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LITHUANIA AND THE SOVIET UNION 1939-1940: THE FATEFUL YEAR

Memoirs by Juozas Urbšys

Translated and edited by SIGITA NAUJOKAITIS



J.Urbšys in 1988

Juozas Urbšys, Lithuanian diplomat and statesman, was born in 1896 and currently resides in Kaunas. He began his long career in the service of his country during World War I as a member of the Lithuanian Central Relief Committee in Moscow (1915-16). An officer in the Lithuanian army, he retired in 1922 to join the diplomatic corps and served in a number of posts in Berlin, Paris, Riga, and Kaunas. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1938-40) during a particularly difficult time in Lithuania's history. His tenure saw the Polish ultimatum of 1938, the German seizure of the Klaipėda Territory in 1939, the forced stationing of Soviet garrisons in Lithuania from October 10, 1939, and ultimately, the Soviet occupation of the country subsequent to the ultimatum of June 14, 1940.

Urbšys and his wife were arrested on July 16, 1940 and deported to the Soviet Union. In 1956, they were permitted to return to Lithuania. Urbšys (hen worked translating a number of works of French literature into Lithuanian, and presently subsists on a meager pension.

Urbšys's memoirs, quite astoundingly, appeared in the Soviet Lithuanian press in September of 1988. One of the few remaining eye-witnesses to the cynical manipulations, both Soviet and German, preceding the occupation of Lithuania, Urbšys, at 93, has recently addressed mass rallies in Vilnius and Kaunas.

The following excerpts are translated from the Lithuanian edition of Urbšys's memoirs and are paginated accordingly.

3. IN MOSCOW

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On the third of October 1939, I, as Lithuania's Foreign Minister, flew to Moscow via Riga. At Moscow airport, decorated for the occasion with Lithuanian and Soviet flags, I was met by a group which included Deputy People's Commissar for

Foreign Affairs, an elderly man, whose name, if memory serves me correctly, was Lozovsky. That same evening, together with the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, Ladas Natkevičius, we were invited to the Kremlin.

Arriving a little before eleven we waited with other automobiles to pass through the gates while uniformed secret police formed us into a line. At the door of the government offices we were met by an official in military uniform who introduced himself as "Commander of the Workers' and Peasants' Government Offices." We exchanged greetings and the commander led us to an elevator which took us to the second or third floor, I do not remember which. In the cloakroom an elderly attendant typical of such places took our coats.

We stepped into the waiting room. There sat one or two taciturn almost dour, young men surrounded by telephones and dressed in civilian clothing. They announced our arrival to whom it was necessary and, opening a door, let us into a further room.

A spacious hall. In the right corner (looking from the door) a large writing desk laden with telephones. In the left, a door opening onto yet another room. Almost directly in front of the open door stretched a long conference table. This then was the office of V. M. Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Molotov, Potemkin, Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and Pozdniakov, Charge of Lithuanian Affairs in the Soviet Union, awaited us. We sat down at the further end of the conference table near the open door.

Before long, Stalin appeared in the doorway: graying, rather thick hair combed upwards, luxuriant mustaches, thick-set frame; a sand colored jacket buttoned down the front with the collar turned back at the neck revealing a thin white band, peasant trousers of the same color stuffed into soft low black boots. A closer look revealed that these supposedly ordinary clothes and shoes were of exceptional quality fabric and workmanship.

Then began negotiations between two sovereign nations, each enjoying equal rights, whose friendly relations, as we have seen, were based on solemnly signed accords still in effect. One would have thought that this was a golden opportunity for a socialist nation to display its moral superiority to the world and a chance for it to prevail forever upon the heart of a small but noble one.

Stalin began to speak and without beating around the bush stated bluntly that the Soviet Union had made a pact with Germany (Hitlerite, Fascist Germany!) granting the major portion of Lithuania to the Soviet Union and a narrow strip of border to Germany. Placing a map of Lithuania on the table, he pointed to the line drawn in on independent Lithuania's territory demarcating the Soviet and German "domains." So this is what Molotov had hidden up his sleeve when, having already made a pact with Ribbentrop, he told Natkevičius that he was expecting a particularly amicable compartment from Lithuania.

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I try to protest against this apportionment of an independent nation saying that Lithuania least of all expected this from its ally the Soviet Union. I refrain from saying too much: a vision of Vilnius, the city and its territory, which the government of Lithuania has sent me here to regain, looms before me. Stalin explains that, on the contrary, the Soviet Union wants no such division and if the Germans renounce their claim then the strip of border will remain part of Lithuania. The ambassador of Germany, von Schulenburg, can be summoned immediately to discuss this question.

Molotov intones:

— Any imperialist country would simply occupy Lithuania and that would be that. Unlike us. We wouldn't be Bolsheviks if we didn't search for new ways. . . .

His words would seem consolatory if one knew for certain that these new ways would not rejoin the old well-traveled ones in the end.

Stalin concretizes:

— We have to sign two treaties: one dealing with the return of Vilnius, and the other regarding mutual assistance.

He spreads out a second map of Lithuania on the table, one more felicitous to the Lithuanian heart. The line drawn in on it shows Vilnius and a portion of the territory to its east ceded to Lithuania. However, this line, passing very close to the capital, is a far cry from all the territory recognized as Lithuanian in the July 20, 1920 peace treaty.

I inform Stalin that the government of Lithuania had but one thing in mind when they sent me to Moscow and that I was empowered to discuss solely the matter of Vilnius with the government of the Soviet Union.

— A mutual assistance treaty, — I continue, — is an entirely new thing which I have not been authorized to discuss. I must return to Kaunas and inform my government of this.

I ask for a copy of the text for the proposed treaty so that my report can be as factual as possible. The Soviet men reply that they will furnish us with a copy of the pact tomorrow.

Tomorrow had in fact begun, for Natkevičius and I left the Kremlin a good deal after midnight.

We had just returned to the legation when a phone call summoned us once again to the Kremlin. We arrived around two in the morning. The same individuals awaited us. They handed us drafts of two treaties: the first, dealing with the return of Vilnius and its territory to Lithuania, and the second, with Lithuanian and Soviet mutual assistance. The latter provided for the permanent placement on Lithuanian territory of, I do not recall the exact number, but no less than 50,000 Soviet troops.

Having read through this draft, I exclaim:

— But this is the occupation of Lithuania!

Stalin and Molotov both smile. The former assures me that this is what Estonia said at first, also. The Soviet Union was not seeking to endanger Lithuania's independence. Rather, the Soviet army stationed in Lithuania would guarantee that the Soviet Union would defend Lithuania in the event of an attack. Thus the Soviet army would be working to insure Lithuania's security.

— Our troops will help you put down a communist insurrection should one occur in Lithuania, — added Stalin smiling.

Perhaps sensing how heavily Stalin's words weighed on us, Molotov began to explain how the Soviet Union would remain as friendly as before towards Lithuania. The Soviets were preferring a mutual assistance treaty because they wished our country well. Such a pact had already been signed with Estonia and that country was not complaining, was it? Latvia would soon sign the same. Did Lithuania want to threaten the entire system of defense?

Stalin, meanwhile, agreed to cut the size of the Soviet army contingent to be sent to Lithuania to 35,000. He was seemingly unaware that Lithuania had such a small army and understood its reluctance to have more Soviet troops than its own. In our argument against the stationing of Soviet garrisons, we had pointed out, among other things, that the army being sent to Lithuania would be twice the size of the Lithuanian army.

Remembering that my instructions do not permit me to negotiate the stationing of troops in Lithuania, I speak hypothetically hoping to garner enough essential information to present as complete a report as possible to my government. I ask whether the contingent could not be reduced to 20,000 and confined to the newly reclaimed territory thus leaving the rest of the country unaffected. Stalin reasserts that troops must be stationed at specific locations throughout the entire country. He will not require that they be sent to Kaunas, however, since he realizes that it would be disconcerting to have another nation's army present at the seat of government. A portion of the Soviet army is to be posted in the territory of Vilnius, though not in the capital itself, of course, but in Naujoji Vilnia. The final number of troops was still, apparently, open to debate.

It looks as if everything has been said. Natkevičius and I rise to leave. Half in jest, I console myself aloud with my ill-starred fate, for having just borne Germany's blow, wresting the Klaipėda territory from us, now another such blow . . .

Stalin retorts:

— Germany grabbed territory from you. We, on the contrary, are ceding some to you. There can be no comparison!

— I am by no means comparing Germany's methods with those of the Soviet Union. Rather, I am grateful that so difficult a matter for Lithuania is being discussed with us in this deliberative atmosphere.

Molotov suggests that we telephone our government to get the necessary authorization. I reply that it is impossible to discuss such a matter over the phone. Stalin concurs.

What an interesting coincidence. When Ribbentrop handed us the ultimatum regarding the annexation of the Klaipėda territory, and when I protested that I had to return to Kaunas to inform my government, he, too, suggested that I get the necessary authorization from my government by telephone.

4. VILNIUS! ARMY GARRISONS . .

He pondered the war raging in Europe and the Soviet/German agreement which left the fate of Lithuania in the hands of the Soviet Union and dependent on its good or ill will. Urbšys entertained some optimistic thoughts about Soviet promises of non-intervention in Lithuanian internal affairs and the possibility that at war's end they would dismantle their army bases leaving Lithuania to go on with its independent life. He also thought that this was perhaps the last chance to reclaim Vilnius.

On the same plane with Urbšys were the Finnish envoy to the Soviet Union, Passikivi, and his wife. Urbšys remarks wistfully that, unlike him, they seemed calm and in a good mood. He points out that the future did not spare them. The Soviet Union, having established bases in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, decided that they wanted some in Finland. Finland refused to sign an agreement permitting this and on December 1, 1939 a war broke out between the two countries ending with a peace treaty signed on March 12, 1940. According to its terms, Finland ceded to the Soviet Union the isthmus of Karelia with its city of Viipuri (Vyborg) and leased the Hanko peninsula to them for thirty years.)

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Back in Kaunas, I reported to the government on the situation. Meanwhile, in Moscow, Latvia signed a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union including, of course, the provision for Soviet troops on its territory. Our envoy in Berlin, having spoken to an official of the German Foreign Ministry regarding Germany's agreement with the Soviet Union to take a portion of Lithuania's territory, was told that Germany was dismissing this matter with a wave of the hand (laesst diese Sache unter den Tisch fallen).

(Urbšys then refers back to a previous citation from the French encyclopedia and notes, wryly, that Germany received about seven and a half million dollars from the Soviet Union for this "wave of its hand.")

The government of Lithuania decides to offer the Soviet Union a mutual assistance pact stipulating that there be no Soviet garrisons on its territory in peacetime. However, this pact would provide for a peacetime military collaboration between the two countries with the possibility of combining their armed forces in the event of enemy aggression.

In other words, there will be two treaties:

1. The treaty regarding Vilnius, such as the Soviet Union offered;
2. A treaty of mutual assistance with no Soviet troops stationed in Lithuania in peacetime but foreseeing a close military alliance of the two countries during wartime.

Our delegation is enlarged for the future negotiations in Moscow and now consists of the Deputy Prime Minister Kazys Bizauskas, General of the Army Stasys Raštikis, and, of course, our minister in Moscow Ladas Natkevičius. I, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, am asked to be chairman.

5. OUR WORDS — LIKE PEAS AGAINST A WALL

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In all likelihood, it was on the evening of October 7th that the delegation arrived in Moscow. We lodged at the Hotel Nacional. That same evening, the Lithuanian representatives were invited to the Kremlin where they were received by Molotov Potemkin, and Pozdniakov.

During the entire trip from Kaunas to Moscow I had racked my brain for the right words to make these muscovite officials understand that the introduction of Soviet troops into Lithuanian territory when neither country was at war was not only detrimental to Lithuania, whose sovereignty and national pride would be wounded, but to the Soviet Union as well. Had not the leaders of the Soviet Union, any number of times, openly condemned the establishment of military bases on foreign soil as injurious to the sovereignty of and a constant threat to those countries in which they were established? Had they not termed the treaties leading to the establishment of such bases as unjust? How then to convince them that a mutual assistance pact safeguarding the equal rights of both countries and freely entered into without the presence of a foreign army in time of peace would be a greater guarantee of security for both countries since it would be warranted by the approval of the entire nation?

Once again we arrive at the Kremlin. Molotov and I sit facing one another at the long conference table. To my right, Bizauskas, Natkevičius, Raštikis. To Molotov's left — Potemkin, Pozdniakov. The head of the table is empty; behind it, in the shadows, a door to the chambers beyond stands open.

I begin to set forth my anxious thoughts. I remind them of Lithuania's past and the fact that, from antiquity, Lithuania has been independent, a lover of freedom in whom this love has never perished. I remind them of czarist times, of the

suppression of printing, of the abjection in which Lithuanians were held in their own country. I summon up the July 12, 1920 peace treaty based on that vaunted principle of the October revolution, the right of nations to self-determination, a treaty which was freely entered into by both nations, with no coercion, and which was to have lasted for all time.

Continuing on, I remark on the beneficial effect that such a high-minded and freely entered into treaty had on the relations between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. Relations which, from the signing of the treaty till now, had been excellent. In Lithuania, I tell them, there is a fund of good will towards the Soviet Union whose proclaimed ideas regarding the peaceful coexistence of nations and the need for international relations based on truth and justice have been, and continue to be, close to our hearts. Lithuania has always been loyal to the Soviet Union never engaging in any international intrigues against it.

Coming to the mutual assistance pact, I submit that in the belief of the Lithuanian government the basing of troops on Lithuanian soil when neither the Soviet Union nor Lithuania was at war with anyone would sow the seeds of mistrust between the two countries, depress the Lithuanian people, and turn the nation against the Soviet Union, for Lithuania would regard such a movement of troops onto its territory as nothing other than occupation. There would be constant misunderstanding between the armies as well as between the stationed troops and civilians. In the international arena, the presence of a foreign army on its territory would degrade the status of Lithuania to that of a dependent nation. Neither the Soviet Union's nor Lithuania's defense interests would be served by such a military action when there was no evident need for it. The security of both nations, however, would be greatly abetted by a defense treaty freely entered into by the two as sovereign nations.

I see Molotov nodding his head as I speak, as if in agreement. Hope kindles in my heart. The other members of our delegation later told me that they, too, had felt the same way.

Suddenly, Stalin appeared in the doorway of the far wall and came sullenly to the table. One could infer that he had been listening to the proceedings from the other room. We stood to greet him.

I said to him:

— In your absence, I was apprising the chairman (indicating Molotov with my eyes) of the views of the Lithuanian government regarding the matter we are deliberating. If you will permit me, I will briefly repeat my arguments.

— Very well, — he said, — sit down.

We all sit while Stalin remains standing. Watching him with upraised eyes as I briefly resume what I have just said, I see that he is getting impatient. He interrupts. I become even more succinct. Finally, Stalin cuts off my speech with:

— You argue too much (vy slishkom mnogo dokazyvajete).

I sum up by saying that the government of Lithuania accepts the idea of a mutual assistance pact. However, it offers its own proposal for such a treaty which in its view, because it would not infringe on either country's independence, would be a surer guarantor of security. The essential difference between the two is that, until the war situation in Europe makes it inevitable, the Soviet Union would not deploy its army on Lithuanian territory.

Neither Stalin nor Molotov show the least bit of interest in the Lithuanian proposal. Troops will have to be brought in. They remind us once again that under the circumstances any capitalist country would simply occupy Lithuania while they, on the contrary, had no designs on either the independence of Lithuania or its internal affairs.

The following day (which was probably the eight of October), seeing that all arguments were fruitless, I implore Stalin in the name of the friendship between Lithuania and the Soviet Union to renounce sending troops into Lithuanian territory. His answer is a short and unsparing "No (Nyet)!"

I can no longer negotiate for I would be exceeding my authorization. Since the Soviet Union does not agree to our proposals, we must refer back to our government for further instructions. I then repeat the same question I had asked during our first meeting, that is, if the Lithuanian government would agree to any Soviet troops at all, could they not be based just in the newly re-acquired territory of Vilnius? The army must be stationed throughout the entire country, asserts Stalin.

The Moscow newspapers of October seventh or eighth had printed an article, together with pictures, about the meetings and demonstrations which had taken place in Vilnius, then still under Soviet rule. Not having those papers in front of me now, I could not say for sure what the demonstrators' demands were. I suspect that they were asking to be incorporated into the Soviet Union or, for what amounts to the same thing, the establishment of a Soviet regime. No other kinds of demonstrations would have been permitted.

One way or another, on October eighth Molotov brought these demonstrations to the attention of the Lithuanian delegation adding that the Soviet government could not placate the working people of Vilnius for long if they ignored their demands. It would be best to secure the necessary authorization and to sign a mutual assistance treaty today, he warned.

6. THE SIGNING

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On October 9, Deputy Prime Minister Kazys Bizauskas and General of the Army Stasys Raštikis left for Kaunas to inform the government about the progress of the negotiations.

The choice facing the Lithuanian government was as follows:

1. Either sign the mutual assistance treaty as demanded, thereby according the Soviet Union the right to establish a set number of military bases at specific locations on Lithuanian territory, and regain Vilnius and part of its territory;
2. Or, refuse to sign the treaty, fore sake Vilnius, and enter into a ruinous conflict with the Soviet Union. A graphic example of the form which such a conflict could take was the Finnish experience which I have alluded to earlier.

Understandably, the government of Lithuania chose the first alternative.

On October 10, Bizauskas and Raštikis returned to Moscow with this decision. The entire delegation then went to the Kremlin. Now that the Lithuanian government had acceded to the Soviet Union's demands it seemed that we would have no further difficulties. That was not entirely so.

We were met at the Kremlin by Molotov, Potemkin, and Pozdniakov. Stalin was absent. Molotov announced that the Soviet government had decided to join into one the texts of the two treaties agreed to earlier thus forming "The treaty of the cession of Vilnius to the Republic of Lithuania and of mutual assistance between Lithuania and the Soviet Union."

Familiarizing themselves with the new draft, the members of the Lithuanian delegation note that the length of time the treaty is in force has been extended to 15 years. This time frame, however, applies only to Articles 2-7, i.e., those establishing the obligations of mutual assistance. Article number one, dealing with the cession of Vilnius and its territory, is without time limit, that is, perpetual.

From further discussions we learn that the size of the army contingent to be sent in has also been increased. We attempt to voice our displeasure at these changes but are summarily cut off by Molotov announcing that this was Stalin's own decision and therefore further alterations are impossible. He orders an old text be brought in showing Stalin's changes in his own hand.

— There, you see, — he says, brandishing that contrived evidence.

— We would like to return to the legation and confer, — I tell Molotov.

— You can confer here. We will give you a separate room.

— We would be more comfortable at the legation.

Returning to the legation we look for the "safest" room in which to consult together. You see, the building used as our legation is being rented from the Soviet fund of government houses. Soviet repairmen work on the premises when something needs fixing. Our legation staff is almost certain that hidden microphones have been installed. Perhaps Molotov knew what he was talking about when he proposed that we consult right there in the Kremlin.

Having established that, talk all we want, we could negotiate nothing better, we "decide" to accept the changes.

This time when we return to the Kremlin, besides Molotov, Potemkin and Pozdniakov, we find an elderly officer, a representative of the Red Army.

— It seems that the staff has not drawn in for itself the line demarcating that which is to be under German control. Give them the map which we gave you during our first meeting. They'll draw in what's necessary and return it to you, — says Molotov.

I remove the map from my briefcase and hand it over to the officer adding:

— Only please do not forget to return it.

— Certainly, certainly. We'll draw in the line and return the map.

That is the last we saw of that map . . . In comes Stalin. Molotov tells him:

— All is taken care of with our Lithuanian friends (S litovskimi druziyami vsio uzhiu ulazhieno).

— How's that, — replies Stalin, — until our offices prepare everything we can take some refreshment here together.

— Moreover, — he adds — now we must appoint a minister plenipotentiary to Lithuania (Karski having been called back, Pozdniakov was acting only as charge d'affaires.)

— What's your opinion? — he asks Molotov.

— It needs some thought.

Since the question was raised in front of us, I interject with a smile:

— You don't have to look any further than Mr. Pozdniakov who is already well acquainted with Lithuania.

Pozdniakov, somewhat befuddled, mumbled something or other. The only word I could make out was "exhaustion."

— You were sitting in jail, or what? — asks Stalin bluntly.

— No, but . . . and Pozdniakov mentions some family misfortunes.

Some cold food and drinks are brought to the other end of the conference table. Voroshilov and Zhdanov, with several days worth of stubble, join us. We talk and take some refreshment.

Stalin pokes fun at the Polish ambassador (whose name, I believe, is Grzybowski) who decided to protest the Soviet army's entry into Polish territory on September 17th. He condemns Rydz-Smigly for fleeing Poland and leaving the country to its misfortunes. Now there's a leader for you!

Voroshilov jokes:

— We propose to Ribbentrop that Germany and Japan accept us into the Antikomintern pact.

On the whole, Voroshilov seems like a humorous man.

A smallish fellow comes in, most likely from the office, to inquire about something. Stalin pours him a glassful of spirits and says:

— Drink!

The young man protests somewhat ceremoniously.

— Drink! Drink! Come, come. A Russian likes to drink (Piej, piej niechievo tut! Russkij chieloviek vypitj liubit!)

The young man lifts the glass, drains it in a gulp, and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. Stalin offers him something to eat.

— Thank you. That's not necessary.

Some functionaries announce that the treaty is ready for signing. We all go to Molotov's large desk. Two photographers are let in. Molotov and I sign the Russian text, the Lithuanian one is not ready. He and I will sign that one alone tomorrow.

Now our signing is "immortalized" by the photographers. Behind the treaty table on the Russian side also stand Stalin, Voroshilov, and Zhdanov. On our side, the members of our delegation.



October 10, 1939 in Kremlin, l. to r.: Natkevičius, Molotov, (sitting) Juozas Urbšys, Bizauskas, Raštikis, Potemkin, Stalin, Voroshilov, Zhdanov, Pozdniakov.

The treaty is signed. We return to our refreshments and sit for a while. It would appear to be time to leave. I stand . . .

— No, no, sit down! We are going to the cinema, — insists Stalin.

And indeed, after a bit, we put on our coats and take the elevator down to the Kremlin courtyard. The cool night air is refreshing. We walk along with Stalin in the lead. In front of us rises a small old, somewhat bowed, Russian Orthodox church. We turn toward its portal.

— Ivan the Terrible used to walk through here, — remarks Stalin.

Narrow steps lead downwards as if to a cellar. The modern interior dissipates all the reminiscences of antiquity inspired by the exterior. Close by the screen several benches are sparsely set about, perhaps eight of them. We sit on separate benches: Stalin with Bizauskas, Voroshilov with Raštikis, I with Zhdanov. I do not remember Molotov with us in the church. Perhaps he was excused and had gone home.

To our right there is a niche, most likely a previous addition of some sort, in which stands a table set with sweets and drinks.

On the screen — a parade of athletes. It is a long film, and perhaps when viewed with a lighter head, a pleasant one. At last "The End" flashes on screen.

Now, home to the hotel? No!

Stalin orders that another film be shown. This time "Volga, Volga ..." appears on the screen. No doubt a boat filled with happy singing youth floats along that river. Zhdanov whispers his pleasure and pride in the film and explains it to me. All of this barely reaches my consciousness. That this were over once and for all ... The end, at least.

It was after seven in the morning when we finally left the Kremlin for our hotel. To go to bed or not to? It was light already.

I summon the bellboy, a polite young man in a white jacket, and ask him for the morning papers and some coffee.

— Coffee, yes, but there are no papers yet. They're late today for some reason. No doubt something special's in the making, — he replies.

The papers appear around midday. On the front pages are the treaties we signed last night and the accompanying photographs.

At the Kremlin, at two o'clock in the afternoon, Molotov and I finish up the night's work by signing the Lithuanian text of the treaty. One could almost dress a wound with Molotov, he is so unctuous. I mention something about leaving.

— Oh no, no! — he interjects — We don't let our friends leave like that. We must celebrate.

(...)

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That same evening we left by train for our country. Molotov and other high-ranking Soviet officials, together with a military honor guard, accompanied us to the Byelorussian station.

We ride towards Vilnius and riding with us are foreign army bases for Gaižiūnai, Prienai, Alytus, and Naujoji Vilnia. One hand gives and other hand takes. Or grabs by the throat? Time will tell.

The passing Russian forests and empty autumn plains are somberly quiet and sleepy. What a dissonance between that tranquillity and my uneasy heart. "I was tormented by the contrast between the majestic serenity of nature and the deep anguish of my soul." (E. Herrick, Episodes 1940-1944). Thus the President of the French Parliament recalled his journey from Paris to Vouvray when he was forced to flee the German-occupied capital. Fortunately, he still had some place to flee to ...

8. WE ACCUSTOM OURSELVES TO ARMY BASES. LIGHTNING OUT OF A CLEAR BLUE SKY.

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Once the mutual assistance pact had been signed the Soviet Union lost no time establishing army bases in Naujoji Vilnia, Gaižiūnai of Jonava, Prienai, and Alytus. Questions arose daily regarding the deployment and stationing of troops but, with

both sides acting in good faith, they were satisfactorily answered.

Pozdniakov was now minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary.

The sentiments that had been stirred up by these events subsided and life went on as usual. While negotiations were underway, or whatever passed for "negotiations", we defended our position and points of view. Now that there was a treaty, the government of Lithuania had resolved to faithfully abide by it though whether the other side would really hold to article VII, regarding sovereign rights and non-interference in internal affairs, neither the members of government nor the ordinary citizens were wholeheartedly convinced.

(...)

(Government officials calmed the public by reiterating that Lithuania remained, as before, an independent and entirely sovereign nation. These official statements were repeated in the Soviet press, but to his query whether or not Stalin or Molotov would receive him in an unofficial capacity to discuss these issues, Urbšys received no reply.

In 1940, around the middle of May, Urbšys was invited by the General Secretary to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Sobolev, who informed him that of the three Baltic Republics Lithuania had the most satisfactorily dealt with its Soviet bases. Not long afterwards, Urbšys was visited by Soviet General Lokstinov who informed him that two Soviet soldiers had apparently been apprehended by some Lithuanians and locked in a celler until they could escape. To Urbšys this seemed barely credible and he told Lokstinov that this sounded like something from "A Thousand and One Nights." Following this, on May 25, 1940, Molotov summoned Natkevičius to the Kremlin, was most unamicable towards him, and read the written statement which the Soviet government was sending the Lithuanian government. The statement posited that yet another two Soviet soldiers had disappeared in Lithuania and that the Soviet government knew for a fact that their disappearance was organized by individuals who were aided by the Lithuanian government. The statement went on to say that the Soviet government regarded such actions as provocations leading to serious consequences and demanded that the Lithuanian government cease such actions and immediately find and return the missing soldiers or else the Soviet government would be forced to use whatever means necessary to obtain satisfaction. Urbšys's impression was that Stalin and Molotov were picking a fight.

Following a meeting of the President of Lithuania and his ministers, and after an investigation of the allegations found them to be baseless, a note was transmitted to Pozdniakov stating that the Lithuanian government found no incriminating facts but that it would continue its inquiry if it were given additional data regarding the individuals and offices which Molotov had in mind.

Molotov's response to Natkevičius was that he did not take the note seriously. Furthermore, he had no intention of providing any further information, but rather, continued to angrily assert that the Lithuanian government refused to take any steps whatsoever.)

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What sort of steps did he deem necessary? Only the gods and, of course, he and Stalin, knew.

Not long ago Molotov had said that "any imperialist country would occupy Lithuania and that would be that. Unlike us who do not do such things. We would not be Bolsheviks if we did not search for new ways." The ways may be new but was not the end result the same as from the old ones?

Day after day, the atmosphere surrounding the relations between the two countries was made more and more complex (just as Ribbentrop and Hitler had done before taking Klaipėda.) Everyday more and more of a smokescreen was created, apparently to cover up these "new ways."

A lot of "smoke" was not necessary in Europe at that time. As the war begun by Hitlerite Germany spread, everyone had enough problems of his own. What is more, the West was simply waiting for the Soviet Union to make a move in Germany's direction — with those two battling each other, the easier it would be for the West.

The official publication "Falsifikatory istorii — Historical information. Ogiz, Gozpolitizdat, 1948," on page 63, portrays and justifies the massive entry of Soviet troops into Lithuania in mid-June of 1940 thusly:

In this way the Soviet Union's defense against Hitlerite aggression was also strengthened in the North by moving the line of defense in the Leningrad region 150 kilometers to the north of Leningrad, up to and including Vyborg.

But that does not mean that the formation of the "Eastern" front has been completed from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Pacts had been signed with the Baltic countries but there were still not enough Soviet troops necessary to maintain the defenses. Moldavia and Bukovina were once again formally joined to the Soviet Union, but there again, there were not enough Soviet troops for defense purposes. In the middle of June, 1940, the Soviet army marched into Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. That same year, on June 27, the Soviet army entered Bukovina and Moldavia, both of which had been rent

from the Soviet Union following the October revolution by Romania. This is how the Eastern front was formed from the Baltic to the Black Sea as a counter to Hitlerite aggression."

So that is why the Soviet army entered sovereign independent republics. Evidently, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian territory was needed to protect the Soviets against Hitlerite aggression (which at the time was only a possibility since aggression against the Soviet Union broke out but a year later.)

(...)

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On May 28, 1940 the Lithuanian government delivered another note to the government of the Soviet Union informing it that it had created a special commission to investigate the Soviet allegations and repeatedly asking it for more information without which it could not begin its work. The Lithuanian government proposed that representatives from the Soviet garrisons also be a part of the commission.

However, that same evening, TASS publicly declared the accusations against Lithuania. The situation was becoming tragic. Day in and day out Stalin and Molotov were terrorizing the Lithuanian government with reproaches and accusations which it could neither trace nor verify since the authors of these accusations were maliciously sabotaging the investigations. To keep the atmosphere from heating up any further and still believing that relations could be normalized, the Lithuanian government was not making any public declarations. At any rate, it could only categorically deny the accusations made against it and thus come into open conflict with the Soviet Union. Understandably, such a forced silence on the part of the Lithuanian government in view of the accusations, publicly and categorically, lodged against it was making the Lithuanian people very uneasy.

TASS's declaration alluded to an event which actually occurred involving a Red Army soldier by the name of Butayev. The soldier had deserted his unit and gone into hiding somewhere. The Soviet garrison command asked Lithuanian authorities to find Butayev and return him to his unit. The Lithuanian police had a difficult time finding him, more so since they could not publicize the search. They finally succeeded in locating him. When the police asked him to come with them, Butayev jumped out the window and started to run. The police pursued him and Butayev, seeing that there was no escape, shot himself. The incident was reported immediately to the Soviet army command in Lithuania which sent its own commission in to investigate. The commission made a sketch of the area and took possession of the corpse. Initially it was thought that he had shot himself through the mouth since he was bleeding from that orifice. After the Soviets had examined the body and performed an autopsy, it was evident that he had shot himself in the chest. At first there was some doubt as to whether Butayev had shot himself or had been shot at, but the autopsy made clear that he had committed suicide. That was how this particularly unpleasant incident was dealt with at the time. Now, however, TASS had interwoven this incident with its other insinuations seemingly hoping that it would lend them greater credence.

9. ULTIMATUM. OCCUPATION.

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The Lithuanian government decided to send its Minister of Foreign Affairs to Moscow to find out once and for all what was expected of Lithuania. Pozdniakov was appraised of this. After several days, Natkevičius telegraphed from Moscow that Molotov wished to speak with the Prime Minister.

On June 7, Prime Minister A. Merkys arrived in Moscow where he stayed until June 12. During that time he had several meetings with Molotov. The latter had invented yet another accusation: Lithuania, apparently, had entered into a military agreement with Latvia and Estonia against the Soviet Union. What an empty fabrication! Estonia and Latvia, at the beginning of their independence, had entered into a mutual military agreement, openly declared and known to all, including the Soviet Union which had concluded mutual assistance treaties with both countries. Lithuania, however, had never been party to the Estonian/Latvian military convention, nor had it made any other war treaty with them.

On June 11, the government of Lithuania sent its Minister of Foreign Affairs to aid A. Merkys. That same evening we were received by Molotov. We explained that now, as always, and especially in view of the international situation, Lithuania sought friendly relations with the Soviet Union based on reciprocal loyalty and fidelity to treaties. Molotov was not the least bit interested in listening to our speech.

A. Merkys flew to Kaunas on June 12, leaving me in Moscow.

Minister Plenipotentiary Natkevičius and I try knocking on other doors in hopes of getting some clarification elsewhere. To this end we visit Assistant Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Dekanozov, who would later direct Lithuania's annexation and who would be shot together with Beria after the Second World War.

I question him about the matter concerning us, hoping to ascertain what it was that the Soviet Union expected of Lithuania.

— The matter is now in government hands and I, personally, can do nothing, — was Dekanozov's answer.

I had brought with me a letter from the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, addressed to the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Kalinin. In the letter, President Smetona solemnly asserts Lithuania's fidelity to traditional friendly relations between the two countries and states that Lithuania has no overt or covert commitments to any third nation which would not be compatible with such relations or with any Lithuanian/Soviet treaties.

"The government of the Republic of Lithuania and I, personally, had always made, and will continue to make, a concerted effort so that the treaty of October 10, 1939 will be most faithfully executed," wrote the President of Lithuania.

Minister Natkevičius and I requested a meeting with M. Kalinin to which he agreed. We gave him the letter. After reading it, this high-ranking Soviet official replied with something akin to:

— These issues are now under consideration by the government of the Soviet Union and I cannot interfere.

* * *

Ca-ta-stro-phe!

Let us remember a moment of the late evening meeting of October 3, 1939 in the Kremlin when Stalin declared to the Lithuanian delegation that the Soviet Union and Germany had agreed to divide up Lithuania and Molotov had talked of "new ways." New ways, indeed. Now it becomes clear that these new ways were paved for the same old purpose — so that hobnailed boots could trample foreign soil.

Midnight on June 14, Molotov summons us to the Kremlin. Natkevičius and I go.

— I have an important announcement for the government of Lithuania, — states Molotov picking up a written message from the table and reading it.

It was the worst kind of ultimatum. Worst in the sense that normally an ultimatum in international affairs means a categorical demand, precluding any further arguments or contradictions, which one country makes to another threatening the use of military force if its demands are not met within the time frame set by the ultimatum. This document, as we will see, was written in such a way, and further clarified by Molotov in words which would leave no doubt or hope, that no matter what concessions Lithuania made, the Soviet Union would still occupy it with its military might.

The first part of the ultimatum deals with reprimands, the second with demands.

The reprimands are divided into two paragraphs. The first harshly repeats the Soviet Union's version of the alleged abduction of Soviet soldiers, now clearly affirming that this was carried out by institutions of the Lithuanian government. That same paragraph mentions "mass arrests and deportations to concentration camps of Lithuanian citizens among whom are those individuals who serve Soviet army troops." All of these allegations are one-sidedly presented as facts which show that "the government of Lithuania grossly violates" the treaty of mutual assistance and is "preparing to attack (!) Soviet army bases established according to that treaty."

The second paragraph of the reprimands ascertains that "the government of Lithuania entered into a military alliance with Latvia and Estonia." That fictitious accusation of Molotov's is presented as a fact showing how "the government of Lithuania brusquely" violated Article 6 of the Soviet/Lithuanian mutual assistance treaty.

Had these accusations had some basis in fact, they would have been dealt with according to the procedures set forth in the September 28, 1926 treaty of non-aggression between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. Article 5 of that treaty clearly states that in the event of a conflict arising between the two countries, and one which they could not resolve by diplomatic means, that Lithuania and the Soviet Union would appoint the necessary commissions. Hence, the Soviet Union, by one-sidedly resorting to military force to purportedly regulate not a real but an artificial conflict of its own making, was the one that grossly violated the treaty of non-aggression, and together with it, all of the other treaties linking the two countries.

This brings to mind the July 5, 1933 treaty regarding the definition of an aggressor which stipulated that the use of armed force by one country against the other cannot be justified by that country's "political, economic, or social structure, the faults attributed to its administration, or to unrest arising from strikes ..."

The second part of the ultimatum demands:

"1. That Minister of the Interior Skučas and Director of State Security Povilaitis be put on trial as those directly responsible for the acts of provocation against Soviet garrisons in Lithuania;

2. That a government willing and capable of assuring the conscientious execution of the treaty of mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and Lithuania, and one resolved to suppress the foes of this treaty, be formed at once in Lithuania;

3. That free passage into Lithuanian territory be guaranteed immediately for those Soviet army units which will be situated in the most important centers of Lithuania and which will be large enough to assure the fulfillment of the Soviet/Lithuanian treaty of mutual assistance and the interdiction of the acts of provocation perpetrated against the Soviet garrisons in Lithuania."

All of these demands are clearly contrary to the treaty of mutual assistance which the ultimatum purports to defend, especially to Article 7 which reads:

"The execution of this treaty shall in no way infringe upon the sovereign rights of the contracting countries, and especially their system of government, their economic and social systems, their military means, or generally, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs."

Finally, the time limit for the ultimatum is set forth:

"The government of the Soviet Union expects a response from the government of Lithuania by 10 A.M. on June 15. Non-receipt of a response by that time will be taken to be a refusal to comply with the above-made demands of the Soviet Union."

Having read this aloud, Molotov handed it to me. I read it again silently. What to do? Or say? Stunned silence on my part.

— I am afraid of what this ultimatum means for Lithuania, — I finally say, feeling that these are not the requisite words.

Words? Like peas thrown against a wall.

Molotov cried out angrily:

—You've sold Lithuania right and left enough times! We know how much the fate of Lithuania means to you.

I waited for his effrontery to subside and after a moment asked:

— Wouldn't it be possible to extend the time limit of the ultimatum? It's almost one in the morning. We won't be able to submit it to our government on time. It still had to be coded.

To which Molotov replied:

— It's not necessary to submit the reasons for the ultimatum. The three points can be coded quickly and you should get a response by 10 A.M. *Even so, whatever your reply may be, the army will march into Lithuania tomorrow.*

(Tomorrow . . . Not tomorrow, today. Tomorrow had already begun . . .)

We return to the legation with the document burning a hole in our pockets. We feel dishonored, trampled, violated.

We try telephoning Kaunas and cannot get through. Evidently all the lines are busy. There is no time to code the message. We send the three paragraphs of the demands and the time limit for the ultimatum in an open telegram.

Towards morning our call to Kaunas finally comes through. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs answers. The director of the legal administration department, Voldemaras Vytautas Černeckis, comes to the phone.

— Good morning, — I say, — I have until 10 A.M. to report whether or not the government accepts the Soviet Union's ultimatum. What can I say?

I am not going to try and reconstruct Černeckis's words. The sound of his voice sufficiently echoes the tragedy of the situation. I feel that my question, too, must sound strange to his ears, almost incomprehensible. It's as if he were saying: "What kind of talk can there be about acceptance or refusal? That doesn't change a thing. The Soviet army is still going to march into Lithuania."

Finally, in a tired and dispirited voice, he says:

— It accepts.

This would be an apt place to honor the memory of this noble patriot. He had married a Lithuanian woman from America and they had raised a large and handsome Lithuanian family. Because she was born in the U.S., his wife had the right to become an American citizen, and through their marriage, so did he. When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, the U.S.

Embassy offered to issue them American passports so that they and their family could go to the States. Černeckis, however, was unwilling to leave his country in its time of misfortune and stayed in Lithuania. Unfortunately, not for long. The newcomer Soviets deported him and his entire family to Siberia. There they incarcerated him in a camp where he died. "Assuring" the "fulfillment" of the non-aggression treaty, they deported his wife and four children beyond the Arctic Circle to the mouth of the Lena River.

On the morning of June 15, Natkevičius and I ask to see Molotov. After a bit, the phone rings:

— Molotov awaits you.

Molotov and Pozdniakov receive us. I say:

— The government of Lithuania accepts your ultimatum.

— Good, — says Pozdniakov, and raising his tone of voice, he adds — But your government continues to carry out policies hostile to ours. We've just received word that it has named Raštikis as the new Prime Minister. How can you name a new prime minister without our knowledge or our consent?

— But you have demanded that a new government be formed ... — I try to explain.

— True, but it has to be acceptable to us. That's why you must confer with us about its composition.

(...)

(Here *Urbšys reiterates Article 7 of the mutual assistance treaty and its specification of non-interference in internal affairs.*)

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And now look — Lithuania, a sovereign nation, can not even form its own government without the Soviet Union's approval.

— Very well, — continues Molotov in a calmer tone, — our special emissary will leave for Lithuania today. I still don't know who it will be.

He stares at me for a while thinking something to himself.

— Your president will have to confer with him about the composition of the new government. With him and with comrade Pozdniakov, — finishes Molotov.

The above-mentioned Dekanozov, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was named that special emissary.

We telegraphed Kaunas of what we have heard from Molotov. Natkevičius says:

— Why not add that Skučas and Povilaitis not try to escape? Why should they be afraid of a trial? Their escape would only appear to be an admission of guilt.

So we telegraphed it ... How naive we still were . . . We thought that, all of this notwithstanding, Lithuania would remain an independent nation. Natkevičius supposed that it would be accorded the status that Mongolia had at the time. We presumed Lithuanian courts would publicly consider the case of Skučas and Povilaitis. The first paragraph of the ultimatum even required that they be put on trial. By ordering the arrest of these two individuals, Prime Minister Merkys was carrying out the demands of the ultimatum. And who heard about any such trial, or even about their fate? — They disappeared into the depths of the NKVD's labyrinths never to resurface. (Author's note, p. 34: "Skučas and Povilaitis were apprehended near the Prussian border, jailed and later executed," in Jerzy Ochmanski, *Historia Litwi*, 1967)

On June 15, in Moscow's grand theater, the final performance celebrating the decade of Byelorussia was being put on. Natkevičius asked whether or not we were going. I replied in the negative. Nonetheless, Natkevičius tried to persuade me to go by arguing that such a demonstration would be pointless.

We went. I was given a seat in the loge next to German Ambassador von Schulenburg, though whether this was for reasons of protocol or for others, I do not know.

Since I am to leave tomorrow, it would be fitting to pay a farewell visit to Molotov. The legation phoned the Protocol Department which quickly returned the call saying that although Molotov was to be at a reception in the Kremlin honoring the Byelorussians he would absent himself briefly to receive me at 11:30 in the evening.

Once again we went to the Kremlin for what would be, at least for me, the last time. Molotov, having left the reception, received us in good spirits. For some reason, he asked my opinion about Justas Paleckis. I replied that the man seemed to

me a sincere Lithuanian patriot. I knew nothing then, nor could I have guessed, of the role which the Kremlin had foreseen for Justas Paleckis.

As he bid us farewell, Molotov looked attentively at Natkevičius and me, saying:

— The two of you will be able to work in the new system.

—Thank you.

Molotov now feels totally the master of Lithuania. And why not, considering how many troops he's crammed in there? As a Russian, he knows *yog kto palku vzial tot i kapral* or in the approximate Lithuanian version, the one holding the cudgel chases who he wants to.

The following morning, the 16th of June, I am on a Swedish passenger plane to Riga. The closer we get to Latvia the more Soviet fighter planes there are in the sky. On the same day that the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania its armies also took over Latvia and Estonia. Two fighters approach our plane, one on either side, and instruct us to land. We follow them to a military airfield and some sort of official alights from our plane. The rest of us wait. After about fifteen minutes he returns and we are airborne once again.

In Riga, I change to a train. Soon I will be in Lithuania, my one and only, my dear and beloved country . . .

10. DEKANOZOV TAKES COMMAND OF LITHUANIA

p. 35;

The airport of Šiauliai is abuzz with Soviet military aircraft. At Kėdainiai, a "mutual assistance" tank partially protrudes from behind the station house. How dismal. Past Jonava, several of the ultimatum's tanks rattle along a rye field path to the highway.