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The Role of History in the Relationship between Lithuania and Russia

The history of Lithuania's and Russia's national intercommunion is a basic part of their coexistence as well as the manifestation of their cultural life. However, their history plays a great role in the relationship between these two countries. And it is not a good sign when it includes not only a cultural, but also political sphere as well. Usually it points towards the fact that countries such as these still lack a steady civil identification and that their relations are still being influenced by various ideologies, myths, versions or simply speculations. Lastly, they may also have various and apparent, as well as theoretical pretences towards each other. Therefore these countries practically cannot develop normal relations built on partnerships and collaboration. On the other hand, this situation undermines history too. In practice it is being turned into an ideology, because competing countries do not need an objective history, but a version that grounds their position and disproves the opponents' one.

The article discusses the tension of historical interpretations existing today between Lithuania and Russia and its genesis. It also explores the negative impacts on the relations between Lithuania and Russia in the general field of relations and offers ways to reduce these tensions.

Introductory Remarks

History has always played an important, perhaps even decisive, role in the relations between Lithuania and Russia. In the Middle Ages a common talking point was whether The Grand Duchy of Lithuania had its legitimacy or it was a fragment of the joint ancient Kievan Rus', which The Grand Duchy of Moscow was trying to assemble. The fate of Lithuania, Russia and even the whole region between the Baltic and Black seas depended on the answer to this question. Historic researches showed a different origin of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, other than Russian countries in Kiev or Moscow. But those researches could not unambiguously give the answer to the raised question. Moreover, objective history was simply unnecessary because both sides wanted to have a handier version. Thus for instance, according to the popular version of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Lithuanian

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roots are in Italy¹. According to the version of Moscow, “disagreement between Gediminas and Kalita was a family row, a row over who would rule Russia²”.

There was no and nor could there be any unified answer to the ideological historical questions, therefore the problem was dealt upon the battlefields. In practice it meant constant wars between The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Moscow. Those wars were intervened only by cessation of arms periods because a real peace was impossible between the subjects who looked at each other as an intrigue-produced double, a thief of territories or identity.

Incidentally, since general masses on the both sides were indifferent, that contention was relevant only for the aristocracy. Those masses went about without any rights and were recruited just for the battles – they were like gunnery meat. As Russia had more meat, this situation finally ended with the fall of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, despite the fact that Poland was in the same union. The Russian historical version, expressed by the words of tsarina Jekaterina II “*ottorženych vozvratyč*” (what was left after being ripped off to restore) won. Due to the Partitions which took place at the end of 18th century, Lithuania ended up in the Great Russian Empire. Here even the name of Lithuania was hidden under the net of Russian Guberniya.

The attitude towards the national foundation changed during the ‘New Times’ or so-called period of modernism. The ruler’s legitimacy was altered by the democratic principle of a nation’s self-determination. The State of Lithuania was reestablished in 1918 and it seemed that this time it was completely different from Russia, because the modern State of Lithuania was being formed by a nation that had unique language - Lithuanian. Unfortunately, the hostility and struggle for the authentic identity between Lithuania and Russia didn’t reduce.

Full-blown modern ideologies deformed or simply changed the concept of a nation. According to the spread of the communistic ideology, instead of *nation* there was the craftily offered the notion of *people*. And it could be claimed that it was a translation of the Russian word *narod*. Due to this, a new metaphysical question was raised again, whether the Lithuanian nation in a democratic way decided to live independently, or on the contrary it was prevented from the decision to stay with Russian people. Even though the history proclaimed it was for the good of nation’s self-determination, once again a homologous answer could not be given.

Defending a nation from the social deformation of the concept of nation gave a nation too much prominence. It was also being reviewed for problems in security even in relation to a racial substitution of a nation. Due to this huge tension that formed with in the region the Russian version of the people’s community, which also had greater power, won. Once again Lithuania became a part of the Russian Empire, only this time it was ingeniously called the USSR - as a Lithuanian ethnographic shade of the great soviet people. One soviet diplomat

¹ Vijūkas-Kojelavičius A., *Lietuvos istorija. [The History of Lithuania]*, Kaunas, 1989, p. 44-46 (in Lithuanian).

² Ustrialov N., *Izsledovanije voprosa, kogoje mesto v Russkoj istorii dolžno zanimat Velikoje Kniažestvo Litovskoje? [Issue Research of What Place Grand Duchy of Lithuania Should Take Part In Russian History]*, Sankt Peterburg, 1839, p. 36 (in Russian).

(i.e. Ivan Maiskij), upon explaining what happened in 1940, even suggested an allegory: once during a drinking spree a peasant Ivan (the most important representative of the people) was so drunk that thieves stole his implements. But as soon as Ivan sobered, he recaptured everything that had been taken away. By the way, one must note that such an explanation was widely accepted in the East as well as in the West.

At the end of the 20th century the idea of an individual's freedom shattered the modern communistic ideology and the State of Lithuania was rebuilt again; this time it was more democratic than national or popular. The Russian Federation was also established, which called itself democratic. However, soon it appeared that this Russian Federation could not be democratic, because first of all the basis of this federation was not clear and under democratic conditions it could simply be decomposing until infinity. Such a prospect tightened Russian's and they began recoiling from democracy. In thoughts they returned to the past, dreaming and identifying themselves with the former Russian Empire. Meanwhile in Lithuania although democracy was anchoring more successfully than in Russia, there were some problems. Lithuanians then began to associate those problems with a negative Russian influence. That is the reason why still today conflicts are appearing between Lithuania and Russia and the situation is growing tenser.

Once again both sides try to ground their position in history. The question now is whether in 1940 there was an occupation from Russian (the USSR) partly in respect of Lithuania or that it should be called something else. This question is very topical and important for both sides because resting upon this answer depends the further material and identificational development between Lithuania and Russia. If the occupation really existed, Russia is responsible for aggravated aggression – and in all aspects illegal action against the sovereign state of Lithuania. This could mean that Russia, as a direct successor of the USSR, should apologize for this historical and legal crime and pay billions for compensation. And what will be next with this for Russia, when after Lithuania's precedent, all present or even future Russian neighbours start claiming for their appropriate compensations? Will it survive as a state? From Lithuania's standpoint, it is only the business of Russia itself. Of course, such a prospect is not suitable for Russia.

But if there was no occupation, and even though they were a little bit pressed and threatened, then it was still the authentic decision of Lithuania to integrate into the State of Russia (the USSR). If this must be more precise, then the resolve to come back into this historically determined, and in this sense natural coexistence, with Russia was by choice. If so, Lithuania would have to calculate differently who is indebted to whom. But the most important thing is that in the case of this version, there would be reasonable suspicion that maybe Lithuania's new seclusion from Russia is just temporal, the result of values' reappraisal. What is more, is that at the moment a general foundation can set upon neither a dynastic legitimacy nor a communistic ideology. However, it is possible to look for and find a new basis for reunion if, of course, it is a natural immanent not only to Russia's but also to Lithuania's interest. Until that basis is found, Lithuania can exist as independent from Russia or integrate into various unions – it does not change the essence of the matter. Of course, if that new 'basis

for reunion with Russia' does not show up, then this version is totally unacceptable for Lithuania because of the approach towards identity.

So Lithuania, as well as Russia, want to ground their positions in history and are thus looking for the answers in history. But once again, can history unambiguously and without any appeal answer the questions raised and solve the dilemma? It is a common knowledge that from the theoretical point of view history cannot strictly answer the question – *what happened*. This answer could be found only with the help of ideology. However, history can tell us a lot about *what and how it happened*. And perhaps such a statement could be the factor to reject a too ideological history and combine other spheres, such as politics, diplomacy, ethics and moral that probably could better solve this dispute.

Therefore, let us look into what history can tell us about the latter dispute between Lithuania and Russia, specifically for the sake of each other's version.

1. The First Proclaim why it could be claimed that Occupation Existed

Confidential papers of the USSR and Germany, signed between 1939 - 1941, can be considered good evidence to claim to the fact that the USSR occupied Lithuania (secret protocols were signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop on August 23, 1939 and September 28, 1939 as well as secret annex to the treaty of January 10, 1941). For those who are familiar with the great politics, it is obvious that in conformity with them Germany allowed the Soviet Union to destroy the State of Lithuania; this is what the USSR did in the summer of 1940. According to the 20th century principles of law, politics and moral the so-called division of spheres between The Great Powers and little state's destruction on those grounds was no longer accepted. The USSR did the best it could to hide and deny the fact of the existence of those secret protocols. The USSR was able to do that because of the inside totalitarian regime, which lasted for 50 years.

When the Soviet Union began the campaign of publicity and democracy, by the courtesy of Michael Gorbachev, it became impossible to deny the existence of secret protocols. Due to this fact on December 24, 1989 a so-called Congress of the People's Deputies passed the resolution (1432 votes for, 252 – against, 264 – suspended) according to which Molotov and Ribbentrop's secret protocols were qualified as void and "invalid since the minute they were signed" because, "they violated third countries' sovereignty and independence"³.

However, such recognition raised a question of the legitimacy of Lithuania's (as well as that of Latvia and Estonia, which was destroyed in 1940) belonging to the USSR. Propagandists of the USSR began to look for means to retain an actual territorial entity of the USSR and two arguments were used for this purpose.

³ "Soobščeniye komissiji po političeskoj i pravovoj ocenke sovietsko-germanskogo dogovora o nienapadenii ot 1939 goda" [Information Of Commission On Political and Juridical Valuation Of Russo-German Non Agression Pact of 1939"], *Pravda*, 1989 12 24 (in Russian).

According to one of them, Germany – the USSR’s secret protocols had nothing to do with the proceedings that took place in the Baltic States in 1940; in other words, those treaties did not condition the juridical and political position of the Baltic States and they stop existing because of some unnameable “other circumstances”.⁴

Another argument is that it had no importance and that the secret agreements signed by Germany and the USSR in 1939 – 1941 were void and their validity expired on June 22, 1941 when Germany started a war against the USSR. This was due to the fact that when going to war Germany violated the public “non-aggression” and “friendship and territorial” treaties with the USSR signed in 1939. Besides, secret protocols did not exist anymore. Therefore, confidential papers did not affect the subsequent Lithuanian (as well as Latvian and Estonian) fate⁵.

Both these arguments were related to one another. They could be easily denied therefore they seemingly were raised in just the hope that for most people it would be difficult to make sense out of convolutions of such a sphere.

In fact, in secret protocols it was not directly stated that according to the agreement between Germany and the USSR, “the USSR is going to occupy the State of Lithuania”. It is only said that “Lithuania devolves to the USSR’s sphere of influence” and that the USSR “because of its interest” would be able to make “special territorial and political readjustments” in respect to Lithuania⁶. However, only a person who has no clue about politics or simply does not have conscience, can doubt what those statements could mean in the lay of the land and what they meant.

By using an indirect (or so-called concludent) method, it is not very difficult to prove that the above mentioned phrases meant an agreement to destroy the country. First of all, the statement “devolves to the sphere of influence” practically meant that the little Lithuanian state becomes totally dependent on the will of the great state – the USSR - and that another great state - Germany – in the lay of the land is able to prevent the USSR from proceeding in respect to Lithuania when it decides and when it agrees that in respect to Lithuania the USSR proceeds the way it wants. Moreover, extant secret negotiation protocols and correspondence between The Soviets and Nazis do not leave any doubts that secret treaties opened way for the USSR to destroy the Baltic States as well as Lithuania⁷. Especially there was a significant sign about the preparation for the

⁴ “1939 metų įvykiai – žvilgsnis iš pusės amžiaus distancijos. A. Jakovlevas atsako į “Pravdos” klausimus”, [The Proceedings in 1939 – a Look from the Distance of a Half Century. A Jakovlev answers questions of “Pravda”], *Tiesa*, 1989 08 19 (in Lithuanian).

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *TSRS – Vokietija 1939. TSRS ir Vokietijos santykių dokumentinė medžiaga 1939 metų balandžio – spalio mėn. t.1* [The USSR and Germany in 1939. Documentary Material of Relations between the USSR and Germany. April – October, 1939 vol.1], Vilnius: Mokslas, 1989, p. 62, 109-110 (in Lithuanian).

⁷ “Lietuvos žlugimo preliudas. 1939 metų rugsėjo 27–29d. Vokietijos – SSRS derybų Maskvoje dokumentai” Paruošė Nerijus Šepetys [“The Prelude of Lithuania’s Fall. September 27 – 29, 1939. The Documents of Negotiations between Germany and the USSR”. Prepared by Nerijus Šepetys], *Naujasis židinys – Aidai*, 2002, No 9-10, p. 457 (in Lithuanian).

destruction of the State of Lithuania during the split of Lithuania's territory: according to the secret protocol signed on September 28, 1939, Lithuanian part in Sudovia had to be separated from the bigger part of Lithuania which went to the Soviets and the rest was left for Germany. Finally after the documents of negotiations between the USSR and Lithuania, which took place after secret treaties between the USSR and Germany, there was witness that Stalin personally told the Foreign Secretary Juozas Urbšys about the agreement with Germany and about the division of spheres of influence. This means that Stalin himself admitted that Lithuania was transferred to the USSR's sphere of influence and that is why the USSR could do with Lithuania whatever it decided⁸. And the fact that the USSR did not destroy Lithuania immediately does not change the point. It is obvious that because of secret treaties with Germany the USSR they thereby eliminated the objective as well as subjective barriers of the destruction.

That is why there was no force that could stop the actions of the USSR as the main power. Besides, Lithuania having found out its real position (similar to the way Latvia and Estonia realized their real situation) was morally stricken against the actions of the USSR. That is why using blackmail the USSR could thrust a treaty on Lithuania, according to which the contingent of the Red Army was brought in⁹. After that for a while the USSR could easily play cat and mouse with Lithuania till finally having decided the USSR could thrust assumed accusations on Lithuania (about soviet soldiers' capturing or a treaty between Latvia and Estonia against the USSR) and delivering an ultimatum to require from Lithuania to let the Red Army in its territory¹⁰. Finally it could affect the election of proper persons to so-called People's Parliament and using a pressure to make the Parliament say the word of the Lithuanian state joining to the USSR¹¹.

On the other hand, a statement that on June 22, 1941 broke all treaties between the USSR and Germany is not quite reasonable. It is true that public agreements ("non-aggression", "friendship and territorial", etc.) broke, but secret treaties concerned with the destruction of the Baltic States are hardly to be broken. After all a fact that having occupied the Baltic States, Hitler did not yet re-establish the Baltic States should have been a signal to Stalin that their secret treaty about the destruction of The Baltic States is still valid no matter how the war between them ends.

Finally, even if we agree with the statement that on June 22, 1941 all public and secret treaties between the USSR and Germany were still valid, it had still not changed the USSR's attitude towards the position of the Baltic States. Due to those secret treaties public officials acts on the incorporation of The Baltic States into the USSR were made, which were still valid¹².

⁸ *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija 1939–1940. Dokumentų rinkinys [Lithuania's Occupation and Annexation in 1939 – 1940. File Collection]*, Vilnius: Mokslas, 1993, p. 71 (in Lithuanian).

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 95-98, 101-104, 125-147.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 180-265.

¹¹ *Baltijos valstybių užgrobimo byla. JAV Kongreso Ch. J. Kersteno komiteto dokumentai 1953–1954 metai [The Case of the Seizure of the Baltic States, The Documents of the CH. J. Kersten's US Congress, 1953–1954]*, Vilnius: DUKA, 1997, p. 323-353 (in Lithuanian).

¹² *Baltijos valstybių užgrobimo byla (11 nuoroda) [The Case of the Seizure of the Baltic States (note 11)]*, p. 265-271, 293, 352-356 (in Lithuanian).

On July 30, 1941 the USSR signed a declaration only with Poland's Emigrant Government, according to which it was recognized that "all treaties made by the USSR and Germany in 1939 in Poland's territory were invalid"¹³. Of course, that declaration was invalidated public "territory" treaty between the USSR and Germany signed on September 28, 1939 which became invalid when Germany started a war against the USSR, but this declaration had not invalidated secret protocols¹⁴. However, in practice that declaration should have meant that a legally internal right of the USSR was invalid in Poland's territories, which the USSR officially called its own in 1939. That is why on principle its former citizens, that were the citizens of the USSR, could return to Polish jurisdiction¹⁵. (By the way, in some way that declaration of the USSR and Poland was topical for Lithuania, too, because it was concerned with the land around Vilnius. The question of Vilnius dependency was conditioned by the decision on Poland's Eastern border in line with the Curzon line¹⁶).

However, the incorporation of the Baltic States' into the USSR on the grounds of the treaty between the USSR and Germany about was not cancelled. Therefore, from the USSR's point of view, its internal right in respect of the Baltic nations was still valid and appealing to that right, i.e. voluntary decision of the Baltic States to join the USSR and because of this supposed approval, the Soviet diplomats could treat the Baltic States as a legal part of the USSR. And since the USSR's internal right was implemented practically because of secret treaties between the USSR and Germany about the division of spheres of influence, the Soviet Union did the best to deny the existence of those secret protocols. It was obvious that admitting to the existence of illegal protocols and then invalidating them would automatically recall legitimacy and the public USSR's rights, referring to which the Soviet Union considered that it legally governed the Baltic States.

At the time when on December 24, 1989 in the Congress of Deputies of the People secret treaties of 1939 – 1941 with Germany were voided, the Baltic nations had already expressed their demand to re-establish their independency. Therefore, the USSR could lay claim to the governance of the Baltic nation only by using force. The USSR legally refused its rights to the Baltic States only on September 6, 1991 after the president of the USSR Gorbachov had admitted the independency of the Baltic States.

Consequently, considering only the above mentioned circumstances a person who has moral and some knowledge about relationship between countries could hardly doubt that proceedings in Lithuania, as well as in Latvia and

¹³ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovjetsko – polskich otnošenij*, t. 7 [Documents and Materials On Soviet-Polish Relationship History Vol. 7], Moskva: Nauka, 1973, p. 208 (in Russian)

¹⁴ *TSRs – Vokietija 1939 (6 nuoroda)* [The USSR and Germany in 1939 (note 6)], p. 107-108 (in Lithuanian).

¹⁵ *Historia dyplomacji Polskiej 1939–1945 t. 5* [History of Polish Diplomacy in 1939–1945 vol.5] Warszawa, 1999, p. 211– 228 (in Polish).

¹⁶ *Sovietskij Sojuz na mieždunarodnych konferencijach perioda Belikoj otečestvennoj boiny, 1941–1945gg: Sbornik dokumentov t. 2, Tegeranskaja konferencija* [Soviet Union in the International Conferences During The Worls War II, 1941-1945 Vol. 2, Conference if Teheran], Moskva, 1984 (in Russian).

Estonia, were a direct and determined result of secret treaties between the USSR and Germany. Due to these treaties the USSR made a forcible act of aggression against the Baltic States and “any other circumstances” could not change the essence of those aggressive acts.

As it has been mentioned, after long hesitations and tossing, the Congress of the USSR’s Deputies of the People came to such a conclusion and on December 24, 1989 pronounced a resolution concerned with a political and legal evaluation of the Non-aggression treaty between the USSR and Germany signed in 1939. In this resolution it was also delivered that “the Congress states that with protocols of August 23, 1939 and other secret protocols that were contracted with Germany in 1939 – 1941, set the limits of “spheres of interests” of the USSR and Germany and other acts were legally against the sovereignty and independence of third parties. Stalin and his toadies used the protocols in delivering ultimatums and pressing other countries, breaking the legal responsibilities that it had obligated in respect to them”¹⁷.

The attention should be given to the phrase of resolution “in respect of law”. It seems that it appeared as a certain compromise because democratically-spirited deputies claimed is as a conception “in respect of international law”. However, authority’s representatives (such as Valentiv Falin) maintained that at the time, i.e. in 1939 – 1945, there was no such thing as international law, there were only separate treaties¹⁸. Probably this is the reason why in the resolution there is the following paragraph:

“The congress notes that during that period, the USSR’s relationships with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were regulated by the system of treaties. According to the peace agreement of 1920 and treaties contracted in 1926 – 1933, their parties obligated to respect each other’s sovereignty, territorial unity and immunity in any circumstances. Similar obligations the Soviet Union had for Poland and Finland”¹⁹

In any case the resolution carried by deputies of the People on December 24, 1989 seems to be close enough to the conclusion that can be drawn while consciously and objectively evaluating proceedings in 1939 – 1940. However, the policy of Moscow begins to recede from such a position, and with a help of various sophisms avoids political responsibility for the violence in respect to the Baltic States.

Such a fundamental expression is a try at distinguishing the USSR’s actions against the Baltic States in 1940, i.e. to distinguish annexation from occupation, and on the one hand, admitting annexation imposed by force and at the same time denying the fact of past occupation

¹⁷ “Soobščeniye komissiji po političeskoj i pravovoj ocenke sovietsko–germanskogo dogovora (3 nuoroda) [“Information Of Commission On Political and Juridical Valuation Of Russo-German Non Agression Pact (note 3)” (in Russian).

¹⁸ Landsbergis V., *Lūžis prie Baltijos [The Break by the Baltic Sea]*, Vilnius, 1997, p. 143 (in Lithuanian).

¹⁹ “Soobščeniye komissiji po političeskoj i pravovoj ocenke sovietsko–germanskogo dogovora (3 nuoroda) [Information Of Commission On Political and Juridical Valuation Of Russo-German Non Agression”] (in Russian).

Occupation is denied on the grounds that in the middle of June in 1940 the USSR sent its formidable army into the Baltic States not because of a declaration of war and even not because of hostility without a declaration of war, but because of treaties with the Baltic States²⁰. Of course, it is admitted that those treaties were a result of the USSR's ultimatum, however, it is claimed that then law did not forbid threatening by force²¹. Besides, with a help of an ultimatum it was not demanded to surrender. For example as in the spring of 1938 Germany demanded from Austria to join the Reich or another example is when in the spring of 1939 from Czechoslovakia it was required to surrender to the protectorate of the Reich. The USSR demanded only for guarantees that the internecine treaties of 1939 between the USSR and the Baltic States would be "cleanly and honestly" carried on. Thus, not only Russian lawyers and propagandists but also official representatives of Russian government drew a conclusion that there was no occupation of the Baltic States²². And subsequent annexation, even though it included some legal breaches, was not solely unilateral USSR actions but they were also performed because of the resolve of the Baltic States themselves. By the way, in this way those "other circumstances", that in his time Alexander Jakovlev did not resolved to name, were clarified.

Of course, this Russian position is only a desperate evasion. It can be easily criticized. It contains an incorrect thesis of the position that international law did not forbid to threaten by force. The existence of such a ban is witnessed by the statement of the State Department of the USA, made on July 23, 1940 when the Soviet's aim to destroy the Baltic States had become clear. Actually it was stated that:

During the last few days' shameful processes, during which political independence and territorial unity of three little Baltic Republics - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – were consciously destroyed by one of the powerful neighbors, apace coming to the upshot...

The policy of our government is well known to everybody. The people of the United States are against any predatory actions, irrespective whether they are performed by direct force or only threatening to use it. The people of this country are also against intervention of any form independent of by what country it is performed, even if it is very powerful, independent of which country's affairs it is being intruded in, even if it is very weak country.

These principles make a foundation to which the relationship of 21 sovereign countries that form a New World refers.

The United States is going to uphold these principles because Americans are sure that if the doctrine that embodies these principles does not gain ground in interne-

²⁰ *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija 1939–1940 (8 nuoroda) [Lithuania's Occupation and Annexation in 1939–1940 (note 8)]*, p. 265-268 (in Lithuanian).

²¹ Černičenko S., "Ob "okkupacii" Pribaltiki i narušenii prav russkojazyčnogo naselenija" ["About The 'Occupation' of Baltic States and The Violations Of Russian Speaking People Rights"], *Meždunarodnaja žizn*. 2004/4; Černišenko S., "Okkypacii ne bylo" ["There Were No Occupation"], *Moskovskij komsomolec v Latvii*, 2004 08 24 (in Russian).

²² *RF užsienio reikalų ministro Vladimiro Čižovo 2005 metų liepos 18 d. pareiškimas [July 18, 2005 Statement of Vladimir Cizov, the Secretary of the Russian Federation]*, www.regnum.ru. (in Russian).

cine relationship between countries, then sense, justice and standards of law, in other words the foundation of the most modern civilization, will not be preserved.²³

The USSR's actions against the Baltic States in 1940 could be reasonably called the indirect aggression. And it is not serious to argue that if international law forbade aggression as such, it did not professedly forbid an indirect aggression. The official statement of the Soviet's characters proclaimed that the USSR considered indirect aggression as unacceptable, too. For instance, in the March of 1938 Maxim Litvinov, Narkom of Foreign Affairs, during the Assembly of the League of Nations said:

The League of Nations should not change its attitude towards indirect seizure or annexation of other countries' territories as well as towards "cases when such annexations are being masked creating puppet "the people's" governments that seemingly are independent but in reality serve only as a cover or tool for foreign aggressor²⁴.

Another Narkom of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Vyacheslav Molotov, in the summer of 1939 during negotiations with representatives of The Great Britain and France concerned with guarantees of the Baltic States, particularly heartily demanded guarantees for countries in the case of *indirect aggression*²⁵. Molotov appealed to the possibility of such aggression from Germany even though Western allies had no doubts that with such a request the Soviets tried to cover its targeted indirect aggression against the Baltic States. Due to the treaty with the Western counties at that time, the Soviet Union could not reach its goal.

It is important to note that Russia's attitude to deny the fact of occupation particularly showed up in the spring of 2005 when Russia commemorated 60 years of victory against Hitlerian Germany.

It is undoubted that the checkmate of Nazism had a huge importance to Europe and all of the world. It cannot also be denied that in the checkmate of Nazism the Soviet Union and mainly the Russian nation played the main role. That is why Russia can deservedly be proud of its role and forever remember the slain from that fight.

However, it could not go unnoticed that commemorating victory against the Nazism Russia apparently tried to emphasize the USSR as a liberator and at the same time to cover, conceal or simply deform the reality about the crime of the Soviet regime against other sovereign nations. This fact especially hurt the Baltic States because according to the Russian version they refused their independence by themselves, and from the USSR's side if there had been some illegal

²³ *Baltijos valstybių užgrobimo byla* (11 nuoroda) [*The Seizure of the Baltic States case (note 11)*], p. 292 (in Lithuanian).

²⁴ Hough W. J. H., "The Annexation of the Baltic States and Its Effect on the Development of Law Prohibiting Forcible Seizure of Territory", *New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 1985, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 390.

²⁵ *Baltijos valstybių užgrobimo byla* (11 nuoroda) [*The Seizure of the Baltic States case, (note 11)*], p. 189 (in Lithuanian); *God krizisa 1938–1939, t. 2*, Moskva, 1990, p. 90 (in Russian).

actions, they cannot anyhow derogate the mission of the USSR as a liberator and cannot deny the legitimacy of the Baltic States' connection to the USSR²⁶

So it is not a surprise that the Baltic States have thrown into contractions against such Russian propaganda and it can assuredly be claimed that their position have won a big enough understanding and favour in the world's community, even though the same world's community took trouble and showed respect to Russia for its historical merits in the checkmate of Nazism²⁷

2. The Second Proclaim why it could be Doubted that Classical Occupation Existed

Indeed the Soviet Army was let in according to a treaty – there was neither resistance with arms nor had the Government of Lithuania entered into an official protest. This was because the larger part of the intelligentsia, that until then had been in opposition, started to support the new government that was formed in reference to the invader's will and without any protest to participate in the Parliament organized by factual invaders. And in the Parliament "having piloted though" a resolution on entering the USSR, neither of deputies voted against it. Of course, it could be said that there was a fear that one would be physically disposed of. On the other hand, it could be claimed that for the biggest part of national intelligentsia their welfare was more important than the destiny of the country. Besides one could suspect that nobody protested not only because of fear, but also because some citizens clearly approved the prospect of these new social reforms.

Of course it could also be appealed that during the summer of 1940 a special situation was in all of Europe. Political arenas that had been in bigger and older countries were disappearing or had already disappeared. But in this case a look will inevitably turn to the past and a question will arise: what national self-awareness and efficiency did, for example, Lithuania demonstrate during all period of its independency?

Of course, everybody knows that practically from the beginning of the existence of the State, Lithuania fought against Poland because it had occupied Vilnius - the historical capital of Lithuania. This fact, of course, was Lithuania's bane due to which all Lithuanians had come through a lot of things. However, the essence of this bane is not that clear. It is not only that Poland seized Vilnius,

²⁶ Sergej Karaganov, a famous political scientist in the Russian Federation, in one of his articles ("Rosijskaja gazeta", September 23, 2005) described Russia's propaganda war against the Baltic States in this way: "Due to our inner weakness, we often react inadequately. For example, look at the reaction towards a pribalt's claim to admit the USSR's fault for Molotov - Ribbentrop's pact! With this wild reaction we almost eclipsed the celebration of the Victory Day was which successful and reinforced the country's prestige".

²⁷ Even in Russia was admitted that attempts to isolate the Baltic States during the commemoration of Victory day were not successful (Kondrašov D., *Front protiv Rossiji: napravlenije agressiji* [The Front Against Russia: The Turn of Aggression], 2005 03 28, www.regnum.ru) (in Russian).

but more important is that Lithuanians could not preserve non-Lithuanian Vilnius by themselves. It is even less known (or to be more precise – it is desirable to know) about Lithuania's actions when this all happened. Unfortunately, we must state that Lithuania's behaviour brought luck neither to its image nor to consolidation of its positions in the international scene. On the contrary, with its behaviour Lithuania more often endangered not only itself but other as well.

It was not a surprise that feeling a threat from Poland, Lithuania was looking for the support of the Great Powers. However, it appealed not to democratic countries, because Lithuania did not understand or appreciate their support, but it appealed to the Germany and the Soviet Union which were not satisfied with the situation after World War I and were seeking for a new war.

These are some stronger episodes from Lithuania's foreign policy between the two World Wars. Already in the summer of 1920 Lithuania agreed to give permission to the Red Army to use its territory while this Red Army was launching a fateful attack against Poland, even though officially it declared itself to be "strictly neutral". Thus, Lithuania helped the Red Army to attack even though it was not a secret that this army was seeking to sovietize Poland and Lithuania itself. During the autumn of the same year Lithuania's army actually helped the Red Army in the fight with Poland in Sudovia²⁸.

In the spring of 1923 Lithuania started rather risky actions towards Klaipeda and Vilnius and was hoping for Soviet Russia's support in a war²⁹. Because of that, a new war in the Eastern Europe almost started. At the end of 1925 and the beginning of 1926 Lithuania offered the Soviet Union a secret war alliance against Poland but at that time the USSR was not ready for a war³⁰. In 1927 – 1928 once again a new war almost started in the region because of Lithuania's venturesome actions. And in 1929 Lithuania's as revisionist country's image was so strong in the international scene that even Litvinov, Narkom of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, refused to come to Kaunas for the official visit. According to him, such a visit would look suspicious to the international opinion and that they would think that the USSR was looking for a war agreement³¹.

In the fourth decade, in Lithuania's behaviour, it could be noticed that stronger manifestations of responsibility came forth not only for its own good but also for the whole region's security. However, at that time Europe was already unstopably moving towards a new war. So, inevitably a question arises

²⁸ Laurinavičius Č., *Lietuvos – Sovietų Rusijos taikos sutartis [The Peace Agreement between Lithuania and The Soviet Russia]*, Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1992, p. 131-166 (in Lithuanian).

²⁹ Senn A. E., *The Great Powers, Lithuania and Vilna Question 1920–1928*, Leiden, 1966, p. 105-136.

³⁰ Kasparavičius A., *Didysis X Lietuvos užsienio politikoje. 1926 metų Lietuvos ir Sovietų Sąjungos nepuolimo sutarties sudarymo analizė [The Great X in Lithuania's Foreign Policy. The Analysis of the contract of Non-aggression treaty between Lithuania and The Soviet Union in 1926]*, Vilnius, 1996, p. 61-74 (in Lithuanian).

³¹ "Augustino Voldemaro užsienio politika ir Lietuvos geopolitika 1927–1929" žr.: Laurinavičius Č., *Politika ir diplomatija [The Foreign Policy of Augustinas Voldemaras and Lithuania's Geopolitics in 1927–1929]* in Laurinavičius Č., *Politics and Diplomacy*, Kaunas, 1997, p. 188-226 (in Lithuanian).

whether for the World War II reasonably blaming The Great Powers, first of all Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, is possible and at the same time it is possible to ignore the responsibility of little countries, such as Lithuania.

Claims for the Soviet Union are usually grounded on the fact that imposing aggression against The Baltic States broke many obligations that had been fixed in treaties signed by it. From the standpoint of a formal letter it cannot be denied. However, historically it is important in respect to what kind of treaties there were, how they were signed, and how they affected political proceedings of that time.

For instance, let us discuss the so-called peace agreement between Lithuania and The Soviet Russia that was signed on July 12, 1920 in Moscow. According to the formal letter of that treaty, Lithuania got its independence as well as Vilnius. Of course, this development was very important to Lithuania. Despite this, a fact that this treaty had an annex that allowed the Red Army, which at that time was attacking Poland, to use Lithuania's territory was also very important³².

The examination perusal also does not let us doubt that if such an annex hadn't had existed, there would have been the treaty itself. Consequently, this treaty between Lithuania and the Soviet Russia can be considered only having in mind the war context of The Soviet Russia and Poland. At the end of the war, in the autumn of 1920 in Riga, the Soviet Russia signed a treaty with Poland, which actually replaced a treaty with Lithuania. Because according to the interpretation of the apparent treaty of Moscow, Russia had to guarantee Lithuania together with Vilnius. And according to the treaty of Riga, Russia allowed Poland to seize Lithuania's eastern part, including Vilnius and Russia even lost its common border with Lithuania³³.

On September 28, 1926 the Soviets signed the so-called non-aggression treaty with Lithuania and formally confirmed that the treaty of July 12, 1920 was not valid anymore. However, Poland contested that and in 1932 the Soviets signed a non-aggression treaty with Poland which confirmed the treaty of Riga. On April 4, 1934 the USSR extended its treaty of 1926 signed with Lithuania. However, Poland contested again and after a month the USSR extended the treaty of 1932 that had been signed with Poland. So a collision of treaties or to be more precise – speculation with treaties that had opposite meanings - was formed.

Of course, Lithuania can say that an acceptable version under the treaty of Moscow in 1920 was valid; on the other hand, Poland can claim that an acceptable version under the treaty of Riga in 1920 was valid. Historically it is obvious that all of those treaties confirmed not the stability and legitimacy in the region, but on the contrary – kept weakening it³⁴. By the way, not only the bilate-

³² Sirutavičius V., Nekrašas E., Lopata R., sudar., *Svarbiausios Lietuvos Respublikos tarptautinės sutartys 1918–1995 [Main International Treaties of the Republic of Lithuania]*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 1997, p. 13-30 (in Lithuanian).

³³ Laurinavičius Č., *Lietuvos – Sovietų Rusijos taikos sutartis (28 nuoroda) [The Peace Agreement between Lithuania and The Soviet Russia (note 28)]*, p. 131-166 (in Lithuanian).

³⁴ "Kam Lietuvos neįpareigojo lenkų – sovietų Rygos sutartis" žr.: Laurinavičius Č., *Politika ir diplomatija (31 nuoroda) ["Things that Lithuania was not Obligated according to the Treaty of Riga between Poles and Soviets"]* in: Laurinavičius Č., *Politics and Diplomacy (note 31)*, p. 134-144 (in Lithuanian).

ral but also the collective agreements in the region were not determined as well. It makes an allusion to the agreement about the pact of Briand and Kellog coming into effect in the region (so-called Litvinov's protocol) signed in 1929, in Moscow³⁵ as well as a treaty that defined aggression signed in 1933, in London. The important thing is that the interpretation of the significance of those treaties depended on those countries' geographic location. On the one hand, since the USSR signed them with its real neighbours Lithuania, did not take part in it. The common significance of these treaties was that all obligations were through those borders. Specifically in respect of the dispute between Lithuania and Poland those treaties witnessed that a legal position was acknowledged in reference with the treaty of Riga but not Moscow. That is why Lithuania took all possible actions when signing separately with the USSR mentioned treaties, in either way they would include the validity of the treaty of Moscow. And the USSR more or less tried to satisfy Lithuania's wishes but not because of sympathy to disadvantage Lithuania but so that the situation between Lithuania and Poland would come to be incompatibly different.

It is obvious that a string of treaties between Lithuania and the USSR, and between Poland and the USSR, not only made the situation in the region uncertain but also endangered the security of Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and Estonia. It is also clear that such a situation was very useful for the USSR and Germany which sought for revenge. Besides, it was not a coincidence that in a secret protocol of August 23, 1939 Lithuania's interests in respect to Vilnius were recorded.

On the other hand, such a situation was not useful for the security of the USSR too. The latter statement should be emphasized because it is naive to think sort of that the USSR generally had no right to its security (although while reading today's Lithuanian publications a different opinion can be formed). Another thing is that the security of that country in history was usually implemented using aggressive tools as well as expansive objectives of that country. Therefore, it is essential not only to identify expansive objectives and prevent from them, but it is also important not to provoke those expansive objectives which later could be seemingly considered as the search for security.

Such an illustration as this ambivalent situation in history can be so-called the neutrality policy, that Lithuania as well as Latvia and Estonia started from the autumn of 1938. Formally with such a policy the Baltic States tried not to intervene into the growing tension between blocks of the Great Powers and specifically stay neutral between the USSR and Germany. Despite this, in practice the Baltic States failed to stay neutral. With their neutrality declaration they took up a good position for Germany and not only practically but also delibera-

³⁵ "Litvinovo protokolas (1929 metų vasario 9 d.) ir Lietuvos diplomatija" žr.: Laurinavičius Č., *Politika ir diplomatija* (31 nuoroda) ["The Protocol of Litvinov (February 9, 1929) and Lithuania's Diplomacy in Laurinavičius Č., *Politics and Diplomacy* (note 31)], p. 157-187 (in Lithuanian).

tely, because they did it advised by Berlin³⁶. Due to this fact, such a policy of the Baltic States contributed to the failure of negotiations between the USSR and the Western countries in 1939, but of course they did not decide everything. At the same time the policy of the Baltic States was useful for the agreement between the USSR and Germany in 1939, but once again they did not decide anything³⁷.

So, if the USSR and its successor - the Russian Federation - are responsible for aggression against Lithuania, isn't Lithuania responsible for constant provocation of that aggression? Isn't Poland responsible for the situation in 1939? By the way, the same question could be given to other aggression victims.

Instead of Conclusion: Is History Necessary in Relationships Between Countries?

Of course history is necessary because even a superficial and episodic look into it gives an opportunity to see the fragments of different nations' objectives, victories and defeats, joys and torments as a film. They stimulate feelings and mind. They are necessary for human nature. They are needed for social and international communication. Despite this, they can hardly bring any good or bad to relationships between countries. Because the past of those relationships is usually varied, everything could be found in it. On the other hand, the organization of that past is of that kind that it will never be destined to find out what really happened.

However, even a fragmentary look into relationships between Lithuania and Russia in the first half of the 20th century let us realize that not everything was that simple and unambiguous. There was neither total truth nor guilt without fault. That is why trying to draw a conclusion in reference with this historic past history can be turned into an ideology or simple politics.

Of course, the seize of guilt could be measured; articles of the criminal code could be applied or looked for mitigating circumstances, etc.

But and in this case, we cannot disregard with realia. As it is obvious that with the present circumstances the codification of historical guilt will be worth something only if both parties recognize it.

Yet let us talk in more detail about those realia. It is clear, that Lithuania in its dispute with Russia cannot agree with a version that in 1940 it disclaimed its

³⁶ Laurinavičius Č., "The Baltic States between the World Wars: Foreign Policy Options and the Problem of Neutrality" in *Die baltische Staaten im Schnittpunkt der Entwicklungen. Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. Herausgegeben von Carsten Goehrke und Jürgen von Ungern – Sternberg. Schwabe & Co.AG. Verlag. Basel, 2002, p. 121-132.

³⁷ Ahman R., "The German Treaties with Estonia and Latvia on 7 June 1939 – Bargaining Play or Alternative for German – Soviet Understanding?" *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Winter 1989, p. 337-364; Feldmann I., Stranga A., "Latvia and the Baltic Policies of the The USSR, Poland and Germany in the Late 1930's", *Proceedings of the Latvian Academy of Science Section A*, 1994, No. 3, p. 9-15.

independency not because of compulsion but with free will. Lithuania cannot accept such a version because of historical facts as well as today's constitutional acts. Official civilization's position to this question, the final and the most important reason is elementary self-respect and the foundations of political identification.

But it should not be hoped that Russia will officially admit its responsibility for Lithuania's occupation in 1940 and all the outcomes that resulted from it. There is no doubt that the present government of Russia will not do that as it would undermine its imperial objectives which, of course, it has. However, it should be realized that the same government of Russia will not do that because of the security of Russia itself as well. But the most important thing is that nobody should expect that from Russia since the majority of Russians would not approve that. And it is not only because Russians have a strong imperial gene but also because in their opinion it would simply be unfair.

By all means, Lithuania can pay no attention to the interests of Russia and should go by its own interests. The first interest is a fight against manifestations of Russian expansion. So, Lithuania can strongly keep claim for Russia that finally it would admit the occupation. Then in such a case realism would demand to evaluate powers that could be a good ground for such a position.

It is a common knowledge that the civilization did not recognize Lithuania's annexation in 1940. This can certify a fact that most of the Western countries with which Lithuania had diplomatic relations in 1918 – 1940, renewed their relationships after Lithuania re-established its de facto independence in 1991 and not contracted them as with a new country. In general, it could be said that the Western countries accept Lithuania's version about the proceedings in 1940 and succession of the State of Lithuania.

On the other hand, it can not be denied that in the position of other countries there is a certain duality. On the one part, supporting Lithuania's position or showing apprehension about their concern about the threat from Russia, on the other part, those countries consider Russia as their strategic partner and officially declare that they are not going to encroach on interests of Russia's security. Such of these countries could be treated as simple courtesy and a desire not to fuel the difference in positions between Russia and Lithuania (as well as other Baltic States) hoping that during this time this difference will bridge. In such a behaviour or to be more precise – its symptoms - one can notice something similar to the policy that the USSR pursued during the interwar period in respect to the dispute between Lithuania and Poland when one party was being told one thing and another - another thing in order that their positions would not close...

In its claims in respect of Russia, Lithuania can refer to another factor which is the nation of Lithuania itself which suffered from occupation, transportations and other repressions. However, the position in this respect is also variegated. Even though the major of Lithuanians agree that Russia endangers Lithuania, the majority of those people consider Russians to be their closest and friendliest neighbours. Friendly appreciations about Lithuanians, to be precise

about "litovskij narod", come from Russia as well. And at the same time a recent survey in Russia shows that the worst of the most unfriendly countries are considered to be the Baltic States, including Lithuania.

All of this does make the questions arise: can it be that Lithuania in the sake of its security is decisively pushing Russia into the corner and at the same time thrusts itself into a new international isolation? Or is it possible that by leading a propaganda war against Russia, Lithuania helps to form a new version about Lithuania and Russia "the consolidation of peoples' masses"?

At any rate, the present political realia should make Lithuania seriously think about its political relations with Russia in general, and specifically about the role of history in those relationships. The political culture would require treating historical facts and their interpretations in a more correct way, without breaking any morality. Politicians who care about national interests should not ignore arguments of the other party. Of course, it is not easy and one recipe for all cases is hardly possible. Communities of the Western countries could be a certain criterion. There the role of history in relationships between countries is smaller than in the post-communist world. There it is also being avoided in making the history of relations between countries a hostage of domestic problems because in Europe it is being tried to avoid conflicts that are evaluated according to historical measures.