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TOWARD THE BALTIC UNION, 1927 - 1934

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[See also: "[Toward the Baltic Union: The Initial Phase](#)" *Lituanus*, vol 14:1, 1968
"[Toward the Baltic Union 1920-1927](#)" *Lituanus*, vol. 12:2, 1966]

For eight years the Baltic States had struggled for their union without any tangible results. Only Estonia and Latvia had formed an alliance in 1923, but even this alliance was not strong.¹ Despite the fact that almost everybody in the Baltic States recognized the great necessity for a Baltic union, there were many factors working against it.

The Baltic nations still did not know each other well enough and had demonstrated little inclination to get better acquainted. Overpowering domestic problems absorbed their minds. They were fiercely proud of their recently gained independence and did not want to sacrifice any portion of it, even if it were for the benefit of all three of them. Each country wanted to develop its own resources to the fullest and feared the competition of its neighbors. They had not yet learned to cooperate, to share their resources and opportunities, and to help each other. They were even afraid to try to cooperate. Some Baltic statesmen believed that a Baltic economic bloc would still be too small to have any influence on world economy and would only antagonize the great powers if it wanted to exercise its strength. They preferred individualistic competition of their states for small favors from the great powers.

Latvia and Estonia had solved their border problems and had no nationalistic territorial ambitions. Both of them were united in deadly fear of their gigantic neighbor, the Soviet Union. Lithuania had no borders with the Soviet Union and was practically shielded from it by Poland. Lithuania had, however, unsolved territorial problems with Poland. The Lithuanian-Polish controversy over Vilnius was the greatest stumbling block on the road to both a small Baltic Union, comprising only Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, or a large union, comprising these states, Finland, the Scandinavian countries and / or Poland, or an alliance of all the states which bordered the Soviet Union on the west. On the other hand, the Germans still hoped for the restoration of Klaipeda territory to Germany along with the Polish corridor and portions of Silesia. Because of the fact that Poland had border problems with all of its neighbors except Rumania and one third of its inhabitants were non-Polish, this country was considered an internally weak, potential danger spot by all of its neighbors. It was regretted that Poland did not want to treat its neighbors as equals and did not make a serious attempt to solve its outstanding problems with them on the basis of mutual satisfaction, a course of action which would create a solid basis for a bloc of friendly countries under Polish leadership.

Because of their territorial ambitions and long range political plans both Germany and the Soviet Union worked in unison against any stabilization of the situation in the area between them. The Soviet Union was strongly against any kind of Baltic Union and Germany was against a Baltic Union which would include either Lithuania or Poland, or both of them. In order to exploit the Lithuanian-Polish controversy, Germany and the Soviet Union cooperated in their support of Lithuania against Poland, but only to the extent, that such a policy would keep the controversy alive and would not allow Lithuania to become too bold and resort to arms in her struggle for Vilnius. Both Germany and the Soviet Union feared that in an open struggle Poland would rapidly occupy Lithuania and the Klaipeda Territory. Germany even feared that Poland might not stop on the East Prussian borders.² Estonia and Latvia realized that Poland was the only stronghold against possible domination of Central Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union. They also realized that they could do nothing to help Lithuania in her struggle against Poland. They wanted to maintain friendly relations with both of these countries, silently praying that they might dissolve their differences one day.

British-French rivalry for political and economic domination in the Baltic area was also an obstacle to peace and order in the region. France supported Polish ambitions as long as there was not yet a chance for Franco-Russian rapprochement, and, when it finally came about, France started to change positions and became "interested" in Lithuania. Great Britain did not want to get involved in Central European controversies and tried to organize a Balto-Scandinavian or simply Baltic bloc without Poland, which seemed to be safer and to cause less Soviet resistance.

On January 2-3, 1927, the Estonian, Latvian and Finnish representatives met in Tallinn. The Soviet propaganda concerning the domination by Poland of the Baltic States had achieved exclusion of Poland from the conference. The new Latvian Foreign Minister, the Social Democrat Felikss Cielens, informed the Swedish Minister that in case of a war between the Soviet Union and Poland, Latvia would remain neutral. The Swedes already knew that the Finns would remain neutral even in case of a Soviet invasion of the Baltic States. On January 12 the German Minister in Riga, Dr. Adolf Koester, was informed by his superiors that an alliance between the Baltic States and Finland was undesirable from the German point of view and that the Baltic States, although still independent, should be considered as belonging to the Russian sphere of influence. The German Government wanted, however, to maintain some influence for Finland among the Baltic States to neutralize the Polish influence.³

A German document, dated February 14, 1927, bluntly explains the policy of Germany toward Lithuania. Germany attempted to use Lithuania as a pawn in a silent struggle with Poland, but without entering into closer relations with the Lithuanians. She was willing to cooperate with Lithuania economically to such an extent as to avoid economic collapse of that country but not to cause her prosperity either. In case of a military confrontation with Poland, Lithuania was to be discouraged from resorting to arms in order to preserve her from collapse and for future German diplomatic games. If Lithuania were conquered by Poland, East Prussia could probably become Poland's next victim.⁴

On February 5, 1927, Estonia and Latvia signed a customs union but it was never put into operation. Meanwhile the relations between Estonia and Latvia became disturbed by their divergent views regarding their relations with the Soviet Union.⁵

On February 25 the Lithuanian Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras suggested the neutralization of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, an eventuality which could be advantageous to the Soviet Union, whose front would be shortened by 1000 miles. Such a proposal, of course, could almost be considered an invitation to Soviet Russia to invade Poland. Voldemaras thus hoped to win back Vilnius and Grodno (Gardinas).⁶

On March 6 Cielens went incognito to Lithuania and met Voldemaras at Kybartai. Cielens told him that the presently weak Germany and Russia could become strong again. Nothing could then save the Baltic States if they were not united militarily, politically and economically. Voldemaras felt safe thanks to the benevolent attitude of both Germany and Soviet Russia toward Lithuania and would welcome Latvia only as an ally against Poland. In his opinion, without Vilnius the Baltic Union would make no sense. Cielens, on the other hand, would not support the conclusion of a Lithuano-Latvian military alliance if it were turned against Poland. Voldemaras was favorably inclined toward a customs union with Latvia, but considered it somewhat premature. On March 18-19 Voldemaras visited Riga on the occasion of the funeral of the President of Latvia, but did not engage in serious conversations. Cielens, who had always adamantly opposed a union of the Baltic States with Poland, was now accused by the Poles of being a tool in the hands of the Germans and Russians. He was actually a great admirer of the Polish nation. Due to the fact that Cielens' policy was more lenient toward the Soviet Union than was Dr. Akel's (Estonian Foreign Minister), the relations between Estonia and Latvia also cooled. When the Estonians received a British and American loan through the League of Nations but the Latvians received nothing, the Russians granted Latvia a trade treaty which was, for a while, advantageous to the latter.⁷

In March, 1927, Cielens formulated his own Eastern Locarno Pact which would guarantee the Baltic States (without Poland) by Germany, the Soviet Union and Western Powers. The Estonians were outright sceptical, the Poles were outraged, but the German Chancellor Dr. Gustav Stresemann reminded Koester on March 19 that Germany would favor the neutralization of Finland, Estonia and Latvia, but not Lithuania and Poland, with whom the Germans had unsettled border problems. On August 17 Cielens visited Voldemaras again and tried to interest him in the problems of customs unions, passport formalities, etc., but the Lithuanian leader only wanted the Latvians to help liberate Vilnius. To avoid annoying the Poles the invited Estonian Foreign Minister did not show up in Kaunas. On September 17, 1927, Cielens formally proposed his Eastern Locarno Pact at the VHIth Session of the League of Nations Assembly. The reaction of the Western Powers was one of caution or disinterest.⁸

When the Lithuanian Social Democrat Jeronimas Plečkaitis attempted a **coup d'etat** at Taurage and Alytus on September 7-19, 1927, one hundred Latvian social democrat volunteers went to the borders, ready to intervene. In its distaste for supposedly Fascist regime in Lithuania the left-wing Latvian Government even overlooked contacts between the Lithuanian insurgent leaders and the Polish representatives Juliusz Lukasiewicz and Dr. Karol Polakiewicz in Riga.⁹

On January 27, 1928, the former Latvian Minister in Lithuania, Antons Balodis, became the Foreign Minister. Because of some disappointments he had experienced in Lithuania, he seemed to be somewhat more favorably inclined toward Poland. On March 25, 1928, Estonia and Latvia concluded a most-favored nation commercial treaty. On April 21-22 the

first conference of the representatives of trade and industry of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania met in Riga. While the Latvians suggested the closest economic cooperation between them, the Estonians and Lithuanians were in favor of bilateral treaties.¹⁰

Annoyed by Voldemaras' unwillingness to solve the Vilnius problem and establish closer relations with the other Baltic States, Balodis decided to apply a diplomatic pressure on him. On September 10, 1928, he formally accused Lithuania in the League of Nations of obstructing traffic on the Liepaja-Romni railroad line by keeping it closed. The lack of traffic reportedly caused great financial losses to Liepaja. The Lithuanian press condemned Balodis' speech severely as an attempt on the part of Latvia to curry favor with Poland by supporting the latter's thesis that Lithuania was deliberately avoiding normal relations with Poland and other states. Some Western and Latvian observers were doubtful whether Latvia's commercial life would be greatly stimulated by opening of the Liepaja-Romni line. If the line were established, the Lithuanian Government would probably try to direct as many goods as possible through Klaipeda. The new Latvian Prime Minister, Hugo Celmiņš, and the new Latvian Minister in Kaunas, Roberts Liepiņš, tried hard to cooperate with Voldemaras, who announced in January, 1929, that he saw no need for the improvement in Latvian-Lithuanian relations. Liepiņš then resorted to personal policy by making contacts with wide circles of Lithuanian statesmen, officers and men of letters, who responded to his overtures in a friendly fashion.¹¹

Rather disappointed, the American Minister in the Baltic States, Frederick Coleman, wrote on April 22, 1929, that during the last two years he had noticed that the Baltic States were steadily drifting away from the idea of a Baltic Union and developing along individual lines. The Latvian manufacturers had feared Estonian competition in certain lines of goods, and the Estonian commercial circles had feared that a large part of Estonia's imports would be diverted to Riga during period of closer cooperation between the two states. Lithuania, in his opinion, pursued a policy of complete aloofness from the other Baltic States, had no commercial treaties and had not taken steps to settle disputed questions which existed between her and her Baltic neighbors, subordinating everything to the Vilnius question.¹²

There was a noticeable tendency in Estonia and Latvia to come closer to the Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, thus following in the footsteps of Finland. There were exchanges of visits of the Swedish, Estonian and Latvian navies and of prominent scholars and artists. On May 27-28, 1929, the President of Latvia, Gustavs Zemgals, visited Sweden. From June 27 to July 1 the Swedish King Gustav V visited Estonia and Latvia. On December 5 Finland for the first time participated in the Conference for Defence of Northern Europe. Estonia and Latvia, however, were non invited. Despite their dislike and fear of Russia, the Scandinavian countries did not want to become directly involved in Baltic controversies. Sweden felt flattered by the admiration of her by the Baltic States and their choice of her as preferred leader in the Baltic area, but she realized her limited potentialities and felt safe in her peninsular isolation. She only wanted to openly demonstrate certain interest in Estonia and Latvia in order to encourage their independence and self-confidence, thus strengthening them as a buffer between her and Russia, without becoming directly involved.¹³

Development of very close relations between Estonia and Poland and the visit of the President of Estonia, Dr. Otto Strandman, to Poland on February 9-10, 1930, without previously consulting Latvia, antagonized Latvians and caused outright anti-Estonian demonstrations in Lithuania. Some Lithuanians did not like the situation. Ernestas Galvanauskas confided to the American diplomats that many of his colleagues at this time were greatly influenced by the German Foreign Ministry through Dr. H. Moraht in Kaunas. He said that the Russian and German diplomats tried to keep the Lithuanian nationalism at the boiling point and channel it against Poland and the northern Baltic neighbors. This situation caused pronounced pro-Polish sentiment in Latvia and Estonia. The President of Poland, Proc. Ignacy Moscicki, visited Estonia. The relations between Estonia and Latvia, which had become worse since December 21, 1929, when Gen. Johan Laidoner had made some derogatory remarks about the cooperation between these countries in economic and military matters, became bitter when Karlis Zariņš was appointed Latvian Minister to Estonia in May, 1930. He understood Estonian affairs and spoke fluent Estonian. During the Third Baltic Economic Conference on June 16-17, 1930, at Kaunas the Lithuanians and Estonians still refused to enter into a Baltic customs union, but were quite interested in possible establishment of common shipyards, common currency, etc. Latvia actually still bought more goods from her Baltic neighbors than she sold to them.¹⁴

In the fall of 1930 the heads of the Latvian and Estonian War Academies agreed on common summer training programs, but these programs were in operation only in 1931 and 1932. In a period from 1925 to 1929 the Latvian and Estonian navies made their first contacts and in 1930 held the first joint maneuvers. On August 4-13, 1931, their maneuvers were held on a larger scale. Six Estonian and six Latvian warships, supported by Finnish naval units, participated in the war games. The Estonian and Latvian land forces, supported by airplanes, also held joint maneuvers. This, however, was their first and last activity of this sort.¹⁵

On November 24, 1930, Celmiņš arrived in Kaunas to sign several conventions and treaties, and assured the Lithuanians that he did not place great importance on Liepaja-Romni railroad. The Lithuanians abrogated their trade treaty with Latvia in April, 1931, however. When the new Lithuanian Prime Minister, Jonas Tuobelis, who was a friend of Latvia, visited Riga on January 24, 1931, the Russian Minister in Kaunas, Karski, formally protested against closer Lithuanian-Latvian relations. Lithuania's isolation from the other Baltic States suited Soviet interests.¹⁶

The relations between Poland and Latvia became worse when the Latvian Government suspended activities of two ultranationalistic Polish organizations in Latvia on October 1, 1931. The closed organizations had utilized schools and a newspaper in order to Polonize the Latvian inhabitants in the neighborhood of Polish borders and advocated their absorption by Poland. On October 6 the Polish Minister in Latvia, Miroslaw Ar-ciszewski demanded freedom for their activities. Threats were expressed that Poland might not ratify the protocol of the Polish-Latvian borders, signed on February 12, 1929, and would reopen the question of six Latvian border communes, at one time demanded by Poland. When the Latvians went ahead and closed the organizations in question, a new more moderate Polish nationalist organization started its activities in March, 1932.¹⁷

Encouraged by worsening Latvian-Polish relations, Dr. Dovas Zaunius confided to the German Foreign Office early in November, 1931, that Latvia might join Lithuania and Germany if she were to receive a guarantee from the Soviet Union that the latter had no intention to attack her. The Germans made overtures accordingly in Moscow on November 6 and on December 5, 1931, with no results. The Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov suggested that Germany might as well guarantee the existing Lithuanian-German borders. The German Ambassador, Herbert von Dirksen, understood that the Soviet Government did not intend to utilize the situation by giving Latvia a special guarantee in order to relieve her anxieties. Litvinov, however, had broader plans in his mind. He wanted to assure the execution of the Soviet ambitious domestic five-year plan by having non-aggression pacts with all of the neighbors.¹⁸

On January 17, 1932, the Finnish and Estonian Governments and on January 17-18 the Estonian and Latvian Governments coordinated their policies toward the Soviet invitation to sign non-aggression pacts with the Soviet Union. All Baltic States and Poland signed such pacts from January 21 to July 25, 1932. Just to be on the safe side, the Poles and Latvians organized common maneuvers of their armed forces near the Soviet borders and the Polish, Latvian, and Estonian general staffs regularly exchanged information. They were not absolutely sure of Soviet benevolent attitude and expected some surprises.¹⁹

The idea of an Esto-Letto-Lithuanian Triple Entente was repeated again in the resolution of the Latvian-Lithuanian conference, held on June 13, 1932. The Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact of November 29, 1932, paved the way for further rapprochement between the Baltic States. Karlis Ozols, former Latvian diplomat, had attempted to spread the idea of a Pan-Baltic Union, which would include the Scandinavian and Baltic States, but not Poland. The relations between Latvia and Lithuania were unnecessarily strained, however, when the Director of the Department of Citizens' Defense of the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior, Jonas Navakas, forbade the Latvians to send Latvian books and magazines to the Kurs, of Latvian origin, who inhabited the Ku-rish Peninsula. The Latvians were also forbidden to visit the peninsula. With the Latvians excluded, the Lithuanians alone now faced resurgent German nationalism in the Klaipeda Territory.²⁰

Hitler's advent to power on January 30, 1933, caused a great consternation in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe. In March, 1933, the former Mayor of Stockholm, Carl Lindhagen, a Social Democrat, submitted to the Swedish Riksdag a proposal to urge the Swedish Government to make efforts for reaching a rapprochement between the Scandinavian and Baltic States and Poland. His proposal, however, was turned down by the Constitutional Commission of the Riksdag.²¹

Already in January both Estonia and Latvia unofficially expressed their interest to welcome Lithuania as a partner in a common Baltic Union. Secretary General of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hermanis Albats, even offered Latvia's mediation in the Lithuanian-Polish controversy. He sensed, however, fears of the Lithuanian industrials to face a possible Latvian competition and certain resentment among the Latvian general public regarding restrictions faced by Latvian visitors to Lithuania.²²

Early in April Karlis Ozols founded the Baltic Union, a private organization, supported by the British and Americans, to further cooperation between the three Baltic States in economic, cultural and political spheres with the hope that Poland and Finland might also join such a union. The Lithuanian delegates reopened the Vilnius question and thus arrested further developments for a while. It is interesting to note that the Finns and Swedes had sent their observers, too, to the conference.²³

On April 7, 1933, the Latvian Prime Minister Adolfs Blodnieks went on record as favoring a Baltic Entente. The leading statesmen of Estonia likewise expressed their support of the Entente. The President of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, expressed his strong opposition to the Baltic Entente, on April 29, however, as long as Latvia and Estonia maintained friendly relations with Poland. Observers of the new Nazi Germany, happily noted that Smetona was unwittingly playing into their hands and cynically remarked that any time they would grant some "little economic concessions" to Lithuania or threaten her with the "Memel questions", they might turn Lithuania's course in the direction favorable to German interests. They were worried, however, about "unnecessary tactlessness" of Smetona's speech toward Latvia and Estonia. The tone of his speech could have adverse results. It was known that many Lithuanian statesmen, men of letters, military men and members of the Lithuanian Home Guards (**Šiaulių Sajunga**) already favored a close Baltic alliance. The Estonians bitterly asked if Lithuania seriously believed that Estonia and Latvia could possibly conquer Vilnius from Poland for her and the Baltic countries could withstand the Soviet pressure without the Polish assistance. Undismayed, the Estonian and Latvian leaders agreed on May 27 that it was of the greatest importance to draw Lithuania into closer cooperation with her northern

neighbors, but modified their stand on August 14. They were afraid that it would be most difficult to maintain further contacts with Lithuania if she officially refused a formal invitation to a conference with Estonia and Latvia.²⁴

There were indications that France was losing interest in a chain of small nations as a defense line against Soviet aggression. It was also becoming apparent that the small nations could not depend on the League of Nations for assistance in case of an outright attack. The great powers were regrouping in hostile camps. When Litvinov approached the French Foreign Minister Paul Boncour in the fall of 1933, suggesting mutual security arrangements, the Latvian Foreign Minister, Voldemars Salnais, pointed out that his country was not interested in joining any particular group which would direct its energies against any state or group of states, but wanted to cooperate with all countries in the interests of peace. The Estonian Minister Hans La-retei was happy to note on September 27 that, although in the past the Soviet Government had taken every opportunity to work against the formation of the Baltic Union, faced by serious Nazi threats, it had recently placed no obstacles in the way of economic and political agreements between the three Baltic States. Lithuania, however, had not yet taken this opportunity to form closer relations with her Baltic neighbors. The Soviet Union, engaged in fulfilment of her Five Year Plans, wanted to see the Baltic Entente as a shield against Nazi Germany. The British saw in a Baltic Entente a better chance for maintenance of status quo in the Baltic area. At the end of September six influential members of the Anglo-Baltic Society arrived in the Baltic States to conduct highly secret conversations for a union of these states. The Americans were also interested in such a union. The great Western democracies believed that this solution offered the only hope for the Baltic States to preserve their independence.²⁵

Nazi Germany, however, decided on December 12, 1933, to continue the previous Weimar policy toward Lithuania, Poland and the other Baltic States. Lithuania was still considered an important factor in Germany's game against Poland and against the possible Helsinki-Bucharest bloc under the Polish leadership. A Baltic Union was not in Germany's interests. It was assumed that with some German economic assistance Lithuania would remain hostile toward Poland. It was likewise assumed that the Soviet Union in her own interests would cooperate with Nazi Germany against Poland. In order to scare the Soviet Union, German negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Poland were started in November 1933. The results were quite unexpected.²⁶

Soon after the beginning of the Polish-German negotiations, the Soviet Government made an attempt to win Poland as a partner in "guaranteeing" the Baltic States. This was a complete reversal in Soviet foreign policy. The obvious purpose was to stop the spread of Germany's political influence. On December 21, 1933, Litvinov suggested to the Polish Envoy in Moscow that both countries issue a joint declaration to this effect without previously informing and alarming the small Baltic States. Litvinov's draft was formulated in such ambiguous terms, however, that any change in the internal life of one of the Baltic States could serve as pretext for intervention. Interested in the independence of the small northern neighbours and attempting to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, Poland did not reject the Soviet proposal out of hand, but insisted that the policy of protecting sovereign states without their knowledge and possibly against their will could lead to dangerous consequences. The action proposed by Litvinov could be taken only with the express agreement of the countries concerned. The Polish Envoy, Juliusz Lukasiwicz, was afraid that the Soviets probably wanted to find an international basis for the treatment of the Baltic States as an object of Moscow's policy and to acquire a pretext for interference in their internal affairs. He also believed that the Soviets were attempting to undermine the trust which Poland enjoyed in the Baltic States. In view of the Polish opposition to the manner in which the proposal was shaped, the Soviet representatives hastened on December 23 to inform Latvia, Estonia and Finland of the intentions of Soviet Union and Poland to protect them. Finland rejected the proposal out of hand, but Estonia and Latvia hesitated. As the Polish Minister, for some still inexplicable reason, revealed the negotiations with the Soviets to the Latvians only on December 28, the Latvians suspected the Poles of foul play. If the Poles had refused the Soviet suggestion, the Soviet Government would have accused Poland of being unwilling to protect the Baltic States. Now the situation was even worse. The Baltic States did not object in principle to a declaration which would guarantee their independence but they wanted to see Germany and other neighboring states join in such a declaration. They did not want to gamble with their independence and neutrality. In the middle of January, 1934, the Baltic States formally rejected the guarantee as it was proposed.²⁷

In his desperation Salnais travelled to Sweden and Finland to achieve somewhat closer political connections with these countries. The Baltic nationals had always pictured the Scandinavian countries as their haven and possible allies, but the Swedes had always been anxious not to associate themselves too closely with the affairs of the Baltic States. The Baits were in the role of idealistic, but poor suitors, and Sweden was in the role of a friendly, but standoffish maiden, who belonged to a well-established and "better" family. The Finns and Latvians agreed only on resumption of the periodic exchanges of visits of their respective foreign ministers and chiefs of general staffs.²⁸

The signing of a ten-year non-aggression pact by Germany and Poland on January 26, 1934, and certain Nazi German activities in the Baltic States created uneasiness among the Baltic nationals. The Estonian and Latvian statesmen concluded that the interests of all three Baltic States would be now best served by a clear political, economic and military union. On February 17, 1934, Salnais and Julius Seljamaa signed a very close Latvian-Estonian defensive alliance, and left the door open for the admission of Lithuania. Their convention obligated the signatories to act together at international conferences, to hold regular conferences of their foreign ministers, and to establish a joint council for the coordination of legal, political and economic matters. The new defensive alliance, which went considerably beyond the original alliance, was modelled on the Balkan Pact of February 9, 1934, and on the Pact of the Little Entente of February 16, 1933.²⁹

As long as antagonism existed between Poland on the one side and Germany and the Soviet Union on the other side, Lithuania had no need to worry about her relations with Poland. When the protection was nullified by the non-aggression pacts between Poland and the Soviet Union and Poland and Germany, and the new German Government voiced its interest in the restoration of Memelland, the Lithuanian Government now had begun to apprehend complete isolation. Some Lithuanian statesmen, notably the Secretary-General of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, Juozas Urbys, had repeatedly urged their government to join the other Baltic States in an alliance. Now, on February 24, 1934, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Dr. Zaunius, who had not been an ardent proponent of such an alliance, expressed Lithuanian desire that a special union be made between Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and that collaboration between them should take place. He indirectly hinted that Lithuania was no longer insisting on involvement of her northern neighbors in the Vilnius issue. Some Lithuanians still had difficulty in seeing what benefit Lithuania could derive from an alliance with Latvia and Estonia, which, with the exception of industrial development and natural resources, were weaker than Lithuania in population, financial stability and modern armament. When the German threats became even more obvious, the Lithuanian Government addressed a memorandum to the Estonian and Latvian Governments on April 25, announcing its interest in closer collaboration between the three states. The Government also submitted a list of vaguely termed principles which could serve as the basis for tightening the bonds of solidarity among the Baltic States. Both Estonia and Latvia were sympathetic. They wanted to make their position respecting Vilnius to be perfectly clear, however.³⁰

On March 28 Litvinov proposed to the German Ambassador in Moscow that their countries should guarantee the independence of the Baltic States, again without previously informing the Baltic governments. On April 11 the German Government refused to sign such a guarantee pact. Only on April 23 were the Baltic governments notified of the goings on. The exchange of notes was sharply commented upon in the Baltic press and political circles. Public opinion demanded that the Baltic governments put an end to communications between third powers whenever the Baltic States were treated as mere tools for their schemes. The Estonian Foreign Minister Seljamaa turned his eyes across the Baltic sea once again and declared on April 23: "With the Scandinavian States, headed by Sweden, we are bound not only by cherished memories of the past, but also by a common culture and by mutual brotherhood in family of North European nations." The visit of the Swedish Foreign Minister to Estonia was interpreted as a desire on the part of Sweden to create closer cultural and economic relations, but it was not quite so.³¹

On April 17, 1934, the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou conceived the idea of an elaborate system of pacts whereby France, Germany, Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia would guarantee the eastern frontiers of Germany. On April 28 the Secretary General of the French Foreign Office, Alexis Leger, included also the Baltic States in the guarantee system. On May 18 Barthou and Litvinov agreed in principle on the proposal which visualized multilateral, regional, mutual assistance pacts of the USSR, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Baltic States without France, and a bilateral Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact.³² On May 7-8 Estonia and Latvia accepted Lithuania's proposal for cooperation with the exception of military collaboration. When Poland expressed her disapproval of closer relations between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Estonian Foreign Minister Seljamaa informed Pilsudski and his Foreign Minister Col. Jozef Beck on May 23-24 that the northern Baltic States had no intention of involving themselves in Lithuania's particular problems, meaning Vilnius and Klaipeda.³³

Preponderant Soviet influences in Central Eastern Europe and in the Baltic regions could render the Franco-Polish alliance meaningless, since Russia's geographical position and power would make her dominant in deciding security problems in this area. Germany viewed the proposal as an attempt to encircle her and frustrate her territorial ambitions in the East, and rejected it on September 8. The proposal would likewise jeopardize Poland's non-aggression pact with Germany and might also open the question of her eastern borders with the Soviets.³⁴

On June 6 and 12 Latvia and Estonia were officially invited to become partners in the Eastern Pact and accepted the invitations favorably. The new Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Stasys Lozoraitis, accepted it even more enthusiastically, which was quite understandable. On July 6-7 the Baltic Foreign Ministers agreed at Kaunas on a tripartite pact of the Baltic States in principle. Poland no longer had objections to the Baltic Pact so long as it would not be aimed at Vilnius. The Latvian and Estonian diplomats promised to do nothing likely to prejudice the Lithuanian standpoint in regard to Vilnius, while the Lithuanians promised not to cause difficulties for the other two partners by too active insistence on their claims.³⁵

On July 24-25 Beck visited Estonia and on July 25-26 Latvia. Influenced by Beck, the Estonians and Latvians expressed some reservations concerning the Eastern Pact proposal. The Baltic diplomats pointed out the lack of a strict system of control for the constitution of the *casus garantia* and the absence of the definition of an aggressor. The role of France toward the Baltic States in case of conflict seemed to have been purely consultative and mediatory and the role of Great Britain was even less clear. Beck assured the Baltic States that as long as they maintained their independence and integrity, they could count on the benevolence and assistance of Poland, although there were no written agreements to that effect between them. On July 28-29 Seljamaa and on August 1-5 Lozoraitis visited Moscow. The Baltic representatives expressed themselves in favor of the Eastern Pact, but the Estonians and Latvians insisted that Poland and Germany should become partners of the pact before the Baltic States could sign it. On September 27 Poland saw it fit to reject the pact.³⁶

Considering the possibility that the proposed Eastern Pact might never materialize, on August 27 the Soviet Government ordered its Minister in Riga, Stefan Brodowsky, to inform the Latvian Government that the Soviet Union was no longer opposed in the present situation to a union of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Two days later, on August 29, a Baltic conference was held at Riga and on the evening of the same day a complete agreement was reached by the delegates on all questions under consideration and embodied in nine articles in a "Convention d'Entente et de Collaboration". The enthusiasm was great. The conference was followed by the Fifth Baltic Economic Conference at Tallinn from August 31 to September 1. On September 12, 1934, the Estonian and Lithuanian Foreign Ministers, Julius Sel-jamaa and Stasys Lozoraitis, and the Secretary General of the Latvian Foreign Office, Vilhelms Munters, who was actually serving as the Foreign Minister for the Prime Minister Ulmanis, signed the Treaty of Good Understanding and Cooperation at Geneva. It was ratified on November 13, 1934, at Riga. This treaty served as the basis for the Baltic Entente. A new phase had emerged in the history of the Baltic States. Unfortunately the Baltic Entente was born rather late. Its birth had been unnecessarily postponed for approximately fifteen years.³⁷

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The substantive articles of the treaty follow:*

* Text in *Latvian-Russian Relations, Documents*, ed. Dr. Alfred Bilmanis (Washington, D. C. : The Latvian Legation, 1944), 250-51.

ARTICLE 1.

In order to co-ordinate their efforts in the cause of peace, the three Governments undertake to confer together on questions of foreign policy which are of common concern and to afford one another mutual political and diplomatic assistance in their international relations.

ARTICLE 2.

For the purpose set forth in Article 1, the High Contracting Parties hereby decide to institute periodical conferences of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the three countries, to take place at regular intervals at least twice a year, in the territories of each of the three States in turn. At the request of one of the High Contracting Parties and by joint agreement, extraordinary conferences may be held in the territory of one of the three States or elsewhere.

Each Conference shall be presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State in whose territory it takes place; if, however, a Conference meets outside the territory of the three States, its President shall be the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the country in whose territory the previous Conference was held.

The President in office shall be responsible for the execution of the decisions taken by the Conference over which he has presided, and, when necessary, shall be instructed to provide for the application of such decisions in the field of international relations.

The periodic Conferences of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Latvia provided for in Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty between Latvia and Estonia for the organization of the Alliance, signed at Riga on February 17, 1934, shall be placed by the above-mentioned Conferences for the duration of the present Treaty.

ARTICLE 3.

The High Contracting Parties recognize the existence of the specific problems which might make a concerted attitude with regard to them difficult. They agree that such problems constitute an exception to the understandings laid down in Article 1 of the Present Treaty.

ARTICLE 4.

The High Contracting Parties shall endeavour to settle amicably and in a spirit of justice and equity any questions in respect of which their interests may clash and also to do so in the shortest possible time. They agree to negotiate with each other such agreements as may appear suitable for attaining this end.

ARTICLE 5.

The three Governments shall give instructions to their diplomatic and consular representatives abroad and to their delegates to international conferences to establish appropriate contact.

ARTICLE 6.

The High Contracting Parties undertake to communicate to one another forthwith the text of the treaties concluded between one of them and one or more other States.

ARTICLE 7.

The present Treaty is open for accession by other States, such accession to take place only if all the High Contracting Parties consent thereto.

ARTICLE 8.

The present Treaty shall be ratified; it shall come into force upon the deposit of ratifications which shall take place at Riga. The Government of Latvia shall transmit to each of the two other High Contracting Parties a certified true copy of the process-verbal of the deposit of ratifications.

ARTICLE 9.

The present Treaty shall be in force of ten years. Should the Treaty not be denounced by one of the High Contracting Parties one year before the expiry of that period, it shall be extended by tacit consent and shall cease to have effect one year after its denunciation by one of the High Contracting Parties.

DECLARATION.

Upon signing the Treaty of this day's date, the Plenipotentiaries of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia hereby declare that their respective Governments will foster the growth and general diffusion in their respective countries of the spirit of mutual understanding and friendship among the three nations and they bind themselves to take or to promote all suitable measures and efforts to that end.

Notes:

1 Edgar Anderson, "Toward the Baltic Entente — The Initial Phase," *Pro Baltica, Mélanges dédiés à Kaarel R. Pusta*, ed. Jüri G. Poska (Stockholm: Comité des Amis de K. R. Pusta, 1965), 41-61; Edgar Anderson, "[Toward the Baltic Union 1920-27](#)", *Lituanus*, Vol. 44 12, No. 2 (1966), 30-56.

2 There are numerous references to this policy in the files of German Foreign Office on Lithuania.

3 United States of America, National Archives (further cited as U. S., Nat. Arch.), 860. P. 00/105; Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, Records of the German Foreign Ministry (U. S. National Archives), (further cited as Germ., AA), Microcopy T-120, Reel 2311, E 154226; Reel 2777, E 374025-6; *Survey of International Affairs*, ed. Arnold J. Toynbee (further cited as Survey), (London: Oxford University Press, 1927 --), 1927, 224.

4 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 2779, E 374974-6.

5 *Survey*, 1927, 224; Latvia, Saeima (Parliament), *Latvijas Saeimas Stenogramas* (further cited as Latvia, *Saeima*), II *Saeima*, Vth Session, 22nd Meeting, cols. 768-78; Felikss Cielens, *Laikmetu maina* (Stockholm: Memento, 1961-64), II, 322-24.

6 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 2778, E 374174-8; Ernest J. Harrison, ed., *Lithuania 1928* (London: Hazell, Easton and Viney, 1928), 55, 57-8.

7 U. S., Nat. Arch., 860. M. 00/148; 860. I. 00/151, 152; 860. P. 00/112; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 278, E. 375513; Reel 2783, E 378507-8; Cielens, II, 331, 338-41; *Survey 1927*, 224.

8 U. S., Nat. Arch., 860. I. 00/153, 158; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 2778, E. 374174-8; Reel 2311, E 154332-5, 90; Reel 2777, E 373632; Reel 2781, E 377023-4; Reel 2783, E 378501-2; Cielens, II, 342, 350-67.

9 U. S., Nat. Arch., 860. M. 00/159; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 2781, E 377-201-2, 7-8; Reel 2779, E 375247-9; Latvia, II *Saeima*, VIIIth Sess., 39th Meet., cols. 1591-92; Statement by Dr. Brūno Kalniņš, personal interview, June 30, 1964.

10 Latvia, II *Saeima*, VIIIth Sess., 1st Meet., col. 10; 4th Meet., col. 120; 9th Meet., cols. 1581-90; Cielens, II, 435-37; Janis Volmars, *Zollunion Lettland-Estland, als historisches, theoretisches und ökonomisch-konstruktives Problem* (Riga: Valters un Rapa, 1934), 115-17.

11 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760M.60.P/2? 15; 860.M.77, 22, 23; C. 00/PR/8; 760.M.61/21; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 1466, D 595093-108; Latvia, II *Saeima*, VIIIth Sess., 4th Meet., cols. 10, 162; III *Saeima*, IIInd Sess., 11th Meet., cols. 433-44; Vth Sess., 9th Meet., cols. 284-85; Vilnis Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija* (further cited as Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija*) (Riga: Liesma, 1965), 216-17, 183-85.

12 U. S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 61/21.

13 *Ibid.*, 758. 60. I; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 3605, E 685671-78; III *Saeima*, IIInd Sess., 18th Meet., cols. 813-18; Vth Sess., 23rd Meet., cols. 866-67; Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija*, 183-85.

14 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 1466, D 595093-108; Reel 3882, K 60. P/24, 27; 760. I. 60. P/2, 27, 31; 860. M. 00/260; 760. I. 075999-6000, 6022-30. 6056, 684-94; U.S., Nat. Arch., 76. M. 60. M/7; Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija*, 185, 217; Latvia, III *Saeima*, Vth Sess., 9th Meet., cols. 284-85; Volmars, 117, 181.

15 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 3883, K 076598, 686, 688, 690, 694, 696-9; Letter of Capt. E. Mittenberg, August 26, 1962.

16 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760. M. 60. P/29; 760. M. 00/37; Latvia, III *Saeima*, VIIth Sess., 17th, 18th Meet., cols. 777-78, 782-85, 891-94.

17 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 5375, K 507267-68, 71-77; Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija*, 222-23; Karlis Staišans, *Latviešu un lietuviešu austrumu apgabalu likteni* (Chicago: Janis Škirmants, 1958), 334.

18 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 5375, K 507280-82, 85-86, 91-93, 95-96.

19 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760. I. 6111/119, 20, 21; 761. N. 4/552; Sipols, *Slepena diplomatija*, 217, 220, 223-24.

20 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 00/22; 860. N. 4016/22; Antonius Piip, "Baltic States as a Regional Unit", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 186 (July 1933), (further cited as Piip, *Baltic*), 175.

21 U.S., Nat. Arch., 757. D. 60. N., March 3, 1933; 760. N. 00/38, May 19, 1933; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 3605, E 685697, 5708-09.

- 22 U. S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 00/31; Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 3605, E 68700-02; Cielens, II, 461-62.
- 23 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 00/35, 38.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 760. N. 00/37; Germ., AA, Reel 3605, E 685718-20; Reel 3507, E 632446-54; Vilnis Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba* (Further cited as Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba*) (Riga: Latvijas valsts izdevniecība, 1963), 26-8.
- 25 U.S., Nat. Arch., 760. P. 00/23; 760. N. 61/40; Roman Debicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 80.
- 26 Germ., AA, T-120, Reel 3081, E 496276-85.
- 27 *Ibid.*, Reel 3605, E 685736-39, 41-42; Reel 3081, E 495836, 38, E 495750-53, 94; U. S., Nat! Arch., 760. N. 00/41, 43, 47; Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (further cited as *Brit. Doc.*) (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1948 --), 2nd Ser., VII, 630-33, 637, 641 -43, 646; United States of America, Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945* (further cited as *Germ. Doc.*), (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957-62), Ser. C., II, 315, 333, 367-69, 774-75, 879-80; Letter from Adolfs Blodnieks, Mar. 14, 1961; Jozef Beck, *Final Report* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1957), 33; General Sikorski Historical Institute, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1961), I, 39; Roman Umiastowski, *Poland, Russia and Great Britain 1914-19U5* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1946), 136; Juliusz Lukaszewicz, *Z doswiadczen przeszlosci* (Nakl. oddz. prop. i kult. dtwa apw., n. d.), 11-3.
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- 30 Robert Machray, "The Baltic Pact, Vilna and Memel", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. CXVII, No. DCXCIX (May 1935), 586, 588-89; Debicki, 86-7; U. S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 00/53, 55; *Revue Baltique* (Riga), Vol. I, No. 1 (1940), 81; Bronius Kazlauskas, *L'Entente Baltique* (Paris: Imprimerie des Presses Modernes, 1939), 144-46; Survey, 19S4, 412-13; *Brit. Doc.*, Ser. 2, VII, 681-83.
- 31 U. S., Nat. Arch., 760. I. 00/32; *Germ. Doc.*, C, II, 683-85, 731-33; 764-66, 788-89; Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba*, 90; *Brit. Doc.*, Ser. 2, VII, 681, 685-86.
- 32 *Brit. Doc.*, 2, VII, 673-74, 686-87; VI, 707; *Germ. Doc.*, C, II, 754, 801-3; Stanislaw Mackiewicz, *Colonel Beck and His Policy* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1944), 48-50; William Evans Scott, *Alliance Against Hitler* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1962), 168-69.
- 33 Survey, 1934, 413-14; Machray, 356-57; Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba*, 30, 84, 86; Jözef Beck, *Beiträge zur europäischen Politik* (Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1939), 125-28.
- 34 *Germ. Doc.*, C, II, 880-88, 902-4; *Brit. Doc.*, 2, VI, 782-83, 893, 899-901; Debicki, 83.
- 35 *Brit. Doc.*, 2, VI, 691-92, 720-21, 803, 838-39, 842-44, 882, 885-86, 896; VII, 730-35, 842-43; *Germ. Doc.*, C, II, 892; III, 214-18, 271, 349-51, 360, 370-71, 385-86, 396-401; *International Affairs* (Moscow) No. 6 (June 1963), 113-15; Scott, 171-72; T. Terauds, "Baltijas politiskie pamati," *Sejejs*, I, No. 3 (1936), 273-74; Beck, *Final Report*, 78-9, 104; Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba*, 82, 84-6; Bohdan Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations 1932-1939* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 58-9; Great Britain, Parliament, House of Common, *Reports and Papers Presented by Command*, Cmd, 5143, Misc. 3 (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1936), 7, 9-14; U. S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1936 --), 1934, I, 498-502, 505-8.
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- 37 *Germ. Doc.*, C, III, 349-51; *Brit. Doc.*, 2, VII, 730-31, 736-40; League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, CLI, 1934-35, No. 35401, p.93; Sipols, *Dzimtenes nodeviba*, 84-6; U. S., Nat. Arch., 760. N. 00/87, 92; Ulmanis, II, 307-9; Kazlauskas, 46-7, 49-51; *Les Problèmes de la Baltique* (Paris: Publications de la Conciliation internationale, Bulletin 1934, 8/9), 843-46.