The Devil's Paradise: The Vilnius conflict in European diplomacy, 1919-1923

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Short Abstract

This thesis is a history of the international settlement of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute over Vilnius, focusing on the involvement of Britain, France, Soviet Russia and the League of Nations. As its theoretical point of departure, the thesis considers that alongside motivations of the balance of power and the national interest in international relations, there exist more salient and less visible unspoken assumptions and mentalités that lay down the intellectual framework in which those realist considerations take place, and that can sway judgments and shape concrete policy decisions.

The thesis traces the emergence of 'didactic' and 'romantic' traditions of historiography on the fall of 'Poland' in the eighteenth century and shows how they shaped the way in which Poland's claim to Vilnius, as well as its geopolitical role in general, was imagined in the making of the new Europe after the Great War. The thesis also demonstrates how assumptions about Lithuanian backwardness and civilizational inferiority conditioned the settlement of the dispute.

By presenting a thorough account of the settlement of the Vilnius dispute under the auspices of the League, this study enriches the League of Nations scholarship with a hitherto neglected episode of inaugural importance in the League's history. Focusing on the bargaining between the intergovernmental Council and the international Secretariat, the work sheds light on the 'league temperament', or the inter -nationalist mindedness, in the most 'realist' of the League's policy avenues - that of international dispute settlement.

In parallel, the thesis analyses the efforts of the dispute *unsettlement* by Soviet Russia. Focusing on the work of Soviet diplomats in Lithuania, the thesis reconstructs Soviet attempts to derail the dispute settlement in the League and beyond, shedding light on the period of 'peaceful coexistence' and of consolidation of power in early Soviet diplomacy.

Long Abstract

This work is a history of the international settlement of one of the thorniest territorial disputes of twentieth century Europe. The dispute arose when Poland and Lithuania, the polities which had previously been united in a common state, reemerged after the Great War as two modern nationalisms and each claimed the city of Vilnius and its surroundings.

The importance of Vilnius for the Lithuanian nationalists was first and foremost related to the status of the city as Lithuania's historical capital. The fight for Vilnius also became the symbol of the Lithuanian 'cultural struggle' against the assimilative dominance of the Polish language and culture. Only two percent of Lithuanian speakers, or 'conscious Lithuanians' lived in the city after the Great War, alongside 35-50% of inhabitants who described themselves as 'Poles'. The 'new' Lithuanian activists descended almost exclusively from the hitherto apolitical and isolated Lithuanian-speaking peasantry, which felt no sentiments for the traditions cherished by the Commonwealth's nobility. The 'new' Lithuanians adopted the crudest ethno-linguistic nationalism as their credo and plotted the 're-lithuanisation' of the ancient capital of Lithuania.

Furthermore, Vilnius had always been the economic heart of *Lithuania propria*[1]. Rivers connected it with the governorate of Kaunas, which was also its source of food and pathway to the sea. For the Lithuanian activists, there hardly seemed to be any alternative to Vilnius as the capital and centerpiece of the Lithuanian state. The run-down Kaunas, the second biggest city in Lithuania, could not compare with the greatness of the Capital.

[1] The term historically used to denote the core of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Polish nationalists of all orientations, on the other hand, considered Wilno the jewel of Polish culture. A popular description of Poland as a ring-shaped bagel, having valuable fringes and an empty center, left Wilno a centrepiece of the former. Much like Lwów, Wilno for the Poles was a part of the precious *borderlands* (Pol. *Kresy*), which were connected to Poland through a preponderance of the Polish language and the dominance of Polish culture. Vilnius University, until its closure by the Tsar in response to the November uprising of 1830-31, boasted Polish as its official language. Wilno had been home to some of the greatest writers, poets and artists who inspired the anti-tsarist resistance, as well as the building of the new Polish state. Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Piłsudski himself had lived and worked in the city. Although Jews made up roughly half of the population of *Vilne*, the Poles enjoyed the strongest political organization in the city, with significant influence of the nationalist National Democrats (Endeks). The Wilno governorate was also the territory where Polish great landlords owned most of the land. In 1918, while peasants in the region, who made up the bulk of its population, spoke Lithuanian, Polish, Russian or any mix of those and were generally not yet up to speed with the categories of modern nationalism, Polish activists still hoped to claim the city on the basis of self-determination, counting on the dominance of Polish culture in the city, as well on the strong sense of Polish nationalism among the Catholic clergy in the region.

The question of the *Kresy* in the making of the new Poland polarised Polish political thought into two rival camps. The Endeks, led by Roman Dmowski, preferred annexation and colonisation, while federalists under Piłsudski promoted the notion of reviving the Polish-Lithuanian union, where Lithuania, fortified with Belarussian and Ukrainian lands, would, they argued, enjoy some degree of autonomy. Both political orientations, however, did not question the dominance of the connecting Polish culture and were strongly opposed to leaving Wilno to a separate Lithuanian

state. Both factions tended to see Lithuanian nationalism as the product of Russian or German anti-Polish intrigue.

In tackling the settlement of the Vilnius conflict, this work applies the concept of *mentalités* in one of the most 'real' areas of international politics – that of the settlement of international disputes. It presents a detailed analysis of the workings of 'didactic geopolitics' in the treatment of Polish territorial claims by the Allies and of the influence of the assumptions of civilizational backwardness in the treatment of those of Lithuania. In the context of the debates between the 'realist' and 'constructivist' schools in international relations theory, the work serves as an example of 'hard geopolitics' being a function of the 'soft' considerations and prejudices.

The work makes a substantial contribution in offering a solution to the puzzle of trying to explain Lloyd George's almost legendary Polono-skeptic disposition. Attempts had been made to explain British Polish policy in terms of Lloyd George's maneuvering as the leader of a coalition Cabinet, trying to please the pro-Russian Left, as well as the influence of his secretaries and experts. Others focused on Lloyd George's appeasement of Germany, or pointed to the British counterbalancing of the French continental policy. In Polish historiography, Lloyd George is almost universally credited with personal anti-Polish bias or even with outright disapproval of Polish independence. Yet all these approaches missed the all-encompassing *mentalité* that guided the British Polish policy in the most fundamental of ways. Tracing the conception and the reception of the didactic tradition of historiography on the old Poland, this work demonstrates how this tradition shaped an epistemic community of Polono-skeptics in the British political elite, and how it influenced its decisions. The choice between making Poland a barrier between Russia and Germany, strong enough to protect itself against them, and 'minimising' Poland to its ethnic core and leaving it a weak buffer which would satisfy both Germany and Russia, strongly depended on

the perception of the capacity of the Polish statesmanship and on the assumptions about the potential of Poland and the Poles for attaining geopolitical significance, which originated from the didactic tradition.

Thes study demonstrates how the Poles recognized and sought to exploit this anglophone didactic tradition to their own advantage by reinforcing the image of its inherent instability and bellicosity to resist Allied pressure in the Vilnius dispute, and to lobby for recognition of the *de facto* Polish eastern border. Responding to Piłsudski's threats he might resign office and to Polish jingoism, the French, and to a lesser extent the British, were determined not to do anything that could risk exacerbating Poland's volatility that could cause another change of government. The didactic tradition also had its constitutional dimension. The Allies, as well as the League Secretariat, saw the Lithuania's role in the projected union with Poland as a check on Poland's vices and supported the constitutional arrangement that would limit possibilities for Polish military adventurism, in a way that Poland in its future military endeavours would receive not only Lithuanian, but also supranational legal supervision. Finally, the Lithuanians exploited the didactic tradition themselves when countering the projects of the Lithuanian-Polish union.

The analysis of Lithuanian participation in the Paris Peace Conference in this work makes a fresh contribution to the historiography of the Conference. It retells this comparatively well-known story from the periphery. The work suggests that the Lithuanians, as well as other underdog national delegations representing the ex-Russian lands, resembled the lower orders of the colonial world. Prejudices that invoked their civilizational backwardness worked against them. Through the discussion of the Lithuanian attempts to secure a British mandate for Lithuania, the study shows how the language of nationalist self-determination in the age of anti-colonial upheaval remained

compatible with demands for the extension of colonialism towards one's own polity, in order to deliver security and prosperity.

The thesis also sheds light on the much under-researched but the most crucial episode of state building in the Baltic in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. It demonstrated how, abandoned to its fate by the Allies and critically lacking capital, rolling stock and all kinds of industrial goods, Lithuania scavenged the goods necessary for the continuation of its precarious existence as an independent polity from Europe. In this respect, the work departs from the well-trodden treatment of the emergence of Lithuania as a fixed event, instead treating it as a non-linear process whose success continued to be uncertain throughout 1919 and beyond.

By presenting a thorough account of the settlement of the Vilnius dispute under the auspices of the League, this study enriches the League of Nations scholarship with a hitherto neglected episode of inaugural importance in the League's history. The work sheds light on the 'league temperament', or the inter -nationalist mindedness, in the most 'realist' of the League's policy avenues - that of international dispute settlement. For the most part, the Secretariat retained its internationalist ethos and maintained its impartiality. In different episodes of the dispute settlement, it succeeded in pushing through its own policy agenda and solicited support for it from the leading member states of the Council. As for the Council, Balfour in his opposition to the Foreign Office, or Bourgeois in his protest against instructions from the Quai d'Orsay, acted more as the *fonctionnaires* of the League than representatives of their national governments, and cast the role of the Council as something more than a meeting of plenipotentiaries.

The analysis presented here gives credence to the view of the League as 'as a force field, one made up of shifting alliances, networks, and institutions, which a host of actors entered and sought to exploit'. In particular, the work demonstrates the inventiveness of the League Secretariat

and of the internationally-minded delegates of the Council in getting the most out of the restrictive and general regime of conciliation stipulated in the Covenant. The League tried to transcend the advisory nature of its competence by invoking its international authority as well as by applying to the conciliation procedure the rules of customary international law relating to arbitration. As a result, the Council neutralized Polish attempts to discontinue the dispute and successfully fed the idea of the plebiscite to both parties. It also successfully ignored Lithuanian attempts to exclude Vilnius from the plebiscite, and elicited acceptances from both parties to its 'jurisdiction' for setting the modalities of the consultation.

Conceived against the opposition of both disputants, as well as against the scepticism of both the Foreign Office and of the Quai d'Orsay, the plebiscite project was the child of the League's Council and Secretariat alone. Despite its ultimate failure, the scope of international involvement made it the landmark event in the history of international peacekeeping. Analysis of the preparation of the plebiscite by the League showed that the latter modelled the practice of 'self-determination' according to the latest academic research on the subject.

Conciliation was the unique policy area in the League, which, more than any other, was constrained by the normative framework of international law. Yet, as this study shows, this framework was contested in the Vilnius dispute not only by France's meddling in support of Polish interests, but also by the Secretariat, guided by competing humanitarian considerations, and by apprehensions of the effect that continuing the dispute would have on the prestige and, ostensibly, the survival of the League. Ultimately, interests of bureaucratic expediency trumped legal considerations, and the Secretariat did not hesitate to manipulate the latter in order to throw the Vilnius dispute out of its agenda. The League could hardly succeed against lack of Allied commitment, pro-Polish sabotage by France, anti-Polish sabotage by Soviet Russia, Polish military

occupation of the disputed territory and Lithuanian anti-Polish 'cultural struggle'. Still, the dispute settlement in the League turned Lithuania from a non-entity to a fully-fledged party of a dispute, equal to that of Poland. Moreover, the League helped to prevent the renewal of hostilities through the military control commission's supervision on the ground.

The first chapter of this work focuses on the debut of Lithuania as a nation-state in international politics. It begins by tracing the roots of anti-Polish animosity in *The Dawn* (Lith. Auszra) magazine (1883-1886) which signified the belated birth of modern ethno-linguistic Lithuanian nationalism. It then turns to exploring the attempts of Lithuanian nationalists, first under the tsarist regime, and subsequently under the German occupation [1915-1918], to entrench in Vilnius by creating a unique Lithuanian 'high culture' separate from Polish hegemony. The chapter finishes with a focus on the unofficial participation of the Lithuanian delegation in the Paris Peace Conference, where it engaged in both discursive and material aspects of state building and clashed with its Polish counterpart.

The second chapter moves the focus to Poland and traces the emergence of the didactic and the romantic traditions of historiography in the aftermath of the partitions. It then turns to the discussion of the clash between Polish and British geopolitical designs for the new Poland in 1919 that were grounded in the two traditions. The chapter demonstrates how the influential epistemic community of Polono-skeptics in the British political elite, rooted in the didactic tradition, blocked most of the Polish territorial claims, Vilnius included, at the Paris Peace Conference.

The third chapter moves on to the cataclysmic events of the summer and fall of 1920. It starts with the Lithuanian-Soviet peace negotiations in Moscow, and then follows the fortunes of Vilnius in the course of the Soviet-Polish war, from the triumph of didactic geopolitics at the time of the Soviet march on Warsaw, to Żeligowski's ultimate capture of Vilnius as a result of the

successful Polish counter-offensive and of the preliminary Polish-Soviet peace. The chapter analyses British and French attempts to both forestall the Polish capture of Vilnius and reverse it after the *fait accompli*.

The fourth chapter focuses on the attempts of the League to settle the Vilnius dispute by the means of a plebiscite. Starting with the introduction of the personalities of both the Council and the Secretariat as well as their views on the League's raison d'être, it proceeds to analyse the Secretariat's painstaking preparations for the plebiscite in both its theoretical and practical domains, with particular focus on the organization of the unprecedented international force to observe its execution. The chapter finishes with an enquiry into the sabotage of the plebiscite by both Lithuania and Poland.

The fifth chapter deals with the settlement of the dispute by direct negotiations between Poland and Lithuania under the auspices of the League, on the basis of the idea of a Lithuanian-Polish federation proposed by Poland. Tracing the painful negotiations of the constitutional provisions, the chapter ends with the successful sabotage of the League's efforts by both parties, as well as by Soviet Russia.

The sixth chapter focuses on the attempts by the League and by the Powers, against Lithuanian insistence on keeping the dispute open, to find an exit strategy in disassociating themselves from the conflict. The chapter explores the strategies of the Powers and of the League in dealing with the clash between the legal, humanitarian and realpolitik considerations that winding up the dispute and acquiescing to the Polish annexation of Vilnius inevitably produced. It then discusses the intervening Lithuanian coup in Memel, which facilitated the ultimate Allied affirmation of the Polish eastern border in March 1923.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LCVA – Lithuanian Central State Archive (Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas), Vilnius Lithuania

LMAVB – Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Vrublevskių Library (Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Vrublevskių Biblioteka), Vilnius, Lithuania

AAN – Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych), Warsaw, Poland

BNW – The National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa), Warsaw, Poland

TCAC - The Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, UK

TNA – The National Archives, Kew, London, UK

BL – The British Library, London, UK

PA – Parliamentary Archives, London, UK

BOD – Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK

DBFP – Documents on the British Foreign Policy

FRUS – Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States

AVPRF – Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Архив Внешней Политики Российской Федерации), Moscow, Russian Federation

RGASPI – Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории), Moscow, Russian Federation

ADMAE – Diplomatic archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des affaires étrangères), Paris, La Courneuve, France

LNA – The League of Nations Archives, Geneva, Switzerland

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INTRODUCTION

The first part of the title of this work, which reproduces the description of Lithuania of 1919 by a British mercenary soldier, was inspired by two circumstances. The first was that unresolved disputes over territories of celestial significance for the disputants are prone to introduce the elements of hell on earth. From the conflict between the classical Greek city states of Athens and Megara over the Sacred Orgas, to the current feud between Israel and Palestine, disputes over territory have been the primary cause of war and instability. Left unsettled, they transform into all-consuming frozen conflicts that derail rationality, waste resources and nourish hatred for generations. The second reason that necessitated the mention of the devil was considerations of originality, having in mind that celestial overtones have already been attempted in national histories of both Poland and Lithuania.

This work is a history of the international settlement of one of the thorniest territorial disputes of twentieth century Europe. The dispute arose after the early modern Republic of Both Nations[2], also known as the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth that united the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish Kingdom until its final partitioning by Russia, Austria and Prussia in 1795, reappeared on the map of 1919 as two modern nationalisms, each of which claimed the city of Vilnius and its surroundings. For both, Vilnius had paramount significance.

For Lithuanian nationalists, Vilnius was above all the undisputed capital of Lithuania. For centuries, it had been the capital of the feudal, multi-ethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Vilnius was first mentioned as the capital of the GDL in 1323 in the letters of the Lithuanian Grand

[2] Lith. *Abiejų Tautų Respublika*, Pol. *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*

Duke Gediminas, whom the ancient chronicles also made the hero in the city's founding myth. The roar of the iron wolf, coming from the top of the hill in Gediminas' dream, was said to pinpoint the location for the capital and to symbolise the fame of Vilnius spreading in the whole world. Assuming the continuity between the modern Lithuanian nation-state and the historical GDL, the idolisation of the latter became one of the cornerstones of state-building. In their construction of the national historical narrative, Lithuanian nationalists regarded the period of the Lithuanian-Polish union as a kind of the dark ages and looked back to glorious days of the standalone GDL.

The fight for Vilnius also became the symbol of the Lithuanian 'cultural struggle' against the assimilative dominance of the Polish language and culture given that around two percent of Lithuanian speakers, or 'conscious Lithuanians' lived in the city after the Great War, alongside 35-50% of inhabitants who described themselves as 'Poles'. The 'new' Lithuanian activists descended almost exclusively from the hitherto apolitical and isolated Lithuanian-speaking peasantry, which felt no sentiments for the traditions cherished by the Commonwealth's nobility. Making their debut by wrestling the Poles for the introduction of the Lithuanian language in church services, the 'new' Lithuanians adopted the crudest ethno-linguistic nationalism as their credo and plotted the 're-lithuanisation' of the ancient capital of Lithuania. While Vilnius might have been *Polish*, it had never been *Poland*, and the Lithuanian nationalists regarded as preposterous the dream of their Polish rivals to make it both.

In terms of geography and economics, Vilnius had always been the heart of *Lithuania propria*. Rivers connected it with the governorate of Kaunas, which was also its source of food and pathway to the sea. For the Lithuanian activists, there hardly seemed to be any alternative to Vilnius as the capital and centerpiece of the Lithuanian state. Kaunas, the second biggest city in Lithuania, had been a run-down outpost of the imperial Russian army. Its crude wooden houses and unpaved

roads made it look more like a village than a city, let alone a capital of a 'self-respecting state'. In this regard, the fight for Vilnius for the Lithuanian nationalists was also the struggle against being defined as a 'ramshackle and hermit republic'.

To Polish nationalists of all orientations, by contrast, Wilno was first and foremost the jewel of Polish culture. Piłsudski's much-quoted saying described Poland as a ring-shaped bagel, having valuable fringes and an empty center. Much like Lwów, Wilno for the Poles was a part of the precious *borderlands* (Pol. *Kresy*), which were connected to Poland through a preponderance of the Polish language and the dominance of Polish culture. Vilnius University, until its closure by the Tsar in response to the November uprising of 1830-31, boasted Polish as its official language. Wilno had been home to some of the greatest writers, poets and artists who inspired the anti-tsarist resistance, as well as the building of the new Polish state. Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Piłsudski himself had lived and worked in the city. Although Jews made up roughly half of the population of *Vilne*, the Poles enjoyed the strongest political organization in the city, with significant influence of the nationalist National Democrats (Endeks). The Wilno governorate was also the territory where Polish great landlords owned most of the land. In 1918, while peasants in the region, who made up the bulk of its population, spoke Lithuanian, Polish, Russian or any mix of those and were generally not yet up to speed with the categories of modern nationalism, Polish activists still hoped to claim the city on the basis of self-determination, counting on the dominance of Polish culture in the city, as well on the strong representation of Polish nationalism among the Catholic clergy in the region.

The question on what to do with the *Kresy* in the making of the new Poland polarised Polish political thought into two rivaling camps. The Endeks, led by Roman Dmowski, preferred annexation and colonisation, while federalists under Piłsudski promoted the notion of reviving the

Polish-Lithuanian union, where Lithuania, fortified with Belarussian and Ukrainian lands, would, they argued, enjoy some degree of autonomy. Both camps, however, did not question the dominance of the connecting Polish culture and were strongly opposed against leaving Wilno to a separate Lithuanian state. Both factions tended to see Lithuanian nationalism as the product of Russian or German anti-Polish intrigue.

In the six years after the beginning of the Great War, Vilnius changed hands six times. In September 1915, the Russians were pushed out from the city by the Germans, who occupied it until the final days of 1918. A few days after the German withdrawal, it was overrun by the Bolsheviks, who made it the capital of the short-lived Lithuanian-Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic (Litbel). In April 1919, Piłsudski's legions pushed the Bolsheviks out of the city. In mid-July 1920 the Bolsheviks retook the city again. A Polish counter-offensive, however, forced them to withdraw by the end of August and leave the city for the Lithuanians. The brief Lithuanian occupation of Vilnius was ended by the pretended mutiny of the Polish General Żeligowski, who, acting on Piłsudski's orders, pushed the Lithuanians out on 9 October. After a long and acrimonious dispute settlement process under Allied mediation, as well as under the auspices of the League, Poland annexed Vilnius in March 1922. In March 1923, the Allies consecrated Polish possession of the city by recognizing the existing Polish eastern border through the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors and pledged not to hear petitions on the matter again.

The Vilnius conflict, which has been compared to the notorious Israeli-Palestinian dispute, had long-term political, social and cultural implications. It kept both states in a state of 'cold war' throughout the interwar period. The border between the two countries remained sealed, telephone lines cut, railway tracks jammed and roads blocked. It made Lithuania a revisionist state *par excellence* and influenced chauvinism, militarism and authoritarianism in its society. Despite

the inclusion of Vilnius within the boundaries of the post-World War II Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Vilnius conflict continued to haunt both states into the 1990s. Lithuania's demand for Poland's formal apology for Żeligowski's capture of Vilnius resulted in a crisis in Lithuanian-Polish relations that lasted until 1994. Ultimately, a compromise formula in the preamble of the Treaty of Good Neighbourly Relations between the two states affirmed each other's territorial integrity 'with their capitals Vilnius and Warsaw'.

The repercussions of the Vilnius conflict transcended its bilateral dimensions. For the states of the Baltic region in the interwar period, it was one of the key obstacles to defensive geopolitical designs that aimed to create a bloc stretching from Finland to Poland. For Soviet Russia, *per contra*, the Vilnius conflict made Lithuania its partner in breaking anti-Soviet coalitions. Britain and France, who steered, or thought to steer, the postwar world order, saw the Vilnius conflict as a major source of instability that invited grave complications in central and eastern Europe, and increased Soviet and German influence in the region. For the nascent League of Nations, the Vilnius conflict was its first major international dispute, which also risked becoming its first major failure. A stress test for the League, it exposed the paper provisions of the Covenant to the harshest reality of international anarchy and pitted the 'new diplomacy' of institutionalized international cooperation against the 'old diplomacy' of power politics and national self-interest[3]. It was therefore not surprising that the gravity of the conflict and its geopolitical implications facilitated the widest international involvement in its settlement.

[3] André Géraud, 'Diplomacy, Old and New', *Foreign Affairs*, 01(1945)

It is the inter- and supra- national[4] aspect of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute over Vilnius that forms the main focus of this work. Its point of departure was the intention to transcend the limitations of existing historiography on the Vilnius question and to look at it from a much wider perspective of international dispute settlement, focusing on the involvement of Britain, France, Soviet Russia and the League of Nations, in the period from the appearance of the Lithuanians and Poles at the Paris Peace Conference until formal Allied désintéressement in the conflict in 1923. Extensive research in the archives of France, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Russian Federation, Poland and Lithuania[5] revealed the staggering extent of international interest in the dispute. Among the many figures who actively sought to bring the Lithuanians and Poles to reason were the King of the Belgians, ministers, prime ministers and MPs of Britain and France, internationalists in the League of Nations Union in London, international lawyers of the League of Nations Secretariat or delegates of Portugal and Spain in the League Assembly. Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece and others had put their military contingents at the League's disposal to be sent as an international force to oversee the Vilnius plebiscite.

There has been no major study of the international settlement of the Vilnius dispute. The most rigorous treatment of the Vilnius conflict remains A. E. Senn's works from 1950s and 1960s[6]. Despite the 'Great Powers' in its title, Senn's work focused mainly on the Lithuanian-Polish aspect of the dispute. Furthermore, the study was severely limited by the lack of access to

[4] 'Supranational' here refers to the involvement of the League Secretariat, which was not directly responsible to the member states and which was capable of autonomous agency, based on the aspired ethics of the 'international civil service'.
[5] For the full list of the consulted archives, see the list of abbreviations.
[6] Alfred Erich Senn, *The emergence of modern Lithuania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Alfred Erich Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania and the Vilna question*, 1920-1928 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966)

primary archival material. A number of works have subsequently dealt with the question from the national(ist) perspective of both of the states[7], or touched upon the Vilnius question episodically[8].

Two key theoretical-methodological assumptions guided the tracing of the international settlement of the Vilnius dispute in this work. The first was the final note of Prof. R.J.W. Evans' valedictory lecture *The Humour of History and the History of Humour*, which cautioned to not take oneself, and others, too seriously[9]. The second was that, alongside realist considerations of the balance of power and the national interest in international relations, there exist more salient, less visible, and much less 'material' unspoken assumptions and mentalités that lay down the intellectual framework in which those realist considerations take place, and which ultimately may shape concrete policies in the most fundamental of ways[10]. *Prima facie*, one would expect the effect of such unspoken anthropomorphic, racial, civilisational or historical assumptions and prejudices to be particularly significant in the Allied treatment of the newcomer states to international arena, in the flux of the emerging world order at the end of the Great War. In 1919, the peacemakers faced unheard names, unseen countries and unfamiliar conflicts. The Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, which used to make the European diplomatic scene a much simpler

[7] Zdzisław Budecki, *Stosunki polsko-litewskie po wojnie światowej, 1918-1928* (Warszawa, 1928); Regina Žepkaitė, *Diplomatija imperializmo tarnyboje: Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai 1919-1939 m.* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1980); Henryk Wisner, *Wojna nie wojna: Szkice z przeszłości polsko-litewskiej* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1978); Piotr Łossowski, *Konflikt Polsko-Litewski, 1918-1920* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1996); Piotr Łossowski, *Stosunki polsko-litewskie, 1921-1939* (Warszawa: PAN, 1997)

[8] Peter J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of peace : the League of Nations in British policy, 1914-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Evaldas Tuskenis (ed.), *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

[9] R. J. W. Evans, *The Humour of History and the History of Humour* (Oxford: Dacre Trust, 2012)

[10] This theoretical trope goes under many headings in international relations theory and international history. For the appraisal of the study of *mentalités* by the *Annales* historians, see Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual history and the history of mentalités: a dual re-evaluation', in Stuart Clark (ed.), *The Annales School: critical assessments* (Vol. 2) (London: Routledge, 1999); for the substantial application of the approach in international history, see T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making Of British Foreign Policy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). In IR theory, the idea falls mostly under the banner of 'constructivism'. See e.g. Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, 46/2 (1992).

place, were now shattered into the multitude of polities, each of them marking their own vector of foreign policy, which crossed or negated those of its neighbours. In such a context, even crude anthropomorphic visualizations of a state, or its historical image, offered a degree of cognitive parsimony against the uncomfortable complexity of the new world order, with the potential to sway judgments and shape concrete policy decisions.

In fact, few of the 'peacemakers', whether in Paris, London or Geneva, had visited, or dealt with, Poland and the Poles, let alone Lithuania and the Lithuanians, before 1914. Any preconceptions about these polities thus must have likely resulted from education in a particular historiographic tradition, or from socialization into a more general intellectual paradigm that judged historical polities and ranked civilizations. At the same time, encounters of Lithuanian and Polish delegates *in vivo* would likely challenge or reinforce these preconceptions, or form new ones. In short, for the purposes of the settlement of the Vilnius dispute, *perception* of Lithuania and Lithuanians, and Poland and Poles, would likely condition *reception* of their claims[11].

From its outset, research into the treatment of Poland in the corridors of European diplomacy pointed to the conclusion that the new Poland tended to be seen in the shadows of its past. This was hardly unexpected, as the history of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or Poland, as it was known to readers in the West, was undoubtedly the most dramatic, and probably the most known, of all the newcomer states. The three partitions that erased Poland from the map of Europe at the end of the eighteenth century shook the foundations of the international system and rippled through European intellectual tradition. Two interpretative traditions emerged in contemporary and later historiography in search of the causes for Poland's downfall. The romantic

[11] For a study on Allied stereotyping towards Poland, see Denis Clark, 'British, French and American attitudes and policies towards the rebirth of Poland, 1914-1921' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2015)

tradition blamed the end of Poland on the partitioning powers and called it the gravest crime against the laws of heaven and earth. Nineteenth century romanticists imbued this tradition with messianism and prometheanism that fuelled the hopes of Poland's revival. The didactic tradition, initiated by the judgmental *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, chastised Poland for the self-inflicted demise and pointed to the grave imperfections of Poland's constitution as well as to the defects of the 'Polish character'.

As this thesis will show, both traditions survived into the twentieth century and shaped the way in which Poland's claim to Vilnius, as well as its geopolitical role in general, was imagined in the making of the new Europe after the Great War. The romantic tradition, with its many adherents in Poland and some in France, projected on Poland the grand mission of protecting Western civilization against the onslaught of Bolshevism and of precluding the explosive combination of 'German brains and Russian resources'. To prevent the fourth partition, and to save Europe, Poland would have to be *forte, très forte* and stretch its borders as far as possible to give it enough resources and strategic perks. For Polono-skeptics of the didactic tradition, who saw the new Poland in the shadows of the Enlightenment, the inherently anarchic and bellicose Poland would have to be reduced to its narrowest ethnographic limits, making it an agreeable buffer state between Russia and Germany.

As far as the new territory or notion 'Lithuania' was concerned, the name itself had remained largely unknown in the West before 1919. Allied preconceptions towards it had mostly been civilisational, seeing it in terms of backwardness of the barbaric East. 95% of Lithuanian speakers were peasants and a Lithuanian political and diplomatic elite originated almost exclusively from the peasantry. As George Young (1872–1952), a communist in the British diplomatic service observed, war and peace 'have 'Bolshevised' Europe by bringing to power

members of the professorate or proletariat, who both speak in languages and think on lines beyond the range of Eton and Winchester'[12]. The almost total lack of nobility and aristocracy in the makeshift Lithuanian diplomatic service, as well as the clumsiness and inexperience of the new Lithuanian statesmen, could not fail to reinforce or at least challenge the elitist presumptions of their western aristocratic counterparts. The two continuing threads - the Allied treatment of Polish claims in the shadows of the Enlightenment, and the treatment of Lithuanian claims in the light of its perceived civilisational inferiority – thus form the backbone of the analysis of the international dispute settlement in this work.

The League of Nations' efforts to settle the dispute forms another part of this work. By taking up the role of the conciliator, the League placed the dispute within its normative environment, constructed from the clauses of its Covenant, as well as from the rules of customary international law. Principles of impartiality, sovereign equality and due process were to interact with *realpolitisch* maneuvering of the two parties and of the Great Powers. The analysis of the settlement of the Vilnius conflict under the auspices of the League touches upon key debates that continue to animate League of Nations scholarship. Among the key questions considered here are: to what extent did the League Secretariat, with its Secretary General and its political and legal sections, remain faithful to the supra-nationalist maxims of the international civil service to which it aspired? Given the clash between legal norms and principles on the one hand, and the interests of the Member Powers in the inter-governmental Council on the other, what strategies were used to legitimise the departure from those norms? Ultimately, tracing the bargaining between the two parties, the inter-governmental Council and the supra-nationalist Secretariat in the Vilnius dispute helps to indicate whether, in case of this particular dispute at least, the international personality of

[12] George Young, *Diplomacy old and new* (London: The Swarthmore Press, 1921), p. 39

the League rose above the mere sum of the national interests of the key Powers, a perennial question in League of Nations scholarship[13].

Finally, an analysis of the international *settlement* of the Vilnius conflict would be incomplete without looking at the efforts of the dispute *unsettlement* by Soviet Russia. Unrecognised and isolated from the Western world and barred from participation in the League of Nations, the Bolsheviks continued to fear fresh Allied intervention against them and counteracted any attempt to create a *cordon sanitaire* on their western border. Keeping the Vilnius conflict alive precluded Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement, weakened Poland and made Lithuania a stumbling block in the schemes of anti-Soviet alliances in the Baltic region. For Lithuania, Soviet Russia's support was one of the few levers it had for checking Poland. Focusing on the work of Soviet diplomats in Lithuania, it becomes possible to reconstruct Soviet attempts to derail the dispute settlement in the League and beyond, which can also shed light on the period of 'peaceful coexistence' and of consolidation of power in the early Soviet diplomacy.

The structure of this work is based on thematically autonomous chapters that maintain a chronological order. **The first chapter** focuses on the debut of Lithuania as a nation-state in international politics. It begins by tracing the roots of anti-Polish animosity in *The Dawn* (Lith. Auszra) magazine (1883-1886) which signified the belated birth of modern ethno-linguistic Lithuanian nationalism. It then turns to exploring the attempts of Lithuanian nationalists, first under the Tsarist regime, and subsequently under the German occupation [1915-1918], to entrench Lithuanianess in Vilnius by creating a unique Lithuanian 'high culture' separate from Polish hegemony. The chapter finishes with a focus on the unofficial participation of the Lithuanian

[13] See Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *The American Historical Review*, 112/4 (2007); Patricia Clavin, 'Defining transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14/4 (2005)

delegation in the Paris Peace Conference, where it engaged in both discursive and material aspects of state building and clashed with its Polish counterpart.

The second chapter moves the focus to Poland and traces the emergence of the didactic and the romantic traditions of historiography in the aftermath of the partitions. It then turns to the discussion of the clash between Polish and British geopolitical designs for the new Poland in 1919 that were grounded in the two traditions. The chapter demonstrates how the influential epistemic community of Polono-skeptics in the British political elite, rooted in the didactic tradition, blocked most of the Polish territorial claims, Vilnius included, at the Paris Peace Conference.

The third chapter moves on to the cataclysmic events of the summer and fall of 1920. It starts with the Lithuanian-Soviet peace negotiations in Moscow, and then follows the fortunes of Vilnius in the course of the Soviet-Polish war, from the triumph of didactic geopolitics at the time of the Soviet march on Warsaw, to Żeligowski's ultimate capture of Vilnius as a result of the successful Polish counter-offensive and of the preliminary Polish-Soviet peace. The chapter analyses British and French attempts to both forestall the Polish capture of Vilnius and reverse it after the *fait accompli*.

The fourth chapter focuses on the attempts of the League to settle the Vilnius dispute by the means of a plebiscite. Starting with the introduction of the personalities of both the Council and the Secretariat as well as their views on the League's raison d'être, it proceeds to analyse the Secretariat's painstaking preparations for the plebiscite in both its theoretical and practical domains, with particular focus on the organization of the unprecedented international force to observe its execution. The chapter finishes with an enquiry into the sabotage of the plebiscite by both Lithuania and Poland.

The fifth chapter deals with the settlement of the dispute by direct negotiations between Poland and Lithuania under the auspices of the League, on the basis of the idea of a Lithuanian-Polish federation proposed by Poland. Tracing the painful negotiations of the constitutional provisions, the chapter ends with the successful sabotage of the League's efforts by both parties, as well as by Soviet Russia.

The sixth chapter focuses on the attempts by the League and by the Powers, against Lithuanian insistence on keeping the dispute open, to find an exit strategy in disassociating themselves from the conflict. The chapter explores the strategies of the Powers and of the League in dealing with the clash between the legal, humanitarian and realpolitik considerations that winding up the dispute and acquiescing to the Polish annexation of Vilnius inevitably produced. It then discusses the intervening Lithuanian coup in Memel, which facilitated the ultimate Allied consecration of the Polish eastern border in March 1923.

Chapter 1. Uncouth Rustics

1.1 The Culture War

In 1883, a small collective of enthusiasts started printing *The Dawn* (Lith. Auszra, Aušra), a monthly magazine that signified the belated beginning of modern Lithuanian nationalism. Its contributors represented the unprecedented class of intelligentsia that stemmed from the recently emancipated Lithuanian-speaking peasantry. *The Dawn* campaigned for two ideals - Lithuanian language and enlightenment - and it posited the logical connection between them. *The Dawn* served as the first connecting forum for Lithuanian nationalists where frictions with *Polishness* were rationalized and put on a path towards the collision with Poland and the Poles a few decades later.

The Lithuanian language, which had never been the written language of the ruling class in the ancient Lithuanian Grand Duchy, was retained by and confined to the isolated rural, socially immobile and politically excluded peasantry. Instructively, the first known written poem in Lithuanian language drew a somewhat gloomy picture of a peasant slowly moving in his cart in spring mud[14]. If therefore the Lithuanian nation was to be defined in exclusively linguistic terms, it would have to be a nation based on two million rustic peasants.

Ultimately, it was Polishness which the first Lithuanian nationalists of the second half of the nineteenth century saw as the greatest threat to the survival of Lithuanian language, and therefore, of Lithuanian 'kin'. 'Polishness in Lithuania has been and is the biggest enemy of *The Dawn*', rather unceremoniously proclaimed its editor Martynas Jankus[15]. 'We, Lithuanians of the new spirit, see the local Poles and polonised Lithuanians as our greatest opponents and opposers',

[14] Kristijonas Donelaitis, 'Metai', written around 1765–1775
[15] *Auszra*, 7-8 (1885), p. 248

seconded Jonas Mačys, *The Dawn*'s correspondent who just turned 19. The new 'conscious Lithuanians' were convinced that Lithuanian language was gradually losing its battle against voluntary polonisation. The Lithuanian nobility had been consistently adopting the Polish language and culture ever since the dynastic union with Poland in the fourteenth century. By the nineteenth century, most of the Lithuanian nobles were native Polish speakers who could not speak Lithuanian or shied away from doing so. Polish was a sought-after 'posh' language, a language of status, nobility, high culture and social advancement, while Lithuanian was considered a peasant, or 'folk' language. Adopting Polishness was easy because it did not entail a religious conversion. For a petty noble, whose wealth and occupation often did not differ from that of a peasant in any meaningful way, and who still could speak Lithuanian, ability to converse in Polish was perhaps the only remaining mark of higher status. Pessimistic prophecies of linguists, who were involved in Lithuanian language research, only contributed to Lithuanian nationalists' anxiety. Oxford's Friedrich Max-Muller gave the Lithuanian language two generations before it would join the 'dead languages' such as Cornish in England[16]; Monier-Williams was certain it would disappear against Russian and German[17].

The extent of polonisation in towns, where children of rural peasants flocked for higher education in schools or in Catholic seminaries, seemed terrifying to Lithuanian nationalists. 'Estates and towns are like the disease of cancer in human body, they devour our language', bluntly summed up priest Juozas Lideikis-'Mažuolis'[18]. In Suwalki, students appeared to 'polonise themselves to the point of flesh and bones; snots from 3rd or 4th grades do not want to talk

[16] Friedrich Max Müller, *The languages of the seat of war in the East* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1855), p. 66
[17] M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary* (Oxford, 1872), p. ix
[18] *Auszra*, 10-11 (1884), p. 368

Lithuanian with their parents!', decried *The Dawn* in outrage[19]. '[The town of] Seiny – it is hell, which destroys the best Lithuanian spirit, and polonises our children <...>', complained Petras Arminas-'Trupinėlis'[20].

The grudge and shame over mockery, inherent in the superciliousness of 'high' over 'low', lordly over peasantly, refined over rustic, urban over rural, was very personal and sat very deep in the psyche of a new 'conscious Lithuanian'. The stigma attached to Lithuanian language as peasant (Pol. '*chłopska*'), boorish or primitive nourished the conviction that Lithuanian language had no place in the more sophisticated life outside the village. In the experience of many Lithuanian nationalists, speaking Lithuanian at school was 'a great shame', as this betrayed one's rustic origins. Lithuanian language was seen as not suitable for discussing 'non-simple', 'more human' things[21].

The wave of ethno-linguistic nationalism that swept through Lithuania at the end of the nineteenth century triggered a chain reaction, described in nationalists' autobiographies as deeply moving, even transcendental transformations, which sometimes resulted in the earthly burning of all one's Polish papers. To a casual Polish-speaking local observer, who was content with the *status quo*, attempts to propagate and demonstratively 'elbow' the 'boorish' Lithuanian language into the public sphere by the new class of fanatical 'lithuanomaniacs' (Pol. *litwomany*), seemed baffling. Many responded by lampooning outright, which to the new 'conscious Lithuanians' only proved Polish superciliousness and exemplified Polish animosity towards the 'sacred' revival of the Lithuanian 'kin'. Whether it was shaming a group of Lithuanian speakers out of a restaurant by a

[19] Ibid, 4 (1884), p. 140
[20] Ibid, p. 149
[21] Ibid, 4 (1884), p. 140

young lord who overheard their Lithuanian conversation and shouted 'Down with boorishness!'[22], or Lithuanian-speaking clerics being 'laughed at' by their Polish-speaking peers[23], *The Dawn* registered cases of mockery with heightened awareness.

As attraction of the Lithuanian aristocracy towards the nationalist project remained a wishful aspiration, Lithuanian activists had to face the unpleasant reality: how to a build a nation from two million peasants, an incomplete social structure, a small intelligensia and the lack of a separate from Polish 'high culture'. Some suggested to focus on the future instead and urged to 'create' the unique Lithuanian high culture from scratch[24]. Others, such as patriarch Basanavičius, indulged in the past. Lithuanian ancestors from 2-3 millenia BC, he wrote, were the biggest, greatest and most enlightened nation on earth, 'the first to bring the seeds of human enlightment and culture to Europe'[25]. For Šliūpas, Lithuanian traditions and clothing showed that Lithuanians of the past must have befriended Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, too[26]. The title of Vilius Bruožis' lecture at the meeting of the Birutė society glowed in its boldness: 'Had Lithuanian been spoken in heaven?'[27].

The Dawn's revolt against Polishness also offered concrete behavioral guidelines for a conscious Lithuanian. 'The Polish language will have to be driven out of Lithuanian churchies [Lith. diminutive *bažnyčiukės*]', postulated Basanavičius. Eglė Malinowska-Šliūpienė strongly advised educated Lithuanian men against taking Polish or polonised wives from the nobility. Herself being one of the latter before her 'conversion', Eglė felt she could teach the subject with

[22] Ibid, 12 (1885), p. 398
[23] Ibid, 1 (1884), p. 98
[24] Ibid, 4 (1884), p. 113
[25] Ibid, 3 (1886), p. 65
[26] Ibid, 1 (1884), p. 63
[27] Ibid, 4-5 (1885), p. 144

unmitigated authority. A Polish noblewoman, she wrote, would only pretend to have 'Lithuanian views' as a bait to catch a rare Lithuanian husband. Once out of the church, she would uncover her 'nails and horns', fast-track polonisation of her man and 'quickly put off that [Lithuanian] fire, as a wolf always looks to the forest'. If only Lithuanian peasants invested in education of their daughters, argued Eglė, Lithuanian men could then avoid looking for noble polonised wives altogether and hereby save the nation from extinction[28]. An advertisement on the reverse of an issue of *The Dawn* proved that Eglė's advice was being taken seriously: 'A prosperous, enlightened Lithuanian man looking for a bright Lithuanian woman for a wife'[29].

In the first years of the twentieth century, Vilnius gradually became the centre of Lithuanian nationalists' activity. None of the activists could envision the future political Lithuania without Vilnius. It was the historical capital which was hard to separate from its hinterland. There also seemed to be no practical alternatives to Vilnius as the capital. Despite being a small and a poor city with underdeveloped industry and full of wooden one-storey houses, Vilnius was the only city in historical Lithuania that could at least look like a capital if not by Western, then by Eastern European standards. It had a magnificent old town where gothic, classical, renaissance and baroque architecture mixed into a curious whole; it had a majestic cathedral on which the Lithuanian priests had their eyes long before 1918. Lithuania even *with* Vilnius seemed quite an improbable phenomenon; Lithuania without Vilnius would be too small, too poor, too weak and, it was believed by many, simply not viable as a state.

[28] Ibid, 4-5 (1885), p. 99
[29] Ibid, 9 (1884), p. 327

There was one fundamental problem for the Lithuanian peasant-based intelligentsia that interfered with its grand designs: like most other cities in *Lithuania Major*[30], linguistically, as well as culturally, Vilnius was anything but 'Lithuanian'. According to the Russian Empire census of 1897 that took language as the basis for nationality, Lithuanians comprised around two percent of the city's population. This element, a few thousand people, largely belonged to the working class proper, mostly made out of village-born servants and workers. Politically, Vilnius was dominated by Polish influence and activism, with strong representation of the *Endeks (ND)*, the Polish Nationalist Democratic Party. Besides the Endeks, most of the Polish political spectrum in Vilnius, as well as many among the landlords of the Vilnius region, were loyal to Warsaw.

None of the leading Lithuanian nationalists originally came from the Vilnius region. It was only in the last decade of the nineteenth century when they started settling in Vilnius after returning from their studies abroad. When the number of Lithuanian activists in Vilnius reached twelve, they named themselves 'The twelve Vilnius apostles', thereby creating the first Lithuanian organization in the city. Even among the apostles, not everyone could speak Lithuanian. When Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, one of the Lithuanian nationalist priests, settled in Vilnius in 1906, he equated the position of the first 'conscious' Vilnius Lithuanians to that of an 'African black-face in Paris'. The Vilnius Poles, he observed, looked at them with a smile and shrugged their shoulders upon hearing the Lithuanian language[31].

Being fully aware of the contingency of ethnicity, the narrow circle of Vilnius Lithuanian nationalists committed to the gigantic task of lithuanisation of the city. All of the nascent Lithuanian political currents, with the exception of the radical socialists, declared war against

[30] *Lithuania major* and *Lithuania minor* had been commonly used to denote ethnically Lithuanian territories under Russian and Prussian jurisdiction, respectively.
[31] Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, *Raštai*, T. 7 (Vilnius: Pradai, 1997), p. 101

polonisation. The 'Democratic party of Lithuanians' (LDP, 1902) rejected 'any sort' of Polish leadership, demanded the institution of the Lithuanian language in churches and promised a fight if the need be[32]. The clerical Christian Democrats (LKDP, 1905), also a party of 'Lithuanians', likewise pledged to stop polonisation and demanded that nobles in Lithuania know the Lithuanian language. The LKDP program openly committed to 'fight with the Polish intelligentsia, who want to spread Polish colonisation of Lithuania, to build Polish schools in order to denationalize Lithuanian children, and who demand the servants of their estates to know the Polish language'[33]. Even the internationalist Lithuanian Socialdemocrats (LSDP, 1896) looked favourably on the maintenance of separate from Polish Lithuanian national identity and often prioritised the national question over labour rights[34].

The project of Vilnius' lithuanisation challenged the Lithuanian activists to address the fundamental issue which had haunted Lithuanian nationalism since its inception in *The Dawn*. When it came to claiming an autonomous or even sovereign Lithuanian state with Vilnius as its capital in real life, the new Lithuanians would compete with other nationalisms for souls and territories. What Lithuanian nationalists felt they needed was an attractive 'high culture' of their own, and they needed it fast. Looking around, the Lithuanians admitted that Lithuanian national art and literature was young and scientific achievement weak[35], making it necessary to 'catch up' with other nations[36]. Construction of a unique Lithuanian high culture, it was thought, would confer

[32] LDP program (1902), in Rimantas Miknys, 'Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902–1915 metais', in *Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos*, T. 10 (Vilnius, 1995), p. 185-195
[33] LKDP program (1905), *Krikščionis demokratas*, 3-5 (1927), p. 195
[34] Leonas Sabaliūnas, *Lithuanian Social Democracy in Perspective, 1893-1914* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 35
[35] *Vairas*, 01 (1914), p. 2
[36] Liudvika Didžiulienė-Žmona, *Raštai*, T. 2 (Vilnius: Pradai, 1998), p. 450

legitimacy to the Lithuanian national movement, foster lithuanisation and prevent the dreaded polonisation.

It would also shield Lithuanian nationalists from the ridicule of their rival Polish counterparts, who generally dismissed the idea of the independent Lithuanian polity as unworkable fantasy of scarce intelligentsia and lower priests. Roman Dmowski, one of the leaders of the Polish Endeks, looked favourably towards the Lithuanian national movement on the condition that it left the dominance of the Polish high culture intact. The Lithuanian language could not suffice for an educated person, argued Dmowski, as it lacked sophistication and as its literature was very scarce[37]. When one of the Vilnius 'apostles', Donat Malinowski, demonstratively lithuanised his name to Donatas Malinauskas, an Endek-affiliated Warsaw journal reminded its readers that one could change his name, but not his culture. 'Which culture he had then? Perhaps Lithuanian? This cannot be, because these cultural values <...> do not yet exist in the Lithuanian crudeness'[38].

The few Vilnius Lithuanian activists thus plunged into zealous cultural struggle. Antanas Smetona, the future Lithuanian president and later dictator, settled in Vilnius as a clerk of the Agricultural bank and declared the creation of national culture – art, science, literature and journalism - the cornerstone of Lithuanian nationalist activity[39]. The most significant financial boost for the Lithuanian cultural struggle came from the personal funds of 'apostle' Petras Vileišis, who settled in Vilnius in 1899 with his savings of 830,000 roubles, earned from engineering bridges in Russia. Vileišis founded the Vilnius factory of railway materials, where he employed around 150 workers, most of them Lithuanians[40]. Vileišis also established a Lithuanian bookstore, a

[37] Roman Dmowski, 'Kwestia litewska', *Przeglad Wszechpolski*, 19 (1895)
[38] *Myśl Niepodległa*, 186 (1911), p. 1411
[39] *Vairas* 01 (1914), p. 2
[40] Tomas Balkelis, *Moderniosios Lietuvos kūrimas* (Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2012), p. 102

publishing house and started printing the Vilnius News (Lith. *Vilniaus Žinios*, 1904-1909), the first Lithuanian language newspaper in the city. Its successor, *The News of Lithuania*, (*Lietuvos žinios*, 1909-1915) was ambitiously marketed as a 'democratic paper, dedicated mostly to intelligentsia and to city dwellers'. From 1904-1914, some 890 Lithuanian books were published in Vilnius[41].

The *Lithuanian Society of Art* was established in 1907 in Vilnius and listed the spreading of Lithuanian art and 'developing Lithuanians' taste of art' as its aims[42]. It organized expositions and endowed its members with periodical photographed collections of Lithuanian artists' works, mixing together amateur and professional paintings, crosses, sculptures, waist-bands, towels, woodwork and Easter eggs. Vilnius also became host to 'Lithuanian evenings', which hitherto had been popular in villages throughout Lithuania. According to the information of a curious Russian secret police agent, these evenings included dancing, playing military music, drinking vodka and playing cards[43].

The *Scholarly Society of Lithuanians*, as Basanavičius declared in its founding conference in 1907, was to research 'Lithuanians as humans and Lithuanians as a separate nation', stepping into the fields of ethnology, archeology, history and anthropology[44]. In line with the fashions of nineteenth-century physical anthropology, patriarch Basanavičius argued that Lithuanians were mostly medium-headed (*mesaticephalic*), but with bigger brains than Poles, Belarussians, Estonians and others[45]. Translating science textbooks into the Lithuanian language, which itself was still being 'standarised' by Jonas Jablonskis, and which had never been the language of science

[41] Violeta Černiauskaitė, 'Atgimusios lietuviškos spaudos tradicijos Vilniuje 1904-1914 metais', *Knygotyra*, 44 (2005), p. 119
[42] *Lietuvių dailės paroda*, T. 3. (Vilnius, 1909).
[43] Kęstutis Raškauskas, 'Kova dėl lietuvių kalbos teisių', *Darbai ir dienos*, 48 (2007), p. 24
[44] Adolfas Nezabitauskis, *Jonas Basanavičius* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1990), p. 265-266. See also Adelė Seselskytė, 'Lietuvių mokslo draugijai - 100 metų', *Tautosakos darbai* 32 (2006)
[45] Nezabitauskis, p. 266

before, required either the invention of new words or clever application of the old ones. Number nine in arithmetic, for instance, could be called ‘devynergis’, but devynergis also denoted a nine-year-old cow[46].

Notwithstanding all its zeal, the Lithuanian cultural campaign struggled to get broader influence in Vilnius. It remained isolated and confined to a few dozen secular and ecclesiastic Lithuanian activists, with some following in the scarce working-class element of Vilnius’ ethnic Lithuanians. Due to the scarcity of 'conscious Lithuanians' in the capital, membership in numerous Vilnius Lithuanian cultural organizations overlapped; so did their leadership. Petras Vileišis, the Vilnius Lithuanian capitalist benefactor, went bankrupt in 1912 and sold his publishing house. No issue of the *Vilnius News* had ever sold more than 150 copies in the city[47]. Out of all the Vilnius churches, only the compact St. Nicholas Church, which Lithuanian apostles ‘won‘ after a tedious campaign, could boast Lithuanian as the language of the mass. Had its ceiling collapsed during one of the Lithuanian evenings, joked the Lithuanian leaders, Lithuanianess in Vilnius would cease[48]. The plan of erecting the 'House of the Nation' in Vilnius (Lith. *Tautos namai*), a bastion of Lithuanian culture which would shelter the Lithuanian societies, a museum, a library and a hall for concerts and plays, did not materialise due to the lack of funds[49]. In short, even if Lithuanian ‘high culture’ was making some progress, the prospects of lithuanisation of Vilnius remained bleak. ‘I do not believe in a miracle’, confessed priest Adomas Dambrauskas-Jakštas in his diary[50].

[46] Petras Klimas, *Dienoraštis, 1915.XII.1–1919.I.19* (Chicago, 1988), p. 87. [Thereafter *Klimas diary*]
[47] Balkelis, *Moderniosios Lietuvos kūrimas*, p. 104-106
[48] Klimas diary, p. 54
[49] Algirdas Grigaravičius, Vladas Sirutavičius, ‘Neįgyvendinta idėja: lietuvių 'tautos namai' Vilniuje‘, in A. Bieliūnienė, B. Kulnytė, R. Subatniekienė (eds.), *Dr. Jonas Basanavičius, 1851-1927* (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2003), p. 177
[50] Adomas Dambrauskas, ‘Iš Kauno kronikos (1908)‘, *Mūsų senovė*, 02 (1921), p. 55

When the Great War began, the Vilnius Lithuanian activists gathered around the *Lithuanian Relief Society for helping victims of the war,* which they formed in order to cope with the increasing number of refugees in the city. As relief initiatives stratified along ethnic lines (the Poles had their own organisation; so did the Jews and the Belarussians), Lithuanian activists were quick to turn relief provision into a weapon of lithuanisation. Relief funds, part of which were provided by the Russian royal family, were used to establish and maintain Lithuanian schools in different parts of Lithuania, to support Lithuanian students, as well as to fund the fast-track Lithuanian teachers' courses[51]. A few Committee-controlled orphanages, which mostly took care of children whose parents could no longer feed them, were turned into the bastions of 're-lithuanisation of Vilnius'[52]. Polish-speaking children in these orphanages were being 'lithuanised' through schooling and entertainment in 'Lithuanian evenings'.

When the Great War broke out, Lithuanian activists declared their loyalty to Russia, hoping to receive dividends for Lithuania in the post-war settlement. The Lithuanian declaration of allegiance painted Lithuanian history as a 'bloody nightmare of fights against Teutonism' and hinted on the autonomy of Lithuania within the potential Russian 'union of nations'[53]. 'But this is rubbish', Ivan Goremykin, the Russian prime minister, told Martynas Yčas, the Lithuanian MP of the Duma, after skimming through the paper. Yčas only shrugged his shoulders in embarrassment. 'Generally speaking, what do you demand?', asked the premier. Yčas started arguing that there was a 'Lithuanian society', which had certain expectations. 'Now I understand. Give the Lithuanian

[51] Klimas diary, p. 55, 64-67
[52] Bieliauskas diary, p. 14
[53] Deklaracija, in Yčas, p. 236-237

population my true gratefulness for their expression of feelings', Goremykin kept repeating, pushing Yčas out to the stairway exit[54].

By the end of September 1915, a year into the Great War, the German offensive pushed Russian troops and all its state apparatus out of Lithuania. The apparent wretchedness of the occupied land served to confirm preconceptions of the barbaric East; it also seemed to justify self-entitlement to the role of *Kulturträger*, which was destined to remedy the Eastern *Unkultur*[55]. When General Erich Ludendorff, later the chief conductor of the German war effort and the *de facto* dictator of wartime Germany, established his headquarters in Kaunas in 1915, he dreamed of resuming the 'work of civilization', which he was sure the Germans were doing in these lands at some point in the distant past. Lithuania appeared to him as a 'mixture of races' which had never produced its own culture[56].

By September 1917, Chancellor Georg Michaelis spoke of the unanimous agreement between the military, the government and the political parties in favour of the annexation of Lithuania to Germany[57]. In the course of the war, as the hopes of a negotiated peace with Russia dwindled, the appropriation of the conquered territories in the East gained increasing support in German public opinion. The Baltic provinces seemed an ideal addition to the German agricultural produce, a source of cheap labour for industrialists, or *Lebensraum* for colonisation. For those who already thought about the next war with Russia, Lithuania offered the advantage of a buffer zone[58].

[54] Martynas Yčas, *Atsiminimai* (Kaunas: Spindulys, 1991), p. 230-231
[55] Vėjas Liulevičius, *The German myth of the East: 1800 to the present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 137
[56] Erich Ludendorff, *My war memoirs, 1914-1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1919), p. 179
[57] Gerd Linde, *Die deutsche Politik in Litauen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden : Otto Harrassowitz, 1965), p. 91
[58] Ibid, p. 20

Wary of including within the German Reich-proper any more 'rebellious' Poles than was absolutely necessary, the Germans initially thought of leaving Vilnius to Poland, which was also expected to become a German protectorate. 'Vilnius we do not want - that may be left to Poland, who can push her frontier as far to the East as she likes', reasoned General Max Hoffmann in the first days of 1917[59]. General Graf Pfeil, who spearheaded the entrance of German troops into the city, called Vilnius 'the jewel in the glorious Polish kingdom' in his posters of propaganda[60].

By spring 1917, however, German plans of attaching Vilnius to the Polish protectorate underwent a reversal. The bid, however timid, on Polish allegiance did not result in any significant boost in the numbers of Polish troops, while Ludendorff reeled from the increase in Polish nationalist agitation in his very own Ober Ost. A strong and unruly Poland-Lithuania surrounding East Prussia now appeared to him as a direct threat to the security of Germany[61]. Ludendorff thus came to see the Lithuanian nationalists as German 'natural allies' against the Poles and contemplated a Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Vilnius, united to Germany under the personal sovereignty of the Kaiser[62].

The February revolution in Russia had the effect of discouraging the German *Militärs* from schemes of outright annexation. The socialists in the Reichstag repeated the pleas for peace without annexations and indemnities and feared that any other policy would lead to the revolution in Germany itself[63]. As a result, at the end 1917, the Vilnius circle of Lithuanian nationalists were invited to form a *Vertrauensrat* (Lith. Taryba), which would provide the necessary 'self-

[59] Max Hoffmann, *War diaries and other papers, Vol. 1* (London, 1929) [thereafter Hoffman diary], 1917 01 09 and 1918 08 23 entries
[60] Full text in Wolfgang Pailer, *Stanislaw Stomma : Nestor der polnisch-deutschen Aussöhnung* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1995), p. 180
[61] Ludendorff, p. 470-472
[62] Ludendorff, 470-472
[63] Abba Strazhas, *Deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg: Der Fall Ober Ost 1915-1917* (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1993), p. 173

determination' for Lithuania's annexation to Germany. Neither the *Militärs* of the Ober Ost, nor the politicians in Berlin could imagine, let alone contemplate, a sovereign Lithuanian nation state. 'The Lithuanian is just about as capable of governing himself as my daughter Use is of educating herself', lampooned Max Hoffmann[64].

Lithuanian activists, on the other hand, were treating the occasion as the birth of the Lithuanian nation state. The Lithuanian committee that was to summon the wider conference of representatives from all over Lithuania already framed Lithuania's future as a strictly ethnic project outside the Polish orbit. The categories of 'Non-unionist' (with regard to Poland) and 'consciously Lithuanian' were decided to be the criteria for the selection of electors, which rightwingers Smetona and Jurgis Šaulys managed to press without much resistance[65]. When Vilnius priest Juozas Stankevičius and Samogitian noble Stanislaw Narutowicz (Narutavičius), a brother of the soon-to-be-president of Poland Gabriel Narutowicz, suggested talking to the Poles, or at least to 'not spit' on them, they were overwhelmed by the intense anti-Polish sentiment of the other delegates. 'With the Poles Lithuanians can never live. This is a settled question', rebuked Jonas Smilgevičius, an agronomist from Samogitia[66]. 'The Poles deliberately proclaim some sort of Africa here', reminded Smetona. Petras Klimas, another Lithuanian activist, went even further and observed that fighting 'Newpoles' (i.e. polonised Lithuanians) was an integral part of a Lithuanian's 'ethical and national nature'. 'A smallest friendship with Poland gives the opportunity for the Polish microbes to spawn in Lithuania', he added[67].

[64] Hoffman diary, 1917 08 15 entry
[65] Alfonsas Eidintas, Raimundas Lopata (eds.)*, Lietuvos Valstybės Tarybos protokolai: 1917-1918* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1991) p. 54, 61 [thereafter *Taryba protocols*]
[66] Ibid, p. 47
[67] Ibid, p. 49-51

In September 1917, the conference of electors gathered in the hall of the Vilnius 'Polish theater' (sic). 213 ethnic Lithuanians out of 264 invited from 32 counties of Lithuania came to the city: 66 Catholic priests, 65 peasants, 59 intelligentsia, 24 of 'unclear professions', 5 landlords and 2 workers[68]. The announcement that the Germans were insisting on the association of Lithuania with Germany evoked much resistance among the participats, peasants especially. Leading the pro-German camp was Smetona, who thought that siding with Germany was the only available option that would also present a ready-made solution to the puzzle of the Lithuanian cultural struggle, whereby Lithuania would 'receive culture' from Germany[69]. Already in the summer of 1916, Steputat took Smetona's delegation on a cultural tour across Germany to showcase the German advancement. In the Ruhr region, Smetona was shown the coal mines and steel and fertilizer plants; in East Prussia, the prosperity of the Prussian Lithuanian peasants was displayed. As a part of the cultural tour, the Lithuanians were also lectured about the German African colonies[70]. Greeting the election of the twenty-member Taryba, the military governor of Lithuania, Prince von Isenburg, orated that Lithuania must become 'a country of culture'[71].

Flirting with the Germans did not gain Taryba any powers in the governance of Lithuanian territory, which continued to be under the tight grip of the German military arministration until the end of the war. Requisitioning the last cow from Taryba's member Malinauskas showed that the Germans did not regard it as anything more than ‘a body composed partly out of good-natured, but crude enthusiasts, and partly of ambitious coffee house

[68] Ibid, p. 7
[69] Protocol of the fifth session of the Vilnius conference by Biržiška, 1917 09 20 / LMAVB, Biržiška papers, 165-161, p. 2
[70] Steponas Kairys, *Tau, Lietuva* (Boston: Lietuvių enciklopedijos spaustuvė, 1964), p. 247; Klimas diary, p. 120
[71] Stasys Vaitekūnas, *Stanislovas Narutavičius: signataras ir jo laikai* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos centras, 2012), p. 251-253; Klimas diary, p. 189

politicians'[72]. Meanwhile, different German states were already trying on the Lithuanian throne. 'So many authorized and unauthorized persons had got their fingers into the Lithuanian pie that nobody knows what will be the end of it', observed Hoffmann in his diary[73].

As the Germans did not give the Taryba any powers in the governance of the city, there still remained the ecclesiastical front, where the battle between the Vilnius Poles and Lithuanians had continued despite the freeze of the military occupation. With German help, the Lithuanians laboured to install a Lithuanian nationalist in the post of Vilnius bishop and to oust the apostolic administrator and a Polish nationalist Kazimierz Mikołaj Michalkiewicz, who had been running the Vilnius diocese since 1907. Replacing the latter with a 'conscious Lithuanian' bishop, thought the Lithuanians, could facilitate the substitution of Polish nationalist priests in the diocese with Lithuanian nationalist priests, infuse more churches with the Lithuanian language and reinforce the lithuanising offensive against polonisation.

The Vatican, while agreeing to sack Michalkiewicz, categorically refused to appoint a Lithuanian 'fanatic'. Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Vatican's secretary of state, inquired into the ethnic makeup of Vilnius and found out that Lithuanians were clearly in the minority. Lithuanian designs were also fiercely contested by Edmund Dalbor, the archbishop of Poznan and the Primate of Poland. He warned Eugenio Pacelli, the papal nuncio to the German Empire and the future pope Pius XII, with 'fatal' consequences if the Holy See appointed a Lithuanomaniac to what he claimed was a Polish city[74].

Instead, the Vatican chose the candidacy of Jurgis Matulaitis (pol. Jerzy Matulewicz), a Lithuanian but not a nationalist. Matulaitis himself, however, doubted 'if even an angel from heaven

[72] Taryba protocols, p. 247; Linde, p. 140
[73] Hoffmann diary, 1918 04 03 entry
[74] Dalbor to Pacelli, 1918 04 04 / Ibid, No. 8500

would please everyone [in Vilnius]', and feared to be 'vaunted and then buried' upon taking the post[75]. When the certainty of the German defeat in the Great War in October 1918 relaxed the Lithuanian-German opposition to Matulaitis' candidacy, the Pope himself ordered the reluctant Matulaitis to take his post at the Vilnius Devil's Paradise and warned he would accept no refusals[76]. As a compromise figure, Matulaitis satisfied neither Lithuanian nor Polish nationalists in Vilnius. 'It seems to me he will not be able to break the local Poles' horns, he will be looking for compromises, and you know that you cannot compromise with the Vilnius Poles', resignedly concluded Purickis[77].

In mid December 1918, the disintegrating German forces started their evacuation of Vilnius and began their withdrawal to the line of defense closer to Kaunas. The Lithuanian makeshift government, with no army of its own to back its authority against the Vilnius Poles and against the approaching Red Army, left some money to the bishop[78], stuck a Lithuanian flag on Gediminas Hill, and followed the Germans to Kaunas. Smetona, Yčas and Voldemaras fled to Berlin to ask the new German government for a loan to kickstart the Lithuanian state. On 5 January, 1919, the Lithuanian flag was ripped to its red stripe, and Vilnius inhabitants were about to experience the governance of yet another regime, their third in four years. By February, two-thirds of Lithuania was in the hands of the Bolsheviks.

As the Lithuanian activists were starting to adapt their nation-building to the new world order of the winners of the war and scraped together anti-Bolshevik resistance, historical

[75] Tadeusz Górski, 'Introduction', in Jerzy Matulewicz, *Dzienniki* (Licheń Stary, 2009), p. 13 <http://www.padrimariani.org/assets/pdf/pl/dzienniki.pdf> [last accessed 2012 05 07]
[76] Gasparri to Pacelli, 1918 10 14 / Ibid, No. 3258
[77] Vida Pukienė, 'Vilniaus vyskupo klausimas 1917–1918 metais', *Istorija. Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai (VPU)*, 62 (2004), p. 54
[78] Leonas to Matulaitis, 1918 12 29 / LCVA 923/1/2, p. 57; also Ibid, 923/1/57 p. 26

perturbations of the Vilnius culture war did not diminish their uncompromising attitude in claiming the city as the capital of the Lithuanian nation state. Vilnius, the Lithuanians now believed, had to be rightly *given* to them by the Allies. The key to the city was therefore diplomacy, claiming it on the basis of historical and economic arguments and avoiding 'self-determination' through plebiscites. The Paris Peace Conference were about to be engage with the Vilnius conflict and all that came with it.

1.2 The Game of Fools

1.2.1 In search of recognition

At the end of 1918, the British Foreign Office received a sequence of three one-sentence-long telegrams. 'Virgo, Pusta and Pup are leaving today for London via Berlin', ran a telegram from the British military mission in the Baltic states. 'Virgo, Pusta and Pup have arrived here and are leaving for London tomorrow', reported Berlin the next day. 'Virgo, Pusta and Pup passed through here this morning on their way to London', ran the message from the British embassy in the Hague. J.D. Gregory, the acting head of the F.O. Russia department, read these telegrams with great excitement.

> I remember when I was a child watching a van hurrying round London displaying a gigantic poster with the notice 'Sousa's band is coming'. The van passed me every day for weeks, and I became more and more worked up with enthusiasm as the great day for the advent of this mysterious power drew near. It had a flavour of the Last Judgment about it, and in fact, when it ultimately arrived, it was almost as noisy. But I was prepared to risk the terror of the apparition in the anticipated excitement of seeing and hearing something which announced itself so magnificently. It was the simple brevity of that notice which was so effective and so awe-inspiring. <…> These are the things that happen only once or twice in one's life: they are rare visions burnt indelibly into the memory. But of all the sensational announcements of coming events none has sent such a thrill through my innermost being as the palpitating news of the imminent arrival in our very midst of Virgo, Pusta and Pup,

> this remarkable trio whose very existence had been kept from me all these years. We hardly slept. We were all agog with suppressed excitement[79].

Kaarel Robert Pusta, Edward Virgo and Ants Piip were the three newly made Estonian diplomats, coming to London and Paris to seek military help against the onslaught of the Red Army. Piip, the surname of the future Estonian foreign minister, was suspiciously lost in deciphering in favour of the more readable 'Pup'.

The moment was indeed symbolic, as was Gregory's satire. The Peace Conference was about to assemble in Paris, where the victorious powers and their chosen guests would sanction the post-war world order and impose it on the losers. The seating plan at the Hall of Mirrors indicated that the world was to remain a place of nation-states, empires and their colonies, with the moderate multiplication of the former to sanction the break-up of the enemy empires. What the list of conference invitations missed, however, was a bourgeoning microcosm of the underdogs. The three Powers that mattered most in making peace - Britain, France, and the United States - were now lobbied by too many unwelcome delegations from all corners of the world, each pushing their most diverse agendas.

Virgo, Pusta and Pup represented a curious category of quasi-state delegations which did not yield to the binary winner-loser classification. Emerging out of the vacuum of power produced by the German surrender and by the civil war in Russia, nationalists from what had been Russian provinces before the war seized the opportunity and began entrenching their statehood both at home and abroad. Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Belarussian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Azerbaijani delegations all came uninvited to the Paris Peace Conference to ask for recognition

[79] John Duncan Gregory, *On the edge of diplomacy: rambles and reflections, 1902-1928* (London : Hutchinson, 1929), p. 184-185

and aid. Their statehood had not been promised in Wilson's fourteen points, or in any other declarations of wartime propaganda. The settlement of their fate was deemed politically incorrect *vis-a-vis* Russia, whose émigré statesmen joined the ranks of the underdogs in Paris and London, keeping a watchful eye on any heresies of parcelling their motherland. For the Peacemakers, upsetting Virgos, Pustas and Pups involved no significant political costs at home, as their diasporas were small and media coverage of their problems was faint. The Allies could thus easily forget their mistakes and blunders, and could afford to regard these underdogs as Gregory did - with a touch of aloofness and lightheartedness, that blended well with the chaos in the emerging map of Eastern Europe.

A good case could be made against small states as such. Nineteenth-century British publicist Matthew Arnold argued against small polities because of their isolation, difficulty in maintaining liberty, lack of room for a 'natural classification of society', or less prestige enjoyed by citizens compared to the great powers. 'Inevitable' fusion with the larger states was therefore preferred, as 'their ultimate fusion is so natural and irresistible that even the sentiment of the absorbed races ceases with time to struggle against it'[80]. Small states that were surrounded by the great powers looked even more puzzling. As historian John Robert Seeley pointed out, 'a small state among small states is one thing and a small state among large states quite another'[81]. Small states also appeared to be a source of big trouble. The Pope of the Catholic church in his encyclical deplored 'unrestrained striving after independence' as one of the causes of the war[82]. The pejorative

[80] Matthew Arnold quoted in Georgios Varouxakis, ''Great' versus 'small' nations: size and national greatness in Victorian political thought', in Duncan Bell, *Victorian visions of global order : empire and international relations in nineteenth-century political thought* 2007 (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 142
[81] Seeley quoted in ibid, p. 144
[82] Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum (Appealing for Peace). Encyclical of Pope Benedict XV, promulgated on November 1, 1919 <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben15/b15adbea.htm> [accessed 2015 01 06]

term ‘Balkanisation’, which in the nineteenth century transcended its geographical context and came to describe the breakup of the large states into smaller states quibbling among themselves, seemed equally applicable to the Russian situation.

Such was the backdrop against which Lithuanian delegates, funded by the American Lithuanian organizations, stormed Paris and London in the beginning of 1919 to ask the winners for all the major attributes of statehood. These amounted to international recognition, borders, boots, uniforms, guns and money. For a state delegation, the Lithuanians faced a number of inconveniences. The makeshift Sleževičius socialist government, now sitting in Kaunas, did not control much territory. While the Lithuanian army was recruiting its first volunteers, the continuation of the increasingly reluctant German occupation was the only force that shielded the country against the onslaught of the Red Army, which now possessed Vilnius and, by March 1919, occupied two thirds of ethnographic Lithuania. As the Lithuanian constituent assembly did not exist until spring 1920, all Lithuanian ministers, premiers and presidents were hitherto elected by the men of Taryba and lacked the popular mandate.

It also did not help that Lithuanian delegates were as aristocrat-less as was their entire national movement and lacked recognisable personalities. The only prominent Lithuanian political activist in the Entente West, Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis, who together with Jean Pélissier since 1912 ran in Paris *L’Union des Nationalités*, a pro self-determination lobby, and who was considered an 'eminent personality' by the French foreign minister Stéphen Pichon, had been ostracised by other Lithuanian activists for his alleged opportunism and was now intriguing against the latter in his private campaign. While Smetona, the soon-to–be-president of Lithuania, saw no difficulty in jumping from a pro-German to a pro-Entente position after the German loss and set out to lead the

Lithuanian Paris delegation, the French government denied him a visa, because they thought him to be too Germanophile for their liking[83].

Instead, the Paris Lithuanian delegation was led by an extravagant 35 year-old foreign minister Augustinas Voldemaras, formerly professor of classics at the University of Perm in Russia. Rather aggressive-looking, unusually short in height, walking with one shoulder facing forward, Voldemaras also did not care about his clothing. Although he disliked doing or receiving diplomatic visits, rarely paid any attention to advice and seemed a bit 'wooden' even to some of his Lithuanian colleagues, such a 'strong backbone', coupled with his linguistic competence, were also the qualities that won him the placement[84].

The membership of the Lithuanian delegation, initially limited to sixteen persons, was tailored to represent all the major locations of Lithuanian ethnicity: ex-Russian *Lithuania major*, still-Prussian *Lithuania minor*, as well as the vast Lithuanian colony in the U.S. One of the greatest Lithuanian assets in Paris, however, Oscar de Lubicz-Milosz (Milašius), came from Paris and challenged the understanding of the ethno-linguistic Lithuanian identity. Originating from a family of Polonised Lithuanian nobility, Milosz had been raised a Parisian and could not speak Lithuanian. A gentle symbolist poet of la Belle Époque, playwright and essayist, a native to Parisian literati whose closest friends were Oscar Wilde and Jean Moréas, Milosz made ends meet by working for the press section of the Quai d'Orsay, where he also became familiar with the Lithuanian national movement. Milosz was discovered and recruited by a Lithuanian priest, who noticed the signature 'poete lituanien' at the bottom of one of his poems[85].

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[83] Senn, *The emergence modern Lithuania*, p. 89
[84] Aldona Gaigalaitė, *Lietuva Paryžiuje 1919 metais* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1999), p. 14
[85] Vincas Bartuška, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės kryžiaus keliais: kritiškas 1914-1919 metų įvykių ir asmenų įvertinimas* (Klaipėda: Ryto sp., 1937), p. 300

To keep in line with the democratic zeitgeist, the Lithuanians also took with them two delegates to represent the selected Lithuanian ethnic minorities[86]. A timid and agreeable expert on fire-fighting, Domininkas Siemaška, was chosen by the Lithuanians to represent the Belarussians[87]. Shimshon Rosenbaum, an able lawyer, a former member of the Duma and one of the leaders of the Zionist movement in the Russian Empire, was preferred to represent the Lithuanian Jews[88]. 'Hold him firmly in your hands, so that he does not act unfavourably towards us', Premier Sleževičius instructed the delegation[89]. As for the Lithuanian Poles or 'Newpoles', they were spared from participation in the delagation altogether, which was in consonance with their exclusion from the Kaunas government, too.

The Paris Lithuanian delegation set up their legation in a two bedroom flat in Rue Bayard, next to the Champs-Élysées. The mission to London, headed by socialist physics professor Vincas Čepinskis and his aide Kazys Bizauskas, arrived in London in March 1919 and settled in a rented seven-bedroom penthouse in 21 De Vere Gardens, Kensington. 'A splendid house – exactly what is needed: dignified and in a splendid locality', approved Laura Blackwell de Gozdawa Turczynowicz, a Canadian opera singer and a suspected Polish spy, who was helping the Lithuanians to secure humanitarian aid[90]. The London mission also hired one Englishman from Riga who, in Čepinskis' words, performed the role of '*Mädchen für Alles*' and was useful for knowing 'English relations'[91].

[86] Instructions for the Lithuanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919 02 13 / LCVA 648/57, p. 34
[87] Gediminas Galva, *Ernestas Galvanauskas: politinė biografija* (Chicago: Akademinės skautijos leidykla, 1982), p. 107
[88] See Eglė Bendikaitė, 'One Man's Struggle: The Politics of Shimshon Rosenbaum (1859–1934)', *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, 13 (2014)
[89] Sleževičius to Yčas, 1919 04 22 / LCVA 383/7/23, p. 2
[90] Blackwell to Sleževičius, 1919 06 16 / LCVA, 923/1/2, p. 90
[91] Čepinskis and Bizauskas to Sleževičius / LCVA, 648/1, p. 29-36

The Lithuanians, like most their fellow underdog delegations, came to Paris with the hope that the peacemakers were going to sanction the independence of their state. Premier Sleževičius instructed the delegation to 'strictly demand' Allied recognition of sovereign Lithuania, ask for admission into the League of Nations and oppose any thoughts of its unification with Poland. The delegation was also to claim Lithuanian borders based on the ethnographic principle, aided by the economic/historic/philosophical corrections that would secure Vilnius for the Lithuanians, as well as endow them with parts of the largely Belarussian-inhabited Grodno province. The Cabinet reminded the delegation that Vilnius was a Lithuanian city, but insisted that there were to be no talks about any plebiscites in that area[92]. In line with the fashions of the time, the Lithuanians also claimed a piece of Germany and articulated their demands for the port city of Memel (Lith. Klaipėda) in the Prussian *Lithuania minor*, which was the only possible gateway to the sea for Lithuania, short of Latvian Liepāja[93]. While claiming more of East Prussia had its active advocate in Šliūpas, the former editor of the *Dawn*, who plotted to 'lithuanise back' the Germanised Prussian Lithuanians, the idea lacked support among the Lithuanian Catholic priests, who were anxious about including more Protestants into Lithuania[94].

Upon arrival in Paris, the Lithuanians sent the Conference a request to accept Lithuania as a fully fledged participant, which was ignored. So was the Lithuanian demand to march in the victory parade, in which the Poles would pass to applause[95]. Instead, Voldemaras spent his time immersed in one-directional correspondence with conference's chair, Clemenceau[96]. The absence

[92] Session of the Lithuanian Cabinet, 1919 07 31 / LCVA 923/1/57, p. 51
[93] Instructions for the Lithuanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference / LCVA 648/57, p. 30
[94] Šliūpas to Voldemaras, 1919 03 25 / LCVA 383/7/20, p. 6
[95] Voldemaras to the President of the Council, 1919 07 08 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 187
[96] Many of the Lithuanian petitions had landed in the drawers of the Quai d'Orsay; many were also forwarded to Joseph Fernand Grenard, its *chef du service russe*.

of feedback did not distract Voldemaras from sending out one very long memorandum after another, for over six months. '*Revendications Lithuaniennes*' asked for 125,000 sq. km. of territory and 6 million inhabitants, 2 million of which were Lithuanian speakers, since Belarussians and Jews, so Lithuanians said, agreed to join. There was no mention of the Poles, except in historical perspective: Poland had always exploited Lithuania, its anarchic privileged classes led both states to destruction, and now it showed aggressive tendencies again[97]. No combinations with other states were needed, wrote Voldemaras to Clemenceau, as 'in our epoch, guarantees of military security are not ensured by the greatness of the state, but by the League of Nations organization'. Lithuania, marketed Voldemaras, could be a neat barrier between Germany and Russia that would contribute to peace[98]. Prussian Lithuanian delegates, claiming to represent the people who Kant idealised for their submissiveness a century ago, now petitioned the Conference claiming that they had been 'Germanised' since the twelfth century and demanded 'the Lithuanian state with Vilnius as its capital, a state strong, big and durable'[99].

Seeking to coordinate action with the delegations of other ex-Russian states, the Lithuanians joined the mini-conferences of the underdogs that operated in parallel to the Peace Conference. The 'Conference of the delegations of the new states of the old Russia' brought together Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Kubans; the three Baltic delegations were also meeting separately once every week. While Voldemaras regarded the other Baltic states with condescension and considered the case of Lithuania to be in another league due to its prior experience of statehood[100], mingling with the other

[97] 'Lithuanie & Pologne', memorandum prepared by the Lithuanian delegation / LCVA 648/57, p. 225
[98] Voldemaras, Revendications Lituaniennes, 1919 03 24 / LCVA 648/57, p. 74
[99] Lithuanians of East Prussia to the Allied governments (petition) / LCVA 648/57, p. 80
[100] Session no. 44 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 05 30 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 67

underdogs, it was thought, would help prove to the Allies that the ex-Russian states were 'no Balkans' and showcase their ability of cooperation[101]. At the same time, such cooperation unmasked plenty of instances of discord and bickering. In June 1919, the Lithuanians demonstratively withdrew their representatives from the conference of the ex-Russian provinces when Belarussian representatives put forward their claims to Vilnius[102]. The three Baltic states had scorned the Belarussian delegation for having 'neither government, nor territory, nor army'[103]. There were also frictions between Lithuanians and Latvians over the common border, as well as over the Latvian refusal to follow the Lithuanian line in its Polish policy[104].

In London Kensington, delegate Vincas Čepinskis, a pragmatic socialist, contemplated world politics and came to the conclusion that the puzzle of the wretchedness of Lithuania could be solved by becoming a British colony. The capitalist winners of the war, reasoned Čepinskis, sought to arrange the world in such a way as to exploit all other countries and colonies. Working classes that could resist this were not sufficiently energetic, and any resistance would probably be calmed down by giving them short working hours, increased salaries and participatory rights, thus making the workers themselves join the capitalists in exploiting the workers of those unfortunate and backward countries and colonies. Therefore, observed Čepinskis, capitalism would still rule in this new phase, where class struggle would be substituted for racial struggle. In such a case, argued Čepinskis, Lithuanian chances of securing independence would be very poor, because Lithuania fell to the category of economically backward. ‘In our opinion under

[101] Session no. 89 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 29 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 190; Naruševičius to Sleževičius, 1919 08 14 / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 242
[102] Voldemaras to the president of the Conference of Latvian, Estonian, Belarussian, Ukrainian and Georgian delegations, 1919 06 16 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 162
[103] Session no. 89 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 29 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 190
[104] Session no. 95 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 10 22 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 127

such circumstances', wrote Čepinskis, 'the best solution for Lithuania would be to offer the British[105] to have a protectorate or a mandate over us, in the form of a secret treaty'. This would allow Lithuania to resist the Russians, the Poles and the Germans. 'Of course we would be exploited', reasoned Čepinskis, 'but, it seems to us, every Lithuanian would agree that English exploitation will never be for us as dangerous as 'brother Pole', Russian or German exploitation. <..> Then our independence would be declared, and our nation's life, even if in a new stage of capitalism, would be more humane than it was until now'[106].

Čepinskis' plan received approval from the government in Kaunas. The Lithuanians meant business – Prime Minister Mykolas Sleževičius of the Socialist Peasants Democratic Party considered giving railway, telegraph, tramway and forest concessions to Britain. This was less generous than it sounded: Lithuanian did not possess any of these assets, save trees The premier also contemplated asking the British to take care of the Lithuanian waters, promising to contribute to Royal Navy expenses in return. It was in the economic interest of Britain, he thought, to have a springboard to Russia, whose raw materials, together with those from Lithuania itself, could leave for Britain from Lithuanian ports. The Minister of Finance, Jonas Vileišis, suggested that Lithuania could produce the goods that the British needed. The motion 'for the English protectorate' was put to the Cabinet's vote and upheld by seven votes with four abstentions. Giving the British concessions for railways, telegraph lines, the port of Memel and river Nemunas was sustained by nine votes against two. 'We want full independence, we want to defend our country against all enemies - Bolsheviks, Germans, Kolchakists, Poles, but if we want to defend against them without

[105] In nearly all Lithuanian and Polish political and diplomatic correspondence, 'England' or 'English' was being used while actually referring to Britain/British. This was also the dominant tendency in German, French and Russian diplomatic correspondence.
[106] Čepinskis to Sleževičius, 1919 06 18 / LCVA 648/1, p. 52-56

weapons, ammunition and money for the army, we need help from another state', summarized Sleževičius. 'By relating with England we will rise in the eyes of other states who will be forced to behave with us'[107].

Yet it did not take long for the Lithuanian delegations to realize that their claims and aspirations were sinking in the swamps of the Russian question. Neither the prominent émigré Russian politicians and diplomats in Paris and London, including figures who described their politics as 'liberal', nor the Russian White military commanders at the front wanted to hear anything about the secession of the three Baltic provinces. Andre N. Mandelstam, formerly a director of the juridical department at the Russian ministry of foreign affairs, informed the Allies that 'the natural place of Lithuania is by Russia's breast'[108]. The wrongs of Tsarism, as well as Bolshevik hooliganism, temporarily gave these tiny nationalities 'a kind of independence fever', argued socialist Nikolay V. Chaikovsky, head of the White-Russian Archangelsk government, before the Council of Four. Independence, he said, would leave these states weak economically and would only push them under Germany's domination[109].

The peacemakers' attention to the sensibilities of the Russian crowd in Paris and London could easily be overestimated. The Russian émigrés, after all, were the conference's uninvited underdogs themselves. Albert Kammerer, head of the Russian department at the Quai d'Orsay, bluntly told the Paris Russians to declare three things, if they ever wanted to be listened to in Paris: a republic, a federation and land for the peasants[110]. The Left in Paris, London and Washington

[107] Session of the Lithuanian Cabinet, 1919 08 15 / LCVA 923/1/57, p. 75; Bizauskas to Voldemaras / LCVA 648/58, p. 292
[108] A. N. Mandelstam, 'Memoire sur l'application du principe des nationalites a la question Polonaise', 1918 10 30 / ADMAE, Pologne, 65, p. 227
[109] Arthur S. Link (ed.), *The deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24-June 28, 1919) : notes of the official interpreter, Paul Mantoux*, Vol. 2 (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 25-27
[110] М.С. Маргулиес, *Год интервенции. Летопись революции*, Т. 1, (Berlin: Grschebin Verlag, 1923), 1919 04 04 entry, p. 341

gave the peacemakers a serious headache, scrutinizing every move of the latter that could potentially bring back reactionary elements to power in Russia. The Tsarist foreign minister Sergey Sazonov, whom Kolchak and Denikin appointed to represent the Russian Whites, was declared an 'unwelcome guest' in the French leftist press and was kept at arm's length by Clemenceau[111]. Liberal prince Georgy Lvov, the first post-revolutionary prime minister of Russia, now chairing the *Conference Politique Russe*, received a cold shoulder from Wilson and Lloyd George. The Allies, besides, still had a lasting grudge over Russia's unilateral escape from the Great War.

Yet this was not to say that the vital interests of *Russia* as a legitimate Great Power were to be ignored when the peacemakers spoke of the Baltic states. Prof. Bernard Pares, a British expert on Russia, warned the policymakers that taking away the Baltic states from it would cause the greatest resentment of the former against anyone who would dare to 'undo the work of Peter the Great' and reduce Russia's access to the Baltic sea. Pares also advised that Lithuania had 'none of the elements of national solidity'. Supporting the independence of such small nationalities against Russia's 'inevitable revival', he argued, would become a dangerous liability to the Western powers and would push Russia under German domination[112]. Already on the day of the Armistice of Compiègne, the Quai d'Orsay distributed Mandelstam's 'Russia's breast' note as a circular to all French diplomatic posts. When, in May 1919, the French high commissar in Omsk asked Paris what to do with the mounting Lithuanian petitions, he was informed that no one had envisaged that Lithuania could become an independent state; it was likely, went the instruction, that Lithuania would be reattached to Russia, with appropriate guarantees for its autonomy[113].

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[111] Т. И. Полнер, *Жизненный путь князя Георгия Евгеньевича Львова : Личность, Взгляды. Условия деятельности* (Moscow: Русский путь, 2001), p. 410
[112] Bernard Pares, 'Memorandum on the position of Russia', 1919 03 02 / TNA/FO 608/196, p. 258
[113] Pichon to the French High Consul in Omsk, 1919 05 22 / ADMAE, Lituanie, 2, p. 282

There was no difference in the British or the American position. At the Council of Four, Lloyd George scaremongered his peers with the danger of the 'Slavs' and remembered when his predecessor, Gladstone, was on the verge of war with Russia. 'If Russia recovers, she with her 160 million inhabitants, will have to be reckoned with in Europe'. Wilson and Clemenceau still put the Germans above the Russians in the realm of their fears, but there was a clear consensus on a principle, which was more readily ignored in the treatment of the enemy states: any action of the Peace Conference that would leave Russia with a lasting resentment should be avoided[114]. The conference's questions relating to Russian vital interests, therefore, would have to wait until Russia was back on its feet. 'We will then be able to turn to the Russians and say: 'Here is what we have done for you', Clemenceau summarised the position of the Allies[115]. Consequently, when at the end of May, the Allies attempted to impose democratic form of government on the future Russian government as a condition of the continuation of their support for the Whites, the only demand as far as the Baltic states were concerned was to decide their future in consultation with the future League of Nations. 'When a Russian government is recognized by the Allies, Lithuania will be turned over to Russia', Robert Howard Lord, American delegation's expert of Russia and Poland, read the statement between the lines[116].

The language in which Allied statesmen and their experts objectified the three Baltic states, as well as their different treatment of Finland, suggested that there was something more to the three Baltic provinces that helped their continued non-recognition. The fourth Baltic state, Finland, had been recognized by Britain, France and the U.S. as early as May 1919, amidst protests from the prominent Russians and without regard to the principle of Russia's territorial integrity.

[114] Mantoux, *Deliberations*, Vol. 2, 1919 06 06 entry, p. 325-326
[115] Ibid, Vol. 1, 1919 05 02 entry, p. 459
[116] Lord to the Supreme Economic Council, 1919 06 16 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 10, p. 380

Underlying such Allied discrimination, in addition to the undeniably more volatile situation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, was the factor of perceived cultural inferiority, or cultural insufficiency, of these nationalities, a conviction which was also perpetrated by the Russian statesmen in Paris. Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, a prominent Russian liberal and a secretary to the provisional government before emigration, translated the idea of Baltic independence to Wilsonian prose as 'self-determination of a nursery or a declaration of a negro republic in Texas'[117]. Wilson himself, before leaving to Paris, adopted the Russian view and ruled out as 'most undesirable' the participation in the Conference of what he politely called the 'inchoate' Baltic nationalities[118].

The most agricultural 'race' of all three, the Lithuanians, attracted particularly vivid characterisations. While Grant Watson, a British liaison officer in the Baltic states, somewhat sympathetically discovered the Lithuanians as a 'cheerful race of agriculturalists rearing their famous geese'; historian Arnold J. Toynbee, now a member of the British delegation, called them 'the most backward race in Europe'[119]. There was a striking difference in tone in which Lord Curzon, the British foreign secretary and the ex-Viceroy of India, spoke about Finns on the one hand, and Lithuanians on the other. The latter he simply called 'stupid and backward'[120]. To the cheerful Gregory, Lithuania looked like a 'suburban state, run by a kind of Poplar County Council'[121]. After his visit to Lithuania in late 1919, American Captain Leach considered the

[117] Karsten Brüggemann, *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des "Einen und unteilbaren Russland" : die Petrograder Front des russischen Bürgerkriegs, 1918-1920* (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 2002), p. 166
[118] Wilson's best source on Russia was a Russophile ex-diplomat, a businessman and the contributor to Wilson's election campaign Charles R. Crane. He was in close contact with the Russian émigrés.
[119] In the view of Toynbee, this was due to Lithuanians' belated adoption of Christianity and because they borrowed civilisation 'second hand from other people'. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Nationality & the War* (London: Dent, 1915), p. 285, 341
[120] Curzon minute, 1922 03 17 / TNA FO 371/8058, p. 48
[121] Gregory, *Rambles and reflections*, p. 180

possibility of Lithuanian statehood a 'farce'. Most of all Lithuania and Lithuanians were lampooned by Polish commentators. In February 1919, a group of landlords from Lithuania argued to the American commission in Warsaw that 'the average intelligence among the Lithuanians was too low' for them to build a state[122]. Propaganda of the Polish National Committee in Paris followed a similar line and presented the Polish culture in Lithuania as the basis of civilisation.

Already accustomed to a cultural campaign in the pursuance of their nationalist polity, the Lithuanians now instinctively continued it in Paris, trying to prove the existence and sufficiency of the Lithuanian culture to the Allies. Voldemaras taught the Tiger that 'Lithuania due to its age and culture occupied the first place among the oppressed nations'. He boldly presented Lithuania as a country of 'high civilisation'[123] and demanded respect for the interests of a 'race whose antique Aryan culture and democratic ideas exercised positive influence on all neighbouring nations of the Baltic'[124]. The delegation actively distributed pamphlets and books about Lithuanian arts and about its glorious history.

Milosz, considered 'god-sent' by his fellow Lithuanians, made officials at the Quai d'Orsay raise their eyebrows at the unexpected elegance of the language of Lithuanian diplomatic notes[125]. He also infused the Lithuanian nationalist cause with a universalist spin. 'If I thus leave my high solitude to speak to you about Lithuania, it is because the marvelous country which gave me all its soul is not only my homeland to me, but also your homeland to you. Yes, women and men of the West, I talk to you about your ancient homeland. Yes, daughters and sons of the Indo-European race, I am talking about your cradle', orated Milosz in his native French to the

[122] Senn, *The Emergence of modern Lithuania*, p. 227
[123] Voldemaras to Dutasta, 1919 02 06 / LCVA 383/7/8, p. 286 rev.
[124] Voldemaras to [a long list of French statesmen], 1919 02 19 / LCVA 383/7/8, p. 277
[125] Janine Kohler, 'De l'exil a « la vie délivrée » - les patries d'Oscar Milosz', *Česlovo Milošo skaitymai*, 4 (2011), p. 37

unsuspecting Paris Geographic Society, putting the wretched reality to shame. A quasi-miraculous land that gave Europe Kant, Towiański, Mickiewicz and Kościuszko, God knew, pleaded Milosz, that the list of celebrated Lithuanians was a long one. 'Just like Rome, Greece and France, Lithuania is more than a homeland: it is an idea, one of the burning furnaces of human evolution'[126].

Lithuanian cultural propaganda, despite all its vividness, did not make a difference to Allied dispositions. In London, Čepinskis' confidential proposal that Lithunia be granted mandated status under British protection was rejected by the Foreign Office on the grounds that the British were not ready to protect Lithuania with their own forces[127]. Instead, the Foreign Office, in the name of Earl Curzon of Kedleston, demanded Čepinskis pay three pounds, four shillings and two pence for the one time he was allowed to use the telegraph[128]. None of the three Baltic delegations was granted a hearing at the Council of Four in Paris. Lloyd George first heard of the existence of the Paris Lithuanian delegation in May 1919, when Chaikovsky mentioned it in the passing[129]. 'It is as if independence were given to Wales', wondered the Welsh Wizard in disbelief[130]. Clemenceau, after incessant requests, agreed to see the three Baltic delegations plus the Ukrainians together, and then made it clear to them that their fate was inseparable from the Russian question[131]. At the moment when Wilson's secretary was trying to prove to the Lithuanians that the President was too busy to ever see them, the apostle of self-determination and his wife passed through on their way to a horse race[132]. ‘The Allies are playing a game of fools’, admitted Pichon, the French

[126] Milosz’ speech at the Salle de la Societe de Geographie, Paris, 1919 03 29, in Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz Milosz, *Deux Messianismes politiques* (Paris: A. Silvaire, 1990), p. 30-33
[127] Session no. 51 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 80
[128] Tilley to Čepinskis, 1919 05 04 / LCVA 648/230, p. 44
[129] *Deliberations*, Vol. 2, p. 25-27
[130] Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 308-310
[131] Session no. 8 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 03 16 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 8
[132] Martynas Yčas, ‘Lietuvos vyriausybės sudarymo etapai ir jos pirmieji žingsniai’, in *Pirmasis nepriklausomos Lietuvos dešimtmetis 1918–1928 m. (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1990)*, p. 65

foreign minister, 'We are ready to declare that the Allies won't allow annexation of Lithuania by Germany, but at the same time we are currently opposing detachment of Lithuania from Russia'[133].

1.3.2 Within the confines of the unsanitary *cordon sanitaire*

Formal recognition, despite all its importance, was not the most urgent matter for a war-devastated country. It was instrumental in a much more pressing task of securing Allied material help to effect national reconstruction, as well as in resisting Sovietisation, which the Red Army threatened from the east.

At the end of 1918, the British had sent to the Baltic coast a squadron of warships, which harassed the ramshackle Soviet fleet and bombarded Bolsheviks ashore as far as the guns could reach. In addition to sinking a few Soviet warships, the British captured two destroyers, Avtroil and Spartak, which they passed on to Estonians. Among the war booty was also F. F. Raskolnikov, the Political Head of the Bolshevik Admiralty, who was found hiding under twelve bags of potatoes in the Spartak[134]. While the British show of naval force was significant in protecting Latvia and Estonia against Sovietisation, it benefitted Lithuania only indirectly, as the latter had no important cities situated on the coast.

The embryonic Lithuanian armed forces, which from their day of inception faced the onslaught of the Soviet armies, were in dire need of all kinds of weaponry, ammunition, clothing and equipment. Everything that they possessed had been obtained by irregular purchases in Germany or by barter with the occupying German soldiers, whereby the latter would fill the pockets

[133] Pichon to Berne, 1918 08 09 / ADMAE, Lithuanie, 1, p. 111
[134] Geoffrey Bennett, *Freeing the Baltic* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2002), p. 45

of Lithuanian volunteers with bullets in return for food. The loot taken from the Bolsheviks made up a significant part of Lithuanian armaments. In infantry regiments, fewer than every second soldier was armed, and many fought shoeless[135].

While Lithuania, being a country of peasants, enjoyed the advantage of incessant food production, it lacked nearly everything else. Its industry was non-existent. All the machinery of value that had not been removed by the evacuating Russians was being taken away by the withdrawing Germans. There were shortages of industrial goods of nearly every kind. Railway transport, vital for the distribution of food, for export of flax and wood, as well as for anti-Bolshevik operations, was paralyzed by the total absence of rolling stock. To help restore the economic life of the country and resist the Bolsheviks, the Lithuanians thus pleaded with the peacemakers to spare credit, locomotives, wagons, weapons and military instructors. The anti-Bolshevik front, after all, seemed like an avenue where the interests of Lithuanians, the Allies, and White Russians coincided, all the more as the latter pledged to honor any agreement between the Allies and the Russian provinces in the event of the restoration of non-Bolshevik Russia.

Meanwhile, the Council of Four together with their generals in Paris were still grappling with the definition of Bolshevism. 'Bolshevism is a popular movement which appears wherever food is lacking and central authority is weak', attempted Italian General Armando Diaz, 'It spreads along the lines of communication, where small cells are formed and soon grow and combine', he added. 'Bolshevism is the form that the revolutionary movement takes in backward countries', simplified Tasker H. Bliss, Diaz's American counterpart. President Wilson, too, feared that a hypothetical army sent to contain the Bolshevism could catch the disease itself. In the midst

[135] Purickis to Voldemaras, 1919 08 04 / LCVA 383/7/19, p. 89; Vytautas Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė nepriklausomybės kovose, 1918-1920* (Vilnius: Generolo Jono Žemaičio Lietuvos karo akademija, 2004), p. 39

of a growing consensus as to Bolshevism's epidemiological nature, Marshal Foch put forward a rather logical solution, which he and Clemenceau pondered for some time. It was based on the French experience in dealing with the yellow plague that was coming from Spain in the 1820s. ‘Against an epidemic disease, we create a cordon sanitaire: we place a customs officer every 200 meters, and they prevent people from crossing' 'If we also fear an armed invasion, we create a stronger barrier’[136]. Such a defensive line, spliced out of buffer states, could stretch from the Baltic to the Black sea, boosting the immunity of the continent, and blocking German exploitation of Russia as a desired side effect. Naturally, it would also spare the West from committing their own troops or other resources.

The French proposal, however, was received with little enthusiasm. Lloyd George, in the mood of the Welsh anti-landlord contrarian he had been in his youth, brought up the example of the newborn Hungarian Soviet Republic as a place where Bolshevism, he thought, did not need any suppression. It was even beneficial, he said, for a country that had the worst system of landholding in Europe, where peasants were as oppressed as in the Middle Ages[137]. 'We don’t even quite know what the causes are', concluded Wilson resignedly. 'If this Bolshevism remains within its borders, that is not our concern’[138]. Frank Polk, head of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, thought it useful to seize and research the German imperial archives in order to trace how precisely the Germans implanted Bolshevism in Russia. This, he thought, would help to come up with the recipe of its eradication[139].

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[136] *Deliberations*, Vol. 1, p. 45
[137] Ibid, p. 49
[138] Ibid, p. 48
[139] Schmedeman to Lansing, 1918 12 02 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 2, p. 465; Polk to House, 1918 12 06 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 2, p. 470

In truth, however, the *cordon sanitaire* had already been in operation. What no peacemaker wanted to dwell on out loud was that, with the Baltic states' armed forces still in their infancy, the Allies counted on the continuing German military occupation of the Baltics against the Bolshevik onslaught. Armistice conditions awkwardly demanded Germany continue its occupation of former Russian territories until further notice[140]. As a result, the arch-enemy, which was about to be punished in Versailles, was at the same time the Entente's undeclared ally in stopping the Bolshevik expansion in the Baltic.

Nevertheless, by summer 1919, Allied reliance on Germany to save the Baltic from Bolshevisation grew increasingly untenable. Increasing numbers of exhausted and demoralised German troops were leaving for Germany, while significant numbers of those who stayed fraternized with the Bolsheviks. While the Four tried to stop the German withdrawal by veiled orders to 'respect the Armistice', they also refused all German pleas for help in supply of coal, food or locomotives for their operations[141]. In order to keep their forces in the Baltic from complete disintegration, authorities in Berlin, who also faced Spartacist uprising at home, started recruiting volunteer *Freikorps*, inviting to the Baltic all 'those who were unable to adjust to the transition from military service to civilian life; those who still wanted to see foreign countries; those who saw their future in them'[142]. Anti-Bolshevik cooperation between German and Lithuanian forces was complicated by the lack of common command and by frictions and mistrust that characterised relations between the occupying and the occupied. The peacemakers increasingly feared that the Germans were fomenting their domination in the Baltic[143]. Supplying the makeshift armed forces

[140] Article XII, Allied Armistice Terms, 1918 11 11
[141] *Deliberations*, Vol. 1, p. 73
[142] Tomas Balkelis, 'Demobilisation and Remobilisation of German and Lithuanian Paramilitaries after the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50 (2015), p. 51
[143] *Deliberations*, Vol. 2, p. 272

of the three Baltic states, on the other hand, could allow German evacuation and strengthen the anti-Bolshevik front in the North.

The peacemakers had good information about the dire situation in Lithuania from their low key military missions, sent on the ground in the first months of 1919. The importance of their intelligence-gathering task was attested by the fact that some among the French authorities believed Latvia to be a Japanese island and authorized the head of the French military mission to draw a sum of a thousand yen for what seemed to be an oriental secondment[144].

The very limited powers of such missions, which became the first Allied representations in the Baltic states, were at odds with the high hopes that the locals invested with the victorious Powers, and with the sincere desire to help which these officers felt in the course of their stay. The French sent to Kaunas Colonel Constantin Reboul, a Russophile officer who was instructed to help make Lithuania 'the centre of solid resistance against German influences' without prejudice to its belonging to Russia[145], at the time when Clemenceau in Paris was ordering the Germans to keep guarding the Baltic states against the Bolsheviks. Reboul observed that the Lithuanian 'race of small peasants' was not susceptible to 'self-Bolshevisation' and urged immediate help to Lithuanians in the form of 12,000 rifles, 120 machine guns, 3 million ammunition cartridges, 5,000 horses, 50 locomotives and 13 boats, all to be furnished by the Germans. In case the Germans could not be forced to do it, Reboul said the Entente should furnish everything by itself, as well as send its military instructors. If such help came from the French, Reboul thought it would be easy to put Lithuania under the 'French grip'[146].

[144] Stephen Tallents, *Man and boy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943), p. 267
[145] Reboul to Pichon, 1919 05 18 / ADMAE, Lituanie, 2, p. 272
[146] Reboul, First report of the French military mission in Lithuania, 1919 03 22 / ADMAE, Lituanie, 2, p. 87

The British and American military missions also urged immediate help. American Colonel Ernest J. Dawley urged 'arms of all kinds', 'supplies of every nature', immediate relief for Lithuanian finances and full command of the Lithuanian army by the Allies. 'American men and American brains can solve this problem more readily and more rapidly than can any other of the Allies', argued Dawley[147]. Witnessing the appalling situation at the front, the British, French and American military experts in the Baltic states met on board a British warship and prepared a joint recommendation to their superiors in Paris, urging immediate supply and pay for the local forces and foreign volunteers, to be commanded by the inter-Allied military mission, as well as an immediate loan for restoration of industry, agriculture and for reduction of unemployment of the three Baltic states[148]. 'I do not believe that Paris realizes the gravity of this situation', American Colonel Warwick Greene implored the peacemakers. 'We have left these border countries either to Bolshevism or Germanism, whichever proves strongest'[149].

Allied experts in Paris agreed on the need to help the Baltic states. The *ad hoc* committee, established by the Council of the Foreign Ministers to study the situation in the Baltic, recommended assigning a credit of £10,000,000, to be managed by the Allied military missions on the spot, for the provision of both humanitarian aid and weapons[150]. Herbert Hoover of the American Relief Administration also supported this solution.

Ultimately, the Council of Four denied all of these pleas. Anxious about committing themselves to the dismemberment of Russia and fearing attacks from the Left in its 'hands off

[147] Dawley, Report on the military situation in Lithuania, 1919 05 15 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 12, p. 189-191
[148] Recommendation of Allied representatives, 1919 06 07 / Ibid, p. 211-212
[149] Greene to Tyler, 1919 06 05 / Ibid, p. 199
[150] Report of the committee to consider the Baltic question, 1919 05 14 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 4, p. 762

Russia' campaigns, ignorance, evasion and lack of interest muddied brief discussions of the Baltic question in negotaitons:

> **Wilson**: Should we send munitions to the local forces?
> **Lloyd George**: We have done it already.
> **Wilson**: We must continue. Any money requested?
> **Lloyd George**: We are sending them all they need, I don't know why they are asking for money[151].

In reality, nothing was being sent, save for the generous shipments to the White Russian armies. At the moment when Wilson, to the relief of his counterparts, finally and clearly refused money to the Baltic states, Lloyd George jumped on the opportunity to embarrass his colleague. 'Here are men who are fighting for their freedom and who can't go on if we send them no money', lectured the British premier[152]. When General Gough, the head of the new inter-Allied military mission in the Baltic states, asked for at least £500,000 to meet the most immediate military necessities, the British gave the idea some consideration, but backed off once again at the reluctance of the French and the Americans to contribute[153]. The latter also censured their mission in the Baltics for being too enthusiastic and ordered it to call itself a 'commission' instead of a 'mission' not to appear as too committing[154].

The glaring Allied disregard of the grave situation in the Baltic states evoked vocal protests from the experts. On 15 June, Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison of the Peace conference's Baltic commission resigned from the American delegation in Paris, saying his honesty and self-respect were incompatible with the Allied treatment of the Baltic states[155]. He also went public and

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[151] *Deliberations*, Vol. 2, p. 428
[152] Ibid, p. 550
[153] Notes of a meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers, Paris, 1919 07 08 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 1, No. 5; Lieven to Burt, 1919 07 16 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 3, No. 18
[154] Minutes of the meeting of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary, 1919 07 15 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 11, p. 298-299
[155] Morison to Grew, 1919 06 15 / Ibid, p. 591

published an article in the leftist *Daily Herald* calling for the redemption of the Allied promises on 'small nations, self-determination, and all that sort of thing'[156]. Allied commissioners in the Baltic warned that inaction would have repercussions to the prestige of the Allies and deplored their treatment of the German occupying forces, which, in the words of Dawley, were 'neither treated as an ally, neither fought as enemy, or considered as agent or servant - just insulted as interloper'[157].

By the end of August 1919, notwithstanding the Allied neglect, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, aided by the German volunteers and by Polish operations in the south-east of Lithuania, pushed the Red Army out of their countries. Lenin, fearing a concerted attack on St. Petersburg, sued for an armistice. The Allies, who still continued their half-hearted support of the Whites, now could not but come to terms with the appearance of the third force in the Russian civil war in the North, that of the Balts themselves. In the absence of the latter's involvement, warned General Gough, Yudenich's Russian North-Western army would collapse[158].

Estonians gave marching on St. Petersburg serious consideration, were that the agreed price of western and Russian recognition of their independence, and threatened the Allies to make peace with the Bolsheviks in case of its denial. 'We, too, could go further, if strategy demanded this', suggested the Lithuanian delegate Tomas Naruševičius. 'Up until Moscow?', wondered Klimas[159]. Lithuanians could not be expected to chase the Bolshevik forces with bare fists, wrote Naruševičius to Balfour. The Lithuanian delegate now asked the British to furnish arms and ammunition free of cost, as well as give financial assistance. Otherwise, he added, the Lithuanians would accept the Bolshevik peace invitation[160].

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[156] S.E. Morison, 'A word for the Baltic peoples', *Daily Herald*, 1919 07 15
[157] Dawley to Grew, 1919 06 22 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 12, p. 202
[158] Notes of a meeting of the heads of delegations of the Five Great Powers, 1919 08 20 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 7, p. 731
[159] Session no. 73 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 08 12 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 74
[160] Naruševičius to Balfour, 1919 10 01 / LCVA 383/7/15, p. 16

The sudden boldness of the Balts only served to annoy the Allied policymakers, whose lack of real commitment towards any of the options in the Russian maze reduced their leverage on any of the factions. At the meeting of the Paris heads of delegations, Balfour bashed the Estonians for 'putting a pistol at the head of the Council', while Philippe Berthelot kept lambasting the Baltic states' independence as contradicting Kolchak's pan-Russian sensibilities and as reducing Russia's access to the Baltic sea. As a result, the too-enthusiastic General Gough discreetly left the Baltic, while the conference's Baltic Commission was reminded not to encourage the Baltic states with its support for their independence[161].

By the end of August 1919, the worsening situation of the Whites at the front, as well as signs of workers' unrest in Britain, led Lloyd George to contemplate the withdrawal of all support for the Russian Whites, as well as ponder some kind of *modus vivendi* with the Bolsheviks[162]. He still, however, scorned the idea of recognising and of supporting the Baltic states as 'the height of recklessness', fearing that this would annoy Russia and commit Britain to frictions with it. No matter White or Red, the Russians, he thought, would not acquiesce to the Baltic states' independence and to the loss of the Baltic ports[163]. The official British declaration of non-commitment, which the Cabinet instructed Curzon to send to the Baltic states at the end of September, announced that Britain would spare them neither military materiel nor credit. At the same time, however, the declaration gave the Baltic states carte blanche in their negotiations with

[161] Notes of a meeting of the heads of delegations of the Five Great Powers, 1919 08 20 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 7, p. 733
[162] Cedric James Lowe and Michael L. Dockrill, *The mirage of power* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 327
[163] Lloyd George to Churchill, quoted in Olavi Hovi, *The Baltic area in British policy, 1918-1921* (Helsinki : Finnish Historical Society, 1980), p. 182

Lenin. Since Britain refused help, argued the British in all diplomatic courteousness, it had no right to argue against the Baltic states making peace with the Bolsheviks[164].

The French, who were bent on continuing the no-contact policy with the Bolsheviks, were less generous. When Pusta, Jānis Seskis and Milosz of the three Baltic states went to see Berthelot at the Quai d'Orsay, hoping to tease out what the French wanted of their countries, Berthelot evaded the issue of aid and refused to discuss the Baltic states' independence without Russian consent. 'But this leaves Estonia without arms and ammunition', complained Pusta. 'So no one has ever sent Estonia a single bullet?', asked Berthelot. 'No, not a single one', replied the Estonian. Berthelot was getting impatient and gradually raised his voice. 'So the reports of the French, British and American military missions are incorrect?', he asked. When Pusta finally hinted on the possibility of peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks, Berthelot could no longer conceal the discomfort that the game of fools entailed. 'If the Baltic states make peace with the Bolsheviks, they will have to stop counting on the aid and support (sic) of the Entente', shouted Berthelot. Seskis and Milosz then took their turns, only to be harangued by Berthelot in a similar fashion[165].

1.2.3 Quid pro quo survival

By the end of summer 1919, it became clear that the Baltic states had been abandoned as a 'grey zone' and left outside the scant schemes of relief and reconstruction, enjoyed by the conference invitees, such as Poland and Romania, or by the ex-enemy states, such as Austria and

[164] HMG to the Baltic governments, 1919 09 24 / LCVA 383/7/19, p. 62
[165] Protocol of the meeting between the three Baltic delegates and Berthelot, October (exact date unknown) / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 65

Hungary[166]. The only thing that Lithuanians hitherto received from the Allies was some foodstuffs from the Hoover mission[167]. The budget was empty, state and army personnel had not received their salaries for months, and the military was in dire need of all kinds of supplies and instructors. The German loan only lasted until spring 1919. When the Lithuanians asked for more, Berlin refused to talk loans until the Lithuanians renounced *'urbi et orbi'* their designs on East Prussia and pledged not to side with Poland. The Lithuanians refused both demands[168]. 'We need money even if we have to dig it from under the ground', despaired the priest Purickis, the Lithuanian envoy in Berlin[169]. Premier Sleževičius predicted a 'catastrophe' and urged the Paris delegation to obtain immediate Allied support[170]. It was clear, however, that it could only be achieved on a strict *quid pro quo* basis, by talking business and teasing the Powers with the most immediate commercial exploitation of Lithuania, independent of any settlement of its fate.

Dealing with the Allies, however, turned out to be no less difficult than dealing with the Germans. In Paris, the Lithuanians managed to strike the most straightforward of all their quid-pro-quo deals with the United States Liquidation Commission (USLC), which was set up to get rid of the large stocks of the remaining American wartime supplies in France. For the conference's underdogs of the ex-Russian Empire, the USLC was one of their very few trade partners that agreed to sell them non-lethal supplies on the basis of credit, accepting government obligations with maturities of up to six years, at an annual interest of 5%. Behind such American risk tolerance, economic self-interest overshadowed humanitarian sensibilities. The sums involved from the US

[166] Anne Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction After the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 118
[167] Table of total relief deliveries 1918 12 01 – 1919 06 30 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 10, p. 501; Paknys to Messinger, 1919 09 11 / LCVA 383/7/23, p. 399
[168] Vileišis to the Paris Delegation, 1919 05 08 / LCVA 383/7/9, p. 152
[169] Purickis to the Paris Delegation, 1919 05 20 / LCVA 383/7/9, p. 1
[170] Sleževičius to Voldemaras, 1919 08 01 / LCVA 383/7/11, p. 4

perspective were negligible and the goods were mostly of low value that made both their transport back to the U.S. and their continued storage in France unfeasible. Yet, the prices demanded were also above the market level[171]. Furthermore, Kolchak agreed to honor all contracts made between the Allied Powers and the de facto Baltic states in the event of their reincorporation into Russia[172], while American commissioners in the Baltic states reported their raw materials as robust securities, which could be used if those states somehow secured independence. The Americans, therefore, could hardly go wrong. As the U.S. legislation did not include non-recognised states among authorised buyers, but allowed sale to private enterprises, the USLC advised each of the underdog delegations to create a dummy intermediary firm, which would enter into contracts with both the USLC and the national government in question[173]. The Estonians named their firm 'Revalis' after their capital city. The Lithuanians, accordingly, called theirs 'Vilnis'.

Having virtually no negotiating power translated into a number of difficulties in the buying process for the Lithuanians. Avoiding any commitment in the dismemberment of Russia, American authorities quickly overturned the initial agreement of the USLC to sell 100 armored cars and 300 pieces of artillery to the Lithuanians [174]. The Lithuanians were also introduced to the hierarchy of buyers, when USLC's initial agreement to sell the former 100 locomotives and 1,300 wagons was annulled. The French government claimed these for themselves[175]. What remained available had to be bought before the window of opportunity closed in October 1919, when the French government bought all USLC supplies in bulk and started re-selling them at a price

[171] Edwin B. Parker, *Final report of United States Liquidation Commission* (Washington: Government printing office, 1920), p. 30
[172] Lord to the Supreme Economic Council, 1919 06 16 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 10, p. 380
[173] Session no. 41 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 05 21 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 62
[174] Session of the Cabinet, 1919 05 31 / LCVA 383/7/11, p. 217
[175] Session no. 47 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 06 05 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 72

premium[176]. To complicate matters further, one Rubinov, who introduced himself as the very well-connected director of the Boston opera house, tried to extort from the Lithuanian delegation a 5%, or $250,000 bribe, otherwise threatening to make sure the Lithuanians did not get anything from the USLC at all. The Lithuanians sent him away, only to receive a letter from the USLC the next day, cancelling all sales to 'Vilnis'. The Estonians confessed that they had paid Rubinov a commission of 3% for the supplies; so did the Ukrainians. Outraged, the Lithuanians went to see Wilson at his hotel, only to be chased away by his secretary. There was a more creative solution, the matter was resolved in one of the five o'clock tea parties organised by American delegates' wives to cheer up their time in Paris. Šliūpas, the American Lithuanian and the former editor of the *Dawn*, explained the situation to the influential American ladies and implored that he, as an American, was ashamed of the actions of American officials. The next day, USLC's decision has been overturned once again[177].

At the end of the day, the Lithuanians succeeded in scraping goods from the USLC for the sum of $4,414,861, or less than 1/3 of what was intended. Nevertheless, these supplies equipped the Lithuanian armed forces and provided Lithuania with much-needed industrial goods, which were also used to pay salaries to the makeshift state apparatus in the absence of money[178]. Among the purchased goods were Class B (worn) 35,000 overcoats, 35,000 breeches, 35,000 pairs of shoes, 50,000 pairs of shoes with new soles, 100,000 pairs of socks, 300,000 items of underwear, more than 600 tons of various canned food, 45 tons of tea, 3,000,000 packs of cigarettes and 10,000,000 boxes of matches for them, 25,000 toothbrushes, 45 tons of hand soap, 100,000 gallons

[176] Session no. 92 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 10 10 / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 34
[177] *Pirmasis dešimtmetis*, p. 98
[178] Ibid, p. 99

of kerosene and 45 tons of candles[179]. Lithuanian priests also added 15,000 francs worth of wine to the shipment, which was vital for church services[180]. In August 1919, steamers full of goods started leaving the port of La Rochelle (La Pallice) for Memel and Liepaja. The French dockers only agreed to load the ships after assurance that the goods were not intended for the White Russian armies[181].

The stocks purchased from the USLC, although essential, were insufficient in kickstarting the Lithuanian state, which still needed weapons, loan and rolling stock. By summer 1919, the Germans were forced to hand over to the Allies their best 7,585 locomotives, 12,221 passenger wagons and 192,988 freight wagons[182]. At the insistence of the French, these had been prescribed in the Compiègne Armistice as well as in the Versailles treaty with the aim to cripple the German transport system and to compensate for the railway material removed from the Franco-Belgian front. Although the Allies ended up with a large surplus of wagons and locomotives stationed in France, they were extremely reluctant to share their war booty with the nascent states of Central and Eastern Europe, where the need for locomotives was absolutely critical. Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia were each given a hundred 'Armistice' locomotives; to the first two, the British also opened a credit of 500,000 each for purchasing various railway material. Both the locomotives and credit were to be repaid as the first charge against reparations from the enemy states[183].

[179] USLC schedule A (undated) / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 119-121
[180] Session no. 97 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 10 31 / LCVA 383/7/18, p. 61
[181] Cabinet session, 1919 12 30 / LCVA 923/57, p. 246
[182] Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The most valuable asset of the Reich : a history of the German National Railway* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 4
[183] Meeting of the Supreme Economic Council, 1919 03 01 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 10, p. 32; Report of the communications section, 1920 01 01 / Ibid, p. 723

Lithuania, despite having no rolling stock at all, had been neglected and left outside such a scheme. Being unrecognised, poor and neither an ally nor an enemy, it could only offer the Allies the most immediate exploitation of its raw materials and count on shady transactions that did not depend on the continuation of Lithuania's independent political existence, even in the short term. As Foch was in charge of most of the Allied war booty, Lithuanians realized they had to talk to the French.

To the benefit of Lithuanians, Allied exploitation of the underdogs seemed to have a competitive vibe. 'I endeavour to continue my work of propaganda and serious economic inquiry of the country, so that the British and Americans are not the only ones to profit from the victory of the Entente', Reboul in Kaunas hurriedly wrote to Paris[184]. Summoned by Clemenceau to report on the Lithuanian situation, Reboul assured that the Lithuanians could guarantee any credit by their agricultural riches[185]. In July 1919, the Quai d'Orsay facilitated the visit of a representative of the quasi-private *Association Linière* to Lithuania , to survey the stocks of flax[186]. Consequently, in Paris, French representatives in the otherwise unenthusiastic Supreme Allied Economic Council swiftly pushed through the decision to allocate Lithuania thirty German 'Armistice' locomotives, on the condition of the conclusion of the financial agreement with the French government[187]. At the end of August 1919, the French High Command informed the Lithuanians of the decision to give them all the weapons they needed, on the same conditions as the transfer of locomotives. The French, Lithuanians were told, would only take flax and timber in return[188]. The proposed scheme

[184] Reboul, First report of the French military mission in Lithuania, 1919 03 22 / ADMAE, Lituanie, 2, p. 87
[185] Session no. 80 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 10 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 84
[186] Eybert to Voldemaras, 1919 07 24 / LCVA 383/7/8, p. 122
[187] Voldemaras to Pichon, 1919 08 26 / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 172
[188] Session no. 76 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 08 25 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 158

of trade left no room for any risks: the French would bring all the goods to Lithuania with their own wagons, and return to France loaded with Lithuanian produce[189].

Sensing that the French might be taking advantage of the wretchedness of Lithuania, Voldemaras attempted to impress upon the French foreign minister that Lithuania had been devastated no less than Belgium and begged to open a credit on the same conditions as those in the Lithuanian deal with the USLC, which, he suggested, could also be guaranteed against the German payment of reparations to Lithuania. Voldemaras also asked the French to reconsider their demands and cede the thirty locomotives on the same conditions as those enjoyed by Poland and Romania. The Lithuanian foreign minister, however, could not conceal his unenviable negotiating position. In case the French for some reason disagreed with these suggestions, the Lithuanians, he said, were still ready to yield and talk in purely *quid pro quo* terms[190].

Naturally, the French opted for the latter option. The contract covering Lithuanian exports of 5,000,000 francs worth of flax to pay for weapons and locomotives had been signed on 17 of September, between Naruševičius of the Paris Lithuanian delegation and Henri Maquet, the 'administrator delegate of the Association Linière'[191]. On the day of signature, the Lithuanians realized that the final version of the contract had been unilaterally altered by the French and differed substantially from what was agreed two days before. Instead of payment half in flax and half in other agricultural produce, the French now demanded it all in flax, the most valuable Lithuanian product, to be handed over before April 1920. Naruševičius protested and offered to resort to

[189] Session no. 80 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 10 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 165
[190] Voldemaras to Pichon, 1919 08 26 / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 173
[191] Contract between Naruševičius and Maquet, 1919 09 17 / LCVA 383/7/13, p. 271

British, Belgian or Dutch arbitrage, which the Quai d'Orsay refused. Fearing repercussions for the future relations with France, the Lithuanians assented[192].

As with the locomotives, the weapons which the French sold the Lithuanians for flax turned out to be stocks confiscated from Germany. Lithuania received 2,000 automatic pistols, 100 heavy and 216 light machine guns, 7,500 Mauser rifles with bayonets, 2,500 carbines and different ammunition, all at half their market price, all of which were designated to be 'destroyed or rendered useless' under Article 169 of the Treaty of Versailles[193]. The French thus had struck a genuinely solid deal. On the Lithuanian end, closer inspection of the received shipment revealed that rifle barrels and bayonets were deeply corroded and required costly repairs, while carbines were from the year 1888[194].

The French were keen on expanding the profitable partnership with the Lithuanians. The French État-Major told the Lithuanians that they were too timid in their purchases and offered to sell much more from the piles of the German weaponry condemned to destruction, while the Quai d'Orsay pointed the Lithuanians to yet another *ad hoc* organisation, the association of forestry, to work out their next agreement[195]. The French now also agreed to trade German weapons for crops, but demanded that the Lithuanians desist from exports to any other nation states until the French exported resources from Lithuania for 15,000,000 francs[196]. At the Quai d'Orsay, Naruševičius was also asked to let in French wine, silk and other luxury products. When Naruševičius hinted that establishment of diplomatic relations would help, the French advised that

[192] Session no. 84 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 17 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 175
[193] Instruction on the delivery of material, 1919 10 / LCVA 383/7/18, p. 86; Session no. 94 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 10 17 / LCVA 383/7/18, p. 120. Overseeing the destruction was the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission under the French general Charles Nollet.
[194] V. Liubinas, 'Mūsų ginklai 1919-1920 metais', *Mūsų žinynas*, 11-12 (1938), p. 768-769
[195] Naruševičius to Sleževičius, 1919 12 02 / LCVA 383/7/18, p. 104
[196] Session no. 83 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 16 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 173

instead of demanding sophisticated recognitions, the Lithuanians should simply announce the name of the Lithuanian representative[197].

The Lithuanians received new French proposals without enthusiasm. As Lithuanian dealings in Paris increasingly substantiated Čepinskis' take on the exploitative nature of world politics, Premier Sleževičius forbade the Paris delegation to make any new deals with the French[198]. The Lithuanians, after all, still hoped to get something from London and saved part of their flax for the British.

Pursuing its policy of non-commitment, the British government refused to provide the Lithuanians with weapons or loans. While the latter were encouraged by the Foreign Office to look for capital in the private sector in Britain, the continued non-recognition and uncertain future of the Baltic states in the chaos of 1919 made investment extremely risky for an potential investor. This, however, did not mean that the British remained indifferent to economic opportunities in the Baltic. Colonel Stephen Tallents, the British commissioner in the Baltic states, became the most enthusiastic advocate of Britain‘s participation in the reconstruction of these provinces. He personally lobbied private enterprises in the city of London and asked the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade for support. Tallents' maximum plan of the British development of the Baltic states included financing the introduction of stable currencies and controlling their emission[199]. Both Tallents and General Turner of the British military mission in the Baltics argued for socially responsible economic engagement, which would take into account the interests of the peasants. 'If it appears to the inhabitants that they are bound hand and foot to a capitalist firm in London, for

[197] Session no. 92 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 10 10 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 120
[198] Naruševičius to Sleževičius, 1919 12 02 / LCVA 383/7/18, p. 104
[199] Tallents to Curzon, 1920 05 19 / DBFP S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 275

whose apparent gain a very inadequate amount is paid for their produce, the prestige of England will suffer very considerably', warned Turner[200].

While the Treasury ruled out any engagement in the Baltics that involved any government spending[201], there was one firm in London, The National Metal and Chemical Bank Ltd., that showed its interest in securing a monopoly over Baltic flax and timber exports. The bank was owned by R. and J. Tilden-Smith, who made their fortune from the reconstruction of derelict enterprises. Tallents' brother worked for the bank[202]. Both the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade blessed the idea and agreed to guarantee the observance of contracts on the part of the Baltic governments[203]. Curzon thought it to be a step in the direction of reopening Russia to British trade through the Baltic ports[204]. No less significant in the British calculations was the feeling of intense adversarial competition with the French for the Baltic markets[205].

On 5 December 1919, representatives of the National Metal and Chemical Bank signed in Kaunas an agreement allowing its agents the exclusive right to export flax of the 1919 harvest for the sum of £200,000. The bank received the assurance from the British Foreign Office that the latter would ensure the fulfillment of the agreement with the Lithuanians or with any other government which would 'absorb or replace' it[206]. According to the agreement, the bank received 5% commission from sales without fixed prices, while the Lithuanian side took upon itself all the expenses of packing, loading, insurance and transport to the Latvian port of Liepaja. While the agreement clearly favoured the bank, it provided the Lithuanians with the advance payment of

[200] Curzon to Tallents, 1920 02 26 / Ibid, Note 2 to No. 205; Tallents to Curzon, 1920 04 22 / Ibid, No. 257
[201] Curzon to Tallents, 1920 06 16 / Ibid, No. 295
[202] Wilton to Gregory, 1921 01 12 / TNA FO 371/6721, p. 140
[203] Tallents to Curzon, 1920 04 22 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 257
[204] Curzon to Tallents, 1920 02 26 / Ibid, No. 205
[205] Tallents to Curzon, 1920 05 19 / Ibid, No. 275
[206] Tilden Smith to the Under-Secretary of State, 1923 03 28 / TNA FO 371/9270, p. 191

£200,000, which saved the Lithuanian state apparatus, and, possibly, the Lithuanian state, from collapse. When Yčas announced the news of the agreement in an overcrowded Kaunas theatre and promised that the three-month late salaries to the public servants would be paid, he was carried out on the hands of a cheering crowd[207].

The transaction, however, did not live up to the high standards that Tallents expected from British commercial involvement. The bank was not transparent in its accounts of sales; it also kept storing the stocks of flax, hoping to achieve a higher price. When the market price of flax fell from £200 to £70 a ton, the bank demanded Lithuania a compensation of £160,000, which drew both sides into lengthy and tedious commercal arbitration[208]. Ultimately, due to the lack of interest of the British government, Tallents' hope of Britain leading the reconstruction of the Baltic states had failed to materialise.

The Lithuanians also tried to obtain foreign military instructors for the Lithuanian armed forces, which they were only able to do in private capacity. After August 1919, the Paris Lithuanian delegation plotted the creation of the 'American brigade', which, it was thought, by its name alone would help to scare away the Poles and other antagonists from invading Lithuania[209]. Priest Žilius entered into contact with demobilised U.S. Army officers in France and recruited Captain William H. Swarthout to lead the brigade's formation. Swarthout offered to organise in the U.S. and send to Lithuania a 6,000 strong 'foreign legion', which he thought could also be used in public works, forestry, mining or farming in peace time. According to his calculations, such a brigade would cost every Lithuanian a reasonable U.S. 60 cents per year[210]. To overcome the

[207] *Nepriklausomos Lietuvos dešimtmetis*, p. 101; Aldona Gaigalaitė, *Anglijos kapitalas ir Lietuva : 1919-1940* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1986), p. 27
[208] Lee to Vaughan, 1923 05 05 / TNA FO/371/9270, p. 203
[209] Session no. 80 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 10 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 166
[210] Swarthout to Voldemaras, 1919 08 11 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 1

opposition of the American government, the Lithuanian delegation planned first to direct the brigade to Cuba on the pretext of chopping wood, and then ship it to Lithuania[211]. By the end of 1919, however, only 21 American officers, including Swarthout, had arrived in Lithuania. The Cabinet decided that prohibitive costs and the language barrier rendered the idea useless; there were also doubts about the morale of these officers, who were caught stealing cigarettes from the stocks of Lithuanian purchases in Paris[212]. Lithuanian ministers also could not get their heads around the fact that Swarthout, an African American whom they codenamed 'Blackskin' (Lith. Juododis), was claiming the rank of a Lithuanian general[213].

Lithuanian experience with smuggling in British officers turned out to be no more successful. The Lithuanian legation in London recruited Frank P. Crozier, the commander of the 36th Ulster Division during the war, who was looking for work after being dismissed from service for misdemeanors. Crozier succeeded in gathering, as he even put it, a 'queer collection of British ex-officers', sixteen in total, and checked in at the Kaunas 'Metropolis' hotel at the end of October 1919, to become the 'Inspector general of the Lithuanian army'. When Crozier attempted to get the backing of the British government for his mission, both the Foreign and War offices distanced themselves from the venture, wishing to keep it purely private. Lithuanians considered the mission as particularly important and agreed to pay the British at British rates. As a result, Crozier was paid a salary of 50,000 Ost-marks, while that of a Lithuanian counterpart of the same rank was merely 1,800. In a few months, when Lithuanians ran out of money, Crozier was happily heading west on a Prussian train, looking at the receding views of what he called the Lithuanian ‘Devil’s paradise’.

[211] Session no. 73 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 08 12 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 146
[212] Dobužis to Naruševičius, 1919 11 22 / LCVA 383/7/48, p. 37
[213] Cabinet Session, 1920 01 10 / LCVA 923/1/86, p. 29

During his short stay, he managed to fight three wars, quelled a revolt and survived an assassination attempt by his British colleague who was not happy about Croizier interfering in his love affairs[214].

When in the last days of 1919 representatives of the four powers gathered at 10 Downing Street to wrap up the remaining issues of the Conference, the atmosphere was that of a strange relief. Everyone agreed that Allied intervention in the Russian civil war had failed, and that this had to be announced publicly in order to appease the Left at home. To dwell on the reasons for such an outcome, said Clemenceau, would be to venture into the sphere of 'high political philosophy'. The Russians, 'the Tiger' confessed to Lloyd George, were after all Orientals, who were 'thoroughly enjoying themselves at the present moment with their fighting, their tortures and so on'[215]. He then brought up again his plan of the *cordon sanitaire*, a 'barbed wire entanglement round Russia' that would thwart the spread of Bolshevism and check Russian-German rapprochement. When Lloyd George observed that any anti-Soviet *cordon-sanitaire* would need Allied money, guns and equipment, Curzon distilled the concept further: 'A barbed wire fence, as it were, round Russia, within which the Allies should not interfere'. The map of the 'fence', if only mental, still contained the glaring gap between Finland and Poland. 'Was our intention to give them no help?', asked Balfour. 'We had allowed them to raise loans', Curzon recalled. 'So far as they were able to do so', he added. The moral support, preached American Secretary of State Davis, should nevertheless continue[216].

[214] Frank P. Crozier, *The men I killed* (London, 1938), p. 56; see also Charles Messenger, *Broken Sword: the tumultuous life of General Frank Crozier*, 1897-1937 (Barnsley : Pen & Sword Military, 2013).
[215] David Robin Watson, *Clemenceau: a political biography* (London : Eyre Methuen, 1974), p. 377
[216] Minutes of the meeting of the international council of premiers, 1919 12 12 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 9, p. 848

1.2.4 The greatest enemy

Just like the question of Lithuanian independence, the puzzle of the eastern border of Poland at the Peace Conference was inseparable from the Allied anxieties about Russia. While the reports of the Conference's Commission on Polish Affairs showcased the different principles which it claimed were guiding its work in sketching Poland's eastern border, the fundamental rule, as Torretta's slip of the tongue betrayed in one of the sessions[217], was to not go beyond what the Russian provisional government promised the Poles in 1917: a state comprised of 'all the lands in which the Polish people constitute the majority of the population'[218]. Consequently, when the sub-commission, comprised of the French General Le Rond, Italian diplomat Pietro Tomasi Della Torretta and American and British experts on Polish affairs Howard Lord and Herbert Paton traced the Polish eastern border, it followed the ethnographic principle and relied on the Russian imperial census of 1897. The resulting line, later to be known as the Curzon line, which was unanimously approved by the Commission on 10 April, 1919, conveniently followed rivers and lakes and approximated the current (2016) Lithuanian border with Poland. While it left the ethnically Lithuanian town of Sejny (Lith. Seinai), as well as the district of Suwalki on the Polish side, the Belarussian Grodno was left outside Poland, as was Vilnius, which remained on the side of Lithuania nearly 150km away from the traced line[219].

On 19 April 1919, less than two weeks after the said line had been traced, Polish forces entered Vilnius, thus ending the life of the Moscow-created Lithuanian-Belarussian Socialist

[217] Commission on Polish Affairs, Proces-Verbal No. 16, 1919 04 10 / ADMAE, Cambon papers, p. 43 rev.
[218] Proclamation of the Russian Provisional Government to the Poles, 1917 03 16, in Robert Browder and Aleksandr Fyodorovich (eds.), *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*, Vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 322
[219] Commission on Polish Affairs, Proces-Verbal No. 16, 1919 04 10, Annex I / ADMAE, Cambon papers, p. 45

Soviet Republic at the fourth month of its existence. Among the war booty were around a thousand prisoners and the Bolshevik money chest[220]. Two days later, Piłsudski arrived in the city, where Polish inhabitants met him as a national hero. Although Piłsudski tried to avoid nationalist rhetoric and proclaimed self-determination for the 'inhabitants of the former Lithuanian Grand Duchy', the tide of Polish nationalist sentiment in the city immediately challenged his federalist visions. At a solemn mass of appreciation, held in the Vilnius Cathedral, Priest Stanislaw Maciejewicz in his sermon equated the Poles' historical hardships to the slavery of the biblical Jews. To the usual annoyance of Lithuanian observers, the sermon was followed by the singing of *Boże, coś Polskę* and by the Polish national anthem. 'Ask those crowds, who are they, and they will reply to you that we are Poles. Vilnius is a Polish city and it has to belong to Poland', orated priest Stanislaw Jasinski to the hundreds of Vilnius inhabitants, who came to pay respects to the fallen Polish soldiers at the Rasos Vilnius cemetery[221].

When Vilnius' Lithuanian activists met to discuss the regime change, the atmosphere was both that of relief and anxiety. Some priests wept from happiness at the end of the Bolshevik regime and argued that in any case it was 'better to deal with a Western democracy than with Eastern barbarians', while socialist-minded priest Tumas-Vaižgantas lambasted Polish landlords of Lithuania, who, he said, had plotted the Polish occupation of Vilnius for fear of parcelling of their estates. Biržiška urged to boycott the government of the new hosts of the city and revive the Vilnius Lithuanian societies, in order to parade the Lithuanian culture once again[222]. In a letter to the Polish

[220] Report of the British military mission in Warsaw, 1919 04 26 / TNA FO/608/268, p. 520
[221] Pranas Bieliauskas, *Vilniaus dienoraštis 1915-1919* (Vorutos fondas, 2009), p. 159
[222] Ibid, p. 158

commissar of the eastern lands Jerzy Osmolowski, the Vilnius Lithuanian committee declared that Lithuanians considered the Polish capture of Vilnius an occupation[223].

A week after capturing Vilnius, Polish forces took Grodno, a Belarussian city recently evacuated by the Germans, which the Lithuanians had eyed for themselves. Polish and Lithuanian units now faced each other and skirmishes ensued along the 100km line of the front[224].

The Polish capture of Vilnius and their further advances alarmed the Lithuanian government in Kaunas and complicated the working of the Šaulys' mission, which had arrived in Warsaw on 19 April to regulate Lithuanian-Polish relations and coordinate the common front against the Bolsheviks. Since the Lithuanians demanded Polish recognition of independent Lithuania with capital Vilnius as a *conditio sine qua non* for any cooperation with Poland, and as the Poles insisted on Lithuanian-Polish federation, Šaulys returned to Kaunas without results[225]. The fate of the Šaulys mission was replicated by the subsequent Staniszewski mission, sent to Kaunas by the Poles at the end of May, which premier Sleževičius greeted by refusing to talk in Polish and speaking Lithuanian through a French translator[226]. Sleževičius was convinced that the Poles were playing for time and suspected their intentions to advance further into Lithuanian territory. 'To attack and beat the Poles one has to have forces. We do not have them. We can only defend', the Premier desperately wrote to the Paris Lithuanian delegation and instructed it to raise a global scandal[227].

[223] Łossowski, *Konflikt Polsko-Litewski*, p. 46
[224] For a detailed description of Polish advances, see Lesčius, p. 254
[225] Purickis to the Paris delegation, 1919 05 08 / LCVA 383/7/9, p. 3; Instructions to Šaulys, 1919 04 19 / LCVA 383/7/20, p. 4
[226] Senn, *Emergence of modern Lithuania*, p. 117
[227] Purickis to Klimas, 1919 05 31 / LCVA 383/7/19, p. 130 rev.

Talks with the Poles in Paris were no more successful. When in June priest A. Vilimas met Paderewski for a confidential talk, the Polish premier called the Lithuanians his brothers and offered to start negotiations immediately. Toeing Piłsudski's line, Paderewski argued that Lithuania would not be able to survive on its own and insisted on a federation of the Austro-Hungarian type, in which the Lithuanians would join the Poles as 'equals with equals'. When asked why the Poles captured Vilnius without agreeing with the Kaunas Lithuanian government beforehand, Paderewski said they had to act quickly and in secrecy in order to save the Vilnius Poles from being killed by the Jews and Bolsheviks[228].

The lack of trust was such that Voldemaras only agreed to a meeting in the presence of witnesses and with a protocol[229]. When he, Martynas Yčas and Alfred Tyskiewicz finally joined Paderewski for a confidential breakfast, the Polish foreign minister was ready to acknowledge Vilnius the capital of Lithuania, but only if the latter was federated to Poland. The only achievement that the meeting produced was a common declaration that 'Lithuanians and Poles talked for one and a half hours and did not come to blows'[230].

Although Lithuanian impressions of preliminary exchanges with Paderewski, notwithstanding irreconcilable positions, were 'quite not bad'[231], these were overshadowed by further frictions. Observing the activities of Dmowski's Polish National Committee in Paris and following its considerable territorial demands, as well as receiving news about the skirmishes at the front, the Lithuanian delegation concluded that the Poles were working to discredit independent Lithuania and its government as a mere by-product of German or Russian anti-Polish intrigue and

[228] Vilimas' report on the meeting with Paderewski, 1919 06 06 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 42
[229] Session no. 48 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 06 07 / LCVA 383/7/4, p. 78
[230] Summary of delegation's activities [06 17 - 06 28], 1919 06 28 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 224
[231] Session no. 55 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 06 24 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 85

lobbying the Allies to sanction Poland's suzerainty over Lithuania[232]. The delegation decided that there was a clear difference between what Paderewski said and what the Poles actually did. As a result it moved to declare Poland their 'greatest political enemy'[233].

The extensive and multi-faceted diplomatic campaign to combat Poland's territorial ambition thus became the all-permeating element of Lithuanian foreign policy at the moment of its inception. The Lithuanians spilled much ink on incessant petitions to the peacemakers, substantiating Lithuanian rights to Vilnius, with evidence spanning from Milosz's poetic mysticism to appeals to common sense. Lithuania without Vilnius, its capital since time immemorial, would be as inconceivable as France without Paris. Economically, Lithuania would die without Vilnius, and Vilnius would die without Lithuania. The Lithuanians turned around arguments which the Poles sought to use in their favour. Vilnius, argued the Lithuanians, was the centre of the *Lithuanian* culture, where the political, literary and scientific renaissance of the modern Lithuanian nation peaked. Unfavorable nationality statistics were challenged as being methodologically flawed and having pro-Polish bias; dismissed as irrelevant due to the non-Polish character of the surrounding region; or set against the long history of polonisation which acted against Lithuanians[234].

Resisting the prospect of the new Lithuanian-Polish union, the Lithuanians went to great lengths in desecrating the heroic image of Poland and portraying it as inherently turbulent, unstable and incapable of orderly governance. '[The Poles] see the image of historical Poland as luminous, surrounded by the nimbus of martyrdom, a mere touching of which would commit blasphemy in

[232] Summary of delegation's activities [04 24 - 05 14], 1919 05 14 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 27
[233] Naruševičius report at the Cabinet session, 1919 05 31 / LCVA 383/7/15, p. 3
[234] 'Vilna: the capital of Lithuania' / ADMAE, Grenard papers, 16, p. 67; 'On the pretended poll of Vilnius in 1916' / ADMAE, Ibid, p. 72; 'Le gouvernement de Vilna' / Ibid, p. 187

their eyes', argued one of the Lithuanian submissions, 'We consider that civilised, sacred and sacrificial Poland is nothing but pretty fiction'[235]. The period of the early-modern Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth has been crossed out in the Lithuanian historical narrative as dark and disastrous. Poland, argued the Lithuanians, had always exploited Lithuania, while its anarchic privileged classes led the Republic of Both States to extinction. Voldemaras wrote Wilson that 'Poles have dragged Lithuania into the abyss they fell themselves in and afterwards deprived the Lithuanian nation of her upper class'[236]. Consequently, the new Lithuanian-Polish union would be an equally hopeless undertaking, as 'mentalities of the Lithuanians and Poles present a total contrast and cannot be reconciled'[237].

Petitions from the activists of the Lithuanian diaspora sounded no less categorical. 'With the Poles, we do not want to have anything in common', read the appeal from Prussian Lithuanians[238]. American Lithuanian representatives lambasted the idea of the new union with Poland as thoroughly undemocratic, since, they claimed, it was only supported by the Polonised nobility, itself detached from the nationalist ideals of the masses and destined to lose its influence as the world moved towards a more just distribution of wealth[239]. The peace conference was also enlightened with examples from everyday life.

> Poles <..> often offend [American] Lithuanian workers by lampooning them as being dark and by saying that they will be ruled by the Poles. Lithuanians respond with a fist, brawls commence between Lithuanian and Polish workers which end up in court. These small facts are the result of political situation; the Entente showed its sympathy to the Poles, while Lithuania is still a question and its citizens are thus being mocked[240].

[235] 'Lithuanie & Pologne' / ADMAE, Ibid, 16, p. 88
[236] Voldemaras to Wilson [undated] / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 161
[237] 'Summary exposé of the development of the Lithuanian national consciousness in the past and at the present' / LCVA 648/57, p. 154
[238] Memorandum by Lithuanians of Eastern Prussia / LCVA 648/57, p. 80
[239] American Lithuanians to Balfour, 1919 02 14 / LCVA 383/7/14, p. 146
[240] Declaration of the American Lithuanians [undated] / LCVA 383/7/14, p. 24

The battle of propaganda was also fought in the French press, which did not miss the opportunity to profiteer from the underdog delegations. The Lithuanians observed that the Poles had bought most of Parisian press and realized that Lithuanian counter-submissions would not be printed for free either. The syndicate of the twelve French newspapers demanded half a million francs for passing Lithuanian-related articles through for four months[241], while *Pays*, *Entente* and *Petite République* offered to do five articles a month for 5,600 francs[242]. Eventually, the Lithuanians decided to go with *Le Temps*, the most important French political newspaper, which proved to be the easiest to bribe, but also was the most expensive. At the end of March 1919, the deal was reached with its editor for printing news about Lithuania for up to twenty days, for the price of 50,000 francs[243]; in September, the Lithuanians opted for one long article of 150 lines for 6000 francs and four short messages of 40 lines, each for 2000 francs, including a 'protection' period of one month, during which *Le Temps* would not print anti-Lithuanian articles. The condition, however, was that Lithuanian articles should only be factual and not anti-Polish[244].

While purchases of newspaper coverage were devouring more than half of the budget of the Lithuanian delegation, the results were hardly noticeable[245]. Klimas concluded that the French press was a 'prostitute' minus the 'fun' factor[246]. *Le Temps* was accused of outright blackmail, whereby it would first print Polish anti-Lithuanian propaganda, and then ask the Lithuanians to pay it to cease[247]. The resulting Lithuanian articles, in spite of their high cost, resembled dry news snippets and missed entirely the anti-Polish bite of Lithuanian petitions to the Peace Conference.

[241] Session no. 11 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 03 20 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 13
[242] Session no. 89 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 29 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 194
[243] Session no. 15 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 03 29 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 19
[244] Session no. 80 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 10 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 167
[245] Expenses of the Lithuanian delegation up until 1919 06 28 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 281
[246] Klimas to Šaulys, 1919 04 25 / LCVA 383/7/249, p. 90
[247] Session no. 80 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 10 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 167

Further negotiations revealed that different French papers would only agree to print anti-Polish propaganda if the other papers did the same. Consequently, the Lithuanians came to painful realization that they were never going to out-wrestle the Poles in the French press and decided to leave alone the 'propaganda of the totally rotten French newspaper-creatures which have entirely lost their name and honor'[248].

Much more important than the challenge of propaganda was the task of finding real political allies. Of all the anti-Polish elements lingering in the Paris Peace Conference, it were the desperate émigré Russian statesmen, who, for their own reasons, mirrored Lithuanian concerns over Polish claims in the East. When Paderewski orated about a Poland of thirty five million inhabitants, Sazonov wondered, not without anxiety, from where the Poles were going to find the extra fifteen million[249]. Maklakov now had second thoughts about Polish secession. 'I think we have been sufficiently stupid (Rus. достаточно наглупили) <...> renouncing [our rights to] Poland at the time of the provisional government', Maklakov argued. Like many other Russians, he was outraged by the Polish claims to Lithuania. 'Now it is difficult to fix the matter, but we can at least struggle against the big pretensions of the Poles'[250].

The Lithuanians had no illusions as to the Russian position on Lithuanian statehood. Notwithstanding the hopeless situation of the Whites in the civil war, Russian émigré statesmen of all strands politely dodged all Lithuanian requests for recognition. Sleževičius instructed the Lithuanian delegation not to engage with the idea of a future democratic Russian federation and reminded that Russia had always preferred force and annexation to peaceful coexistence[251]. Yet,

[248] Session no. 84 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 17 / Ibid, p. 177
[249] Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov, *Fateful years, 1909-1916* (London: J. Cape, 1928), p. 315
[250] Маргулиес, Т. 1, p. 332
[251] Sleževičius to the Paris delegation, 1919 07 09 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 61

as long as Russia remained in turmoil, this ultimate disagreement could be set aside, paving the way for a courteous collaboration in countering Polish claims to Vilnius and resisting the inclusion of Lithuania into the dreaded Polish orbit[252].

Invited to appear separately before the Commission on Polish Affairs, Lithuanians sounded out the Russians beforehand and agreed on a common position. Voldemaras thus lectured the Commission about the perpetual hostility between the Poles and Lithuanians and spoke of the Russophile tendencies of Russian-educated Lithuanian intelligentsia[253]. If the Allies were necessarily bent on grouping Lithuania with other states, argued Voldemaras, one should not forget that there was not only Poland, but also Russia, who recognized Lithuanian independence[254]. On the Russian side, Sazonov and Maklakov argued that Russia had only ever agreed to a strictly ethnographic Poland and tried to downplay the strength of the Polish element in Lithuania. The Russians eagerly contested various nationality statistics that had been put forward in support of Polish claims. Even the member of the Lithuanian delegation Yčas, whose Lithuanian sentiments were undoubtable, said Sazonov, had been signed as a Pole in one of such censuses[255]. In private, Maklakov threatened the French ambassador to Britain Paul Cambon that 'by robbing us, Poland would become the object of our hatred and the direction of our intensive struggle'[256].

While Lithuanian *ad hoc* partnership with the Paris Russians against the Poles helped to counter Polish claims to Lithuania, it also reinforced Allied dispositions of treating Lithuania as a Russian province. Instructively, Kammerer concluded that the Lithuanians, despite all their

[252] Naruševičius report at the Cabinet session, 1919 05 31 / LCVA 383/7/15, p. 3; Summary of delegation's activities [04 24 - 05 14], 1919 05 14 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 27
[253] Commission on Polish Affairs, Proces-Verbal No. 22, 1919 05 10 / ADMAE, Cambon, p. 76
[254] Summary of delegation's activities [04 24 - 05 14], 1919 05 14 / LCVA 383/7/16, p. 28
[255] Commission on Polish Affairs, Proces-Verbal No. 23, 1919 05 14 / ADMAE, Cambon, p. 79
[256] Маргулиес, *Diary*, Т. 1, p. 332

categorical pleas for independence, would be favourable to reunification with democratic Russia[257]. Currying favour from the Russians also served to distance the Lithuanians from Latvians and Estonians in Paris. Witnessing that one of the core Russian objections to Baltic independence, which also resonated among the Allies, was the vital interest of Russia in the ports of Riga, Liepaja and Tallinn, the Lithuanians avoided commitments towards the independence of its northern neighbours and hoped to be spared by the Russians for Lithuania's comparative unimportance[258]. As a result, the Lithuanians surprised their fellow underdogs by refusing to sign the common declaration of independence of the ex-Russian states, which the latter sent to the Allies as a protest against the Peacemakers' pro-Russian position[259].

Next in the Lithuanian anti-Polish arsenal was the Jewish card. Not only did Jews comprise nearly half of Vilnius' inhabitants, but the issue of Jewish rights also ranked high in the couloirs of the Paris Peace Conference. As the Vilnius communist Jewish Bund was antithetical to the Lithuanian nationalist state, siding with the Jews meant reconciling the idea of the ethnic Lithuania with the demands and aspirations of Lithuanian Zionists, represented in the Paris Lithuanian delegation by Rosenbaum.

After heated debates, the Lithuanian delegation adopted Rosenbaum's sketch of the rights of Jews in Lithuania, which Voldemaras sent in his name to the Conference's international *Comité des delegations juives*. The declaration promised treatment of Lithuanian Jews that was unparalleled in contemporary state practice. Lithuanian Jewry were to enjoy, among other rights, proportional representation in legislative institutions, free use of Hebrew at schools and in matters of law, autonomous administrative organs with competences to issue binding decisions and impose

[257] Commission on Polish Affairs, Proces-Verbal No. 22, 1919 05 10 / ADMAE, Cambon, p. 76
[258] Session no. 44 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 05 30 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 67
[259] Klimas to the Latvian delegation, 1919 06 19 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 228

special taxes on 'Jewish nationals', same legal status for Rabbis as for Catholic priests and a separate ministry of Jewish affairs, which had already been established. 'We hope that you will find these rights sufficient to assure the well being of our citizen Jews', concluded the Lithuanian appeal to the *Comité* [260]. Unsurprisingly, Rosenbaum's suggestion to declare something alike to Lithuanian Poles was left unmentioned[261].

For his part, Rosenbaum returned the favour and became one of the most formidable Lithuanian assets in Paris against Poland. Before Rosenbaum joined the Paris Lithuanian delegation, observed one prominent French diplomat, Lithuanians were hardly noticeable. 'It was only with the arrival of this little Jew when everything has changed and, as if touched by an electric shock, the thoughts of the diplomatic world often had to turn to the side of Lithuania. Time and again we had visits - those from Lithuania; telephones were perpetually in motion, alarmed with messages, or demands of Lithuania, offices were buried in memoranda, and newspapers overloaded with Lithuanian interviews'[262].

Rosenbaum helped to source and distribute eyewitness accounts of the pogroms of the 'grand style', which the Polish legions were said to have committed upon entering Vilnius, including arrests, executions and systematic pillaging of Jewish property[263]. The delegation also publicised the resolution of the Vilnius Jewish local authority, in which it protested against beatings, murder, robbery and deportations of the Jews that began with the Polish occupation of the city[264]. The Lithuanians translated information on the Vilnius pogroms into different languages and distributed it to governments and to the press of many countries through the Lithuanian

[260] Voldemaras to the Comité des delegations Juives, 1919 08 05 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 92
[261] Session no. 71 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 08 05 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 71
[262] Leon Reich, *Żydowska Delegacja Pokojowa w Paryżu. Sylwetki dzielaczy żydowskich* (Lwów, 1922), p. 57
[263] Rachmilewic, 'Rapport des evenements de Vilna par les temoins occulaires', 1919 05 08 / LCVA 383/7/9, p. 125
[264] Resolution der Wilnaer Gemeinde wegen der jüngsten Ereignisse, 1919 05 06 / LCVA 383/7/9, p. 122

diplomatic network, which now spanned from Bern to Stockholm. 'The note has made a lot of noise and will certainly harm the Poles a lot, while producing sympathies for us', gloated Purickis from Berlin[265]. In order to obtain more compromising material against the Poles, Rosenbaum suggested the Lithuanian government let the Poles continue their behaviour in the occupied regions, in order to have more compromising material against them[266].

Claiming to represent the interests and opinions of Vilnius Jews, Rosenbaum worked to dispel the idea of a plebiscite in Vilnius, which was much feared by the Lithuanians. There was not a slightest reason for such a consultation, argued Rosenbaum in his submission to the Peace Conference, since not a single Jew out of 55% of the total inhabitants of the city would vote for the annexation to Poland of the Lithuanian capital, which the Jews called the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania'. The plebiscite, said Rosenbaum, could never be genuine under Polish occupation anyway, as the Poles would terrorise the Vilnius Jews, forcing them to abstain from voting and thereby resorting to the 'obscure concepts of the Middle Ages, the époque in which only Christians, or, more precisely, only Catholics, have been considered worthy of the name of a human'. To the delight of Lithuanians, Rosenbaum also challenged the argument of Polish cultural superiority. The arrival of the Jews to Lithuania, argued Rosenbaum, happened long before the 'intrusion of the Poles' in this country, and the Jewish contribution to its economic and cultural life has been 'infinitely greater'[267]. When E.H. Carr of the Conference's Baltic Commission met Rosenbaum and pondered the plebiscite in Vilnius, the latter denounced the idea in a similar language and boasted about the Jewish agreement with the Lithuanians, which, he said, guaranteed all the rights to the Jews[268].

[265] Purickis to Sleževičius, 1919 05 28 / LCVA 383/7/2385, p. 292
[266] Session no. 62 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 07 17 / LCVA 648/58, p. 156
[267] Rosenbaum to Voldemaras, 1919 08 05 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 122
[268] Session no. 59 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 07 10 / LCVA 648/58, p. 90

The Lithuanian delegation at the Peace Conference also relied on a network of *ad hoc* friends, affiliated by common disaffection towards the Poles. The most helpful of these friends was R.J. Caldwell, a well-connected American businessman who came to Paris with the American delegation and became something akin to a Lithuanian spiritual advisor. 'I should place no confidence whatever in any covenant or convention with the Poles', Caldwell advised Voldemaras and lectured him on the more effective ways in wrestling the Poles. 'If we cry 'Wolf' when there is no wolf, we may not get the desired action when the wolf really appears', Caldwell explained Voldemaras the importance of making protests against the Poles based on accurate information[269]. The American also advised that it was pointless to try to resist the Poles militarily, while it was smart to threaten to fight 'to the last man' and thereby invite the goodwill of the Conference. Caldwell also helped the Lithuanians in their anti-Polish propaganda campaign. 'Such base and infamous ingratitude has never been exhibited since the Turks came out of Asia and the Tatar invasion', wrote Caldwell to Frank A. Vanderlip, the president of the National City Bank of New York, suggesting to threaten Poland with shutting off food and supply relief[270].

Caldwell also advised the Lithuanians to approach the Czechs and Ukrainians in order to form a triple alliance against the Poles, and to offer them to engage Poland's forces in the North in times of need. For that end Caldwell gave the Paris hotel addresses of Tomáš Masaryk and Karel Kramář, Czechoslovakia's president and premier, respectively. Oscar Straus, a close friend of Colonel House, was suggested as a contact person in dealing with the Ukrainians; 'you will have no trouble in making progress, because he is down on the Poles anyway'[271].

[269] Caldwell to Voldemaras, 1919 05 05 / LCVA 648/57, p. 175
[270] Caldwell to Vanderlip, 1919 05 07 / Ibid, p. 189
[271] Caldwell to Voldemaras, 1919 05 05 / Ibid, p. 175

Although the Lithuanian and Ukrainian delegations worked out the declaration of the alliance against the common antagonists, it was abandoned due to Ukrainian misfortunes at the front[272]. The Czechs, while sufficiently anti-Polish, turned out to be too Russophile for Lithuanian liking. Kramář urged the Lithuanians to drop their unrealistic demands for independence and instead advised to exploit the temporary weakness of Russia by striking a good bargain on Lithuania's place in the new Russian federation, a move that would also thwart Polish imperialist ambitions[273]. Kramář also declined to accept a Lithuanian representative to Czechoslovakia and instead invited Lithuanians to adhere to the Czech project of the constitution of Russia, which the Lithuanians refused[274].

The most unequivocal outcome of the Lithuanian anti-Polish campaign at the Peace Conference was that there remained hardly anyone who was not *au courant* about the Lithuanian-Polish animosity and Vilnius as its bone of contention. Lithuanian anti-Polish propaganda and cooperation with the Russians also seems to have had some effect in dispelling the idea of Lithuanian-Polish federation among the Allied policymakers. Quoting Lithuanian submissions to the Conference, Pichon concluded that 'the distance between these people and the Poles is so great that the only solution [of the Lithuanian question] which now appears to be excluded is linking Lithuania to Poland, including in the form of federation'. Consequently, Pichon wrote to his minister in Warsaw that Lithuania in all probability would go back to Russia, and instructed him to avoid talking about this with the Poles, in order not to annoy them[275].

[272] Declaration of the Lithuanian-Ukrainian alliance, 1919 09 03 / LCVA 383/7/17, p. 141
[273] Session no. 87 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 22 / LCVA 383/7/3, p. 181
[274] Session no. 88 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 09 25 / Ibid, p. 187
[275] Pichon to Pralon, 1919 05 12 / ADMAE, Europe, Lituanie 13, p. 33

There was no consensus among the Allied experts on how to settle the Vilnius conflict. Morison reminded the Lithuanians that their claim to Vilnius was not unquestionable and suggested that the city could be administered by the League of Nations for fifteen years, followed by a plebiscite organised by the Americans and the British[276]. Lord, another American expert, had outraged Naruševičius by his suggestion to leave Vilnius to the Poles. Any Lithuanian government in Vilnius, the city for whose deliverance from the Bolsheviks Poland had spilled much blood, he said, would fall due to the lack of support among the inhabitants. Lord also discounted Lithuanian anti-Polish propaganda[277]. The general opinion among the French experts was similar to that of the Americans. It was only the British who showed some support. James Young Simpson, a professor of natural science attached to the British Paris delegation, reassured Yčas that notwithstanding ethnographical statistics, Britain was in favour of including Vilnius into the Lithuanian state as its historical capital and economic center[278]. The 'Lithuanian state', however, was still perceived by Simpson in the context of the desired Russian federation.

By the end of 1919, Lithuania had emerged as a *de facto* nation state. Left without Allied support of almost any kind, and burdened by the ramifications of its peasant-like nature, the Paris Peace Conference nevertheless provided the opportunity to scavenge all the items it needed to continue its improbable existence. Allied positions on the future of Lithuania or on its dispute with Poland turned out to be a function of their down-to-earth Russian sensibilities. Yet much more depended on how the Allies saw Poland and the Poles, who were followed into the twentieth century by the legacies of their distant past.

[276] Session no. 47 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 06 05 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 72
[277] Summary of delegation's activities [06 17 - 06 28], 1919 06 28 / LCVA 383/7/12, p. 220
[278] Session no. 47 of the Lithuanian delegation in Paris, 1919 06 05 / LCVA 383/7/1, p. 73

Chapter 2. In the shadows of the Enlightenment

2.1 A Commonwealth between murder and suicide

Out of all the new states that resulted from the sanctioned breakup of the 'enemy' empires and from the disorder in Russia, Poland had the most cataclysmic historical context to it. The phenomenon of wiping out the declining Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, or 'Poland', as it was known in the West, from the map of Europe in 1795 by partitioning it between Russia, Austria and Prussia had startled contemporary observers and provoked reflection. Thinking about such a remarkable event in the history of world politics stretched from the romantic victimisation of Poland to its didactic mockery for self-inflicted downfall.

Many contemporary commentators, irrespective of their sympathies with Poland, saw the partitions as an outrageous crime against the international order. Edmund Burke considered the first partition of Poland 'the first very great breach in the modern political system of Europe'[279] and a fragrant violation of the natural law of nations[280]. John Lind, tutor to a nephew of the last King of Poland and the most prolific friend of that country in eighteenth century Britain, portrayed the cause of Poland as the cause of all Europe, especially of its smaller nations, against foreign aggression[281]. On the occasion of the final partition, *The Times* had reprinted an article from the Jacobin *Journal des patriotes de 89*, which condemned the barbarous, immoral and 'monstrous violation of all that is sacred' and deprecated the 'stupid silence of Europe' in its response[282].

[279] 'History of Europe', in *The Annual Register for the year 1772* (1773), p. 2
[280] Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 226
[281] John Lind, *Letters concerning the present state of Poland* (London : Printed for T. Payne , 1773), p. 189; see also his pamphlets *'Partage de la Pologne en 7 dialogues en forme de drame*' and *'Les Droits des trois puissances alliées sur plusieurs provinces de la république de Pologne*'
[282] 'Partition of Poland', *The Times*, 1795 12 23, p. 3

The Commonwealth also received some sympathy from the liberal circles of Europe for its last minute reforms, which aimed at remedying the defects of its constitution and saving the state from extinction. When Michał Wielhorski, the Crown and Lithuanian Master of the Kitchen, hired Rousseau to write his suggestions for saving his failing state, the latter praised Poland for its otherworldly resilience[283]. In addition to constitutional reforms, Rousseau suggested Poland renounce all hopes of conquest and even voluntarily contract its boundaries[284]. The reformative work of the Great Sejm of 1788-1792, culminating in the constitution of May 3, 1791, had been hailed as the 'Polish revolution' and praised for its progressiveness and democratic spirit[285]. For conservatives, the peaceful Polish revolution was an antipode to its violent French counterpart[286].

In the romantic nineteenth century, narratives of Poland's victimhood fuelled the ideas of its revival. The Great Emigration, mostly to France, of Polish elites solidified there a strong base of friends of Poland. Adam Czartoryski's Hôtel Lambert in Paris became one of the most significant bastions of Polish culture in the world and included many notable figures among its friends. In Britain, the Polish cause had been championed by the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, whose president, poet Thomas Campbell, castigated the European powers for acquiescing to Poland's disappearance[287]. The downfall of Poland and the subsequent unsuccessful Polish uprisings against Russian rule inspired romantic art. Horace Vernet's *Polish Prometheus* (1831) painted a fallen Polish officer lying prostrate, with a giant black Russian eagle on top of him, while Ary Scheffer's *Polonia* (1831) displayed a young woman, the personification of Poland, trampled

[283] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the government of Poland and on its proposed reformation* (1772), Chapter 1 <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/poland.htm> [last accessed 2012 02 13]
[284] Ibid, Chapter 5
[285] R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 316
[286] See Edmund Burke, *An appeal from the new to the old Whigs: in consequence of some late discussions in Parliament relative to the reflections on the French revolution* (London : Printed for J. Dodsley, 1791)
[287] Thomas McLean, *The other East and Nineteenth-Century British literature* (London: Palgrave, 2012), p. 119-120

upon by a Cossack cavalryman. Feuilly, a specimen of the contemporary revolutionary youth in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, attributed to the partitions global significance. 'All contemporary social crimes have their origin in the partition of Poland. The partition of Poland is a theorem of which all present political outrages are the corollaries'[288].

To the nineteenth century Polish romanticists, the brutality and injustice of the partitions, as well as the failure of the uprisings, cast on Poland and the Poles an aura of martyrdom and accorded it a special mission in the world. For Andrzej Towiański and his followers, Poland was the most Christian nation and the first to truly welcome the word of God, a nation that heaven had chosen to serve as a beacon of Christianity in the world[289]. Juliusz Słowacki in his *Kordjan* called Poland 'the Winkelried of nations', after a Swiss legendary hero who had given his life to save the many[290]. Adam Mickiewicz gave prominence to the vision of Poland as a Christ of nations. Mickiewicz's famous *Forefather's Eve* (Pol. *Dziady*), written after the failed 1831 November insurrection, immortalized the partitions in a scene of crucifixion[291]. For some Polish romantics, the transcendental sacrifice of Poland granted it worldly geopolitical importance. According to poet Zygmunt Krasiński, Poland was to amalgamate in itself both East and West and to become the center of European equilibrium and the key to the European fortress[292].

The trend of romantic victimization of Poland and of the condemnation of its undertakers, however, had its strong antithesis in blaming Poland and the Poles for causing their own demise. The perceived defects of the Commonwealth's constitution had been already codified in Western

[288] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* < https://beq.ebooksgratuits.com/vents/Hugo-miserables-1.pdf> [last accessed 2013 12 15], Vol. 3, Book 4, Chapter 1
[289] Andrzej Towiański, *Pisma*, T. 3 (Turyn, 1882), p. 65; Andrzej Towiański, Tłómaczenie z włoskiego (Druk W. Bona, 1897), p. 141
[290] Juliusz Słowacki, *Kordian* (1833) <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/kordian.pdf>, Act 2
[291] Adam Mickiewicz, Dziady, https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/dziady.pdf, Part 3, Scene 5
[292] Z. Krasiński, *Wybór listów politycznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013), p. 123

geographies of that country in the seventeenth century. In one of the first British texts on Poland, George Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury, noted that elections of kings in Poland were plagued by factionalism which often led to civil wars[293]. Peter Heylyn described the Polish nobility as impatient and lawless, to whom king's decrees lasted for no longer than three days[294]. In a similar vein, John Barclay's *Icon animorum*, which described the character of the European nations, scorned Poland as a 'nation borne to cruelty and licentiousness, which they call liberty' and bemoaned the impotence of the king to curb the nobility's blatant abuse of its excessive powers[295]. Internal instability of Poland had been mythologised in a geography by Pierre d'Avity, which claimed that Polish factionalism 'not only crept into provinces, towns and families, but also grew between the father and the son, the husband and the wife'[296].

Travel literature of the eighteenth century retained the harsh tone of older geographies. William Coxe's widely quoted account of his visit to Poland concluded the 'proverb that Poland subsisted by anarchy' to be true[297]. For Coxe, it was not the meddling and aggression of the neighbouring powers that was to blame for the country's decline. The problem was 'glaring imperfections' of Poland itself. If ruled right, it would never have fallen prey to its neighbors[298]. In a similar vein, Joseph Marshall bemoaned Poland's intolerable order and the lavishness of the Polish nobility[299].

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[293] George Abbot, *A briefe description of the whole world* (London : Printed for W. Sheares, 1656), p. 19
[294] Peter Heylyn, *Mikrokosmos: a little description of the great world* (Oxford : Printed by William Turner, 1631), p. 188-189
[295] John Barclay, *The mirror of minds: or Barclay's Icon animorum* (London : Printed by I. B[eale], 1633), p. 186-188; Fynes Moryson, *An itinerary containing his ten years travel through the twelve dominions* (London : Printed by Iohn Beale, 1617), p. 27
[296] Pierre d'Avity, *The estates, empires & principalities of the world* (London, 1615). P. 643
[297] William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*, Vol. 1 (London : printed for T. Cadell, 1790), p. 12
[298] Ibid, p. 12, 41
[299] J. Marshall, *Travels through Holland, Flanders [...] and Poland in the years 1768, 1769, 1770* (London: printed for J. Almon, 1772), p. 260-263

No criticism, however, came close in its harshness to the mockery that the unfortunate Poland and the Poles had received from the *philosophes* of the enlightenment. Their dislike of Poland had both philosophical and personal basis. The glaring ineffectiveness of its political system ran contrary to the maxims of rationality and reason that the age of enlightenment professed. The *liberum veto* was said to ruin even the legislative initiatives of God's angels, apostles, and of God himself[300]. Those in favour of monarchism had been astounded by the ever inflating *pacta conventa* that reduced the Polish king to powerlessness, while Poland's anachronistic feudalism and lack of social mobility appeared at odds with the democratic ideals so prided by the *szlachta*. Poland also seemed to be the hotbed of Catholic fanaticism and intolerance, the vices to which the *philosophes* attributed the troubles in their own France[301]. No less importantly, the most vocal critics of Poland happened to be intimate friends with, and in the pay of, the statesmen who signed the warrants of Poland's dismemberment. Catherine the Great had paid Diderot a salary of 25 years in advance. Voltaire was her tutor, who also received a pension from Frederick of Prussia. When it came to the undoing of Poland, the partitioning monarchs were enlightened by the *philosophes*, and the *philosophes* were enlightened by the partitioning monarchs.

To Montesquieu, Poland was the most imperfect of all aristocracies[302]. Mably called it 'the most monstrous anarchy', with an uncertain possibility to redeem its mistakes[303]. Hume was no less forgiving and saw Poland as 'the most defective [Kingdom] in the arts of war as well as peace,

[300] Jerzy Lukowski, 'Recasting utopia: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the Polish constitution of 3 May 1791', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), p. 67. For contemporary critique by the authors of the Commonwealth, see Stanislas Konarski, *O skutecznym rad sposobie albo o utrzymywaniu ordynaryinych seymow* (Warszaw: Scholarum Piarum, 1760)
[301] Morley, *Diderot and the encyclopædists*, T. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 119-120
[302] See Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (London : Printed for J. Nourse, 1750).
[303] Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Collection complete des oeuvres de l'Abbe de Mably*, T. 8 (Paris : Impr. de C. Desbrière, 1794-1795), p. 2-3, 16

mechanical as well as liberal'[304]. Enlightened criticism of Poland was also made encyclopedic. 'It appears that slavery and excessive freedom argue which of them will destroy Poland', read the *Encyclopédie* in its introduction to the country[305]. Poland also had its dark corner in the works of the German enlightenment, serving as a [negative] example of how not to rule, which also helped to put one's own polity in a positive light[306]. The pejorative concept '*polnische Wirtschaft*', synonymous with anarchy and disorder, as well as the term '*selbtverschuldete Untergang Polens*' were common in the writings of German Enlightenment thinkers[307].

The final attempts to remedy the imperfections of Poland, while admired by liberally minded commentators, had also a fair share of critics. Grimm lampooned Rousseau's *Considerations* as a 'ridiculous' attempt to teach republican spirit to the anarchic feudal state 'of this bunch of all sorts of adventurers, intriguers and thieves […] encouraged by the fanaticism of monks and by the imbecility of people […] without plan, without talent, without any other project than plunder'[308]. While conservatives used the example of the 'Polish revolution' to criticise that in France, French revolutionaries responded by belittling the reforms in Poland. Méhée de la Touche in his *'History of the pretended revolution of Poland*' mocked the new Polish constitution and argued that France had 'nothing in common' with Poland, whose capital was the 'modern Sodom' and the 'centre of all the vices'[309].

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[304] David Hume, *Essays moral, political, and literary* (Indianapolis : Liberty Classics, 1987), p. 276
[305] Louis de Jaucourt, 'Pologne', in Jean d'Alembert (ed.), *Encyclopédie, Dictionnaire raisonne des sciences, des arts et des metiers, par une Societe de Gens de lettres*, Vol. 13 (Paris, 1765), p. 931
[306] See especially David Pickus, *Dying with an enlightening fall : Poland in the eyes of German intellectuals, 1764-1800* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001)
[307] Vėjas Liulevičius, *The German myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 51-52; Michael G. Müller, *Die Teilungen Polens: 1772, 1793, 1795* (München : C.H. Beck, 1984); Hubert Orłowski, 'Polnische Wirtschaft': Zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1996); Dariusz Lukasiewicz, *Czarna legenda Polski: obraz Polski i Polakow w Prusach 1772-1815* (Poznan, 1995)
[308] Friedrich Melchior Grimm et al, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot*, Vol. 10 (Paris, 1829), p. 131
[309] Jean Claude Hippolyte Méhée de La Touche, *Histoire de la prétendue révolution de Pologne: avec un examen de la nouvelle constitution* (Paris, 1792), p. 187

The reactions of the *philosophes* to the partitions ranged from didactic condemnation to gloating jubilation. Some had even encouraged Catherine the Great in her task[310]. Voltaire, who found Poland to be a 'beautiful subject of harangue', praised the first partition as a 'glorious event' and blessed it as the 'unscrambling of the Polish chaos'[311]. Unsurprisingly, the statesmen of the partitioning powers quoted the defects of Poland and of the Poles in justifying their action as something necessary and inevitable. Frederick II scorned the Poles as 'the most frivolous and inconsiderate people in Europe' and 'the zealous lovers of anarchy'[312]. The treaty of the first partition of Poland, signed by Russia, Austria and Prussia, proclaimed in its preamble that Poland was being partitioned 'in the name of the very Holy Trinity', in order to curb the 'factional spirit that maintained anarchy in Poland' and to ensure 'good harmony'[313]. The convention signed beforehand between Russians and Prussians found the moral basis for the partition in 'the general confusion in which the republic of Poland exists by the dissension of its leading men, and the perversity of all its citizens'[314].

After the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth was partitioned for the last time in 1795, scolding Poland and the Poles for their fatal vices had molded into a robust historiographical tradition that cast Poland in the shadows of the enlightenment. In search for the causes of the fall of Poland, this tradition prioritised Poland's internal troubles over the meddling of the foreign powers. The inability of historians to transcend their national affiliations might have been one reason for such a preference; yet on its own, the focus on the vices of Poland and the Poles

[310] Marc Raeff, *Catherine the Great – a profile* (London : Macmillan, 1972), p. 38
[311] Voltaire, *Oeuvres completes de Voltaire*, Vol. 24 (Kehl, 1785), p. 93
[312] Frederick II, *Posthumous works of Frederic II, King of Prussia*, Vol. 4 (London: Printed for J. Robinson, 1789), p. 88
[313] Albert Sorel, *La question d'Orient au XVIII siècle: les origins de la Triple Alliance* (Plon, 1878), p. 252
[314] George Shaw-Lefevre Eversley, *The partitions of Poland* (London, T. F. Unwin, 1915), p. 52

themselves offered far more didactic value than a well-trodden inquiry into the malicious designs of the great powers. Conquests and games of the balance of power had long been the bread and butter of history and offered little new; approaching a demise of a state as self-inflicted not only involved more drama, but could also teach an object lesson by highlighting the avoidable pitfalls of statecraft.

Rulhière's much quoted and unfinished '*Histoire de l'anarchie de Pologne*' was the first major post-partition history that set the tone for the didactic tradition[315]. Salvandy's work half a century later referred to the extinction of Poland as a historical 'suicide', deemed 'instructive' in showing what happened when one ignored the necessity of order over liberty and preferred passion over wisdom[316]. The most extensive works on the partitions written by German historians followed the didactic tradition. Sybel, who was grateful to Bismarck for opening him the archives, portrayed Frederick's share in the partitions of Poland as 'desirable, nay, absolutely essential'. The appeal of the didactic approach to him was based on the standards of fairness and academic objectivity.

> It may seem harsh to expose the weakness of a perishing nation, but historical justice demands that we should not conceal the sins by which a people once powerful drew destruction on its own head. The melancholy spectacle of its fall would be more than we could bear if we were forced to regard it as the work of capricious fate and not as the consequence of deep and heavy guilt[317].

In a similar vein, Adolf Beer's seminal work on the first partition emphasised internal reasons for Poland's demise and retrieved moralistic generalisations about the 'Polish character'. Notwithstanding his patriotism, the Pole 'had never possessed sense and understanding for the hard work of statesmanship'. For Beer, the fate of Poland had been dictated by an 'inexorable law of

[315] See Claude-Carloman de Rulhière, *Histoire de l'Anarchie de Pologne et du Demembrement de cette Republique* (4 Vols) (Paris, 1807).
[316] N. A. de Salvandy, *Histoire du Roi Jean Sobieski et de Royaume de Pologne* (Paris: Didier, 1863), p. 460-461
[317] Quoted in Eversley, p. 250

nature', which extended to all areas of human life. It was a perfect case of world history acting as the court of the world[318].

Among the few British authors who took on the subject of the partitions of Poland in the nineteenth century, Carlyle was probably the most renowned. Drawing on the German works on the subject, he surpassed them in the didactic tone and condemnation. To Carlyle, Poland was an abomination that defied God's preference for orderliness. It deserved to die, since 'anarchies were not permitted in this world' and were 'to the Maker of this Universe eternally abhorrent; and from the beginning have been forbidden to be'[319]. The Partition of Poland, ran Carlyle's much quoted judgment, was 'an event inevitable in Polish History; an operation of Almighty Providence and of the Eternal Laws of Nature'[320].

Didactic interpretation of the fall of Poland dominated Russian historiography. Solovyev's *The Fall of Poland*, in symmetry to Sybel's work on Frederick, justified the actions of Catherine the Great. For Solovyev, the internal anarchy of Poland made it ill with 'exhaustive fever' which ultimately led to its demise[321]. Lessons from the self-inflicted extinction of Poland in the eighteenth century were considered crucial when considering the prospects of its revival in the nineteenth. For some, the object lesson was that the Poles had proven themselves to be incapable of independent political existence. Speaking of things which the Poles should internalize as '2x2=4', the controversial philosopher Vasily Rozanov taught the Poles

> that political nations do not exist twice, that the Poles are really just ethnographic material, not a political unit even on the level of a possibility or a dream, that their nation did not die

[318] Adolf Beer, *Die erste Theilung Polens,* Vol. 2 (Wien: Carl Gerold, 1873), p. 319
[319] Henry Duff Traill (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 55
[320] Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, Vol. 5 (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), p. 670
[321] Sergey Solovyev, *Istoria padenia Polshi* (Moscow: Grechev, 1863), p. 9

> and would not die, but their state has died in an absolutely certain death, decomposing much earlier than partitions [...][322].

Boris Nikolaevich Chicherin, one of the most renowned Russian political thinkers of the nineteenth century, readily attributed to the Poles 'the lack of political sense, which for long had characterised this gifted and unfortunate nation'[323]. In his course on political science, Poland exemplified a nationality, which fell due to 'total absence of political reason'. For Chicherin, the revival of Poland in any form could only be accomplished if the Poles learned from the mistakes of their past.

> <..> Poland ultimately fell victim to its own political senselessness. Such is the judgment which must be passed on it by a politician, who is impartially observing phenomena of the political life. <...> A person, who sympathises with Poland and wishes its revival, can not but say that this is only possible on the condition that it is going to benefit from the lessons of history. The Poles must realise that for independent life, passionate aspirations alone are not enough; one also needs sound political sense, understanding of one's situation and ability to adapt to the circumstances[324].

The two interpretations of the fall of Poland – the romantic and the didactic – had profound implications on the way Poland's geopolitical role and significance had been imagined, and its claims conceived and received, in the making of the new map of Europe after the Great War. Either way, the new Poland could not escape the shadow of its revealing historical death. The romantic tradition, shared by many statesmen of the new Poland, with its messianic and promethean overtones, presupposed it a major role in Europe as a strong barrier between Russia and Germany and as the bulwark against the advance of Bolshevism, if not as its ultimate undertaker in all of Russia. Such visions demanded a large Poland, consisting of all of its pre-partition territories, which would be able to resist a future Russo-German combination against it. As an opposite, the

[322] V.V. Rozanov, 'Belorussi, litovci i Polsha v okrainom voprose Rossii', in Sergeev, *Nacija i imperija v russkoj misli nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Prensa, 2004), p. 125
[323] B.N. Chicherin, *Istorija politicheskich uchenij*, T3 (St. Petersburg, 2010), p. 684
[324] B.N. Chicherin, *Kurs gosudarstvennoj nauki*, T. 3 (Moscow, 1898), p. 89

didactic tradition of historiography on the Polish partitions, building on the stark judgments of the philosophes, postulated the innate defects of Polish statesmanship which would have to be guarded against in the making of a new Polish republic. Fundamentally quarrelsome, rebellious and anarchic, the viability of the new Poland would thus depend on reducing it to its ethnic minimum and making it a mere buffer zone between Germany and Russia, which would give those two powers no pretext to partition it again.

2.2 Between prometheanism and realism

'The circumstances are directly providential, surpassing all messianic hopes of Towiański and Mickiewicz', uttered Prince Wladyslaw Lubomirski in his 1919 sketch on the future Poland's foreign policy, 'The time is great and awaits its man'. Moscow and St. Petersburg would have to be hit at the same time with lightning speed, leaving the world with one giant *fait accompli* and performing one of the greatest *coups de théâtre* in the history of humanity. By eradicating Bolshevism, Poland would do humanity a favour, even greater than Sobieski's saving of Vienna from the Ottomans[325].

Lubomirski was a typical specimen of the old order. He wrote war time speeches for the Emperor Charles I of Austria, and stood by him after his abdication. King Alfonso XIII of Spain was his personal friend, and diplomat Lord [2nd Baron] Acton of Britain was his pen pal. Lubomirski belonged to the layer nobles of the Commonwealth tradition which the new Poland had inherited in its political, diplomatic and cultural elite. Count Mauricy Klemens Zamoyski, heir

[325] Lubomirski's note on international relations, 1919 / BNW, Wladyslaw Lubomirski political papers, Nr. 52624, p. 1074-1076

of a magnate family of the Commonwealth and the biggest land owner in interwar Poland, held ambassadorship in Paris in 1919-1924, while Prince Eustachy Kajetan Sapieha, descendant of one of the most prominent aristocratic families of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, became the foreign minister of Poland in 1920. Few of the nobles were as maximalist as Lubomirski, but most agreed that Poland was destined to be great and play a crucial role on the new map of Europe, once the biggest crime in history had been redressed.

On 10 November, 1918, released by the Germans from Magdeburg prison, Józef Piłsudski arrived at the Warsaw train station. There, he was met by Wladyslaw's cousin Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski, a member of the Regency Council, a war-time organ of Polish self-government inspired by the Central Powers, who symbolically passed his authority to Piłsudski and supported his nomination as the head of state and the commander in chief. Piłsudski was born in Lithuania into a family of *szlachta* 60km to the north of Vilnius and raised in the spirit of Polish romanticism. His father had participated in the January uprising of 1863, and his mother read him Krasiński and Słowacki[326]. During his study years in Vilnius, Piłsudski joined the socialists and conspired against the regressive tsarist regime, for which he had been sentenced to exile in Siberia for five years.

For the old types such as Lubomirski and Piłsudski, who looked back to the Commonwealth, the primary space for Poland's expansion lay in the East. It was considered the traditional and legitimate direction for the Polish civilisational mission, aimed at extending the progressive Polish/Western culture against Muscovite domination. The slaughter of the Romanovs and ascension of Lenin to the throne of Russia that now called for the scrapping of nobility worldwide transformed the eastern neighbor from the enemy of the state to the enemy of

[326] Z. Zygmuntowicz (ed.), *Józef Piłsudski o sobie. Z pism, rozkazów i przemówień Komendanta* (Warszawa, 1936), p. 6

civilization. For Piłsudski, who was first and foremost a military practitioner, expansion eastwards was a strategic necessity in making Poland defensible against Russia of any colour. He considered Russia Poland's arch-enemy and had long argued for its division into small separate states, or, failing that, pushing its border as far to the East as possible, even if that meant a multi-ethnic Poland. If Poland was to reach the pre-partition limits of the Commonwealth of 1772, it would thus have to deny Moscow the 'historic' Lithuania, comprised of Lithuanian, Belarussian and Ukrainian lands.

Piłsudski's arch-rival Roman Dmowski, the leader of the National Democrats (Endeks), claimed to advocate a much more modern vision of Poland that was willing to break with the past. Dmowski's *Thoughts of a modern Pole* (1902), which became the bible of Polish nationalism, defined Poland strictly in terms of Polish ethnicity. Comparing the potential for assimilation of Poles by Germany and Russia, Dmowski came to the conclusion that German orderliness and administrative effectiveness trumped Russian historically proven incompetence, and considered German domination the greatest threat to the security of Poland. For Dmowski, who called Frederick the Great the author of the destruction of Poland, this threat could only be countered by reducing East Prussia to a minimum and by separating it from the rest of Germany, what would carve out Poland access to the sea in Danzig and get it out of German encirclement. Poland's geopolitical function would thus be the uncompromising containment of Germany in its perpetual D*rang nach Osten*[327]. To avoid enemies on two fronts, Dmowski was in favour of a compromise with Russia, whereby Poland would renounce some of the eastern lands of the pre-partition Commonwealth in its favour.

[327] 'Roman Dmowski', in Piotr Eberhardt, *Tworcy Polskiej geopolityki* (Arcana, 2006), p. 45; See also Dmowski, *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska* (Warsaw, 1908); *Akty i dokumenty dotyczące sprawy granic Polski na Konferencji Pokojowej w Paryżu 1918-1919*, T. 1 (Paris: Leve, 1920), p. 12

Despite differences in their approaches towards Germany and Russia, both Dmowski and Piłsudski agreed on a great deal of fundamentals. The emerging Poland had to be big and strong, the thought 'so fundamental as to remain unspoken' in Polish political thought[328]. Both saw the rebirth of Poland as a retribution for the great crime of partitions, a legacy that necessitated taking the vast pre-partition territory of 1772, including access to the sea in Danzig, as a point of departure. The thought of both allowed for overstepping ethnographic limits in the light of strategic considerations. Both assumed that Poland had a civilisational mission in the East towards Catholics and those Orthodox Christians whom the Polish culture had historically reached or could safely reach in the future. They were equally anxious about the fate of the big Polish landowners, situated far away from Poland's ethnographic core, were they left outside the Polish state. When it came to forests, coal mines and oilfields, more was better than less. Above all, the memory of the partitions suggested that the geopolitical situation of Poland between Russia and Germany was fundamentally unsafe. The realisation that Poland had been reborn out of the temporary weakness of Russia and Germany, and the conviction that those two powers might eventually combine against it in a new partition, compelled looking for defensible strategic lines in both East and West.

Among the challenges that Polish grand designs in the east had to face, Lithuanian nationalism, the most organised nationalism of the *Kresy*, was perhaps the greatest of all. Starting as a movement to resuscitate the Lithuanian language against polonisation, it stood in direct contradiction to the ideas of Poland's geopolitical expansion and its civilisational dominance, which it aimed to neutralise. Lithuanian swift rejection of the Commonwealth tradition alienated those Poles, who continued from that tradition. Short of its ethnographic, non-political

[328] Mieczysław Biskupski, *The history of Poland* (London: Greenwood, 2000), p. 55

manifestations, Lithuanian nationalism received sympathy neither from Dmowski's nor Piłsudski's camp.

Dmowski's wartime Polish National Committee in Paris (Pol. Komitet Narodowy Polski, KNP) had tried to present Lithuanian nationalism before the Quai d'Orsay as a kind of rustic abomination.

> They are neither nobles nor bourgeois of the Polonised towns who have faith in nothing but Poland; they are not uneducated peasants who do not generally know Lithuanian history and are ready to do whatever their lords and their priests tell them. They are not the high clergy, who have always recognized that Poland pulled the country out of paganism and Lutheran heresy. It is the new men, poor, without names, leavers of foreign universities and ambitious to do big things. They do not represent anything but their agitation, which seems like resistance, but only pleases their superiors. They are a strong blow against the Polish cause[329].

Whatever the ambiguities of Piłsudski's national identity, it did not allow for any kind of independent action of/by Lithuania. For him, it was the extension of Poland, cemented by dominance of the Poles[330]. The conscious political autonomy of Lithuania and Vilnius against Kraków and Warsaw, fully alive in the Republic of Both Nations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and based on a non-linguistic Lithuanian identity, had much less footprint in the Commonwealth tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of which he was a heir. For Piłsudski, Lithuanian sovereignty would be a geopolitical anomaly which could only materialize as the result of Russian or German anti-Polish intrigue.

Piłsudski's identity was thus much less anachronistic than that of a small group of the Polish-speaking nobles from the parts of the historical Lithuania who called themselves the

[329] Memorandum on Poland's borders, 1918 11 01 / ADMAE, Europe, Pologne, 65, p. 139
[330] Robert Frost, 'Ordering the kaleidoscope: the construction of identities in the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth since 1569', in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.), *Power and the nation in European history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 227

Countrymen (Pol. *Krajowcy*)[331]. This group saw themselves as the citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and considered historical Lithuania with the capital in Vilnius to be an integral country, based on historical, territorial, economic and cultural unity, necessarily tied to Poland through Polishness as a connecting culture, but not subsumed by it. Among them was Czeslaw Milosz, who called himself 'the last of the countrymen', and Bronislaw Piłsudski, Jozef's elder brother. They were openly anti-nationalist and disapproved hegemony of any nationality[332]. Another Countryman, Kazimierz Prószyński, passionately deplored both Lithuanian and Polish ethnic nationalisms, which genuinely confused him. He saw the Lithuanian nationalism as artificially provoked 'separatist tendencies within the uninformed masses', which he could only explain by foreign intrigue or by animosity towards Polish landlords. Prószyński was certain that if the Poles of Poland did a *beau geste* and recognized Lithuanian independence, Lithuania would then willingly join Poland in a Commonwealth[333].

For the Polish political elite, and even for the romantic countrymen, who had little political weight, the new Lithuanians were alien in terms of class, language and ideology. Lithuanian nationalism was popularly labeled as 'Lithuanomania' (*Litwomania*), and its activists were called 'Lithuanomaniacs' (*Litwomany*). Their territorial claims annoyed Warsaw as 'Lithuanian great power tendencies'[334]. As the Lithuanians stood on Poland's recognition of independent Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital as a *conditio sine qua non*, attempts at negotiations in the first months after the Great War ended without results.

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[331] For the discussion of the Krajowcy identities, see Juliusz Bardach (ed.), *O dawnej i niedawnej Litwie* (Poznań, 1988); Jan Jurkiewicz, *Krajowość – tradycje zgody narodów w dobie nacjonalizmów*. *Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej w Instytucie Historii UAM w Poznaniu (11–12 maja 1998)* (Instytut Historii UAM, 1999)
[332] Rimantas Miknys, 'Marianas Zdziechowskis ir Krajovcine ideja', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 31 (2008), 231
[333] K. Proszynski, 'Il est temps de se liberer des idees imposes' (1917) / ADMAE, Europe, Pologne 65, p. 187
[334] Political report of the Polish consulate in Konigsberg, 1920 10 12 / AAN, MSZ, 22338, p. 18

For Dmowski, the solution of the Lithuanian question lay in the incorporation of Lithuania, including its ethnic part, into the Polish state. Piłsudski, whose eastern program was far more ambitious, hoped that Lithuanian nationalists, together with the Ukrainians and possibly Belarussians, could be persuaded into a federation with Poland. Naczelnik was more of a geopolitical opportunist than a romantic dreamer. He knew the eastern limits of Poland would be decided on the battlefield, and regarded *faits accomplis* as one of the methods of persuasion. As socialism for him was the means to wrestle tsarism which he abandoned in the post-war circumstances, federalism was just one of the formulas for detaching the different nationalities from Russia and attaching them to Poland, the formula that could also be squared with the standards of the Wilsonian moment[335]. At the same time, he sardonically instructed his confidante Leon Wasilewski to keep an eye on Paderewski-the federalist in Paris, so that 'different imperialist rascals would not take him out of the thorny path, leading to federalist heaven'[336].

In the beginning of 1919, after some bickering, Piłsudski finally recognized Dmowski's KNP in Paris as the voice of Poland at the Paris Peace Conference and sent there his trusted delegates. On 2 March, 1919, the KNP set out to decide the program of Poland's eastern limits, which inevitably centered on the problem of Lithuania and tried to reconcile Piłsudski's and Dmowski's visions. Piłsudski's emissaries Antoni Sujkowski and Kazimierz Dłuski advocated maximum possible expansion to the East and stood firmly on the idea of federation with 'historical' Lithuania. Such a Lithuania, in addition to ethnically Lithuanian territories, would include Belarus with cities of Grodno and Minsk, and would have its capital in Vilnius. Federation with Poland

[335] Dmowski memorandum to Wilson, 1918 10 09, in *Akty i dokumenty*, T. 1, p. 49
[336] Piotr Wandycz, 'Piłsudski a federalism', *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 4 (2012), p. 47

would translate into separate assemblies in Vilnius and Warsaw, while shared institutions would include a high command, ministry of foreign affairs, single currency and a customs union[337].

Sujkowski's argument for federation rested on the danger of a hostile Lithuania for Poland's security. If ethnographic Lithuania was to remain independent, it should not have Vilnius due to Lithuanian artificial hostility towards the Poles. But since 'Lithuanians had the same rights to Vilnius, as Poles had to Wroclaw', denying them Vilnius would leave Lithuania an enemy of Poland and would increase the influence of Russia in the *kresy*. In the forecasted war between Poland and Russia, Poland could then be exposed to an attack on Vilnius from Lithuania. Alternatively, Polish conquest of ethnographic Lithuania and its incorporation pure and simple into the Polish state would be a source of irredentism. A federation, on the other hand, would appease the Lithuanians by letting them have Vilnius as a center of their enlightenment and a seat for their governmental and cultural institutions, while opening up ethnographic Lithuania to Polish influence[338].

Sujkowski argued that such a federative scheme would help to appease the Allies – first and foremost the reluctant British – and justify Poland's eastward expansion beyond its ethnographic limits. Simple annexations, explained Sujkowski, might be construed as imperialism, while announcing a federation, even if it was brought on Polish bayonets later on, would help to argue the Polish case in the Allied capitals. A federation with Lithuania would be a stepping stone towards expanding past the River Dnieper and making 'huge strategic Poland', which would guard Europe against Bolshevism[339].

[337] KNP session, 1919 03 02, in *Akty i dokumenty*, T. 1, p. 82
[338] Ibid, p. 84
[339] Ibid, p. 82

While the idealist Paderewski thought of a 'federation of equals', Piłsudski's emissaries in the KNP treated it purely instrumentally, as a means of effecting and justifying Poland's eastern expansion. Sujkowski thought that at least initially, civil and military commissars would be enough to represent Lithuania in the federation, because allowing elections of an assembly could lead to 'outright humorous results' due to Lithuanian backwardness. Dłuski confessed that he would be content with offering the Lithuanians a 'half-fictitious' federation, modalities of which could be dictated after capturing the lands of Lithuania with Polish troops. To Dłuski, a federation allowing for an assembly in Vilnius would save the Warsaw Sejm from the participation in it of Lithuanian and Belarussian MPs. All the non-Polish elements could be confined to the Vilnius assembly, where they would not cause trouble and still be under Polish influence. For Medard Downarowicz, another Piłsudski man in the KPN, federation could be promised first, and then retracted later in favour of incorporation, upon the successful advance of the Polish army, which was to be followed by Polish administration[340].

Dmowski, however, considered even such a half-hearted federation unacceptable. He stood firmly on the basis that territorial expansion had to be balanced against the maxim of a Polish Poland. The inclusion of too many non-Poles, he thought, would be detrimental to Poland's internal cohesion and external power. Dmowski suspected that around one-fourth of non-Poles in the Polish Sejm could already cause trouble, as another one-fourth of the Polish MPs could potentially join them in pursuit of their ambitions and thus make a dangerous majority. Poland would thus have to be a centralized, unitary state, while federation meant weakness. Only those lands should be included, whose ethnic makeup could be altered by colonising them with Polish settlers, on the condition that this would not over-stretch the efforts of the state.

[340] Ibid, p. 82

In Dmowski's last analysis, 'there was no one to federate with'. 'When we talk to the Poles, we see that they are from the same world', Dmowski paraphrased what 'everyone' said at the Conference. As for the Lithuanians, 'the Allies considered them half-wild, said they talked to them like to negroes'. They were thus not the people with whom one could negotiate or sign contracts. 'Who was going to rule that historical Lithuania?', he asked, and predicted a horrid Vilnius assembly, made up of Lithuanians, Belarussians, Jews and a few Polish landowners, who would most likely emigrate after a land reform. Dmowski suspected a silent agreement between Lithuanians and Jews, and feared that those two elements could dominate the Lithuanian assembly and even block the alliance with Poland. All these difficulties, argued Dmowski, would be overcome if Lithuania was simply incorporated into Poland and ruled from Warsaw, giving it some sort of cultural autonomy.

In search for a common ground, Dmowski put forward another solution, which could satisfy both nationalists and federalists. Due to its civilisational superiority, Poland could claim before the Allies a mandate over the lands of historical Lithuania. That way, expansion eastwards would not mean denationalisation of Poland. While Sujkowski liked the proposal and declared his readiness to renounce the idea of federation in favour of a mandate over Lithuania, he doubted if the Allies would ever grant Poland that privilege[341]. When it came to voting, the Endek majority rejected the federation proposal against the protests of Piłsudski's emissaries and adopted Dmowski's programme, which, in recognition of the 'very young national movement of Lithuanians', called for the incorporation of ethnographic Lithuania without Vilnius into the Polish state, where it would receive a special regime[342].

[341] Ibid, p. 83
[342] KNP note on the eastern frontiers of Poland, 1919 03 03 / *Akty i dokumenty*, T. 1, p. 130

Disagreement over the form and method of rule over the historical Lithuania, as well as the precise limit of Poland's eastern border, however, was of secondary importance in the fluid military situation of 1919, in which Piłsudski and his armies had the upper hand. Upon his capture of Vilnius from the Bolsheviks in April 1919, in pursuance of the federalist program, Piłsudski issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which promised self-government and defied the annexationist vision of the KNP.

The importance of the Polish diplomacy in Paris first and foremost lay in convincing the Allies of Poland's larger geopolitical mission in Europe, as the barrier against German exploitation of Russia, guardian against the advance of the Bolsheviks and overall as a crucial element in the European balance of power. A strong Poland, argued the Piłsudskiite press, could even replace a strong Russia in the Allied calculations[343]. Extension of Poland's limits in any direction, however, needed the sanction of the Allies. In the west, only an imperative Allied demand could force Germany to cede Poland Danzig and Upper Silesia. While the uncertainty in the east allowed more freedom for maneuver, Poland still needed allied support, as it lacked almost everything needed to conduct large scale military operations, short of men.

The two chests of memoranda[344], which the Poles brought to the Paris Peace Conference to explain every question of Polish interest to the allies, inevitably drew a parallel between the old and the new Poland. It was the concerns of security that formed the strongest continuity: the new Poland had to be great enough to guard against the fate of its predecessor, destroyed by the aggression of its neighbours. Yet the past was to become a double edged sword in pressing Polish claims before the Allies. When Dmowski complained to Wilson that 'one of the results of the work

[343] Piotr Okulewicz, *Koncepcja "miedzymorza" w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918–1926* (Poznań, 2001), p. 37
[344] Roman Dmowski, *Polityka Polska i obudowanie państwa, T. 2* (Częstochowa: Antoni Gmachowski, 1937), p. 148

of the official statisticians, historians, economists and publicists was the indifference of public opinion in the great nations towards the cause of Poland'[345], he alluded to the elements of the didactic interpretive tradition of the historical fall of Poland that lingered in direct contradiction to the romantic designs of the present. The latter were to find their most formidable opponent in Britain.

2.3 The British veto

2.3.1 The epistemic community of Polono-skeptics

> The English do not love the Poles. <…>. This animosity has to do with different causes - temperament, history, present circumstance, all of which join together in doing Poland a disservice in the British opinion. For it, the Polish people are incurably shallow, lacking political spirit and all organizational abilities. These flaws, that previously caused the disaster of Poland, doom it to more dangerous adventures in the future. <…> The Russians and Germans wait, but there will come a day when the Polish anarchy and its remoteness from France would return them these lost provinces <…> For us, the French, reconstitution of Poland was an act of justice towards the past and an act of faith towards the future. For the English, it is an experience which has to be reduced to a strict minimum, even if it risked a certain failure[346].
>
> *Comte de Saint-Aulaire, French ambassador in London, 1921 05 20*

The skepticism with which official Britain approached the claims of the newly reconstituted Poland after the Great War has almost become legendary. An aphorism much quoted at the time

[345] Ibid, p. 38
[346] Saint-Aulaire to Briand, 1921 05 20 / ADMAE, Europe, Pologne 72, p. 90

contended there to be 'only two really stable and straightforward Poles - the North Pole and the South Pole'[347]. Lloyd George's infamous equation between giving a watch to a monkey and according Poland Silesia was just one of his Polish jokes. 'You see the moment we get to fundamentals we are 'Poles' apart', Lloyd George enjoyed himself, extending his hands as far as he could and laughing in his merry way[348]. Countering the pro-Polish submissions of the French when discussing the boundaries of the new Poland, the British premier would have 'the whole room puffing with laughter'[349].

It was not merely the individual British political figures who were causing a headache for Polish diplomacy. Within the British political and diplomatic elite, the revived Polish eagle had encountered an entire epistemic community of Polono-skeptics. Curzon, Balfour, Hardinge, Lloyd George's private secretary Philip Kerr, education secretary H.A.L. Fisher, Hankey, PID experts Namier and Paton, were all part of it and together steered the British Polish policy in 1919 and beyond. British Polono-skepticism had no exclusive party affiliation. For most, save, perhaps, for Namier, whose anti-Polishness related to personal grievances, the matter had been largely 'impersonal'.

Reserved attitudes towards Poland had been hardly unusual in the British foreign policy of the last two centuries. The contemporary British government displayed little if any interest in the fate of the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth and did not protest against its partitions. The British at the time considered their embassy in Warsaw as merely an outpost for securing information about the partitioning designs of its neighbours, while the British ambassador

[347] Lindsay Bashford, 'In the Little New Countries', *Blackwoods magazine*, (01) 1921, p. 77
[348] Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary*, Vol. 1 (London : Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 51
[349] BL MS Balfour 49704, p. 20

was instructed to observe the dismemberment of Poland and protect British commercial interests[350]. The resolution put forward by Fox against the British acquiescence to the second partition, which he called the 'outrage on the rights of independent nations', had been rejected in the House of Commons[351]. Little changed in the attitude of Britain towards the troubles of Poland in the nineteenth century. Britain did not support the revival of independent Poland in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars[352]. When it came to the uprising of 1863, no one in the British government took the same interest in the cause of Polish independence as they had taken in that of Italy. Francis Napier, British minister to Russia, confided to the Tsar that Protestant Britain had nothing to gain from the establishment, in the rear of protestant Germany, of a great Catholic and military monarchy with strong French sympathies. When the insurrection escalated and when the British finally attempted to convince the Tsar to end the hostilities by proposing a general amnesty and the return to Poland of the previously granted privileges, it was out of fear that unmitigated repressions might provoke the French intervention[353]. Poor, weak, geographically remote, Catholic[354] and considered to be a 'semi-Asiatic' French sphere, neither the declining Commonwealth of the eighteenth century, nor the revolting Poland of the nineteenth, mattered much in the British schemes of trade or in its calculations of the balance of power.

The factors that previously caused British *désintéressement* in Poland, however, could hardly account for the much more outstanding British Polono-skepticism in 1919. There was

[350] *History of British foreign policy*, Vol. 1, p. 179
[351] Eversley, p. 157
[352] Charles Duke Yonge, *The Life and Administration of Robert Banks, Second Earl of Liverpool*, Vol. 2 (Macmillan, 1868), p. 37; Eversley, p. 271
[353] Adolphus Ward (ed.), *The Cambridge history of British foreign policy, 1783-1919,*Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 459-460
[354] It has been contended that 'the average eighteenth century Englishman's anti-Popery complex' worked against sympathies for the Catholic Poland. David B. Horn, *British public opinion and the first partition of Poland* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1945), p. 84. Inversely, it was perhaps not a coincidence that the most Polonophile figure in the postwar British diplomacy had been Esme Howard, a Catholic.

hardly anything left of the role that religion played in the conduct of the foreign policy in the eighteenth century. While the traditional Franco-Polish affinity continued, it could not disquiet the British as much in the context of the modern Entente cordiale as it upset them at the time of Anglo-French wars. Britain, in fact, might have as well put Poland under its own tutelage, which was preferred to that of France by a significant part of the Polish political elite. Denying Germany exploitation of Russia was as important to Britain as it was to France. So was the cordon-sanitaire against the spread of Bolshevism, dreaded by most except for the radical Left, an instance in which the 'semi-Asiatic' would always be preferred to the outright 'barbaric'. Had Britain helped to push the maximum Polish claims to their ultimate realization, a Poland with the borders of 1772 or even beyond them, with 282,000 square miles territory and 35 million inhabitants would not have exactly been a weak state. In short, Britain might have as well believed in Poland. Just as France, it could have desired it '*forte, très forte*', and found it a place in its geopolitical calculations. And yet, it most clearly refused to do so.

What made the epistemic community of Polono-skeptics within the British political elite in 1919 was rather the manifest disbelief in the statesmanship capacity of the Poles, which originated from the shared reading of the history of Poland – the overwhelmingly didactic interpretation of its fall as a self-inflicted suicide. Assuming the continuity in the 'Polish character', and in the absence of any overriding Polonophile affiliations, this interpretation became the all pervasive *spiritus movens* in the British Polish policy.

Tracing the pathways of reception through which British statesmen inherited the strongly didactic reading of the fall of Poland points to the thread of British historiography that had retained the judgmental tone of the *philosophes* in the era of nineteenth century romantic liberalism and after. The stark criticisms passed on by Coxe, Marshall and Williams in their travel accounts

became recursive for use in the later works. The devout but rare pro-Polish advocacy of John Lind or Thomas Campbell could not offset the much more quoted and no less poetic ridicule by Carlyle. Burke's well known panegyric for the 3 May Constitution of Poland, for which he received a medal from the last king of Poland Stanisław August Poniatowski, was balanced by his judgment of it elsewhere as only serving to supply 'that restless people with new means, at least new modes, of cherishing their turbulent dispositions'[355]. The attempt to write a history about histories in the mid-twentieth century, which turned out to be as Polono-skeptic as the histories themselves, testified to the viability of the didactic tradition. '[An Englishman of an eighteenth century] knew too much about conditions in Poland to think of Poland as a little nation struggling to be free', concluded D. B. Horn in his study on the British attitudes towards Poland, while 'nineteenth-century idealism combined with ignorance of eighteenth-century realities produced a distorted picture of eighteenth-century Poland as one of the little nations struggling to be free'[356].

There appeared to be a preference for the didactic over the romantic in the history of Poland within the discipline of Modern History at Oxford university, where many of the future British statesmen either read or taught. Examination questions in Modern history on the subject of Poland ranged from the didactic-neutral, asking for the reasons of its failure, to the didactic-suggestive, asking if the Poles themselves could bear any share of blame for the first partition of Poland[357], or, as it was put more bluntly, 'when and how did Poland begin to be a source of disturbance in Europe?'[358]. Fisher, a tutor in modern history at New College and Education Secretary in Lloyd

[355] Edmund Burke, 'Thoughts on French affairs (December 1791)', in Edmund Burke, *The works of Edmund Burke – with a Memoir*, Vol. 2, (New York: G. Dearborn, 1837), p. 95
[356] Horn, p. 78, 86
[357] Oxford University examination papers. Second public examination. School of Modern History, General History, Period VII, Trinity Term, 1914
[358] *Oxford University examination papers in law and modern history : for the academic years ending July, 1867 to 1872*. Trinity Term, 1868 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1872), p. 21

George's cabinet, was one of the sources of Lloyd George's Polono-skepticism. In his own historical work that touched upon the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw by Napoleon in 1807, Fisher talked of 'megalomania of the Poles which no misfortune could quench and no experience could temper'. The Poles had not been ripe for the progressive French laws that Napoleon gave them, because it was impossible 'to repress the effervescence of a people in whom the habit of discussion and invective had been strengthened by centuries of aristocratic anarchy'[359].

For students, taking up a subject of Poland in an essay provided an opportunity to show off one's critical faculties and offered a safe space to be judgmental. 'To say that its constitution was the cause of its fall, or that its customs were those of no other nation is to utter a mere historical commonplace', wrote Curzon, a student at Oxford and the future British foreign secretary, in his essay for the Lothian prize on the Polish king Jan Sobieski.

> Every writer who has made Poland his topic has joined in condemning the bizarre medley of freedom and restraint, of equality and despotism, of law and anarchy, that constituted what its citizens were proud to think was the sole republic in the world that was presided over by a king. Everyone has noted the contrasted splendor and degradation, the mingled barbarism and refinement, that characterized the life and habit of the people.

Paraphrasing Rousseau, Curzon set out to examine the causes of why such a 'strange and mis-shapen fabric', or 'excrescence on the face of history' as the Polish mode of government emerged and lasted. Ultimately, he attributed Poland's miraculous longevity to its long time isolation among the neighbors as backward as itself and to the heroism of the king Jan Sobieski, whom he idolized as a 'Christian hero' who saved Vienna and repelled the Ottoman advance[360].

Through the epistemic community of Polono-skeptics, the modern British Polish policy turned out to be a remarkable instance of 'academic' considerations shaping 'interests' and

[359] H.A.L. Fisher, *Studies in Napoleonic statesmanship: Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1903), p. 152-154
[360] George N. Curzon, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon: John Sobieski, King of Poland'. Essay written for the Lothian Prize at Oxford, submitted March 1881. BL Mss Eur F112/358

geopolitics. The choice between making Poland a barrier between Russia and Germany, strong enough to protect itself against them, and 'minimizing' Poland to its ethnic core and leaving it a weak buffer which would satisfy both Germany and Russia and which would not leave them with a lasting resentment that might provoke the recurrence of the partitions, strongly depended on the perception of the capacity of the Polish statesmanship. Manifestations of British Russophilia or Russophobia, which might have worked against the Polish claims in the East, as well as instances of Germanophilia or Germanophobia, which could work against those in the West, were inseparable from the assumptions about the potential of Poland and the Poles for attaining geopolitical significance.

2.3.2. Towards didactic geopolitics

In 1914, the sovereignty of Poland was neither expected nor particularly welcomed by any of the warring factions. Their propaganda declarations made in competition for Polish loyalties did not go beyond autonomy[361]. In the Entente camp, the Allies toed whichever line the Russians were prepared to concede in their Polish policy. Briand's 1917 memorandum on the Allied war aims thus only contained a very careful reference to the Tsar's own promise of Polish autonomy, explicitly indicating that Poland was regarded as a purely Russian matter[362]. Paléologue, the French ambassador in Russia, tried to dispel suspicions of French pro-Polishness and pleaded that recommendations of France had never gone beyond the Polish autonomy[363]. The British were no less timid. 'It is true that Poland brought it upon herself', A.J. Balfour laid down the essence of the

[361] Declaration reproduced in Alfred J. Rieber, *The struggle for the Eurasian borderlands : from the rise of early modern empires to the end of the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 543
[362] Memorandum sent on behalf of the Entente by Aristide Briand to the American Ambassador, 1917 01 10, in Jacques Néré, *The foreign policy of France from 1914 to 1945* (Boston : Routledge & K. Paul, 1975), p. 265
[363] Wandycz, p. 8

didactic tradition in his wartime speech on foreign policy, which had yet to favour Polish independence. 'If Poland had understood the elements of reasonably good government, the idea that she could be partitioned like an inert mass, as she was, is out of the question'[364]. Hardinge appeared to be of the same view. 'So long as it is only a pious aspiration it does not much matter what is said'[365]. The agreement of the revolutionary Russian provisional government to Polish independence allowed the Allies to extend their wartime propaganda further and to promise independent Poland with access to the sea. When the Allies won the war and blessed the disintegration of the enemy empires, the promise had to be fulfilled.

Compared to the embellished note of French recognition of Poland's independence, which praised Polish martyrdom, the British equivalent looked like a mere formality. Colonel Wade, the interim British representative who was the first to come to Warsaw immediately after the armistice, received no indication of a British Polish policy. He was quickly overwhelmed by incessant Polish pleas for help of any kind in their fight against the Bolsheviks. 'The theory that the Poles are an imperialistic race and would only use their arms for aggressive purposes appears to rest on acquaintance with only one section of the Polish people, and to be really part of the German propaganda', Wade tried to argue in his dispatch to London, to which he received no reply[366]. The wretchedness of Poland had impressed every observer on the spot. 'It had no bases, no outlets, no communications, no supplies, no army. The Poles were fighting the Bolsheviks who might be attacking them, the Ukrainians whom they chose to attack, and the Germans from whom they wished to wrest Posen', argued Foch before the Allies in January 1919, and feared that Poland

[364] Balfour's statement on foreign policy to the imperial war council, May 1917, in Robert Lansing, *The Lansing papers, 1914-1920*, Vol. 2 (Washington : U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1939), p. 27
[365] Paul M. Hayes, *Modern British foreign policy. The twentieth century, 1880-1939* (London : A. and C. Black, 1978), p. 201
[366] Wade to Howard, 1919 03 01 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 323

could be suffocated before its birth. Unmoved, Balfour responded with a rant about Polish *faits accomplis*, while Lloyd George remembered 'an ancient quarrel in Poland between the feudal elements and the peasants', which, he said, did not make the Polish cause against the Bolsheviks so unequivocal[367].

Anglo-Polish relations thus appeared to be heading to a bad start. Some considered the Warsaw legation second rate[368], while Horace Rumbold, Britain's first minister plenipotentiary in Poland, hoped that 'it was surely better to be first or cock of a small dung-hill than second on a large one'[369]. The appointment of Lieutenant-General Carton de Wiart as the head of the British military mission in Poland appeared to be fine-tuned for the British idea of Poland. 'I had only a hazy idea as to the whereabouts of Poland, but I knew that it was somewhere near Russia and that the Bolsheviks were fighting there', wrote de Wiart, surprised by his appointment[370]. Battle-seasoned in South Africa and Somalia, left with one arm, one eye and one foot, de Wiart resembled a legendary pirate[371]. He was known for his impulsive character, his complete disregard of danger, willingness to fight duels and, according to some accounts, held the world record for bad language[372]. 'We thought you were the sort of man who would know that country', de Wiart was told by his superiors as to the reasons for his appointment[373]. De Wiart's instructions advised him to avoid any commitments towards Poland[374].

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[367] Meeting of the Council of Ten, 1919 01 22 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 3, p. 675
[368] Mond to Rumbold, 1919 09 01 / BOD MSS Rumbold 26, p. 25
[369] Martin Gilbert, *Sir Horace Rumbold; portrait of a diplomat, 1869-1941* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 56
[370] Carton de Wiart, *Happy odyssey : the memoirs of Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart* (London: Cape, 1950), p. 73
[371] E. T. Williams, 'Carton de Wiart, Sir Adrian (1880–1963)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
[372] Hermione Ranfurly, *To war with Whitaker : the wartime diaries of the Countess of Ranfurly, 1939-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1994), p. 123
[373] De Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*, p. 96
[374] TNA FO 608, 0458

The inter-allied mission to Poland, conceived and initiated by Lloyd George, arrived in Warsaw in February 1919, after being ceremoniously greeted in every Polish town on its way. The speaker of the new Polish diet Wojciech Trąmpczyński in his welcoming speech said that the Polish cradle had been threatened from all sides, and pleaded for the help of the 'powerful west wind'[375]. The much less ceremonious instructions for the mission, inspired by the British premier, demanded to advise the Poles against 'the politics of ill-thought aggression and faits accomplis' and make them renounce all military adventures against Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Russians and Germans, which could lead to another partition[376].

In the House of Lords, Curzon in his inaugural explanation of the British Polish (non)policy in March 1919 awkwardly attempted to justify the indifference of the British public opinion of the nineteenth century towards the sufferings of Poland, claiming that it was based on 'rather pedantic considerations of imperfections in the Polish constitution'. He observed that Poland of the present did not have a higher moral claim to British sympathies or relief than other states, 'upon grounds of poetic or any kind of justice', and ended with a little sermon on the necessity of a 'compact' and 'genuinely Polish' Poland which should concentrate on its internal development[377]. When Count Sobański met Curzon and thanked him for his lukewarm speech, the latter took this opportunity to deprecate the Polish suggestion to march a Polish regiment through London where it would be honoured by a royal or by any other person of significance. This, taught Curzon, would raise the question 'What have these Poles done to deserve this special honour? Is it not their duty now to be

[375] TNA:FO 608, 8321
[376] Report of the inter-allied commission, 1919 04 17 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 438
[377] The Allies and Poland. Curzon's speech in the House of Lords, 1919 03 13 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1919/mar/13/the-allies-and-poland>

fighting for their country rather than to be feted in London; and should not all such compliments be postponed until the troops have played their part?'[378].

The British delegation, headed by Lloyd George, came to the Peace Conference with a clear idea of a minimal ethnographic Poland and did not foresee for it any major geopolitical role. Including within Poland large non-Polish minorities, as it was noted in the opinion of the Political Intelligence Department, would 'run the risk of recreating the conditions which in the eighteenth century led to the partitions of Poland' and leave it prey to the concerted action of Germany and Russia[379]. The manual on Poland for the British peace delegation enumerated the causes of its downfall and concluded that its expansion beyond ethnographic limits, including its historical union with Lithuania, had been a task 'too big' for her[380]. The British saw the new Poland in the shadows of the enlightenment and suspected it to inherit all the vices of its predecessor. As a consequence, it had to be taught, disciplined and saved from itself.

On January 29, 1919, Dmowski appeared before the Council of Ten and claimed most of what belonged to the Commonwealth in 1772. The exposé lasted for five hours, and some still considered it excellent. Dmowski was delivering his speech in French and English at the same time. He had his reasons to distrust the Conference's interpreters. In one of the previous sessions, his statement that Poland was situated in the part of Europe where the greatest danger threatened peace, was translated into English as him saying that Poland formed the greatest danger to peace[381]. Dmowski's audience, while very distinguished, lacked one very important personality. Lloyd

[378] Curzon to Howard, 1919 03 19 / TNA FO 608/56, p. 106
[379] Appreciation of the internal situation in Russia, 1919 01 12 / TNA FO 608/196, p. 32 rev.
[380] *Poland : general sketch of history, 1569-1815* (Foreign Office, Historical Section, 1919)
[381] W.F. Reddaway, 'The Peace Conference, 1919', in W.F. Reddaway (ed.), The Cambridge history of Poland, 1697-1935 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), p. 496; Dmowski, *Polityka Polska*, p. 143, footnote 1. Dmowski later blamed this on Mantoux, the interpreter, being a Jew.

George only showed up after Dmowski had finished. When Balfour was having a chat with the latter during the break and tried to grab the passing Lloyd George to join them, the British premier turned around and walked away[382].

The British refused to help Poland in clothing, arms or ammunition, which was catastrophically lacking for its anti-Bolshevik operations. Paderewski pledged to hold against the 'barbarians' and complained of the total absence of Allied help. British military observers reported that Polish soldiers were 'literally in rags or in a semi nude state'. Looking up what the French were sending to the Poles, the British realized it was inferior second hand clothing discarded from the French army. 'It seems likely that we have a good deal of rubbish in the way of discarded army clothing which may be even for destruction which we might enquire about', minuted Colonel R.H. Beadon of the British delegation, who was anxious not to let the French steal the thunder in the matter[383]. The request, however, had been denied. The Poles would only receive from Britain 600,000 coats and 200,000 pairs of boots that they had bought privately from Messrs. Pearl Cope&Williams[384].

The Polish request to organize the navy of the reborn Poland was met in London with a similar lack of enthusiasm. Balfour thought the Poles could only be allowed to have a symbolic navy, the size of which would be insufficient to upset the peace in the Baltic or deplete Polish finances. A few British warships, decommissioned for scrapping, together with a number of 'revenue cutters' for which Poland would pay by itself, thought Balfour, could thus be sufficient to appease the Polish desire to occasionally show the Polish flag in foreign ports, bolster the waning popularity of Britain in Poland and counter the French influence in the organization of the Polish

[382] Dmowski, *Polityka Polska*, p. 144
[383] R.H. Beadon minute, 1919 10 20 / TNA FO 608/56, p. 208
[384] Warsaw legation (unsigned) to Curzon, 1919 10 11 / TNA FO 608/56, p. 227

army[385]. Admiral Hope thought a state yacht and a small craft for police and fishery duties would suffice[386]. At the end of the day, the British only sent a five member naval mission of administrative, hydrographic and commercial character, which was withdrawn in the beginning of 1921 for reasons of cutting expenditure[387].

Both in the east and west, the British opposed Polish claims nearly every step of the way. 'It may be urged, indeed, that the larger the Poland, the greater the buffer between the Germans and the Russians and in the strictly geographical sense this is true', wrote Fisher to Lloyd George, advising him on the Polish policy, 'per contra and with the greater reinforcement from the lessons of the past may it be urged that the larger the Poland, the stronger the chances of a Germano-Russian combination against it'[388]. Lloyd George did not need much convincing. When the question of Danzig came up for discussion at the Council, he effectively blocked its assignment to Poland and only agreed to making it a free city, scrapping the unanimous recommendation of the expert Commission on Polish Affairs.

The clash between the romantic and the didactic interpretative traditions of the fall of Poland came to animate the discussions of the question at the Council of Four. Clemenceau, advocating a hard line on Germany, did his best to frame the issue as a remedy against the 'great crime' of partitions and recalled 'children whipped for having prayed to God in Polish'[389]. When it came to considering the interests of the German 'colonists', Clemenceau urged to arrive 'not at a mathematical justice, but at a justice which takes feeling into account'[390]. During his presentation

[385] Balfour to Curzon, 1919 06 25 / TNA FO 608/70, p. 41
[386] Hope minute, 1919 06 17 / TNA FO 608/70, p. 36
[387] See Donald Stoker, *Britain, France and the Naval Arms Trade in the Baltic* (London : Frank Cass, 2013)
[388] Fisher to Lloyd George, 1919 03 17, in Bryant, F. Russell (ed.), *The coalition diaries and letters of H.A.L. Fisher, 1916-1922 : the historian in Lloyd George's cabinet Fisher diary* (Lampeter : Edwin Mellen, 2006), p. 397 [thereafter *Fisher diary*]
[389] Mantoux, *Deliberations*, Vol. 1, p. 34
[390] Ibid, p. 64

of the Polish case for Danzig, Paderewski wept. Poland, he pleaded, was surrounded by a 'furious assault of disorder and violence' and stood as 'the fortress of political order in Eastern Europe'. The Polish people, represented by 'probably the most democratic assembly in existence in the world', demanded Danzig as a *conditio sine qua non*, as well as Upper Silesia, Lvov and a federation with Lithuania. 'On this last question, I believe there has been no report presented', interrupted Lloyd George. 'We must take national feeling into account; Germany is not yet knocked out', continued Paderewski. 'Really?', heckled the British premier. 'We have seen them be always the same, ever since the tenth century', pleaded Paderewski, recounting a story about the grand master of the Teutonic Order, who invited Poles to a banquet and then killed them[391].

On his part, Lloyd George lambasted the innate defects of the 'Polish character' and warned against the partitions of the future. The Poles, he said, would 'govern badly and will take a long time to conduct business in the western manner'[392]. The British premier lectured about the image of the Poles as an 'inferior and despised people' in the eyes of the Germans, and did not seem to contest its validity. Putting millions of Germans under the inferior Polish rule would make 'the most dangerous source of irritation and trouble'[393].

The discussion was bound to turn into dissection of the didactic outcomes of the fall of Poland. 'What had caused the death of Poland was not merely its faulty political system, but principally its lack of communication with the sea', pleaded Cambon, the French head of the Polish Commission. Hence, if Poland died when it lost Danzig, it was also vital for its resurrection[394].

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[391] Ibid, p. 200-203
[392] Ibid, Vol. 1, p. 37
[393] Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 386-387
[394] A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George : a diary by Frances Stevenson* (London: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 176; John Mason, *The Danzig dilemma; a study in peacemaking by compromise* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1946), p. 52

Lloyd George, however, was immovable and scolded the Polish Commission for 'scandalous' pro-Polishness. Wilson, who had promised Poland access to the sea in his statements of wartime propaganda, now favoured the British didactic interpretation, and seemed to be even more archaic in his arguments than his British counterpart. Poland, Wilson now contended, was bound to be weak, 'not only because historically it had failed to govern itself, but because it was sure in the future to be divided into factions, more especially as religious differences were an element in the situation'. The strategic necessity of giving it territories inhabited by Germans would thus have to be balanced against the danger of provoking future frictions with Germany[395]. All that had been promised to Poland was access to the sea, and that access might as well be made more complicated than sovereignty, observing the principle of a minimal ethnographic Poland.

The British followed the same principle of minimal Poland in the east, where they blocked the attribution to Poland of Eastern Galicia, a territory of Ukrainian majority, which formed a part of pre-partition Poland and which the Poles considered crucial for its oilfields and for the largely Polish city of Lvov. The advance of Polish forces in the beginning of 1919 led to skirmishes with Ukrainian nationalists, and by June 1919 Eastern Galicia fell under Polish control. The Polish army of General Haller, which the allies had helped to repatriate from France to Poland for the purpose of helping defend Poland against the Bolsheviks, had been sent by Piłsudski to fight the Ukrainians. As a consequence, Lloyd George almost wished for another partition. 'It will come to pass that we will judge them as did the Prussians and the Russians; we will conclude that they have no right to exist'[396]. While the territory had never belonged to the Russian empire and was part of Austria before the war, the British Premier would rather see it go to Russia, than put Ukrainians, whom he

[395] Mason, *Danzig Dilemma*, p. 53
[396] Mantoux, *Deliberations*, Vol 2, p. 125-126

deemed Russian, under the rule of the anarchic Poles. At the end of May, the British inspired Allied note to Piłsudski threatened to deny Poland supplies, assistance and the service of 'Council's authority'[397].

The problem was that there was not much to deny. The only significant element of Allied aid to Poland had hitherto been American food relief, withdrawal of which would require the Allies to agree on starving the civilian population. Moreover, while Clemenceau in Paris signed the warning to the Poles, the French minister and military mission in Warsaw did everything to encourage the Poles to go on, which rendered all attempts at pressure useless[398]. The British could thus only look forward to denying the Poles victory on the negotiating table and making sure that despite the Polish de facto possession, the status of Eastern Galicia remained open.

At the Council of Foreign Ministers, the British succeeded in securing a resolution which accorded Poland temporary administration of Eastern Galicia, subject to a plebiscite at some point in the future[399]. Instructively, British delegates had erased the reference to Galicia as part of pre-partition Poland in the project of the resolution[400]. Ultimately, as the modalities of such a temporary status proved to be intractable, the British had pushed through a proposal to give Poland a mandate over Eastern Galicia under the League's Covenant for a period of 25 years, after which the League's Council would decide on the final status. This was the first time a mandate had been applied for white people in Europe, a circumstance that baffled some members of the Polish Commission[401]. It was also the first time when a mandate was invoked for dealing with a *fait accompli* and used to preclude annexation.

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[397] Full text of the note in TNA FO 608/59, p. 118
[398] Howard minute, 1919 05 25 / TNA FO 608/56, p. 422 rev.
[399] Meeting of the Council of foreign ministers, 1919 06 25 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 4, p. 855
[400] Meeting of the Council of Heads of Delegations, 1919 09 19 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 8, p. 270
[401] Process-verbal No. 36 of the Commission on Polish Affairs, 1919 11 08 / ADMAE, Cambon papers 87, p. 122

The decision caused an uproar in Poland. In Paris, Paderewski pleaded that it denied Poland the land of Polish poets, heroes and statesmen, while Patek was at a loss to understand why the Allies were snatching away from Poland something that had always belonged to it and that was claimed by no other government[402]. When in December 1919 Clemenceau visited 10 Downing Street, he tried to appeal to Lloyd George's decency. It was not that the issue mattered too much to the French, he said, but the Poles were a 'very sentimental people', and they expected Britain to be more favourable. What really mattered to the Tiger was getting the British round to his idea of a strong Poland as a bulwark against Germany. 'If only we could get rid of Germany, there would be peace in Europe', he confessed. Lloyd George, however, was unmoved. He taught Clemenceau how 'the Poles had always been a very troublesome people in Europe' and argued that Polish expansion was bound to cause mischief[403]. The only result of a tête-à-tête with Clemenceau was that Lloyd George yielded on suspending the decision on the mandate, what left the status of Eastern Galicia even less certain[404].

For the British, Eastern Galicia turned out to be a rehearsal of dealing with the much more intractable Lithuanian problem. While for the Poles, Vilnius was more important than Lvov, British Polono-skeptics saw Polish expansion towards Lithuania as another infringement of the concept of a minimal Poland, grounded in the didactic tradition of its history. Paton deprecated Polish plans of colonization in the east and saw them as a recourse to the similar vice of the pre-partition Poland that had greatly weakened it and used up its energy. Paton was convinced that expansion in the east would likewise mean the ruin of the new Poland[405]. In a similar vein, Tyrrell was astonished to

[402] Meeting of the Council of Heads of Delegations, 1919 09 23 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 8, p. 331-332
[403] Notes of a Conversation at 10, Downing Street, 1919 12 11 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 2, No. 55
[404] Meeting of the Council of Heads of Delegations, 1919 12 22 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 9, p. 626
[405] Paton minute, 1919 03 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 97

hear that even Jędrzej Moraczewski and Ignacy Daszyński, the leaders of Polish socialists, claimed historical Lithuania and plotted its colonisation[406].

When it came to the Vilnius question, the minimalism of British Polono-skeptics clashed with the particularities of self-determination. For Lloyd George, Vilnius was just like Lvov – a severable enclave of Polish population, surrounded by non-Poles, and remote from Poland proper. Vilnius appeared to him to belong to the Russian sphere of influence, as he appreciated the Russian claims and believed that Vilnius, as well as other governorates of historic Lithuania, had too many Russians for Russia to renounce and for the anarchic Poles to stomach[407]. In this he shared the opinion with Hardinge, formerly an ambassador in St. Petersburg, who was now helping the desk on Polish affairs of the British delegation. Hardinge invoked his personal experience of visiting Vilnius and argued that Polish claims to Vilnius and Grodno had no real basis, both in terms of religion and nationality[408]. Among the Allies, Wilson agreed that Vilnius was in the Russian sphere, while the French policy still lacked definition.

For Paton, who was an expert dealing with ethnographic statistics and who already thought of the Lithuanians, it was clear that the latter had no claim to the city on the basis of ethnicity. Paton thus favoured the idea of a plebiscite, as it was 'thoroughly undesirable that a small peasant nation like the Lithuanians should attempt to rule people of another race and language'[409].

No settlement of the Vilnius question, however, could be attempted in the chaotic military situation of 1919, when patches of Lithuanian territory had been occupied by German,

[406] Tyrrell minute, 1919 04 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 368
[407] Howard complained that 'We have perhaps taken it too much for granted that the White Russians of the Vilnius and Kaunas and Grodno are Russians in the true sense of the word, and are desirous of remaining Russian. Howard to Balfour, 1919 03 04 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 98
[408] Hardinge minute, 1919 04 / TNA FO 608/57, p. 406
[409] Paton minute, 1919 03 / Ibid, p. 97

Lithuanian, Bolshevik and Polish forces. While Piłsudski's capture of Vilnius in April 1919 from the Bolsheviks did not evoke protests from the British, anti-Bolshevik resistance was the only motive that could potentially appease them. The British considered the occupation as temporary and warned the Poles that annexation of Lithuania would never be tolerated by the Allies[410]. Clashes between Polish and Lithuanian forces were also bound to weaken the makeshift 'cordon sanitaire', a circumstance that also caught the French attention. In April 1919, the Allies thus started pressing both Kaunas and Warsaw to refrain from hostilities, and pondered a temporary demarcation line to separate their forces[411].

2.3.3. Drawing the lines

On 24 May, in the Council of Foreign Ministers, the French High Command pressed the demand of its Polish counterpart to sanction the occupation of territories up to the line Liudvinavas-Balbieriškis-Darsūniškis-Žiežmariai-Čiobiškis-Ukmergė, which was deep inside ethnic Lithuania. The request was blocked by Robert Lansing, Wilson's Secretary of State, who maintained that 'no Pole should be allowed to advance north of the ethnic line'. If the Lithuanians were not yet ready to occupy the territories evacuated by the Germans themselves, Lansing preferred to delay the German evacuation in order not to let the Poles in[412]. Just like the British, the Americans considered Lithuania a Russian sphere.

On 13 June, the Allies notified the two governments of a demarcation line, traced by Colonel Reboul of the French military mission in Lithuania, based on the factual dislocation of

[410] De Wiart to Haller, 1919 05 11 / TNA FO 608/56, p. 400
[411] Meeting of the Council of foreign ministers, 1919 04 26 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 4, p. 628
[412] Meeting of the Council of foreign ministers, 1919 05 24 / Ibid, p. 772

Lithuanian and Polish forces. It went 5km east along the Varėna-Vilnius-Daugpilis railway line, leaving it to the Poles, who had claimed it for their anti-Bolshevik operations. While the line left Vilnius on the Polish side, the Lithuanians were left the towns of Suwalki and Seiny, both on the Polish side of the 'ethnic' line[413].

While the Lithuanians accepted the line, Polish foreign minister Skrzyński complained to the French that the line left some Polish-speaking districts on the Lithuanian side and warned that the inhabitants might rebel against the Lithuanian occupation. The Poles claimed that the buffer zone stretching 5 km into the Lithuanian territory along the railway was not enough to secure this Polish route of supply to the Bolshevik front. As there were no Bolshevik forces on the Lithuanian side of the railway, Skrzyński claimed that it still needed a stronger 'military cordon' against the Lithuanians and the evacuating Germans. 'Unfortunately, we deal here not with peaceful Lithuanian people, but with a group of individuals, whom the Germans had brought to power, and who had overtly hostile views towards Poland, as well as with the Germans themselves whom we know too well'. He then demanded a new demarcation line that would extend the Polish occupation up until the Alytus-Stakliškės-Žiežmariai-Kaišiadorys-Bagaslaviškis-Lyduokiai line, or around 70 km into the ethnic Lithuanian territory east of Vilnius (see Map 1)[414].

While Eugene Pralon, the French minister in Warsaw, supported the Polish request for expansion, it was ignored by the authorities in Paris, who were content with Reboul's line of demarcation. Failing to get Allied or French blessing for their scheme, in the beginning of July Polish forces unilaterally advanced further into Lithuania towards their desired line, forcing the Lithuanians to retreat and causing a number of skirmishes in the process. On 10 July, reacting to

[413] Laroche to Henrys, 1919 06 13 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 13, p. 53. For a map, see Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė*, p. 255
[414] Skrzyński to Pralon, 1919 06 20 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 13, p. 57

the protests of the Lithuanians, who called the Polish move a 'manifest aggression'[415], Clemenceau, with the agreement of the Allies, ordered Foch to demand the Poles withdraw towards Reboul's line of demarcation[416].

Piłsudski, however, refused to cave in. When General Henrys read the Allied demands, the Chief of State threatened him with an unstoppable Polish uprising in the district of Suwalki, if it was left to the Lithuanian occupation. As to the occupied territories east of Vilnius, Piłsudski said the Lithuanians would not have sufficient forces to protect themselves against the Bolsheviks anyway[417]. Piłsudski openly scorned the Lithuanian government as having a 'German character' and believed the Lithuanians would turn towards Poland after the fall of that government[418]. Naczelnik now appeared to exploit the tenets of British Polono-skepticism himself. In response to Wyndham‘s pressure, he threatened to resign and leave for Lithuania. The former was left impressed with Piłsudski's 'absolute determination' and hinted to Balfour that Poland would succumb to instability if the Head of State carried out his threat[419].

The Polish request for expanding the territory under its occupation found a sympathetic ear in the French High Command. On 26 July, Foch presented to the Allies a modified line, which, while reducing the zone of occupation demanded by the Poles, left them the Suwalki district and increased the buffer zone along the railway from 5 to 12 km across. Both Clemenceau and Balfour were extremely reluctant to legalise the *fait accompli*. Clemenceau said he thought the territory in question was Lithuanian, while Balfour stated that the Poles had defied the orders of the Allies. Nevertheless, Foch's line was approved after the invited Allied experts of the Polish

[415] Voldemaras to the Supreme Allied Council, 1919 07 12 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 13, p. 93
[416] Notes of a meeting of the heads of delegations, 1919 07 10 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 7, p. 88
[417] Henrys to Foch, 1919 07 18 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 13, p. 97
[418] Noulens to Pichon, 1919 08 07 / ADMAE, Lituanie 13, p. 134
[419] Notes of a meeting of the heads of delegations, 1919 07 29 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 7, p. 378

Commission testified the district of Suwalki to be on the Polish side of the ethnic line[420]. This line of demarcation was to settle as the de facto boundary until the next year.

The final British bow to the Poles at the Paris Peace Conference resulted in the Council resolution of 8 December that set the minimum line in the east of Poland, up until which the Allies recognized its 'full and complete' sovereignty[421]. The line, later to be known as 'Curzon line', was born out of the work of Paton and Oxford military historian Charles Oman, and Lloyd George did not conceal that he considered it as the legitimate Polish border. It left Polish-occupied Vilnius around 200km beyond the boundary, a distance which also separated the British image of Poland from its Polish antipode.

British opposition had greatly baffled the Poles. 'We cannot be wrong in every case', complained Paderewski to de Wiart[422]. Dmowski thought British Polono-skepticism was a result of Jewish conspiracy, and that unfriendliness of Lloyd George, whom he called 'that parochial solicitor from Wales'[423], had been inspired by 'a woman of problematic origins – Austrian Jew who tried to pose as Italian'[424]. 'They ask what is the good of having brought a child into the world if you do not endow it with the gifts usually presented by godfathers', wrote Rumbold from Warsaw. 'To this I reply that if it had not been for us there would not have been a child at all'. Rumbold nevertheless admitted that the Poles had suffered from the saying 'give a dog a bad name'[425], and suggested Lloyd George give the Poles a pat on the back to 'grease the wheels'[426]. What came from London, however, was another tutorial. The Poles, Kerr transmitted Lloyd

[420] Notes of a meeting of the heads of delegations, 1919 07 26 / Ibid, p. 315
[421] Additional Protocol to the Treaty Concluded at Versailles between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, 1919 06 28 / DBFP, S.1, Vol. 2, Appendix E to No. 32.
[422] De Wiart, *Happy odyssey*, p. 77
[423] Dmowski, *Polityka Polska*, p. 140
[424] Report on the situation in France, 1919 10 16-24 / AAN, MSZ, 19998, p. 136
[425] Rumbold to Gregory, 1920 04 10 / BOD MSS Rumbold 26, p. 193
[426] Rumbold to Kerr, 1919 12 06 / Ibid, p. 80;

George's message, should know that the premier saw the issue 'in the light of a thousand years of European history, and of the inevitable fact that Poland's neighbors<…> will ere long become strong'[427]. British experience in the Paris Peace Conference had only deepened their Polono-skepticism. 'I share your doubts as to whether the Poles will ever make anything of their country', Hardinge confessed to Rumbold, 'they never have so far, and as they always seem to be quarrelling amongst themselves I don't see why they ever should pull themselves together in the future'[428]. Hankey shared Hardinge's skepticism. 'Personally I doubt if Poland is of much value, as her people is unstable', read a note in his diary[429].

There can be little doubt that the survival of Kaunas Lithuania, and in turn the entire project of nationalist Lithuania, against a Polish *fait accompli* in the chaos of 1919 had much to do with the incessant pressure put on Warsaw by the British Polono-skeptics and with the active surveillance by British commissioners on the ground. British involvement even led some in Warsaw think that Britain had marked Lithuania as its own sphere of interest. When in October 1919 Marjan Świechowski appealed to Piłsudski to occupy Kaunas and disband the Lithuanian government, he urged to do so 'before the English took command there'[430]. Yet, as the defeat of the Russian Whites became more and more certain, it was clear that the ultimate fate of the eastern border of Poland, and that of Lithuania, would lie in settling accounts with the Soviets, whether in war or in peace.

[427] Kerr to Rumbold, 1919 12 15 / BOD MSS Rumbold 26, p. 97
[428] Hardinge to Rumbold, 1920 01 06 / BOD MSS Rumbold 26, p. 129
[429] Hankey diary entry 1919 12 29 / TCAC, HNKY 1/5
[430] Marjan Świechowski to Wasilewski, 1919 10 01 / AAN, MSZ, Wasilewski papers, 1591, p. 35

Chapter 3. Settling accounts with the Bolsheviks

3.1 Moscow's rabbits

The relation of the Baltic states to Russia was one of the great paradoxes that defined the chaos on the Baltic coast in the aftermath of the Great War. At the time when the three nationalist governments were organizing resistance against the Bolshevik westward offensive and quelling communist agitation from within, the continued reign of the Bolsheviks in Russia offered better prospects of Baltic statehood than the alternatives. Among the liberals in Russia, most were dead set even against the schemes of federation; the authoritarian White generals did not want the 'Baltic states' mentioned at all. The western ex-Allies of Russia had toed the Russian line and neither invited, nor recognized the Baltic states at the Paris Peace Conference. At the same time, the Allies still looked with disfavour towards the spread of Bolshevism. Thus while most newborn Central-Eastern European states celebrated the 'Wilsonian moment', the Baltic states could only count on making the best out of the 'Leninist moment'[431].

When it came to the propaganda discourse on 'self-determination', or, as one British diplomat called it, 'that unfortunate phrase invented by president Wilson'[432], its Bolshevik version came as an interesting alternative to its Wilsonian analogue. 'Self-determination' had long been in the vocabulary of the Russian Socialists. In 1902, Lenin included in the program of the Russian Social Democratic Party 'the acknowledgment of the right to self-determination for all nations entering into the composition of the state'. His later writings went as far as arguing for the complete

[431] For a comparison of the two, see Arno J. Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: political origins of the new diplomacy, 1917-1918* (Cleveland: World, 1964)
[432] Charles Hardinge, *Old diplomacy : the reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst* (London : J. Murray, 1947), p. 233

political secession of nations from their empires, including the Russian Empire[433]. Lenin's decree on peace after the October revolution confirmed this principle. In January 1918, Kamenev publicly uttered that 'Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and the Ukraine answered this definition perfectly; these territories were forcibly annexed and forcibly detained by Tsarist Russia'[434].

All this was, of course, demagogy, subsumed under the Bolshevik agenda of breaking tsarism, staging a world revolution, and bringing the working class to the forefront of international relations. The subject of 'self-determination' in the Bolshevik vocabulary, when it signified secession, was the proletariat of a nation; the creation of a new bourgeois state could only be supported in exceptional cases. But even for the proletariat, 'self-determination' meant the right of voluntarily choosing the right thing, that is, voluntarily joining the new Soviet state. In his negative approach to the small states, Lenin resembled western 'imperialists'. 'Class-conscious workers do not propagate secession', taught Lenin, 'they are aware of advantages of large states'. To him, large states offered better prospects for the command economy and for the revolutionary organization of labour[435]. While detesting tsarist imperialism and arguing for the oppressed nations' right to secede, the Bolshevik leadership shuddered at the mere thought of losing control of the territories of the former Russian empire.

Hence when it came to approaching 'self-determination' as secession, the Leninist and Wilsonian ideas relating to it did not differ in principle: in the absence of the consent of the rump state, it was only meant for the enemy's territory. While Wilson shared the views held by the 'bourgeois' Russian émigrés and was dead set against the independence of the Baltic states , the

[433] Albert N. Tarulis, *Soviet policy toward the Baltic states, 1918-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), p. 5-6
[434] *Izvestia*, 24 January 1918
[435] Quoted in Tarulis, p. 22

Bolsheviks had argued for their secession against both the German and the Russian empires. Chances of the Baltic statehood, then, rested on a delicate balance between Bolsheviks being too weak to engage in military expansion, also denied to them by Poland and by the Allies, and yet strong enough to stay in power in Russia. Assuming these conditions, Soviet propaganda on self-determination offered a decent discursive framework for *modus vivendi*.

The Bolsheviks had already approached the Baltic states with peace proposals in the fall of 1919, at the time when their situation on the front against the Whites had been critical[436]. By the end of January 1920, the joint Polish-Latvian offensive had pushed the Bolsheviks out of Latgalia and cut Lithuania off from Russia. The ongoing civil war, the fear of further Allied intervention and of the common anti-Bolshevik front, as well as the resistance put up by Poland and the Baltic states pushed the Bolshevik leaders to ponder the doctrine of 'peaceful coexistence'. 'Our ascendance in Lithuania cannot be based on the Red Army', argued Mickevičius-Kapsukas, the leader of the Lithuanian communists, in February 1920. 'We have to strive ourselves to ignite [Lithuania] from inside, relying on the local workers and poorest peasantry'. At the same time, however, he reported that the Vilnius governorate had been the most unfavourable of all for revolutionary work. 'There is no factory proletariat, the masses are dark, the mix of nationalities, religions and so on precludes it from conversion [to communism]'[437].

As another obstacle against sovietisation of Lithuania, Mickevičius-Kapsukas saw the ideological, as well as physical, counter-influence coming from western imperialists. Uncovering and deciphering such instances of foreign capitalist exploitation, even if this necessitated a bit of exaggeration, was regarded by the Soviets as a mark of political shrewdness and served to sustain

[436] Politburo session, 1919 09 06 / RGASPI, F17/3/25 p. 9
[437] Meeting of the communists of Lithuania and Belarus in Moscow, 1920 02 01 / RGASPI, F17/63/12, p. 8

the wholeness of the ideological narrative. 'Everything in Lithuania is under the rule of the British', complained Mickevičius-Kapsukas in a meeting of Lithuanian and Belarussian communists in Moscow. 'German occupants did that very roughly, but the English and the French, while squeezing [Lithuania] even harder, do it more delicately, proficiently and thus less visibly'[438]. Among the motives of the British, Mickevičius-Kapsukas read the desire to not allow the Poles to dominate in Lithuania, as well as the British 'grip' on Lithuanian forests, grain and flax. The bourgeois Lithuanian government, he thought, had become 'a full subordinate of English capital in Lithuania'[439].

In the first half of 1920, therefore, neither the sovietisation of Lithuania from the inside nor the export of communism on bayonets appeared to be feasible for the Bolshevik leadership. On 8 March, 1920, the Soviet Politburo confirmed Chicherin's suggestion to start negotiations of peace treaty with Lithuania. It also delayed Mickevičius-Kapsukas' return to Lithuania from Moscow, where he resided since the dissolution of LitBel (Answer: 'not yet') and asked him to tone down Bolshevik propaganda for taking power in Lithuania[440]. Peace was equally important for the Lithuanians, especially if it could be concluded before the Poles did the same. In the latter case, the Lithuanians would be the first to mark the borders which were also contested by the Poles[441]. Repeated requests for advice in the Foreign Office resulted in the confirmation that British position did not change and amounted to indirect approval. The French, who held the most tsarist bonds of all of Russia's creditors, were still counting on the victory of the Whites and were against any

[438] Ibid, p. 8
[439] Meeting of the communists of Lithuania and Belarus in Moscow, 1920 02 15 / RGASPI, F17/63/12, p. 9
[440] Politburo session, 1920 03 08 / RGASPI, F17/3/65
[441] Galvanauskas to MFA (Kaunas), 1920 02 15 / LCVA 383/7/76, p. 59

attempts of *modus vivendi* with the Soviets. British acquiescence, however, allowed the Lithuanians to ignore any French attempts at pressure.

The Lithuanian Cabinet decided to demand in Moscow the same territories whose attribution they had failed to secure from the Allies in Paris – the 'Lithuania propria' of Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwalki and Grodno governorates. As most of the Grodno governorate had been ethnically Belarussian, the Lithuanians were to ask the ideologically anti-imperialist Soviets to agree to some degree of Lithuanian imperialism. In this respect, the Cabinet spoke of the Lithuanian claim to Grodno in a vocabulary that already echoed the League of Nations regime on mandates: Lithuanians would be content with a 'protectorate' or a 'sphere of influence' over Grodno for at least 20 years, before its inhabitants could be consulted to decide their ultimate fate. Among non-territorial demands, the Lithuanians decided to press for compensation for property that had been destroyed or taken away by the evacuating Russian army in 1915, as well as for repatriation of Lithuanian citizens and for the return of evacuated property[442].

Revolutionary Moscow could only be a thrilling destination. Many MPs who had been initially invited to join the delegation declined the invitation. Social-democrat Vladas Požela argued against participation in it of Lithuanian socialists, as he thought the Bolsheviks would treat them as ideological traitors[443]. Diplomat Tomas Naruševicius, a graduate of Moscow State university and an employee in the Moscow city council before the War, took upon himself to lead the delegation. Trying to make negotiations palatable to the non-Bolshevik Russians, the Lithuanians handed to Boris Vasilchikov, a former minister of agriculture of pre-war Russia, a

[442] Klimas to Voldemaras, 1920 04 26 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 175
[443] Audrone Veilentienė, *Lietuvos respublikos seimų įtaka užsienio politikai 1920–1927 metais.* Doctoral dissertation (Vilnius university, 2010), p. 42

memorandum on how Lithuanian independence would not injure the 'vital interests' of democratic Russia and received his promise to support the matter among the Russian émigrés in Paris[444].

The Lithuanians considered the Moscow peace negotiations a solemn event in their project of state-building. For one, it would settle the accounts with the former empire. Moreover, in the words of premier Galvanauskas, a swift signature of peace with the Bolsheviks could prove to the Entente Lithuanian 'political maturity' and facilitate recognition of Lithuanian independence by the west[445]. The state-building significance of the moment had also been attested by the fact that the delegation, on its way to Moscow, was asked to arrange 120 arm chairs, 30 desks, 20 long desks, 200 simple chairs, 10 wardrobes and 10 bookshelves from Riga for the newly-elected 112-member Lithuanian constituent assembly[446].

On 5 May, a Lithuanian train of a few wagons, one of them packed with reserves of food and drinks, arrived in Moscow. The Lithuanian delegation was lodged in a hotel, majestically called 'The Manor of Dukes' (Kniazhi Dvor), loftily standing among houses with nailed-up windows that bore witness to the calamities of revolution. There, the Lithuanians were met by a Kremlin messenger, who handed them a greeting, pencilled by Lenin himself. The welcome message flattered the Lithuanians by promising the only *conditio sine qua non* on which they had insisted before the departure: 'Russia without any greedy thoughts recognizes the independence of the Lithuanian state with all ensuing juridical consequences and in good faith and forever renounces all Russian sovereign rights that it has ever had in relation to the Lithuanian nation and its territory'. This greeting, except the 'greedy thoughts' bit, was to serve as the first clause of the peace treaty. While such a declaration sharply contrasted with Lenin's decree that had recognized the short-lived

[444] Klimas to Voldemaras, 1920 04 26 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 175
[445] Cabinet session, 1920 04 23 / LCVA 923/1/86, p. 151 rev.
[446] Zaunius talk with Balutis and Naruševičius, 1920 04 29 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 195

Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic just half a year ago, this could not spoil the solemn feeling of the moment. 'It was like a shining star in the mist of those times. Unexpected, dreamed of, a fantasy of fantasies!', rejoiced delegation's secretary Klimas[447].

In May 1920, Moscow was a mixture of the pompous, wretched and macabre. Negotiations were to take place in the majestic Kharitonenko mansion which overlooked the Kremlin from the other side of the river. Built by a sugar magnate and since nationalised, the building boasted elements of baroque and sheltered rare paintings on its walls. The movement of the delegation in the city was restricted and its members enjoyed close surveillance from the *Cheka*. On Red Square, the Bolsheviks were parading makeshift units, destined for the Polish front. Among the propaganda posters, there were also some in English, welcoming the British labour delegation that had just arrived in the city. The Bolshoi Theatre was hosting performances multiple times a week and was fully booked most of the time. There was, however, no sight of bread anywhere. When a member of the Lithuanian delegation invited his old acquaintance, a druggist in Moscow, to have a bite on Lithuanian food in the hotel, the disoriented guest jumped at the canned meat with his bare hands and started stuffing it into his pockets[448].

Standards of basic diplomatic courtesy compelled both sides look for a semblance of a common ground. The Lithuanian delegation boasted about the exclusively peasant, non-bourgeois character of the Lithuanian state and emphasised that every single member of the delegation was a son of peasants. The head of the Soviet delegation, Adolph Joffe, from a bourgeois family in Crimea, praised Lithuania as one of the few states that did not declare war on Soviet Russia[449]. When it came to business, the main interest of the Soviets in talking to the Lithuanians was the

[447] Petras Klimas, *Iš mano atsiminimų* (Lietuvos enciklopedijų redakcija, 1990), p. 246
[448] *Lietuva*, 1920 07 17, p. 3
[449] *Lietuva*, 1920 07 13, p. 2

coordination of military action in the forthcoming Soviet counter-offensive. Tukhachevsky asked Chicherin to induce the Lithuanians, without disclosing Soviet operational plans, to attack Vilnius no later than 20 May. Such a move would secure the right flank of the Soviet offensive and make the Poles withdraw their significant forces from its way[450]. Tukhachevsky's request had been confirmed by the Politburo two days later[451], and Chicherin started pressing his Lithuanian guests to set the date for a coordinated offensive. The Lithuanians were assured that all the points of Soviet-Lithuanian peace, as well as formal recognition of Lithuania's independence, would depend on Lithuanian cooperation in the Soviet-Polish war[452].

The Lithuanian delegation, on the whole, was in favour of seizing the moment. Naruševičius urged Kaunas to march on Vilnius after the Red Army reached Lida. Otherwise, he predicted major difficulties in getting the Bolsheviks out of Vilnius if the latter reached the city first[453]. Trying to gauge Bolshevik military prowess and ascertain their prospects in the war, Colonel Kleščinskas talked to the officers of the Soviet high command, where he also ran into his old acquaintance, one Lebedev. Kleščinskas concluded the Bolshevik discipline to be good, the high command capable and Tukhachevsky able. 'If the Entente does not help the Poles, not only the Bolsheviks, but also the wider circles believe in victory. The war is considered patriotic', reported Naruševičius with enthusiasm and advised Kaunas to take the opportunity[454]. He also urged not to fear the Polish march on Kaunas in return for the Lithuanian complicity with the Soviets, at the time when the latter were attacking the Poles in the east[455]. 'As we see it, the

[450] Tukhachevsky to Chicherin, 1920 05 08 / RGASPI, F17/3/76, p. 3
[451] Politburo session, 1920 05 10 / RGASPI, F17/3/76
[452] Naruševičius No. 1 to Kaunas, 1920 05 08 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 172; also Naruševičius No. 3, 1920 05 13, ibid, p. 168
[453] Naruševičius No. 4 / Ibid, p. 185; Naruševičius telegram, 1920 05 20 / Ibid, p. 186
[454] Naruševičius telegram (undated) / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 208
[455] Naruševičius No. 9, 1920 05 22 / Ibid, p. 166

Bolsheviks would not be dangerous to us, if we were their rabbits', reported Klimas from Moscow[456].

While not entirely averse to the prospect of stepping into the Polish-Soviet war against the Poles in order to capture their sought-after capital, the Lithuanian government had doubts about the Bolshevik intentions. 'Explain to Chicherin <...> that we cannot promise them to attack the Poles without having a guarantee that [the Bolsheviks] would not attack us afterwards', Voldemaras instructed the delegation. Lithuanians thus would only consider joining the war after the peace treaty with Lithuania had been signed and ratified by the Soviets[457]. The Bolsheviks were to be told that the Lithuanians might as well join the Poles against the Soviets[458].

Meanwhile, in the discussions of the borders of Lithuania, the Bolsheviks were displaying impeccable preparedness. The Soviet delegation relied on language-based ethnographic statistics, collected from every known work on Lithuania, and brought an ethnographic map, prepared in St. Petersburg by a special order. Joffe shamed Lithuanian demands for the whole of Belarussian and Jewish Grodno as outright imperialism. While Rosenbaum, a Zionist in the Lithuanian delegation, passionately argued for its inclusion into Lithuania and invoked arguments ranging from the distribution of the ancient tribes, to the 'common culture as well as non-culture', Joffe scorned the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as an imperialist project, no better than the Russian Empire itself. To Rosenbaum's plea that Jews of the Grodno governorate were determined to join Lithuania, Joffe, himself Jewish, replied that there was no such thing as Jewish self-determination, since the Jews were 'not a territorial nation' anyway. In private, Joffe tried to exploit ethnic prejudices of

[456] Klimas, Second report on the negotiations with Soviet Russia, 1920 06 13 / Ibid, p. 145
[457] Voldemaras to peace delegation, No. 2, 1920 05 13 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 167
[458] Voldemaras to peace delegation, No. 3, 1920 05 15 / Ibid, p. 190

Lithuanian nationalists and urged them to stop being led by the nose by Jews and Belarussians, who weakened 'the pure national character of the Lithuanian state'[459].

Soviet insistence on ethnic, religious and economic factors in drawing the borders of Lithuania fell in line with Stalin's idea of territorial as opposed to cultural autonomy and with his definition of a nation as a 'historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'[460]. Soviet negotiators thus looked favourably to the Lithuanian possession of Vilnius as the economic centre of the country[461]. In case of the eventual sovietisation of Lithuania, the border thus negotiated with the Lithuanian nationalists, or elements of that border, could potentially serve as the limits of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Just as in case of any other clause of the treaty, however, the Bolsheviks put Lithuania's involvement in the Russian-Polish war as the basis for agreement.

In mid-May, the Soviet side stepped up its demands and put forward the project of a strategic 'Military agreement between Russia and Lithuania'. It set the modalities of 'separate and combined military action' with the view of freeing Lithuanian territory from Polish occupation. According to this agreement, Russia would guarantee protection of Lithuanian territory 'with all the might and instruments of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic', as well as enjoy free use of railways and free movement of Soviet forces inside Lithuanian territory. Both sides would desist from negotiations with Poland under any circumstances. Above all, the draft agreement included an obligation for the Lithuanian high command to fulfil the directives of its Russian

[459] Klimas, First report on the negotiations with Soviet Russia, 1920 05 26 / Ibid, P. 164
[460] Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the national question* (1913)
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm>
[461] Klimas, First report on the negotiations with Soviet Russia, 1920 05 26 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 164

counterpart[462]. The Soviets thus pressed for a fully fledged military alliance. Instructively, at about the same time, the Politburo confirmed the new 'shadow' government (Central Committee) of the Lithuanian-Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic and accorded it the status of the Regional Bureau of the Communist Party[463].

While the strategic importance of Lithuania led the Politburo to insist on keeping negotiations from breaking[464], at the end of May Voldemaras recalled the core of the delegation back to Kaunas for discussion. The government was particularly discouraged by the fact that the Soviets, despite their promise of unconditional recognition of Lithuanian independence, were now associating it with the common military action against the Poles. It was feared that siding militarily with the Bolsheviks could serve as a pretext for a Polish attack on Kaunas and 'throw [Lithuania] out of the Western orbit', leaving it at the mercy of Soviet Russia[465]. At any rate, it was not yet clear which of the warring sides was going to end up more successful in the war[466].

For the same reasons, two weeks of discussions in Kaunas between the members of government and the committee on foreign affairs of the Constituent Assembly resulted in a decision against joining the war on the Soviet side. Instead, the Lithuanians decided to offer the Soviets to push Polish forces out of Lithuania including Vilnius, at the time and by the means decided by the Lithuanians themselves, in case the Soviets agreed to include such a clause in a secret treaty[467]. At the same time, however, the Lithuanians also informed the Allies of their readiness to cooperate with the Poles, on the condition of recognition of Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital[468]. For the

[462] Military agreement between Russia and Lithuania (draft, May) / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 212
[463] Politburo session, 1920 05 25 / RGASPI, F17/3/82 p. 12
[464] Ibid
[465] Voldemaras to peace delegation, 1920 05 22 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 194
[466] Voldemaras to peace delegation (undated) / Ibid, p. 191
[467] Memorandum of the joint sitting of the foreign affairs committee and the government, 1920 06 05 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 153
[468] Reboul to the War ministry, 1920 05 27 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 14, p. 100

Kaunas government, it was clear that the ultimate fall of Poland would be followed by the sovietisation of Lithuania[469].

Both London and Paris pressed the Lithuanians against an alliance with the Soviets. For the French in particular, the prospect of Lithuanian-Soviet alliance, or even that of Lithuania's pro-Soviet neutrality, now touched upon the alpha and omega of the French foreign policy. If the Poles failed to achieve total victory, and if the Bolsheviks advanced as far as Dvinsk, pro-Soviet Lithuania would facilitate the direct transit link between Germany and Russia, 'hail the efforts of agents of Berlin' and endanger the security of the whole Europe[470]. For French diplomacy, the Vilnius conflict between Poles and Lithuanians thus suddenly became the key which could lock or unlock the dreaded Russo-German connection.

French attempts to press Warsaw to satisfy Lithuanian appetites for Vilnius and to press Kaunas to desist from cooperating with the Bolsheviks[471], however, proved to be unsuccessful. Reboul's trip to Warsaw on 5 June with the view to induce the Poles to an agreement with the Lithuanians ended without results[472]. To the annoyance of the French, Patek replied categorically that Poland would never abandon Vilnius[473]. On 4 July, at the time when the situation on the front had already turned from hopeless to potentially catastrophic for the Poles, Warsaw only went so far as to telegraph Kaunas its half-hearted decision 'to recognise the National assembly of Lithuania and the government of Lithuania as independent organizations *de facto*'[474].

[469] Reboul to the War ministry, 1920 06 02 / Ibid, p. 118
[470] Reboul to the War ministry, 1920 05 28 / Ibid, p. 114
[471] Millerand to Reboul, 1920 05 27 / ADMAE, Lituanie 14, p. 102
[472] Reboul to the War ministry, 1920 06 11 / Ibid, p. 120
[473] De Panafieu to Millerand, 1920 06 17 / Ibid, p. 122
[474] Sapieha to Purickis, 1920 07 04 / Ibid, p. 156

Having received no desired concessions from Poland, on 12 July, the Lithuanians signed the peace treaty. The radio connection between Moscow and Riga, used by the delegation for communicating with Kaunas, mysteriously stopped working in the last days of the negotiations[475]. Among the most valuable gifts that the delegation brought back to Kaunas were Soviet recognition of Lithuanian independence and of the borders (the delegation's 'minimum' demand), which included not only Vilnius, but also the northern part of the Grodno governorate with the city of Grodno (see Map 1). In the Suwalki governorate, the border recognised by the Soviets crossed into the territory of ethnographic Poland, defined by the Allies to the west of the Curzon line. The Bolsheviks even pledged to transfer to the Lithuanians three million roubles in gold. The price that the Lithuanians paid for all these 'concessions' was a secret exchange of notes, attached to the treaty, which allowed the Red Army to cross the Lithuanian border and occupy parts of its territory during the Polish-Soviet war, on the condition that Soviet forces would be withdrawn in the absence of strategic necessity[476]. Absurdly enough, the Soviet copy of the same note, signed by the Bolshevik greats Joffe and Julian Marchlewski, omitted the latter condition entirely[477]. Faced with the Soviet determination to break up the negotiations at the time of their military successes, the Lithuanians agreed[478].

In short, while the Bolsheviks failed to achieve direct Lithuanian military involvement, they succeeded in neutralising the Lithuanian forces on their right flank and secured freedom of maneuvre in the Vilnius governorate that stood on their way to Warsaw. Lithuanian balancing thus followed the fortunes on the battlefield and, given Polish uncompromising attitude regarding the

[475] Zaunius talk with Balutis, 1920 07 12 / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 13
[476] Note of the Lithuanian delegation to the Soviet delegation / LCVA 383/7/77, p. 104
[477] Note of the Soviet delegation to the Lithuanian delegation / Ibid, p. 103
[478] Purickis to Tyskiewicz, 1920 07 24 / LCVA 648/193, p. 120

Vilnius question, now leaned to the Soviet side. The Soviet-Lithuanian treaty, however, was still subject to ratification, an act which would lose its purpose if Warsaw fell.

3.2 The triumph of didactic geopolitics

The Lithuanians had concluded peace with the Bolsheviks at the time when Polish situation on the front was going from bad to catastrophic. Piercing through Ukraine as far as Kiev at the beginning of May, by June 1920 Piłsudski's armies were retreating along the entire front. In the second half of July, the Red Army was moving into ethnographic Poland 20 miles a day. For the British Polono-skeptics, Polish misfortunes had vindicated their didactic geopolitics. It was a rewarding 'we told you so' moment that once again cast upon Poland the shadows of the Enlightenment. A fourth partition of Poland was in the air.

Already in January, 1920, Lloyd George had lectured Patek against continuing the war with the Soviets, urged him to agree with the Lithuanians and warned that the Poles would receive no help in case of Soviet counter-offensive[479]. Lloyd George contemplated aiding the economic reconstruction of Russia and resuming trade, which would open up Russian raw materials and bring down inflation[480]. He also hoped that trade and reconstruction could mitigate Bolshevik radicalism. For a British Polono-skeptic, Polish *Drang nach Osten* served no purpose other than destabilising the region. Moreover, fighting the Bolsheviks had been greatly unpopular with Europe's Left, which was also incited by Soviet propaganda. At the first meeting of the Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations at the end of May 1920, Lloyd George was telling the Soviet Commissar for Foreign

[479] Curzon to Rumbold, 1920 01 27 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 3, No. 664
[480] Hoare to Horne, 1920 06 09 / PA LG F/27/5-6, p. 362

Trade Leonid Krassin in greatest detail how he had warned Patek, who had sat in the same room and on the same chair, that the British would not support the Poles in an attack on Russia[481].

For the British Polono-skeptics, the success of Soviet counter-offensive in June was less unpleasing than the Polish march on Kiev a month before. Lloyd George now scolded the Poles for 'plunging madly into conquest and adventure', which, he said, had barred the Poles from both peace and the sympathy of the Powers. To the British premier, Poland's future now seemed 'not very bright'[482]. Hankey, too, gloated over the didactic momentum. 'The Poles have played the fool and done exactly what we warned them not to do by pushing into Russia far beyond their ethnographic boundaries. Now they are getting it 'in the neck' from the Bolshevists, and they deserve it'[483]. Rumbold, whose views towards Poland were somewhat more nuanced than those of his superiors, agreed with the general framework. 'I believe that if some deus ex machina were to come forward tomorrow and solve all Poland's problems both internal and external and start the country with a clean sheet, the Poles would be so bored that they would get up a crisis in two or three months', he wrote to Hardinge[484]. One attempt at a summary of British 'public opinion' contended that there was 'not much sympathy for Poland and the Poles, which is entirely their own fault'[485].

The Polish advance on Kiev was yet another episode that challenged the foundations of the physical and normative Allied authority in the new world order. The presumption, repeated daily in the corridors of Versailles, was that the Allied sacrifice in the war had parented the new states of Central and Eastern Europe, a circumstance that must also serve to legitimise Allied authority.

[481] Hankey diary 1920 05 31 entry / TCAC, HNKY 1/5, p. 128
[482] Kerr to Rumbold, 1920 06 10 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 29
[483] Hankey diary 1920 05 23 entry / TCAC, HNKY 1/5, p. 125
[484] Rumbold to Hardinge, 1920 06 21 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 47
[485] Parody to Rumbold, 1920 07 22 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 88

'Your liberty was paid for with the blood of other peoples', Lloyd George had scolded the Poles in Paris, 'and truly, if Poland, in these circumstances, should revolt against our decisions, she would be something quite other than we had hoped'[486]. Such injunctions, however, lacked credible threats and were even contested on their own moral terms. The British were annoyed by the news that achievements of the British navy in the war were being deprecated in Poland. In response, the otherwise frugal Foreign Office organized a shipment of propaganda literature to Warsaw about the role of the British fleet and dedicated £100 for translation and printing[487].

Already in 1919, experience in dealing with Poland and with other newcomer states prompted Balfour to reflect on the reasons why most of those states had at some point disobeyed British 'explicit instructions'.

> Our small allies, one would suppose, would obey us through gratitude; the latter (enemies) through fear. But the gratitude is being rapidly worn away by our persistent efforts to prevent the nations we have saved or created from cutting each other's throats and seizing each other's territory; while the fear cannot easily survive the continued spectacle of our obvious military weakness. <...> The Conference is therefore compelled to talk when action is required. Even the threat of action is denied us; for so notorious is our impotence that we cannot afford to bluff[488].

While sending troops 'to shepherd our friends' could help, 'asking the war department of a Great Power for soldiers is like asking a mendicant for a thousand pounds'. Economic options of diplomatic persuasion, such as threatening to withhold something which would otherwise be given, could not work at the time when not much was being given, while more extreme economic sanctions, such as stopping humanitarian aid, would unjustly punish the civilian population[489]. Poland's grave misfortunes in the summer of 1920, however, returned the didactic power to the

[486] Mantoux, *Deliberations*, Vol. 2, p. 311-313
[487] Spicer to Kimens, 1919 04 23 / TNA FO, 608/57, p. 418
[488] Balfour, 'Armies and economics', 1919 07 27 / BL MS Balfour 49750, p. 20
[489] Ibid

British Polono-skeptics. The French continued refusal to talk with the Bolsheviks returned Lloyd George to the saddle of the Polish crisis.

In the beginning of July, in his desperate search for support, Patek came to the conference in Spa to see the two Allied premiers. While Millerand hardly said anything, Lloyd George took his time to lecture Patek extensively about the distinction of 'true nationalism' and imperialism, and scolded the Poles for quarrelling with Lithuanians, Czechs and for trying to annex Ukrainians and Germans[490]. The day after meeting Patek, Lloyd George approached the French and confronted them with the question on how much exactly the Allies could 'loyally stick by Poland'. He theatrically reminded Millerand that letting Poland be trampled out of existence by the Bolsheviks would eternally dishonour the Allies, who undertook to defend the independence of Poland in the Peace Treaty. To the surprise of the French, Lloyd George also hinted that despite post-war exhaustion of Britain, 'if the English Nation's sense of fair-play were roused', it could be possible for Britain to send soldiers. To Rumbold, it seemed that the French could at least spare some colonial troops[491]. 'No! No men!', replied Marshal Foch with great emphasis. Millerand concurred with his general and only shrugged his shoulders in response as to what he proposed to do[492]. The sudden magnanimity of the British arch-Polono-skeptic and his offer to sacrifice British lives in redeeming Polish follies could only be construed as a clever trap for the French. The latter did not hesitate to take the bait and said what the British wanted them to say as soon as the question of French troops had been mentioned[493].

[490] Notes of a Meeting at Spa, 1920 07 06 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 8, No. 46
[491] Rumbold to Leeper, 1920 07 09 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 55
[492] Lloyd George notes of conversation with Foch, 1920 07 08 / PA LG/F/201/1/8
[493] This is also the interpretation in Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet war, 1919-1920 and 'the miracle on the Vistula'* (London: Pimlico, 2003)

On the next day, Spa saw the arrival of the new Endek Polish premier Władysław Grabski. To flatter Lloyd George, Grabski pleaded guilty for disregarding Allied advice and himself denounced Piłsudskiites as senseless dreamers. Grabski now asked for Allied intervention in initiating the Soviet-Polish peace negotiations and for material support in case the Bolsheviks refused a fair peace offer and marched deeper into Poland. To Lloyd George, this appeared as the moment to force upon Poland his didactic geopolitics. After scolding Poland for quarrelling with all its neighbours, Lloyd George made it clear that Allied help would be conditional upon Poland abandoning its 'imperialist and annexationist' policy, on its settlement within the minimal ethnographic frontiers, and upon making a fair settlement with its neighbours, including Lithuania[494].

Lloyd George taught Grabski that inability to come to terms with the Lithuanians was 'the whole trouble throughout the recent history of Poland' and pressed him to hand over Vilnius to Lithuania. Pointing to the 'Curzon line' on the map, Lloyd George contended that Vilnius was far beyond the legitimate frontiers of Poland. Even though the share of the Polish population in the town might be significant, he said, the surrounding region was in no way Polish. There was also a motive of strategy. Since Lloyd George was informed of the willingness of the Soviets to grant Vilnius to the Lithuanians in their peace negotiations, he thought that Lithuanian possession of the city had a chance of saving it from Bolshevisation. In Lloyd George's last analysis, the Vilnius question was a question between Lithuania and Russia, and 'not a Polish question at all'[495]. The French agreed, albeit for their own reasons: appeasement of Lithuania was seen in Paris as crucial in avoiding the formation of a bridge between Russia and Germany[496].

[494] Notes of a meeting in Spa, 1920 07 09 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 8, No. 55
[495] Notes of a meeting in Spa, 1920 07 10 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 8, No. 59
[496] Millerand circular, 1920 08 01 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 14, p. 166

Even when pressed by the prospect of the downfall of Poland, Grabski did not yield to Lloyd George's pressure and refused to renounce Vilnius. It took Curzon to step in and propose a compromise, whereby the Lithuanians should be allowed to occupy and defend Vilnius, but the final solution would be reached later by the Allied Powers. Otherwise, the fate of Vilnius would be inevitably settled solely between Lithuania and Soviet Russia[497].

Allied promises of help did not sound reassuring. While Rumbold fantasised about 'blotting out Moscow' with the 'biggest bombs' in helping Poland[498], Lloyd George and Millerand only promised to help in negotiations and to 'maybe spare' some military material, officers and possibly airplanes or pilots, explicitly excluding the possibility of sending troops. Neither the prospect of destruction of Poland, nor Bolsheviks reaching the German border as its inevitable outcome worried the Allies so much as to justify their direct military involvement, which also carried significant political costs at home. When it came to the defence of Poland, the British and the French turned out to be equally Polono-skeptic. Due to the increasingly critical situation on the front, however, even lukewarm allied promises were enough for Grabski. On 10 July, he signed the agreement which committed Poland, inter alia, to withdrawing to the Curzon line, immediately handing over Vilnius to the Lithuanians, and to accepting the decision of the Supreme Council as to the Lithuanian boundaries.

On 11 July, in fulfilment of their part of the bargain, the British transmitted the gist of Grabski's agreement to Moscow and pressed for an armistice. The note also suggested a conference in London where Poland, Soviet Russia and other border states would fix their boundaries. In case the Red Army moved beyond the Curzon line, the British threatened the Bolsheviks with assistance

[497] Notes of a meeting in Spa, 1920 07 10 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 8, No. 59
[498] Rumbold to wife, 1920 07 18 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 84

to Poland by 'all the means at their disposal'. As the tone of the note already disclosed that the British did not mean troops, the only real lever that Lloyd George had against Soviet Russia was the prospect of breaking the ongoing Anglo-Soviet trade talks[499].

At the same time, Lloyd George initiated the despatch to Warsaw of the emergency Anglo-French mission. Just as in the case of the first Allied mission to Poland conceived by the British premier in the beginning of 1919, the current mission's purpose was likewise didactic. The Poles were to be talked into approaching the Bolsheviks for an armistice, and helped with military advice if the Bolsheviks refused to settle for the minimal ethnographic Poland. For the British part of the mission, Lloyd George chose D'Abernon, Major General Percy Radcliffe and Hankey, who was as notorious a Polono-skeptic as the premier himself. While eager to take up the relatively unassuming didactic role in Warsaw, Lloyd George left the military side to the French and suggested the candidacy of Foch to lead the defense of Poland. Paris, however, did not want to risk the prestige of France in the woes of its eastern ally and instead sent General Maxime Weygand, Foch's chief of staff[500].

Upon arrival in Warsaw on 25 July, the mission first pondered supplying the Poles on the cheap. The idea was to ask the Germans to arm the Poles with weapons which they were submitting for destruction in conformity with the treaty of Versailles. However, as this idea inevitably involved making concessions to Germany, the matter was dropped[501]. Instead, the cargo of arms had been shipped to Danzig, but the dockers refused to unload the steamship in their support of the Bolsheviks. Ultimately, it took a British battalion to carry out the task.

[499] Communication from British to Soviet government, 1920 07 11 / PA LG F/201/1/9
[500] Anthony Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand, 1867-1965* (Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 48
[501] D'Abernon diary, 1920 07 26 / BL MS 48953, p. 6

For the British members of the mission, their experience in Warsaw served to prove their Polono-skeptic dispositions. While the Polish government listened to the Allied advice and sued for an armistice, Piłsudski turned out to be intractable. He refused to take Weygand into his confidence, let alone put him in charge, and hesitated to make use of 600 French officers already present in Poland. While the Bolsheviks were marching on Warsaw, Sapieha still hoped that they could give Poland 'a free hand' in Lithuania in exchange for a free hand in Ukraine[502]. For Radcliffe, who now scorned Polish intrigue and factionalism, 'It needed but a short stay in Poland to understand how it was that she went under in the old days'[503]. D'Abernon deplored Poland's 'rash military adventure and her disgraceful defeat', which he thought was aided by Piłsudski's vanity and incompetence[504].

The French, on their part, suspected Piłsudski, the peasant premier Witos, and socialist Daszyński to be semi-Bolshevik themselves and even feared that they might set up a Soviet in Warsaw on their own[505]. To Hankey, it did not matter much even if the Polish government turned Bolshevik. 'Provided we can get an independent Poland, not subject entirely either to German or Russian influences, it is no business of ours what sort of an internal government it has', he wrote to Lloyd George. According to Hankey's logic, the chronic instability of Poland would mean that any government, including one hostile to the Allies, would not last for long anyway[506]. At the same time, shared beliefs about the innate factionalism of Poland excluded the option of Piłsudski's resignation. The British, the French, as well as the Polish government assumed that it was

[502] Hankey to Lloyd George, 1920 07 28 / TNA CAB 1/29, p. 114
[503] Radcliffe, Report on the Franco-British mission to Poland, July-August, 1920 / BOD MSS Rumbold 27, p. 137
[504] D'Abernon diary, 1920 07 26 / BL MS 48953, p. 6
[505] Hankey to Lloyd George, 1920 07 26 / TNA CAB 1/29, P. 136
[506] Hankey to Lloyd George, 1920 07 23 / Ibid, P. 190

impossible to replace the Chief of State without the country succumbing to factionalism and civil war[507].

Unimpressed by Allied bluffing, the Bolsheviks refused a London conference, insisted on bilateral talks with the Poles, then refused their armistice proposals and marched further. On 8 August, a week before the battle of Warsaw, Kamenev finally transmitted to London the Soviet armistice conditions. In essence, they amounted to Poland's capitulation, leaving it at the Soviets' mercy. The Bolshevik proposal, while accepting the Curzon line as the boundary of Poland, required, inter alia, to limit the Polish army to 50,000 men, demobilise it within a month, and asked for 'arming of the workers to be under the control of representatives of the Trades Unions of Russia, Poland and Norway'[508]. While the proposal was not taken seriously in Warsaw, it was good enough for Lloyd George, who now urged its acceptance. Pursuing his didactic geopolitics towards Poland, the British premier now stood close to acquiescing to its fall, which appeared to him to be just as self-inflicted as the demise of Poland of the past.

3.3 Return of the capital

The progress of the Soviet counter-offensive emboldened the Lithuanians, who now were ready to take control of the borders that Moscow had recognized. Due to French and British pressure, the Lithuanians hesitated to attack Polish positions and sought an agreement with the Polish high command for the cession of Vilnius. Piłsudski only agreed to act upon Grabski's agreement to cede Vilnius to the Lithuanians on 13 July, when the Red Army was a dozen

[507] Hankey to Lloyd George, 1920 06 26 / Ibid, P. 166
[508] Draft conditions of armistice between Russia and Poland, 1920 08 08 / PA LG F/201/1/10

kilometres from the city. On their way to the city the next day, Lithuanian units were engaged by Polish forces, which still lacked instructions[509]. When the first Lithuanian detachments reached Vilnius on 15 July, it had already been occupied by the Red Army. The next day, RKP(b) Central Committee proclaimed that Soviet Russia must help the Polish and Lithuanian proletariat free themselves from their capitalists[510]. At the end of July, Trotsky and Tukhachevsky prepared the plan for the ultimate occupation of Lithuania, using around 15,000 Red Army troops[511].

On 16 July, Kaunas welcomed the return from Moscow of the peace delegation and celebrated the 'return of Vilnius'. 'The Poles did not endure the blow that the Russian threw at them!', orated priest Mykolas Krupavičius, the leader of the Christian-Democrats of the constituent assembly, 'nobody knows now, where they are going to end up – in Grodno, or in Warsaw!' (crowd laughing). 'We will not mock the trampled snake, we will only throw it out of our land', he continued. Kaunas rabbi Shapiro in his speech blamed the Poles for killing Jews and praised the unification of Lithuanian Jewry[512]. After a short and formal 'Vive la France' in front of the French military mission, the mixed crowd engulfed the residence of the British. An orchestra played 'God save the king' amidst the shouts 'Hurray England!'. The return of Vilnius, it seemed, would add the missing link in the Lithuanian cultural struggle. In his solemn address to Colonel Ward-'Rasputin', priest Juozas Tumas thanked the British for 'vetoing' the designs of Lithuanian enemies and pledged Lithuania's readiness to join the ranks of 'cultured states'. It took 25 years for the Japanese to become cultured, orated Tumas, but the Lithuanians were going to reach that goal much

[509] Lesčius, p. 290
[510] *Польско-Советская война 1919–1920. Ранее неопубликованные документы и материалы*, Т.1, (Москва, 1994), p. 142.
[511] Zenonas Butkus, 'Pirmasis sovietų pasiuntinys Lietuvoje A. Akselrodas: diplomatinės veiklos pusmetis', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 1996, p. 123
[512] *Lietuva*, 1920 07 18, p. 2

faster. Moved by the manifestation, Ward congratulated the 'return' of Vilnius and hailed the start of intensive cultural and economic development of Lithuania, a speech that got him crowd-surfed on his chair[513].

Meanwhile, Bolshevik-occupied Vilnius was undergoing a regime change. Mass arrests were going on during the nights, complemented by searches, confiscations of private property and outright pillaging. The Bolsheviks occupied the premises of Vilnius university and started interfering with the schools of the city. A special unit started announcing the names of those executed[514]. Among the sentenced to death by the revolutionary tribunal was Count Stanislaw Tyskiewicz, whom the Bolsheviks offered to release in exchange for a locomotive and a few wagons[515]. The last pro-Lithuanian newspaper, *Echo Litwy*, had been closed and its editor arrested. Requisitions were chaotic, unpaid, and often undocumented. Nationalisation of industry had been announced. Mickevičius-Kapsukas came to Vilnius and the revolutionary committee (Revkom) started pondering the change to the peace treaty, pronouncing in favour of connecting Lithuania to Soviet Russia[516]. A month into the Soviet occupation, the Bolshevik manifestation was already shouting 'Down with Lithuanian kulaks' in front of the symbolic Lithuanian military outpost.

Alarmed by the situation in Vilnius, the Lithuanians tried to get hold of the Bolshevik emissaries in Riga. 'Lithuania will be very sad if Russia holds Vilnius for long, especially if it starts to create there its government', Zaunius complained to Joffe[517]. As repressions in Vilnius were getting worse, Kaunas stepped up the language and impressed upon the Soviets that Lithuanians

[513] *Lietuva*, 1920 07 20, p. 2-3
[514] Ivanauskas to minister of interior, 1920 08 17 / LCVA 383/7/76, p. 126; Joffe to Chicherin, 1920 07 27, AVPRF 151/3/2/6, p. 9
[515] Šumskis to the commander in chief, No. 5, 1920 07 29 / LCVA 383/7/76, p. 89
[516] Šumskis to the commander in chief, No. 6, 1920 07 29 / Ibid, p. 87
[517] Chicherin to Purickis, 1920 07 21, AVPRF 151/3/2/1, p. 32

had an 'army, weapons and allies', which they could be forced to turn against them. 'Emphasise to the Russians, that we all had strictly oriented to their side, but such their behaviour had evoked the greatest rage in our entire nation and we cannot afford to wait until the reds come to us to Kaunas', wrote Purickis to Naruševičius[518]. 'Even the weakest animal makes noise, screams, declares ultimatums, if it feels that its life had been threatened', Purickis tried to pump up his envoy against the Soviets[519]. At the same time, the government announced mobilisation[520].

In response, the Bolsheviks tried to downplay Lithuanian apprehensions. 'I emphasise again – our occupation is temporary and Soviet Russia is not a threat in any way to Lithuanian independence and national self determination of the Lithuanian working nation', Chicherin tried to soothe the Lithuanians[521]. The last two words of Chicherin's reassurance, however, could not but spoil its intended effect, and soon a delegation of three Lithuanians were begging Bolshevik emissary in Riga Yakov Ganetsky. Soviet occupation of Lithuanian capital, argued the Lithuanians, was also harming Lithuania's international prestige, while Vilnius was not important strategically for the Soviet offensive anymore. Ganetsky was playing along. 'Here you are affected by the psychological moment <...> It is still unsafe in the streets of Vilnius, the Poles are still harassing'[522].

While displaying little if any restraint in Vilnius, the Bolsheviks nevertheless did not rush with their sovietisation plans of the rest of the country and waited for the fall of Poland. Joffe advised Chicherin to act 'very carefully' in Lithuania[523]. The Bolsheviks, at least their moderate

[518] Purickis to Naruševičius, 1920 08 05 / LCVA 383/7/76, p. 39
[519] Purickis to Naruševičius, 1920 08 05, / Ibid, p. 108
[520] Česlovas Laurinavičius, *Lietuvos-Sovietų Rusijos Taikos sutartis : 1920 m. liepos 12 d. sutarties problema* (Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1992), p. 153
[521] Chicherin to Purickis, 1920 07 21 / AVPRF 151/3/2/1, p. 32
[522] Ganecky (Riga) to Chicherin, 1920 07 24 / AVPRF 151/3/2/6, p. 3
[523] Conversation of Joffe with Zaunius, Riga, 1920 07 18 / AVPRF 151/3/2/6, p. 1

diplomatic wing under Chicherin, still feared Allied intervention and were anxious about the repercussions of the untimely invasion of Lithuania for their international prestige.

> I personally do not think that the Entente could do much against us. But organisation of some sort of army of modern condottieres and its dispatch under the guise of village workers or something of that kind I still consider possible. We should not, I think, lose our heads in the good circumstances, as well as in the bad and one should not go over the top (Rus. *зарываться*). In these circumstances, the Lithuanian question assumes serious importance. In case of our conflict with Lithuania and due to the popularity of the latter among even the circles of the proletariat in Europe, [the Entente] can harm us more in the guise of helping Lithuania, than without that, all the more so as the main circumstance, which does not allow the Entente to harm us, is the opposition of the working masses[524].

The unexpected Polish victory in the battle of Warsaw in mid-August saved both Poland and Lithuania from sovietisation. To D'Abernon, who had hitherto prophesised Poland's defeat, it now seemed the eighteenth decisive battle in world history. Rumbold, who had described the war as the contest for which of the two armies was more rotten[525], now equated the outcome to Sobieski's saving of Vienna against the Turks[526]. Upon return to Paris, Weygand was welcomed by a large spontaneous crowd. The British mission returned to London largely unnoticed, while Hankey had stayed in Warsaw for only a few days. 'Here [in Britain] one does not understand in the least how [the Polish victory] came about and with the experience of the past, one does not like to be too sanguine', wrote Newton to Rumbold[527]. For the circle of British Polono-skeptics, there was not much to remember and at least something to forget.

The Polish victory and the commencement of their counter-offensive on 18 August ensured Soviet observance of the schedule of evacuation of Vilnius, signed with the Lithuanians in the beginning of the month. Witnessing the turn of the tide and seeking faster Bolshevik departure

[524] Joffe to Chicherin, 1920 08 05 / RGASPI, 5/1/2001, p. 2
[525] BOD MS Rumbold 27, p. 122
[526] Rumbold to Arbuthnot, 1920 09 01 / BOD MS Rumbold 27, P. 153
[527] Newton to Rumbold, 1920 08 28 / Ibid, p. 135

from the rest of Lithuanian territories, the Lithuanians started harassing the withdrawing Soviet troops themselves. Quoting Lithuanian attacks on the Red Army troops, Chicherin threatened Kaunas with 'the most unpleasant consequences'[528]. Being chased by Lithuanian peasants, it seemed, touched upon Bolshevik great power ambitions. 'The Lithuanians should have been persuaded by now that our military power did not diminish at all and that we can seriously threaten them', scolded Chicherin, '<..> so let them not behave towards us as towards a power worth neglect'[529]. Having no instructions for engagement with Lithuanian forces, the Red Army was avoiding collision and retreating. Axelrod, the newly appointed Soviet diplomatic representative in Lithuania, was furious. 'In connection to our misfortunes on the front, the Lithuanians turned up their noses. It is necessary to wipe them'[530].

After taking everything they could carry from the city, including church bells and ancient archives, the Bolsheviks evacuated Lithuania on 26-27 August. It seemed thus as if the Lithuanians emerged from the Russo-Polish War in a nearly perfect position. Not only did they enjoy Soviet recognition of a very favourable border, but they also dodged, by the virtue of Polish victory, sovietisation as its assumed price. The task that remained was to find a way to retain their possessions past the happy hour of Bolshevik evacuation against the approaching Polish counter-offensive. As a consequence, the Lithuanians now plunged into occupying the territories that the Soviets had 'given' them in the Moscow treaty.

The first Lithuanian units entered Vilnius on 26 August and the government started arranging relocation of its apparatus to the capital. Taking over the multi-lingual Vilnius proved to be a challenge. For the needs of the city, the cabinet allocated one million ostmarks. Due to the

[528] Gukovsky to Purickis, 1920 08 27 / AVPRF 0151/3/2/1, p. 43
[529] Chicherin to Axelrod, 1920 09 14 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 33
[530] Axelrod to Chicherin, 1920 09 02 / AVPRF 0151/5/3/9, p. 19

shortage of Lithuanian speakers, the government desisted from the 'lithuanisation' of the courts in the Vilnius governorate and left the working language Polish or Russian[531]. In dealing with the Vilnius poor, said to comprise one third of the city's population, the cabinet agreed to foster public employment, deport jobless non-Lithuanian citizens to their country of origin, while others were to be directed to the countryside to work for peasants[532].

The reaction of Vilnius inhabitants to the Lithuanian entry had been mixed. Nationalist Poles lampooned the rustic Lithuanian administration and did not consider it permanent or serious. The federalists were more positive and looked forward to the opening of the Vilnius assembly. Polish speakers were annoyed by the influx of Lithuanian speakers in the administration, which often necessitated resorting to the Russian language for communication[533]. The Jews, on the whole, hesitated to show open support to any of the nationalisms.

On the battlefield, the Lithuanian plan to capture and hold the long line of Grabowo-Augustów-Lipsk-Grodno-Skidel was ruined by the Polish counter-offensive. On 28 August, Polish forces pushed the Lithuanians out of Augustów and took Suwalki and Seiny three days later. Faced with the choice between entrenching roughly along the Curzon line, advocated by Colonel Žukas, or attempting to recapture the broader Moscow treaty limits, favoured by Colonel Ladyga, the government chose the latter. 'After we fire a few shots, Polish chickens will disperse', argued Ladyga. While the Lithuanians amassed forces and retook Seiny on 2 September, their ill-prepared offensive on Augustów and Suwalki was repelled, which eventually led to the Polish recapture of Seiny on 9 September[534].

[531] Cabinet session, 1920 08 27 / LCVA 923/1/86, p. 271
[532] Cabinet session, 1920 09 01 / Ibid, p. 275; Ibid, 1920 09 06, p. 278
[533] Lossowski, p. 158
[534] Lesčius, p. 306

The resumption of skirmishes between Lithuanians and Poles seriously disquieted Paris and London, who did not show much trust in the Poles and feared another Soviet counter-offensive. The near destruction of Poland led the French to espouse Lloyd George's idea of a minimal ethnographic frontier in the east and to press the Poles to not go further than the Curzon line. There was no more talk about 'forte, très forte', when it came to Polish boundaries in the east. Millerand now went as far as to quote to the Poles the position of Kerensky's government as the basis for the extent of Poland.

> The government of Poland should not forget that currently the only base allowing to fix the Polish borders without risking grave difficulties with Russia is the declaration of the provisional Russian government which recognized in March 1917 Poland in 'territories inhabited majorly by Poles'. It is on this basis that the Peace conference established the eastern frontier of Poland.

For Millerand, Grabski's agreement still stood. He now overtly washed his hands in case the Poles overstepped the Curzon line. Polish peace terms to the Bolsheviks, Millerand now spoke in Lloyd George's vocabulary, should leave Russia no lasting resentment and allow for them to be 'ratified' by public opinion in France, Britain and the U.S.[535]. Instructively, Paléologue boasted to D'Abernon about him telling the Poles that France was not going to sacrifice the alliance with Britain for Polish frontiers[536]. Being in agreement as to the eastern limits of Poland, both Paris and London now pressed the Poles to leave Vilnius to the Lithuanians[537]. Seeking to avoid the risk of cooling Poland's *amour-propre*, Millerand nevertheless instructed French representatives in Kaunas and Warsaw to leave the initiative to the British[538].

[535] Millerand circular, 1920 08 22 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 14, P. 169
[536] D'Abernon diary, 1920 09 01 / BL MS 48953, p. 32
[537] Millerand circular, 1920 08 26 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 14, p. 178
[538] Millerand to Warsaw and Kaunas, 1920 08 27 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 14, p. 181

3.4 The ultimate *fait accompli*

By the end of September, the Bolsheviks were retreating along the entire front and the Polish forces had crossed the Curzon line. Definite successes of the Polish counter-offensive marked a new stage in the Polish-Soviet negotiations. If during the talks in Minsk in mid-August the Soviets had lodged the Polish delegation in a vermin-infested manor and talked in the language of categorical demands, the negotiations in Riga in the second half of September offered prospects for a real peace. By now, the Poles had renounced the ambitious plan to restore the borders of 1772. At the same time, however, there was a consensus in Warsaw that Poland should extend further than the Curzon line, that Vilnius should be restored back to Poland's orbit, and that the Lithuanian-Soviet peace treaty, concluded at the time of Poland's misfortunes, ought to be ignored[539]. The main interest of the Soviets, on the other hand, was to prevent the resurrection of Piłsudski's federalist ambitions and to achieve Polish recognition of Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, as well as of the independence of 'bourgeois' Lithuania within its Moscow treaty borders[540]. Both sides were exhausted and desired to avoid a winter war.

On 5 October, a compromise in principle was reached, whereby the Poles would receive a border far to the east of the Curzon line, in return for their renouncement of Belarus and Ukraine. As for Lithuania, the Bolsheviks conceded a corridor, proposed by Grabski, which linked Poland with Latvia and cut off Lithuania from Russia. Lithuania with Vilnius in its Moscow treaty borders thus ended up in a pocket, surrounded by the new Polish acquisitions (see Map 1). Moreover, the Polish side had extracted from the Bolsheviks a clause of désintéressement,

[539] Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish peace of 1921 and the creation of interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 108-110
[540] Borzęcki, p. 118

according to which the Polish-Lithuanian dispute was to be settled exclusively between Poland and Lithuania. Although the Soviets detested the corridor as the French idea of separating Russia from Germany and as the Polish idea of 'devouring' Lithuania, this was not the point on which they were prepared to break the negotiations. Joffe agreed to the corridor, after securing Polish promise to allow commercial transit[541].

As a result, the Lithuanian 'rabbits', who had advised Joffe on ethnographic literature in his battle against the Polish claims in Riga negotiations, were duped by their quasi allies. No less ironically, while Grabski's agreement before the Allies in Spa in July toed the Curzon line, the Grabski corridor, extracted from the Soviets in September, pushed the border hundreds of kilometres eastward. What remained in keeping the Poles from marching on to Vilnius, then, were weak Lithuanian forces that had been scattered in skirmishes in the south, and the pressure coming from Paris and London.

The British started receiving reports on the likelihood of a Polish move on Vilnius already at the end of September and took the initiative to forestall the operation. London pressed Warsaw for assurances that it was going to stick to Grabski's agreement. For Curzon, it was clear that the Bolsheviks had designed their peace treaties in such a way as to embroil Lithuania with Poland. He warned Warsaw that if the Poles moved on Vilnius and provoked another Soviet counter-offensive, they should not count on the help of 'Poland's friends'[542]. In Warsaw, however, help from 'Poland's friends' had already been somewhat of a touchy subject, which could only get a comical spin when argued by the British Polono-skeptics. For the Poles, the help inflicted on them by one of these friends during the July-August crisis rendered Grabski's agreement a *lettre morte*.

[541] Ibid, p. 136-137
[542] Curzon to Rumbold, 1920 09 29 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 544

The British were persistent nonetheless and mounted a great deal of pressure. On 26 September, Colonel Ward-'Rasputin', pumped up by the Lithuanian extreme anxiety, took an emergence flight from Kaunas to Warsaw in a two-seater aircraft. In Warsaw, in the presence of Rumbold, he obtained assurances from Sapieha and from the Polish chief of general staff Rozwadowski that the Poles would not march on Vilnius. Sapieha, nevertheless, voiced his opposition to the transfer of the dispute to the League of Nations, while Rozwadowski threatened to crush Lithuania with five divisions if the Lithuanians assisted the Bolsheviks or persecuted the Poles[543].

When on 2 October Rumbold received intelligence that the Poles intended to take Vilnius within 48 hours, he informed Sapieha that the military might be planning an operation behind his back, and that the adventure would have 'a most damaging effect on position of Polish government and would alienate sympathies of Allies who would lose confidence in wisdom and moderation of that government'[544]. To back up words with actions, Curzon sounded the French with the idea to withdraw the two Allied Ministers from Warsaw, replacing them with chargés d'affaires[545].

Paris was not *au courant* about Piłsudski's plans on Vilnius. It seemed to be another complication on the Polish-Soviet front which would also weaken Poland by reducing the prospects of the Lithuanian-Polish union and by increasing the German and Bolshevik intrigue in Lithuania. In the preceding Suwalki negotiations, the Poles had agreed on the armistice in front of representatives of the League, and infringement of this armistice could weaken its authority. For the French foreign minister Leygues, however, the sanction proposed by the British seemed too extreme. In his reply to Curzon, Leygues made no reference to it and instead suggested a joint

[543] Ward to Curzon, 1920 10 12 / TNA FO 371/5374, p. 14
[544] Rumbold to Curzon, 1920 10 02 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 551
[545] Curzon to Derby, 1920 10 05 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 554

protest note to Piłsudski that urged the Poles to leave the Lithuanians 'their capital' and 'make them understand the danger of politics that will fully alienate the Russians and oppress the Lithuanians'.

While Curzon was annoyed by the French moderation, the urgency of the situation left no time for any negotiations on the question. Consequently, late in the evening of 9 October, referring to Milosz's report that the Poles were 15 km from Vilnius and continued to advance, Leygues telegraphed Panafieu to act with his British colleague in Warsaw and make a demarche to Piłsudski as soon as possible[546]. By that time, Vilnius had already been taken.

On 8 October, when the advancing Poles were at a distance of 25km from Vilnius, the evacuating Lithuanians had transferred their authority to the Allied military representatives and appointed Reboul as the military governor of the city. British and French officers' excursion to meet the advancing Polish forces resulted in their detainment in Voranava, where they were kept in custody until the end of the operation[547]. Żeligowski's troops had entered the city at 5 o'clock on the same day, in a *fait accompli* that had been couched as Żeligowski's mutiny. The city was taken with minimal resistance, as the bulk of Lithuanian forces had been cut off by the Poles in the south.

Official Warsaw disclaimed the action and embarrassed Sapieha, who did not know about Piłsudski's plan. The British were outraged. The Poles did not listen once again and breached the agreement signed in the presence of Lloyd George. Curzon wrote to Derby that the Poles were guilty of a 'gross breach of faith' and that it was 'impossible for the Allied Governments to tolerate the affront thus offered them, which if condoned can only lead to further Polish oppression'.

[546] Leygues circular, 1920 10 09 / ADMAE, Pologne 71, p. 164
[547] Pargiter report, 1920 10 10 / TNA FO 371/5374, p. 46

Curzon once again asked the French to withdraw their minister from Warsaw, as Rumbold had already been on leave since 5 October[548]. In the meantime, Gregory at the Foreign Office reduced the Polish chargé d'affaires to tears and threatened that the Poles would have to bear the consequences. At the very least, Vilnius had to be evacuated at once, and the responsible general court-martialled[549].

While Ward-'Rasputin' from the British military mission in Lithuania exceeded his competence and impulsively threatened Żeligowski with a British blockade of Danzig, the French consul in Lithuania, Caumeau, praised Żeligowski's capture of Vilnius for cutting Lithuania off from Russia. Having quarrelled with the Lithuanian authorities over the Vilnius flat, which had been ultimately passed to the Lithuanian defense minister[550], he was glad to finally find himself in sympathetic circles. While all other Allied representatives left for Kaunas, Caumeau came into contact with Żeligowski and remained. In his dispatch to the Quai d'Orsay, Caumeau blamed the Lithuanians for cooperating with Bolsheviks and Germans and expressed his repulsion for the whole Lithuanian project of statehood. To him, Lithuania was a country 'without public opinion, where the ideas do not travel further than villages dispersed between the forests'[551]. Caumeau thought the possession of Vilnius to be a 'civilisational question', in which he had no particular sympathy with the Lithuanian 'cultural struggle'. 'Lithuanising this country was a pity. A Lithuanian university in Vilnius - what an absurdity. And the historical right? Since the fifteenth century Vilnius had been Polish, and world culture would gain nothing in favouring the extension

[548] DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 564
[549] Ibid, No. 566
[550] Caumeau to Millerand, 1920 09 30 / ADMAE, SDN 248, p. 108
[551] Caumeau to Leygues, 1920 10 11 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 16, p. 90

of the domain of this rustic language used by two million Lithuanian peasants'[552]. Gabriel Padovani, the new French representative in Kaunas, was somewhat more sympathetic.

> The Poles should not have tried to recapture Vilnius. It was in order; it was excellent. Certainly the Lithuanian government was not perfect and it was never worse than in this ministry. Nevertheless, elections to parliament that would have taken place in the recovered territories would have brought a majority for the Poles, and this would have changed the attitude of the government and the destiny of Lithuania. Now, everything has to be started from scratch. If Żeligowski disperses the Lithuanian army and leads the performance, there would be no complications and the Lithuanian operette would be liquidated, probably in our best interests[553].

Sartiges, the former French representative in Kaunas, suggested compensating the Lithuanians with the ethnically Lithuanian towns of Seiny and Punsk. 'That would be a form of consolation to Lithuania', wrote Sartiges to the Quai d'Orsay, 'very thin, but better than nothing'[554].

Meanwhile, Panafieu in Warsaw resisted Paris's orders and argued back against the badly belated Anglo-French démarche to Piłsudski. The clauses of the Polish-Soviet preliminaries, Panafieu felt, were not sufficiently understood in Paris. He lectured Paris that the Polish-Soviet accord undermined the Lithuanian-Soviet peace treaty, as Vilnius was left in the pocket cutting it from Russia by the Polish corridor, and as the Soviets were made to declare the Lithuanian dispute as a matter to be settled exclusively between Lithuania and Poland. Panafieu also suspected the demarche to be a British trap for France. 'I have to remark that all the Polish parties, including the socialists, are very favourable towards France, but not to Britain, whose influence was reduced to nothing since the events of July and August. The British government cannot miss the advantages to associate itself with France in a demarche the failure of which is certain and that is of a nature

[552] Caumeau to Leygues, 1920 10 12 / Ibid, p. 216
[553] Padovani to Leygues, 1920 10 17 / Ibid, p. 212
[554] Sartiges to Leygues, 1920 10 18 / Ibid, p. 217

to diminish French authority'[555]. Leygues, however, was not impressed and ordered Panafieu to make the demarche[556].

On 12 October, the drama of the Franco-British demarche to Piłsudski had finally reached its culmination. During an official reception at the Belvedere in the morning of that day, Piłsudski, with a little tongue-in-cheek, explained to Panafieu that it would require sending three or four divisions to Vilnius to bring Żeligowski's troops back, but that he was not sure about the attitude of the soldiers. In the evening, the French minister and British chargé d'affaires Percy Lorraine read the joint note in front of Piłsudski, appealing to his wisdom and asking to leave the Lithuanians 'their capital'. After carefully listening to the lecture, Piłsudski responded with a monologue that continued for almost one hour and, according to Panafieu, the Chief of State had never seemed so profoundly sincere and emotional[557].

Piłsudski masterfully played his part. He praised himself for 'refusing to go to Vilnius', a temperance in which 'no one except him would have succeeded'. He also threatened to resign and go to Vilnius as a 'simple citizen'. Consequently, in an extraordinary display of Franco-British solidarity, the two representatives sat down the same evening and drafted a joint telegram to their own governments, asking to release the pressure on Poland.

Their arguments showed that Piłsudski had outplayed them in the confines of their own didactic tradition. Expressing no doubt as to the credibility of Piłsudski's threat to resign, de Panafieu and Lorraine in the appeal to their authorities came close to predicting another fall of Poland, in case his threat materialized. 'The party struggle that was partially suspended during the critical events of the last months, but that resumed since the reopening of the Diet, would take new

[555] Panafieu to Leygues, 1920 10 09 / Ibid, p. 48
[556] Leygues to Panafieu, 1920 10 11 / Ibid, p. 79
[557] Panafieu to Leygues, 1920 10 12 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 16, p. 98

forms of violence', while the designation of his successor would cause 'harshest rivalries and competitions'. Externally this would mean rupture with the Allies and make Poland uncontrollable. The demarche, they feared, could have only pushed Piłsudski a step closer towards such a 'disastrous' resignation. Panafieu and Lorraine also reiterated Piłsudski's argument that purely ethnographic Lithuania would only be able to retain Vilnius by force, and that the region would not support the government that failed to 'liberate' it in one way or another[558].

There was, of course, not much that London and Paris could do against a blatant *fait accompli*. While in the Cabinet meeting a week after the capture of Vilnius, Curzon was still suggesting to throw Poland out of the League in case the Poles refused to withdraw their troops[559], he also admitted that most of the noise amounted to 'beating the air and attempting to hide our impotence'[560]. In addition, the didactic tradition set the limits on how far one could go in pressing the Poles. The British ultimately scrapped their idea of formally withdrawing their ambassador for the fear that this could lead to the resignation of foreign minister Sapieha, 'one of the few sane minds' in Poland[561]. In a similar vein, Curzon recognized that Piłsudski's resignation could have cataclysmic consequences for the inherently unstable Poland and decided to abstain from sanctions that could provoke them[562]. As a way out, both the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay gave their support for the settlement of the Vilnius conflict in the League.

Pushed out of Vilnius after a few days of occupation, the Lithuanian government had to re-settle in its rustic 'interim' capital. The task was even more difficult for the diplomatic corps. Kaunas had no paved roads and no buses or trams. Water supply was provided by maids - 'water

[558] Panafieu to Millerand, 1920 10 14 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 16, p. 131
[559] TNA CAB 23/23, 1920 10 18
[560] Gregory conversation with Ciechanowski, 1920 10 11 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 566, note 3
[561] Fleuriau to Millerand, 1920 10 13 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 16, p. 107
[562] Fleuriau to Millerand, 1920 10 15 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 16, p. 143

carriers' who were shuttling between homes and the river Nemunas with a pole and two bins on their shoulders. There was no sewerage and unpleasantly looking outhouses were common in public places. The only modern toilet was situated in the ministry of finance, which had become a popular diplomatic destination[563]. The best and the only hotel with a curious name 'Metropolis' left much to be desired. 'I arrived here after a series of harrowing railway journeys with a bad chill and a feeling akin to depression at the sight of Kovno and the buggy room reserved for me in the hotel (!)', complained Ernest Wilton, the first British diplomatic envoy to the Baltic states[564].

The military situation of Lithuania after the capture of Vilnius and subsequent to the Polish-Soviet peace preliminaries was critical. Żeligowski's forces now faced Kaunas, while the east and south of Lithuania was encircled by the Polish territory. Lithuanian attempts to hire German soldiers from East Prussia to fight Żeligowski in return for food were uncovered by the French military mission and blocked. Lithuanian forces alone, numbering 25,000 and poorly equipped, were no match for Piłsudski's armies. In the north, Poland warned Latvia against any action contra Żeligowski.

Soviet acquiescence to Grabski's corridor and the Polish capture of Vilnius diminished Lithuania's geopolitical significance as a link between Russia and Germany. It also challenged the Lithuanian doctrine of Moscow's rabbits. In response to the Lithuanian protests, the Bolsheviks announced that there was no conflict between the treaties of Moscow and Riga: Vilnius would remain Lithuanian until the Lithuanians decided themselves to 'give' it to Poland. In November, in another attempt to soothe the Lithuanians, Joffe sent the Poles a lukewarm protest note, claiming that the situation in Vilnius could not be left without Russian attention, that Żeligowski's actions

[563] Valentinas Gustainis, *Nuo Griškabūdžio iki Paryžiaus* (Spindulys, 1991), p. 27-31
[564] Wilton to Gregory, 1920 11 03 / TNA FO 371/5380, p. 54

were a threat to the Soviet republics, and that Poland would be held responsible[565]. The Lithuanians, instead, hoped for not much less than a renewal of the Soviet-Polish war. 'I reply to their enquiries that if the Poles do not give us the reason, we won't break the agreement with them', reported Axelrod[566].

One of the outcomes of the Polish-Soviet peace was that it made possible a truly peaceful, if only awkward, relationship between Lithuania and Soviet Russia. On the one hand, the Lithuanian government boldly quelled Bolshevik agitation at home. On the other hand, it desperately looked for Soviet Russia's support against Poland. Resisting plans of Lithuanian-Polish federation was the point on which the policies of Lithuania and Soviet Russia coincided. The Bolsheviks intimated to the Lithuanians that a state of small peasants did not contradict Soviet ideology too much, and contrasted it with 'feudal' and imperialist Poland which had to be broken down sooner or later[567]. Joffe openly confessed to Zaunius that the Bolsheviks were not going to touch Lithuania before Poland and Germany were sovietised at some unknown point in the future; until then, he said, Lithuania for them was even better bourgeois than soviet[568]. At the same time, the Soviets did not exhibit much hope for the permanence of their Lithuanian rabbits. Axelrod predicted that Lithuania would not be saved by the League, as it was 'doomed and given by the Entente, essentially, by France, to Poland for devouring'[569]. The settlement of the dispute in the League was about to test Axelrod's predictions in practice.

[565] Joffe to Chicherin, 1920 11 11 / RGASPI 5/1/2001, p. 122
[566] Axelrod to Chicherin, 1920 11 22 / AVPRF 0151/5/3/9, p. 12
[567] Purickis to Voldemaras, 1920 01 20 / LCVA 383/7/76, p. 73
[568] Zaunius to Purickis, 1920 12 21 / Ibid, p. 6
[569] Axelrod to Chicherin, 1920 10 29 / AVPRF 0151/5/3/9, p. 15

Chapter 4. The Plebiscite

4.1 The League of Nations under construction

In October 1920, when the Vilnius conflict was to be left to the League to resolve, the latter was still negotiating the core principles of its raison d'être. In March 1920, isolationists in the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League, with one of its loudest opponents, republican Senator Albert Beveridge from Indiana, denouncing the League as the work of 'amiable old male grannies who, over their afternoon tea, are planning to <..> denationalize the nation's manhood'[570]. U.S. withdrawal raised serious doubts on the future weight and practicability of the League, but the prospect of their eventual return was still considered as realistic in 1920.

Peaceful settlement of disputes between states had been the holy grail of internationalism since its inception. In this respect, to the dismay of many enthusiasts, the League's Covenant, as finalised at the Paris Peace Conference, watered down supra-nationalist or legalist maximalism in favour of classic inter-governmentalism. There was no compulsory arbitration. The regime of conciliation[571], defined in Article 15, gave the intergovernmental Council of the League the powers of investigation and of finding a settlement of the dispute, to be effected in a non-binding recommendation. On the other hand, the Covenant was silent on the rules or methods to be used in working out such a settlement, leaving the Council full discretion in their choice. Moreover, the procedure of conciliation could not but assume the core principles of the legal process, such as

[570] William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 57

[571] Conciliation here is construed as a non-binding dispute settlement method, distinguished from simple mediation by the intervening party enjoying a formal legal footing. See J.G. Merrills, *International dispute settlement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 58

impartiality, equal status of the parties or publicity of the proceedings. It also enjoyed all the authority and prestige of the League. To a great extent, then, the League's conciliation mechanism was to become what its organs and its member states would make of it through practice. When it came to forging the first precedents, no one in the League was particularly interested in bad ones. In this respect, the Lithuanian-Polish dispute over Vilnius was to be one of the League's defining moments.

If the League, as many of its proponents intended, was to become something more than the fluctuating sum of national interests, it was up to the figures in the Council, as well as to the members of the Secretariat, to make it happen. While state representatives in the Council could hardly 'decouple' themselves from their governments that were as wary as ever of scattering sovereignty, appointments to that body were still fine-tuned to the internationalist momentum of the League. Representing Britain in the Council was Balfour, a cautious believer in progressive internationalism that could potentially override 'unenlightened national self-interest'[572]. For Fisher, an academic member of the British delegation, to avoid frustration of high hopes and to face the real world in which the 'international experiment' was to unravel, the League had to avoid blunders and limit itself to dealing with problems that it was actually capable of solving. 'Gusts of generous impatience', reasoned Fisher, 'were more to be feared than a superfluous dose of prudence'[573]. Fisher was sceptical regarding calls for compulsory jurisdiction of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) and lampooned the idea of 'a tiny state, with half the population of Sheffield, hauling a big Empire before an International Court of Justice'[574]. He was also in favour

[572] Jason Tomes, Balfour and Foreign Policy: the international thought of a Conservative statesman (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 284
[573] H.A.L. Fisher, *An international experiment* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 8
[574] Ibid, p. 16

of the unanimity rule that embraced state sovereignty and prevented a 'phantom of the super state'[575]. Being against committing the British Empire to the international dispute settlement mechanism of the League, Fisher nevertheless saw its usefulness in dealing with the unruly newcomer states. The League could thus be the force able to 'command the respect and to curb the ambitions of the small nations so recently enfranchised and so new to the sobering responsibilities of freedom'[576].

Among the more internationalist figures of the League's Council, there was Paul Hymans representing Belgium, a professional *avocat*, historian and Belgian liberal foreign minister. During the drafting of the League's covenant in the Paris Peace Conference, he gained a poor reputation among the Powers for advocating a greater role for the small states. The French representative in the Council Leon Bourgeois was one of the League's spiritual fathers who took the dispute settlement provisions most seriously. A 69 year old leftist lawyer, Bourgeois had held some of the highest political posts in France, but most of all he was renowned for his lifelong international legal activism. Bourgeois led the French delegation to both Hague Peace Conferences, where he worked on issues of arbitration and international dispute settlement. Bourgeois had advocated a League with teeth, armed with compulsory jurisdiction in settling international disputes[577].

It was the permanent League Secretariat, however, that had the chance to best represent the League's internationalist momentum. Its chief, Briton Eric Drummond, received his job of Secretary General after Cecil's idea of a powerful 'Chancellor' of the League had been scrapped, and after other candidacies, such as Hankey, Venizelos or Masaryk, fell through. Drummond

[575] Ibid, p. 25-28
[576] Ibid, p. 40
[577] Stephen Wertheim, 'The League of Nations: a retreat from international law?', *Journal of Global History*, (7) 2012, p. 221-223

resembled more a British civil servant than an enthusiast internationalist. Having worked as a clerk in the Foreign Office and served as a private secretary to two foreign and one prime ministers, Drummond was educated into the Hobbesian world of international relations. He was wary of overstepping the limits of his competences set by the Powers for the fear that this could further alienate them from the already modest League's project[578]. On the other hand, charged with the creation of the League's Secretariat, Drummond conceived it as a 'truly international civil service', where its members would be loyal solely to the League and who would enjoy independence from their states of nationality[579].

Appointments of international civil servants were generally in tune with these goals. Recruitment process was highly informal and relied on recommendations and connections of the existing members of the Secretariat. Internationalism and impartiality were among the qualities that were sought after, in addition to linguistic competence and relevant expertise. The legal section was headed by Joost van Hamel, a professor of criminal law, international lawyer and a diplomatic historian from Amsterdam, who came to know Drummond while working as a newspaper correspondent in Paris in 1918. Van Hamel was a lifelong liberal internationalist who up to the very end of 1930s lectured about states' 'instinct of federation against friction' which was bound to make fighting superfluous[580].

The third highest position in the League, the directorship of the Political section that dealt with international disputes, was taken up by Paul-Joseph Mantoux. Mantoux was a Sorbonne-educated professional historian who had taught British and French history in University College

[578] James Barros, 'The role of Sir Eric Drummond', in *The League of Nations in retrospect* (Berlin, 1983), p. 33 – 35
[579] Eric Drummond, 'The Secretariat of the League of Nations', *Public Administration*, (9) 1931, p. 229
[580] Joost A. van Hamel, 'Federating as a motive power towards peace', *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 23 (1937), p. 4-5

London and the London School of Economics, and who later co-founded the Graduate institute of international studies in Geneva. Despite not having any government experience, Mantoux had a good grasp of contemporary practical international politics as he had served as interpreter in most of the post-war highest level Allied councils. Mantoux was a great believer in the League; Drummond's idea of a 'modest and timid' secretariat unsettled him[581]. In order to strengthen the position of the secretariat, Mantoux campaigned to achieve extensive sharing of intelligence between the national governments and the secretariat, and was dismayed by the 'absolute obstruction' of the former[582]. As his right hand, Mantoux chose Pierre Denis, son of Ernest Denis, a renown French historian of Central Eastern Europe. Before joining the League, Pierre Denis was a professor of geography in Buenos Aires and in Strasbourg.

Mantoux and his cosmopolitan colleagues saw the danger of making the League the 'perpetual Peace Conference', and wished the Council to share the internationalism of the secretariat.

> If the Council is nothing but a meeting of plenipotentiaries, each of whom brings with him secrets and exclusive instructions of his government, with whom no common action according to the international plan is possible, in such a case the Council will be nothing more than a sub-committee of the Supreme Council, to which a few neutral powers will be invited, for reasons of politeness, to send their delegates[583].

Still rehearsing the concept of the League in the summer of 1920 with Robert Cecil, both agreed that it was not feasible to imagine the League as a judiciary, and that it was better to focus on conflict prevention rather than its regulation. 'The League of Nations still has credit that it must use', read Mantoux's minutes after meeting Cecil. 'Not to fear discussions and crises: they are

[581] Pierre Denis to Tobias de Rego Monteiro, 1920 06 19 / LNA, Mantuox papers, P154; also Eric Drummond to Jean Monnet, Ibid.
[582] Pierre Denis to Harold Nicholson, 1919 12 20 / LNA, Mantoux papers, P154
[583] Mantoux minute, 1920 06 14 / Ibid.

worth more than courteous silence broken by a cannon'. As to the latter possibility, the bellicose '*Pologne et ses voisins*' came first in the Mantoux's list of the 'threats of war'. 'If they materialize, the greatest catastrophe would be inevitable. Prevent at all costs'[584].

The League thus came into existence as a compromise between careful minimalists and optimistic internationalists. In order to survive, it would have to lay down its roots into the realm of international politics and claim prestige and authority that its authors thought it deserved. The Vilnius conflict, the first major dispute to be brought before the League's Council, was about to test the organisation in practice.

4.2 The science and practice of self-determination

The year of 1920 was the time of plebiscites. A plebiscite appeared as the most 'objective' means to solve inter-nationalist territorial disputes that were mushrooming on complex ethnic maps of the post war Central and Eastern Europe. It offered a degree of certainty in the face of seemingly impossible complexity and made disputes look technically solvable. It corresponded to the contemporary nationalist maxim that the political and the ethnic should coincide, while also drawing legitimacy from the slogans of self-determination during the Leninist and Wilsonian 'moments'. Counting votes, after all, was much easier and less controversial than grappling with endless arguments couched in terms of historical rights or economic needs of populations. It was to be expected, therefore, that the League would turn to plebiscites as the preferred means of settling territorial disputes.

[584] Mantoux conversation with Cecil, around June 1920. LNA, Mantoux papers, P154

The case of Vilnius, however, was unique, as Lithuania claimed it as its capital and as the basis for its statehood. A zero sum solution such as the plebiscite could thus hardly be expected to lead to any conciliation. The territory was also under control of one of the disputants through its military occupation and civil administration. Organizing a plebiscite without remedying these circumstances would be a farce, amounting to the a priori legitimisation of the *fait accompli* under the guise of the League. Implementing a properly impartial plebiscite, on the other hand, would require unprecedented international involvement and would cause immense practical difficulties.

The French preferred to avoid the plebiscite and to settle the Vilnius conflict by federating Lithuania to Poland. The Polish-Soviet preliminary peace and the resulting Grabski corridor reduced Lithuania's geopolitical importance as the dreaded link between Russia and Germany and made Lithuanian sensibilities easier to ignore, and Polish claims easier to support. At the same time, Lithuania's abortive attempt to hire Prussian volunteers against Żeligowski seriously disquieted Paris. Consequently, the French turned to advocating Piłsudski's formula of using Vilnius as a lever to induce Lithuania into a union with Poland. While Leygues agreed to the transfer of settlement of the Vilnius conflict to the League in accordance with the 'real aspirations of the population', the strictly confidential explanation that followed left no room for Lithuanian statehood:

> We think that independent Lithuania is not viable and the only solution that can avoid making it an instrument in the hands of Germany and ensure peace in this part of Europe, is the creation of relationship (union, federation) between Poland and Lithuania, giving Lithuania within it a 'proper personality' and ending the rivalry between Kaunas and Warsaw. This solution would foment between Germany and the Bolsheviks the necessary barrier[585].

[585] Leygues circular, 1920 11 07 / ADMAE, SDN 249, p. 130

Curzon likewise disapproved the plebiscite idea and instructed Balfour to push the idea of the Lithuanian-Polish federation instead. As much 'allergic' to the post-war multiplication of small states as he was critical of the unruly Poles, Curzon was convinced that an independent state of backward Lithuanian peasants was impracticable[586]. When Lithuanian foreign minister and (ex) Catholic priest Purickis came to London to implore the ex-Viceroy to help against the Poles, Curzon criticized Lithuanian reliance on Britain and on the League as lacking 'a practical line of policy' and pressed his colleague to reconsider the idea of Lithuanian statehood. Lithuania, Curzon suggested, was

> a small country, a poor country, a country of restricted resources, a country with indeterminate and disputed frontiers. Did [Purickis] anticipate that such a unit could permanently maintain an independent existence in complete detachment from its more powerful neighbours? Would there not be an irresistible tendency to move either in the direction of Russia, on the one hand, or of Poland on the other? Whatever the form of co-operation that might be adopted with either of these neighbours, had not the Lithuanian statesmen foreseen that some form of federation or incorporation must in all probability ensue?[587]

For Curzon, a plebiscite could only be a makeshift solution, leaving the crux of the Lithuanian problem unresolved. He already thought in practical terms and could not imagine where the League would get the troops, qualified officials, money and food, needed to implement the plebiscite. As a result, Balfour was instructed to press the idea of the federation where the League, with some British prodding, could still mitigate the extreme Polish conditions unacceptable to Lithuania[588].

Balfour, however, already approached the dispute from his position as a member of the League's Council and treated Lithuania as a fully fledged party to the dispute. Balfour preferred

[586] Curzon to Grahame, 1920 10 27 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 617
[587] Curzon to Ward, 1920 10 26 / Ibid, No. 616
[588] Curzon to Balfour, 1920 10 27 / Ibid, No. 617

Lithuania to receive Vilnius and thus become a 'prosperous and permanent' political unit. The Poles, Balfour thought, were trying to occupy as much as possible of Lithuania, destroy it as a separate country, subordinate it as an ally of inferior status and use its food. On the other hand, Balfour sought to safeguard the League's prestige against what he thought to be the farce of a dispute settlement, plotted by France in support of Poland, 'as far as it decently, or indecently, could'. For the British representative in the Council, it was clear that such a Franco-Polish scheme would 'ruin the position for ever of the League of Nations', at the time when the League was being invented. 'Neutral States and America are closely watching our procedure', wrote Balfour to Curzon, 'and will probably pass their final judgment on us according to its results. We are therefore face to face with world issues'[589].

A plebiscite, provided it left a chance for the Lithuanians and was preceded by the genuine evacuation of the Polish forces from the occupied territory, appeared to Balfour as an option which, against the background of the League's values and discourse on self-determination, neither Poland nor France could openly refuse. The only thing the French could do then would be to try to skew the modalities of the plebiscite in Poland's favour. What Balfour was not so sure about was whether the Lithuanians, who counted on the Vilnius Jews and Belarussians for support, would really win a proper plebiscite, and whether they could still successfully make a state if they wouldn't secure it. In any case, Balfour saw no hope in the imposed Lithuanian-Polish federation, as such a solution would leave Lithuania 'under embittered sense of injustice'[590]. As Curzon's instructions did not reach Balfour in time, he was left to act in the Council according to his own opinion.

[589] Balfour to Curzon, 1920 10 28 / Ibid, No. 622
[590] Balfour to Curzon, 1920 10 28 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 622

Professor Simon Askenazy was to represent the Polish case in the Council. He replaced Paderewski, who had ceremoniously hugged Voldemaras in the last session of the Council, and whose position had subsequently been rendered untenable by the Polish capture of Vilnius. A lawyer and a historian, Askenazy was much less sentimental and better versed in the language of Polish claims, having himself written a study on Silesia. Warsaw's instructions to Askenazy allowed for only two options of settling the dispute: the Endek solution of simple Vilnius' annexation to Poland, or Piłsudski's idea of a Lithuanian Federation, made up of Kaunas, Vilnius and part of Grodno provinces, with Poland. Askenazy was instructed to hold on uncompromisingly to the idea that Vilnius was ethnographically Polish. 'Our aim in the current moment is to play for time', read Warsaw's instruction to Askenazy, 'in a sense that in the nearest future the settlement and even discussion of the Lithuanian-Polish question by the third authorities, that is, by the Supreme Council or the League of Nations, have to be avoided. We have to try to escape the further intervention of the League of Nations, and if possible, completely remove the Lithuanian-Polish question from its agenda'[591]. Lithuania being surrounded by the Grabski corridor and with Vilnius under Polish military occupation, Warsaw could not but prefer to be left to face Kaunas alone.

Lithuanian policy towards the Vilnius case in the League was markedly legalistic and based on a supra-nationalist framing of the League. The Lithuanians maintained (and believed) that the Suwalki armistice, broken by Żeligowski's attack on Vilnius two days after its signature, was an international *treaty* enforceable before the League. The breaking of this treaty was thus a dangerous precedent of 'international banditry' in international relations. The Lithuanian government argued that it was the task of the League, the guardian of international law, to enforce its observance and

[591] MSZ circular, 1920 10 20 / AAN, Aleksander Meysztowicz papers, 9, p. 406

restore the *status quo ante*, and even referred to the League's involvement as 'arbitrage'[592]. The Lithuanians feared that the Poles would seek to delay the dispute settlement, entrench in the occupied territory and polonise the inhabitants. Any attempts of the Powers to force Lithuania into a federation with the aggressor, read the instructions to the Lithuanian delegate, would be a mockery of the League's principles[593].

On 26 October, Askenazy and Voldemaras were finally summoned to sit at the Council table in the majestic *Palais des Académies* in Brussels. The atmosphere in the room was very different from that in Paris a month earlier. Askenazy started the session by proclaiming that the dispute, as submitted by Poland itself on 5 September, no longer existed, and thanked the League for its involvement. The former Council resolution has been carried out by Poland, Askenazy claimed, since the armistice with the Lithuanians was signed in Suwalki, and as the Soviet-Polish war, referred to in the resolution, was finally over. 'Lithuania of Kaunas', Żeligowski's 'Central Lithuania', and Poland, said Askenazy, would be able to solve all problems among themselves alone. To make things more appealing to Voldemaras, Askenazy added that Żeligowski's coup, although not directed by the Polish government, 'had been approved by the whole of the Polish nation'[594].

Such a position raised some eyebrows in the Council and infuriated Voldemaras. The latter urged the Council to consider penalizing Poland by the sanctions prescribed in Article 16 of the Covenant. Poland, Voldemaras claimed, was either trying to force Lithuanians to recognize Żeligowski, or were once again plotting a regime change in Kaunas with the goal of luring Lithuania into a damned union with Poland. The Lithuanian representative hoped that the boldness

[592] LNA, Mantoux papers, P154
[593] Policy note (undated) / LCVA 383/7/080, p. 29
[594] Minutes of the Council session, 1920 10 28 / LNA, S4, Poland-Lithuania [1920 11-]

of Askenazy annoyed the British and worked in Lithuanian favour. 'It would have been difficult to choose a more stupid representative', wrote Voldemaras to himself. 'This is beneficial for us – he was arrogant and treated the English representative Balfour as his equal'[595].

It was clear that the Council could not let Askenazy off the hook without prejudicing the principles and prestige of the League. Yet purely legally, Askenazy's claim was not implausible, as the basis of conciliation procedure under Article 15 was the consent of the parties, and there was nothing in the Covenant that would prevent a party from the unilateral discontinuation of the conciliation. By analogy, in the field of arbitration, there were hardly any rules of customary international law that could prevent the party from discontinuing the process before the arbitral award was reached[596]. Retaining the dispute in the League thus required either some legal invention, bidding on the League's symbolic authority, or appeals to 'common sense'. In response to Askenazy, Balfour emphasized the latter: 'Poland appeared to desire to avoid the intervention of the League of Nations in a dispute which she had nevertheless herself submitted'. 'It was <..> inadmissible', added Bourgeois in a legalistic fashion, 'that when two States had submitted a dispute to the League of Nations, one of the Parties should on its own authority withdraw'. Bourgeois made it clear that Askenazy's withdrawal would not be accepted. The latter still tried to hold his ground, but Hymans stepped in and redirected the attention to the root of the question. Since both parties boasted about self-determination, said the Belgian, would they not accept a plebiscite carried out under the auspices of the League?

The slogan of 'self-determination' was clearly something that neither of the parties could openly contest. As to the core modalities of the plebiscite, Hymans made it clear that the League

[595] Voldemaras to Purickis / LMAVB, 172-704, p. 1
[596] See Gerhard Wegen, 'Discontinuance of International Proceedings', *AJIL*, 76 (1982), p. 721

took the matter seriously and that in order to ensure the basic standards of impartiality, it was necessary to disband Żeligowski's army and to introduce the control of impartial forces on the ground. Extending the League's authority, Hymans claimed the right for the Council to impose its own conditions for the plebiscite and was supported in this by the Italian representative Tittoni. The resulting Council resolution thus reserved the right for the Council to set the modalities of the plebiscite, including the extent of the territory to be consulted. On a final note, Hymans simply threatened both delegates that 'countries which refused the good offices of the League would incur a heavy responsibility in the face of Europe'. At this point, however, it was clear that the Council had claimed itself a role in the dispute settlement that was closer to authoritative arbitration than it was to the mere 'good offices'. The Council neutralized Polish attempts to discontinue the dispute and successfully fed the idea of the plebiscite to the two representatives, leaving little room for subsequent opposition by the two governments. It also successfully ignored Lithuanian demands for sanctions, for which there was clearly no political will among the Powers.

On 29 October, the Sejm's Committee on Foreign Affairs criticised the Council's resolution and passed a motion inviting simple annexation[597]. The Polish government, however, was not in a position to completely disregard the League and risk alienating Entente powers in other questions of Poland's interest. Even if the League were to hold the plebiscite, Poland could minimize the risks by counting on its long term military and administrative dominance in the Vilnius region, ensuring that the modalities of the plebiscite were to leave Poland in its superior position over Lithuania. Warsaw thus formally agreed to the plebiscite, but attached certain 'desiderata and suggestions' to their acceptance. Key was a demand for the extension of the plebiscite to Kaunas region; the exemption of the Polish corridor that separated Lithuania from Russia, and the request

[597] Panafieu to Leygues, 1920 10 30 / ADMAE, SDN 249, p. 78

for a ‘simple and rapid’ procedure that would also keep the Polish military occupation intact, save perhaps for its transformation into a local militia which could withdraw during the moment of the consultation. According to the Polish proposal, League commissioners, accompanied by Lithuanian and Polish representatives, would visit the contested zones one by one. They would convoke local assemblies, which in ‘spontaneous and immediate’ fashion would then verbally express their opinion[598].

Kaunas received the Council’s proposal of a plebiscite with anxiety. Vilnius was already under tight Polish military and administrative occupation and agitation. With around 2% of ‘conscious Lithuanians’ in the city of Vilnius itself, the Lithuanian side would have to rely on Jewish and Belarussian votes in order to win. Although Lithuanians had established separate ministries of Jewish and Belarussian affairs in Kaunas to appeal to both groups and were sheltering and financing émigré Belarussian nationalists, the support of the Jews and Belarussians in case of elections was by no means certain. Discussions in the Constituent Assembly reflected anxieties that the ‘low standard of civilisation’ and the lack of national consciousness in the countryside of the Vilnius governorate made the inhabitants susceptible to easy manipulation, in which the Poles would have an advantage of being an occupying power for the last two years[599].

Notwithstanding the fears of losing a plebiscite, it was nevertheless in the interest of Lithuania to keep the League involved and not to be left to face Poland alone. Poland had been increasingly entrenching Żeligowski’s forces in Vilnius in numbers that also threatened Kaunas, and the proposed plebiscite was one of the very few ways, if not the only way, to force their evacuation. The resulting Lithuanian reply to the League Council essentially amounted to having

[598] Denis report to the Council, 1920 11 12 / LNA, S4
[599] Session of Lithuanian Constituent Assembly, November 1920 / ADMAE, SDN 249, p. 110

their cake and eating it too. It argued that the city of Vilnius had to be exempted from the plebiscite altogether as the Lithuanian capital, while the plebiscite had to be extended to the west of the Curzon line in order to capture the ethnically Lithuanian towns of Seiny and Punsk. As to the modalities of the plebiscite, the Lithuanians pressed for the full evacuation of Żeligowski's forces and for allowing enough time for Polish agitation to settle down and for Lithuanian war refugees to return to their homes. What was more, international *de jure* recognition of Lithuania had to be made a *conditio sine qua non* for the Lithuanian agreement, otherwise Lithuania would appear inferior to Poland and lose votes because of its uncertain international position[600].

When Major Keenan, a member of the League's control commission, walked around the Żeligowski occupied Vilnius and tried to survey the attitudes of its inhabitants, he was unable to make any predictions.

> The impression I got is that they are all afraid to speak, and adopt an apathetic attitude until they got to know one and gain confidence. The Poles are all for Poland at any price. There are Poles among them who can also be Lithuanians and that at the bottom of their hearts want Lithuania. The Jews, who are the funniest of all in their evasive answers, are for Lithuania because it is to suit their pockets much better. The Lithuanians are the most afraid to speak but they do not want to see the town Polish. The Russian element is mixed, but the majority of them are for Lithuania. From what I have seen during my stay here, I shall defy anyone to predict the result of any vote if the town is clear of Polish or Lithuanian military influence.

The picture of the surrounding villages was no less complex and did not seem to give in to the parlance of modern nationalism. 'Some villages which I have come across speak Polish and Lithuanian equally well and the inhabitants do not know whether they are Poles or Lithuanians <…>. One gets the impression that a large number of the inhabitants have not found their nationality yet'[601].

[600] Cabinet session, 1920 10 30 / LCVA 923/1/86, p. 324
[601] Keenan to Buxton, 1921 02 13 / LNA, S5

Meanwhile, the Council considered the Lithuanian and Polish replies to its plebiscite recommendation. While Polish 'suggestions' were manageable, the Lithuanian 'advice' to exclude Vilnius ran contrary to the very idea of the plebiscite and challenged the authority of the Council that it claimed in setting plebiscite's modalities. Such Lithuanian diplomatic 'chicanery' was rejected out flat by the Council[602]. 'No reason to accept it as satisfactory', ruled Bourgeois[603]. Under the pretext that the Lithuanian acceptance note came from the Lithuanian chargé d'affaires in London, Bourgeois demanded the Lithuanians to send a new note, this time emanating from Voldemaras, the official Lithuanian representative in the League. In the meantime, the Secretariat successfully pressed Voldemaras to give a proper reply. The League thus elicited acceptances of its 'jurisdiction' for organizing the plebiscite from both Poland and Lithuania. Both delegates were once again reminded of the authority of the Council. 'The Council will let you know about the modalities of the plebiscite', assertively stated the Council resolution[604].

The League thus could start working out concrete plebiscite plans. The most recent precedents, however, gave little ground for optimism. The Allies had already burnt their hands in Allenstein and Marienwerder in July 1920. This plebiscite, that pitted Poland against East Prussia under international supervision, had been accompanied by terror, murder, theft of voting cards, dead people in the voting lists and accusations of bestiality[605]. The League could not afford a repetition of the Marienwerder case in Vilnius. It would have been clearly harmful to the League's prestige, all the more as the Vilnius plebiscite was to be the first plebiscite in the League's history. It were these fears that initially led the head of the League's control commission Pierre Chardigny,

[602] Mantoux to Denis, 1920 11 05 / LNA, S4
[603] Denis to Mantoux, 1920 11 06 / Ibid; Denis to Mantoux, 1920 11 02 / LNA, Mantoux papers, P154
[604] Denis report, 1920 11 12 / LNA, S4
[605] 'Niemieckie bestialstwo', Gazeta Warszawska, (41) 1920, p. 4-5.

Bourgeois and Mantoux to consider sacrificing the considerations of impartiality in favour of the Polish idea of the fastest possible plebiscite. Such a 'fast' plebiscite would require the least League's involvement and would save it from administration of the plebiscite territories.

According to the plan, prepared by Chardigny, the plebiscite territory would be divided into ten zones, each assigned a commission of three League officers, accompanied by one Polish and one Lithuanian representative. The commissions would then go to towns and villages and in each of them hold 'a sort of general assembly of the population', where the latter's 'verbal sentiment'[606] would be registered on the spot. Such a 'summary and rapid system' would require no electoral lists and no vote counting. Troops would be evacuated from a particular zone for the period of consultation, while the League's commissioners would control roads and railways[607]. In the opinion of Bourgeois, such a plan would account for the weakness of the League's operational possibilities, lessen the influence of propaganda and would minimize cheating, endemic in 'regular' plebiscites with written bulletins[608].

These officials' opportunism, however, did not sit well with Drummond[609]. While it may have avoided certain pitfalls of the 'regular' voting, the plan of a 'simple and fast' plebiscite introduced even greater problems, central among them being quantification of the 'verbal sentiment', the issue of who to convoke to express it, or on what basis to solve a subsequent disagreement over the interpretation of a particular 'verbal sentiment' in the absence of written evidence. The fact that Poland had expressed itself in favour of this approach would raise doubts

[606] Such a mode of expression had a precedent in the 'plebiscite' of Avignon/Comtat Venaissin of 1791. Eligible voters were brought together in a local church; those in favour of the motion would stay in the choir, while those against would walk to the chapel.
[607] Project on the reimbursement of expenses, 1920 11 20 / LNA, S4
[608] Denis minute / LNA, S4
[609] Ibid

on the League's impartiality. Lithuania was against it and desired a longer period of time in which they could agitate and awaken more 'conscious Lithuanians'. It was not long before Chardigny himself changed his mind, and the idea of the 'summary and rapid system' was eventually dropped[610]. The League thus had no choice but take the risk and hold a 'modern' plebiscite.

The League's research into the science of the plebiscites old and modern was codified in Van Hamel's 'Note on plebiscites in general'. The philosophy behind such a science echoed Rousseauian social contract theory and resonated with a rather unreserved principle of self-determination. The modern world, observed Van Hamel's guidelines, needed to espouse new principles and forget the old ways. The 'principle of modern democracies', or the element that held together different parts of a nation, stemmed from the free convention that set rights and obligations of the government and the governed. At the time of universal suffrage, when there was no greater power than reason and justice, no one could force a population to remain in a state to which it did not want to belong. Every sufficiently large group thus must freely decide to which state it wanted to be subjected. It was also impermissible, read Van Hamel's study, to annex a territory without popular consultation. One did not govern a country, if one did not govern the souls, and 'it would be detestable and painful if a group of inhabitants were forced to adhere to a nationality which appears repulsive to them'[611].

Van Hamel's memorandum advocated the modern nationalist principle that ethnic and political boundaries should coincide. This inevitably raised the question of what constituted a particular ethnicity, and how it was scattered on the map. In the Lithuanian-Polish case, Van Hamel considered language to be an insufficient marker of nationality: those who wanted to separate might

[610] Chardigny to LON, 1920 11 20 / LNA, S4
[611] Van Hamel, Note sur les plebiscites en general / LNA, S4

speak the same language as those from who they wanted to separate. Thus it was necessary to look at other 'ethnic elements', such as religion, idioms, schools, culture or geographic roots[612].

As to the modalities of the plebiscite, the memorandum considered the best practices to be found in the plebiscite clauses of the Versailles treaty, relating to the territories of Upper Silesia, Allenstein, Marienwerder, Saar and Schleswig. Another source was scholarly literature, notably, Sarah Wambaugh's seminal work on plebiscites[613]. The document argued that the best practices first and foremost required real guarantees of impartiality - occupation by neutral troops sufficiently in advance of the plebiscite, disbanding all military and paramilitary organizations, evacuation of non-locals, requirement of voters' continued residence, administration by an international commission with full administrative powers to dismiss local cadres, special tribunal and penal sanctions for all sorts of trickery and the establishment of the central election commission with its president chosen unanimously. Moreover, electoral lists had to be published well in advance allowing those not inscribed to appeal before a special commission. The secrecy of voting had to be assured. As for electoral constituencies, they would not have to follow old administrative divisions and instead could be based on local communes such as villages or religious assemblies. Voting rights for women had to be granted, since, in Van Hamel's words, 'except in ancient or rare instances, men and women had always and everywhere been admitted on an equal footing', and also because deciding to which nationality one belonged was a simple enough question[614].

The Vilnius case also raised a question on how to ascertain the will of illiterate populations. Here, Van Hamel studied the precedents of Avignon/Comtat Venaissin (1791), the Plebiscite in

[612] Ibid, p. 2
[613] Sarah Wambaugh, *A Monograph on Plebiscites: With a Collection of Official Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920)
[614] Van Hamel, Note sur les plebiscites en general / LNA, S4, p. 3

Belgium (1793), Rhine Valley (1793), Mulhouse (1798) and the Italian plebiscites of 1848 and 1859. These cases offered a number of options. Members of the community could be brought together in a local church, the question explained, and the vote could be expressed by an elector walking to a predefined location of the church. Alternatively, a voter could be accompanied by a literate friend, or by a priest. In order to guarantee the secrecy of vote, however, colour coded bulletins was Van Hamel's preferred method[615].

The most crucial practical issue, of course, was occupation of the plebiscite territory by international troops. It was obvious to everyone involved that a plebiscite under Polish military occupation would be nothing but a farce. Chardigny expected that at least a thousand troops would be needed to keep order and to control roads and railways[616]. In the conditions of 1920, putting together such an international force would be no less difficult than getting Żeligowski out. A poor typhus stricken land surrounded by the chaotic Red Russia and the ever suspicious East Prussia, Lithuania would not be a walk in a park. Curzon, for example, considered such an international contingent impossible.

Hymans and Bourgeois, however, ignored British objections and took the initiative. Their initial idea was to source the troops from all 6 European members of the Council (Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Greece and Spain). Bourgeois saw the French foreign minister Leygues and received his agreement for 200-300 men. On his behalf, Hymans spoke to the Belgian prime minister and obtained the latter's agreement, on the condition that the contingent would be of 'truly international' character, and that the expenses would be covered by the League or by the disputants. Naturally, wide international participation meant a safer and a more legitimate mission. Having

[615] Ibid
[616] Hymans to Drummond, 1920 11 01 / LNA, S4

successfully secured participation of Belgium and France, the organizers did not hesitate to advertise this fact in their call for troops sent to the remaining members of the Council and hinted that the expenses would be paid by the disputants. Each member was asked for two companies of infantry and one machine gun section, accompanied by 5-6 officers with administrative experience and with the knowledge of Russian or Polish[617]. Omitting the Lithuanian language might have seemed suspicious to the Lithuanians, but few Europeans knew that such a language existed at all.

Greece was the first to reply to the League's call and offered 50 men commanded by three officers, and repeated the Belgian demands, i.e., that the contingent was international, and that it was paid for[618]. As other Council member states did not rush to answer, the Secretariat kept pressing their representatives and asked them to telegraph their governments immediately. The League's pressure soon began to bear fruit. Spain agreed to provide two companies of infantry[619]. The British followed suit and promised adequate participation[620]. Of all European members of the Council, only Italy remained silent. To compensate for the Italians, and to reduce their relative burden, the Council decided to also invite Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden each to supply 100 men[621]. All of them agreed. Denmark even promised to pass a special law that was necessary for sending troops abroad, and the agreement of the leaders of all political parties was obtained for that purpose[622]. The League thus ventured into a new era of international peace keeping. Such a wide international peacekeeping force, if materialized, would have been unprecedented in history.

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[617] Bourgeois to ambassadors, 1920 11 05 / LNA, S4; Mantoux to Balfour, 1920 11 22 / Ibid
[618] Communique to the members of the LON, 1920 12 09 / Ibid
[619] Communique to the members of the LON, 1920 11 19 / Ibid
[620] Mantoux to Drummond, 1920 11 28 / Ibid
[621] Communique to the members of the LON, 1920 11 24 / Ibid
[622] Denmark acceptance letter / Ibid

To develop the details in so far as the military side of the issue was concerned, Bourgeois was in touch with Paris, consulting General Weygand, the chief of staff to Marchal Foch, and Colonel Requin of the French general staff. The elaboration of technical details were entrusted to the British, French and Spanish military officers present in Geneva, whose report was approved by the League's Council on 25 November. The international force was to be commanded by Colonel Chardigny, the experienced president of the League's Control Commission in the Vilnius dispute. The arrival of the force was to proceed in two stages. The British and French contingents, supplied from Danzig and Memel, would be sent to Vilnius by rail from France on 1 December, without touching the territory of Germany. This meant that they would have to travel through Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. If everything went well, other contingents would be transported by sea through Danzig. Spain would provide transportation for Spanish and Belgian troops, while Norwegians, Swedes and Danish would sort out among themselves their own transport. The Greeks were dropped, as they would have been the only contingent coming from the south.

As the preparations went ahead, two successive expeditions were sent to Vilnius itself to survey the health and sanitary conditions and to look for accommodation for the international contingent. On 23 December, General Niessel from the French military mission in Warsaw sent a commission headed by Dr. Paul Baron, Médecin Major of the French military mission in Warsaw. Another mission, headed by American Colonel H. A. Shaw from the League of the Red Cross Societies in Geneva, examined Vilnius from 13 to 18 January. Investigations were 'thorough and painstaking in every particular' and the final report suggested bringing the conditions in Vilnius to 'Western European and American standards' that the city had never seen before.

The risk of typhus that was still prevalent at the time was to be countered by extensive focus on sanitary provisions. The troops were to be housed in two barracks complexes, occupied by the Polish soldiers at the time of investigation. The examiners proposed that, once the Poles had evacuated the site, the floors were to be scrubbed and doors and windows refitted. Manual water supply pumps were to be changed to power pumps with a water delivery wagon. Shower baths and separate facilities for washing face, hands and underwear were to be installed and steam or hot air disinfectors provided. Existing unsanitary latrines were only to be used at night, and brand new trench latrines with light tight seats and self-closing covers were to be constructed for day use. Since the barracks contained one small kitchen that only served soup for the Russian troops before the war, every national detachment was to have its own kitchen with roasting and baking facilities. The challenge of 'unusually prevalent' venereal diseases and prostitution in Vilnius was to be countered by compulsory venereal prophylaxis[623]. The entire detachment was to be vaccinated against small pox, typhus and cholera before departure. Every national detachment was to be furnished with its own medical personnel and medical supplies and be ready to establish its own infirmary for less serious cases. Investigators compiled the list of the necessary drugs, medical supplies and stationery and requested efficient ambulance service with four ambulances. Patients requiring prolonged hospitalization or complex surgery were to be admitted to Vilnius Railway hospital. Since the French personnel dominated the preparations, Chardigny insisted on an American chief medical officer. However, none was available in Europe at the time[624], and another Frenchman, Dr. Albert Vaudremer, a specialist in tuberculosis research, was chosen for the task[625].

[623] Shaw to L.O.R.C.S., 1921 01 19 / LNA, S5
[624] Ibid
[625] Longley to Vaudremer, 1921 02 10 / Ibid

One of the thorniest issues still remaining was definition of the territory to be consulted. This issue led to the friction between Bourgeois and the French government. The latter instructed both Chardigny and Bourgeois to consider as the maximum limit of plebiscite territory the boundary of the Curzon line followed by the border defined in the Lithuanian-Soviet peace treaty, with the exception of Seiny as a Lithuanian religious sanctuary[626]. In response, Bourgeois lectured Leygues that Chardigny was a 'mandatory' of the Council, and that he himself had 'an obligation of loyalty' towards his Council colleagues to not act on double instructions[627].

Although the Council authoritatively asserted its competence in this matter, the parties were first given a chance to agree among themselves[628]. In Kaunas in the beginning of December, Chardigny visited foreign diplomatic representatives with the view press the Lithuanians to participate in a conference with the Poles in Warsaw. Chardigny also insisted on the specific selection of delegates, quoting Smetona, Galvanauskas, or Yčas as the 'ablest' of Lithuanians. Kaunas agreed, but sent a delegation headed by priest (later bishop) and the speaker of the Lithuanian Seimas Justinas Staugaitis instead.

The hosting Polish delegation, headed by Prince Sapieha, placed high hopes in this meeting. When the Lithuanians on their way stopped at the Polish consulate in Königsberg for visas, the Polish consul hinted that the Poles were expecting to use the conference to solve all Lithuanian-Polish relations through federation. After arrival in Warsaw on 10 December, the Lithuanians were met by a single clerk from the Polish foreign ministry, who showed the guests some wall paintings around the Warsaw train station before accompanying them to a tiny hotel. Chardigny, who met the Lithuanians in Warsaw, pressed both sides to focus on the plebiscite and on nothing else.

[626] Leygues to Gout, 1920 12 09 / ADMAE, SDN 250, p. 59
[627] Bourgeois to Leygues, 1920 12 11 / Ibid, p. 61
[628] Chardigny to Bourgeois, 1920 12 03 / LNA, S4

‘Chardigny started talking very energetically with us, but our delegation’s cold mood immediately cooled down his heat’, Staugaitis proudly reported to Kaunas. It was not long before Chardigny confided in resignation that ‘in Warsaw, just as in Kaunas, there is no one to talk to, no one wants to talk clearly, some kind of Soviet order’[629].

On 12 December, the Lithuanian and Polish delegations, under the guidance of the Control Commission, met for the first time after the Vilnius occupation. Disagreements already surfaced in the opening ceremonial statements. ‘Lithuania and Poland were together for centuries; they will surely find a way to agree’, declared Sapieha in French. ‘The two peoples since ages had many happy moments, but they had even more moments of trial’, corrected Staugaitis in Lithuanian when his turn came[630]. Sapieha talked warmly to Lithuanians, avoided the question of the plebiscite and pressed the idea of a federation. Unofficially, Sapieha blamed the Polish public opinion, inflamed by his own Endeks, and said that there were many things that he could do, but which he could hardly accomplish against the tide. Lukasiewicz then did an exposé on how many times the Poles had defended the ‘borderlands’ against the Bolsheviks, and how the Lithuanians never helped them. ‘Why wouldn’t Poland give Vilnius to Lithuania?’, asked Jonynas directly. ‘Poles do not see any reason to do this’, teased Lukasiewicz.

When the discussion finally turned to the plebiscite, to the dismay of Chardigny, both sides hinted that they were ready to avoid it. The Lithuanians first suggested that they were not afraid of the proper plebiscite at all. ‘We are benefitting from the social relations in Lithuania’, declared Žemaitis, as ‘according to the understanding of the people, Polishness in Lithuania means the same as ‘lordship’, because most of the Poles in Lithuania are landlords’. The Poles thus would have to

[629] Staugaitis to Purickis / LCVA, 383/7/84, p. 34
[630] Staugaitis protocol, 1920 12 13 / LCVA 383/7/84, p. 2 rev.

rely on landed conservatives, who were mistrusted in the wider population that wanted to acquire land. Belarussians and Jews would vote for Lithuania, and the lack of food would even attract a part of Polish speakers. But despite 'looking calmly towards the plebiscite', argued Žemaitis, it might still turn out badly for any of the sides and would in the end only inflame Lithuanian-Polish relations. The Lithuanians then put forward a proposal which the Poles would have rejected even before their victory against the Bolsheviks: the Moscow treaty borders for Lithuania in return for free transit to the sea, economic concessions, cultural autonomy for the Poles and amnesty to Polish prisoners. Unsurprisingly, the Polish side found this 'totally unacceptable', but still insisted on the abandonment of the plebiscite in favour of direct negotiations[631]. The Warsaw conference soon broke down without results[632].

Meanwhile, the League was stopped neither by the failure of Lithuania and Poland to agree on the plebiscite zone, nor by their apparent lack of interest in the plebiscite altogether. Bourgeois was petulant and disciplined the Lithuanian delegates in Paris. 'We are playing here', he shouted. Bourgeois now demanded a straightforward acceptance of the Council's plebiscite recommendation. The Lithuanian government desired the plebiscite, answered Galvanauskas, but the public opinion was against it. In the previous League sessions, he added, 'the Lithuanian delegate did not sufficiently introduce the sentimental side of the issue because of shyness'. 'I

[631] Staugaitis protocol, 1920 12 20 / LCVA 383/7/84, p. 18

[632] Interestingly, the Lithuanians in Warsaw were contacted by Marian Swiechowski, a member of the Polish Temporary Political Committee in Vilnius. Having pleaded for liquidation of the 'Lithuanian operetta' a year ago, Swiechowski now approached the Lithuanians and offered them to agree with Vilnius Poles, call the Vilnius assembly and break with Warsaw, on the condition of Lithuanian guarantee of Polish language rights and cultural aspirations. Swiechowski needed Lithuanian support for his Committee, as Vilnius Endeks were in the process of abolishing it. He found it unfortunate that the Lithuanians were talking to Warsaw, and not to Vilnius Poles. 'Any assembly would do, even a pro-Lithuanian one', he pleaded. Lithuanians, however, met these promising suggestions with a stubborn refusal, maintaining their formalistic non recognition of the current Vilnius regime (Staugaitis to Purickis, 1920 12 19 / LCVA 383/7/84, p. 34).

understand, but it is time to reply', further pressed Bourgeois. 'Yes is yes', mumbled Galvanauskas, 'the plebiscite has been accepted by Lithuania'[633].

In Warsaw, the League pressed the Poles to evacuate Żeligowski's forces from Vilnius. Although promised by Piłsudski already in November 1920[634], the action was being delayed into 1921. General Burt had a very strained talk with Sapieha, who was 'tired, irritated, and got rather vague'. Sapieha claimed that evacuation went against the public opinion, and that there was a threat of Lithuanian invasion[635]. On 20 January, in an attempt to appease the League, Żeligowski simply reorganized his army. On 1 February, Chardigny posed Sapieha an ultimatum to reduce Żeligowski's force to 15,000 in 20 days. Instead, Sapieha promised to make it 20,000 until 2 March[636]. Finally, after much disagreement, Bourgeois managed to extort a formal assurance from Piłsudski and Sapieha that all Żeligowski's troops would move out of the Vilnius region at the time when the international contingent arrived[637].

Principally, therefore, no unsolved practical issues remained that would prevent the multinational plebiscite force from departing to Vilnius. Chardigny suggested 10 March as the date of landing[638]. Conceived against the opposition of both disputants, as well as against the scepticism of both the Foreign Office and of the Quai d'Orsay, the plebiscite project and the painstaking preparations for its execution had been the child of the League's Council and Secretariat alone. Its completion, if successful, could turn it into a milestone of internationalist agency.

[633] Protocol of the private meeting with Burgeois, 1921 01 28 / LNA, S5
[634] Chardigny to LON, 1920 11 10 / LNA, S4
[635] Burt to Buxton, 1921 01 11 / LNA, S5
[636] Purickis to Chardigny / Ibid
[637] Bourgeois to Piłsudski, 1921 02 09 / Ibid
[638] Bourgeois to Foch, 1921 02 14 / Ibid

4.3 The art of sabotage

The Lithuanians were witnessing the League's zealous preparations for the plebiscite with deep seated anxiety. It turned out that all their prior objections had been challenged by the League's authority, which now steadily sleepwalked them into the definite plebiscite in Vilnius. 'I don't understand what is happening with this 'plebiscite', complained Jonas Jablonskis, a linguist and the founder of standardized written Lithuanian, to the foreign ministry.

> The region that is about to be polled has been under Polish agitation, instigation and demoralisation for two years already. What can these demoralised people now say – join the 'free Polish state' or unclear 'Lithuania', which, possibly, won't remain an independent state? The plebiscite will tell the world only one answer – part of Lithuania wants to be with the Poles. After such a decision, there will be no other decision – it will only remain… for us ourselves to join them. Even the Jews, after careful thinking, won't vote for us. Where are we going with this? There can be no plebiscite **now**. If we were a recognized state, then in a few years these people, after knowing us more, they could vote. Now the plebiscite for us is totally inadmissible, and this is also what I hear around[639].

'No plebiscite in the capital Vilnius region', read Purickis' desperate instruction to Voldemaras, 'Motives - Lithuanian nation cannot risk its capital because of temporarily fooled population, intimidated Jews and low culture in the surrounding district'[640]. Yet at the same time, the Lithuanians could not afford to break with the League. Lithuanian hopes for a new war between Poland and Soviet Russia, which could potentially release Vilnius from Polish occupation, were fading away. British efforts to press Poland to reverse Żeligowski's affair had failed, while the French now toed Piłsudski's line. Therefore, except for Lithuanian own offensive, the League was the last straw that the Lithuanians could hold on to in their hopes to get Żeligowski out, or, at least, to keep the question alive. 'When this suggestion [to exclude Vilnius] does not pass through -

[639] Jablonskis to Balutis, 1920 11 25 / LCVA 383/7/81, p. 24
[640] Purickis to Voldemaras, 1920 11 25 / Ibid, p. 23

declare your dissatisfaction or protest and consider the decision of the League as imposed', Purickis instructed Voldemaras[641]. By playing along with the idea of the plebiscite, even if it initially included Vilnius, the Lithuanians hoped to replace Żeligowski's troops by the international contingent and to elicit international de jure recognition as a condition for ensuring the equal status of the two parties[642].

In the Geneva Council session, Voldemaras finally communicated the promised 'considerations' attached to Lithuanian acceptance of the plebiscite. He blamed the local Vilnius Endeks and their masters in Warsaw for 'secessionist' voices in Vilnius and claimed for Lithuania the 'inalienable right to the ancient capital of their country'. 'A nation is composed of more dead men than living', Voldemaras told Bourgeois, 'The evidence of four centuries of history should be of greater value than the claims of a small Polish party, which can only protest on account of its privileged position'[643]. Voldemaras' academic yet theatrical performance in Geneva, however, did nothing to stop the League and preparations for the plebiscite went on.

Meanwhile in Lithuania, skirmishes on the battlefield increased Lithuanian hostility towards Chardigny's Control Commission. On 7 November, Żeligowski's forces attempted to advance further into Lithuania, ignoring the Control Commission's requests to stop the hostilities. On 19-21 November, the Lithuanians succeeded in stopping the Polish advance near Giedraičiai and Širvintos and mounted a counter offensive, which some thought to be capable of recovering Vilnius. However, facing the pressure of the Control Commission, the Lithuanians stopped the advance and signed a truce with Żeligowski on November 29. Lithuanian authorities felt embittered

[641] Ibid
[642] Purickis to Voldemaras, 1920 11 26 / LCVA 383/7/81, p. 19; Voldemaras note / TVMAB, 172-167, p. 4
[643] Voldemaras statement in the LON Council session, 1920 11 23 / LNA, S4

that the Commission was capable of stopping them, but not the Poles[644]. It was not long before Chardigny started complaining of an 'excessively formal' Lithuanian attitude towards the Commission[645].

The Lithuanians tightly scrutinised the workings of the League's Control Commission and the intelligence they had gathered did not dispose them well towards international peace keeping. A comprehensive report, prepared by priest Bielskus with a curious pseudonym 'Mr. Lithuanian', drew a particularly dark picture of its members. As reported by Mr. Lithuanian, Serb Lasič, the Commission's secretary, was wise, but studied the Lithuanian question from Polish sources and repeated the 'Polish slanders' that the Lithuanians were pro-German; the Italian Bergera, as a count, sympathized with the Polish szlachta and did not know anything or cared about the Lithuanian question; even the British member Keenan, complained Mr. Lithuanian, was indifferent towards Lithuanian matters. As for the Lithuanian representative to the Control Commission Ignas Jonynas, Mr. Lithuanian reported him to be a laughing stock - 'they played and ripped on him all the evening'. Worst of all appeared to him to be Frenchman Chardigny, the Commission's head, 'whose politics was French government politics, whose plan was the plan of the French HQ, and whose final aim was to join Lithuania to Poland'. Mr. Lithuanian diligently reported Chardigny's drunk slip of the tongue, where he called Lithuania a state of 'a few ragamuffins, not worth of any independence'. The report demonised Chardigny to the point of considering him more dangerous than Żeligowski himself. 'Lithuania must <...> not allow some Chardigny play the master in Lithuania', urged Mr. Lithuanian[646].

[644] Voldemaras to Hymans, 1920 12 03 / Ibid
[645] Chardigny to LON, 1920 11 26 / LNA, S4
[646] Report on the Control Commission / LMAVB, 172-716

Mr. Lithuanian's dislike of Chardigny, however overblown, was shared in Lithuanian government circles. 'Don't sleep re Chardigny – do everything to oust him', wrote Balutis to Voldemaras in Geneva[647]. The latter had no qualms to declare to Hymans that Chardigny's action in Lithuania was incompatible with the latter's security[648]. The Lithuanians also lobbied for the appointment of a Briton as a replacement to Chardigny in his position of the commander of the international force. None of these efforts, however, were successful. Neither Bourgeois nor anyone else in the League had ever thought of replacing Chardigny, who had been involved in the Vilnius dispute settlement on the ground since the very beginning. As a result, the Lithuanian press soon indulged into bouts of anti-French hysteria, which disquieted even the British Foreign Office[649]. Failing to find support among the Allies, the Lithuanians started looking for like-minded Polish friends elsewhere.

Preparing for the possibility of an imposed plebiscite, the Lithuanians toyed with the idea of employing a German expert to serve as the Lithuanian member of the plebiscite commission. In the view of the Lithuanians, no one knew how to wrestle with the Poles better in plebiscites than Germans. Generally, the German Auswaertiges Amt, despite its very active observation, stood aside from the active involvement in the Vilnius conflict. It was not the issue on which it could risk additional trouble with the Entente. Nevertheless, when Viktoras Gailius, the Lithuanian representative in Berlin, came to see Adolf Georg von Maltzan, the head of the Auswaertiges Amt Russian department, and asked him for advice in sourcing a good German expert, the latter connected Gailius with Dr. von Holtum for a consultation in a neutral place. Dr. von Holtum had previously served as the head of the German *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, an association grouping together

[647] Balutis to Voldemaras / LMAVB, 172-716
[648] Voldemaras to Hymans, 1920 11 29 / LNA, S4
[649] Naruševičius to Voldemaras, 1920 12 / LMAVB, 172-193, p. 4

all political parties with a view to preparing the infamous plebiscite of Marienwerder. The German expert advised not to divide the Vilnius region into different plebiscite zones, if the Lithuanians hoped to save the city. He also observed that there should be much more than a thousand international troops to counter Polish agitators. Holtum offered his services and was ready to work for the Lithuanians from Berlin for 3000 marks per month, or in a position in Lithuania for the same amount. He also asked for 200,000 marks as a 'guarantee', in case he became compromised in the eyes of the Entente and thus unable to find work in any official position in Germany. In order to make the plebiscite right, Dr. von Holtum quoted 9 months of energetic work and a few million marks for expenses[650]. 'I don't think he knows much about plebiscites', confided Gailius, but 'the experience of the Germans [in organising plebiscites versus the Poles] is undeniable, as is their inclination to wrestle the Poles. Maybe we could negotiate'[651].

However, as the League's preparations for the plebiscite were gaining momentum, sabotaging it altogether increasingly seemed the best option for the Lithuanians. In search for a formula that would ruin the plebiscite without causing rupture with the League, the Lithuanians turned to the Bolsheviks and begged their diplomats for notes that they could wave in Geneva and scare away the international contingent. There was, after all, at least some common ground between the two. The Soviets still feared another Allied intervention that could oust them from power and looked towards the plebiscite with suspicion. They were also embarrassed by their diplomatic isolation and did not hesitate to mock the League at every opportunity. Soviet representative in Lithuania Axelrod, having already written the Lithuanians a number of such notes in relation to the Żeligowski affair, thought this to be an opportunity to 'drive the wedge even deeper into Lithuanian

[650] Gailius to Purickis, 1920 12 04 / LCVA 383/7/131, p. 9
[651] Ibid, 1920 11 29 / Ibid, p. 7

relations with the Entente'[652]. It was not long before the Lithuanians received their note. 'This note, I hope, will show your government that in the fight against adventurism of Żeligowski, just as in any other fight against encroachment on the independence of the small states, Russian Socialist Federalist Soviet republic will always be a true ally', read Axelrod's note of dedication[653].

On 3 December, Voldemaras finally played the Soviet card in Geneva. For him personally, such a role must have seemed a tad ironic. Just a few months earlier, Voldemaras in his polemic in the French press called Bolshevism a virus, invented by the Germans 'in their infinite perversion', that was 'more terrible than asphyxiating gases'[654]. Now, however, the Lithuanian representative in the League was eagerly bringing in Soviet Russia into dispute settlement. Voldemaras declared to Hymans that the presence of allied troops on Lithuanian soil would violate the Lithuanian-Russian peace treaty, where Lithuanian government undertook not to permit on its territory troops hostile to Soviet Russia. Such allied hostility was derived from their support of the Whites in the Russian civil war. Voldemaras now claimed that the settlement of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute was impossible without participation of Soviet Russia and hinted on a possibility of a 'new bloodthirsty struggle'[655]. He also translated and disseminated the Soviet note in its entirety, which lampooned the League and 'empathically protested' against 'sending to Vilna armed detachments of various foreign states, ostensibly on the recommendation of an institution styled the 'League of Nations', an association of states which was not recognized by the Soviet Republics', and which appeared 'liable to encourage the preparation of new hostile actions against the Soviet republics'[656].

[652] Axelrod to Narkomindel, 1921 03 08 / AVPRF 0151/4/6/5, p. 12
[653] Axelrod to the Lithuanian government / TVLMAB, 172-715
[654] Voldemaras manuscript / TVLMAB 172-343
[655] Voldemaras to Hymans, 1920 12 03 / LNA, S4
[656] Joffe to the Polish delegation / Ibid

The League, however, was ignoring such indirect and vague Soviet threats. Mantoux and Denis thought that the Soviets were spreading their usual propaganda. Askenazy soon retaliated and downplayed the Soviet threats, stressing that winter precluded the possibility of a renewal of the Polish-Soviet war. The Lithuanians, declared the Polish representative in Geneva, had the intention to 'distort the plans of the Soviet government', and to obstruct the Polish-Rusian peace negotiations[657]. The Lithuanians were also criticised in the Foreign Office for exaggerating the Soviet menace.

Nevertheless, the Lithuanians did not stop here and kept pressing the Soviets for yet stronger notes. Chicherin was asked for a note, where Russia would demand that the international contingent be made up of troops from 'neutral countries only' (i.e., excluding France), or that there would be participation of the Red Army troops in this international contingent[658]. Chicherin agreed, albeit with some reluctance. The danger was that the League might overcome the Lithuanian rejection of its proposals, continue with the plebiscite and expose the Soviet bluff. This time, the Lithuanians were asked for something concrete in return – a written assurance that Lithuania was not going to join any anti-Russian coalitions, 'even in case of big compensations'. The Bolsheviks, apparently, were still anxious about the possibility of allied intervention. The Lithuanian promise to the Soviets was drafted in Riga by Joffe and Rosenbaum. Chicherin, fulfilling his part of the bargain, sent his own note to the Lithuanians, where he openly threatened that the appearance of international troops of the 'so called League of Nations' would be treated by Soviet Russia as a hostile act. Consequently, Voldemaras did not hesitate to attack Geneva with yet another piece of Soviet artillery.

[657] Askenazy to Hymans, 1920 12 11 / LNA, S4
[658] Axelrod to Narkomindel, 1921 01 03 / AVPRF 0151/5/3/9, p. 9

Lithuanian scaremongering both annoyed and disquieted the League and its members. On the one hand, it was obvious that the Lithuanians were doing everything to avoid the plebiscite, and that the Soviets could be bluffing with their threats. Mantoux recognized that Soviets would be unable to oppose the international contingent by force without restarting the war with the Poles. Such a feeble international contingent could have hardly served as the *casus belli* for Russia anyway. To Mantoux, the Soviet note appeared as a hostile act towards the League which also intended to prevent Eastern Europe from joining the League. The 'very big danger for the League is to yield to this maneuver of intimidation', warned Mantoux. At any rate, if the Soviets broke the peace preliminaries with the Poles, then it was up to the Poles to demand explanations from Moscow[659].

On the other hand, Soviet threats increased sensitivity towards intelligence reports or plain rumours, relating to the Soviet military preparations. One such report, relating to the increase of Soviet purchases of weapons, disquieted the French government, which suspected that this development could be associated with the plebiscite[660]. The first state that most definitely succumbed to Lithuanian-Soviet scaremongering, however, was Switzerland. In January 1921, both Austria and Czechoslovakia agreed to allow the railway transit of the international force, on its way from France to Vilnius, through their territories[661]. It was only the agreement of Switzerland that remained. Vaclovas Sidzikauskas, the Lithuanian minister in Bern, worked hard to make the passage of the international contingent a hot issue in Swiss government circles and in the Swiss press. Chicherin's threatening note was widely disseminated[662]. Sidzikauskas told the Swiss that

[659] LON Political section memo, 1921 02 12 / LNA, S5
[660] ADMAE, SDN, 250, p. 51
[661] Verbal notes of Austria and Czechoslovakia, 1921 01 11 / LNA, S5
[662] Sidzikauskas to Jurgutis, 1921 02 23 / LCVA 383/7/143, p. 93 rev.

in case of military collision between the contingent and the Soviet army, the League would then ask for reinforcements, which would have to pass through Switzerland again. This, he suggested, would violate the precious Swiss neutrality[663]. Such a ground for refusal, of course, was hypothetical and weak. Nevertheless, it was not long before the Swiss Council started receiving interpellations from the parliament. The Swiss minister in France ensured Sidzikauskas that sabotaging the international contingent was the issue where Lithuanian and Swiss interests coincided. The Swiss were thus prepared to act as the Lithuanian bulldozer in 'burying the plebiscite'[664].

In February 1921, the Swiss minister to France Alphonse Dunant came to the Paris Council meeting and attempted to present the Swiss refusal. 'The government of the Soviets was hostile to the intervention of the League of Nations and was said to be preparing a military offensive in combination with revolutionary movements in Europe', he claimed. In effect, Dunant re-broadcast the Lithuanian hoax to an international audience. Bourgeois was furious. Switzerland, he said, caused a great moral injury to the League, at the time when Geneva had been chosen as its seat, and at the time when Switzerland had been admitted on its own special conditions. Then Bourgeois proceeded to teach the Swiss some internationalism. 'If every state could oppose to the League of Nations its own individual and separate conviction, continuous cooperation between the nations would be difficult', taught Bourgeois and expressed his hope that the Swiss would change their mind[665]. Fantastic apprehensions of a transit country derailing the long prepared plebiscite was not something that Bourgeois was prepared to tolerate.

[663] LNOJ 2 (1921), p. 171
[664] Sidzikauskas to Jurgutis 1921 03 06 / LCVA 383/7/143, p. 83
[665] LNOJ 2 (1921), p. 172

To banish the prospect of the plebiscite completely, the plebiscite needed a push from the other side. This was something that the Poles did in style. At the time when the Lithuanians resorted to 'anti-aristocratic' methods of sabotaging the plebiscite, the Poles on their behalf used their access to the international network of aristocracy. Prince Wladyslaw Lubomirski had often been asking his personal friend, the King of Spain Alfonso XII, for a favour in settling the Polish problems in the League. Spain was a member of the League Council, and its representative, José María Quiñones de León, had considerable influence there. Whether it was influencing the Council debates[666] and designating favourable experts[667] in the case of Upper Silesia, or supporting the Polish cause in the question of Danzig[668], Prince Lubomirski did not hesitate to use his royal connections, framing Polish pleas for support as benefitting the peace of Europe or humanity as a whole. The Vilnius conflict was no exception. Already in the fall 1920 Lubomirski asked Alfonso XII to help bring the 'extremely important and urgent' Vilnius question to a 'prompt and successful conclusion' in the League. Poland, Lubomirski pleaded, had to be assured its patrimony Vilnius, and the 'difficulties created by the Kaunas government' had to be ended, at the time when Poland was guarding Europe from the Bolsheviks in the interests of the humanity[669]. In turn, Alfonso XII personally instructed Quiñones de León to 'do everything that he can in order to help the claims of Poland'[670]. Unsurprisingly, 'suspicious behind the scenes activity of Quiñones de León' was the key factor that Mantoux quoted when blaming the Council for the failure of the Vilnius plebiscite[671].

[666] Lubomirski to Alfonso XIII (undated) / BNW, 52624, p. 40
[667] Ibid, 1052
[668] Ibid, 1029
[669] Ibid, 2575
[670] Ibid, 2554
[671] Paul Mantoux, 'Lost opportunities of the League of Nations', in *The world crisis* (London: Longmans, 1938), p. 16

The Vilnius plebiscite was desired by no one except the League, for reasons of which at least some were plausible. It was doubtful if an international contingent of a thousand men, with little or no knowledge of the local languages, thrown between the two uncompromising nationalisms, could have bettered the bestiality of Marienwerder. Even in case of withdrawal of the Polish regular army under Żeligowski, the peacekeepers would still have to grapple with the extensive network of Polish underground military organisations in the region. The most likely scenario of rushing the plebiscite to its fastest conclusion would have certainly awarded the city to Poland, while a longer period of agitation, in the event of its unlikely adoption, would have unleashed ecclesiastic brawls surpassing everything that Lithuania had ever seen. All the worldly science and convenience of plebiscites, then, was hardly suitable for a devil's paradise, to which at least one of the sides attached existential importance.

Yet the process of carving out the Vilnius plebiscite against all the odds revealed something about the League that escaped the eye of its many post mortem critics. It was a case in which the League displayed a personality of its own, which could not be subsumed by the national interest of Britain or France. Balfour in his opposition to the Foreign Office, or Bourgeois in his protest against instructions from the Quai d'Orsay acted more as the *fonctionnaires* of the League than representatives of their national governments, and cast the role of the Council as something more than a meeting of plenipotentiaries. At the same time, the competence of conciliation envisaged in the Article 15 of the Covenant was construed by the Council in the most expansive manner and transcended the limits of simple mediation by invocation of the League's authority. The preparation of the Vilnius plebiscite and its ultimate failure, on the other hand, demonstrated the role played by the excluded states in shaping events at the League.

Chapter 5. Back to the Union of Both States

5.1 Sapieha's plan

The idea of a Lithuanian-Polish federation, or something approaching it, as the means for settling the conflict, had been contemplated by Polish, French, British, Italian, and even by a few Lithuanian statesmen. The Lithuanian representative in London Count Tyskiewicz, the only aristocrat in the Lithuanian diplomatic service, had allowed himself a margin of personal diplomacy and hinted at the idea to the British in 1919[672]. The calculations on the map, as viewed from London and Paris after the Polish *fait accompli*, dictated a rather poor menu for choice for Lithuania. While Lloyd George and his garden suburb[673] still considered Lithuania a Russian sphere and disapproved the boundary that the Poles had wrestled from Russia in the Riga peace treaty, his preoccupation with other matters left the day to day tracking of the Polish-Lithuanian dispute in the hands of Curzon and the Foreign Office. For the ex-Viceroy of India, who disliked the concept of a small state *per se*, the idea of statehood of two million peasants, whose elite he felt was 'stupid and backward', seemed preposterous. All the more so as such a state had been situated between Russia, Germany and Poland. For Curzon, since Russia went Bolshevik and since Germany was the (ex)enemy, there remained only Poland to which Lithuania could gravitate. Both countries, after all, were Catholic, the union between them had been practiced in the past, and their future rapprochement seemed to offer a chance of solving the intractable Vilnius dilemma. In the same vein, the French considered sovereign Lithuania improbable and susceptible to Soviet or German

[672] DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 11, No. 172
[673] Lloyd George's private secretariat

intrigue against the Entente. At any rate, Piłsudski refused to submit the dispute to arbitration, and threatened to call elections in the Vilnius region in case negotiations with Lithuanians failed[674]. Under these circumstances, Piłsudski's final attempt at federalism through the Vilnius *fait accompli* received careful Allied endorsement.

At the end of March 1921, Sapieha, in agreement with Piłsudski, confidentially sounded out British, French and Italian ambassadors in Warsaw with his idea of solving the dispute by the means of a Lithuanian-Polish federation. Soon in April, Sapieha presented the three ambassadors his 23-page long plan, for which he secured the approval of the rest of the Polish cabinet. In order to save the plan against his fellow Endeks in the Polish Sejm, Sapieha preferred the Powers or the League assume the parentage.

The plan roughly outlined the architecture of the federation and lambasted the modern Lithuanian nationalism that stood in its way. The militant *Lithuanomania,* read the preamble to the Sapieha's plan, could have only been artificially created by the Germans; Lithuanians had only a very narrow literate class and relied on German intellectual production. If the new Lithuanians tried to re-establish the Grand Duchy according to modern nationalist principles, they would not be able to play the dominant role and would disappear in the mass of attached foreign populations. Polish civilization, argued the Polish plan, was superior to Lithuanian; Vilnius was the centre of Slav civilisation, and any attempts at its lithuanisation would be preposterous. The plan also stressed that a Lithuanian nationalist state would serve as a bridge between Russia and Germany, and that Lithuanians were likely to divide large Polish estates and give them to German landlords. At any

[674] Max Muller to Curzon, 1921 04 06 / DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 10

rate, the plan designated Lithuanians as 'brutal annexationists', while Poland, it said, pursued magnanimous policy and looked to present circumstances instead of history[675].

Such a preamble was followed by the proposed modalities of the new voluntary Lithuanian-Polish union. Sapieha's plan accepted Lithuanian interest in Vilnius and acknowledged that Vilnius and Kaunas regions formed a single historical and economic unit. Perhaps, then, Vilnius might be accorded to Lithuania, if the latter was united with Poland. Lithuanian-Polish federation would be something that Poland could accept 'for the grand sacrifice of renouncing incorporation of Vilnius pure and simple'[676].

Within such a federation, Lithuania would consist of two cantons - Kaunas (47,000 sq. km, 1,800,000 inhabitants) and Vilnius (37,000 sq. km, 1,100,000 inhabitants). The whole territory of Lithuania would roughly correspond to the limits set out in the Lithuanian-Soviet treaty of July 1920. Each canton would have its own regional diet and its administrative organs with competences in education, canton finances, cantonal defence (i.e. against the other canton) and other local interests. The two cantons would be united by a common legislative organ, formed out of delegations from the two cantonal legislatures. These two delegations would initially deliberate and vote separately, until the time when enough trust was gained to amalgamate them into a common legislative organ. The delegations would elect a common government of Lithuania. The common areas of policy between the two cantons would include industry, commerce, finance, justice, communications, post, minorities, agriculture and workers' legislation. Relations between such bi-cantonal Lithuania and Poland, on the other hand, would be set out in a special statute. The two states would share a common president, a common minister of foreign affairs and defence, and

[675] Sapieha's aide-memoire, as submitted to the three ambassadors / LNA, S6
[676] Ibid

a common office for economic and communication affairs, while the Polish high command would lead the armies in case of war.

The project of Lithuanian-Polish federation included a number of important benefits for Poland. It would give Poland another access to the sea through Memel, it would give it a say over the treatment of the Polish minority in the ever suspicious 'Kaunas Lithuania', and it would bar Lithuanians from plotting against Poland in their foreign policy. Polishness of Vilnius would still be guarded against the Kaunas Lithuanians by the Polish cantonal army. At the end of the day, it would be a federation of Lithuania of 3 million with the 20 million Poland.

On 15 April, the ambassadorial trio of William Max Muller, Hector André de Panafieu and Francesco Tommasini met at the Italian legation in Warsaw to discuss the Sapieha's plan. 'A typical Polish production, verbose and inconclusive', remarked the French minister. 'Cannot fail to produce irritation in the mind of the reader', observed his British colleague. There was, he complained, little to choose between the Poles and Lithuanians when it came to biased reasoning. In the course of three meetings, the ambassadors redrafted the scheme from ground up, omitting historical references, unnecessary contentious issues and altering the modalities of the proposed federation in order to make it more palatable to the Lithuanians. All agreed, however, that the latter must be prepared to pay the price the Poles demanded, as neither Lithuania nor anyone else was willing or able to extract Żeligowski from Vilnius[677].

To placate the Lithuanians, the trio increased the weight of Lithuania's votes in the election of a common president and made it practically equal to that of the 20 million Poland. The clause on the superiority of Polish high command in wartime was removed in favour of a common chief of the army. Separate 'cantonal defence' was scrapped in favour of 'territorial militia', which meant

[677] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 22

that Poland would not be able to keep its regular army in Vilnius against Kaunas. Most importantly, the common legislative body of Lithuania made up of two cantonal delegations was substituted by a single Lithuanian diet elected by direct universal suffrage under proportional representation, a modification that would significantly increase the political weight of the Kaunas canton. After demurring, Sapieha accepted the redrafted project on behalf of his government, and begged that his share in the authorship of the scheme were kept secret against annexationists in the Polish Sejm. The scheme, Sapieha suggested, could be introduced to Hymans, the League's rapporteur on the Lithuanian-Polish dispute, as having the approval of Britain, France and Italy[678].

In Rome, Tomassini encountered no problems in securing his foreign minister's endorsement[679]. Paris, too, gave the project full blessing. History and geography meant that it had to be a federation, Berthelot wrote to Curzon, a federation that must also bar the Lithuanians from a separate foreign policy. In order to appease Lithuanian sensibilities with regard to the word 'federation', Berthelot suggested renaming the project as a 'convention of the union'. At the same time, he refused the British proposal to grant *de jure* recognition to Lithuania, seeking to retain it as a lever of pressure[680]. Consequently, the French ambassador in Brussels Pierre de Margerie was instructed to recommend the ambassadors' scheme to Hymans in the League as having the approval of the French[681].

London, however, hesitated to accept the ambassadors' project. Being more Polono-skeptic than their allies, the British were also better versed in the views of the Lithuanians, who had treated the Foreign Office, sometimes to the irritation of its clerks, as the first counter of advice. Curzon,

[678] Ibid, No. 22
[679] See Francesco Tommasini, *Odrodzenie Polski* (1928)
[680] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 28; Laroche note to Gout, 1921 03 14 / ADMAE, SDN 252, p. 36
[681] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 35

while favouring a close relationship between Lithuania and Poland in principle, expected practical difficulties in ending the lengthy conflict by the sudden amalgamation of the two adversaries into a common country. Instead, Curzon advocated a more gradual approach and suggested to the French that in return for Vilnius, included into Lithuania on the basis of some sort of autonomy, Lithuania could conclude a commercial agreement with Poland, grant it free transit to the sea through Memel, and recognize its belonging to the same political orbit. A scheme of Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement along the similar lines had been pencilled in at the Foreign Office in collaboration with Naruševičius[682]. Such a gradual solution, thought Curzon, was bound to lead towards a closer integration in the future[683]. Naturally, London's scheme was much closer to the Lithuanian idea of solving the dispute than it was to Piłsudski's plan of a fully fledged federation. Balfour, who continued to represent Britain in the League's Council, was by now pro-Lithuanian. 'All the information that I have been able to collect shows that the combination of economic necessity and historic sentiment makes it absolutely necessary to give Lithuania her ancient capital, notwithstanding ethnographical considerations', read his comment of the Curzon letter to Berthelot, 'Perhaps, however, it is unnecessary to say all this to the French'[684].

Failing to agree with the French, the British ultimately adopted an attitude of non-commitment. London could not press Warsaw alone; it also tried to avoid unnecessary moves that would deepen Britain's already Polono-skeptic image in Poland. The British were also wary of the damage to Britain's prestige which would result from the failure of a project to which it would have given its uncompromising support. Consequently, Curzon instructed his diplomats to take no

[682] Naruševičius to Kaunas (undated) / LCVA 383/7/127, p. 171
[683] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 18
[684] Ibid

exclusive commitment towards any of the schemes, but to support anything that approximated, but fell short of, the three ambassadors' proposal[685].

British scepticism towards his plan disquieted Sapieha, who believed that without strong concerted pressure of both Britain and France, his final attempt at federalism would be doomed to failure. In addition to bringing the Lithuanians round to the idea of a federation, Sapieha needed overt Allied pressure to shield him and his government from the annexationists in the Sejm. Sensing the lack of enthusiasm coming from the British, in April 1921 Sapieha paid a visit to London. In a meeting with Crowe at the Foreign Office, the Polish foreign minister made a long exposition on the 'clear right' of Poland to Vilnius and stressed that no responsible Pole could openly advocate anything but annexation of Vilnius to Poland. However, he told Crowe, he was ready to have his federal solution, although it did not do justice to Poland's claims, to be imposed on Poland by the League of Nations or by the British. He confessed that open support for federalism would cause the immediate fall of the cabinet. Sapieha repeated that 'the solution entirely rested with England', which, he said, was also its interest and duty. 'I earnestly combated this novel view of the responsibilities of HMG', minuted Crowe. 'Our advice to Poland had not been very fortunate, and it seemed a little unfair to saddle HMG with a series of failures which seemed to me due to the want of goodwill of the two parties'. Crowe broke off the discussion midway, as he felt that Sapieha 'harangued him for over an hour'[686]. At the end of May, Sapieha came to London again, this time looking for Lloyd George's support. As Curzon hardly wanted to share his work with the anti-diplomatist premier, he declined Sapieha's plea for an interview on the grounds of too short a notice[687].

[685] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 34, No. 43
[686] Ibid, No. 38, Note 6
[687] Ibid, Note 7

Responsibility for the new round of efforts to settle the Vilnius conflict, then, was yet again conveniently outsourced to the League and to it alone. For Hymans, the *rapporteur,* and for his aides in the Secretariat, who had received Sapieha's plan, as well as its ambassadorial draft, it was clear that any realistic chance of dispute settlement presupposed taking the Piłsudskiite plan of federation as the basis for discussions. The Poles had Vilnius under their military occupation which the League, despite all its efforts, had already failed to remedy before. While the Poles had captured and held Vilnius in contravention of Council resolutions, the problem of the *fait accompli* had to be set aside. At the same time, such *realpolitik* had to be reconciled with impartiality, complete equality and respect for sovereignty of the parties that the League professed.

Adventures of the League's Control Commission in Lithuania could not but moderate the League's optimism. At the end of March, a crowd of Polish women students in Vilnius assembled at the railway station and pelted Chardigny's face and uniform with eggs. One of the hypotheses in explaining this new phenomenon was that the League's Control Commission had recommended exclusion of women from voting in the League's plebiscite[688]. Alternatively, the Polish representative in the League's Secretariat Perlowski explained to his colleagues that the cause of the attack might have been purely linguistic. Whenever ladies addressed Chardigny in French, explained Perlowski, the former would always reply in Russian, 'yet, to speak to a Pole in Russian is the same as to speak to a French or Belgian in German'[689]. Perlowski thus advised the League Secretariat to listen to Chardigny's submissions in the dispute settlement with a certain 'mental reserve', as the head of the League's Control Commission might still hold some grudge[690]. Chardigny himself, not unreasonably, held the Vilnius Polish authorities responsible for the act and

[688] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 7
[689] Abraham? to Mantoux, 12 April 1921/ LNA, S6
[690] Note on Neyman's meeting with Perlowski, 1921 04 20 / Ibid

moved his commission to Kaunas in indignation. 'I will not return to Vilnius until all these Żeligowski troops are swept away', Chardigny was reported saying upon leaving Vilnius. 'I have the power to do this and I will do this if the need be'. The Commission's Italian member Bergera, however, refused Chardigny's orders and stayed in Vilnius, an episode which Mantoux attributed to the 'Italian intrigues'.

The apparent lack of allied commitment unsettled the League's secretariat, which was busy setting the stage for direct Lithuanian-Polish negotiations under Hymans' mediation in Brussels. 'We must act by our own forces: persuade the parties that the peaceful and regular solution is useful and necessary for them', reasoned Denis. While he was optimistic as to the prospects of convincing the Lithuanian and Polish delegates, he doubted if the same could be achieved with regard to their governments. 'Is Askenazy not going to fear to become a traitor before his country if he cedes us Vilnius?', he asked[691]. At the same time, Denis thought the Secretariat should not let Britain or France rob the League of a dispute. 'From the point of view of the League, we have to do everything possible that the question does not escape us', he wrote to his colleague Gerald Abraham. 'We will not avoid the question to be decided in Paris and London, but what we can do is to make sure we are present during the decisive moment and that they accept our point of view'[692].

Seeking to muster support for the dispute settlement in the League, Mantoux visited Bourgeois, Margerie, the chief of Briand's cabinet Hermitte, as well as Jules Laroche, director of the department of political and commercial affairs at the Quai d'Orsay. He also talked to Parisian journalists, although, thinking about the 'interest of the League', Mantoux was in favour of limiting the publicity of negotiations whose success was uncertain. Overall, the atmosphere for the League's

[691] Denis to Abraham, 1921 04 12 / LNA, S6
[692] Denis to Abraham, 1921 04 23 / Ibid

action appeared to be favourable. Jean Gout, representative of France in the League, told Mantoux that the League in its preoccupation with the Vilnius conflict was 'eminently in its conciliatory role', 'a flattery which I add to the bucket which is not always full of enthusiastic expressions in favour of the League'[693].

On the eve of Brussels negotiations, there was one point on the ethics and teleology of the planned Lithuanian-Polish convention on which the British, the French and the League's secretariat seemed to agree: the arrangement must be such as to let Lithuania moderate the inherent vices of Poland, and not make Lithuania suffer for them. While Denis thought that the Poles had more rights to Vilnius than Lithuanians, he agreed that union with Lithuania would be for Poland 'the force and element of [its own] stability'[694]. Despite greeting the conclusion of the definite Polish-Soviet peace treaty in March 1921, both the British and the French adhered to the didactic geopolitics and did not regard Poland's acquisitions beyond the Curzon line, including the Grabski corridor, as legitimate Polish territory. If a common or at least a harmonized foreign and defence policy between Lithuania and Poland were to be established, Lithuania should then be safeguarded against being drawn into a war where 'purely Polish interests' were involved. Balfour thought it unjust to demand Lithuania defend the corridor against the Bolsheviks, or, more importantly, against the future reconstituted non-Bolshevik Russia[695]. Lithuania would also have to be uncommitted to war if the quarrelsome Poles went on another offensive rampage against its neighbours. In this respect, Berthelot favoured the Lithuanian-Polish union for the checks and balances that it offered against

[693] Mantoux to Drummond, 1921 04 19 / LNA, S6
[694] Denis to Abraham, 1921 04 23 / Ibid
[695] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 18, note 6

the potential Polish bellicosity in the future[696]. The shadows of the Enlightenment, it seemed, followed the dispute settlement into the halls of Brussels and Geneva.

5.2 The Brussels evasion

Hymans and the League Secretariat had before them Sapieha's plan of the Lithuanian-Polish union, its ambassadorial modification, as well as the Lithuanian counter-plan, in which Lithuania, in return for Vilnius, offered Poland good neighbourly relations and promised to treat it like any other country. 'The somewhat ungrateful task you have undertaken is of great importance for the future of the League', Drummond tried to assuage Hymans[697].

The commencement of the negotiations was far from smooth. The first round was set to start on 20 April at the Belgian ministry of foreign affairs. At the time when the Lithuanian delegation, headed by finance minister Ernestas Galvanauskas, was on its way to Brussels, the Poles asked the Secretariat to allow Askenazy's delegation two additional weeks before they needed to arrive. Having experienced Lithuanians waving Soviet protest notes before, the Poles wanted to wait for Soviet ratification of the Riga treaty. It contained a clause on Soviet disinterest in the Lithuanian-Polish conflict that would thereby leave no legal basis for Soviet intervention. Sapieha also needed more time to muster support for his plan in Warsaw. As a result, Askenazy became ill until 2 May.

Hymans, however, wasted no time, and convoked the first introductory session as planned, on 20 April, with Count Sobański, the Polish minister in Brussels, as Askenazy's substitute. He

[696] Ibid, No. 28
[697] Drummond to Hymans, 1921 04 11 / LNA, S6

also held private and confidential 'warm up' sessions with each of the two delegations, a practice which Drummond found to be an 'admirable invention', to be followed in the League's dealings of the future[698]. Hymans stated at the outset that his role was 'neither arbiter, nor mediator' – he was there only to prepare a compromise[699]. In fact, bolstered by the authority of the League, his role was somewhere in between those two.

Denis and Chardigny warned Galvanauskas to be prepared to make very serious concessions, if he wanted to secure control of Vilnius[700]. At the same time, the League Secretariat thought it important to observe the internationalist ethos and not let the balance fall towards the stronger party[701]. Talking to Laroche at the Quai d'Orsay, Denis thought him to be 'seduced' by the Poles[702]. 'The conclusion is that one should not trust[703] the men of the Quai d'Orsay', observed Denis. While the pressure put on the Poles by the French left much to be desired, Bourgeois seemed excellent nonetheless. When Sapieha approached him privately with an exposé on the Polish point of view, Bourgeois refused to discuss it and gave Sapieha his congé. 'We will proceed as if you did not tell me anything', Bourgeois told the Pole[704].

When Askenazy had finally arrived in Brussels, the two delegations were wined and dined in the presence, among others, of Hymans, Drummond, the League Control Commission, members of the League Secretariat, the Belgian premier, Belgian foreign minister and British ambassador[705]. To keep the pressure and to show that the world was watching, Hymans also took Lithuanians and Poles for an audience with the King of the Belgians.

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[698] Drummond to Hymans, 1921 04 27 / LNA, S6
[699] Summary of the first round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 04 20 / Ibid
[700] Denis telephone message, 1921 04 30 / Ibid
[701] Denis to Abraham, 1921 05 12 / Ibid
[702] Denis telephone message, 1921 04 30 / Ibid
[703] Fr. *donner le bon Dieu sans confession*
[704] Denis to Abraham, 1921 05 03 / LNA, S6
[705] Report No. 3 of the Brussels Lithuanian delegation, 1921 05 09 / LCVA 383/7/129, p. 65

The Lithuanian government's instructions to its Brussels delegation stressed the urgent necessity for rapprochement with Poland. Above all, the Lithuanians still feared a Polish march on Kaunas. While the Polish-Soviet peace technically left Poland a 'free hand' in Lithuania, and at the time when Germany was in no position to intervene, Poland was still constrained by the Allies and by the League, which it could not afford to upset in face of the forthcoming settlement of other disputes of its interest. The delegation was thus instructed to seize the window of opportunity and look for all possible means to come to an agreement with Poland. The list of concessions that the Lithuanians would offer in exchange for Vilnius, however, hardly had anything in common with the extent of the ambassadors', let alone Sapieha's project. In return for Vilnius, the Lithuanians were prepared to renounce their claims for Belarussian territories and to give a wide territorial autonomy to the Vilnius governorate, particularly as it related to courts, internal administration, education and cultural and social institutions. As far as Lithuania's relationship to Poland was concerned, Lithuania would allow Poland free transit through its territory and would enter into some economic conventions, while still maintaining 'full economic independence'. Instructions to the Lithuanian delegation did not project any special defensive link between the two states, save for the promise not to attack its neighbour and not let others use Lithuania's territory against it. In defensive cooperation with Poland, Lithuania would only go as far as the other Baltic states did so[706].

Lithuanian reluctance to ponder more far reaching concessions was strengthened by the lack of endorsement by Britain for the project of fully fledged Lithuanian-Polish union, which was regarded by the Foreign Office more as a long term solution at best. Furthermore, the Lithuanians counted on the potential alliance with Latvia and Estonia as a counterweight to Poland,

[706] Instructions to the Lithuanian delegation at the Brussels conference, 1921 04 15 / LCVA 383/7/127, p. 158

a solution that was also advised by Wilton in Kaunas. Throughout April and May, Purickis was busy touring Riga and Tallinn, seeking to dispel any tendencies toward their Polish orientation. His cordial reception in both capitals, as well as the signature of the whole range of technical agreements with the Latvians, including their confidential assurance of military involvement on Lithuania's side in the event of the Poles marching further into Lithuania, gave grounds for optimism.

Acquiescence to the dominance of Polish influence in Lithuania, after all, went against the very essence of Lithuanian nationalism that based itself on the refutation of that influence in the 'cultural struggle'. The Lithuanian delegation agreed that it was better to lose Vilnius than to do away with the project of Lithuanian 'national and cultural' independence altogether. Making Polish the second official language disquieted the Lithuanians as the introduction of the dreaded 'Polish culture'[707], while giving Vilnius a simple territorial autonomy was feared to lead to 'Polish machinations' and irredentism[708]. 'No compromise possible in any of the questions [of Vilnius and sovereignty]', wrote Purickis to the delegation[709].

The almost comical gap between the positions of the two delegations that became apparent in the first rounds of negotiations was further widened by Askenazy's bold suggestion that it was the Polish side which enjoyed the position of power. He reminded the Lithuanians that the Polish Sejm had pronounced in favour of annexation a number of times already, which could be effected if Lithuania refused the union[710]. The *fait accompli*, after all, allowed the Poles to maintain an expectative attitude. To the annoyance of Hymans, who had lectured that might did not create right,

[707] Klimas to Purickis, 1921 04 29 / LCVA, 383/7/129, p. 84; Klimas to Purickis, 1921 04 28 / LCVA 383/7/128, p. 198
[708] Report No. 2 of the Brussels Lithuanian delegation, 1921 05 04 / LCVA 383/7/129, p. 80
[709] Purickis to the Lithuanian delegation, 1921 04 30 / LCVA 383/7/128, p. 195
[710] Klimas to Purickis, 1921 05 03 / LCVA 383/7/127, p. 140

Askenazy declared that 'Lithuania in the current conflict represented the plaintiff'[711]. In the same vein, Sapieha warned Grahame, the British minister in Brussels, that the Lithuanians could either take his project, as amended by the three ambassadors, or leave it – they would not be able to take Vilnius by force, and the Poles would keep it until the Lithuanians became ripe for the union[712]. Such audacity did not pass unnoticed in London. 'I have never myself had the slightest doubt as to Sapieha's real mind about Vilnius. We shall have to recognize Lithuania', ranted Curzon[713].

Notwithstanding their seemingly irreconcilable positions, both Lithuanians and Poles found themselves entangled in the international dispute settlement in which they wanted no part. The apparent hopelessness of the negotiations did not dissuade Hymans, who proceeded to divide the explorations of a close Lithuanian-Polish relationship into the three pillars of defence, economy and foreign policy. Negotiations went on, but the distance between the two positions was not getting any closer in any of those areas. While the Poles pressed for a complete customs union, free movement of persons and labour, and redirection of Lithuanian imports and exports towards Poland to the exclusion of Germany, the Lithuanians protested against the proposed 'dictate' by Poland and were only prepared to accord it the status of the most favoured nation[714]. Discussion on a close relationship in matters of foreign policy was even more problematic. Hymans suggested creating a common organ for tackling the matters of common foreign policy, Askenazy deemed this insufficient, while the Lithuanians rejected any common permanent institutions altogether[715]. 'I don't think it to be possible or necessary to create between Poland and Lithuania anything more

[711] Summary of the second round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 05 06 / LNA, S6
[712] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 47
[713] Ibid, No. 47, note 9
[714] Summary of the fourth round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 05 07 / LNA, S6
[715] Summary of the seventh round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 05 13 / Ibid

than normal relations between two sovereign states', Galvanauskas bluntly put it to Hymans[716]. One could not imagine better relations than those between France and Belgium, argued Galvanauskas, but no one was talking of uniting them[717]. At the same time, the Lithuanian delegate admitted that a closer relationship might not be impossible in the future, after animosity between the two states settled down[718].

No matter how much Hymans wanted to avoid the fruitless discussion of various 'rights' to Vilnius, both Lithuanians and Poles still took their time to reiterate their side of the story. To present their case for Vilnius, the Lithuanians brought Milosz from Paris. While his poetic submission lasted for 16 pages, the rational professor Askenazy responded with 35 pages. Then Lithuanians expanded to a 28 page counter-statement, and the Poles matched it. The fire of historical, ethnographic, economic and legal arguments was furiously exchanged. Lithuanians quoted the treaty of Moscow, while the Poles referred to the treaty of Riga. Lithuanians belittled the share of the Polish population in the Vilnius region, while the Poles exaggerated it. Lithuanians said the Vilnius economy would suffer without Lithuania, while the Poles said it would suffer without Poland. No less importantly, both claimed Adam Mickiewicz as their national poet[719].

Conceptually, the Lithuanian side fought the new Polish-Lithuanian union by invoking the negative image of the old Poland. The Lithuanians were already well versed in such arguments, having pledged allegiance to the didactic tradition ever since the Paris Peace Conference. In his letters to Simpson, Smetona unashamedly invited the sympathetic Scotsman to recall 'what Carlyle said about the Partition of Poland'[720]. To Hymans, the Lithuanians now emphasised that living with

[716] Notes on the conversation between Hymans, Askenazy and Galvanauskas, 1921 05 11 / Ibid
[717] Ibid
[718] Ibid
[719] Lithuanian submission in the tenth round of negotiations, 1921 05 23 / LNA, S6
[720] Smetona to Simpson, 1921 02 05 / LCVA 383/7/87, P. 52

Poland in a union for two hundred years had been a 'catastrophe'. Through the union, claimed the Lithuanian delegate, the 'spirit of anarchy of the nobles' had spread from its genuine source in Poland to the fine Lithuanian Grand Duchy, and soon killed both states. There was a 'striking contrast', argued the Lithuanians, between the two nations in their 'political and moral concepts', and 'Lithuanians had always criticized Poland for its regime of anarchy and discord'. Lithuanian delegation quoted histories of the didactic tradition to show that 'Lithuanians knew well that Polish spirit of insubordination and revolt, that contempt for all hierarchy, that slavery imposed on the people and that infinity of other calamities'[721]. The Belgian, therefore, should think twice before resurrecting the union.

When it came to talks on the common defence, Lithuanians did not conceal that one of the main reasons for their reluctance to join Poland was their unwillingness to suffer for the vices that the new Poland appeared to inherit from its predecessor. Lithuanians hoped to escape the wrath of Germany and Russia that they thought Poland was likely to experience due to its expansion beyond its ethnographic frontiers. 'We do not have territorial ambition', argued Galvanauskas to Hymans and Askenazy. 'Poland, on the contrary, is exposed to conflicts with Germany, because it occupies partly Germanized territories in the west, and to conflicts with Russia, because in the east its frontier with Russia will be questioned when Russia goes back to normal state. We therefore foresee for Poland many perils and possibilities of conflicts with which we have nothing to do'. Askenazy replied, with some reason, that the idea that Lithuania could maintain neutrality was an illusion, and suggested reading some Ludendorff who thought Lithuania to be the ideal territory for German colonization. Askenazy also reminded Galvanauskas that Russian Whites were openly speaking of retaking both Vilnius and Kaunas. These arguments, however, did not impress

[721] Response of the Lithuanian delegate to the Polish memoire, 1921 05 23 / LNA, S6

Galvanauskas, who, like most Lithuanian politicians, had not much regard for Polish statesmanship or military prowess. Even if united together, said Galvanauskas resignedly, both states would still fail to resist the combination of Germany and Russia against them[722]. In the words of Max Soloveichik, the minister of Jewish affairs attached to the Lithuanian delegation, acceptance of a common foreign policy with Poland would be identical to a 'suicide'[723].

Such fatalistic prophecies, however, did not dim Hymans' determination to move forward and he presented a scheme that both parties were invited to accept as the basis of discussion. Known as the 'Hymans project', it was actually developed with the help of Denis and Mantoux of the League Secretariat, on the basis of the ambassadors' project[724]. Essentially, the scheme tried to find the middle ground between Sapieha's proposals for federation on the one hand, and Lithuanian insistence on 'complete sovereignty' on the other[725]. According to this project, Lithuania would get the border, stretching from the Curzon line in the west to the line set by the Riga treaty in the east, including the so called 'corridor', in return for cantonal structure of Lithuania and its flexible alliance with Poland in matters of foreign policy, defence and economics. Just as Sapieha and Piłsudski wanted, Lithuania would be made up of two autonomous cantons, Kaunas and Vilnius, but this time the powers of the central government and of the cantons would be modelled according to the example of Switzerland. Both Polish and Lithuanian would be the official languages of the state. There was no more talk of the 'cantonal armies', or of the separate cantonal militias. Instead, Lithuania would have a single army with its single command. Żeligowski forces, as well as all non-

[722] Notes on the conversation between Hymans, Askenazy and Galvanauskas, 1921 05 11 / LNA, S6
[723] Soloveichik to Purickis, 1921 04 29 / LCVA 383/7/128, p. 200 rev.
[724] Denis telephone note, 1921 05 18 / LNA, S6
[725] Denis telephone message, 1921 05 18 / Ibid

native officials, would have to evacuate the Vilnius canton, but the troops of Lithuania would not be able to be stationed there until the Vilnius canton had held its cantonal elections[726].

As for Lithuania's relations with Poland, the Hyman's project suggested a rather elastic connection, much weaker than what Sapieha and Piłsudski intended. There would be neither a common president, nor common ministers of foreign affairs or defence. Instead, two permanent joint bodies would be created with strictly limited competencies. A common council for foreign affairs, made out of six representatives, appointed by the two governments in equal numbers, would decide which questions were of joint concern to both states, and would prepare a programme of common action. There would also be a common organ made up of two delegations, equal in numbers, appointed by each of the national parliaments. This body would provide the legislative sanction for those measures of foreign policy of mutual interest that required it.

In the field of economics, the Hymans plan stipulated a more extensive connection than the most favoured nation clause, suggested by the Lithuanians. Both states would enjoy, save for the necessary exceptions, the free movement of goods, as well as the common currency. A common economic council would deal with questions of common economic interest. In addition, the Hymans project teased Lithuanians with the attribution of Memel to Lithuania. Should the Lithuanian-Polish agreement be achieved, Hymans officially pledged to request the League to use its influence with the Allies in favour of the assignment to Lithuania of Memel, which would also serve as Poland's access to the sea[727].

In the most important of the elements of the Lithuanian-Polish union, that of common defence, the Hymans project unceremoniously bowed down to the didactic tradition. The project

[726] LNOJ 1921/09, Annex B, p. 780
[727] Ibid, p. 780-781

awkwardly stipulated the competence for the joint council of foreign affairs to decide if any contemplated common military operation was of a 'defensive character', implying that the whole defensive alliance would only be triggered in case of the affirmative answer. While formally assuming the possibility of offensive action of any of the two states, there was no doubt that this clause was conceived as a check against the assumed Polish bellicosity. This clause was a response to the idea popular in the British, French and the League circles to make Lithuania a moderating influence on the unruly Poland. At the same time, it would safeguard Lithuania against one of the fundamental vices of Poland.

Moreover, the Polish demand for a common military command was watered down in the Hymans project by explicitly leaving the 'main body' of Lithuanian troops under the Lithuanian command in time of war. As a further guarantee, in case the joint council on foreign affairs reached a deadlock in considering whether a particular operation was offensive or defensive in character, both states would conform to the decision of an arbitrator, appointed by the president of the Permanent Court of International Justice in advance. Therefore, Poland in its future military endeavours would receive not only Lithuanian, but also supranational legal supervision.

Before presenting the project to the disputants, the League Secretariat missed no effort in getting it endorsed in London and Paris, whose pressure appeared to be essential. After approaching Balfour and others in London, Drummond let Hymans know that the *rapporteur* could be 'absolutely assured of the fullest support' of the British[728]. Signals from France were likewise encouraging. Hymans and Mantoux went to see Briand himself, who showed much interest and promised French support[729]. Laroche in the Quai d'Orsay was equally enthusiastic and blessed the

[728] Drummond to Hymans, 1921 05 10 / LNA, S6
[729] Mantoux to Drummond, 1921 05 19 / Ibid

project[730], while Bourgeois pledged to support it in the Council[731]. Accordingly, French and British envoys in Warsaw and Kaunas received the instructions to press both governments for acceptance[732].

When Hymans privately sounded Sapieha and showed him his plan, the latter dismissed it as having no hope of acceptance by the Polish cabinet[733]. A week after, when the contents of the project were leaked to the wider public, Sapieha fell. Reaction of the Lithuanian government to the Hymans project was likewise negative. The latter determined to continue its opposition to the cantonal system, as well as to the two official languages and permanent common institutions[734]. International pressure, however, forced both delegations to be inventive in their answers to Hymans. The Lithuanian delegation agreed to take the project as the basis for discussion, and then added a brutal reservation that an understanding between the two countries 'would in no way imply any federalities'[735]. Even such an 'agreement' did not come easy. Askenazy, in the presence of Hymans, had to repeat the question to Galvanauskas seven times before the latter finally agreed to negotiate on the basis of the project. Such an easy answer disquieted other Lithuanian delegates and caused a heated conversation in Lithuanian, after which Galvanauskas took Lithuania's own proposal from his pocket and started outlining its benefits. 'It is either ridiculous or dishonest', Lukasiewicz complained, 'to accept a scheme as a basis for discussion and at the same time to make it perfectly clear that you will have nothing whatsoever to do with the basic principles of that scheme'[736].

[730] Denis to Abraham, 1921 05 18 / Ibid
[731] Denis telephone message, 1921 05 18 / Ibid
[732] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 58, No. 60
[733] Ibid, No. 50
[734] Purickis to Galvanauskas, 1921 05 25 / LCVA, 383/7/127, p. 9
[735] LNOJ 1921/09, Appendix 1, p. 775; Klimas to Purickis, 1921 05 27 / LCVA 383/7/128, p. 100
[736] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 78

The Polish own reply, however, matched the evasiveness of its Lithuanian counterpart. The Poles made their acceptance dependent on the participation in the negotiations, as a third party, of Polish representatives from the puppet state of 'Central Lithuania' and asked to suspend negotiations until this condition was fulfilled[737]. By putting forward a demand which the Lithuanians and the League would most certainly reject, the Poles sought to delay the negotiations until the question of another Polish *fait accompli* in Upper Silesia was resolved[738].

The Polish demand infuriated Galvanauskas, who called it unprecedented in diplomatic history[739]. The British reacted by postponing the sending of a financial adviser to Warsaw until the Vilnius conflict was settled[740]. O.C. Harvey, a junior Polono-skeptic in the Foreign Office, scolded Poland for breaking the negotiations and praised the Lithuanians for going as far as they could without committing themselves to the 'hateful federation'[741]. Max Muller had a hard talk with the acting Polish foreign minister Jan Dąbski and told him that appointment of the Vilnius delegation under the Żeligowski regime would be nothing but a farce. The British minister taught Dąbski to consult the Allies next time he dispatched instructions, just as the Lithuanians did[742].

In Brussels, Hymans scolded Askenazy in a raised voice about Żeligowski's illegal 'regime of force'[743]. As a compromise, upon Drummond's suggestion, the rapporteur proposed to allow both Poland and Lithuania invite an equal number of witnesses from Vilnius[744]. Askenazy,

[737] LNOJ 1921/09, Appendix 2, p. 776
[738] Summary of the fourteenth round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 05 30 / LNA, S6
[739] Declaration of the Lithuanian delegation, 1921 05 29 / AAN, Meystowicz papers, 1128/09
[740] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 66
[741] Harvey minute, 1921 06 16 / TNA FO 371/6725, p. 172
[742] DBFP S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 71
[743] Summary of the fifteenth round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 06 01 / LNA, S6; Mantoux to Abraham, 1921 05 30 / Ibid
[744] Denis to Mantoux, 1921 05 30 / Ibid

however, was immovable. 'The act of general Żeligowski is a fact', he reminded, and 'in the presence of this fact one has to look for a solution'[745].

Askenazy's obstinacy disquieted the French, albeit for quite a different reason. Few in Paris had any qualms about Lithuania, which was regarded with deep suspicion. Padovani, the French representative in Kaunas, scorned the Lithuanians for waiting for 'better days that would bring about Polish catastrophes'[746]. For Briand, 'it was very important that Poland would not give an appearance of being intractable and that it would not take the responsibility for rejecting the envisaged agreement'. At the time when Lloyd George lambasted the Poles for presenting yet another *fait accompli* in Upper Silesia[747], Polish intractability in the Vilnius question appeared to play in the hands of the British, helping them resist the French pro-Polish policy in the former issue. Briand thus instructed Panafieu to press the Poles to show Poland's deference to the will of the League Council and to accept the Hymans project as the basis for discussion, thereby preparing the ground for the favourable settlement of the Upper Silesian question[748]. In the same vein, Laroche in the Quai d'Orsay pressed Grabski to continue negotiations with the Lithuanians and to desist from annoying the British any further[749].

In this connection, the French deprecated Polish insistence on involving their puppet state in the negotiations. As for the Lithuanian and Hymans' demand to evacuate Żeligowski's troops, Paris pondered a settlement whereby only 'non-locals' would have to leave. As it was nearly impossible to determine who were the locals, Poland's formal adherence to such a solution would

[745] Summary of the fifteenth round of Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, 1921 06 01 / Ibid
[746] Padovani to Briand, 1921 06 24 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 94
[747] Lloyd George speech at the House of Commons, 1921 05 13
[748] Briand circular, 1921 06 06 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 68
[749] Note on Laroche conversation with Grabski, 1921 06 11 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 74

display its loyalty for the League, while also leaving Polish military occupation and communication between mainland Poland and the Polish-Russian border east of Vilnius intact[750].

While Grabski agreed and promised Polish acceptance of the Hymans project as the basis for discussion, he did not conceal his feelings towards a union with Lithuanians which were shared by his fellow Endeks. 'To conduct a common foreign policy with Lithuania is to open one's cards to Germany', the Polish premier scaremongered the French[751]. Pressed by Panafieu in Warsaw, Lukasiewicz reluctantly agreed to continue negotiations, but complained of the anti-Polishness of the League Secretariat and of the pro-Lithuanianess of the British. He also claimed that Hymans did not know much about Vilnius and feared new pro-Lithuanian amendments[752].

'To receive and to give nothing, and on top of this make one think that it is the other who is obstinate, this is the tactics', complained Mantoux. 'It is for us to prevent it from succeeding and, if necessary, to denounce it *urbi et orbi*'. To Mantoux, the Polish reservation appeared to be a trap for the League, implicating the latter in the indifference towards the principle of self-determination[753]. After the Brussels negotiations broke down, Hymans and the Secretariat now counted on the support from the Council and invited both delegations to appear in Geneva at the end of June.

5.3 The Geneva deception

On the eve of the Geneva Council session, both Britain and France endorsed Hymans' project. For the British Polono-skeptics, who thought a Polish Vilnius would sooner or later mean

[750] Note on the Vilnius question, 1921 06 16 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 82
[751] Note on Laroche conversation with Grabski, 1921 06 11 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 74
[752] Panafieu to Quai d'Orsay, 1921 06 14 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 80
[753] Mantoux to Comert, 1921 05 30 / LNA, S6

a Russian war, the settlement in the League appeared to be the last opportunity to get the Poles out. Fisher, who came to Geneva to represent Britain in the Council, was glad to find Chardigny, the head of the League Control Commission, 'very much alive to defects of the Poles' and in favour of the expulsion of Żeligowski's forces from Vilnius[754]. Chardigny, who was still recovering from the egging in Vilnius, ranted at Fisher that 'the Poles were impossible, that their arrogance and folly made enemies for them on every side, with the result that there had been a great change of feeling with respect to them in Paris'[755].

The idea of a change of the French attitude, of course, was more a result of wishful thinking than an accurate reflection of the French policy. Briand's support for the Hymans' project was first and foremost tactical, seeking to bolster Poland's image in the League and to mollify Britain in the forthcoming settlement of Upper Silesia. The ground had been prepared, he wrote to the French delegate in the League Gabriel Hanotaux, for Poland to accept the Hymans' project as a matter of principle. Briand did not mention Lithuania in this regard. If the Poles accepted the proposal, and the Lithuanians rejected it, the key French objective would still be achieved. Ironically, while Fisher wrongly assumed the cooling of Franco-Polish relations, Briand unfoundedly praised Fisher as the first British delegate who appeared to agree with the French on a Polish question[756].

On 28 June, the Council in its unanimous resolution approved the Hymans' project and invited both delegations to continue negotiations on its basis. To deal with the trap of self-determination, the resolution provided for the subsequent confirmation of the final agreement between Lithuania and Poland by the cantonal diet of Vilnius. At the same time, the resolution demanded Poland evacuate, by 1st September, Żeligowski's troops and administrative officials who

[754] Fisher diary, p. 764
[755] Fisher's note on the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations, 1921 06 29 / TNA CAB 24/126/1
[756] Briand circular, 1921 06 24 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 90

were not natives of the disputed territory and projected a local police force of around 5,000 men, to be organised by the League's Military Control Commission. The resolution also asked Lithuania, until the same date, to withdraw its troops to their normal peace stations and to effect a partial demobilisation[757].

To bolster the acceptance of the resolution by the governments in Kaunas and Warsaw, representatives of the Council unleashed their powers of imperative moral persuasion. 'The whole world has need of peace, and to refuse to accept as a basis of further discussion a plan which affords a reasonable prospect of peace, would constitute an act of treason against the interests of European civilisation', lectured Fisher. Both Hanotaux and Imperiali of Italy endorsed Fisher's statement and stressed the unanimity of the Council[758].

On 15 July, the Polish foreign minister Konstanty Skirmunt formally accepted the Council's resolution in principle. To the annoyance of Hymans, the Polish submission still sheltered behind the pretence of Żeligowski's autonomy vis-à-vis Warsaw and left to the latter the fulfilment of measures of evacuation prescribed by the resolution[759]. Meanwhile, in the Lithuanian assembly, the Hymans' project and the Council resolution evoked nearly universal opposition. Aside from the many undesired aspects of the Lithuanian-Polish union, the Lithuanians predicted Polish abuse of the evacuation clauses and did not even consider demobilisation. The appearance of the Hymans' project in the press provoked public protests, which were also incited by the opposition. The many articles of condemnation in the press coined the prejorative term 'hymansman', denoting anyone who was in favour of the idea presented by the Belgian. The Lithuanian reply that reached Hymans on 22 July awkwardly stood on the 'immediate and exact fulfilment of the Suwalki Agreement'

[757] LNOJ 1921/09, Annex E, p. 784
[758] LNOJ 1921/09, p. 767
[759] LNOJ 1921/10, p. 869

and rejected the Council's resolution *in toto*[760]. As a result, the first round of international evasion was won by the Polish side.

The depth of the Lithuanian sense of affront greatly upset the League. Disappointed, Hymans told the Lithuanians that their quoted Suwalki armistice was worthless in real life negotiations[761]. To Drummond, it was the Lithuanian categorical espousal of the didactic tradition that was to blame for the refusal. 'Of course they believe that Poland is an ephemeral creation and that when Russia revives she will help them not only to secure the disputed territory, but much more in addition', argued Drummond. He was now in favour of withdrawing the League's Control Commission and leaving the Lithuanians 'stew in their own juice' for not having played squarely with the League[762]. It was now Crowe of the Foreign Office who urged moderation on the Secretary General and advised patience. Crowe explained that the reply of the inexperienced Lithuanians, who were his frequent visitors, looked worse than it was meant to be, and that it did not mean the refusal to continue the negotiations[763].

In Geneva, both Hymans and the Secretariat were reluctant to inaugurate the League's history with a certain failure. The rapporteur still invited the two delegations to come to Geneva at the end of August. After the Allies charged the League to trace the frontier in Upper Silesia, Denis thought the League could exploit its increased leverage vis-à-vis the Poles in the settlement of the Vilnius question[764].

While agreeing to send Askenazy to Geneva for another round of negotiations, Warsaw already considered the project of federation with the Lithuanians a failure and looked forward to

[760] LNOJ 1921/10, p. 870
[761] Naruševičius to Purickis, 1921 07 26 / LCVA 383/7/128, p. 74
[762] Drummond to Balfour, 1921 07 22 / DBFP, S1, Vol. 23, No. 131, Note 163/2
[763] Crowe to Drummond, 1921 08 09 / DBFP, S1, Vol. 23, No. 131
[764] Denis to Chardigny, 1921 08 13 / LNA, S6

convoking the Vilnius assembly, which was to appeal for annexation of the Vilnius region to Poland. In the likely event of the League's unwillingness to allow Poland a free hand in Vilnius, Skirmunt instructed Askenazy to delay the Vilnius case in the League until the settlement of the question of Upper Silesia had been achieved. Fearing to annoy the Powers and the League in the latter question, the Poles were also postponing the announcement of Vilnius elections. In case the issue of elections surfaced during the negotiations, Askenazy was to emphasize 'spontaneity of peoples' demands' for the immediate self-determination. 'Our aims therefore should be to deny all significance to both the Hymans' project and to our other obligations associated with this project', read instructions to Askenazy. If the Lithuanians raised the matter of the broken Suwalki armistice, the Polish delegate was to deny its significance on the basis of its temporary military character. If Hymans insisted on the continuation of the direct Lithuanian-Polish negotiations, Askenazy was instructed to stall them by introducing the issues of minorities or by raising the question of the establishment of consular relations with Lithuania, and putting their resolution as a condition for entering into negotiations on the Hymans project[765]. The Poles also isolated Lithuanians by securing the agreement of the Baltic states to desist from an alliance with Lithuania, pending the settlement of the Vilnius question[766].

On 3 September, after long discussions with each of the delegations, Hymans presented his amended draft, which tried to appease the Lithuanians. Responding to Lithuanian objections that the first project amounted to a complete overhaul of the internal constitution of Lithuania, the second project dropped the idea of bi-cantonal federation of Lithuania in favour of the single Vilnius canton within the Lithuanian state. The Vilnius canton would enjoy the same degree of

[765] Skirmunt's instruction to Askenazy, 1921 08 18 / AAN, Meystowicz papers, 1128/09
[766] Chardigny to Denis, 1921 08 07 / LNA, S6

autonomy as a Swiss canton, including its representation in the central diet of Lithuania in proportion to its population. The central diet and government of Lithuania, sitting in Vilnius, would then have the same powers over the Vilnius canton as the Swiss federal government had vis-à-vis the Swiss cantons. The institutions of liaison between the foreign policies of the two states would remain the same as they were in the first Hymans project - joint sessions of the two parliamentary delegations, as well as a common council for foreign affairs, with the modification that the power to decide which questions jointly concerned the two countries would now be given to the joint sitting of the two parliamentary delegations, instead of the common council for foreign affairs. This reversal amounted to adding more legislative safeguards to the coordination of foreign policy.

In the realm of defensive cooperation, while the first Hymans project stipulated the competence for the joint council for foreign affairs to decide whether a contemplated military operation was of a 'defensive character', Hymans' new draft vaguely left for the two governments to decide whether they should help each other in war at all, at the same time leaving the awkward reference to arbitration in case of a disagreement on this point[767]. The new constitutional formula, then, followed the old didactic tradition: Lithuania would serve to tame the vices of Poland, while Poland would be precluded from drawing Lithuania into its bellicose adventures.

The amended Hymans project started a new round of evasion. Briand now bet on Lithuanian refusal and urged the Poles to accept. As before, he thought this would mollify accusations of Polish imperialism and intransigence in the League and would help to sway the votes in the commission of the Council, charged with the question of Upper Silesia[768]. To the annoyance of the French, however, Askenazy's official reply stated that Poland accepted the first

[767] Council resolution, 1921 09 20 / LNA, S6
[768] Briand to Panafieu, 1921 09 08 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 207

Hymans project as the basis for discussion and saw no reason to even comment on the new draft[769]. In his speech in the League Assembly, Askenazy called the second Hymans draft 'the most mortal injury aimed against Poland's existence since the partition'[770].

Having been scolded by the British for their unfortunate attempts at drafting, the Lithuanians now sourced help at the Foreign Office and put together a reply that did not conceal British input. There was no more talk of the Suwalki armistice or of the woes of Żeligowski. Instead, the Lithuanian statement accepted the 'general features' of the second Hymans project, and openly outlined a number of concessions which the Lithuanians were prepared to make, including a common 'secretariat' of foreign affairs, a common economic council, a defensive military agreement and a wide autonomy for Vilnius, including the right to use Polish there as an official language. Lithuanians also attached to their reply the elaborate comparison between the latest Hymans proposal and its Lithuanian corrections[771].

While the sudden smartness of Lithuanians in watering down the clauses of his compromise project annoyed Hymans, Poland's flat refusal made him quote Beneš who had said that 'Poland would not survive the years unless she got a different race of statesmen'[772]. Embarrassed by the endless dispute, Hymans now refused to allow any modifications of his latest draft and put it before the Council. The latter unanimously adopted the second Hymans draft as the definite and final recommendation.

In a steamy Council session, Lithuanian-Polish recriminations were followed by solemn appeals to reason. Balfour scolded Askenazy and urged the Council to invoke 'the strength of moral

[769] LNOJ 1921/09, p. 999
[770] Assembly session, 1921 09 24 / LNA, S6
[771] LNOJ 1921/09, p. 993
[772] Fisher diary, p. 822

persuasion'. 'It is not tolerable for Lithuania, for Poland, for the comity of nations, that this sore should be a running and perpetual sore', pleaded the British representative[773]. Bourgeois, on his part, remembered the times when Paderewski shook hands with Voldemaras and urged both disputants to make a sacrifice in the 'higher common interest of all, the interest of the League of Nations and in the interest of the whole world, which cannot be separated the one from the other'[774].

To Bourgeois, the internationalist French representative in the Council, the Lithuanian semi-positive reply appeared to offer the real basis for the settlement of the dispute. Consequently, he sounded Paris with the view of mounting serious pressure on Poland together with the British. To the dismay of Bourgeois, Briand responded by deprecating the second Hymans draft and by scolding Bourgeois for insufficient appreciation of Polish interests against the French 'adversaries and rivals'. Lithuania, taught the French premier, was a country of 'very inferior civilisation', ruled by a handful of intellectuals under German influence, which needed to be substituted by Polish influence. The second Hymans draft, in Briand's view, made the latter goal more difficult to achieve[775]. The Quai d'Orsay also instructed their representative in the League to abstain from voting on the acceptance of Lithuania into the League of Nations, which was formally proposed by Hymans, and which eventually left France and Poland the only two abstentions in the context of the unanimous vote in favour. 'I cannot hide from you the complete isolation in which we find ourselves together with Poland in the current situation', regretted Bourgeois. 'The general impression here is that, in the alliance known to everybody of Poland and France, it is the Polish views which prevail'[776].

[773] Council session, 1921 09 24 / LNA, S6
[774] Ibid
[775] Biand to Bourgeois, 1921 09 22 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 231
[776] Bourgeois to Briand, 1921 09 26 / ADMAE, SDN 253, p. 237

While the League waited for the response of the two governments to the Council's final recommendation, it was clear from the beginning that the Polish response would be missing or negative. Having the tacit agreement of the French, and against the British non-committal advice, Warsaw began preparations for the elections to the Vilnius diet. It was now left for Lithuania to decide if the League's involvement was a partial, or a total failure. Besides, a positive Lithuanian reply to the League would offer the basis for keeping the dispute alive internationally. The power of verdict on the long internationalist effort, however, was also claimed by a power on the red fringe of diplomacy.

5.4 The Red Obstruction

The negotiations in Brussels under Hymans chairmanship coincided with the arrival in Lithuania of the new Soviet envoy, Semion Ivanovich Aralov. While his predecessor Axelrod was a true 'old communist', Semion Ivanovich Aralov was a true professional. Having earned the modest rank of Major in the military intelligence department of the Imperial Russian Army, Aralov was one of the founding members of the Cheka after the Revolution, and from October 1918 headed the Red Army Intelligence Directorate, precursor to the Russian foreign military intelligence service (GRU). In July 1920, at the time of the climax of the Russian-Polish war, Aralov had relinquished his position as the head of GRU and took an operational role as the head of intelligence of the 12th Army. He was sent to Lithuania as a diplomat after his candidacy had been refused by the Czechs, who implicated him in the executions of Czech nationals.

Being much less 'civilian' than his western diplomatic peers in Kaunas, Aralov blended well with the confidential rules that the Communist party's Central Executive Committee laid down for the Soviet diplomatic missions abroad. The rules awkwardly acknowledged that a Soviet

diplomatic mission was not desired and could only be 'tolerated' by a receiving state. Soviet diplomats were required to counter the probing on the part of the 'enemy' with utmost secrecy and with spartacist military discipline. 'In any other, see a spy, in any acquaintance – a traitor', read the theses. Hence even for the most trustworthy diplomats, there should remain in Russia their relatives or close friends as potential hostages, in order to insure against deflection[777].

A true spy of military grade, Aralov was not much of a doctrinaire. In his despatches, he still habitually referred to Soviet Russia simply as 'Russia' and tended to avoid ideological clichés. His rare attempts at adjustment of the substance of his messages to the ideas of class struggle came out as superficial and unconvincing. 'This class struggle is so strongly rooted that it appears to me that for this reason I cannot guess their real intentions', read one of Aralov's excuses[778].

Chicherin drafted his new envoy in Kaunas very extensive instructions, at the basis of which lay the painful realization that Soviet Russia was not up to the challenge of exporting the revolution in the short term. With their army repelled by the Poles, and with their country ravaged by famine, the Bolsheviks had to adapt their foreign policy to the unwelcoming reality. 'You are joining the work under completely different international conditions than those under which Axelrod was working last year', lectured Chicherin. 'The last attempts to attack Russia have been liquidated, and we reached the period of peaceful coexistence and economic cooperation with all nations, even if they are capitalist'. Soviet Russia now needed to restore its economy, and this in turn required peace and priority of economic interests in Soviet foreign policy, with preference for transit and trade. In this regard, Chicherin noted, the Baltic states were of paramount importance. It was not long ago, remembered the Soviet Narkom, when the Western enemies tried to use the former

[777] Theses by the Communist Party CK executive committee for Soviet missions / LCVA 383/7/108, p. 10
[778] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 28 / AVPRF 151/4/6/5, p. 17

Russian Western provinces in order to separate Russia from the 'live world'. However, thanks to Soviet recognition of the Baltic countries, they turned from a barrier to 'geographical intermediaries', connected to Russia via common interests. 'It is in our interest to continue this entirely appropriate situation', explained Chicherin[779].

Chicherin's instructions exhibited a certain pro-Lithuanian flavour that served to set Lithuania apart from the other Baltic states. First, Lithuania had engaged in the war against the Bolsheviks on much lower a scale than its neighbours, because it was shielded by Polish-Latvian operations in the east. Secondly, according to Chicherin, the social character itself in Lithuania with predominance of peasant influence made the Lithuanian government friendlier to Soviet Russia than were its neighbours. More particularly, Chicherin observed that the opposition between Lithuanian peasantry and Polish landlords was very deeply rooted in Lithuanian politics and was conducive to a pro-Russian orientation[780].

Unsurprisingly, the Lithuanian-Polish conflict received a great deal of attention in Bolshevik foreign policy. Appreciating Lithuanian 'decisive' refusal to join the war on the side of the Whites or the Poles, Chicherin saw any project of merging Lithuania and Poland together as yet another attempt by the Entente to create anti-Soviet coalitions. 'Follow with utmost attention any attempts to bring Lithuania and Poland closer together', Chicherin instructed Aralov. 'Lithuanian independence is one of our core international interests. Independence also in a sense that certain Western powers try to turn Lithuania into their vassal province'[781]. Aralov was to guard Lithuania by all the means available against 'simple swallowing' by Poland and to warn 'not

[779] Chicherin's instructions to Aralov, 1921 04 28 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 50
[780] Ibid
[781] Ibid

always astute Lithuanian political figures who sometimes easily succumb to the bait of the Entente'[782].

'Through a number of combinations, create disagreements among surrounding states, thus weakening them, strengthening our prestige and influence and attaching them to us', Aralov built upon Chicherin's guidelines. The Soviet envoy expected that Russia's geographic proximity would help counter and neutralise the influence of the Entente[783]. 'The more tense and unsettled are Lithuanian-Polish relations, the better it is for us, and it is necessary, of course, to inflate them further', reasoned Aralov[784].

The possibility of Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement also upset Soviet plans for a closer cooperation with Germany through Lithuania, which was already impaired by Grabski's corridor. Despite very active spying by the French military mission, Kaunas still served as a hub of secret contact between Russian and German agents. The Germans were interested in transferring from Germany to Russia the factories and technicians of aircraft systems, whose manufacture was restricted by the Versailles treaty[785]. In this respect, Aralov established contact with the director of the German air transport company Lloyd-Ostflug[786] and was approached by the representatives of Kiger planes[787]. Aralov also arranged secret visits to Moscow of the representatives of German consortiums[788].

In the summer of 1921, Aralov's agent in Koenigsberg met Prussian officers Erich Riecker, Rudolf Lissigkeit and Friedrich Pahl. After verifying the Soviet agent's feelings towards Poland

[782] Chicherin to Mostovenko, 1921 03 24 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 6
[783] Aralov to Litvinov, 1921 06 25 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 106
[784] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 09 10 / Ibid, p. 59
[785] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 28 / AVPRF 0151/4/6/5, p. 17
[786] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 22 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 200
[787] Aralov to Litvinov, 1921 06 08 / Ibid, p. 148
[788] Davtian to Zander, 1921 12 12 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 21

and France, the Prussians opened up and ranted about humiliation and threat to East Prussia coming from Poland. 'Why haven't you done anything, when we were near Warsaw?', complained the Bolshevik. 'We couldn't', explained the Prussians, 'we had too few soldiers, we would have been totally repressed [by the Entente], it was still too early – we have to wait until Britain and France drift apart'. Riecker, who claimed to be in charge of a 100,000-strong organisation, offered the Soviets specialists of all types, including military officers and generals, as well as railway material, canned food and medicine[789].

In their cordial exchanges, Soviet and German emissaries in Kaunas agreed that the prospect of the extension of Poland at the expense of Lithuania was mutually undesirable. The German Vice-consul in Kaunas Gahn directly asked Aralov if, in the event of the Lithuanian-Polish union, Russia would act 'not only with words, but also in arms'. 'Both the third state (Russia) and the fourth state (Germany) would be in a similar situation, because our economic interests here coincide', Aralov redirected the question. Gahn, however, confessed that even if Poland decided to devour Lithuania, Germany could not afford to be the fourth state due to its precarious position vis-a-vis the Entente[790]. Signals coming from East Prussia were somewhat more reassuring, but nothing concrete. Upon visiting Aralov in Kaunas, unofficial agents from Koenigsberg vaguely promised the help of certain circles of East Prussia, if Soviet Russia decided to help Lithuania in the event of its war with Poland[791].

For the Soviet envoy, just as for his commissar in the Narkomindel, it was the social aspect that determined the contours of the Lithuanian Polish conflict. Aralov identified 'Lithuanian peasant's historic hatred towards a Polish landlord' as the cornerstone of Lithuanian foreign policy.

[789] Talk between German and Soviet agents (undated, approx. summer 1921) / AVPRF, 0151/5/4/20, p. 97
[790] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 17 / Ibid, p. 214
[791] Aralov to Litvinov, 1921 06 14 / Ibid, p. 119

He noticed that land in Lithuania was desired not only by the landless peasants, but also by the middle class, and registered fears that in the event of the union with Poland, the Polish landlords who had fled Lithuania during the war, would return and take back the land that was being parcelled under the land reform[792]. For Aralov, the apparent dichotomy between Lithuanians-peasants and Poles-landlords provided the 'objective' reason for Lithuanian rejection of ties with Poland[793].

From the first days of his arrival, Aralov's work in Lithuania revealed tensions between pro and anti-Lithuanian motivations that characterised the awkward 'peaceful coexistence'. On the one hand, he appeared to like Lithuania thanks to its overwhelmingly peasant, non-aristocratic character. On the other hand, Aralov constantly complained to Moscow of anti-communist repressions and counted more than 150 communists in Lithuanian jails. The communist party had been declared illegal in Lithuania and its underground activities were being harshly prosecuted by the authorities. Those who were sentenced to execution for preparing armed coups, Aralov was not able to save even by threatening the implications for the relations between Lithuania and Soviet Russia[794]. The Soviet envoy thought it necessary to 'discredit the Lithuanian government, use all the means to point to their class hatred towards workers and uncover peasant hypocrisy (sic)'[795].

Aralov's triple role of a spy, a diplomat and a communist manifested certain contradictions. As a communist, Aralov preferred to work for the peaceful legalisation of the communist party and complained to Moscow of the plots of takeover of power in Lithuania, still advocated by the Comintern. At any rate, he found Lithuanian communists weak, their communist enlightenment unsatisfactory and their connection with the masses poor. As an eminent spy, he lectured

[792] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 21 / Ibid, p. 207
[793] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 09 10 / Ibid, p. 59
[794] Aralov to Litvinov, 1921 06 11 / Ibid, p. 133,
[795] Aralov to Jakubovich, 1921 06 23 / Ibid, p. 2

Narkomindel that it was very difficult to do secret work in a small country such as Lithuania. Aralov was annoyed by amateurish blunders of the underground communists, whom he regularly had to send back to Moscow after their loss of cover. He also praised the good organisation of Lithuanian secret services under Christian-Democratic leadership. After searching the communists, the Lithuanians were finding secret warehouses of dynamite and weapons. Such instances only served to hinder the work of Aralov-the diplomat.

The news of the Lithuanian-Polish negotiations in Brussels under the auspices of the League seriously disquieted Moscow and its new emissary. 'Nothing is clear, I do not understand what this means', complained Chicherin confusedly[796]. 'Why are Lithuanians going to Brussels, after they have refused [the plebiscite]?', he asked[797]. Generally, the feelings of Soviet diplomats towards the League, which they saw as an instrument of the Entente, stretched from envy to denial. In order to belittle its authority, the League was referred in Soviet diplomatic correspondence as 'a collection of states calling themselves the League of Nations'. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks felt bitterness as a result of their exclusion from the organisation, which contributed to their diplomatic isolation. 'The [club of] saintest of the saints', sarcastically wrote Aralov, hinting that Entente powers were not that much more benign than Soviet Russia. Lithuanian peasants touring the finest halls of Brussels and Geneva, which were barred to the Bolsheviks, could only add to the anxiety. 'Diplomatic voyages made Lithuanian diplomats giddy', Aralov complained. 'After seeing 'good tone', sitting and talking to 'real people', they became quite proud'[798].

Soviet diplomacy faced severe constraints in its choice of tactics for unsettling the Lithuanian-Polish conciliation in the League. Grabski's corridor barred the Soviets from

[796] Chicherin to Mostovenko, 1921 03 27 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 3
[797] Chicherin to Mostovenko, 1921 04 10 / AVPRF, 0151/4/6/5, p. 49
[798] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 06 22 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 113

employing the crudest methods of pressure against Lithuania. In the words of Aralov's predecessor, 'If we had a border with them, we could squeeze them; now, however, we have to behave with them with utmost care in every step, in order not to harm the common cause by some awkward word'[799]. After the Poles had finally accepted Karakhan as the Soviet envoy in Warsaw in May 1921, Soviet diplomacy operated under the assumption that tendency in Polish diplomacy towards peace prevailed. Being in no position to fight another war, and looking forward to economic reconstruction, the Soviets could not afford to risk complications in Soviet-Polish relations by overtly supporting Lithuania against Poland. Soviet Russia, after all, had been compelled to declare desinteressement in the Vilnius dispute in the Riga treaty; any stronger intervention on Lithuania's behalf in Warsaw could be construed as the breaking of its obligations.

Consequently, the methods available to Soviet diplomacy in countering the efforts of the League to bring Lithuania and Poland closer together were limited to careful bluffing about the possibility of a new war, attempts at psychological persuasion and doing small favours for Lithuania. The precarious position of Lithuania, which almost evoked Aralov's sympathy, offered some prospect of success of such a tactics. The Soviet envoy transmitted to Moscow a gloomy picture of Lithuania, where three fourths of its budget was devoted to the army, where chauvinism was on the increase, while the Poles were entrenching in Vilnius and raiding the border regions. 'The Entente bites and grumbles for friendly neutrality towards Russia, the Poles bared their teeth, British attention can be painful as well, and Russia is separated by the corridor', observed Aralov. 'They feel hunted down, cornered and prepare for a new Polish offensive'[800].

[799] Axelrod to Chicherin, 1921 02 22 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 35
[800] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 06 01 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 174

Seeking to persuade the Lithuanians to reject the Hymans project, Chicherin pondered 'concessions', what first and foremost translated into fulfilling the obligations that Soviet Russia had assumed in their peace treaty with the Lithuanians. 'All questions (transit, return of prisoners, etc.) have to be decided in the most favourable way to Lithuania. Grant all their wishes, excluding cases where this would prejudice our security', Chicherin instructed Aralov[801]. In practice, however, the Soviets were extremely reluctant to fulfil their treaty obligations. While Aralov urged Narkomindel to release more Lithuanians from Bolshevik prisons in Russia, only a handful of people per month reached Lithuania. Lithuanian pleas to return their ancient archives likewise remained unanswered, despite Aralov's recommendation to Moscow that only rats would consult them in Russia[802]. Neither was there much progress in the matter of the return of property, evacuated from Lithuania during the war. 'Lithuanians are annoyed that <..> they only receive all sorts of rubbish. I think there is no big danger in this', advised Aralov, who feared that return of Lithuanian property would contribute to the ongoing drain of gold and silver from revolutionary Russia[803].

Fearing provoking the Poles by their bluff, the Soviets could not offer much help in the form of anti-Polish notes, a method used in previous stages of the dispute unsettlement with some success. When Baltrušaitis asked Chicherin for a Soviet note to Poland against the Lithuanian-Polish union for use in Brussels negotiations, Chicherin only allowed his thoughts to be transcribed in a lower-status protocol. Its mildness, however, rendered it useless. The chief of Soviet diplomacy only went so far as to call the plans of a Lithuanian-Polish union a new episode in the Entente's

[801] Chicherin's instructions to Aralov, 1921 04 28 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 50
[802] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 08 31 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 76
[803] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 08 24 / Ibid, p. 68

interventionist policy and the victory of Soviet enemies[804]. Another Soviet note to Lithuania, which Purickis had begged for countering the second Hymans project, was a tad stronger. Unlimited Lithuanian independence, read the note, was crucial to Soviet Russia, and now the latter heard that in Geneva, in the meeting of the 'so called League of Nations', proposals were put forward which could hinder that independence. Russia, therefore, could not remain indifferent, when France tried to join all its western neighbours, including Lithuania, against it, and Lithuania was invited to draw the necessary attention. A more serious expression, which bluntly called the Hymans project a 'hostile act', had been scraped in the Narkomindel as too risky a bluff[805].

The Lithuanians did their best to exploit the latter note in London and Paris. Max Muller, having no clue of Lithuanian complicity, helpfully disseminated it to both the Poles and the French[806]. To Gregory in the Foreign Office, the note only proved that it was impossible to know what the Bolsheviks were up to[807]. In the Quai d'Orsay, the Lithuanians unsuccessfully attempted to use the note to get Żeligowski out of Vilnius, by arguing that the continued Polish occupation could provoke another Polish-Soviet war. Laroche, while giving some credibility to Soviet threats, thought instead that the Vilnius question was only a pretext that could not provoke the Soviet attack alone[808]. The Soviet note also provoked a protest from Warsaw, which contended that Soviet interference in the Lithuanian-Polish dispute ran contrary to the clause of the Riga treaty that left the Vilnius conflict to be settled exclusively between Lithuania and Poland. In response, Moscow

[804] Baltrušaitis to Purickis, 1921 05 02 / LCVA 383/7/108, p. 131
[805] Chicherin to Avižonis, 1921 09 16 / AVPRF 0151/3/2/1, p. 52
[806] Max Muller to Curzon, 1921 09 30 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 175
[807] Dilley to Curzon, 1921 09 22 / Ibid, No. 163, Note 197/1
[808] Hardinge to Curzon, 1921 09 30 / Ibid, No. 176

cleverly argued that Poland prejudiced the said treaty clause itself when it agreed to transfer the settlement of the Vilnius question to the League[809].

What remained in the Soviet arsenal in obstructing the Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement under the auspices of the League, then, was persuasion by the mixture of empty threats and no less empty promises of support. Unsurprisingly, such efforts worked best on the Lithuanian representatives in Moscow, who had eventually become the stounchest advocates of the refusal of the Hymans project. The Lithuanian minister in Moscow, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, was already a Russophile. One of the most renown symbolist poets in Russia, he had also chaired the Russian writer‘s society in Moscow, a prestigious post which he had to relinquish when taking up his position as the Lithuanian minister. Impressionable Baltrušaitis, who enjoyed intellectual conversations with Chicherin, but witnessed first hand the cruelty of the Bolsheviks, easily succumbed to the Soviet point of view in the Lithuanian-Polish question. In Narkomindel, Baltrušaitis was persuaded that Russia would regard Lithuanian acceptance of the Hymans project as a hostile act, and took for granted the hint of a new Soviet-Polish war in the near future. At the same time, he was pacified by unofficial promises of support in case of Polish attack on Lithuania[810]. Terrified, Baltrušaitis employed all his poetic persuasion to persuade Kaunas to break with Hymans. ‘They are going to attack Poland inhumanely, with barbaric methods‘, he wrote to the foreign minister. Soviets, he warned, were preparing for Poland death batallions and a special branch of Cheka, made up of Bolsheviks who were burning with feelings of revenge and of hatred for aristocracy. If Lithuania sided with Poland, Soviets would treat it as the latter‘s left flank and

[809] Davtian to Zander, 1921 12 12 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 21
[810] Baltrušaitis to Purickis, 1921 11 27 / LCVA 383/7/108, p. 29 rev.

unleash all their brutality on Lithuanians[811]. As for the Entente and the League, Lithuania was only a 'cork to temporary plug a hole', argued the Lithuanian minister in Moscow[812].

Juozas Avižonis, the secretary of the Lithuanian legation in Moscow, was no less enthusiastic and advocated full orientation towards Soviet Russia as the cornerstone of Lithuanian independence. The communists, he wrote to Kaunas, were 'sick people, immersed in idée fixe, stubborn psychos', and one had to approach them as such – 'treat them in all seriousness, press them to bow down to healthy reason and firm will, and only avoid one thing – beating them with a stick, because a sick man hates a fist'[813]. 'The devil is not as scary as it is said to be', wrote Avižonis. Britain and France, he thought, did not care much about Lithuania, thus it was better to project the latter as a neat barrier between Russia and Germany. Just like Baltrušaitis, Avižonis was impressed by the Soviet hatred of Poland's 'internal anarchy' and widespread nobility and energetically pleaded for the rejection of the final Hymans project[814]. 'This firm word, the last word – will have to put an end to it'.[815]

Yet Moscow did not gain much from the enthusiasm of the Lithuanian legation. Kaunas always took the views of its emissaries in Moscow with a grain of salt and even pondered replacing Baltrušaitis. The Soviets, too, had mixed feelings about him. While Chicherin called him 'precious'[816], Davtian and Aralov were convinced that Baltrušaitis was 'two faced', insincere, only tried to pose as 'our man' and hence could not be trusted[817].

[811] Baltrušaitis to Purickis, 1921 11 27 / Ibid, p. 31
[812] Baltrušaitis to Purickis, 1921 10 31 / Ibid, p. 35
[813] Avižonis to Purickis, 1921 07 21 / LCVA 383/7/109, p. 121
[814] Avižonis to Purickis, 1921 11 03 / Ibid, p. 30
[815] Avižonis to Purickis, 1921 11 06 / Ibid, p. 5 rev.
[816] Chicherin to Aralov, 1921 05 29 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 69
[817] Davtian to Aralov, 1921 09 30 / Ibid, p. 27

Consequently, all the work to obstruct Hymans‘ project at the League was left to Aralov‘s Cheka‘ist mastery in Kaunas. Increased Lithuanian secretiveness during the Lithuanian-Polish negotiations in Brussels and Geneva made this work even more challenging. Foreign minister Purickis cut down on meetings with Aralov and stopped returning visits, despite the latter’s frequent calls and offers of support[818]. While Purickis longed for the Polish-Soviet war and ‘gulped down’ every hint dropped by Aralov regarding complications in Russian-Polish relations. He did not consider Aralov’s threats or bland promises of support very seriously[819].

The sudden acceptance of the second Hymans’ draft by the Lithuanian delegation in Geneva compelled Aralov to step up his activities. Imitating the cooling of the Soviet attitude towards Lithuania, Aralov stopped his visits to the Lithuanian foreign ministry, ‘not even looking to its side’ for two weeks[820]. The most significant contribution of the Soviet emissary to obstructing the League’s efforts, however, came in the form of his incitement of the anti-Hymans plan hysteria, that swept through Lithuania in the fall of 1921. Through intermediaries, Aralov enjoyed access to the newspaper Balsas (Voice), which he had sometimes used for indirect anti-Entente propaganda. While the censorship blocked articles against the Hymans project, the Soviet legation’s typography workers came to help. They secretly printed the paper and distributed it throughout Kaunas during the night, presenting the censorship with a *fait accompli*. Furthermore, Aralov organised the printing and distribution of the Soviet notes against the Hymans project. ‘The mood is becoming more lively’, Aralov reported, ‘I will continue the fight, using also acquaintances in public circles’[821].

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[818] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 17 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 214
[819] Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 28 / AVPRF 0151/4/6/5, p. 17; Aralov to Chicherin, 1921 05 28 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 189
[820] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 09 17 / AVPRF 0151/5/4/20, p. 50
[821] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 09 21 / Ibid, p. 46

As the dispute settlement in the League approached its culmination at the end of 1921, the Soviets, despite all their attention, were pesimistic about the Lithuanian rejection of the Hymans project. 'The picture is that of infinite wobbling and fear of their own nation, the League, and of Soviet Russia', wrote Aralov to Moscow. Purickis confessed that acceptance of the project would result in the fall of the government, while its rejection would leave Poland a free hand not only in Vilnius, but also in Kaunas. When Aralov tried to turn the balance towards rejection, however, Purickis instinctively started defending the benefits of agreement with Poland. The Soviet envoy concluded that the government was ready to make concessions and that it thought of 'fooling' their peasant electorate and the army[822]. 'From our side, everything possible has been done', reported Aralov to Moscow. 'They were told that union with Poland would be treated as a hostile act. We advised to be careful with the Entente, the League etc. But such is the position of Lithuania, that it has to be devoured by someone'[823].

The thrilling spectacle of Lithuanian wobbling between acceptance and refusal of the last Council resolution was held in suspense until its abrupt ending. The Hymans' project was opposed by all political parties, the majority of the Seimas' commission of foreign affairs, the clergy, the president, the three cabinet ministers, and the incited public opinion. The minority in favour of tactical acceptance comprised the prime minister, the foreign minister, a majority of the diplomats and Vilnius Lithuanians, who feared repressions[824]. On 25 November, a bomb exploded next to Galvanauskas' bedroom, leaving him with light injuries, while a number of pro-Hymans politicians received anonymous threats. At about the same time, foreign minister Purickis was pushed from office, after customs officers, at the instigation of a rival politician, checked the foreign ministry's

[822] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 10 15 / Ibid, p. 5
[823] Aralov to Menzhinsky, 1921 09 24 / Ibid, p. 44
[824] Wilton to Curzon, 1921 11 02 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 207

train as it was about to leave to Russia on an humanitarian mission. In one of the wagons, described as containing flour in the customs papers, officers found 40kg of cocaine, many pairs of silk stockings and other luxury goods. On 3 December, against the persistent advice of the British, the Lithuanian cabinet rejected the Council's resolution.

Lithuanian refusal divided the League's secretariat as to what was to be done next. Drummond wanted the League to ditch the dispute immediately, while Mantoux and Denis were in favour of continuing the League's mediation[825]. Neither London, nor Paris showed any interest in the latter scenario. Bourgeois, under instructions from Briand, was now in favour of quietly waiting for the Polish Vilnius elections. Denis was astonished to hear that Bourgeois would not support their condemnation by the Council. This, he thought, was a result of pro-Polish bias and put the League in a very uncomfortable situation vis-à-vis Lithuania[826].

The long and dramatic episode of the Vilnius conflict thus reached its ugly conclusion. Starting as an attempt of Polish federalists to induce Lithuania into a union, it was transformed by the League into a process that treated both of the parties more or less equally. It also generated a process that had exhausted every opportunity to find the middle ground between them. It transformed the weaker party from a non-entity to a fully-fledged participant, to which all the standards of due process applied. While the spirit of internationalism in the Council gradually gave way to imperative adherence to the national interest, the League Secretariat retained its adherence to the standards of the international civil service to which it aspired. The successful passing of the second Hymans draft, deemed unsatisfactory by France and Poland, as a Council resolution attested to the importance of the small Secretariat. It was, of course, difficult to expect the League's effort

[825] Mantoux to Chardigny, 1921 12 08 / LNA, S6
[826] Denis to Chardigny, 1921 12 21 / Ibid

to succeed in the face of a host of obstacles that included, among other things: British disinterest, pro-Polish sabotage by France, anti-Polish sabotage by Soviet Russia, Polish military occupation of the disputed territory, and a Lithuanian anti-Polish 'cultural struggle'. The challenge of the dispute settlement was now bound to give way to the no less thorny task of legitimation of the *fait accompli*.

Chapter 6. The pariah of Europe

6.1 Forgetting Vilnius

On Sunday, January 8, elections took place to the diet of 'Central Lithuania'. While Żeligowski had left Vilnius beforehand and was replaced by a temporary government under the Polish landlord from Lithuania, Aleksander Meystowicz, there was no sight of the promised evacuation, which Hymans called 'a horrible farce'[827]. Non-Polish parties were effectively barred from participation; most Lithuanians, Belarussians and Jews abstained from voting[828]. The League Military Control Commission, which observed the elections, concluded that it was impossible to regard them as a genuine expression of the will of the population[829]. The Coalition of Nationalist Parties[830] received most of the votes, and together with the People's Councils[831], a quasi-socialist group which the *Endeks* subsequently drew to their side, commanded 94 out of 106 mandates in favour of annexation. On 20 February, the Vilnius diet passed the motion, by 96 votes against 6, that solemnly rejected all 'legal and political pretensions' of Lithuania to the city and invited the Polish government to annex 'Central Lithuania' 'without reservations and conditions'. A twenty-member delegation of the diet set off to Warsaw to negotiate the act of union[832].

The newly elected authorities immediately started repression against the 'foreign elements' of Vilnius. By the end of January, 33 prominent Vilnius Lithuanians and Belarussians, including

[827] Letter (unsigned) to Skrzyński, 1922 01 05 / AAN, Meysztowicz papers, 9, p. 303
[828] Dilley to Wilton, 1922 01 17 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, Enclosure to No. 282; Report of the Military Commission of Control, 1921 12 24 / LNA, S7, Notes and projects [1922 01 27-], p. 9
[829] Ibid, p. 28
[830] Pol. *Zespoł Stronnictw i Ugrupowań Narodowych*
[831] Pol. *Rady Ludowe*
[832] *Sejm Wilenski, 1922: przebieg posiedzen wedlug sprawodzan stenograficznych w opracowaniu kancelarji sejmowej* (Wilno, 1922); Panafieu to Poincaré, 1922 02 23 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 23, p. 62-63

journalists, newspaper editors, leaders of cultural organisations and priests, were arrested on charges of espionage and treason. After being kept in prison for two weeks, they were put on a train and banished to Kaunas upon the intervention of the Control Commission. As another measure directed at paralysing the work of non-Polish organisations, the Vilnius Polish authorities started confiscating assets of Vilnius' Lithuanian societies[833].

Meanwhile, the League Council resolution of 13 January, quoting both parties' refusal of its final recommendation, officially wound up the League's conciliation in the Vilnius dispute and set the date of withdrawal of Chardigny's Military Control Commission[834]. The Lithuanians, read the Commission's final report, were dreamers who focused on their past and overestimated their strength, while the Poles were jingoists who underestimated Lithuania and treated it as a vassal. The Commission's British member, Major Keenan, attached a separate recommendation, subsequently ignored by the Council, which asked to leave at least one commissioner on the ground to ensure fair play. That commissioner, he observed, should be neither British nor French, as 'the general impression among Poles and Lithuanians was that the British support the Lithuanians, while the French support the Poles'[835].

In response to Lithuanian protest against the Polish elections in Vilnius, the League Council, in a compromise between the British insistence on condemnation and French refusal of it, issued a lukewarm declaration, stating that it could not recognise a solution of the dispute which went against its recommendations, and which lacked the consent of both parties. The French, nevertheless, were still content with the result. 'Thanks to our help, Askenazy obtained most of his practical demands: non-permanence of the Control Commission, replacement of the demarcation

[833] Padovani to Poincaré, 1922 02 08 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 23, p. 20
[834] LNOJ 1922/02, p. 99
[835] Report of the Military Commission of Control, 1921 12 24 / LNA, S7, Notes and projects [1922 01 27-], p. 11

line, and [acquiescence] to the maintenance of Polish occupation in the form of [Council's] silence', Jean Gout, the head of the French service in the League, reported to Paris[836]. The Lithuanian complaint that the League was abandoning the dispute at the time when the Poles were busy in legalising the *fait accompli* was left unanswered. Witnessing the blocking of the League's conciliation by France, Mantoux tried to look at the bright side of the League's experience in the Vilnius conflict. While the conciliation did not succeed, he observed, the League still obliged both states to explain themselves before the world and precluded further armed conflict[837].

Both Britain and France were against Polish annexation of Vilnius pure and simple. For one, this would mean a definite rupture between the two disputants, precluding any hope of a federation in the future. The French habitually feared that annexation of Vilnius could make Lithuania a German satellite and facilitate the bridge between Russia and Germany. To keep the door open for rapprochement between Poland and Lithuania, Poincaré urged the Poles to give the Vilnius region autonomy which would resemble that in a confederated state, or at least retain its special *physionomie*[838].

As the Polish government promised to fight the Warsaw Sejm for Vilnius autonomy, Allied pressure was aimed at strengthening the government's hand against annexationists. Yet while Skirmunt himself asked for the joint Allied warning[839], his opposition to annexation was lukewarm, if not insincere. Panafieu was certain that had the Polish government not hesitated, it could have manipulated the decision of the Vilnius diet any way it wanted. The 'Peoples councils', observed the French minister, were not capable of creating any political doctrine by themselves; it could

[836] Gout to Poincaré, 1922 01 14 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 22, p. 198
[837] The role of the league of nations in the international life, 1922 05 19 / LNA, P154, Mantoux papers, Fond 6(3)
[838] Poincaré circular, 1921 12 17 / ADMAE, Lithuanie 22, p. 156
[839] Max Muller to Curzon, 1922 02 27 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 311

have been equally easy to induce the block of the leftist parties to pronounce in favour of an autonomy. Moreover, Skirmunt himself disseminated propaganda in the international press, which reinforced the message that no influence could overcome the unanimously annexationist disposition of Vilnius' inhabitants[840].

The behaviour of the Polish legation in Paris added to the suspicions that Poland was cheating its senior ally. At the beginning of February, the legation's counsellor Józef Wielowieyski addressed Laroche a confidential note, telling the French to be 'patient' and desist from pressure, in order not to make matters worse, and asking to leave the Polish government to its own devices in its opposition to annexation[841]. While the Quai d'Orsay listened and hesitated from the more active pressure urged by the British, Panafieu already suspected insincerity[842].

Negotiations between the Polish government and the delegation of the Vilnius assembly on the act of the union lasted eleven hours, taking them through the night. Even though the government only vaguely insisted on a separate statute for the Vilnius region, the Vilnius delegation, pumped up by the Endeks, split in half and failed to reach majority[843]. The deadlock over the Vilnius question resulted in the government's resignation, but in a few days most of the government, including premier Antoni Ponikowski and foreign minister Skirmunt, were back in their posts. Socialists in the Sejm's commission on foreign affairs blamed Skirmunt for duplicity in encouraging annexationist tendencies in the Vilnius Sejm behind the scenes[844]. On 7 March, the

[840] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1922 02 27 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 23, p. 79
[841] Wielowieyski to Laroche, 1922 02 04 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 23, p. 7
[842] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1922 02 27 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 23, p. 79
[843] Max Muller to Curzon, 1922 03 03 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 320
[844] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1922 02 23 / ADMAE, Europe, Pologne 73, p. 51

French finally agreed to join the British and the Italians in a joint warning to Skirmunt against annexation, Panafieu now being very blunt in his language[845].

On 24 March, the Warsaw Sejm unanimously ratified the Act of Union, as amended by the Endek 'compromise' clause, which demanded the statute for Vilnius to be drawn in accordance with the wishes of the Vilnius diet. Effectively, this amounted to an act of annexation pure and simple. The Vilnius assembly was dissolved, and its twenty members admitted into the Warsaw Sejm. 6 April saw the passing of the law that extended Poland's jurisdiction over the Vilnius region. Contrary to all of the government's previous promises, the Vilnius region was made an ordinary voivodeship of Poland. Piłsudski, formerly a federalist, had no qualms about the result and did not put up any resistance of significance. On 18 April, he visited Vilnius for the formal celebration and publicly thanked everyone involved in the *fait accompli* for resisting international pressure[846]. To the annoyance of Max Muller, Skirmunt was still telling him that annexation was only temporary.

The British, who had been the strongest, if not the only Lithuanian backers throughout the dispute, now drifted towards *désintéressement*. A non-believer in the permanency of the Baltic states, and an advocate of putting Polish-British relations on a friendlier basis, British minister in Warsaw Max Muller advised the Foreign Office to exclude the word 'Vilnius' from any future conversations with the Lithuanians. For him, the issue had been solved by the 'successful assertion of the claims of the stronger Power'. 'The Lithuanian government will continue to cry for the moon so long as anyone shows any disposition to listen to their tale of woe, but once it is made clear to

[845] Max Muller to Curzon, 1922 03 07 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 324
[846] Max Muller to Curzon, 1922 04 20 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 371

them that there are no sympathetic ears there is some prospect that the disappointment will be forgotten <...>'[847].

While Max Muller was markedly pro-Polish, Wilton, the British commissioner for the Baltic states, sympathised with the Lithuanians and had already been socialised into thinking in terms of their 'cultural struggle'. Ultimately, he thought the loss of Vilnius saved Lithuania from the 'dread of polonisation'. The Poles, he observed, had been zealously polonising the occupied area, which hitherto displayed no marked national feeling, ever since the Żeligowski coup, while the underground Z.B.K. held the non-Polish population in terror. Under such circumstances, advised Wilton, even if Vilnius was returned to Lithuania, it would already be too late for the Lithuanian culture and power to attempt 'lithuanisation'. Contrary to Max Muller, however, Wilton had no hopes of Lithuanian reconciliation to the loss of their capital and predicted that any trouble in Poland in the future would become Lithuania's opportunity[848].

The Foreign Office had little trouble in forgetting the issue. 'We couldn't prevent it and we can't undo it', minuted Gregory. 'Probably neither side has any real right to Vilnius, and Poland may as well have it as anyone else, provided that it doesn't weaken her. If anyone is to make a fuss, it should be the League, but with the overwhelming mass of Polish public opinion in favour of incorporation the League's protest would be as futile as any other'[849]. Curzon was a bit more pensive. 'I cannot smile at a result which is as great an encouragement to filibustering as Fiume or Silesia, and a heavy rebuff to the League of Nations. It seems to me that our senses are getting blurred'[850].

[847] Max Muller to Curzon, 1922 04 20 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 371
[848] Wilton to Curzon, 1922 02 22 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 307
[849] Gregory minute, 1922 03 02 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 307, Note 383/14
[850] Curzon minute, 1922 03 02 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 307, Note 383/14

Soviet Russia, another pillar of Lithuanian anti-Polish resistance, did not show much interest either. Unable to contemplate a new war with Poland, and seeking to benefit from the Polish overtures of trade, the Soviets were not willing to embitter their relations with the Poles by showing Lithuania any greater support in the Vilnius question. 'We cannot offer anything real, so all talks with Lithuanians are limited to cloudy phrases of our sympathy, respect for Lithuanian independence etc.', wrote Jakov Davtian, Aralov's successor, to Moscow[851].

Having occupied the limelight of the international stage in Brussels and Geneva, and having enjoyed increased allied attention at the time of the Soviet-Polish war, Lithuania was now isolated and gradually turned into a revisionist pariah of European diplomacy. Trying to find a way out of a hopeless situation, the Lithuanians pondered joining the Polish-French military alliance, as well as teasing the French with extensive economic concessions in Lithuania, in return for France disciplining Poland and reviving the Vilnius question[852]. The French, however, showed no interest. At the Quai d'Orsay, Milosz was told to forget Vilnius[853].

In London, Naruševičius continued his efforts of propaganda, reading anti-Polish lectures at the League of Nations Union, chasing British MPs with pamphlets and pondering making a film on the Vilnius question. Signals from the British political circles, however, were discouraging. Rejection of the Hymans project, Naruševičius was told, injured the prestige of the League and lost Lithuania friends, while rumours of Lithuania siding with the Bolsheviks and Germans gave France and Poland an advantage in opposing British efforts in support of Lithuania[854].

[851] Davtian to Chicherin, 1921 12 15 / AVPRF 0151/5/3a/14, p. 18
[852] Zaunius to Jurgutis, 1922 03 02 / LCVA 648/22, p. 5
[853] Lithuanian MFA secret bulletin, 1922 03 28 / LCVA 648/48, p. 122
[854] Naruševičius to Jurgutis, 1922 02 10 / LCVA 648/48, p. 15

Lithuania's isolation was deepened by its inability to outmanoeuvre Poland in its Baltic policy. On 17 March, 1922, Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Poland signed in Warsaw a political agreement which together with its two annexes amounted to a defensive alliance and recognised the status quo in the Vilnius question[855]. While the agreement subsequently fell through due to Finland's failure to ratify it, it strained Lithuania's relations with its Baltic neighbours. The Lithuanians bluntly declared to the Estonian foreign minister Piip that they no longer considered Estonia to be 'Lithuania's friend'[856].

Lithuania's isolation allowed Poland to exploit its alliance with France in an attempt to compel Lithuania, or what remained of it, into the Franco-Polish sphere of influence. In November 1922, the Polish government confidentially asked its French counterpart for an 'exchange of views' with regard to the Lithuanian question. The Polish statement of such views, submitted to the Quai d'Orsay, went to extremes in scaremongering the French regarding the German influence in Lithuania. Describing Lithuania as a 'pseudo-neutral' country that alone facilitated the realisation of Soviet-German rapprochement, the Poles suggested concrete measures of common action in order to bring Lithuania into the Franco-Polish orbit in financial, military and political areas. The proposed measures included introducing French capital in Lithuania or provoking a movement for the reduction of the Lithuanian army. Furthermore, read the Polish views, agricultural Lithuania should take Polish imports, and the French should rely on the Polish minority in Lithuania,

[855] Zenonas Butkus (ed.), *Baltijos valstybių vienybės idėja ir praktika 1918-1940 metais. Dokumentų rinkinys* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2008), pp. 273-276. For the appraisal of the Polish Baltic policy, see Jakub Lubelski, 'Związek Bałtycki i Trzecia Europa. Koncepcje reorganizacji Europy Środkowej w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej', *Nowa Europa*, 9 (2010), pp. 193-194; Marian Leczyk, *Polska i sąsiedzi: stosunki wojskowe, 1921-1939* (Warszawa: Comandor, 2004), p. 121

[856] Lithuanian MFA secret bulletin, 1922 06 12 / LCVA 648/48, p. 226

represented by seven Poles in the Lithuanian assembly, who constituted 'the only element of civilisation in that country'[857].

Poincaré, who regarded Polish unconditional annexation of Vilnius as folly, was not impressed and framed the French government's reply in the 'exchange of views' as a polite tutorial. While agreeing on the need to counterbalance German influence in Lithuania, Poincaré lectured the Poles that 'oppressors of Poland too much played Lithuania against Poland and Poland against Lithuania', and that the only interest of the French was to favour rapprochement 'as close and durable as possible between the two states whose union in the past was an element unmatched in force and stability'. Poincaré then reminded the Poles *à titre tout amical* of the allied demand for Vilnius autonomy that was necessary in order to prepare the way for a Lithuanian-Polish union[858].

Poincaré's references to the union were, of course, badly out of date and acceptable to neither of the disputants. Instead, the Lithuanians were trying to embarrass the Poles at every opportunity. They had succeeded in registering the Suwalki armistice, which the Poles had broken in their capture of Vilnius, as an international agreement before the League Secretariat. For the sole purpose of annoying the Poles, the Lithuanians also raised the idea of arbitration before the Permanent Court of International Justice and tried to make the most out of Polish refusal in their propaganda. 'Don't forget that we are in a state of war and act accordingly', read the foreign minister's diplomatic guidelines on what to do when meeting a Pole. 'Be cold, formal, avoid shaking hands, do not talk when others see, no meetings in public places, avoid visits'[859].

[857] Memorandum on the views of the Polish government towards Lithuania, 1922 11 10 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 112
[858] Poincaré to Zamoyski, 1922 11 27 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 122
[859] Jurgutis to Naruševičius, 1922 03 29 / LCVA 648/48, p. 126

In the conference of Genoa, the biggest international event since the Paris Peace Conference, and the first major international forum to which Lithuania was officially admitted, the Lithuanians already emerged as revisionists of the European status quo. It was rather symbolic that on their way to Genoa, the Lithuanian delegation followed Soviet and German delegations to Rapallo, a circumstance which subsequently led to finger-pointing that the Lithuanians were in 'bad company'. In Genoa, the Lithuanians chased other delegations with sketches of anti-Polish propaganda and with historical maps, of which they had prepared a hundred copies each[860]. As an indication of their state of mind, the Lithuanians gloated over the incident when Skirmunt was led out of a hotel by the Italian police for an alleged 'homosexual attack'[861] on one of the servants. 'To the characteristics of our degenerates[862], working for Poland', read the heading on the Foreign Ministry's bulletin[863]. Under the most indirect of pretexts, and to the great annoyance of the conference's participants, Galvanauskas succeeded in raising the Vilnius question in political, economic and even in transport commissions.

'Was not the League of Nations dealing with this?', Lloyd George asked Carlo Schanzer, the Italian foreign minister, who showed him one of the Lithuanian memoranda. 'I am not sure', replied Schanzer[864]. It took Beneš, another Polono-skeptic, to explain the current state of the Vilnius dispute to the British premier. With the help of a map, Beneš gladly reminded Lloyd George how the Poles had refused the resolutions of the League and absorbed a piece of Lithuania. Pumped up by the Lithuanians, Beneš urged the British premier to reopen the question and recalled that Joffe confessed to the Lithuanians that the Polish-Soviet peace treaty was nothing more than

[860] Galvanauskas to Naruševičius, 1922 02 23 / LCVA 648/48, p. 100
[861] Lith. prejor. *Pederastiška ataka*
[862] Skirmunt was a Polish landlord from Lithuania
[863] Lithuanian MFA secret bulletin, 1922 04 29 / LCVA 648/48, p. 172
[864] Note of a conversation between Lloyd George and Schanzer, 1922 04 13 / DBFP S. 1, Vol. 19, No. 70

an armistice. Ultimately, both Polono-skeptics agreed that the Poles were courting disaster, and that no one would help them in the event of Poland's another war with its neighbours[865].

Lloyd George, after all, did not need much convincing. Still faithful to his didactic geopolitics, he regarded the border that the Poles wrested from the Soviets in the Riga peace treaty as a source of trouble in the future. Considering the Polish-Soviet peace a mere truce, he hoped that the Genoa conference could achieve a more durable settlement for Eastern Europe. Ultimately, he thought that Poland could still 'downsize' itself to its more or less ethnic borders in return for a pact of non-aggression with the Soviets, a settlement which could then be consecrated, if not guaranteed, by the authority of the Allies[866]. He knew that the Riga treaty border was frowned upon by all strands of Russians, and, just as in summer 1920, he could not imagine western intervention in its protection. As a result, in his talk with Skirmunt, Lloyd George downplayed the importance of the formal Soviet *désintéressement* in the Vilnius dispute in the Riga treaty, boasted by his Polish counterpart. 'Russia was always Russia', he said, and 'he who sups with the Devil needs a long spoon'[867].

Being 'absolutely certain' that the Russians together with the Lithuanians were sooner or later going to clear the Poles out of Vilnius, Lloyd George lobbied for the inclusion of the Lithuanian question in the agenda of the conference[868]. It was an open sore, he argued to the French, which the Allies had hitherto avoided, but which had to be dealt with for the sake of durable peace in Europe. The French opposed Lloyd George's advances; they did not want to offend their Polish

[865] Notes of a conversation between Lloyd George and Beneš, 1922 04 26 / DBFP S. 1, Vol. 19, No. 95
[866] Lloyd George to Horne, 1922 03 22, in Lord Beaverbrook, *The decline and fall of Lloyd George* (New York: Duell, 1963), p. 293
[867] Note of a conversation at the Villa d'Albertis, Genoa, 1922 05 05 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 19, No. 112
[868] British Secretary's Notes of a Meeting between the Representatives of the British, French, Italian, Belgian and Russian Delegations, 1922 04 15 / Ibid, No. 74

allies, and they still hesitated to deal with the Bolsheviks and only sent to Genoa their minister of justice Barthou[869]. The Soviets, for their part, were lukewarm. They had already come to terms with the Germans in Rapallo and considered the status quo of the Riga treaty satisfactory in their current phase of consolidation of power[870].

As the Genoa conference foundered upon the French insistence on Soviet acceptance of Russia's pre-war debts, Lloyd George still hoped to settle the Vilnius question in the forthcoming negotiations with the Soviets in the Hague conference in summer 1922[871]. He also pondered a complete rehearing of the Vilnius question in the League and even thought of making the League an 'arbiter' in its settlement[872]. The 'truce' of Riga, Lloyd George argued, 'did not in the least bind the League not to proceed with their investigations in the matter'[873]. Failing a comprehensive settlement, the British premier was prepared to follow the example of the U.S. and leave Europe, or at least its eastern part, to 'stew in its own juice'[874].

Lloyd George's revisionism irritated both Secretary General Drummond and the Foreign Office, who had already deemed the settlement of the Vilnius conflict a failure as well as an embarrassment, and who were now in favour of Allied recognition of the *status quo*[875]. Astonished by Lloyd George's enthusiasm, Drummond asked Balfour to enlighten the PM about the definite finality of the Vilnius question settlement so far as the League was concerned[876]. Hoare in the

[869] Meeting of the Inviting Powers to the Genoa Conference, 1922 05 10 / Ibid, No. 121
[870] Note of a Conversation at the Villa d'Albertis, Genoa, 1922 05 07 / Ibid, No. 118
[871] Hankey to Crowe, 1922 05 30 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 390
[872] Note of a Conversation between Mr. Lloyd George and Barthou, 1922 05 02 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 19, No. 106; Notes of a Conversation between Lloyd George and Beneš, 1922 04 26 / Ibid, No. 95
[873] Meeting of the Inviting Powers to the Genoa Conference, 1922 05 16 / Ibid, No. 135
[874] Note of a conversation at the Villa d'Albertis, Genoa, 1922 05 05 / Ibid, No. 112
[875] Memorandum regarding the Treaties with Russia, 1922 04 06 / Ibid, No. 61
[876] Drummond to Balfour, 1922 05 24 / PA, LG/F/3/5/19

British Warsaw legation deplored Lloyd George's initiatives as an open invitation to the Bolsheviks to question the Polish-Soviet peace treaty[877].

On May 19, Galvanauskas took the stage at the closing plenary session of the Genoa conference. He reminded the diverse and distinguished audience of the Polish misdeeds towards Lithuania and called them an obstacle to the reconstruction of Europe to which the conference aspired. Expanding on Żeligowski and on the breaking of the Suwalki armistice, he orated on how the Poles had flouted the League, and made sure that everyone knew about Poland's refusal of the Lithuanian invitation to submit the dispute to the PCIJ. When the Conference's chair, Italian Prime minister Luigi Facta, interrupted Galvanauskas and asked him to sit down, the Lithuanian delegate only became more brutal in tone and gestures and waved his fist in the direction of Skirmunt[878]. Lithuania, Galvanauskas continued, was entering a reservation to the conference's declaration of non-aggression, since the Lithuanians could not accept the *status quo* which that declaration praised[879]. Naturally, Galvanauskas' memorable address made subsequent eulogies in the name of the peace of Europe sound rather awkward.

With the end of the Genoa conference passed the last opportunity to revise the Vilnius question. Lloyd George's last attempt at didactic geopolitics in the Polish problem, seeking to appease the Russians, both red and white, squared well with Lithuanian appeals to the anti-Polish wrath of Russia. Yet his idea of Eastern Europe's pact of non-aggression with Russia offered at best only palliative treatment of the chronic problem of Eastern Europe's insecurity. Lloyd George's scheme would have left the Baltic states firmly in the Russian sphere. To Poland, it offered no real guarantees either. The Polono-skeptic Lloyd George did not contemplete

[877] Hoare to Ovey, 1922 06 20 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 390, note 490/10
[878] Konstanty Skirmunt, *Moje wspomnienia, 1866-1945* (Rzeszow: WP, 1997), p. 133
[879] Minutes of the Third Plenary Session of the Genoa Conference, 1922 05 19 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 19

committing Britain to the defence of even an ethnographic Poland. Moreover, any durable settlement would have to include a compromise with Germany, which France under Poincaré would have most certainly contested. After Poland ratified the Riga peace treaty, and after it annexed the Vilnius region, Lloyd George's revisionism seemed hardly opportune. After returning to London, the British premier did not raise the Vilnius question again, while soon in October 1922 he fell from power. It was up to the Foreign Office, the Quai d'Orsay and the League Secretariat to come up with the final exit strategy.

6.2 Between the law and the greater good

Polish annexation of Vilnius and the League's abandonment of the dispute left unresolved a number of important secondary issues which the League could not ignore. First, the remaining status of the Vilnius region as a disputed territory left it outside the coverage of the regular mechanisms of minority protection prescribed in the Polish minorities treaty[880]. Upon winding up its involvement in the dispute, the Council had pledged to supervise minority protection in the disputed Vilnius region directly and send fact finding missions in case of need[881]. The Council found such responsibilities troublesome, expensive, and generally undesirable, while extending the coverage of the Polish minority treaty to the Vilnius region would offer the benefit of Poland's extensive contractual obligations towards its minorities. It was obvious, however, that asking Poland to extend the coverage of the Polish minority treaty to the Vilnius region could be construed as the implicit recognition of Polish annexation. The Lithuanians maintained their categorical

[880] Minorities treaty between the principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, 1919 06 28 / Clive Parry (ed.), *The Consolidated Treaty Series*, Vol. 225, 1919 (New York: Dobbs Ferry, 1969), p. 412
[881] LNOJ 1922/02, p. 99

objection to such a solution and instead demanded the League appoint a high commissioner for the protection of minority rights in the disputed territory.

Secondly, in the Vilnius region there remained a strip of a 'neutral zone', which the League Military Control Commission had established in November 1920 in the armistice that it brokered between Żeligowski and Lithuania. Home to tens of thousands of people, it was a no man's land that hosted no regular administration or police of either of the two states. It became a hunting-ground for deserters and smugglers and had to endure interference by paramilitaries of both sides. After the League withdrew its Military Control Commission in February 1922, almost the whole strip had been occupied by Polish partisans. Lithuanian paramilitaries captured the towns of Širvintai and Giedraičiai in the north and a small strip in the south, containing a 15 km chunk of the Vilnius-Grodno railway line that connected Vilnius with Warsaw.

The Lithuanians were dead set against any proposal of the League to abolish the 'neutral' zone by parcelling it between the two disputants. Seeking to keep the dispute open, the Lithuanians desisted from any action that could at least remotely be construed as Lithuanian acquiescence to Polish annexation of Vilnius. They also gladly blocked the railway as part of their wider policy of exerting pressure on Vilnius by means of its total blockade from the side of Kaunas. This included completely sealing the border and severing telephone and postal connections.

The League Secretariat had long been pondering getting rid of the neutral zone. From a humanitarian standpoint, the zone kept tens of thousands of inhabitants at the mercy of Polish and Lithuanian armed bands. As far as the Lithuanian blockage of the railway was concerned, the Secretariat was also bringing a wider European perspective to bear. For Mantoux, the need to reestablish the double track line from Warsaw to St. Petersburg, one of the big arteries of

international communication in Eastern Europe, transcended Lithuanian susceptibilities[882]. The Council was also fed up with constant complaints from both sides with regard to skirmishes in the neutral zone, which often called for expensive and unpopular fact-finding missions.

In both cases of minority protection and of the neutral zone, therefore, the League's calculations of expediency and of the 'greater good' clashed with the Lithuanian legalistic insistence on the *status quo*. Purely legally, the Lithuanian case seemed solid. Based on the advisory nature of the Council's authority as prescribed in the Covenant, any decision of the Council pertaining to the Lithuanian-Polish conflict would require Lithuanian acceptance. As a result, the League had to invent a delicate compromise between Lithuanian legalism and humanitarian considerations, while also maintaining its non-recognition of the Polish annexation of Vilnius.

As far as the protection of minorities in the Vilnius region was concerned, discussions in the Secretariat led to a creative solution of confidentially asking the Poles to make a 'spontaneous' statement in the Council meeting, declaring the extension of the minority treaty regime to the non-Polish elements in the Vilnius region. 'There is thus a moral situation', argued Mantoux, 'from which the Council could benefit, not in order to be pleasant to Poland, but only to ensure the non-Polish elements' guarantees'. Taking such a declaration into account, the Council would then draft a resolution accepting the extension of the Polish minority treaty to include non-Poles in the Vilnius region. At the same time it would recognise its disputed status to placate the Lithuanians[883].

[882] Mantoux to Hymans, 1923 01 23 / LNA S8, Notes for Mantoux folder
[883] Procedure for assuring protection of minorities in the Vilnius territory (undated) / LNA S8, Correspondence with Hymans folder

Ultimately, the plan worked. Confidentially asked by Mantoux, Askenazy agreed to make a 'spontaneous declaration'[884].

Abolishing the neutral zone, however, proved to be a much bigger challenge for the League. In May 1922, the League Council sent Pedro Saura, Spanish Consul General in Brussels, and ex-member of the old Civil Commission overseeing the unsuccessful Vilnius plebiscite, to the neutral zone on a fact-finding mission. His task was to trace a provisional demarcation line that would allow each of the parties to introduce their regular police in their part of the neutral zone, without prejudice to its contested status. The Council evaded Lithuanian objections to such a mission by claiming that in looking after the well-being of the local populations, it was free to make recommendations of any sort.

Two months of research in the Lithuanian-Polish borderlands convinced Saura of the intractability of the Vilnius question. He noted the striking economic interdependence between Vilnius and Kaunas that made a single economic whole; he also confirmed that Vilnius was a city of Polish culture[885]. Saura's official report for the Council traced a line of demarcation in the neutral zone, trying to find the balance between ethnographic and economic considerations. Overall, it followed the *status quo*, with the exception of assigning the whole railway to the Poles. Saura, just like the Secretariat, thought that the railway should share the fate of Vilnius for economic reasons[886]. At the same time, Saura was sceptical as to the improvement that a new demarcation line would bring. He did not see how the Lithuanians could be made to give up the railway; he also

[884] Mantoux conversation with Askenazy, 1923 01 15 / Ibid
[885] Saura to Laroche, 1922 11 01 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 93
[886] Report on the neutral zone by Saura, 1922 12 09 / Ibid, p. 131

feared repressions against the local inhabitants that could result from the territory's change of ownership[887].

Imposition of Saura's demarcation line against Lithuanian objections posed a great challenge for the League. The Council could only make recommendations, against which a Lithuanian objection was a foregone conclusion. Poland, on the other hand, welcomed the new boundary, as it gave it the railway, and as it could be presented as a legitimate and impartially traced line in case the Allies were to recognise the Polish eastern border. Paris supported Warsaw and was in favour of the Council confronting the Lithuanians with the 'final demand' (*mise en demeure*) to leave the railway to the Poles. In case the Lithuanians disagreed, the French thought Poland should be authorised to use force and capture the missing part of the railway from the Lithuanians[888].

Mantoux saw the dangers of such a solution. He feared that an official recommendation of the demarcation line by the Council, implicitly leaving Poland a free hand in capturing the railway from the Lithuanians, could degenerate into a larger war between the two states. On the other hand, Mantoux suspected that with or without recommendation, the Poles would take things into their own hands anyway. At this point, the long and acrimonious Vilnius conflict was already blurring the senses of the Secretariat's director of the political section. Mantoux now longed for the League's complete disassociation from anything relating to the Vilnius Devil's Paradise. 'What good is it to continue to keep track eternally about this affair', wrote Mantoux to Hymans, 'what good is it to encourage one and another party to keep perpetually addressing us new complaints and protests if it each time ends up in a deadlock? <..> Nothing, to

[887] Ibid, p. 134
[888] Blanchet note on the demarcation line, 1922 12 19 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 140

my mind, harms the prestige of the Council more than reopening in each session of the debate which stays forever without conclusion [sic]'[889]. The predictable hopelessness of the Lithuanian-Polish conflict, however, was unexpectedly shaken by the Lithuanians' very own *fait accompli* in the Prussian district of Memel.

6.2.1 A crime as well as a blunder

The port city of Memel (Lith. Klaipėda), together with the narrow strip of coastline running north-east of Königsberg, had been under German jurisdiction since the thirteenth century. Starting as an outpost of Teutonic knights who skirmished with the surrounding Lithuanians, Memel successively belonged to the Duchy and Kingdom of Prussia and to the German Empire. Development of Königsberg being an overriding priority for the German government, by 1914 Memel was a somewhat stagnating little port of East Prussia, with wood manufacture as its key industry. It was the central point of the Baltic timber trade and the British had a Vice-Consul there. Ethnically, Germans predominated in the town and bigger villages of the Memel district, while the rural areas were mostly Lithuanian.

After the Great War, the Memel district became part of a punishment package against Germany. During one of the sessions of the Four at the Paris Peace Conference, it took the mercurial Lloyd George a few minutes to 'arrange' the Memel district for 'Lithuania'. In a striking contrast to his stance on the Polish-claimed Danzig, Lloyd George argued for severing Memel from Germany on the grounds that its population was Lithuanian and that Memel was the only outlet to

[889] Mantoux to Hymans, 1922 12 28 / LNA S8, Correspondence with Hymans folder

the sea available to Lithuania[890]. While Lloyd George was yet to see a live Lithuanian, his primary motive was catering for the interests of Russia, which had long desired Memel as a spoil of war. Paderewski, who had contemplated an easy federation with Lithuania at the time, did not object. 'It is not a Polish question, but a Lithuanian one', Paderewski told the British premier. 'Memel is without any doubt Lithuanian, and its possession is essential for the life of Lithuania; for it is the only port which serves that country'[891].

Germany was thus forced to cede the Memel district to the Allies under Article 99 of the Versailles Treaty. In reply to the German protest, based on strong historical, cultural and ethnographic arguments, the Allies reiterated that

> The district in question has always been Lithuanian; the majority of the population is Lithuanian in origin and in speech; and the fact that the city of Memel itself is in large part German is no justification for maintaining this whole district under German sovereignty, particularly in view of the fact that Memel is the only sea outlet for Lithuania. It has been decided that Memel and the adjoining district shall be transferred to the Allied and Associated Powers for the reason that the status of the Lithuanian territories is not yet established[892].

At the beginning of 1920, the French took over the temporary administration of the Memel district on behalf of the Allies. The authority of the French administration, first headed by General Dominique Odry, and subsequently by the High Commissioner Gabriel Petisné, was buttressed by a French batallion. Petisné, formerly *sous-préfet* of Lyons, was helped by a six member local Landesdirektorium, appointed by himself, which had only advisory capacity. A French visa was required to enter Memel, and only French authorities could issue a Memelander's passport[893].

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[890] Mantoux, *Deliberations*, p. 272
[891] Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 308-310
[892] Memel, Appendix VII to CF-70, 1919 06 18 / FRUS, PPC, Vol. 6, p. 479
[893] E.H. Carr, Notes on Memel, 1921 12 13 / TNA FO 371/6733, p. 169

Lithuanian nationalists had been eying Memel, the most valuable prize of the Prussian *Lithuania Minor*, ever since their 'awakening' in the pages of *The Dawn*. In the aftermath of the Great War, Lithuania emerged with only a few kilometres of coastline and no port of its own. Almost the entire mainland Lithuania was separated from the sea by a narrow strip of the Memel district. All the goods that the Lithuanians scavenged from Europe were being imported either through the Latvian port of Liepaja, or through Memel, which was now under the increasingly uncomfortable French supervision. After the Poles occupied Vilnius and surrounded Lithuania by the Grabski corridor, Memel was Lithuania's only potential outlet to Europe. As a consequence, securing Allied attribution of Memel to Lithuania became the second greatest objective of Lithuanian foreign policy.

From the outset of their independent political existence, seeking to show to Memelanders and to the Powers 'what a *Freistadt* would mean without Lithuania'[894], the Lithuanians had been subjecting the district of Memel to every possible means of economic pressure. Exports to Memel were only permitted with the sanction of the minister of commerce. Heavy duties were imposed on the export of timber, crucial for Memel's saw mills and cellulose and plywood factories. Furthermore, the Lithuanians constantly blocked the river Niemen and stopped the sailing of timber from Poland. Imports from Memel likewise faced severe customs restrictions and required the Lithuanian consul's permission. Periodically, under all kinds of pretexts, the Lithuanians sealed the border entirely, which paralysed all traffic[895]. As another means of isolating Memel, they also directed most of their trade to Königsberg or Liepaja, despite the much bigger costs and distances involved.

[894] Lithuanian MFA secret bulletin, 1922 03 24 / LCVA 648/48, p. 110
[895] Report on Memel (unsigned), 1923 01 01 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 2

Since the beginning of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute over Vilnius, Britain and France had used the postponement of Memel's final status, together with the withholding of *de jure* recognition of Lithuania, as levers against Lithuanian obstinacy. 'It was more than probable that in the general settlement of all the east European problems Memel would fall to Lithuania', Gregory teased the leading Lithuanians in 1921. 'The sooner each nation showed by its good behaviour a disposition to come to some compromise with its neighbours, the sooner would it attain its own true aspirations'[896].

The failure to settle the Lithuanian-Polish dispute in the League at the end of 1921 and the subsequent annexation of 'Central Lithuania' to Poland inevitably brought back the question of Memel's future status. The cession of Memel to Lithuania, if only under autonomy, would conform to the previous Allied declarations, as well as offer some prospect of Lithuanian appeasement for the loss of Vilnius. From the outset, the Foreign Office contemplated the eventual attribution of Memel to Lithuania. 'If they get Memel which will give them a real and useful access to the sea they may settle down grumblingly to a semblance of peace and the last of the outstanding territorial questions will have been settled', argued Ovey at the Foreign Office[897]. In the words of Wilton, who recognised that Lithuanians had never really had an opportunity of cultural and economic development, Memel 'would put the heart into three million Lithuanians'[898]. Since Memel only bordered Prussia and Lithuania, the sole alternative could be a *Freistadt* on the lines of Danzig.

Considerations of fairness and economic necessity, however, were not the only ones in dealing with the Memel issue. What was understood by the western powers to be a civilised

[896] Gregory, Interview with three leading Lithuanians, 1921 02 23 / TNA FO 371/6726, p. 19
[897] Ovey minute, 1922 03 10 / TNA FO 371/8058, p. 22
[898] Wilton to Curzon, 1922 02 23, TNA FO 371/8058, p. 38

German town with its lit streets, buses and railway network now faced the prospect of being ruled by uncouth rustics from Kaunas, a solution that could not but hurt both spoken and unspoken colonialist instincts of civilisational hierarchy. 'Stupid and backward as the Lithuanians are, I have long thought they ought in the long run to get Memel, all the more if they lose Vilnius', minuted Curzon. 'But I would not make it a short run'[899]. The French, who had an even lower opinion of Lithuanians, and who were pressed by the Poles to secure them port facilities in Memel, advocated the *Freistadt* solution from the beginning.

At the end of 1921, the British sent E.H. Carr, a junior British diplomat stationed at Danzig, to Memel to survey the situation. Carr, a notorious snob, concluded that 'Lithuania was at least 100 years behind Memel in civilisation and to attempt to incorporate one in the other would be simply a crime as well as a blunder'[900]. Advocating a free city solution, Carr felt most confident that the party that demanded incorporation of Memel into Lithuania was very small and numbered 'very few members who are both intelligent and honest'. Among the peasantry where the Lithuanian sentiment was supposed to exist, Carr reported complete indifference. As to the French opinion, 'in spite of their generally anti-German bias, the French are as convinced as anyone of the hollowness of any Lithuanian claim to Memel based on the principle of self-determination'[901].

The visit to Memel of Basil Fry, the British consul in Danzig, led to a similar conclusion. Lithuanian possession of Memel, he reported, would only make matters worse for Lithuania, as it would bring Memel down to Lithuania's level. It was better, he advised the Foreign Office, for Lithuania to have a prosperous neighbouring market and 'an example to learn from'. At any rate,

[899] Curzon minute, 17 03 1922 / TNA FO 371/8058, p. 48
[900] Carr to O'Malley, 1921 12 13 / TNA FO 371/6733, p. 159
[901] Notes on Memel by E.H. Carr, 1921 12 13 / TNA FO 371/6733, p. 161

a *Freistadt*, desired by the population as an alternative to the impossible reunion with Germany, could still ensure Lithuanian access to the harbour and give it free transit[902].

Another visitor to Memel, the chief of the League Military Control Commission Chardigny, noticed that passing from Memel to Lithuania amounted to an abrupt crossing in time as well as in civilisation. Chardigny tried to unpack the exact components of the civilisational difference. In Memel, he observed, there were no illiterate peasants, and small ownership had long been developed next to large ownership under the principles of modern agriculture. The Lithuanian side of the border, on the other hand, welcomed with an illiterate peasantry and with a land reform that risked to parcel every bigger estate. Memelander-Lithuanian peasants, reported Chardigny, did not feel anything for Lithuania. Germanisation gave them prosperity and well being, and they wanted this to remain[903].

Such modern travel literature on Memel influenced political decisions. Curzon was 'knocked prostrate' by Carr's report, which, he thought, 'proved to the general satisfaction that the Lithuanians were a savage and contemptible people and that the true destiny of Memel was German'[904]. It was German, of course, not in a sense of belonging to Germany, but of letting the Memel Germans rule themselves. There were also British commercial interests at play, although this factor should not be overestimated. Most of Memel's timber production was leaving for Britain, while a number of British firms received forest concessions in the Białowieża forest in Poland, to which Memel might have served as an outlet. Consequently, at the end of 1922, the British came round to the French point of view and were in favour of making a free city out of

[902] Fry report on Memel (extract), 1923 01 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 7
[903] Chardigny to Mantoux, 1921 11 22 / LNA, S6, Correspondence with the Military Mission [1921 04 08-1922 01 26]
[904] Curzon minute, 1923 01 23 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 569, Note 699/3

Memel. A *quid pro quo* solution, formerly thought to placate the Lithuanians for their loss of Vilnius, and to increase their chances of successful statehood, gave way to competing considerations of undisputed civilisational hierarchy and economic interest.

The veterans of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute settlement in the League Secretariat were disquieted by the news that the idea of making a *Freistadt* out of Memel, pushed by the Poles and the French, was getting weight in Paris. They asked Saura to try to influence the Quai d'Orsay to leave Memel to Lithuania. For Mantoux, it was clear that a free city would inevitably gravitate to Germany. 'If this is what they want in France and Poland, I don't have any right to oppose, but I can cite you an English proverb about the inconvenience that one can have by cutting one's nose in order to show an ugly grimace to one's neighbour'[905]. Saura, the League's rapporteur on the demarcation line, recognised that Poland wanted to lock up Lithuania in a 'nutcracker' by denying it both Vilnius and Memel. What was needed, Saura thought, was to leave the Lithuanians some sort of dignity, for both internal and external use. By giving Memel to the Lithuanians, Saura reasoned, the latter would be presented with a sort of psychological success that could be portrayed as a counterbalance for their abandonment of their claims to Vilnius[906].

On 6 January, 1923, the expert committee of the Conference of Ambassadors presented its conclusions on the Memel question. Influenced by the committee's French chair Laroche, the report did not conceal its strong pro-Polish, anti-Lithuanian bias. While Poland did not even have a border with the Memel district, Poland's interests now assumed the paramount importance in the committee's conclusions. The original Allied position to leave Memel to Lithuania, read the report, actually had in mind the historical Lithuania, which was connected to Poland. Memel was not so

[905] Mantoux to Chardigny, 1922 10 24 / LNA, S8, Correspondence with Hymans folder
[906] Saura to Laroche, 1922 11 01 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 93

much the only Lithuanian access to the sea, as it was ‘a natural outlet to Poland‘s eastern territories‘. Culturally and commercially, read the report, Memel was ‘generations ahead’ of Lithuania, and its absorption would bring Memel down to Lithuanian level. Moreover, Lithuania would not be able to deal with the local Germans, ‘inexperienced as she is in international affairs, entirely ignorant of maritime questions which chiefly interest Memel, uncertain of her own political future, and hampered by the continual dispute with Poland as to her southern frontier‘. Lithuanian possession of Memel, the report continued, would mean stopping Memel‘s trade with Poland, presupposed by the recent commercial agreement between the latter two.

Among the committee‘s conclusions was insistence that Lithuania was deeply under German influence. The only motive for attributing Memel to Lithuania, then, could be the strengthening of the latter, so that it could adopt a more independent attitude and gravitate towards Poland, ‘but the Allied governments could hardly be justified in sacrificing the interests of Memel and of Poland for the sole object of obtaining such a doubtful result‘. The report concluded by advising to make Memel a free city under a French high commissioner, appointed by the League. Such a solution, argued the report, would keep Memel as a pawn against Lithuania in its conflict with Poland, and would even facilitate the federation between Poland, Lithuania and Memel. In the view of the committee, the Lithuanians would be unable to find the necessary capital to build an alternative seaport in their own town of Palanga, which in turn would dissuade them from plotting Memel‘s blockade[907]. The day after the committee‘s conclusions had been drafted, however, the Quai d‘Orsay received intelligence information that the Lithuanians were brewing a *coup de force*.

Preparations for the coup, whose mastermind and the main organiser was the premier Galvanauskas, were painstaking in every way. A special unit was made up of 40 officers, 584

[907] Report of the committee of the Conference of Ambassadors, 1923 01 06 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 32

soldiers, 455 members of the Riflemen Union, 63 horses, 21 heavy machine guns, 17 telephones, 54 km of wire, 3 cars and 4 motorcycles[908]. All participants were dressed in civilian clothing, which for the Lithuanians meant the tattered garb of Lithuanian peasants, including birch-bark sandals and strips of linen[909]. The commanders changed their names to resemble those of Memelanders. The unit was ordered to pretend to be 'the most genuine' inhabitants of the Memel district. The soldiers were to ensure that they did not possess even an odd cigarette or a box of matches, which could associate them with Lithuania. The force was barred from drinking alcohol and from skirmishing with the French; it was also ordered to guard against the entry into the district of German soldiers or weapons[910].

On the eve of the operation, the Lithuanians sounded out Hans von Seeckt, the commander in chief of the German army, and received his promise that no German policeman in Memel was going to fire at Lithuanians[911]. For Germany, it was naturally better to have Memel an autonomous part of little Lithuania, than to have it as a Franco-Polish protectorate. Kaunas also approached Moscow, which had no reasons to oppose the operation either. The Soviets even moved their troops to the Polish border in order to dissuade Poland from seizing the opportunity to attack Lithuania[912].

On 10 January, the Lithuanian special force, which to an American observer appeared as a 'horde of Lithuanian peasants'[913], crossed the border and occupied the whole Memel district, as well as the city, in the next few days. The French garrison withdrew to the suburb, leaving two dead. Martynas Jankus, the ancient publisher and editor of *The Dawn*, was made the head of the

[908] Budrys' order to the Special unit, 1923 01 / LCVA 929/3/422, p. 23-26
[909] Donald Day, *Onward Christian soldier* (Noontide Press, 1982), p. 134
[910] Budrys to the Commander in Chief, 1923 01 06 / LCVA 929/3/422, p. 9-11
[911] Vytautas Žalys, 'Das Memelproblem in der litauischen Außenpolitik (1923-1939), *Nordost-Archiv*, 11/1993, p. 254
[912] Galva, *Ernestas Galvanauskas*, p. 304
[913] Day, *Onward Christian soldier*, p. 134

pseudo-indigenous ‘Supreme rescue committee of *Lithuania minor*‘, which took over the administration from Petisné, while Smetona, the former president of Lithuania, came to Memel to represent Lithuania. A makeshift assembly was rapidly convened, which unanimously appealed for the incorporation of Memel into Lithuania. As a gesture to Poland, the Lithuanians banished the Polish consul from Memel.

In reality, the local population did not welcome the Lithuanian coup, save for the small fraction of Lithuanian nationalists under Kaunas' direction. Upon the entry of Lithuanian forces, Kaunas emissary Zaunius was annoyed to find that Memel was already exhibiting tendencies of ‘separatism’ from Lithuania. ‘The first steps in Memel proved that a centralist disposition [i.e. union with Lithuania] could only be effected not through persuasion, but through dictatorship, taking the district‘s Direktorium into our hands and pursuing our policy, without explaining much to the local activists‘[914].

Otherwise, the circumstances for Lithuanian filibustering could not be more opportune. The special unit crossed the border four days after the committee of the Council of Ambassadors had drafted its conclusions, three weeks after the *de jure* recognition of Lithuania by the Allies, and one day before the French invasion of the Ruhr. On top of it all, the weather was freezing.

Having long ago threatened the Lithuanians that a move on Memel would bring about ‘the end of Lithuania‘[915], Paris now faced the *fait accompli* under the most uncomfortable of circumstances. Being preoccupied with the invasion of the Ruhr and wary of further escalation in Prussia, the Quai d‘Orsay was also actively incited by the Poles, who reminded it that the Lithuanian coup was ‘an outrage against the prestige and authority’ of the Allies, as well as against

[914] Zaunius to Galvanauskas, 1923 02 12 / LCVA 383/7/378, p. 38-41
[915] Lithuanian MFA secret bulletin, 1922 03 28 / LCVA 648/48, p. 122

Poland's vital interests[916]. Somewhat half-heartedly, Zamoyski offered to send Polish troops to fight the Lithuanians, but only under Allied command[917].

Contrary to the Vilnius scenario, it was now the French who lobbied the British for concerted Allied pressure on Lithuania. Initially, Poincaré threatened Lithuanians with action by the Poles[918]. In another attempt at pressure, Poincaré warned the Lithuanians not to upset the Allies at the time when they were making an impartial decision on Memel's future[919]. Galvanauskas played along by imitating cooperation and even succeeded in fooling Padovani of his sincerity[920]. Deception, however, could not be continued indefinitely. Coordinating with the insurgents, Galvanauskas kept walking back and forth from his Kaunas home to the telegraph station, until he bumped into Padovani, who started following him[921].

Ultimately, the French sent two torpedo boats, two avisos, and the battleship Voltaire to Memel, while the British joined with the cruiser Caledon. In the circumstances of January 1923, however, neither the French, nor the British were willing or able to force the Lithuanians out. Indirectly coordinating the act with the 'rebels', a few detachments of French and British marines disembarked and patrolled the immediate coast for a face-saving interval, after which everyone, including the original French garrison, boarded the ships and sailed away[922].

On 16 February, 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors decided to transfer the sovereignty over Memel to Lithuania, based on a number of conditions. The Memel district was to become an autonomous territory, while the Lithuanians were to grant Poland freedom of transit and port

[916] Zamoyski to Poincaré, 1923 01 12 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 124
[917] Peretti note on the visit of Zamoyski, 1923 01 08 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 126
[918] Ibid, p. 126
[919] Poincaré circular, 1923 01 11 / ADMAE, Europe, Memel 05, p. 103
[920] Padovani to Poincaré, 1923 01 10 / Ibid, p. 82
[921] Galva, *Ernestas Galvanauskas*, p. 306-309
[922] Donald Day, *Onward Christian soldier*, p. 135

facilities for 'Polish districts for which Memel was the natural outlet'[923]. As the latter districts included Vilnius and Grodno, the Lithuanians opposed any mentioning of Poland whatsoever and negotiations reached an impasse. While Poincaré demanded the acceptance of the Conference's decision without reserve, the Lithuanians only 'took note' of it. Eventually, the Conference dumped the matter to the League. There, it was tackled by a special commission under the chairmanship of the American diplomat and the former Under-Secretary of State Norman H. Davis, a process that evoked much interest in the League in the U.S. It took more than a year to negotiate the final convention, which was signed between Lithuania and the principal allied powers on May 8, 1924. As a result of continued Lithuanian obstinacy, the convention did not mention Poland.

Having escaped Allied retribution, the Lithuanians celebrated the successful 'insurgency' and quickly turned it into one of the core threads in their national narrative, which hitherto could only boast the contested glory of the past. The Lithuanian affront, however, came at a price of pushing downhill the finalisation of the Vilnius question, which now rapidly headed towards the *double outrage*.

6.3 The double outrage

The Lithuanian *fait accompli* in Memel upset French and Polish plans for a free state; it also was a blow to France's prestige. In such an atmosphere, consecration of the Polish *fait accompli* in Vilnius by recognising the Polish eastern border was the inevitable kneejerk reaction. In the aftermath of the Lithuanian coup in Memel, the French were increasingly incited and manipulated by the Poles, who did everything to exploit the opportunity for the legalisation of the

[923] Decision of the Conference of Ambassadors with regard to Memel, 1923 02 16, in *The question of Memel: diplomatic and other documents* (London: Lithuanian information bureau, 1924), p. 62

Vilnius annexation, and who feared that after a successful coup in Memel, Lithuanians would march on Vilnius. The Polish foreign minister Skrzyński exaggerated the threat of Lithuania to the French and claimed that it had the biggest army in Europe per capita – 100,000 soldiers for a two million state, which, he said, would be able to capture Vilnius[924]. At the same time, Skrzyński exploited the image of Polish bellicosity and tried to impress upon the French Poland's readiness to march on Lithuania. Skrzyński bluffed to Panafieu that he could barely contain the militaristic public opinion in Poland and that official attribution of Vilnius to Poland 'would allow the Polish government to wait without nervousness for the regulation of Memel question'[925]. In the same vein, Zamoyski impressed upon Emmanuel de Peretti de la Rocca, director of political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, that he had done everything he could in order to 'calm down the spirits in Poland, but that there were belligerent dispositions in high places [to invade Lithuania] that worried him, not because of Lithuania – for the Polish army it would be nothing more than a military promenade – but because in case of war between Lithuania and Poland, Soviet Russia would certainly enter into the game'[926]. The Poles also invoked the German menace and complained to the French that Maltzan threatened the Polish minister in Berlin[927]. In Geneva, Askenazy intimidated Mantoux, threatening to invade the neutral zone and even cross further into Lithuania, unless the railway was attributed to Poland[928].

The Polish display of jingoism influenced Poincaré, who now spared no effort to placate the unruly *âme polonaise* with the prompt recognition of the Vilnius annexation. At the time of the French invasion of the Ruhr, he feared that the pretended Polish invasion of Lithuania would

[924] Skrzyński visit to Peretti 1923 03 23 / ADMAE, Europe, Pologne 73, p. 223
[925] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1923 01 30 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 187
[926] Peretti note on the visit of Zamoyski, 1923 01 25 / Ibid, p. 163; Peretti to Panafieu, 1923 01 27 / Ibid, p. 176
[927] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1923 01 30 / Ibid, p. 184
[928] Mantoux conversation with Askenazy, 1923 01 15 / LNA S8, Correspondence with Hymans folder

expose Poland's border with Prussia 'to a surprise' from the Germans[929]. As a result, Poincaré took the initiative and instructed his ambassador in London to rally, urgently and in secrecy, both the British and the Italians to take the first step in the consecration of the Polish annexation of Vilnius and fix the demarcation line in the neutral zone[930].

Legalisation of the Polish annexation of Vilnius, however, could hardly be effected under the auspices of the League. Not only would this be contrary to the principles of justice that it professed, but this would also go against its continued policy of non-recognition of the Żeligowski affair. For the League, despite its dissociation from the merits of the Vilnius conflict in January 1922, the latter still remained an open dispute. Consequently, the French pondered 'removing' the Vilnius case from the League before even trying to set a demarcation line and taking it over by the Conference of Ambassadors, which, as a simple inter-governmental organ of the Powers, was unconstrained by the niceties inherent in the procedure of the League[931]. Poincaré wanted the League Council to officially disassociate itself from the Vilnius question and pass it over to the Conference of Ambassadors. In this connection, he asked his ambassador in Brussels to warn (*prévenir*) Hymans, the League's former rapporteur on the Vilnius question, about the intention of the French, British and Italians to push for the takeover of the case from the League[932]. As the League Secretariat now welcomed an exit strategy, Hymans agreed, but still advised to consult Mantoux in order to find the right legal formula[933] [934].

[929] Poincaré circular, 1923 01 30 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 189
[930] Poincaré circular, 1923 01 20 / Ibid, p. 154
[931] Gout to Quai d'Orsay, 1923 01 23 / Ibid, p. 160
[932] Poincaré to Margerie, 1923 01 26 / Ibid, p. 169,
[933] Herbette to Poincaré, 1923 01 27 / Ibid, p. 175
[934] Poincaré to Margerie, 1923 01 26 / Ibid, p. 170

The British showed no objection. The Foreign Office now returned to its long-held view which saw Lithuanian possession of Memel as compensation for the Lithuanian loss of Vilnius and as the moral ground for prospective recognition of Polish possession of the city. In the words of Gregory, 'there may be a certain immorality in letting one wicked deed cancel another, but we have come to the conclusion that we must have peace and that we can only get it by accepting facts'. Curzon agreed. '[Vilnius] is gone and not all the King's horses or the King's men will reinstate the Lithuanians. Therefore I incline to the double outrage proposed. Anything, further, to get it out of the hands of the Ambassadors' Conference or of the League of Nations whose experience in the Baltic has been depressing'[935].

Unaware of the change in the British position, the French ambassador in London Saint Aulaire expected his task of convincing the British to be a challenging one. He complained that 'all propositions coming from us with regard to Poland are seen suspiciously as partial and in favour of Poland', the Vilnius 'procedure' being no exception. In order to gather support, Saint Aulaire suggested to act through the pro-Polish British minister in Warsaw, Max Muller. This and getting Italian support, argued Saint Aulaire, would allow France 'to appear inspired by the interests of the peace and not by our solicitude with Poland'[936].

Surprisingly, opposition now came from the most unexpected of places. Rome replied that it was not keen on posing the Vilnius question and the issue of the neutral zone at the moment and that it did not want to remove the case from the League[937]. Poincaré was furious. 'The question of Vilnius and the neutral zone is not for 'posing'', the chief of French diplomacy ranted to his

[935] Curzon minute, 1923 01 23 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 569, Note 699/3; Saint Aulaire to Poincaré, 1923 01 25 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 162
[936] Saint Aulaire to Poincaré, 1923 01 26 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 168
[937] Roux to Poincaré, 1923 01 23 / Ibid, p. 159; Roux to Poincaré, 1923 01 29 / Ibid, p. 180

ambassador in Rome, 'it has already been 'posed' and the League was embarrassed in regulating it. This is what *we* want, this is not to complicate matters, but to simplify them'[938].

Witnessing the French haste towards consecration of the Polish annexation of Vilnius, the Poles themselves were alarmed about the potential effect that French legal interventions on Poland's behalf might have. Askenazy suggested to Laroche that it would be better to leave the League Council to set the demarcation line in order to exploit the prestige of the League and make the solution appear 'logical and equitable enough for the rest of the audience'. Askenazy reminded the French that the Conference of Ambassadors did not have any competence for tracing the line, an issue which was officially the object of deliberation in the League. Askenazy also brought to the Quai d'Orsay the drawing of the Polish version of the demarcation line that he thought the League should adopt. While Saura's line still left a number of villages in the neutral zone to the Lithuanians, Askenazy's line proposed to give the Poles nearly all of the zone[939]. However, if the League Council for some reason did not give satisfaction to such a solution, it would be better if the matter was removed from the League after all, reasoned Askenazy, and that the Council of Ambassadors decided instead.

Polish intervention convinced the French to leave the settlement of a demarcation line for the League Council. Such a line could then independently be used by the Conference of Ambassadors as the basis for setting Poland's eastern border in the Vilnius region. Dropping the idea to insist on the removal of the matter from the League, it would be easy, thought Laroche, to persuade the reluctant Italians and the rest of the Council and ensure that Polish interests prevailed.

[938] Poincaré to Roux, 1923 01 26 / Ibid, p. 172
[939] Note to Gout, 1923 02 01 / Ibid, p. 194

Upon the Lithuanian objection to such a line, the Council should then wash its hands and leave the settlement for the Council of Ambassadors[940].

February 3 saw the adoption of the Council‘s resolution, recommending the demarcation line. It followed Saura‘s boundary, but gave more territory to Poland around the railway in order to safeguard it against the Lithuanians[941]. As the Council was limited by the original mandate for Saura‘s mission, the resolution stressed the provisional character of the line, reserving all territorial rights. However, there were caveats. The original intention of the Council was to establish civil and judicial authority in the neutral zone; it had nothing to do with military occupation. The actual recommendation, however, only mentioned the establishment of ‘authority‘, an indication that the Poles were given free hand in taking the railway. The last paragraph of the recommendation unusually stressed that Council’s ‘recommendation’ was ‘final’.

Discussion of the resolution turned the Council session into the bitterest standoff that the League had hitherto experienced. It had the feeling not of the beginning of the 1920s, but that of the end of the 1930s. While the Polish delegate readily accepted the Council‘s recommendation, voicing a brief complaint that not all Polish demands had been satisfied, the Lithuanians, as was expected, realised where the matters were going and rejected the recommendation entirely. Sidzikauskas protested against the imperative tone of the document that was only a recommendation, reminding everyone of the unsettled Vilnius conflict and of the illegal Polish occupation. He also threatened that Lithuania would oppose ‘by all means and in the most energetic manner‘ any Polish attempt of taking the railway by force[942]. Balfour asked if Sidzikauskas meant violence, to which he replied that Lithuania would sue Poland before the PCIJ for breaking the

[940] Laroche note on the neutral zone, 1921 01 30 / Ibid, p. 191
[941] Council resolution, 1923 02 03 / LNA S9, Pologne-Lithuanie [1922 08-]
[942] LNOJ 1923/03, p. 238

Suwalki armistice. René Viviani, the former French premier and now the president of the League Council, spared no words in chastising the Lithuanians. He bluntly threatened Sidzikauskas that Lithuanian armed resistance would call into play sanctions described in Article 16 of the League's covenant. Viviani even enumerated the sanctions to Sidzikauskas: economic, financial, military and banishment of the delinquent country from the League[943]. This was probably the most comprehensive package of threats that had ever been officially suggested to any country in the history of the League of Nations. In private, the French projected that if the Lithuanians resisted the Polish takeover, it would be necessary for the Council to ban Lithuania from the League and demand that all the member states 'cut all relations, even personal, and especially including the postal service with the country that had been ostracised from the League'[944].

On 15 February, the Lithuanians requested the League Council to submit two questions for the advisory opinion of the PCIJ: whether the Council had a right to make a recommendation on the parcelling of the neutral zone; whether the terms of the recommendation conformed to the League Covenant; and if so, whether one of the parties had a right to implement the recommendation despite the opposition of another party[945]. Even though it was unrealistic to expect that the Council would submit its own decision for review before the Court, advisory opinion could also be asked by the president of the Assembly. The sudden intelligence of the Lithuanians, which resulted from hiring international lawyers, including Andre Mandelstam, formerly a legal adviser to one of tsarist Russia embassies, unnerved the French. Jean Gout, the director of the French

[943] Poincaré to Padovani and Panafieu, 1923 02 04 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 197
[944] Note by Gout, 1923 02 04 / Ibid, p. 199
[945] Mantoux, 'The question of the neutral zone between Poland and Lithuania', 1923 02 15 / LNA S8, Correspondence with Hymans folder

Service before the League, even pondered a contingency plan in case Poland nevertheless 'succumbed before the Court'.

> In the course of the three months that separate us from the session of the court, the Polish government is free to proceed with expulsions [of Lithuanians from the newly acquired territories]. Naturally, if it succumbs before the Court, those expelled will be able to reclaim indemnities or compensations. In my opinion, the Polish government should limit expulsions to the most modest number possible, and it would be clever to offer those expelled <...> land elsewhere in Poland. <...> In such a way it would be possible to disperse this German pit [sic] and, as it is probable that the majority of the settlers would not accept [relocation], such a humanitarian gesture [of offering settlement elsewhere in Poland] would be beneficial before the League[946].

The possibility of litigation was also seriously considered by the League Secretariat, whose international lawyer van Hamel produced a memorandum on the possible ways of defense. At the end of the day, he argued, it was unrealistic to expect that the Council would submit its own decision for it to be annulled in the Court. 'If the Conference [of the Ambassadors], with your explanatory assistance, considers the question seriously and without delay, all the histories of the neutral zone, provisional line, the rights to execute or not recommendation of the Council – all of this won't have any significance, except retrospectively', wrote Mantoux to Chardigny[947].

Having achieved the League's mandate, the Poles initially hesitated to occupy the zone in which they were given freedom of action and now expressed their concern to avoid bloodshed. Instead, they toyed with the idea of sending the train of engineers to fix the railway part on the previously Lithuanian side of the neutral zone. If the Lithuanians resisted, however, the Poles were resolved to attack. The French were perturbed by the Poles' sudden moderation, fearing that the issue could lose momentum. A memorandum prepared by Raymond Brugère in the Eastern department of the Quai d'Orsay concluded that Poland should occupy immediately what was given

[946] Note by Gout, 1923 02 04 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 199
[947] Mantoux to Chardigny, 1923 03 08 / LNA S8, Telephone messages folder

to it, in order to avoid the appearance of 'weakness and shyness which can hardly be explained in the current circumstances and after energetic Viviani's words<...> This is the first time when Poland has its right in this unfortunate question of Vilnius'[948]. In the same vein, the draft note to Panafieu in Warsaw urged to forget the engineers and simply occupy the territory[949].

However, a despatch from Padovani in Kaunas led to the aforementioned note being scrapped. Panafieu was now instructed to tell the Poles to postpone the use of force. This time, the Lithuanians pressed the right buttons. The Lithuanian prime minister told Padovani that the Lithuanians would oppose the occupation of the neutral zone by all means. He suggested, in a not-too-veiled threat, that a Belarussian uprising was being prepared in Vilnius and Grodno, as well as other uprisings that would take place in Galicia and Silesia. Padovani was convinced and suggested delaying the Polish occupation[950].

> The harsh, energetic and, in certain cases, revolutionary tone in Lithuanian politics is there since the *de jure* recognition of Lithuania and since the Memel affair. To my mind, Lithuania enters more and more to the sphere of influence of powers that are not satisfied with the current order established by the Entente in Europe. Like Germany and Russia, it criticizes Poland for taking away the lands populated by its nationals and it is more and more disposed to profit from the anti-Polish tendencies of its two neighbors in order to regain them[951].

In return for their keeping its nervous spirits contained, Poland was promised all French help in permanently setting the Polish-Lithuanian border in Poland's favor as soon as possible[952].

Ultimately, sending engineers became impossible, as the Lithuanians were secretly preparing resistance in their portion of the neutral zone[953]. As a consequence, the Poles waited no

[948] Brugere note for Laroche, 1923 02 08 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 210
[949] Poincaré to Panafieu, 1923 02 10 (draft) / Ibid, p. 212
[950] Padovani to Poincaré, 1923 02 10 / Ibid, p. 217
[951] Padovani to Poincaré, 1923 02 12 / Ibid, p. 225
[952] Poincaré to Panafieu, 1923 02 12 / Ibid, p. 229; Poincaré to Panafieu, 1923 02 15 / Ibid, p. 239
[953] Quai d'Orsay to Padovani, 1923 02 15 / Ibid, p. 240

longer and occupied their part of the zone after a brief skirmish with the Lithuanian partisans. Allied pressure and weak signals of support from Berlin and Moscow prevented the Lithuanians from involving the regular army. The Lithuanians managed to extract a note from Chicherin threatening 'serious consequences' from the USSR, but everyone knew that it was a bluff[954]. The demarcation line was set and secured by Polish forces, and the issue thus 'removed' from the League. This paved the way for the Conference of Ambassadors to finalise the Polish eastern border.

On 15 February, Poland formally asked the allied governments to determine its eastern border, reminding the allies that the Lithuanian coup in Memel was 'directed against peace established by [sic] the Versailles treaty, attacking the respect of [sic] solemn international treaties and foundations of peace and equilibrium, and inciting all elements of disorder by acts of violence threatening the whole Europe'[955]. At the same time, Skrzyński also pumped up the French, arguing that the 'extremely conciliatory' attitude of the powers towards Lithuania looked weak to Polish public opinion and was the cause of the Lithuanian provocations[956].

Allied recognition of the existing Polish eastern border, however, was bound to raise a number of issues. Above all, it would be a departure from the didactic geopolitics, advocated throughout by the British, and episodically by the French, ever since meeting the Poles at the Paris Peace Conference. Recognising Poland's extension hundreds of kilometres beyond the ethnic Curzon line, frowned upon by Russian statesmen of all orientations, raised the question of how far, if at all, the Allies were prepared to commit themselves to protect Poland against Russia's revisionism in the future. Naturally, such recognition would also consecrate the Polish annexation

[954] Padovani to Poincaré, 1923 02 19 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 25, p. 34
[955] Zamoyski to Poincaré, 1923 02 15 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 24, p. 246
[956] Panafieu to Poincaré, 1923 02 15 / Ibid, p. 238

of Vilnius and bury any prospect, even purely theoretical, of Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement. While the latter circumstance could be ignored, the Conference of Ambassadors still faced a challenge from international law. On the one hand, the Conference was no longer bound by any reference to the Lithuanian-Polish dispute, which would have been a problem for the League: the forum of Allied representatives was free to proceed as if there was no dispute at all. On the other hand, the Conference still needed a legal basis for its decision, in order to confer on it at least a semblance of legitimacy. While Article 87 of the Annex to the Versailles Peace Treaty presupposed the setting of the Polish eastern border by the subsequent decision of the Allies, Lithuania, which had not been admitted to the Paris Peace Conference, was not a party to that treaty, and its objection to the 'jurisdiction' of the Conference of Ambassadors was a foregone conclusion.

Lithuanian formal agreement to the Conference's jurisdiction thus had to be salvaged despite their continuous denial of that jurisdiction. In this respect, the Allies were helped by another Lithuanian diplomatic blunder. In a letter to the League Council of 18 November 1922, Lithuanian prime minister Galvanauskas, notwithstanding his intentions to the contrary, nearly unequivocally accepted the competence of the Allies in setting the Polish eastern border.

> [Lithuania] has recognised Article 87 of the Treaty of Versailles and has therefore abandoned the argument which she has several times made use of before the Council, namely, that she was not bound by the Treaty of Versailles because she had not been represented at the Peace Conference and because she had not signed the Treaty. This is perfectly true, but by the acts and statements which I have just quoted she has adhered to Article 87 of the Treaty, she has asked for it to be applied and has recognised the competence of the Conference of Ambassadors, in taking account of the solemn undertakings of Poland towards the Lithuanian state, as well as the vital interests and rights of Lithuania.

At the time when the statement was made, Galvanauskas had no illusions as to the result which an award from the Conference of Ambassadors would bring. The intent and purpose of

Galvanauskas‘ statement was to resuscitate the dispute by bringing it to the Conference of Ambassadors, where he expected it to be settled in the same way of non-binding conciliation as it had been tackled in the League. The last sentence of Galvanauskas‘ statement was awkwardly meant as a reservation, associating Lithuanian agreement to the Conference‘s jurisdiction with the observance of the Suwalki armistice. Essentially, this meant restitution of the *status quo ante*. Despite Galvanauskas‘ complex intentions, there could hardly be a more clear-cut invitation for the Conference of Ambassadors' action, which the latter took as a semblance of the legal basis for setting the border between Lithuania and Poland.

This was not the only blunder committed by the Lithuanians that made Allied consecration of Vilnius' annexation easier. On the evening of 18 February 1923, Lieut. General Carton de Wiart, the head of the British military mission in Warsaw, together with Major Grant and two Polish officers, were detained by Lithuanian troops on the Lithuanian-held territory around the neutral zone. The reasons for the odd company being there were not immediately clear. De Wiart himself claimed that he was asked by the British legation in Warsaw to report for the League on the situation at the front. He also confessed, however, that one of the Poles who accompanied him was the head of the Polish counter-espionage bureau, who had ‘very compromising papers’ with him[957]. The rest of the story, as de Wiart told it, was that the Lithuanians recognized the prominent Polish spy and took all four to the Brigadier-General’s headquarters. All except the British were searched, and de Wiart reported with satisfaction that the Polish spy succeeded in passing him the compromising papers without anyone noticing, thereby saving the company from further trouble. The Lithuanian high command was notified of their arrest, and orders were received to bring all

[957] Carton de Wiart, *Happy odyssey : the memoirs of Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart* (London: Cape, 1950), p. 92-93

four to Kaunas. According to de Wiart, on arrival the Lithuanian foreign minister came to interrogate him about his crossing the Lithuanian frontier. De Wiart did not answer any questions but 'assured him that I had only arrived by accident, and I hoped sincerely that I should never set foot in his country again'[958]. While the Poles were jailed, the two Britons were placed in separate rooms in the Metropolis hotel with sentries at their doors, where they were kept through the night. In the morning, de Wiart and his colleague were freed and informed that the Lithuanian prime minister wished to come and apologize for what happened. De Wiart declined the apology and was taken to the British legation. As the Lithuanians did not make an exception in their complete sealing of the border with the Polish-held Vilnius region, de Wiart had to return to Warsaw by taking a long journey via Königsberg and Danzig.

Upon de Wiart's return, Piłsudski sent for him personally. 'Chaffing me over my capture, he thanked me sincerely for the great service I had rendered Poland. I asked him what he meant. He answered that now perhaps the British would know what sort of people the Lithuanians were'[959]. The article for *The Times* by the correspondent in Warsaw was ready on the following day after De Wiart left Lithuania. Under the heading 'Bad treatment by the Lithuanians', it went

> General Carton de Wiart and Major Grant returned to Warsaw to-night, after suffering indignities from Lithuanians such as seldom, if ever, have been undergone by British officers at the hands of any country accepted in the comity of nations, except during a state of war <…> General Carton de Wiart and Major Grant arrived at Kovno on Monday evening and were lodged in a dirty hotel in two rooms, with a private soldier with fixed bayonet stationed at each door <…> On Tuesday morning they were visited by two officials, presumably a sort of Cheka <…> Permission to leave Lithuania via Vilna was refused, and the return journey was made via East Prussia to Tczew, where they were received by a Polish guard of honour suitable to a general's rank[960].

[958] Ibid, p. 93
[959] Ibid, p. 94
[960] *The Times*, 1923 02 24, p. 9

The newspaper message that followed stated that the Polish government had approached the Conference of Ambassadors requesting to set the Polish-Lithuanian frontier in accordance with Article 87 of the Versailles Treaty. Jean Gout of the French Service in the League made sure Mantoux received a copy of the paper.

While Mantoux chuckled at the 'tragi-comical' episode[961], in British eyes, the Lithuanians were done for. The Lithuanian representative in London was told that no one would talk to him until full explanations and apology were given by the Lithuanian government[962]. Referring to *The Times* article, Curzon called the treatment of De Wiart 'unpardonable'. Although Tudor Vaughan, the British minister in Kaunas, persuaded the Lithuanians to release even the chief of the Polish counter-intelligence himself and suggested Max Muller in Warsaw make the most of this Lithuanian courtesy vis-à-vis the Poles, Curzon was immovable. 'Lithuanians have put themselves out of court altogether by their impossible behaviour ever since the Memel coup and there is no justification for asking that their susceptibilities may be considered'[963]. When Curzon received the Lithuanian official apology, he instructed Vaughan to maintain 'rather brutal language' towards a régime which still '[did] not understand diplomatic parlance'.[964] Vaughan, in turn, pleaded against being seen as too sympathetic for the Lithuanians. 'Nothing was further on this occasion from my thoughts than to consider susceptibilities of this semi Bolshevist people for whom I have growing contempt. I only wish to treat them with fairness and impartiality'[965]. On the same day, Curzon gave the green light for fixing the Polish-Lithuanian frontier at the Conference of Ambassadors in

[961] Mantoux to the French minister, 1921 02 27 / LNA, Mantoux papers, Fonds 8(5)
[962] Curzon to Max Muller, 1923 02 26 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 633
[963] Ibid
[964] Curzon to Vaughan, 1923 03 07 / Ibid, No. 641, note 6
[965] Curzon to Max Muller, 1923 02 26 / DBFP, S. 1, Vol. 23, No. 633, Note 6

such a manner as to include Vilnius in Poland[966]. As Lord Crewe reported from the Conference, 'It looked as if conference had had enough of this miserable country [of Lithuania] and were disposed at all costs to let Poland extend to the sea'[967].

On 15 March 1923, quoting the Lithuanian acceptance of its jurisdiction, as well as the '*de facto* situation created by the resolution of the League Council', the Conference of Ambassadors delimited the Polish eastern border in conformity with the existing *status quo*[968]. The French representative Laroche suggested a different reading of the Żeligowski coup. It was the installation of Lithuanians in Vilnius by the Soviets that justified Żeligowski's action, Laroche argued[969]. Poincaré confidentially informed the Polish government of the 'preponderant role' played by the French delegates in securing the Conference's agreement and doing everything to speed up the solution desired by Poland[970]. The Conference's decision contained the signature of the Polish ambassador in Paris. The Lithuanians, on the other hand, only heard about their 'award' from unofficial sources.

The first and the last discussion of the Conference's decision took place in the meeting of the League Council on 21 April. Galvanauskas complained that the Conference of Ambassadors relied on the Council's recommendation of the provisional line of demarcation in consecrating Polish annexation of Vilnius, and asked the Council to disassociate itself from the Conference's decision. Hymans, the long time rapporteur on the Vilnius question, defended the decision on the basis of Lithuanian acquiescence. Naturally, salvaging acceptance of jurisdiction of an arbitral

[966] Curzon to Crewe, 1923 02 26 / Ibid, No. 637
[967] Crewe to Curzon, 1923 02 26 / Ibid, No. 636
[968] Decision taken by the Conference of Ambassadors regarding the Eastern frontiers of Poland. Paris, 1923 03 15 / *The League of Nations treaty series*, Vol. 15, 1923, p. 261-265
[969] Quai d'Orsay note, 1923 02 21 / ADMAE, Europe, Lithuanie 25, p. 63
[970] Poincaré to Panafieu, 1923 02 22 / Ibid, p. 72

tribunal from historical statements of a party against its continued objection to such an arbitration was extremely farfetched and unheard-of in customary international law. Normally, agreement to arbitration would have necessitated an unequivocal *compromis* between the two parties, detailing the limits of arbitrator's jurisdiction and other modalities[971]. As for the Lithuanian request to the Council for an advisory opinion of the PCIJ, Hymans replied that given the accomplished fact of the Conference of Ambassadors' decision, 'it was going too far in the desire to further legal science and legal theory pure and simple'[972]. The Soviet reaction to the decision gave the hopelessness of the Lithuanian position a comical spin. The Soviet note, desperately obtained by the Lithuanians from Chicherin, pointed to the Allied lack of 'good sense'[973].

[971] Shaw, *Public international law* (2008), p. 1051
[972] LNOJ 1923/06, p. 580
[973] Balutis to Baltrušaitis, 1923 03 24 / LCVA 648/49, p. 67

CONCLUSION

In 2013, a football match took place in Vilnius between the Lithuanian *Žalgiris* and Polish *Lech*. Armed with stickers of the interwar map of Poland, a group of Polish fans marched the streets and shouted 'Wilno is ours!' The Lithuanian Police, reinforced by their colleagues from Poland, watched the parade with an air of boredom. Their main task was to control the traffic: the general public showed no interest in the purpose of the demonstration. In the twenty-first century, the Vilnius conflict was no more. Half a century of Soviet rule, which forced the expulsion of most of the city's Polish population, as well as the incentives of Euro-Atlantic integration with the breakup of the Soviet Union, had precluded even a thought of revision of the border, which Stalin drew along the Curzon line.

Many of the protagonists of this work ended up being murdered at the hands of the Soviet Union. The former Estonian prime minister Ants Piip-'Pup' died in a Soviet prison camp in 1941. Bizauskas of the London Kensington Lithuanian legation was shot by the NKVD the same year. Tukhachevsky, the commander of the Polish-Soviet war, fell at the hand of his comrade Vasily Blokhin, the most prolific mass murderer in the history of humanity, who alone murdered around two and a half hundred Polish POWs a day in Katyn in April 1940[974]. Ironically, Voldemaras' diplomatic voyages to Geneva in the beginning of 1920s saved him from execution. The Soviet NKVD branch of South Ossetia, where Voldemaras was imprisoned, did not dare to sentence him and sent the case back to Moscow, arguing that Voldemaras had been 'an internationally colourful

[974] See Michael Parrish, *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security, 1939-1953* (London: Praeger, 1996)

figure'[975]. A few months later, Voldemaras died from exhaustion in a Moscow prison. At the end of the day, it took hell on earth to redeem the Vilnius Devil's Paradise.

This study makes an important contribution to the international history of the twentieth century as the first sustained account of the international settlement of the iconic Vilnius conflict. It is a multi-national and multi-archival study, exploring the policies of Britain, France, Soviet Russia and the League of Nations.

Above all, this work is one of the very few studies that provides a substantial analysis of the influence of *mentalités* in one of the most 'real' areas of international politics – that of the settlement of international disputes. It presents a detailed analysis of the workings of 'didactic geopolitics' in the treatment of Polish territorial claims by the Allies and of the influence of the assumptions of civilizational backwardness in the treatment of those of Lithuania. In the context of the debates between the 'realist' and 'constructivist' schools in international relations theory, the work serves as an example of 'hard geopolitics' being a function of the 'soft' considerations and prejudices.

The work makes a substantial contribution in offering a solution to the puzzle of trying to explain Lloyd George's almost legendary Polono-skeptic disposition. Attempts had been made to explain British Polish policy in terms of Lloyd George's maneuvering as the leader of a coalition Cabinet, trying to please the pro-Russian Left, as well as the influence of his secretaries and experts[976]. Others focused on Lloyd George's appeasement of Germany[977], or pointed to the British

[975] Gediminas Rudis, 'Augustinas Voldemaras – nemokėjęs pralaimėti politikas', in Ričardas Čepas (ed.), *Lietuvos respublikos ministrai pirmininkai, 1918-1940* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 1997), P. 65
[976] Norman Davies, 'Lloyd George and Poland', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), p. 153
[977] See Stella Rudman, *Lloyd George and the Appeasement of Germany, 1919-1945* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011)

counterbalancing of the French continental policy[978]. In Polish historiography, Lloyd George is almost universally credited with personal anti-Polish bias or even with outright disapproval of Polish independence[979]. Yet all these approaches missed the all-encompassing *mentalité* that guided the British Polish policy in the most fundamental of ways. Tracing the conception and the reception of the didactic tradition of historiography on the old Poland, this work demonstrated how this tradition shaped an epistemic community of Polono-skeptics in the British political elite, and how it influenced its decisions. The choice between making Poland a barrier between Russia and Germany, strong enough to protect itself against them, and 'minimising' Poland to its ethnic core and leaving it a weak buffer which would satisfy both Germany and Russia, strongly depended on the perception of the capacity of Polish statesmanship and on the assumptions about the potential of Poland and the Poles for attaining geopolitical significance, which originated from the didactic tradition.

The study demonstrates how the Poles recognized and sought to exploit this anglo-phone didactic tradition to their own advantage by reinforcing the image of its inherent instability and bellicosity to resist Allied pressure in the Vilnius dispute, and to lobby for recognition of the *de facto* Polish eastern border. Responding to Piłsudski's threats he might resign office and to Polish jingoism, the French, and to a lesser extent the British, were determined not to do anything that could risk exacerbating Poland's volatility that could cause another change of government. The didactic tradition also had its constitutional dimension. The Allies, as well as the League Secretariat, saw Lithuania's role in the projected union with Poland as a check on Poland's vices

[978] Miklós Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe: Britain and the 'Lands Between, 1919-1925* (New York : Central European University Press, 2005), Chapter 5
[979] Peter D. Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (London : Routledge, 2004), p. 130

and supported the constitutional arrangement that would limit possibilities for Polish military adventurism, in a way that Poland in its future military endeavours would receive not only Lithuanian, but also supranational legal supervision. Finally, the Lithuanians exploited the didactic tradition themselves when countering the projects of the Lithuanian-Polish union.

The analysis of Lithuanian participation in the Paris Peace Conference in this work makes a fresh contribution to the historiography of the Conference. It retells this comparatively well-known story from the periphery[980]. The work suggests that the Lithuanians, as well as other underdog national delegations representing the ex-Russian lands, resembled the lower orders of the colonial world. Prejudices that invoked their civilizational backwardness worked against them. Through the discussion of the Lithuanian attempts to secure a British mandate for Lithuania, the study shows how the language of nationalist self-determination in the age of anti-colonial upheaval remained compatible with demands for the extension of colonialism towards one's own polity, in order to deliver security and prosperity.

The thesis also sheds light on the much under-researched but the most crucial episode of state building in the Baltic in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. It demonstrated how, abandoned to its fate by the Allies and critically lacking capital, rolling stock and all kinds of industrial goods, Lithuania scavenged the goods necessary for the continuation of its precarious existence as an independent polity from Europe. In this respect, the work departs from the well-trodden treatment of the emergence of Lithuania as a fixed event, instead treating it as a non-linear

[980] Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007). Participation of the Baltic states has been left largely untouched by the major works dealing with the Conference, e.g. Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: six months that changed the world* (London: John Murray, 2003)

process whose success continued to be uncertain throughout 1919 and beyond[981]. Furthermore, the study revealed a microcosm of personalities who, while generally unknown and barely visible in the histories of their countries of citizenship, played the crucial role in realising the aspirations of statehood of the wretched Baltic provinces.

By presenting a thorough account of the settlement of the Vilnius dispute under the auspices of the League, this study enriches the League of Nations scholarship with a hitherto neglected episode of inaugural importance in the League's history. The work sheds light on the 'league temperament', or the inter -nationalist mindedness, in the most 'realist' of the League's policy avenues - that of international dispute settlement[982]. For the most part, the Secretariat retained its internationalist ethos and maintained its impartiality. In different episodes of the dispute settlement, it succeeded in pushing through its own policy agenda and solicited support for it from the leading member states of the Council. The successful passing of the second Hymans draft, deemed unsatisfactory by France and Poland, as a Council resolution attested to the importance of the, as yet small, Secretariat, which quickly outstripped its intended powers. As for the Council, Balfour in his opposition to the Foreign Office, or Bourgeois in his protest against instructions from the Quai d'Orsay, acted more as the *fonctionnaires* of the League than representatives of their national governments, and cast the role of the Council as something more than a meeting of plenipotentiaries. At the same time, Briand's unwavering protection of Polish interests and civilizational prejudices against Lithuania did not sit well with Bourgeois.

The analysis presented here gives credence to the view of the League as 'as a force field, one made up of shifting alliances, networks, and institutions, which a host of actors entered and

[981] Cf. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (eds.), *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
[982] Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 56

sought to exploit'[983]. In particular, the work demonstrates the inventiveness of the League Secretariat and of the internationally-minded delegates of the Council in getting the most out of the restrictive and general regime of conciliation stipulated of the Covenant. The League tried to transcend the advisory nature of its competence by invoking its international authority as well as by applying to the conciliation procedure the rules of customary international law relating to arbitration. As a result, the Council neutralized Polish attempts to discontinue the dispute and successfully fed the idea of the plebiscite to both parties. It also successfully ignored Lithuanian attempts to exclude Vilnius from the plebiscite, and elicited acceptances from both parties to its 'jurisdiction' for setting the modalities of the consultation.

Conceived against the opposition of both disputants, as well as against the scepticism of both the Foreign Office and of the Quai d'Orsay, the plebiscite project was the child of the League's Council and Secretariat alone. Despite its ultimate failure, the scope of international involvement made it the landmark event in the history of international peacekeeping. Analysis of the preparation of the plebiscite by the League showed that the latter modelled the practice of 'self-determination' according to the latest academic research on the subject.

Conciliation was the unique policy area in the League, which, more than any other, was constrained by the normative framework of the international law. Yet, as this study showed, this framework was contested in the Vilnius dispute not only by France's meddling in support of Polish interests, but also by the Secretariat, guided by competing humanitarian considerations, and by apprehensions of the effect that continuing the dispute would have on the prestige and, ostensibly, the survival of the League. Ultimately, interests of bureaucratic expediency trumped legal

[983] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 5

considerations, and the Secretariat did not hesitate to manipulate the latter in order to throw the Vilnius dispute out of its agenda. The League could hardly succeed against lack of Allied commitment, pro-Polish sabotage by France, anti-Polish sabotage by Soviet Russia, Polish military occupation of the disputed territory and Lithuanian anti-Polish 'cultural struggle'. Still, the dispute settlement in the League turned Lithuania from a non-entity to a fully-fledged party of a dispute, equal to that of Poland. Moreover, the League helped to prevent the renewal of hostilities through the military control commission's supervision on the ground.

Retrospectively, the study begs the question which of the two geopolitical visions of Poland – the romantic, or the didactic - was 'right'. Lloyd George's prophecy that 'Russians together with the Lithuanians' would inevitably retake Vilnius materialised after 17 years. The old PM lived to see his prophecies coming true, when Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia executed the fourth partition of Poland in September 1939. Just as in the summer of 1920, Lloyd George rejoiced in the triumph of his didactic geopolitics and took the opportunity to blame Polish imperialism and improvidence for the act and to proclaim the Soviet invasion the 'liberation of [Russian] kinsmen from the Polish yoke'[984]. Curzon, on his part, nearly hit the bullseye by predicting in 1920 that the Baltic states had around twenty years to exist. Was there a possibility to avoid the fate of 'seasonal states'?

It is clear that didactic geopolitics could have only worked in case of a strong commitment of Western Europe to the security of its eastern counterpart. Yet, as this study has shown, hopes for such a commitment had been shattered as early as 1919, much earlier than Locarno officially blessed the *insecurity* of the region. Neither Britain, nor for that matter France took Poland or the

[984] Lloyd George, 'What is Stalin up to?', *Sunday Express*, 1939 09 24

Baltic states seriously and instead wished a non-committal sanitary cordon free of charge. Didactic geopolitics, then, was both the region's hope and its doom.

MAP 1. Borders and lines of demarcation, 1919-1921



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