Minister of Foreign Affairs was never pushy or demanded reconciliation with Poland and Germany without any trade-offs but he was relatively tired of hearing the same arguments about L. Żeligowski and the Hague tribunal¹²⁰. The only answer that Lithuania provided was the statement of Klaipėda and Vilnius being domestic problems which was, of course, not sufficient answer. V. Munters told clearly that he had no wish to interfere in domestic affairs [meant Vilnius and Klaipėda problems]. However, he was looking for an opportunity to tell that the treaty of establishing diplomatic relations with Poland, which would leave Vilnius question opened would be at this moment the best solution. It would not undermine Lithuanian position and both sides would profit. Munters named one argument after another and he seemed to be impartial. Negotiations with Poles and opening this question again would have given a new boost to Lithuanians and facilitated the Baltic cooperation.

V. Munters eagerly shared his views on the specific problems. Especially in Klaipėda he saw a lot of windows of opportunities. According to him, Lithuanians could wait until local

¹¹⁸ The Eastern Pact was a proposed mutual-aid treaty, intended to bring the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania together in opposition to Nazi Germany.

¹¹⁹ Conversation between V. Vileišis and Munters about specific problems 1935 06 07 // LVVA.2575.7.83. p. 19.

¹²⁰ Lithuania's appeal to the court in order to clarify Klaipėda statute

elections pass and freeze all negotiations in the meantime but it would not guarantee what would happen in those 3-4 months. The second Munters' proposal was to begin official negotiations with Germans and eliminate their propaganda. On the other hand, he felt it could be risky to retreat too much which would result to acceptance of new unfavourable conditions. Lithuanian envoy V.Vileišis seemed to agree with V. Munters insights.¹²¹ Even though V. Munters mentioned advantages and disadvantages of both possible approaches, he most probably preferred the second option. He was suspicious about reaching any positive outcomes in the local elections. He predicted gradual growth of German authority. At this moment Lithuania had more leverage to negotiate. By no means, Munters wanted to allow collapse of Lithuanian positions in Klaipėda. At that moment he saw an opportunity to negotiate as equals and maybe gain some moral and material benefits. It was already clear that Germany becoming a super power. V. Munters was also very sceptical that signatory states would be very interested in Klaipėda issues and he did not count on their support.¹²² He had information that the Great Britain pushed Lithuania to create normal conditions in Klaipėda under which local parliament should function and trustworthy directory would have to be founded. The Foreign Office told V. Munters personally that he should exert his influence and bring Lithuanians to common sense as long as it was not too late.¹²³

Latvian diplomacy was very active and dynamic. No wonder super powers imagined them as mediators. V. Munters managed to stay diplomatic and keep his own controversial opinions to himself so Lithuanians would not be infuriated. There was a huge difference between Latvian and Estonian criticism. Latvia was not pushy. They sought for the best solution for both sides. Latvian envoy L. Sēja was surprised by the new vice minister of Estonia position regarding Lithuania. According to L. Sēja, O. Öpik thought that there was lack of goodwill from Lithuanian side to fix relations with Poland and reach any compromise with them. He was also certain that Lithuania was challenging Germany in Klaipėda, as a result, dragging Latvia and Estonia down together with them and weakening their situation. L. Sēja could not believe this and he wanted to know whether these statements corresponded

¹²¹ Conversation between Vileišis and Munters about specific problems 1935 06 07 // LVVA.2575.7.83. p. 20.

¹²² Lithuanian envoy conversation with V. Munters 1935 06 09 // LCVA.648.1.22 41

¹²³ Opinion about Klaipėda question and situation in Lithuania 1935 10 28 // LVVA.1313.1.92. p.393

to the governmental position.¹²⁴ Another Latvian envoy M. Valters informed his government that Estonians were beloved in Poland and they were under strong Polish influence. M. Valters noticed that Polish media repeated often what Tallinn said. The latest example of that was an article, in which the Baltic Entente was depicted as non-existent and the Polish-Lithuanian conflict considered as the main cause for that. M. Valters wrote in his report that he was obliged to defend position that Baltic Entente did exist and the conflict did not influence the cooperation at such extent as it would look like.¹²⁵ M. Valters tried not to put a lot of attention at the conflicts as the main failure for the union. They were worried that Estonians stressed so much reluctance of Lithuanians to comply. Moreover, there were even more frightening information floating around. envoy R. Liepiņš heard that colonel R. Maasing bragged about Germany's offer to Estonians to conclude non-aggression treaty and he predicted that in the nearest future Germany and Poland would improve their relationship which would lead to division of Lithuania and South Latvia. Even though this information was received as a rumour, R. Liepiņš took it seriously, he could hardly believe that allied army could spread such disgraceful news.¹²⁶

It was even more striking for Latvians because they so much believed in the importance of the Baltic Entente. While A. Smetona concentrated on gaining at any price Vilnius and K. Pāts feared growth of the Soviet Union, K. Ulmanis at the conference of envoys in 1935 emphasized that the Baltic cooperation strengthens Latvian positions.¹²⁷ At the same conference diplomat K. Zariņš proposed to expand the union to economic and military fields. Of course, he was right to say that it could only be done after reconciliation with Poland and Germany, otherwise the cooperation would exist with reservations.¹²⁸ Economic and defence union was the main aim that only few believed could be really accomplished. V. Munters was more down-to-earth. He thought that positive sequence of actions in Vilnius question would have positive effect on the Baltic cooperation. For this reason, he assigned Latvian envoy to Germany to speak about it with his counterpart envoy J. Šaulys. H. Celmiņš pointed out to J.

¹²⁴ L. Sēja's impressions of O. Öpik 1937 11 30 // LVVA.2575.7.2181. p.12.

¹²⁵ M. Valters informs about Polish-Lithuanian relations 1937 04 08 // LVVA.2575.7.2179 p.294.

¹²⁶ R. Liepiņš informs about major Maasing's conversations 1935 04 17 // LCVA.2575.8.65. p. 4-5

¹²⁷ Andersons E. *Latvijas vēsture 1920-1940: ārpolitika I.*, 1982, Daugava. P. 418

¹²⁸ IBIDEM. P.419.

Šaulys that in the name of Entente and general Eastern Europe security it would be necessary to reconcile with Poland. H. Celmiņš regretted that the conflict would have been easier solved sooner when J. Piłsudski was alive. J.Šaulys raised two conditions for successful establishment of diplomatic relations: Lithuanian minority in Vilnius must be stopped persecuted and Vilnius questions - left opened. He imagined active role of Latvia and Estonia in making this deal, therefore he asked H. Celmiņš to talk over this question with Polish envoy Lipski. He took this role seriously and a little later visited Lipski. However, the conversation was not fruitful. J.Lipski blamed Lithuanians for setting up some kind of commission to investigate Polish activities. He suggested establishing direct contacts in order to proceed in a normal manner.¹²⁹ This clearly showed that Latvians had no chance for successful facilitation of the conflict. Poland was not ready for any compliance. Even if the Poles showed more understanding, there were no guarantees Lithuanians would have come to terms. J. Šaulys was Polish-friendlier than most of the Lithuanian diplomatic service. In spite of all hardships, Latvians tried to find out consensus for very good reasons. The stronger Baltic states tied with Poland the more chances they had to withstand German threat and the latter was considered to be the real danger.

¹²⁹ H. Celmiņš private conversation about Lithuanian-Polish establishment of diplomatic relations 1936 01 31 // LVVA.1313.1.103. p 372.

3.1. Active neutrality: helping to find consensus in Vilnius

Latvia adhered to neutral position because Poland and Lithuania were more or less equally important partners. Whenever Lithuania or Poland attempted to win Latvia's support they resisted and denied any allegiance to one or another side. This was the case when Lithuanian community celebrated its Independence Day in Riga and Lithuanian envoy held a speech with references to Vilnius occupation. Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted quickly. They showed anger that Lithuania used their hospitality and territory in order to start old provocations which had seemed to be over.¹³⁰ Latvian diplomats managed this scandal to keep quiet from Poland and V.Vileišis admitted crossing the red line. In the same nature Latvians treated Polish diplomats who thought could use Latvia in order to reach its goals. Poland tried to show that Lithuania was to blame and they had no intentions to establish relations. Foreign minister of Poland J. Beck ensured that they did not use diplomatic channels to harm Lithuania. According to him, Lithuania itself constantly created obstacles. Latvian envoy M. Valters responded to Beck's statements with a suggestion to come forward with their own proposals. The envoy wanted to give an impression that the conditions in Lithuania are favourable for new Polish proposals.¹³¹ Rather than listening Polish diplomats' complaints Latvia welcomed a dialogue. They knew that Poland set strict preconditions - to establish diplomatic relations. Polish complaints did not make the situation in no way easier. Latvia wanted to see a constructive dialogue between both parties.

It was surely not easy with Lithuania too. Latvians saw the conflict had reached the stage where you really could hardly do something. M. Valters thought Vilnius questions reached "chronicle disease level". The stage where it would be better to leave it as it is only trying to contain both sides from minority repressions.¹³² Latvians understood how little could be done in this situation. Lithuanian society had been long fed with hatred and anger. L. Sēja described Vilnius issue as an integral part of Lithuanian domestic life. No government would be capable to move this question from the deadlock. At least, L. Sēja thought that this

¹³⁰ Condemnation of V.Vileišis speech 1936 02 19 // LVVA.1313.1.103. p. 235.

¹³¹ M. Valters conversation with J. Beck 1936 05 23 // LVVA.2575.7.1900 p.137.

¹³² M. Valters informs about Polish-Lithuanian relations 1937 04 08 // LVVA.2575.7.2179. p. 295.

particular government was on the brink of downfall and incapable to make changes. He also noticed how the opposition to Smetona's regime used this question for their power games.¹³³

Who is to blame for unsuccessful attempts to establish relations? Latvians noticed that strained relationship of Lithuania and Germany naturally pushed Lithuania to the Polish side and they were the ones more interested in some kind of modus vivendi with Poland. L. Sēja was certain the Poles were not thinking to provide any help for Lithuanians against Germany.¹³⁴ Envoy M. Valters after reading L. Sēja's impressions of the situation in Kaunas came to conclusion that chief of Eastern department at the Polish ministry T.Kobyłański's thoughts are as subjective as the ones heard in Kaunas. He referred to T.Kobyłański's approach to the settlement of the conflict. M.Valters had more hopes in J. Beck who was more restrained and less noticeable whereas T.Kobyłański was prone to escalate the question.¹³⁵ Latvia carefully assessed Polish attitude to Lithuania and did not cherish any hopes that Poland would facilitate conflict solution. It might be that Poland expected Germany to weaken Lithuania which would give an opportunity to utilize this situation and come to better terms with Lithuania. Latvians did not speculate in such way but they noticed peculiar lack of cooperation from Poland and even sabotaging any possible deal. Lithuanians were not cooperative as well but for different reasons. In fact, L. Sēja was advised by some Lithuanian intellectuals not to interfere in Polish-Lithuanian crisis because Lithuanian nation would not value Latvian help even if it averts military actions of Poland. The nation would think Latvians worked for Polish interests.¹³⁶

Latvians did not count on Polish aggressive activities. There were some reports prepared by L. Sēja about the conflicts at the Lithuanian-Polish border territory. L. Sēja did not buy J. Beck's attempts to pretend he had nothing to do with that. Latvians knew Poland could use border conflicts in order to push Lithuania to establish relations (and the future showed a border conflict really happened) but this scenario, according to Latvians, was only imaginable if the conflict between Germany-Lithuania would start and Poland used it as a

¹³³ L. Sēja's assessment of relations between Poland and Lithuania 1935 04 24 // LVVA.2575.8.63. p. 632.

¹³⁴ L. Sēja's reports on the situation in Klaipėda 1935 04 24 // LVVA.2575.8.63. p. 631.

¹³⁵ M. Valters' impressions from conversation with T. Kobyłański 1937 04 08 // LVVA.2575.7.2179 p.292.

¹³⁶ Post-Polish ultimatum situation in Lithuania 1938 03 28 // LVVA.2574.3.3202. p. 115-116.

pretext.¹³⁷ The Eastern flank between Poland and Lithuania was entrenched but Germany's actions could encourage Poland to use the situation. In this context, Latvians did not exclude the chance that Latvia could also suffer from this scenario as much as Lithuania. Latvian envoy M. Valters quoted "Gazeta Warszawska" article in which Paris conference times were recalled when Polish politician R. Dmowski had demanded to join Klaipėda region to Poland as autonomic region. It was also highly possible that Southern part of Latvia would be attached to this autonomic region [at least, Latvians thought so].¹³⁸ In the current situation it was more hypothetical sequence of actions but taking into consideration tensed situation in Klaipėda this scenario was not absolutely excluded. A true friend of Lithuania, envoy A. Bilmanis considered any cultural autonomy of Eastern part of Lithuania as dangerous to Lithuania as for Latvia while the same cultural ambitions would be demanded in Latgale.¹³⁹ Not only politicians were concerned. These fears were quite widely spread in the society. A popular Swedish newspaper wrote that Latvian society was well aware of the Polish plans of annexation, which are noticeable, in the first place, in Daugavpils and Liepāja.¹⁴⁰ Differently from Estonia, Latvia always acted more restrained to Poland and Germany even felt that agreement between two of them could be prepared against Latvia. This was not, of course, a blind belief of conspiracy. V. Munters himself wrote that majority of these statements belonged to fantasy, but these were spread and repeated so many times that one could start to doubt and become nervous.¹⁴¹ They knew they would have to be cautious not only about what was happening in Latvia but also in Lithuania because Vilnius and Klaipėda problems directly touched upon Latvian interests.

¹³⁷ L. Sēja's report about Lithuanian- German relations 1937 11 29 // LVVA.2575.7.2181. p. 11.

¹³⁸ M. Valters' report on situation in Klaipėda 1935 02 11 // LVVA.2575.8.62 p.375.

¹³⁹ P. Zadeikis' meeting with envoy A. Bilmanis 1936 04 17 // LCVA.383.7.1861 p.56.

¹⁴⁰ Göteborgs Handelstidning article about Latvia 1938 06 02 // LCVA.383.7.1888. p.307.

¹⁴¹ V. Munters' comments the situation in Eastern Europe 1935 02 23 // LVVA.2575.8.63 p.757

3.1.1. Mediation between Lithuania and Poland: the key to Latvia's national security

V. Munters attempted many times to bring S. Lozoraitis and J. Beck together in order to find a solution in the conflict. V. Munters admitted that right after the Baltic Entente treaty had been signed, he took initiative to establish first contacts between Poland and Lithuania. The same happened a year after, in 1935, during the League of Nations assembly. The only thing that he achieved was to give Latvian facilities for a meeting. However, long-lasting changes the conversations did not bring. In 1937 V. Munters believed that reconciliation can be achieved without establishing diplomatic relations. It would be difficult to imagine that V. Munters was not aware of J. Beck's position. J. Beck told many times that without diplomatic relations reconciliation cannot be realized. Self-respectable mediator probably would not have attempted so many times to bring both sides on the table if he had not have could reason. V. Munters in 1937 stated himself that a third party cannot interfere in order to solve the conflict.¹⁴² But this did not stop him coming back to the question later again. Neither Poland nor Lithuania approved V. Munters' mediation therefore his stubbornness was quite surprising. Some Latvian politicians were also sceptical about interference in it. Former minister of foreign affairs V. Salnais admitted that Lithuanians or Poles did not ask for Latvian support therefore it would only cause suspicions to Lithuania.¹⁴³ V. Munters' high interest in the issue could be explained with the fact that he believed this matter was not only about bilateral Polish Lithuanian relations. Geopolitical situation was deteriorating and Germany became dangerous to Latvian national security.

Lithuanians were suspicious of such V. Munters' interest in Polish-Lithuanian relations. They were not sure what were the main V. Munters's intentions. He sensed himself that there was a lack of trust in him and he could be labelled as some kind of Polish envoy. He reassured Lithuanians that he conducted these conversations at its own will and his own name without any encouragement or order.¹⁴⁴ There is no doubt that Poles attempted to influence Latvians to be more favourable to their point of view. But there was no reason not to believe

¹⁴² Report from Baltic envoys' meeting in Berlin 1937 04 16 // LCVA.383.7.1863. p 37.

¹⁴³ Feldmanis I. Stranga A. Virsis M. p. 109.

¹⁴⁴ V. Vileišis conversation with V. Munters 1936 09 09 // LCVA.648.1.52 p. 183

Munters' words. On the contrary, Latvian diplomats seemed to clearly understand Polish insidious objectives. M. Valters wrote that T. Kobylański wanted to push Munters to the position of mediator who would help to reach favourable outcome to Poland but M. Valters denied any subjectivity and indicated that they wanted to keep friendly relations with both sides.¹⁴⁵

Munters had no thoughts to serve one or another state's objectives. He had his own goals that might have more matched with the Polish ones. However, he did not want to reach reconciliation at any price. He appealed to conscience of Lithuanians and warned them that situation would only get worse. V. Munters mentioned that Germany with its "Drang nach Osten¹⁴⁶" policy cannot be considered as a friend. In his mind, Germany was happy to see disagreements between Poland and Lithuania. The absence of relations helped Germans to exert pressure on Lithuania. As long as Lithuania did not manage to fix the situation Poland and Germany would weaken its positions on international level. V. Munters thought this all could be avoided if consensus would be found. Lithuanian envoy seemed to be convinced. V. Vileišis understood that Latvia protecting its own security.¹⁴⁷ In other word, he realized that Munters identified Germany as the main danger to Latvia and in order to strengthen their own national security Polish-Lithuanian reconciliation was vital.

V. Munters tried to persuade that reconciliation with Poland would change relations with Germany while Lithuania could count on Polish Latvian and Estonian help defending the rights of Klaipėda district. On the other hand, honourable treaty with Poles would not burden in solving Vilnius issue.¹⁴⁸ V. Munters' words might have sounded seductive but it is hard to say how much they were based on reality. Probably he was too optimistic about Poland's eagerness to assist in Klaipėda. J. Beck was pre-occupied with settlement of its own conflict. He was even ready to solve it militarily if it was needed. He asked V. Munters to hand over message to Lithuanians that if there was a conflict on the Polish-Lithuanian border Poland

¹⁴⁵ Conversation about the incident on Polish-Lithuanian border 1938 03 15 // LVVA.2574.3.3202 277

¹⁴⁶ German expansion to the East.

¹⁴⁷ V. Vileišis conversation with V. Munters 1936 08 31 // LCVA.648.1.52 p. 168-169

¹⁴⁸ IBIDEM. p. 171.

would shoot.¹⁴⁹ Despite the tension between Lithuania and Poland, V. Munters was concerned about high probability of Germans taking advantage of this situation which would have even bigger reverberations than Polish-Lithuanian conflict.

Latvians tried to bring Estonians to this matter. Some world powers saw Estonia as a perfect mediator. They considered Estonia as a country which had good relations with Poland, as well as, with Lithuania. Brits and French expected that Estonian could bring together Poland and Lithuania.¹⁵⁰ In 1936 H. Celmiņš mentioned to F. Akel a wish to organize negotiations between Poland and Lithuania. He willingly agreed to participate in it.¹⁵¹ This would have given more leverage to Latvians to conduct negotiations. Estonians seemed to be interested in the process. Differently from Latvians, Estonians did not seek for any bigger geopolitical aims therefore they did not pursue reconciliation for any cost. The same F. Akel (who was in general inclined to mediation) later in 1938 refused to make *démarche* together with V. Munters facing crisis between Lithuania and Poland. F. Akel explained that no contacts were established with J. Beck. Moreover, Lithuania neither informed Estonia about the conflict nor asked for advices.¹⁵² Estonians did not believe that reconciliation between Poles and Lithuanians could happen since the influence of the Soviet Union was such big on Lithuania.¹⁵³

When 1938 March an incident on the border happened, V. Munters took an active role trying to clarify the situation. He expressed his concerns to Lithuanian representative that international situation compelled the government of Lithuania to consider the question of reconciliation with Poland. V. Munters discussed about this question with K. Ulmanis and they came to conclusion that German pressure after events in Austria would strengthen on neighbouring countries – Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania Denmark and new complication might appear on North-East and Eastern border.¹⁵⁴ One has to remember these conversations took place on the night from 11th to 12th March. V. Munters knew only that something

¹⁴⁹ Feldmanis I. Stranga A. Virsis M. p. 111.

¹⁵⁰ J. Markus summary of Polish-Lithuanian relations 1935 07 05 // ERA.957.14.176. p.11-12.

¹⁵¹ a new mediator to solve a Polish-Polish dispute 1936 02 05 // ERA.957.14.10. p. 136.

¹⁵² Feldmanis I. Stranga A. Virsis M. p. 119.

¹⁵³ J. Markus summary of Polish-Lithuanian relations 1936 02 03 // ERA.957.14.176. p.78.

¹⁵⁴ V. Munters summary of 11th -19th March events 1938 04 04 // LVVA.1313.1.128. p. 18

happened on the border of Lithuania and Poland. However, he quickly warned Lithuanians not about their direct threat Poland but Germany.

Lithuania assessed dangers differently from Latvia. Its primary enemy was Poland. Lithuanian envoy did not take seriously German threats. He doubted that the rise of Nazism in Klaipėda could be compared with what happened in Austria. He believed Austria had its own historical reasons and these events cannot be applied to Klaipėda. V. Munters disagreed with it and told that Germany after attack on Klaipėda would require signatory rights in Klaipėda and nobody would resist it. He told that this maybe would not worry Latvia much but Lithuania is an ally and Latvia cares about Lithuania as much as about themselves.¹⁵⁵ Latvians attempted to warn Lithuanians about upcoming dangers in all possible ways. They believed Lithuanians did not realize the full scale of dangers. Latvians feared their Lithuanian colleagues were thinking that this crisis would be overcome as all others before. V. Munters called the envoy on 12th March after Anschluss and the conflict with Poland. Interestingly, Lithuanian envoy was not surprised that the conversation turned to the matters happening in Austria.¹⁵⁶ In this conversation V. Munters also mentioned that J. Beck told: “If Lithuania agreed with Poland, then me myself would come to Klaipėda with combat vehicles and Germans would have to understand what would it mean...”¹⁵⁷ It is clear that both countries could not reach a common language because their interests or geopolitical view was completely different.

It is now clear that Germany discussed about such sequence of actions that V. Munters warned of. German deputy director of the political department Bismarck wrote in one of memorandum: “If an open conflict should break out between Poland and Lithuania and Poland actually sent a warship to Memel, it would be desirable for the protection of our claims to the Memel Territory to have a German warship appear off Memel simultaneously”.¹⁵⁸ After the conflict had been calmed down, H. Celmiņš enquired in Berlin whether there were agreements between Poland and Germany before the Polish ultimatum.

¹⁵⁵ Conversation about the situation on the Polish-Lithuanian border 1938 03 13 // LCVA.671.1.54. p. 178.

¹⁵⁶ V.Munters discusses Polish ultimatum 1938 03 13 // LCVA.671.1.54. p. 177.

¹⁵⁷ Summary of the incident on administrative border 1938 04 05 // LCVA.383.7.2080. p. 53.

¹⁵⁸ Documents on German foreign policy 1918-1945. p.429

Nobody provided this kind of information but the idea of division of spheres was not excluded. The American ambassador told that he had heard rumours. According to him, in case Lithuanian reject the ultimatum, Poland would get the whole Lithuania and Germans would get the Polish corridor.¹⁵⁹

3.2. Silent support of Lithuania's sovereignty over Klaipėda region

Klaipėda question was not considered as specific problem. It proves not only 1934 conversations between heads of foreign policy, but also V. Munters' phrase told a year later: "Klaipėda question do not belong to specific question in the sense as it is defined in the treaty's third article because according to Lithuania, the region is subjected by Lithuanian sovereignty and the responsibility of observation of Klaipėda statue carries signatory states and the League of Nation council."¹⁶⁰ But reality did not always corresponded the facts and interests of countries. Estonia did basically nothing and did not support any of the side. Latvia behaved in this situation differently because preventing Germany from military actions was a top priority. Latvian envoy in Berlin reported that expansion of Germany is no security guarantor to Lithuania and other Baltic states.¹⁶¹

Latvians considered Germany as unpredictable partner and had no confidence in their actions. They were suspicious about the information on the situation in Klaipėda given by Germans and treated it with reservations. After German diplomat W. von Grundherr complained about violent rule of Lithuanians in Klaipėda, Latvian envoy in Berlin E. Krieviņš treated this information carefully. The initial task for him was to understand where was actually the truth told and where was W. von Grundherr telling a fiction. E. Krieviņš had an impression that the situation was prepared for seizure of Klaipėda by Germans.¹⁶² From envoy's point of view, Klaipėda became a powder-keg and everything had been already decided. It could be that E. Krieviņš had reliable sources in Berlin while at the time he wrote the report Germany had already prepared the plan. Latvia was only left to speculate what would be Germany's

¹⁵⁹ H. Celmiņš report on the current affairs in Berlin 1938 04 12 // LVVA.2575.7.2377 p. 70.

¹⁶⁰ J. Taurēns, *Baltijas virziens Latvijas Republikas ārpolitikā 1934.-1940.gadā*, 1999. p. 73.

¹⁶¹ H. Celmiņš reports about the most important current questions 1938 04 12 // LVVA.2575.7.2377. p. 71.

¹⁶² E. Krieviņš assessment of the situation in Klaipėda 1938 12 05 // LVVA.2575.7.2377. p. 176.

tactics. Latvian general consulate in Klaipėda was afraid of secret Polish-German pact in which both countries would solve their disagreements at the expense of their Eastern neighbours. It was speculated that the plan would envisage liquidation of the Polish corridor. Germany could occupy Lithuania and Latvian Courland until the river Daugava. After that Germany would give Klaipėda and Liepāja to Poland in return getting Polish corridor.¹⁶³ When there was a couple of months left until the seizure of Klaipėda, L. Sēja announced that Lithuania received alarming information from the Nazi party about their preparations of Anschluss. He also added Heimatsdienst¹⁶⁴ agitated every evening against Lithuania and lately Latvia had been mentioned too.¹⁶⁵

Latvia was also concerned about Lithuania's actions. Latvians instructed Lithuanians what should be done in Klaipėda. In the conversation with Lithuanian representatives V. Munters suggested ending the court process of Nazis as soon as possible so that the impression in Europe would be stronger. He believed European countries were on Lithuania's side but the longer the process took the more it lost urgency. Secondly, V. Munters restrained Lithuanians from any pressure on local citizens who could easily turn to Germany's side. He assumed it could also give a chance for Germany to cause alarm that the signatory states are incapable of handling Klaipėda statute. V. Munters was concerned that Lithuania makes out of Klaipėda enormous problem on the international arena but there would be no chances of getting international help. The best solution was to keep status quo of the positions that Lithuania had. If Klaipėda statute was revised in this case, the situation could exacerbate because signatory states would put on Lithuania duties or in the worst-case scenario Germany would get the rights to have saying just like other signatory states. According to V. Munters, in this case Klaipėda would become a second eternal problem just like Vilnius.¹⁶⁶

Lithuania agreed to the most of those advices but they expected more from Latvia than a few pieces of advice. The cooperation and support were only provided on diplomatic level. When the situation sharpened in 1935 Munters probably did not want to undertake any actions that

¹⁶³ J. Seskis reviews Polish corridor liquidation project 1935 06 20 // LVVA. 2575.8.64 p.731-732.

¹⁶⁴ Reich Central Office for Domestic Propaganda

¹⁶⁵ Conversation between J. Urbšys and L. Sēja 1939 01 05 // LVVA.2575.15.102 p. 151.

¹⁶⁶ V. Munters comments on the situation in Eastern Europe 1935 02 23 // LVVA.2575.8.63. p 757-758.

would signal military readiness. He told that a military aid in Klaipėda was not possible because military plans were not coordinated and it also required approval of Estonia. Demonstrative action was also excluded while Latvia did not have a common border with Germany. V. Munters suggested assembling military headquarters for consultation. He was also ready to make *démarche* to the German government but admitted it would expose weaknesses of Lithuania to which envoy V. Vileišis agreed.¹⁶⁷ There is no ground not to doubt V. Munters' honesty. It is the fact that the cooperation had not reached military fields, therefore any "hard power" actions were excluded. He kindly offered other demonstrative measures and V. Vileišis appeared to be satisfied with all that. Another Latvian diplomat that provided his help by giving advices was L. Sēja. He was not sure whether Lithuania could proof to the court in the Hague or Geneva that Germany systematically interfered in Klaipėda things. "Even though Lithuanians possess enough material to proof that, it could not succeed in judicial arguments in the court because Lithuania would not be able to argue that illegitimate directory ruled in Klaipėda for a year" – said L. Sēja.¹⁶⁸ Latvians stressed legitimate side of actions in Klaipėda while Lithuania sometimes mistakenly interpreted the statute. Latvia knew on that depended how the signatory states treated Lithuania. So far, they treated Lithuania fairly, denying Germany's interference but there was a fear to lose this privilege.

But the situation in Klaipėda was much more complicated and even Latvian diplomats could not agree on united policy. Two envoys residing in Lithuania and Estonia had relatively different point of views. L. Sēja who resided in Lithuania was certain R. Liepiņš' assessment of the situation in Klaipėda was incorrect. He denied R. Liepiņš' statements that German division relocated next to Lithuania was retaliation against regrouping Lithuanian troops. L. Sēja clearly emphasized that Germans were first to provoke it. Though he mentioned that Lithuanians were in no way perfectly dealing with the situation and he made sure to give a note on that to Lithuanians. However, the envoy in Lithuania avoided interventions as such because it would be badly perceived by Lithuanians.¹⁶⁹ Even diplomats were confused by

¹⁶⁷ Munters conversation with Lithuanian envoy V. Vileišis 1935 04 04 // LVVA. 1313.1.92. p.111-112.

¹⁶⁸ L. Sēja describes situation in Klaipėda 1935 04 24 // LVVA. 2575.8.63. p. 630.

¹⁶⁹ L. Sēja's remarks about report about Klaipėda of Liepiņš 1935 02 02 // LVVA. 2575.8.62. p. 525.

rapidly changing situation in Klaipėda. In 1934-1938 Lithuanian-German relations were as a roller-coaster. It was not always clear who would cause problems and deterioration of relationship.

Slowly Latvia sensed that Klaipėda slips out of Lithuanian hands. L. Sėja described the situation in Klaipėda as a bitter fight. To him German aim was clear – to separate Klaipėda from Lithuania. He was surprised by how Lithuanians neglected to express tougher position. Lithuanians acted as if they forgot that Germany did not possess equal rights as the signatory states. He had a feeling that Lithuania set softer terms in Klaipėda.¹⁷⁰ It seemed that Lithuanians were not able anymore to realize the seriousness of situation. They downplayed the threat of Germany. When did this breakthrough happened? In 1934-1935 Lithuanians acted firmly and they were the first country to put Nazis behind bars due to their anti-state activities. In 1934 Latvian envoy praised Lithuanians for their bravery not being frightened to face German anger. The envoy also admitted that they determinedly working on Lithuanization of this region despite being under very difficult conditions because Germans financed Klaipėda's citizens very well.¹⁷¹ Gradual emergence of German power led to appeasement policy in Klaipėda. At the end of 1938 it was only left to conclude for L. Sėja that practically everything had been prepared “for the final solution of the question”. The only unsolved enigma was when would Germany give a starting shot to the local inhabitants and they would ask for Anschluss.¹⁷² In comparison to Latvians, Lithuanians were relatively disillusioned of what was happening in Klaipėda or at least the leading politicians did not foresee possible dangers. When Lithuanian prime minister gave an interview at the beginning of 1939, he claimed that in Klaipėda prevailed order and peace therefore there was no need to be concerned whereas L. Sėja had the opposite opinion. He thought prime minister's statement was “comically optimistic”.¹⁷³ He predicted nine requirements that Germany handed over to the Lithuanian government were just the beginning of a broader action in Klaipėda.¹⁷⁴ L. Sėja was struck by the government's impotence and lack of long-term plans

¹⁷⁰ L. Sėja's report about German-Lithuanian relations 1938 10 24 // LVVA.2575.7.2381. p.183

¹⁷¹ L. Sėja's description of Klaipėda question 1934 12 20 // LVVA.2575.8.61. p. 71.

¹⁷² E. Krieviņš reports on Klaipėda question 1938 12 05// LVVA. 2574.3.3204. p. 73.

¹⁷³ L. Sėja speaks about governmental changes in Klaipėda 1939 01 13 // LVVA.2575.15.102p. 142.

¹⁷⁴ L. Sėja's report about situation in Klaipėda 1938 05 31 // LVVA.2575.7.2381. p. 115.

or ideas what to do in Klaipėda.¹⁷⁵ It was not only Latvian diplomats depicting such grim perspectives in Klaipėda. For instance, Lithuanian diplomat J. Šaulys told to Latvian envoy E. Krieviņš that it would be better to forget about Klaipėda. He regretted investing 200 mln. in Klaipėda's sea port.¹⁷⁶ Latvians were discontent with such neglect of Lithuanians and because of that one could not expect anything from Latvians who were from time to time accused of interfering in domestic affairs.

No matter how complicated situation was, Latvians sympathized with Lithuanians because their security was crucial for their security. In order to ensure their own security, the key issue was existence of the Baltic Entente. Latvian diplomats were realistic. They wanted to ensure these specific problems would not interfere in successful existence of Baltic Entente. Even though the best solution would be finding an ultimate solution of these problem, the minimum they expected from Lithuanians was keeping a status quo in Vilnius. Latvians understood sensitivity of this question to Lithuanians. They did not assume as the worst-case scenario to postpone solution of this problem. Latvians saw that the problem reached the deadlock and they feared the same would happen in Klaipėda. Those problems were interconnected in Latvian foreign policy and stability in Vilnius was depended on stability in Klaipėda. On a smaller scale, Latvia faced similar problems as Lithuania did. There were parts of Latvia that could be separated and given to other countries, there was a German minority that was not fully loyal to the Latvian state. Thus, the Baltic Entente was a natural security guarantor. Latvian press already in 1933 came forward with articles praising the Baltic Entente as the most effective way against the changing security situation in Europe after Nazis came into power.¹⁷⁷ Latvia in no way wanted to challenge Klaipėda and infuriate Nazis but through diplomatic channels attempted to strengthen Lithuanian position.

¹⁷⁵L. Sēja conversation with S. Lozoraitis about Klaipėda 1938 11 05 // LVVA.2575.7.2381. p. 198.

¹⁷⁶E. Krieviņš analysis situation in Klaipėda 1938 12 05 // LVVA.2575.7.2377. p. 177.

¹⁷⁷Feldmanis I. Stranga A. Virsis M. p. 15.

3.2.1 Disclosing German threat: Latvian General Consulate in Klaipėda

Even though Latvian diplomatic mission in Klaipėda had the status of consulate, its importance cannot be underestimated. The general consular J. Seskis was extremely experienced diplomat. At the moment he was appointed to this post, Klaipėda was not the easiest mission. Klaipėda had always attracted additional attention of diplomatic missions in Lithuania. J. Seskis himself noticed that Klaipėda was interesting to the diplomatic corps residing in Lithuania. Representatives of great powers almost every time made their first trip to Klaipėda. Due to German propaganda the district became notorious in Europe. Klaipėda was in the similar situation comparable with the one in Czechoslovakia or Austria therefore an experienced diplomat who would tackle with tasks was needed.

Lithuanians put a lot of hopes in the new chief of diplomatic mission in Klaipėda. They asked for a diplomat who could be named general consul because until 1934 only Germans had appointed general consul. Hence, he was the only who supervised the consular corps in Klaipėda. Lithuanians complained that it caused a lot of inconveniences under such tense relations between Lithuania and Germany.¹⁷⁸ When J. Seskis arrived to Klaipėda he was received with all honours. He admitted that representatives of Lithuanian government many times expressed their gratitude of having not only German political representative but also Latvian.¹⁷⁹ Very soon J. Seskis managed to live up expectations of Lithuanians. He provided diplomatic help dealing with honorary consulates. He always emphasized importance of Lithuanization. When honour consulates doubted what to do on 8th September¹⁸⁰ J. Seskis reminded that they should be trustworthy Lithuanian citizens. According to him, it was probably first time when honour consuls raised Lithuanian flags.¹⁸¹ The appointment of J. Seskis and giving the status of general consulate had an important diplomatic and political benefit to Lithuanians. It was also a clear sign of support to Lithuania.

¹⁷⁸ Request of foundation of Latvian general consulate in Klaipėda 1934 03 15 // LCVA. 383.7.1528 p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ Situation in Klaipėda district 1934 11 16 // LVVA.2575.7.1377. p.19.

¹⁸⁰ The day when Vytautas the Great coronation was planned but did not happened since the crown did not reach Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

¹⁸¹ Political life in Klaipėda district 1937 10 09 // LVVA.2575.7.218. p. 48.

J. Seskis did not only engage in public diplomacy but also collected information about German anti-state activities in Klaipėda which formed position of the official Riga. He described situation as very grim. Local people organized marches with torches which reminded him the situation in Germany. He was outraged over Germans' refusal to learn Lithuanian language. Between German and Lithuanian students constantly happened fights and more autonomic institutions did not select Klaipėda's electoral college for Lithuanian presidential election showing that these elections did not interest them.¹⁸² J. Seskis noticed that Germany prevented Klaipėda from development and economic growth although Lithuanians put a lot of money in the sea port. According to him, the local government, controlled by Germans, used different methods to cling on power. He reported that there was a great shortage of flats in Klaipėda and renting prices are as high as in big European cities but local government did not do anything about that and postponed building of new living flats so the demographic situation would not change in favour of Lithuanians.¹⁸³ Moreover the locals ripped apart Lithuanian flags, teared down monuments and there were initiative groups which agitated families to let kids to go to teach only German language. J. Seskis had no doubt that Germans are to blame but he was also not fully satisfied how Lithuanians dealt with the situation.

He had a critical view of Lithuanians managing Klaipėda. It is noticeable in his reports that the situation exacerbated in Klaipėda. At first, he praised Lithuanians who by all means were resisting poisonous German actions and despite their differences in capacities Lithuanians managed to defend their prevalence successfully. 1934 December Seskis informed Riga that Lithuania was trying to break the domination of local Germans in Klaipėda which was very well financed by their compatriots in Germany. However, after a couple of years in service, he noticed Lithuania ceased to act strictly. 1938 July J. Seskis writes that court verdicts were shortened for Hitler supporters and thus Lithuanians lost authority among local Germans.¹⁸⁴ It should be reminded that before Lithuania had fiercely brought Nazis to justice. The most known case of that was Sass and Neumann court, also known as the first Nazi court process

¹⁸² Political situation in Klaipėda district 1938 11 15 // LVVA.2574.3.2197 p. 6.

¹⁸³ Klaipėda's national policy 1936 12 21 // LVVA.2575.8.69. p.9.

¹⁸⁴ Political life in Klaipėda district 1938 05 19 // LVVA. 2574.3.2197. p.49

in the world which took place in 1934-1935. There were also other Latvian officials who would express their surprise of Lithuania's inactive role. Latvian envoy A. Bilmanis wondered how Lithuania did not cope with this problem so long. He told: "We made Riga Latvian so you can also make Klaipėda Lithuanian".¹⁸⁵ However, Lithuanians justified such situation with very strict convention that did not allow to tackle with the situation.

Despite of situation being complicated and almost unchangeable, J. Seskis had a very clear vision what should be done against German propaganda. Due to his consular duties he could not express his thoughts but laid out his own opinions in reports. In general, he was critical to the policy that Lithuanians conducted in Klaipėda. He demanded revision of Klaipėda policy which was based until now only on condemnation of Hitler's speeches. He stated that Lithuanization of Klaipėda had been delayed for a decade. Schools are taken over by Hitler support the whole district became a bastion of Hitlerism and so J.Seskis required a better national policy. According to him, considerable changes had to be done at schools which became Germans and cannot raise Lithuanian spirit.¹⁸⁶ It was also essential to connect physically Kaunas to Klaipėda which meant building a railroad connection. J.Seskis wished that reconciliation with Poland would be prioritized. He blamed partially Lithuania fighting for Vilnius but morally and practically leaving Klaipėda for Germany.¹⁸⁷ He was disappointed with Lithuanians who caused instability and political indecisiveness. He considered being a mistake suspending the martial law in Klaipėda. There was a threat that it would encourage Hitler's supports "to stop only in Narva".¹⁸⁸

Maybe J. Seskis might not have been such critical to Lithuanians and their policy in Klaipėda if he had not thought that something similar could not happen in Latvia. But he was convinced that events in Klaipėda could also influence Latvia. He realized that Klaipėda district is considered by Germans as a "bridge" to Eastern Europe and Baltic states. They could not put up with the fact that this "bridge" would be demolished.¹⁸⁹ J. Seskis was aware that after

¹⁸⁵ First meeting of Baltic envoys in Washington 1935 11 09 // LCVA.383.7.1861. p. 245.

¹⁸⁶ Political life in Klaipėda district 1936 01 12 // LVVA.2575.7.1902. p. 105.

¹⁸⁷ Local parliament election under German terror threats 1935 10 27 // LVVA.2575.15.85. p12.

¹⁸⁸ Ē. Jēkabsons, Klaipėda Europos dēmesio centre: 1939 metai. Žvilgsnis iš Latvijas, Klaipėda, 2013. p.174.

¹⁸⁹ Lithuanian-German relation 1934 12 06 // LVVA.2575.7.1377. p. 11

Klaipėda the next would be Latvia.¹⁹⁰ He equated situation in Klaipėda with the events in Sudetenland. By his estimations, if the conflict in Klaipėda splashed, it could have long lasting consequences to all Baltic states. J. Seskis faced with the situation when Latvian teachers came to Klaipėda and Lithuanian teachers received them nicely but German families did not want to take up Latvian teachers because “the Latvian government oppressed their brothers in Latvia”.¹⁹¹ 1938 December he predicted that Lithuania would become German vassal state and Klaipėda district with all its treaties would become the Trojan horse what would make Lithuania subjected to German influence. Moreover, he did not expect any world power to interfere and stand on Lithuania’s side. In his opinion, big countries did not pay any attention at factual economic cultural and political conditions. They did not want to understand that local Germans’ aim was to keep German cultural and political status quo. So, in the case of German take over Lithuanians and (because of fear to be invaded too) Latvians had to stand alone. Maybe because of this reason general J. Balodis was ready to station Latvian troops next to Lithuanian border when Germany threatened Lithuania.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ What happened with Klaipėda district 1938 12 15 // LVVA.2574.3.3204 p. 44.

¹⁹¹ Political life in Klaipėda district 1938 05 19 // LVVA2575.7.2381. p.108.

¹⁹² Z. Butkus, M. Ilmjārv. Latvijos ir Estijos požiūris į Klaipėdos atplėšimą nuo Lietuvos 1939 metais p. 19.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has dealt with the impact of territorial questions on Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian bilateral and multilateral relations. It was found that neither Latvia nor Estonia had known what was considered as specific problem before the discussions started. Vilnius question was the only specific problem envisioned in the treaty of the Baltic Entente. Klaipėda was not defined as specific problem. This reflected to behaviour of Latvia and Estonia although they handled with these problems depending on their own interests. Latvians provided help mostly through diplomatic channels whereas Estonians were much restrained despite the fact that in 1934 they seriously considered to support Lithuania's case in Klaipėda. However, Klaipėda issue slowly turned into a specific problem. Lithuanians could not cope with German pressure. Latvians together with Estonians blamed partially Lithuania for making concessions to local Germans and concentrating on Vilnius.

The main aim of Latvia's foreign policy was a strong Baltic union. They advocated for solving specific problem. However, Latvians did not see it as an issue preventing from strengthening the Baltic Entente. Estonians were more categorical. They believed as long as specific problems existed the union cannot be real and lively. Specific problems raised mistrust to partners. J. Laidoner believed that drawing with closer to Lithuania could make Estonia defenceless against Soviet Union. Specific problems were the main reason why deeper integration did not happen but it is not clear at what extent it had an impact on choosing neutral policy and abandoning the Baltic cooperation.

Estonia as well as Latvia were critical regarding Lithuania's activities in Klaipėda. They were disappointed that Lithuania was incapable to deal effectively with the situation. But there were signs that Estonia and Latvia would have perceived the loss of Klaipėda as a threat to all Baltic states. Especially Latvia believed its own territorial integrity at some extent depended on the situation in Klaipėda. Estonian foreign policy shifted more to the idea that Lithuania's disagreements with Germany put in danger Estonia. K. Selter attempts to mediate between Germany and Lithuania did not seem impartial but rather gave an impression that

Lithuania had to hand over Klaipėda to Germany. On the other hand, Estonian diplomats might have realized the inevitability of Klaipėda loss.

Both countries kept neutral stance and called for reconciliation over Vilnius region. They left this question to Lithuania and Poland to settle. Despite diplomatic scandals, Estonia did not undermine Lithuania's position. Similarly, the problem was treated by Latvia. However, they showed much more interest in reconciliation. Since 1934 V. Munters attempted to mediate in the conflict. Latvia took critical position of both sides. They did not succumb to Polish influence in order to push Lithuania to reconciliation. On the other hand, they harshly criticized their allies who made Vilnius problem a part of its domestic politics. Latvians were extremely interested in reconciliation because they believed Germany could use this conflict in order to invade not only Klaipėda but also Latvia.

Latvians similarly like Lithuanians perceived "Drang nach Osten" policy as direct threat to them therefore the idea that Germany had an influence on Latvia was out of question. At first, Estonians stuck to a similar perception of Germany being a threat but later on there was noticeable growth of German-friendly powers in Estonian politics. However, no direct proofs were found to claim that Germany managed to influence Lithuanians through Estonia. Estonian partners were also suspicious about Estonia's commitments to Poland. There were many sympathies for Poland especially in the military circles. Estonia's behaviour sometimes gave a ground to believe that they consulted with the official Warsaw about Vilnius question. In reality, Estonians attempted to calm down and ensure Poles that good relations between Baltic states would be also positive for Poland.

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