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## **The Change in Attitude of the Lithuanian Political Elite towards Poland in 1934–1939**

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kazys Škirpa; Jurgis Šaulys; Stasys Raštikis; Stasys Lozoraitis; stosunki polsko-litewskie; polityka zagraniczna Litwy w okresie międzywojennym; historia dyplomacji.

**Keywords:** Kazys Škirpa; Jurgis Šaulys; Stasys Raštikis; Stasys Lozoraitis; Lithuanian-Polish relationship; Lithuania's Foreign Policy during the Interwar period; History of Diplomacy.

### **Introduction**

Lithuania and Poland are the neighbouring countries which have been historically very closely related from ancient times. Considering the hundreds of years of history, one could feel happy that most frequently the two countries were in close friendship. The Grunwald Battle in 1410, which finished the existential struggle with the most developed military force at that time, the Teutonic Order, for the benefit of Lithuania and Poland, was the most significant example of collaboration between the two countries, but there have been more of them. For instance, not everybody knows that the Lithuanian and Polish armies repelled the forces of the Crimean Khan at at Lopushna in 1512, not even to mention one of the greatest battles in

the modern European history in 1621 when the joint military forces of the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth won against the powerful army of the Osman Empire at Chotin. When Russia became more powerful at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and divided the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth with its Western neighbours, Lithuanians and Poles struggled together against it many times. The heroic struggle of Tadas Kosciuska and two hopeless but at the same time relentless uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated a strong will of both nations and emphasized the fact that there were more similarities rather than differences between Lithuania and Poland.

Still, the new era of national revival promoted the search for differences and individuality in all Europe. This helped forming modern Lithuanian and Polish nationality and also caused conflicts about the common past and, of course, the future. Vilnius city remained one of the most problematic issues: for Lithuanians, it is undoubtedly the historical capital and for Polish it is the city with many Polish residents, which implied that it was a part of national future Poland. The idea of reestablishing the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth had some supporters in Poland, but was not popular in Lithuania with only a small number of supporters-intellectuals. One of these people was Mykolas Riomeris, a Lithuanian Pole, who sincerely wished all the best for Lithuania and also saw the Lithuanian-Polish relationship together. Still, no one could stop the unresolved conflict, which was referred to as a struggle between Don Quixote and Prometheus<sup>1</sup> by historian Algimantas Kasparavičius, even mediation by the Entente states, which won the war. This was demonstrated by failed Paul Hymans negotiations and constant futile disputes in the League of Nations. The situation when Poland was depicted as a clumsy and neglectful hooligan in Lithuania, abusing the help of more powerful states, settled for some time, while Lithuania was viewed by the Polish as a small and insolent villain, who kept throwing stones and then quickly hid behind the backs of Germany and the SSRS dissatisfied by the Versailles agreements. The armies of both countries constantly discussed the plans of a possible war, and there were disagreements not only because of Vilnius, but also because of Klaipėda and its dependence; in addition, the political leaders frequently manipulated with the fear of the enemy in order to reach their internal policy aims.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Kasparavičius, *Don Kichotas prieš Prometėją (tarpukario lietuvių – lenkų iracionalioji diplomatija)*, „Darbai ir dienom“, t. 30, Kaunas 2002, p. 50.

In the case of Lithuania, the grievance about Vilnius was so strong that it unified Lithuanians more than a prayer or an anthem<sup>2</sup>.

The situation started to change slightly only in 1933, when the National Socialists headed by Adolf Hitler came into power in Germany. It became apparent that the Versailles system would experience considerable challenges in the nearest future. Germany did not want to incite other states against it; therefore, it signed a non-aggression pact with Poland in 1934. On the other hand, Lithuania, being a small country, became one of the first victims of the new and aggressive regime. This was unsurprising: it was the easiest to offend Lithuania, a small country, by constantly talking about the violation of German rights in Klaipėda and encouraging the feelings of revenge in society, which led to WWII. Therefore, the direction of the Lithuanian foreign policy started changing. During 1934–1935, Lithuania was the first country which organized the prelude of the Nuremberg trials: it tried the National Socialists of Klaipėda Region who had organized an anti-national conspiracy. Only because of the Western countries, which were trying to maintain their *status quo*, President Antanas Smetona modified the sentence and suspended the death penalty to the conspiracy organizers. The reaction of the Third Reich was adverse: an economic blockade for Lithuania started, army troops gathered in East Prussia, and the planes of the newly recreated German army, Wehrmacht, crossed the Lithuanian border. Therefore, unsurprisingly, all political elite, i.e. not only A. Smetona, but also his new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stasys Lozoraitis, and Commander-in-Chief Stasys Raštikis started thinking about possible easing of relations with Poland.

For Poland, the conflict with small Lithuania was useless because the issue of Vilnius caused the hostility of Lithuanians, which could be manipulated by both Berlin and Moscow. Both these capitals attempted to regain the glory lost at the end of WWI and hoped for instability in Central Eastern Europe region. This meant that 1934 was the year when the conditions were favourable to look for at least a minimal compromise. The circumstances reached a climax in 1938, but this was not the way the idealists of both sides had expected. Nevertheless, the relations between the two

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<sup>2</sup> Illustrative example to this fact – during the time of Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania, even prohibited underground Party of Communists in Lithuania for a while recommended to its members to abstain from anti-government policy, at least till the time it will be clear there are no Poland's occupation danger anymore. More on this – G. Janauskas, *Jėga nėra teisė (1938 m. Lenkijos ultimatus ir Lietuvos visuomenė)*, „Darbai ir dienom“, t. 30, Kaunas 2002, p. 115.

countries were slowly improving; however, they were terminated by the severe catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had devastating consequences for Lithuania and Poland, WWII.

Consequently, the aim of the present research is to discuss the period of 1934–1939, when the relations between Lithuania and Poland were improving. It is also the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries. Currently, the situation has changed and none of the countries has territorial pretensions. In addition to that, both countries respect each other's modern statehood, and Lithuanian society views Poland as a strategic partner. It is important to remember how cooperation started during much more unfavourable time: what obstacles were met and what personalities contributed to improving relations. Despite the fact that historiography on this event is abundant, it is interesting to analyse its aspects not only from colleagues' works<sup>3</sup>, but also from archive sources which have been researched mostly in Lithuania – Central State Archive and Department of Manuscript's in National Martynas Mažvydas Library, but some documents from Archives of Modern Records in Poland was used as well. In this work there is an aim to reflect the turn of Lithuanian policy towards the Polish factor as a counterbalance for the increasing power of Germany, which aimed at its small Eastern neighbour, Lithuania. Later, the German aggression and the Soviet insidiousness turned into a death trap to the sovereignty of both states. Still, both countries survived this dramatic period and are celebrating the centenaries of their modern statehood. Taking into consideration that contacts were established 80 years ago in the adverse atmosphere, what obstacles should appear in developing close relations now, when they are extremely necessary for both Lithuania and Poland?

### **1934: a New Course of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy**

Even though the conflict with Germany occurred in Lithuania before A. Hitler's coming to power, in January 1933 mass student demonstrations

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<sup>3</sup> Detail list of used publications is in "Bibliography". Most important works, used in this article is from Lithuania's historians Algimantas Kasparavičius, Vytautas Žalys, Česlovas Laurinavičius, Saulius Sužiedėlis, Giedrius Janauskas, Egidijus Aleksandravičius, Asta Petraitytė–Briedienė, Jonas Vaičėnionis, Aldona Gaigalaitė, Liudas Truska. Some of them wrote not one article or study regarding Lithuanian – Polish relations.

from the University of Berlin were organized, where students participated dressed in Nazi uniforms, and the Rector also appeared. The participants chanted “No Germany without Memel”<sup>4</sup>. (Memel is name of Klaipėda in German language – S.J.). The more the Nazi regime dominated in Germany, the more anxiety there was in Lithuania. This preconditioned a different view towards the painful question, a conflict with Poland over Vilnius. Therefore, A. Smetona chose S. Lozoraitis as a foreign policy representative; another reason was the perception that the attempts to regain Vilnius by any means could lead to the loss of all Lithuania due to the increasing threat from Germany. Thus, the President needed a politician who did not have a negative attitude towards Poland<sup>5</sup>. The new Commander-in-Chief Stasys Raštikis soon joined him. He became the Commander-in-Chief after an unsuccessful putsch against the President, which was organised by a pro-German wing of the army, trying to gain stronger central government. V. Žalys refers to the foreign policy of these two young, yet very important men as a tandem<sup>6</sup>. There were some diplomats and politicians who were suspicious about the attempts to mitigate the relations with Poland, for instance, military attaché in Germany Kazys Škirpa, the General Staff Colonel and the first volunteer of the Lithuanian Army. In his report, he considered that the reduction of tension between Germany and Poland may be beneficial for Lithuania as the conflict between these countries would have involved it as well<sup>7</sup>. This report is distinctive from the context in its optimism<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> 1933.01.16 Pro Memoria from Lithuania's Legation in Germany. Unknown author. Lietuvos centriniis valstybės archyvas ((Lithuania's Central State Archive) Further – LCVA), f. 671, ap.1, b.7, l.10.

<sup>5</sup> A. Petraitytė-Briedienė, *Lietuvos diplomatinės tarnybos šefas Stasys Lozoraitis (1940–1983)*, Vilnius 2012, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> V. Žalys, *Lietuvos diplomatinės tarnybos ir kariuomenės vadovybės sąvoka įtvirtinant Lietuvos valstybingumą 1923–1938 metais*, [in:] *Lietuvos Nepriklausomybei – 80*, Vilnius 1999, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> A. Gaigalaitė, *Stasio Lozoraičio politinė veikla dėl Lietuvos nedalomumo, taikos ir saugumo (1934 06 12–1938 12 05)*, [in:] *Lietuvos užsienio reikalų ministrai 1918–1940*, Kaunas 1999, p. 298.

<sup>8</sup> More about K. Škirpa's personality, his ideas and diplomatic works in other articles, of the same author's – S. Jazavita, *The Position of Lithuania in the Japanese-German Relationship: Cooperation between Kazys Škirpa and Hiroshi Oshima in 1935–1939*, „Darbai ir dienos” 2017, Nr 67, p. 191–213; S. Jazavita, *Illusion and Reality of Statehood: the Search for Parallels between the Lithuanian Activist Front and the Organisation of Ukrainian National-*

Nevertheless, at the same time K. Škirpa sent his considerations about the army reorganization and the Lithuanian foreign policy to Minister Stasys Lozoraitis and the Commander-in-Chief Stasys Raštikis. In fact, this was a suggestion to continue his policy developed until 1926 when he had served as the Military General Staff when the left government was in power. In his document, K. Škirpa discussed the defence from the two enemies of Lithuania's independence: Germany, which, in his opinion, wanted to obtain Klaipėda Region and push eastwards, and Poland, which would be willing to revive the union and dominate culturally in the federal state<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, K. Škirpa developed the idea that regaining Vilnius with a large part of Lithuanian society was the most important aim of foreign policy and could happen only with the help of the stronger neighbour. He vividly claimed the following:

Provoking an isolated-separate Lithuania's conflict with Poland, which is more than ten times stronger than us, would be such an adventure that the future generations and history could never forgive us.<sup>10</sup>

As Lithuania had significant problems with both Poland and Germany at that time, naturally, it was believed that the only neighbour which could help was the USSR. It did not have a common border with Lithuania, and Lithuanian society constantly discussed that the agreement of July 12, 1920 with the Soviets ensured the real territory of Lithuania, while its one third had been occupied by Poland. Therefore, unsurprisingly, S. Lozoraitis, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, first went to Moscow in 1934. In 1935, the tension from Germany reached climax, and *military attaché* Kazys Škirpa snapped during the meeting with Major Horst Rössing, the representative of the German General Staff, that "To Lithuania, Germany seems to be

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ists, „Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка. Історія” 2017/1 (132), с. 72–82; S. Jazavita, *Diplomatic Activities of Kazys Škirpa, the First Lithuanian Envoy to Poland, in March–December, 1938*, „Europa Orientalis. Studia z Dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich” nr 6 (2015), s. 91–117; S. Jazavita, *Pirmosios sovietinės okupacijos dienos K.Škirpos akimis: slapta Lietuvos diplomato vizitas į Kauną*, „Kauno istorijos metraštis”, t. 16, p. 71–84.

<sup>9</sup> J. Vaičenonis, *Dokumentai pasakoja. Lietuvos kariuomenės vyriausiojo štabo viršininko plk. K.Škirpos Lietuvos kariuomenės vystymo planas*, „Karo archyvas” 2006, t. 21, p. 337.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 341.

a greater enemy than Poland”<sup>11</sup>. This was not surprising as Lithuania was the first state which tried Nazis, who were getting more active in Klaipėda Region. Due to this, German society was agitated about Lithuania<sup>12</sup>. For instance, immediately after the trial of the Hitlerites in Klaipėda, the youth dressed in stormtrooper uniforms kept marching by the legation shouting various insults. Lithuanian envoy to Berlin, Jurgis Šaulys, received both anonymous letters threatening death and expressing admiration that such a small country had courage to oppose Hitler<sup>13</sup>. Obviously, under such circumstances, J. Šaulys’s resolution to turn to Poland was increasing. According to him, relying not only on the USSR but also on Poland, Lithuania would gain more political power against German intentions<sup>14</sup>. It is important to present this person, who became one of the most significant supporters of the Polish-Lithuanian rapprochement, in greater detail. J. Šaulys was one of the most active signatories of the February 16 Act, who encouraged to get closer to the democratic layers of Germany and to “bring back” Lithuania to Europe. He became the first Lithuanian envoy to Warsaw in 1919, during the period when the relations between the two young countries were becoming complicated but still were not hopeless. Before the war, J. Šaulys had participated in the activities of Vilnius Masonic Lodge, where the questions of reestablishing the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth had been discussed in addition to other issues, when the Russian Empire would collapse. The leader of the lodge was above-mentioned M. Riomeris; among other active people, there were future signatories of the Independence Act: Jonas Vileišis, Steponas Kairys, Donatas Malinauskas, Mykolas Biržiška, and many other intellectuals. During the war, J. Šaulys was the leader of the lodge “Lietuvos Didieji Rytai” (“Lithuanian Great East”)<sup>15</sup>; however, it did not manage to reach the aim to reestablish the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which, of course, would have been in close cooperation with Poland. Even though the contacts established in

<sup>11</sup> 1935.01.16, Pro Memoria from Lithuania’s Military Attache in Germany K. Škirpa. About Discussion with Mayor Rössing, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.36, l.1–3.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gaigalaitė, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> 1935.03.30, Lithuania’s Envoy in Germany J. Šaulys Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.36, l.71–72.

<sup>14</sup> 1935.04.05, Lithuania’s Envoy in Germany J. Šaulys Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.36, l.83–85.

<sup>15</sup> J. Kastanauskaitė, *Lietuvos inteligentija masonų ir paramasoniškose organizacijose (1918–1940)*, Vilnius 2006, p. 17.

1919 were broken off by the incited conflict, they still remained to a certain extent. The signatory of the Independence Act was married to Kazimiera Celinska, a sister of a Polish officer. Even after her death, he managed to maintain contact with his brother-in-law, and using the contacts, unofficially met with Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the Polish Military Chief. J. Šaulys always felt close to Poland, even during the period when this was not popular among the Lithuanian state leaders. These attitudes were strengthened when A. Hitler and the National Socialists came into power in Germany, which terrified J. Šaulys and caused to look for help.

This was one of the first “swallows” in Lithuania’s turn towards Poland. But it was not the only one. In the same year, two influential people associated with Christian Democrats also encouraged to orientate to Poland more actively; they may have foreseen that Nazi Germany caused a significant threat. These people were Vytautas Magnus University Professor Kazys Pakštas, the leader of Ateitininkai Federation, who had a leading authority in Lithuanian society, and Leonas Bistras, the leader of the oppositional Christian Democrats Party. The latter received much criticism for these ideas<sup>16</sup>. The time was really too early.

### Could Warsaw Be a Better Alternative than Moscow?

Concerning the question of Vilnius, Lithuania sought help in many European states. It aimed at attracting influential politicians. In some cases, these attempts were successful; for instance, in 1933, an influential member of Swedish Riksdag, a former Burgomaster of Stockholm, and an old friend of Lithuania, Karl Lindhagen, recognised Vilnius for Lithuania<sup>17</sup>. It should be mentioned that the Swede strived for this idea taking into consideration the growing power of Germany and aiming at a closer cooperation between the Scandinavian and the Baltic countries, where Poland could also have some space. When the Swedish politician visited Lithuania in 1934, its semi-official newspaper referred to Lindhagen as “the great Swedish guest”<sup>18</sup>. The

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<sup>16</sup> S. Sužiedėlis, *Vilniaus klausimas ir lietuvių – lenkų konfliktas ketvirtio dešimtmečio krizės ir Antrojo pasaulinio karo kontekste*, [in:] *Lietuva ir Lenkija XX a. geopolitinėje vaizduotėje*, Kaunas 2012, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> R. Motuzas, *Lietuvos diplomatinis atstovavimas Švedijoje*, Vilnius 2011, p. 323.

<sup>18</sup> Didis Švedų svetys – C. Lindhagenas išvažiavo, „Lietuvos aidas“, 31.07.1934, p. 6.



visit of this great guest coincided with Minister Lozoraitis's trip to Moscow; therefore, the Lithuanian press was replete with positive words about the attempts of Moscow to "preserve peace" in Europe. In addition, much attention was paid to the visit of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Colonel Józef Beck to Moscow and the relations between Poland and Latvia, which had a common border at that time. Among other publications, this was discussed by the military magazine "Karys"<sup>19</sup>. The same issue provided more criticism towards the German pressure in Klaipėda Region and discussed its other aspirations to expand influence in Europe. Thus, during this year, the press included some changes in the usual policy. In 1934, not only Minister S. Lozoraitis, but also a large group of Lithuanian journalists visited Moscow; the group of journalists was versatile, representing various political views. There was even Jonas Kalnėnas, the editor of *Trimitas*, the magazine of the paramilitary organization the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union. In the photos provided, Edvardas Turauskas, acting as the director of the News Agency ELTA, was probably the most noticeable person, who later managed to become one of the most influential Lithuanian diplomats. Next year, the intellectuals from the organization "The Lithuanian Union for the Cultural Knowledge of the USSR Nations" visited the USSR, and the group included such famous people as the most famous writers Vincas Krėvė, Balys Sruoga, or the above-mentioned Mykolas Biržiška, who acted as the head of the "Union for the Liberation of Vilnius" in 1925–1935. However, these people could not foresee the threat of the Soviets. The Lithuanian envoy to Moscow poet Jurgis Baltrušaitis complained to the USA ambassador in Moscow William Bullitt that the German forces in East Prussia were larger than the Lithuanian military forces 5–6 times, but it was hardly possible to expect hope from the USSR as Poland and Latvia would not be willing to let the Red Army pass their territory. J. Baltrušaitis was considering that the USSR forces could possibly come by sea<sup>20</sup>. Still, it should be taken into consideration that in Reichstag A. Hitler was ardently cursing Lithuania, German planes constantly crossed the border, and the military forces were accumulated near the border<sup>21</sup>. However, the Soviets were cunning in their foreign policy: it was important for them to manipu-

<sup>19</sup> *Politikos apžvalgas*, „Karys” 1934, Nr. 8, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> 1935.06.19, USA Ambassador in USSR W. C. Bullitt Report to Secretary of State C. Hull, LCVA, f.R-952, ap.1, b.66, l.23–27.

<sup>21</sup> A. Gaigalaitė, op. cit., p. 306–307.

late the dreams of Lithuanians to receive help under necessity, but they did not want to provide any clearer guarantees.

### **The Changes in the Attitudes towards Poland: why did the Compromise Attitude Become more Popular?**

During this period, the attitude towards Poland was becoming more favourable, at least in internal communication among diplomats. V. Žalys has made the following valuable conclusion:

Gradually, the opinion that despite the problem of occupied Vilnius it is necessary to find some *modus vivendi* with Poland was becoming more dominant. Therefore, in the 1930s, “the Polish factor” was not treated as a threat to the Lithuanian independence. Polish cultural expansion was also not viewed as threatening<sup>22</sup>.

In other words, for a long time the mistrust in Poland was related to a fear. However, Lithuania progressed in all spheres during the interwar period, and this provided some benefit in the mid-1930s: more confidence developed and, consequently, there was more courage to formulate ideas in foreign policy. The proof of this was the military domain. The year 1934 may be considered to be the breaking point because a large part of the Lithuanian military forces was transferred from the border with Vilnius Region to Nemunas, near the border with Germany<sup>23</sup>.

An important role during this period was played by the young Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. Lozoraitis. Even though his opponents were trying to stick him the “Polonophile’s” label during his later rich political life and would even disdainfully transcribe his surname in Polish, *Lazerowsky*<sup>24</sup>, his attitudes were sufficiently pragmatic. He was sure that Lithuania would not regain Vilnius by force, while Germany and the USSR were not friendly countries, which would be willing to help selflessly. Also, Germany caused huge tension to Lithuania, and S. Lozoraitis himself was

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<sup>22</sup> V. Žalys, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> E. Aleksandravičius, *Politinių veiksmų realijos ir marginalijos. Lenkų klausimas lietuvių išeivijoje*, „Darbai ir dienos“ 2002, Nr. 30, p. 160.

critical towards Nazism. Therefore, he sincerely believed that the relations between Lithuania and Poland could be different, and both countries would benefit from this. His insight was also demonstrated by the fact that he was a very rare person in contemporary Lithuania who perceived that Germany and the USSR were not interested in resolving the question of Vilnius: it was more important for them to keep this question open and to manipulate it constantly<sup>25</sup>.

### **The Relations between Lithuania and Poland after the Death of Marshal J. Pilsudski**

One of the reasons why the year 1935 was important was that the long-time Polish leader and one of the independence fathers, J. Pilsudski, passed away. Of course, this attracted much attention in Lithuania. The semi-official newspaper "Lietuvos aidas", the newspaper of Christian Democrats *Rytas*, and the newspaper of the Lithuanian Peasant People's Union "Lietuvos žinios" published information on the main pages about the funeral, attempted to create the picture on what the largest European capitals were talking about the situation, and were also trying to guess the destiny of Poland and, of course, Lithuania. On May 13, the main message in the editorial of "Lietuvos aidas" was the following: "Marshal J. Pilsudski Passed away," and the title was written in capital letters. Next to it, there was an addition: "Rydz-Smigly was appointed as the General Inspector of the army, and Gen. Kaspžyckis was appointed as the Military Minister. Berlin is nervous." Of course, the most interesting thing is that the message about "nervous Berlin" appeared, and it also included a respectful quotation about the Marshal from the organ of the Nazi party "Voelkicher Beobachter"<sup>26</sup>. The Lithuanian authorities were afraid of Germany and Poland getting closer because it had a conflict with both large neighbours. As the USSR did not promise anything specific, there was hope that the relations with Germany and Poland would worsen and the Damocles' sword would retreat from Lithuania. These ideas were supported by paraphrased insights from the British media that the death of the Marshal would cause a signif-

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<sup>25</sup> V. Žalys, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Mirė maršalas J. Pilsudskis*, „Lietuvos aidas“, 05.13.1935, p. 1.

icant crisis in Poland as the government was operating only because of his authority. The insights from the Polish press were mentioned only the next day; in addition, the narrative claimed that the Polish would have difficulty in replacing J. Pilsudski<sup>27</sup>. On the same day, “Lietuvos aidas” published an unsigned article titled “The Path of Life of Juozas Pilsudskis.” Despite the fact that positive articles about Poland were not numerous, this was exceptional, describing the contribution of the Marshal the following:

The Polish are right in saying that Pilsudskis will represent a distinct period in Polish history. His merits to Poland are really considerable. He was working for Poland all his life, even though he was totally separated and closed from the Polish. However, this attracted the Polish to him even more, which is demonstrated by the overwhelming impression caused by his death in all Polish society layers.<sup>28</sup>

This might have been a rule typical of a Christian country, i.e. not to say anything negative about the person who passed away. However, the Lithuanian form of his name, Juozas, also shows certain national sentiments. In general, more positive references were used in the newspaper “Rytas” of Christian Democrats. The article printed in this newspaper referred to J. Pilsudski as a “real Samogitian”, and his life was described in a way similar to an adventure film; also, his heroism was emphasised. The description stopped with 1918. As for the later period, it was claimed that “further activities of Marshal Pilsudski are well-known to everyone”<sup>29</sup>; therefore, the author did not want to remind the reader about his relations with Lithuania, which would have deteriorated the respectful tone of the article.

Nevertheless, this was an exception from the general rule. The newspaper “Lietuvos žinios” of the Lithuanian Peasant People’s Union was more critical. It published a series of articles “Marshal Juozas Pilsudskis. From the Red Flag to the Marshal’s Dictatorship”. It described all life of J. Pilsudski and the change in opinion from socialist ideas to a strict leader, who did not care about the values of social justice, but aimed at rees-

<sup>27</sup> *Pilsudskio darbą tegali pakelti tik milijonai – sako lenkų spauda*, „Lietuvos aidas“, 05.14.1935, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Maršalo Juozo Pilsudskio gyvenimo kelias*, „Lietuvos aidas“, 05.14.1935, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Juozas Pilsudskis. Jo kilmė ir jaunystė*, „Ryta“, 05.15.1935, p. 5.

tablishing Poland with the borders of 1772<sup>30</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the policy of viewing Poland as the main enemy was still dominant in the public life of Lithuania. On October 9, 1935, Lithuania commemorated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Suwalki Agreement and the loss of Vilnius. For this occasion, poet Petras Vaičiūnas created a performance in the State Theatre titled “The Broken Oath.” The performance was reviewed by the military magazine “Kardas”. The review highlighted the metaphor of a Lithuanian girl, and two colonels, Polish Bandurskis and Lithuanian Budrys, who fell in love with her. Because of the love to Marilė, Bandurskis promised never to raise a sword against Lithuania, but, of course, did not keep to his promise and came to “liberate” her. Of course, there is even no doubt which hero was chosen by Marilė. Finally, Bandurskis, who was rejected, left her and being unable to deal with the pain because of the loss and moral decline, which led to the betrayal, shot himself to death. According to “Kardas” author col.ltn. Romanas Bukevičius, this was *the moral suicide of Poland, which had broken the oath*<sup>31</sup>. Besides, the reviewer was also indignant that Budrys was shown as a weak personality because he defeated the enemy and let him go, while Bandurskis was shown as modest, noble, and knightly, which contrasted with his horrible action, which symbolized breaching the Suwalki Agreement. This drama may sound strange for a reader in 2018; however, it should be noted that all most important officers and the Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian Army, S. Raštikis, appeared in the premiere, which means that such ideas seemed attractive to most Lithuanians. This example is only one among many others. October 9 commonly reminded of a national mourning day. On that day, at midday, everyone would stop working, traffic would also stop, and everyone would stand and consider about the lost capital<sup>32</sup>. Naturally, the government’s attempts to change policy were complicated because society had already got used to the idea that the loss of Vilnius and the aspiration to regain it had been the factor which united the nation the most. Diplomats could make agreements quickly and develop a different policy, but changes in people’s mentality take the longest; thus, naturally, fast changes were accepted unwillingly.

<sup>30</sup> *Maršalas Juozas Pilsudskis. Nuo raudonosios vėliavos iki maršalo diktatūros*, „Lietuvos indos“, 05.17.1935, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> R. Bukevičius, *Sulaužytoji priesaika*, „Kardas“ 1935, Nr. 21, p. 468.

<sup>32</sup> L. Truska, *Ilgas kelias į Vilnių*, „Kultūros barai“ 2010, Nr. 4, p. 73.

## Attempts for a Breakthrough and the Signs of Traditional Hostility

Certain changes in the situation may be noted in the attempts to integrate Lithuania into the Baltic States more thoroughly. Despite the consideration that there were four Baltic States during the interwar period, they were connected very little. Finland, having tight relations with Sweden, was naturally linked more to the Scandinavian countries, while there was closer communication between Estonia and Latvia. It was complicated for them to cooperate with Lithuania as they considered the USSR as a threat and did not have conflicts with Germany and Poland. Therefore, the questions of Vilnius and Klaipėda placed the countries at a different level. The Lithuanian press often criticised Latvia and Estonia, especially when they cooperated with Poland more closely. The Baltic Entente, which was established in 1934 with the contribution of Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, changed the situation. A friendly attitude of Latvia and Estonia towards Poland could help to search for compromises in the Lithuanian cultural and political elite. An exceptional person here was the Rector of Vytautas Magnus University Mykolas Riomeris, who was well-known to the Polish political elite. When giving a talk in the Lithuanian-Latvian-Estonian cooperation congress in Ryga, he even produced an idea about the federalization of the Baltic seaside states. These three countries had to be in a closer contact with Poland. It should be noted that M. Riomeris criticised the model chosen by Poland to prove its domination by imperial methods and discussed about the federation of equal states. Even though it was an utopia, one can claim that M. Riomeris was really insightful. He perceived very well that historically both Lithuania and Poland are doomed when the geopolitical factors of Germany and Russia start cooperating<sup>33</sup>.

A certain breakthrough had to be reached when a Lithuanian press representative in Poland was appointed based on the suggestion of Polish diplomat Tadeusz Katelbach. In the absence of diplomatic relations, this could be a sufficiently effective way to find out more about the neighbouring country. A deeper analysis of the Lithuanian press has shown that Lithuanian readers were always interested in Poland due to the fact that infor-

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<sup>33</sup> M. Riomeris, *Baltijos politinės problemos*, „Kultūra” 1935, Nr. 8, p. 442.

mation about it was abundant. Young journalist Valentinas Gustainis, who was really liked by the Lithuanian elite, was appointed as the representative. In 1937, he published a book titled *Lenkija ir lenkai (Poland and the Polish)*, where he described a psychological portrait of the Polish, exaggerating in many places. It was difficult for Poland to cope with J. Pilsudski's death, and soon the atmosphere became more strained. Therefore, V. Gustainis's mission was finished in 1936. He wrote a detailed report to Minister S. Lozoraitis and concluded the following: "I am sure that there is no hope to communicate with the Polish"<sup>34</sup>. This was said after the meeting of S. Lozoraitis with the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Col. J. Beck in Geneva in 1935, which provided some hope that the relations between the countries would be reestablished. The unsuccessful negotiation was caused by the absence of support from A. Smetona. On March 24, 1936, when unofficial negotiation was conducted, the President claimed during an open lecture that the nation would not allow establishing relations with Poland by any means as the cost was simply too high<sup>35</sup>. In the same year, a new event shook all Europe, i.e. a civil war in Spain. Germany and the USSR actively supported both sides; therefore, this war became the field of ideological competition. Also, the Berlin Olympics was held in Germany, where it aspired to demonstrate its superiority in any sphere to other countries. Only two countries were not invited to the Olympics, Lithuania and the USSR. Naturally, Lithuania was feeling isolated and attempted to develop relations with the USSR, for which Lithuania was a certain gate to Europe due to cultural isolation. Thus, some Lithuanians chose a traditional direction, Moscow: Col. Jonas Černius, the Chief of the Army General Staff, and Col. Konstantinas Dulksnys, the Chief of the Information Unit of the General Staff. The latter was shot dead by the same Soviets. In Moscow, J. Černius complimented the Red Army to the newspaper "Pravda" for good organization<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, the Communist Party was forbidden, and the Komintern spies were caught. However, foreign policy required to maintain the direction which had few alternatives. The USSR envoy to Lithuania Michail Karskij was satisfied with this policy

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<sup>34</sup> 1936.07.21, Lithuania's Special Press Envoy in Poland V. Gustainis Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis LCVA, F.648-ap.1,b.23, l.11.

<sup>35</sup> L. Truska, *Ilgas kelias į Vilnių...*, p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> *Kariuomenės štabo viršininkas Maskvoje*, „Trimitas" 1936, Nr. 19, p. 450.

and mentioned that earlier J. Černius and K. Dulksnys had been “cold,” but the visit helped them perceive that because of worsening relations with Germany and no perspectives with Poland, Lithuania had no other option, only to expect help from the East<sup>37</sup>. When the Polish government appointed Col. Ludwik Bociański as Vilnius Voivode, and he employed stricter means against local Lithuanians, the newspaper of the popular Riflemen’s Union “Trimitas” paid much attention to this: it constantly published articles about the sad situation of Lithuanians in Vilnius Region and asked to wait for the moment when the capital would be liberated using guns<sup>38</sup>. The officers’ newspaper “Kardas” resented even during Christmas why Poland accused Lithuania of not treating the Polish minority fairly and provided precise numbers that in Lithuania there were 20 Polish unions, 23 primary schools, and 4 gymnasia. Also, it was noted that there were no differentiation based on nationality when entering the university and a rhetorical question was posed: “What is the situation with Lithuanians in Vilnius?” The answer was provided immediately: “The Polish brutality is already affecting the depth of our hearts”<sup>39</sup>. Even though the title of the article was “Kalėdinės mintys” (“Christmas Thoughts”), it was hardly related to the celebration, which demonstrated that one or another decision or attempt to change the relations were necessary. Possibly, because of desperation or in order to find solace or mobilization of the country, “Trimitas” also published such pieces as the poem “Mano tautai” (“To my nation”) by Kazys Sabulis. The poem harshly criticized both Germany and Poland. It claimed that in the West the “*stern and bloody*” sun is going down, while in the South “mistakes are still pressing about the union.” When poverty is walking in the fields in Vilnius, “a Pole is proud of his wolf-like morality.” Finally, in order for the “Polish and Germans to understand,” the Lithuanian nation is suggested to start talking in “tons of dynamite.”<sup>40</sup> This militant and inspiring, yet too ambitious piece of writing for a small nation reflects the sufficiently complicated and tense situation, which was problematic to resolve even for the most intelligent diplomats.

<sup>37</sup> A. Kasparavičius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė Maskvos politinėse ir diplomatinėse spekuliacijose (1920–1936 m.)*, [in:] *Lietuvos nepriklausomybei – 80*, Vilnius 1999, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Dėl lietuviybės persekiojimo Vilniaus krašte*, „Trimitas” 1936, Nr. 36, p. 835.

<sup>39</sup> *Kalėdinės mintys*, „Kardas” 1936, Nr. 24, p. 641–643.

<sup>40</sup> K. Samulis, *Mano tautai*, „Trimitas” 1936, Nr. 35, p. 829.



## New Personalities in the Army and the Change in the Main Source of Threat

Officers played a very important role in Lithuania's life during the inter-war period. Their attitude towards the changing situation and the geopolitical role of Poland is illustrated by the report of the Commander-in-Chief S. Raštikis and the Chief of the General Staff J. Černius to the Minister of National Defence Stasys Dirmantas. The report considered that Poland could either seek to involve Lithuania in a close union or simply occupy it because of the fear that Germany could use the territory of Lithuania in order to attack Poland. The military chiefs started perceiving that most probably other states would not risk to get involved into a large-scale conflict because of Lithuania; therefore, a better scenario appeared to be a peaceful regulation of relations, maintaining the rights to Vilnius, but not expecting to regain it in the nearest future. The regulation of the conflict would allow retreating a part of military forces and positioning them in the area where the conflict was mainly expected. Even though the strategists of the Lithuanian army did not refuse Vilnius, they were afraid that Germany had much higher abilities to commit an act of aggression against Lithuania than Poland, and it might have been possible to stabilize relations with the latter one<sup>41</sup>. The young Commander-in-Chief S. Raštikis was both liked and disliked by Lithuanian society; however, he had already become one of the most popular figures. His critics emphasised that he was married to the President's niece, while his supporters stressed that he was almost the only person who dared making independent decisions, and President A. Smetona appreciated them. As for the question of Poland, S. Raštikis held identical views with S. Lozoraitis<sup>42</sup>. Even in his memoirs published after the war in the USA, which became the book reviewed the most among Lithuanian exiles, S. Raštikis recalled those times quite positively and claimed to have willingly agreed with S. Lozoraitis's initiatives<sup>43</sup>; he was also positive about the Polish military *attaché in Lithuania*, Leon Mitkiewicz<sup>44</sup>. In 1937,

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<sup>41</sup> V. Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenės gynybos planai ir priemonės galimai lenkų agresijai atremti 1921–1937 m.*, „Karo archyvas“, t. 28, 2013, p. 295–298.

<sup>42</sup> V. Žalys, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> S. Raštikis, *Kovose dėl Lietuvos. Kario atsiminimai*, t. 1, Los Angeles, 1956, p. 515.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 472.

there were more reports where the Military Commander was looking for possible partners against the German threat, and he mentioned Poland as a possible variant more frequently. S. Raštikis was able to convince the Minister of National Defence, S. Dirmantas, about this attitude. He and the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis mentioned to foreign diplomats that in the case of a German attack, they would seek for help not only in Moscow, but also in Warsaw<sup>45</sup>.

### **The Ultimatum of 1938: Forced Relations or a Dictate of Necessity?**

Historian A. Kasparavičius views the year 1938 as the period when the first serious threat to Lithuania's statehood coincided with the starting crises all over Europe<sup>46</sup>. The German annexation of Austria, commonly referred to as Anschluss, opened the possibilities for other countries to use force policy. After six days, Poland, unfortunately, used the same methods and demanded Lithuania to start diplomatic relations immediately. Even though Poland ensured the support of two most powerful and competing European states, Great Britain and Germany, because of different reasons, the reaction spread all over Europe with the fear that this conflict could turn into the second Sarajevo. Taking into consideration the military situation and the need to establish relations, Lithuania accepted the ultimatum, which caused anger in society, and politicians had to react to this. Because of these reasons, Lithuanian newspapers announced that Lithuania was supporting peace and made a sacrifice for the peace of all Europe. It was expected that the image of a victim could save the prestige of the government to a certain extent, which suffered greatly because of accepting the ultimatum<sup>47</sup>. Immediately after the ultimatum, the mood of Lithuanian society was particularly unfavourable towards the government. This situation was used by more radical political powers both on the right and on the left. According to Liudas Truska, as regaining Vilnius had become a moral symbol of the nation, its factual denial and acceptance of the ultimatum was humiliation of the

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<sup>45</sup> V. Žalys, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> A. Kasparavičius, *Katastrofos nuojautos: Lietuvos karinė diplomatija Antrojo pasaulinio karo išvakarėse*, „Karo archyvas“, t. 27, 2012, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> G. Janauskas, op. cit., p. 99.

nation, which caused a moral crisis<sup>48</sup>. One of the attempts to improve the situation was appointing Col. K. Škirpa, the first volunteer of the Lithuanian Army and the former Chief of the General Staff, as the first Lithuanian envoy to Poland. K. Škirpa was known as the supporter of the “hard line”, who attempted to struggle actively for regaining Vilnius and was not afraid to negotiate with German and the USSR representatives. However, he was also considered to be in opposition to President A. Smetona and even tried to hinder his coming to power in 1926. Appointing K. Škirpa as the envoy, A. Smetona possibly wanted to kill two birds with one stone.

Even though in the Lithuanian and Polish historiography<sup>49</sup> the image dominates that K. Škirpa was pro-German and pro-Polish, this statement has to be specified as K. Škirpa’s conception constantly changed depending on geopolitical changes. A more detailed work on K. Škirpa’s activities in Poland has already been produced<sup>50</sup>; therefore, this article concentrates on his attempts to improve relations in Warsaw and their reflections in Kaunas. First, his presentation of credentials to the Polish President Ignacy Mościcki was very successful. The President complimented Lithuanians and emphasised that they had established the state “in fact, from nothing.” This was a confirmation that Poland agreed with the new and national conception of the Lithuanian state and did not attempt to negate its legitimacy or return to the union tradition. In addition, the President mentioned that K. Škirpa would win many hearts in Warsaw. He thanked the President and diplomatically emphasised that “despite the special circumstances under which I’m starting my mission [...], I’m tabula rasa in the relations that I’d try to establish”<sup>51</sup>. After leaving the reception, K. Škirpa mentioned being deeply touched when the orchestra played the Lithuanian anthem, and this emotion was even strengthened by the fact that this was happening in the middle of Warsaw. In addition to this, I. Mościcki left a really favourable impression on K. Škirpa; he was sure that “the President really wanted

<sup>48</sup> L. Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai*, Vilnius 1996, p. 344–346.

<sup>49</sup> In Lithuania’s historiography this tendency could be seen from 1980 in works of Regina Žepkaitė, in Poland from 1985 in works of Piotr Łossowski. After that it was re-cited by various historians.

<sup>50</sup> More on this in article by same author – S. Jazavita, *Diplomatic Activities of Kazys Škirpa, the First Lithuanian Envoy to Poland, March–December, 1938*, „Europa Orientalis. Studia z Dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich”, 2015 (6), c. 91–117.

<sup>51</sup> 1938.03.31, Lithuania’s Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.13.

to develop good relations between the two countries”<sup>52</sup>. The Lithuanian envoy was soon invited to hunt pheasants with the Polish President, and in diplomacy this was viewed as a clear sign of goodwill.

Nevertheless, real politics is often unrelated to demonstrative politeness. Naturally, there were many problems that had to be resolved. Even though K. Škirpa himself was surprised that such a large number of Polish officials had a positive attitude towards him, there were also some supporters of the “strict line.” The opinions of the Lithuanian envoy and the Head of the Eastern Europe Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland Tadeusz Kobylanski were completely different. He was the person who had the most negative point of view towards Lithuania and was planning to prepare a much more aggressive text of the ultimatum as it may have even required to recognise Vilnius to Poland. More prudent Polish state actors still made a decision that such an ultimatum could still be accepted, but it would hurt the national pride of Lithuanians, and this would not lead to positive future relations<sup>53</sup>. K. Škirpa and T. Kobylanski had several conversations, during which they did not manage to find any common ground. On April 29, during a banquet organized for the Lithuanian delegation, T. Kobylanski claimed that a Lithuanian plane entered the territory of Poland; K. Škirpa replied without any irony: “I hope, Sir, you didn’t shoot it?”<sup>54</sup> This situation illustrated the communication atmosphere, where such phrases were not scarce. Undoubtedly, during the interwar nationalism period, one of the important questions topical to both the Polish and Lithuanians was the question of minorities. Lithuanians were concerned about their countrymen in Poland, and the Polish cared about their countrymen in Lithuania. In his telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the first visit days, K. Škirpa mentioned that he consciously had not talked about this, but he wanted to mention that Lithuania accepted the ultimatum with a territorial reserve, hoping to regain Vilnius. T. Kobylanski was angry about it and prevented the reserve from delivery, even though the Lithuanian envoy had almost agreed with Minister J. Beck<sup>55</sup>, who in prin-

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, l.14.

<sup>53</sup> A. A. Žulys, *Dar kartą 1938 m. kovo mėn. Lenkijos ultimatumo Lietuvai klausimu*, [in:] *Lietuva ir Lenkija XX a. geopolitinėje vaizduotėje*, Kaunas 2012, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> 1938.05.02, Lithuania’s Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to General Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2041, l.73.

<sup>55</sup> 1938.04.03, Lithuania’s Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Secret Telegram to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2041, l.92.

ciple led the Polish foreign policy. This situation may be compared to the Lithuanian one: the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. Lozoraitis, had much less freedom in decision-making. Despite the fact that A. Smetona trusted him and tended to listen to him, the main decisions were made by the President, which was rarely reflected in documentation. As for the President's attitude, it should be noted that he gave a more detailed speech at the beginning of the year, which was published in "Mūsų Vilnius", the newspaper published by the "Union for the Liberation of Vilnius." He emphasised that Poland was making a mistake, aiming to establish relations forcefully as Lithuania would never allow this. In addition, he condemned narrow nationalism and claimed that Lithuania would not start persecuting loyal Polish, even though Lithuanians were persecuted in Poland. A. Smetona maintained:

Lithuanians have always valued everyone's national consciousness and don't want to inflict violence. In their large state, different nationalities could co-exist. They can also co-exist now, when the small state is reestablished<sup>56</sup>.

The President's ideas were real nice; yet, the article was published two months before the ultimatum, which was accepted. In this case, despite being sufficiently insightful, A. Smetona made a mistake by not trying to prepare society for a possible establishment of relations, while Lithuanian officers, politicians, and diplomats were discussing and waiting for this.

As for the activities of the envoy, he managed to find considerable support from the people who were favourable towards K. Škirpa and Lithuania, and were devoting remarkable efforts to affect the attitude of all Polish political elite. An exceptional person was Earl Stanisław Tyszkiewicz, a Vice-Burgomaster of Warsaw, whose father Aleksandras was living in Kretinga and was renowned as a patriot of Lithuania. Making use of the acquaintance with this person, K. Škirpa soon found a connection with his son. The Earl was worried about weak democracy in Europe and conniving to the Communist movements. Therefore, he viewed Fascism and its radical variation, National Socialism, as the only counterbalance<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> A. Smetona, *Tautų santykiai privalo būti tvarkomi teisingumu*, „Mūsų Vilnius“ 1938, Nr. 1–2, p. 1–2.

<sup>57</sup> 1938.04.07, Pro memoria from Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa. About Discussion with Count Tyszkiewicz, Vice-Burgomaster of Warsaw, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.30.

K. Škirpa did not want to agree with this and attempted to convince him that anti-Communism in Germany aimed at justifying mass arming, while a sufficiently large number of officers tended to reach an agreement with the Soviets<sup>58</sup>. Another person who was favourable to Lithuania was the Minister of Social Security, Marian Zyndram Kościałkowski. It may seem that his direct job was hardly related to foreign affairs, yet he was an influential politician, who worked as a Prime Minister in 1935–1936, and had been one of the closest J. Pilsudski's friends and companions. Originally, he was from Pandėlys, Lithuania, and his birth certificate is still preserved at Rokiškis Region Museum. Because of these reasons, this influential Polish politician was very favourable to Lithuania. He immediately told that he would talk to K. Škirpa privately, as a person rather than a minister, who could not get asleep because of a threat from Germany<sup>59</sup>. He and the Lithuanian envoy discussed in great detail why the countries had not managed to have the same position in the struggle against common enemies in 1918–1920. In addition, it should be noted that these two men directly were at different fronts<sup>60</sup>. He also considered that the main object of the German aggression should be the Baltic States rather than Poland. K. Škirpa replied that first Germany would be willing to reestablish the borders of 1914, which was a considerable threat not only to Lithuania, but also to Poland. In addition, the envoy was consistently lobbying about Lithuanian schools in Vilnius Region. In his opinion, Poland was not doing anything to attract Lithuanians psychologically, which would be useful in the future as the relations between the countries would improve. M. Z. Kościałkowski explained that it was T. Kobylański who was destroying the relations and suggested addressing his brother Bogdan Kościałkowski on any question, who was a Lithuanian Affairs Adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. K. Škirpa reported on this situation to K. Lozoraitis that M. Z. Kościałkowski “undoubtedly holds pro-Lithuanian views.”<sup>61</sup> This suggests the fact that M. Z. Kościałkowski, having an important position in fights

<sup>58</sup> Ten pat, l.31.

<sup>59</sup> 1938.08.01, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.110.

<sup>60</sup> Marianas Zyndram-Koscialkovskis, Information from Rokiškis Museum, <https://www.muziejusrokiskyje.lt/apie-muzieju/ekspedicijos-tyrimai/marianas-zyndram-koscialkovskis>, looked at 10.13.2018.

<sup>61</sup> 1938.08.01, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.112.

against Lithuania twenty years ago (he was the Head of the Polish Intelligence in Vilnius and actively contributed to the POW conspiracy), did not hinder the relationship. At that time, they were fighting on opposing fronts as K. Škirpa was the Chief of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, which was fighting with the Polish Army in Suwalki Region. This made an influence on careful K. Škirpa's attitude towards contacts with Poland for the rest of his life; nevertheless, the situation in 1938 made him search for contacts and cope with his internal mistrust. This situation demonstrated that insightful actors both in Lithuania and Poland perceived their past mistakes and unwillingness to communicate, which had tragic consequences, and attempted to correct them at least to a certain extent. Moreover, M. Z. Kościółkowski's forefathers were a distinguished family of Lithuanian nobility.

One more influential person with whom cooperation was established was Cardinal Aleksander Kakowski. K. Škirpa visited him as a representative of another Catholic country and left a very positive impression.<sup>62</sup> The Cardinal's support could help the envoy attract more sympathies. On his order, one more Lithuanian mass was served in the Marion Church in Warsaw, and not only the staff of the legation, but also Lithuanians living in Warsaw were attending the mass. Little by little, K. Škirpa was feeling more comfortable in Warsaw; therefore, he would invite guests and actively discussed various issues even with the Polish opposition, who maintained close contacts with Gen. Władysław Sikorski, living in France and disliked by the authorities<sup>63</sup>. His main task and idea was to find friends and increase the number of pro-Lithuanian people in Warsaw.

Undoubtedly, it difficult to reconstruct which state actors were really sincere and which only pretended to be as such. In his letter to a friend and diplomat Albertas Gerutis to Geneva, the Lithuanian envoy claimed that "it is even more complicated to pursue the path here, in Warsaw, than anywhere else, especially as I'm feeling too much of 'brotherly' Polish love"<sup>64</sup>. It was difficult to perceive the real opinions. K. Škirpa had visited all most influential actors of the Polish state. In addition to the above-mentioned ones, he also paid a visit to the Prime Minister Gen. Felicjan Sławoj Skład-

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<sup>62</sup> 1938.05.22, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.66.

<sup>63</sup> 1938.08.31, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.133–134.

<sup>64</sup> 1938.05.05, K. Škirpa Personal Letter to A.Gerutis, LCVA, f.668, ap.1, b.603, l.8.



kowski, the President of Warsaw Stefan Starzyński, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Szembek, the Minister of Trade and Industry Antoni Roman, the Minister of Post and Telegraph Emil Kaminski, the Minister of Communication Col. Juljusz Ulrych, Minister of Religions and Education Prof. Wojciech Świątosławski, Head of Senate Aleksander Prystor, Vice-President of Seimas Stanisław Schaetzel, Head of the General Staff Gen. Wacław Stachiewicz, Marshall J. Piłsudski's widow Aleksandra Piłsudska, famous historian Prof. Władysław Wielhorski, the Head of the Second Department of the Polish Military Staff (Intelligence) Gen. Tadeusz Pełczyński, and other people who held different views and were representatives of various professions<sup>65</sup>.

The conversations with the person who led the Polish foreign policy, J. Beck, were very important, yet difficult. He and the Lithuanian envoy were of similar age; they were both colonels devoted to their country. One more similarity was that he was also a representative of the "hard-line attitude" towards Lithuania<sup>66</sup>. It is interesting that not only Lithuanian but also British and American diplomats, who held friendly attitudes towards Poland, referred to J. Beck as "a person without any scruples"<sup>67</sup>. During conversations with J. Beck, similar to T. Kobylanski, attempts were made to demonstrate that despite positive contemporary relations between Germany and Poland, the situation may change any time. For instance, during a conversation K. Škirpa suggested him to take into consideration his words that "there are millions of Communists in Germany, just dressed in brown"<sup>68</sup>; therefore, an agreement between the Third Reich and the USSR was only a question of time. Unfortunately, the Lithuanian envoy was absolutely right. Even though the Lithuanian envoy was criticizing J. Beck's policy at the beginning, before leaving Warsaw he expressed many positive words about the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs<sup>69</sup> to

<sup>65</sup> 1938.07.08, Pro memoria from Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa. Report to Cabinet of Ministers of Lithuania about Policy of Poland, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.92.

<sup>66</sup> S. Sužiedėlis, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>67</sup> 1938.03.23, USA Embassy's in Great Britain Chancellor H.V. Johnson Report to Secretary of State C. Hull, LCVA, f.R-952, ap.1, b.66.

<sup>68</sup> 1938.06.07, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.82.

<sup>69</sup> 1938.12.06 USA Ambassador in Poland A. Biddle Report to Secretary of State C. Hull, LCVA, f.R-952, ap.1, b.66, l.155.



his friend and influential ambassador of the USA in Poland<sup>70</sup>, Anthony Biddle Jr.

Another important person who came to Poland in 1938 was the Lithuanian Military *Attaché*, Colonel of the General Staff Aloyzas Valušis. He was one of the most energetic Lithuanian officers. In 1926–1927, he was President A. Smetona's Adjutant; he fell in love and got married to the President's daughter. In 1934–1938, he was the Chief of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars' Regiment of the Lithuanian Great Hetman Jonušas Radvila. He was selected to take this position in Poland by Commander-in-Chief S. Raštikis and the Chief of the General Staff J. Černius<sup>71</sup>. K. Škirpa was the first to express the need for a military attaché as he himself had served in this position in Germany in 1928–1937. He claimed that the people in the highest military ranks did not want to reveal information, while the position of an envoy was not suitable to communicate with lower-rank officers, who could provide valuable information. In addition, it was observed that more tension between Germany and Czechoslovakia required careful monitoring of the Polish army<sup>72</sup>. The fact that S. Raštikis, J. Černius, and later Minister S. Lozoraitis chose this person, most probably illustrated the idea that he had shared similar ideas on the question of Poland. On the other hand, this might have been a subtle sign of favour from President A. Smetona. Of course, the Polish intelligence knew that the military attaché was the Lithuanian President's son-in-law.

### **The Activities and Destiny of “The Union for the Liberation of Vilnius”**

“The Union for the Liberation of Vilnius” (subsequently, ULV) took probably the strictest position towards Poland during the interwar period in Lithuania. This organization had been established in 1925 and expanded considerably by the end of the 1930s: it had 25,000 active members and

<sup>70</sup> C. Morley, Foreword, *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War: The Diplomatic Papers of A.J. Drexel Biddle Jr., United States Ambassador in Poland 1937–1939*, Ohio State University Press, 1976, p. XI.

<sup>71</sup> 1938.06.10, Lithuania's Armed Forces Commander S. Raštikis Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2046, l.17.

<sup>72</sup> 1938.05.24, Lithuania's Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2046, l.19.

more than 600,000 supporters. The divisions of the organization were spread all around Lithuania, and their number reached more than 600. It was one of the most influential public organizations in Lithuania. Many active members of this organization were linked to another influential organization of interwar Lithuania, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union. ULV was also interesting in the sense that it was open for all parties: the supporters of the right and the left, Lithuanians, and the representatives of other nationalities, mainly Jews and Belarusians, participated in its activities. The organization published the magazine "Mūsų Vilnius" ("Our Vilnius"), which was popular and widely read. The chairperson of the Union in 1935–1938 and the editor of "Mūsų Vilnius" was Antanas Juška, who published an article before the ultimatum. It explained that Poland would never understand Lithuania, because it was dominated by aristocrats, similarly to the period of Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, while workers and farmers did not have rights there. Vilnius Voivod L. Bociański, who pursued strict policy towards Lithuanians was even compared to Vilnius Governor-General Michail Muravjov, who had applied particularly strict measures, suppressing the uprising of 1863. In addition, Lithuanian Poles were accused of not joining Lithuania's Council in 1918. It was also mentioned that no relations were possible with Poland which used sticks in the historical capital of Lithuania or imprisoned people for keeping Maironis's poems<sup>73</sup>. However, the author also mentioned that Lithuania would be very happy, having a friendly southern neighbour:

an agreement with Poland would be welcomed by all Lithuanians, and we would be the first ones. Nevertheless, the main conditions of this agreement is a sincere perception of New Lithuania and the aspirations of the Lithuanian nation and an objective treatment of Vilnius question. [...] The present Polish language and activities would not cause any resonance, and we will strengthen forces and look for friends to go against Poland rather than with it.<sup>74</sup>

The same issue published the considerations of Juozas Žlabys, a right-wing officer and a poet, titled "Visi keliai veda į Vilnių"<sup>75</sup> ("All Roads Lead to Vilnius"). The article indicated that each self-conscious Lithuanian had to

<sup>73</sup> A. Juška, *Lenkija ir Lietuva*, „Mūsų Vilnius“ 1938, Nr. 6, p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, p. 100.

<sup>75</sup> J. Žlabys, *Visi keliai veda į Vilnių*, „Mūsų Vilnius“ 1938, Nr. 6, p. 100–101.

have a map of Vilnius and its region and study it carefully, while the main aim of Lithuanian mothers was to teach their children the legend about the Iron Wolf, so that the children would grow up as liberators of Vilnius. The magazine also published the reviews of new books. The book *Benjamins Kordušas* by Jonas Marcinkevičius continued the ideas expressed by P. Vaičiūnas in “The Broken Oath.” J. Marcinkevičius was a volunteer of the Lithuanian Army, who deserted to Poland and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Being under-age, he received a 10-year punishment. In prison, he was reading considerably and became a famous novelist. The main character was a landlord who had lost his fortune, had huge debts, viewed the new farmers with disdain, and could not bear the thought that elite in Kaunas was farmers’ children. According to the reviewer, “J. Marcinkevičius highlights the parasitism of Polish nobility and the unclear position of the old generation officials”<sup>76</sup>. The end of the novel reminded of P. Vaičiūnas’s play as being unable to stand life in unfair Lithuania and disillusioned with everything, landlord Kordušas shot himself to death.

Naturally, the Polish ultimatum caused much pain for the editorial board of “Mūsų Vilnius”. “Lithuanian society was very solemn, grieving, and deeply moved, yet exceptionally united when facing this sad hour”<sup>77</sup>. Still, the editorial board emphasized that rumours about Vilnius did not have any ground. Lithuanian society was particularly afraid that the ultimatum forced Lithuania to recognize Vilnius for Poland. Also, the speech of President A. Smetona was quoted, where he claimed that “it seems, there wasn’t such severe cruelty in Vilnius, even under the Russian government”<sup>78</sup>. Of course, the organization could feel sufficiently safe when the President himself expressed such views publicly. In response to the ultimatum, the ULV attempted to strengthen its activities. Priest Fabijonas Kėmešys encouraged to strengthen the teaching of French and English and to be much more active as the arrival of the Polish envoy could increase the disloyalty of Lithuanian Poles<sup>79</sup>. At the end of the month, it was announced that the year 1937 was exceptional as the organization received the most abundant sup-

<sup>76</sup> J. V. Narbutas, *Dvarininkija mūsų naujoje literatūroje*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 6, p. 100–101.

<sup>77</sup> *Lietuvos sūnūs ir dukterys!*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 7, p. 113.

<sup>78</sup> *A. Smetonos kalba pasakyta Lietuvos šaulių sąjungos rinktinių suvažiavime 1938 m. kovo 12 d.*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 7, p. 114.

<sup>79</sup> *Lenkų viltys ir mūsų kelias*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 7, p. 117.

port from Lithuanian residents, while after the ultimatum in 1938, a record number of new members joined the ULV and the number of subscribers of "Mūsų Vilnius" was also increasing<sup>80</sup>. The publication started demonstrating a certain change in the attitude towards Poland with a noticeable note of triumph. An anonymous author asked in the issue published on May 15 "Kas kaltas?" ("Who is Guilty?") and discussed the troubled relations between Poland and Germany. The author reminded that Poland had to remember history and the period of Grunwald Battle when "the most reliable friends of the Polish were and could be only Lithuanians and Czechs. Who knows, maybe it will be destined for the times of Grunwald Battle to revive?"<sup>81</sup> However, the Polish authorities were criticized that they did not attempt to have closer relations with Lithuanians or Czechs; on the contrary, they spoiled the relations by their aggressive attitude towards Lithuanians in Vilnius Region. These articles were frequent, and they reminded for the Lithuanian reader that despite the signed agreement on diplomatic relations, there were still many problems.

Nevertheless, the changed circumstances affected the conditions. In autumn, during Munich agreements, Germany appeared to be an aggressive European state which dictated its own conditions, and its pressure increased in Klaipėda; for these reasons, the threat of Poland seemed to be much smaller to Lithuanian politicians. The ULV was closed, even though this caused a turmoil in society, which had been used to the idea of regaining Vilnius fast.

## Changes after the Munich Conference

The geopolitical situation in Europe changed completely after the Munich Conference. Germany became more powerful and exerted more pressure to Klaipėda. This influenced the Lithuanian political elite to search for a closer contact with Poland, especially as the relations with the USSR were worsening when Lithuania had not received any support from Moscow during the Polish ultimatum<sup>82</sup>. At that time, a group of people formed

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<sup>80</sup> *Dirbkime ir toliau savo darbą*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 7, p. 131.

<sup>81</sup> *Kas kaltas?*, „Mūsų Vilnius” 1938, Nr. 10, p. 178.

<sup>82</sup> Č. Laurinavičius, *Ką reiškia Lietuvai turėti Klaipėdą?*, „Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis”, vol. 21, Klaipėda 2010, p. 21.

in Poland who were trying to establish contacts with Lithuania. One of the main persons was the above-mentioned M.Z. Kościółkowski, who wanted to come to Kaunas as a private person rather than a minister. Other well-known people were Gen. Roman Gorecki, former Polish Senator Roman, and engineer Straszewicz, who could even talk Lithuanian quite well. According to K. Škirpa, this “Union of Friends of Lithuania” had been established four years ago, when the conditions were not very favourable; however, it managed to do as much as possible, taking into consideration the context; it was even attempting to intercede for the Lithuanians in Vilnius Region<sup>83</sup>. K. Škirpa expected M. Riomeris and J. Vileišis to host the guests as they were favourable to Poland and were respected by Lithuanian society. It should be noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested postponing the visit, refusing the guests in a polite way<sup>84</sup>. Similarly, after the discussion with S. Lozoraitis, the General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Juozas Urbšys suggested K. Škirpa postponing another initiative, a visit of journalists from Poland, which had to take place on October 7, 1938<sup>85</sup>. It is unknown why one more important initiative was not undertaken. On December 12, 1938, the Burgomaster of Kaunas Antanas Merkys visited Warsaw. He was the person close to A. Smetona. K. Škirpa had talked to the Vice-Burgomaster of Warsaw S. Tiskiewicz and proposed bringing flowers to the grave of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw. According to the Lithuanian envoy, the fact that the funeral wreath would be brought by an influential Lithuanian could serve as a certain symbol, pleasing Poland but not provoking an angry reaction from Lithuanian society as the wreath should be only from Kaunas and not from all Lithuania<sup>86</sup>. Naturally, attention should have been paid to this, especially after all those years of negatively portraying Poland in press and in the speeches of political actors. Most probably, because of this reason, the Lithuanian political elite did not dare to make this step: A. Merkys was welcomed respectfully in Warsaw and communicated with all representatives of the Polish Government, but did not lay a funeral wreath on the tomb of the Un-

<sup>83</sup> 1938.11.14, Lithuania’s Envoy in Poland K.Škirpa Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs S.Lozoraitis, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2041, l.10–11.

<sup>84</sup> 1938.12.01, Lithuania’s General Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys Report to Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2041, l.9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, l.12.

<sup>86</sup> 1938.12.05, Lithuania’s Envoy in Poland K. Škirpa Report to General Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, f.383, ap.7, b.2014, l.288–291.

known Soldier. Despite the fact that the authorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tended to improve the relations with Poland, their cautiousness preconditioned the suspension of initiatives of the envoy. In December, when the relations with Germany absolutely deteriorated, K. Škirpa was appointed to serve there, hoping that his acquaintances with German politicians, officers, and foreign diplomats could reduce the pressure from the Third Reich. At that time, J. Šaulys was not even received by the officials of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed to Warsaw, and this job was suitable for J. Šaulys and his conception, which he could implement.

### **The Development of Relations after J. Šaulys's Arrival to Warsaw**

J. Šaulys returned to Warsaw when the relations between Lithuania and Poland were quickly improving. One of the manifestations was closer communication of diplomats in other states. An illustrative example of this was a party organized by the Polish envoy to the USA Jerzy Potocki in honour of the Lithuanian legacy in Washington. The Lithuanian envoy to the USA Povilas Žadeikis referred to this politician as extremely favourable to Lithuania<sup>87</sup>. J. Šaulys was continuing the successful work. He was particularly interested in the Lithuanian-Polish relations when he was working in Berlin. For instance, in the summer of 1938, he visited Vilnius, where he met Bronisław Krzyżanowski, a member of the Polish Democratic Party, who held opposing views to the official policy embodied by L. Bociański. J. Šaulys had known B. Krzyżanowski for a long time, and they both were active Masons in Vilnius. It is interesting that local Lithuanians wanted to join the Polish led by B. Krzyżanowski and even to raise the question of Vilnius Region autonomy<sup>88</sup>. J. Šaulys finished his ideas by noting that local Lithuanians would like to have a Lithuanian Consulate in Vilnius. He himself also supported this idea because he thought that this would encourage more intensive contacts between Kaunas and Vilnius, and this could be beneficial.

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<sup>87</sup> 1938.12.03, Lithuania's Envoy in USA P.Žadeikis Report to General Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2014, l.282.

<sup>88</sup> 1938.08.04, Pro Memoria from Lithuania's Envoy in Germany J. Šaulys. About situation in Vilnius region, LCVA, f.383, ap.7, b.2097, l.101.

He was trying to implement this policy after arriving to Warsaw. Polish officials were joyfully waiting for him because the Polish Ambassador in Berlin Józef Lipski had announced to his authorities in Warsaw that J. Šaulys was particularly constructive towards Poland<sup>89</sup>. In his first speech in Poland J. Šaulys declared, that he is well aware about common history bonds between Lithuania and Poland, as well, that he is going to Warsaw definitely not for first time, and always was interesting in Polish nation fight for her independence, as he always was on Polish side in their independence fights. He declared that there were successful works done from both sides in 1938, but he hopes to continue that with even bigger energy and hope from the help from President of Poland I. Mościcki<sup>90</sup>. Even though it was common in diplomacy to be friendly then You arrive for first time, tone of this speech was very pro-Polish. On January 21, 1939, the new Lithuanian envoy met with the Prime Minister of Poland, F. Sławoj Składkowski. In their discussion, many hopes were expressed that this year would be particularly beneficial for the development of Lithuanian-Polish relations. They both agreed that there were some problems, but they were being resolved little by little. They were just worried about the relations with neighbours, and here the Polish and Lithuanian politicians were wrong. They expected the USSR to be involved in internal problems for a long time and Germany to devote efforts to retrieving colonies and reestablishing the Kaiser's empire<sup>91</sup>. However, this did not happen. On March 22, Lithuania was forced to give up Klaipėda, and Germany, which was becoming more powerful, also started an aggressive policy towards Poland. In Warsaw, J. Šaulys could do more than K. Škirpa, because he was also closer to the Lithuanian political elite. President A. Smetona was his close friend; in addition, his private letters have revealed that the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Urbšys, respected J. Šaulys very much and was learning from his political experience<sup>92</sup>. Also, he had more influential

<sup>89</sup> S. Sužiedėlis, op.cit., p. 165.

<sup>90</sup> Lithuania's Envoy to Poland J. Šaulys Speech during meeting with President of Poland I. Mościcki, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Polsce (Poland's Archive of Modern Reports. Further – AAN), f.322, b.16800, l.15–16.

<sup>91</sup> 1939.01.23, Pro Memoria from Lithuania's Envoy in Germany J. Šaulys. About discussion with Gen. F.Skławodski, Prime Minister of Poland, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.23, l.180.

<sup>92</sup> 1932.03.28 and 1939.08.03, J. Šaulys Personal Letters to J.Urbšys, Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos rankraščių skyrius (Lithuania's Martynas Mažvydas National Library Department of Manuscripts. Further LNMMBRS), f.15, b.344, l.1–2.



friends. Here, the attitudes of his close friend, the Signatory of the Act of February 16 and the Burgomaster of Kaunas, J. Vileišis, are very interesting. On January 31, 1939, this influential and authoritative person wrote an article to the newspaper *XX amžius* (*Twentieth Century*). In the article, J. Vileišis criticized the regime established by his acquaintance A. Smetona and considered that there had been many mistakes made in the relations with Poland, which led to the ultimatum. Better relations may have allowed “regaining one or another meter of the Lithuanian land”<sup>93</sup>. Yet, even the representative of centre-left political views, J. Vileišis, admitted the fact that the Polish involvement into the activities of Vilnius Conference and the Council of Lithuania in 1917–1918 could have preserved Vilnius for Lithuania, but would not have allowed establishing national Lithuania as these both choices were impossible. Because of these and other reasons (the lack of democracy in contemporary Lithuania), political censorship did not allow to publish this article.

### **Relations between the Countries after the Loss of Klaipėda and the Beginning of WWII: the Visit of the Lithuanian Military Commander to Warsaw**

The loss of Klaipėda was useful neither to Lithuania, nor to Poland. The latter, trying to win Lithuania’s sympathies, agreed to sign an agreement on better transit via Klaipėda port on December 22, 1938. An initiative was also displayed by Lithuania. Poland opened consulate in Klaipėda and tried observe situation here. On January 31, 1939 Poland’s envoy to Lithuania Frantyszek Charwat send report to minister of foreign affairs J. Beck about situation here. He mentions that situation here are completely controlled by disloyal local Germans, Lithuania’s police held no authority there and there are a lot of portraits of local Germans’ leaders Wilhelm Bertuleit and Ernst Neumann<sup>94</sup>. On March 10, 1939, the Lithuanian Military Commander went this far that even inquired the Polish military *attaché* L. Mitkiewicz about the possibility to establish a military alliance which would be

<sup>93</sup> 1939.01.31, Manuscript of J. Vileišis article „Prisiminus praeitį” (To Remember the Past). Prohibited to print by censorship, LNMMBRs, f.29, b.1699, l.2.

<sup>94</sup> 1939.01.31, Poland’s Envoy in Lithuania F. Charwat Report to Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Beck, AAN, f.474, b.170, l.15



joined by all anti-German countries<sup>95</sup>. Even though Poland did not agree with this, it was still worried about the further activities of the Third Reich. Poland carefully observed situation in Klaipėda and Lithuania let Poles to open Consulate in this city. Consul Józef Weyers at the time sent a lot of interesting reports to the Polish envoy to Lithuania F. Charwat. In one of them, dated March 18, 1939, J. Weyers expressed that leader of Klaipėda nacionalsocialists Wilhelm Bertuleit was angry that Lithuania government approve chant “Heil Smetona”, “Heil Voldemar”, “Heil Stalin” and for now even “Heil Pilsudski”, but local Germans are prohibited for expressing such a expression of respect to their leader in Berlin<sup>96</sup>. This information once again proves that Lithuanian government saw Germany as a main threat to Lithuania, and believed that not only USSR could help, but Poland as well. Of course F. Charwat also communicated with S. Lozoraitis, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs (he was changed by J. Urbšys on December 5, 1938), who at that time took the office of an envoy to Italy and an authorised minister and head of the commission for resolving the Lithuanian-German problems of the take-over of Klaipėda Region<sup>97</sup>. F. Charwat was compassionate about the loss of Klaipėda and also tried to clarify whether the agreement signed had not contained any secret paragraphs. On the other hand, he mentioned that Poland cared much about the possible German pressure on Lithuania, and his government would devote all efforts to decrease it. According to F. Charwat, the German aggression was dangerous for *everyone*. S. Lozoraitis himself emphasised these words of the envoy<sup>98</sup>. Edvardas Turauskas, an influential member of the Christian Democratic Party, was appointed as the Director of the Policy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was working along the same lines. He had so much enthusiasm that on March 21, during his visit to Warsaw, he was trying to save from the German ultimatum and arbitrarily, without any agreement from the Government, suggested the French ambassador in Poland, Leon Noel, that Lithuania would defend itself from Germany if all other countries would be willing to begin a war with it. Lithuanians

<sup>95</sup> Č. Laurinavičius, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> 1939.03.18, Poland's Consulate in Klaipėda J. Weyers Report to Envoy in Kaunas F. Charwat, AAN, f.471, b.11, l.6.

<sup>97</sup> A. Petraitytė – Briedienė, op.cit., p. 41–42.

<sup>98</sup> 1939.03.25, Pro Memoria from Lithuania's Special Minister S. Lozoraitis. About Discussion with Poland's Envoy F. Charwat, LCVA, f.648, ap.1, b.54, l.31–34.

knew that L. Noel was supportive for Lithuania, and even he was known as a person who protested to Poland's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Szambek at the time then Poland chosen to start diplomatic relations with ultimatum. L. Noel then said, that Poles used methods similar to those Nazi Germany are using in Europe.<sup>99</sup> This supportive position of France was a result of long time hard work of Lithuania's envoy in Paris and signatory of Independence Act Petras Klimas who managed to prove French politicians that Lithuania is friendly country with anti-Nazi opinion. However this was not enough, because Poland, France, and other countries were not willing to start fighting about such an unimportant question as Klaipėda and hoped Germany stop her aggression in Europe after Anschluss of Klaipėda<sup>100</sup>.

Germany was attempting to use the peaceful take-over of Klaipėda for its propaganda. The visit of the Commander-in-Chief S. Raštikis to Berlin on April 20, 1939 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Hitler's anniversary served this purpose. During the visit, S. Raštikis was constantly photographed and appeared on magazine covers. In his memoirs, he wrote that during his short conversation with the Fuhrer and with Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich, he was photographed from all sides, and his photo was even chosen on the cover of the semi-official newspaper<sup>101</sup>. Poland reacted by inviting S. Raštikis to visit Warsaw. After the agreement with President A. Smetona and the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Urbšys, S. Raštikis accepted the offer and visited Warsaw on May 8, 1939. He was accompanied by the Head of the Information Department of the General Staff, K. Dulksnys, who had searched for a common European coalition partners against Germany, the Polish military *attaché to Lithuania* L. Mitkiewicz, and the Lithuanian military *attaché to Poland* A. Valušis. In Warsaw, S. Raštikis was welcomed by the highest Polish officials led by the Commander-in-Chief of Poland's armed forces, Gen. Edward Rydz-Śmigły<sup>102</sup>. "Lietuvos aidas" published a commentary that the Lithuanian Military Commander was met with applause in Warsaw<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> Pro Memoria from Unknown Author in Poland's Foreign Ministry. About French Diplomacy Reaction to Poland's Ultimatum to Lithuania. AAN, f.1775,b.1,l.1–2.

<sup>100</sup> E. Turauskas, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės netenkant*, Vilnius 1990, p. 31–32.

<sup>101</sup> S. Raštikis, *min.veik.*, p. 566–568.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 570.

<sup>103</sup> *Kariuomenės vadas gen. Raštikis Varšuvoje*, „Lietuvos aidas“, 05.09.1939, p. 1.

In the evening publication, the commentaries of Polish newspapers were published, which were extremely warm, and the common Lithuanian-Polish interests were emphasized. "Ostatnie Wiadomości" referred to him as "a guest close to our hearts," and the editorial of "Kurjer Warszawski" was titled "Long Live Lithuania".<sup>104</sup> It should be noted that there were no such problems as at the end of 1938, when A. Merkys could not lay a funeral wreath on the Unknown Soldier's grave because of unclear reasons, even having in mind the compromise suggested by K. Škirpa. This may be treated as a symbolic, yet very belated moment in the relations between interwar Lithuania and Poland, which marked a different stage in the Lithuanian-Polish relations.

Looking through the memoirs of the Commander-in-Chief, it seems that he felt sufficiently comfortable in Warsaw. He communicated fluently and fruitfully with E. Rydz-Śmigły and with the Chief of the General Staff Gen. W. Stachiewicz; in addition, the conversation with Prime Minister F. Sławoj Składkowski was also very nice and successful. The President also left quite a positive impression. S. Raštikis was very negative only towards the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Beck. He seemed to be dictator-like, not allowing for his interlocutor to say something, and talking only about himself and his merits. S. Raštikis was shocked that in his office J. Beck had a collection of European politicians, and A. Hitler's photo with his personal autograph was placed in the most visible place. In general, in his memoirs written after WWII, S. Raštikis praised the courage of the Polish army demonstrated during the war. His positive attitude is also highlighted by the fact that even 18 pages of his memoirs are devoted to this meeting in Warsaw.<sup>105</sup> Most importantly, after coming back to Lithuania, S. Raštikis gave an interview to "Karys",<sup>106</sup> where he expressed particularly positive views about the attitude of the Polish press and army towards his visit and the compliments about Lithuania. This was of particular importance as S. Raštikis was really popular among soldiers and society; therefore, his opinion was taken into consideration.

<sup>104</sup> *Kariuomenės vadas gen. Raštikis Varšuvoje*, „Vakarinis Lietuvos aidas", 09.05.1939, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> S. Raštikis, min. veik., p. 569–586.

<sup>106</sup> *Lietuvos neutralumo žygis*, „Karys" 1939, Nr. 20–21, p. 600.

### **Instead of an Epilogue: the Conversation between J. Šaulys and I. Mościcki in Switzerland**

The warming relations between Lithuania and Poland were destroyed by WWII, which caused tragedies, destruction, and millions of casualties for both states. With respect to percentage, both Poland and Lithuania experienced the greatest destruction in Europe, and both became the victims of the *devils' alliance* – Germany and the USSR. How the relations might have developed in the future, a conversation between the former Lithuanian envoy to Poland and one of the fathers of the modern state, J. Šaulys, who had the office of a Lithuanian envoy to Switzerland, and the former President of Poland I. Mościcki might reveal. J. Šaulys mentioned that the conversation in Friburg, a symbolically neutral territory, where the former Polish President found shelter, was private and sincere. He told that J. Pilsudski, who had signed an agreement with Germans, had warned not to trust them, just being ill, did not expect to see this time himself. Both politicians were glad that Lithuania accepted almost 100,000 refugees from Poland. I. Mościcki inquired whether the refugees were not causing problems and diplomatically suggested behaving with them as nice as possible in the name of the future friendship between the countries. J. Šaulys responded that the behaviour with them was nice despite the fact that the youth expressed certain dissatisfaction with Lithuania. The former Polish President was dissatisfied with some Polish emigrants who reproached Lithuania about Vilnius and was glad that it did not belong to the Bolsheviks. I. Mościcki spoke prophetic words, which echo from the unhappy 1940: “Vilnius won’t be an obstacle between Poland and Lithuania. Not any more...”<sup>107</sup>

Even though during the interwar period the modern states of Lithuania and Poland found more differences than similarities, the last years demonstrated a complicated but purposeful movement forward. Even after long-term mutual hostility, the countries managed to find at least partial *modus vivendi*. They were united by mutual threats, especially by the German aggression, when the disaster of WWII was approaching, which caused overlooking differences and forgetting the most important question of Vilnius,

<sup>107</sup> 1940.04.06, Pro Memoria from Lithuania’s Envoy in Switzerland J. Šaulys. About Discussion with I. Mościcki, former President of Poland, LCVA, F.MK-9, ap.1, b.6, l.29.

at least temporarily. Unfortunately, both Lithuania and Poland perceived aggressive intentions of Germany, but did not pay appropriate attention to the Soviet Union, which was as aggressive as Germany and much more treacherous. Therefore, the geopolitical factor instigated by revolutionary Communist ideology determined the destiny of both countries. The utopian ideas of the front against Germany could not become true when the USSR attempted to use this for subjugating the neighbouring countries. Thus, it is obvious that the Lithuanian-Polish cooperation would have gained new forms without the aggressive neighbouring countries, which destroyed the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth in 1795 and decided to delete modern Lithuania and Poland from the political map for a long time in 1939. It is difficult to say what positive and negative things would have been caused by the cooperation, but history lessons should help us be strong and not to repeat painful mistakes, at the same time avoiding comfortable moralization from a retrospective. Thus after half a century of these events, Lithuania and Poland drove out invasive Communism, got rid of Moscow domination, and started their new epoch. During this epoch, the past can become our strength and help facing new challenges.

## Conclusions

1. The traditional Lithuanian foreign policy with Poland based on conflict started changing in 1933, when National Socialists came into power in Germany. As it started intensive pressure on Lithuania, the impossibility to fight two fronts was perceived as well as the fact that changes were necessary. Their first signs were the appointment of Stasys Lozoraitis as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and the changes in the Lithuanian Army, from which pro-German officers were expelled after the June putsch against President Antanas Smetona.
2. The changes towards Poland were slow. Under the conditions of German pressure in 1934–1936, Lithuania attempted to orientate towards the USSR; however, some people encouraged to search for help not only in Moscow, but also in Warsaw. The contemporary envoy to Germany Jurgis Šaulys, the Rector of Vytautas Magnus University Mykolas Riomeris, the leader of the opposition Christian Democratic Party Leonas Bistras, and the Head of Ateitininkai Federation

Kazys Pakštas were among them. However, the image of Poland as an enemy was still prevalent in a large part of society. The 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Suwalki Agreement was commemorated intensively, in the form of mourning.

3. Even though in the defensive plans of the Lithuanian Army Germany was more frequently viewed as the main enemy and the main defensive forces were directed towards it, diplomatic relations were established only in 1938, after the Polish ultimatum to Lithuania. An experienced officer and diplomat Kazys Škirpa was appointed as the first envoy to Poland, who was renowned as the supporter of the “hard line” towards Poland. Still, a number of his initiatives were a reasonable compromise, but they were cancelled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as suggested too early. Nevertheless, both sides made compromises. Poland refused the demand for Lithuania to deny the right to Vilnius and its region, while Lithuania closed the Union for the Liberation of Vilnius, which united the nation in order to regain the capital.
4. After the Munich Conference, the “Appeasement” policy experienced a fiasco, and the power of Germany was gradually increasing. K. Škirpa went to work in Berlin, and J. Šaulys was transferred to Warsaw. This way, the Lithuanian Government attempted to appease Germany and to strengthen its positions in Poland. However, Germany annexed Klaipėda, and Poland suggested only moral help. Because of these reasons, the image of Poland was improving in Lithuania. The visit of the Commander-in-Chief Gen. Stasys Raštikis, who was very popular in society, to Poland in May, 1939 particularly contributed to this. The visit was probably the warmest episode in the Lithuanian-Polish relations during the whole interwar period.

### **Streszczenie**

#### **Zmiana postrzegania Polski przez litewską elitę polityczną w latach 1934–1939 r.**

Artykuł analizuje starania elity politycznej Litwy, by zmienić politykę wobec Polski w okresie 1934–1939. Początek tych starań wiąże się z przemianami geopolitycznymi, przede wszystkim z dojściem do władzy w Niemczech narodowych socjalistów w 1933 r. i wkrótce potem podpisanym niemiecko-polskim układem

1934 r. W reakcji na to prezydent Antanas Smetona na nowego ministra spraw zagranicznych wyznaczył Stasysa Lozoraitisa, który nie był negatywnie nastawiony wobec Polski. Oprócz niego za złagodzeniem stanowiska wobec Polski opowiedzieli się znani litewscy działacze społeczni, a po mianowaniu na przywódcę wojska Stasysa Raštikisa w 1935 r. – również wielu wysokich oficerów. Mimo to proces ocieplania stosunków był powolny. W prasie litewskiej poprzez inercję wciąż jeszcze dominowało wyobrażenie Polaka jako wroga, mimo że dyplomaci i oficerowie coraz częściej upatrywali głównego niebezpieczeństwa w rosnących w siłę Niemczech. Elita polityczna powoli zaczęła rozumieć, że Litwa może nie odzyskać Wilna w najbliższym czasie, tymczasem utrata wrót morskich – Kłajpedy – stawała się coraz bardziej realna.

To zaważyło na pierwszych zmianach. W planach wojskowych z 1937 r. jako główne niebezpieczeństwo traktuje się już Niemcy, podnoszona jest też kwestia porozumienia z Polską. Do tego jednak trudno było doprowadzić, zwłaszcza że stosunki między Polską i Litwą zostały nawiązane w sposób nieprzyjemny – jedna ze stron otrzymała ultimatum. Wydarzenie to wywołało na Litwie niemały kryzys moralny i polityczny. Głównym ambasadorem w Polsce mianowano słynącego z twardego kursu wobec Polski pierwszego ochotnika armii litewskiej, oficera i dyplomata, Kazysa Škirpę, wojskowym attaché zaś został zięć prezydenta Antanasa Smetony, pułkownik sztabu generalnego Aloyzas Valiūsis. Mimo wszystko K. Škirpa starał się kierować relacje z Polską w stronę konstruktywnej współpracy, przestrzegał polskich kolegów o agresji Niemiec i ich prawdziwych planach. Czasem kierownictwo MSZ musiało gasić inicjatywę ambasadora, sądząc, że społeczeństwo może ją źle zrozumieć. Najlepszym przykładem jest przełożenie wizyty wpływowych polskich polityków w Kownie pod pretekstem nadejścia zimy.

Po konferencji w Monachium w Europie jeszcze bardziej wzmożła się niemiecka groźba. Niemcy zaczęły zagrażać zwłaszcza Kłajpedzie. W interesie Polski nie leżało, by Litwa straciła ten port, co stało się kolejnym przyczynkiem do wzajemnego zbliżenia. W celu złagodzenia nacisku ze strony Niemiec Litwa wysłała do Berlina K. Škirpę, który miał wiele znajomości w wysokich kręgach politycznych Trzeciej Rzeszy, równocześnie, dążąc do wzmocnienia relacji z Polską, przeniosła do Warszawy dyplomata i sygnatariusza aktu Niepodległości z 16 lutego Jurgisa Šaulysa, który znany był jako największy zwolennik naprawy stosunków z Polską. Mimo podjętych starań Niemcy i tak odebrali Litwie Kłajpedę, a do ściślejszej współpracy pomiędzy Litwą a Polską nie doszło. Jednak sympatie litewskiego społeczeństwa, zwłaszcza po aneksji kraju kłajpedzkiego przez Niemcy, wyraźnie przesunęły się w stronę Polski. Widać to było zwłaszcza po tym, w jak pozytywnym świetle przedstawiona została wizyta przywódcy armii litewskiej, cieszącego się dużą popularnością, generała Stasysa Raštikisa w maju 1939 r. – był to bodajże najcieplejszy epizod okresu międzywojennego w stosunkach obu krajów.



## Summary

### **The Change in Attitude of the Lithuanian Political Elite towards Poland in 1934–1939**

The present article analyses the efforts of the political elite of Lithuania to change the policy towards Poland in 1934–1939. The beginning of the changes is related to geopolitical changes, first of all, the coming of the National Socialists to power in Germany in 1933 and the German-Polish Agreement in 1934. Reacting to this, President Antanas Smetona appointed Stasys Lozoraitis as the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, who did not have a negative attitude towards Poland. In addition, other famous society members expressed the opinion to soften the attitude towards Poland; after Stasys Raštikis was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief in 1935, a large number of officials supported this opinion. Still, the processes were not changing immediately: the Lithuanian press was still dominated by the image of a Pole as an enemy despite the fact that diplomats and officials saw Germany, which was getting increasingly stronger, as the main threat. The political elite gradually perceived that Lithuania could not regain Vilnius in the nearest future, but there was a real threat to lose Klaipėda, the gate to the sea.

These factors preconditioned the first changes. In 1937, in the plans of the Lithuanian army, Germany was viewed as the main threat, and questions were raised that an agreement with Poland had to be made. It was difficult to achieve this; therefore, the relations were established by an unpleasant way, after the Polish ultimatum. This situation provoked a considerable moral and political crisis in Lithuania. The first Lithuanian Army volunteer, an officer, and diplomat Kazys Škirpa, who was renowned as the supporter of the “hard line” towards Poland, was appointed as the first envoy to Poland, while Aloyzas Valušis, the son-in-law of President Antanas Smetona was appointed as a military *attaché*. K. Škirpa attempted to change the relations with the Polish colleagues towards a more constructive direction and warned them about the aggression of Germany and its real plans. The heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sometimes had to stop the initiatives of the envoy, being afraid that society could understand them in a wrong way. For instance, the arrival of the influential members of the Polish political elite to Kaunas was postponed due to the start of winter, as it was explained.

After the Munich Conference, Germany posed even more threat to Europe, particularly to Klaipėda. Poland was not interested in Lithuania losing the port, and this was one more reason for closer contacts. In order to soften the pressure from Germany, Lithuania sent K. Škirpa to Berlin, as he had many acquaintances among the authorities of the Third Reich. For the sake of strengthening relations with Poland, it transferred the diplomat and the signatory of February 16 Act, Jur-



gis Šaulys, to Warsaw, who was a strong supporter of renewing relations with Poland. Despite this, Germany annexed Klaipėda, while a closer connection between Lithuania and Poland was not created. Still, especially after the annexation of Klaipėda Region, Lithuanian society was much more favourable towards Poland. This was highlighted by the Lithuanian and Polish media, which described the visit of the Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian Army General, Stasys Raštikis, who was particularly popular in society, in a very warm way. The visit, which took place in May, 1939, was possibly the warmest episode in the Polish-Lithuanian relations during the whole interwar period.

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