



Regional Factor in Transnational Relations: the Experience of Latvia and Lithuania in the 1920s

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In 1919, the close union of three new countries separating from Russia – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – seemed self-evident. The necessity and feasibility of such a union was justified both by the economic interests of the new countries and their common historical experience, but first of all, by the aspect of external security: in order to strengthen their independence, each of these countries needed safe borders and allies. The consciousness of this unity was best seen through the efforts of the three new countries pursuing for their international recognition. Also, it was important how the allied powers looked at the issue of their recognition and future as a single whole.

However, at the same time each of the new countries also had their own narrow pragmatic interests that brought serious cracks in their original unity. Latvia's relations with Estonia in 1920 were aggravated by disputes over border demarcation and Valka's affiliation, which was exacerbated by the Latvians' judgments on the policy of the "Estonian occupation regime" in Northern Vidzeme. In turn, in the relations between Latvia and Lithuania in 1920, the biggest stumbling block was the question of Latvia's position in the conflict between Lithuania and Poland. Latvia's decision was complicated due to several considerations, and one of the most important was the recent struggles for freedom: Latvia, whose army with the support of Polish army in January 1920 fought off the Red Army and released Latgale, could not suddenly turn its back to recent ally. Other interested countries did not hesitate to use this uncertainty in the position of Latvia, and one example of this was the German radio news about the Latvian-Polish secret agreement, which refers to the division of Lithuania (*IV* 1920 11 08). In this situation Lithuania was ready to see a hidden subtext in the position of Latvia, and at the moment when a message about transferring Polish-Soviet Russian peace talks to Riga was made at the beginning of September 1920, Lithuania took a radical decision and launched the mass expulsion of Latvian citizens from Lithuania. In response to this on September 7, 1920, Latvian Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Meierovics (1887–

1925) sent a Note to the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, warning about potential Latvian counter-steps (*IV* 1920 09 11). In the absence of a response, on September 10 the Latvian government issued an order which determined that all Lithuanian citizens in Riga and Liepaja must leave Latvia no later than at 12 o'clock at night on September 12 (*IV* 1920 09 10). The further escalation, though, was stopped: on September 10, from the Lithuanian government was received a reply that the expulsion of Latvian citizens is suspended, and on September 11, the Latvian government recalled the expulsion of Lithuanian citizens (*IV* 1920 09 13). The final point was made by the order of the Government of Lithuania on September 15, 1920, that the expelled Latvian citizens can return (*IV* 1920 09 17).

The September 1920 crisis was the lowest point in the relationship between Latvia and Lithuania. However, at the same time, the efforts for rapprochement began. Latvia took the first step by turning to the governments of Lithuania and Poland on September 9 with a proposal to delegate their representatives to Riga for a deal to close the ceasefire (*IV* 1920 09 11 a). At the end of October by another Note the Latvian government confirmed that the relocation of the Latvian army could not be seen as a hostile step towards Lithuania (*IV* 1920 10 25). Lithuania took a step towards rapprochement in November 1920, when the Polish attack threatened the existence of Lithuania, and Latvia's position got principled importance: on November 11, Lucjan Żeligowski (1865–1947) confidants arrived in Riga to try to secure Latvia's neutrality, and on November 13, two Lithuanian delegations – the military-political delegation and the delegation of the Lithuanian Seimas – came to Riga to search for Latvia's support against Żeligowski (*JZ* 1920 11 13).

Also, the conclusion of the military conflict between Lithuania and Poland allowed normalized relations between Latvia and Lithuania. On March 20, 1921, the Latvian-Lithuanian Border Arbitration Court closed its work after a four-month activity, deciding on a border line which took effect on March 31. On May 14, 1921, two Conventions were signed in Riga: Convention between Latvia and Lithuania on the delimitation of the boundaries between the both countries, the rights of border residents and the state of real estate, redistributed by the border line, and the Convention between Latvia and Lithuania on Citizens' Rights. However, the government's decision to recognize Lithuania *de iure* on February 16, 1921 – for the third anniversary of the proclamation of the Lithuanian state – became a special affirmation of friendship in Latvians' judgments, emphasizing that, apart from Soviet Russia, Latvia is the first state which gave full recognition to Lithuania (*IV* 1921 02 17; *JZ* 1921 02 15).¹

The end of the warfare and the agreements that were concluded had laid the foundation for further development of transnational relations, which in the case of Latvia-Lithuania relations, stood out with extremes: the both societies attempted

¹ In fact, Latvia was the third country to recognize Lithuania *de iure*; the first country that did it yet before the Soviet Russia was Germany.

rapprochement alternated with political aggravations. The purpose of this article is to give a general description of the development of relations between Latvia and Lithuania in the 1920s, focusing on three phenomena that very clearly express the different aspects and contradictions of these relations. There are two main research methods used in the study: content analysis and comparative method. It has to be emphasized that the given research is based on the Latvian press materials, therefore, it does not claim a full view from the point of view of both countries, but reflects only the opinion of Latvian political and public circles.

Sources and Literature

The main source used in the research is the periodical and non-periodical publications of Latvia in the 1920s. Among the first to be noted is the official gazette “Valdības Vēstnesis” (“Government Herald”) of the Government of Latvia and the largest Latvian language newspaper “Jaunākās Ziņas” (“Latest News”). An interesting example of a local view was the newspaper “Lietavas Latvis” (“Lithuania’s Lett”), issued in 1925–1926 by the Latvians Union in Lithuania. From it, by the way, we can find out that in the elections of the 3rd Lithuanian Seimas in May 1926, the list of the Latvians Union in Lithuania received in Šiauliai district 1379 votes and in Telšiai district 1094 votes (*LL* 1926).

In the list of non-periodical issues, first of all, there are two official publications: Statute of the Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society (*Biedrība* s 1921) and publication dedicated to the 10th Congress of Latvian and Lithuanian Rapprochement (*Lietuvių* 1934). In turn, the efforts of the political unity of Latvians and Lithuanians were more widely discussed in two brochures by Jānis Aleksandrs Liberts. In the brochure “Without Five Minutes Twelve!” which came out in 1923, he discussed the idea of a Latvian-Lithuanian Common-country (*Liberts* 1923), while in the second brochure “The Baltic Kingdom” that was published in 1929, he followed the development of this Common-country idea in the 1920s (*Liberts* 1929).

As a topic of scientific research, the issue of relations between Latvia and Lithuania in the 1920s was given a fairly wide attention. One of the first can be mentioned the article by Ādolfs Klīve about the Latvian aspirations for the creation of the Union of the Baltic States or “Entente Cordiale” published in 1935 in Z. Meierovics’ Memorial book (*Klīve* 1935). Characterizing Meierovics’ active work and the demonstration of Latvia’s sympathy for Lithuania, clearly expressed in his speech on 18 February 1921 (*IV* 1921 02 21), the author found that the cause of the failure of a closer political union, at least in part, was in Lithuania’s position. After 1945, a sharp difference in approach appeared in historical studies. In the historiography of Soviet-time Latvia, the relations of the three Baltic States were analysed through the prism of the interests of Western “imperialist” superpowers, especially France and England (*Počs* 1971). Meanwhile, a fundamental study on Latvia’s foreign policy in 1920–30 was issued by Latvian historian in exile Edgars Andersons, whose work also analyses Lithuanian politics and relations between

Latvia and Lithuania (A n d e r s o n s 1982). In his judgments on Lithuania's policy and position in relations with Latvia, Andersons was harsh, concluded that Estonia was the only ally of Latvia (A n d e r s o n s 1982, 142).

After the restoration of Latvia's and Lithuania's state independence in the early 1990s, a series of studies have been launched devoted both to the development of the Baltic region (J u n d z i s 1998; M a č i u l i s, J ē k a b s o n s 2018) and the interwar relations of both countries. Ēriks Jēkabsons has most often turned to this topic in Latvia, focusing on the relations between the two countries during the struggles for freedom and the life and activities of the Lithuanian community in Latvia in the 1920s–30s (J ē k a b s o n s 2003; 2007). However, on the background of Lithuanian research works (A k m e n y t ė 2008; M a č i u l i s 2011), Latvian researchers are lagging behind both in the assortment of research topics and in the qualitative content of research, as evidenced by the errors in the factual material that could be found in these works.² But the main drawback of the current research works is the lack of a comprehensive view of the relations between Latvia and Lithuania, when at times they are viewed as the closest friends, but at times – almost as enemies. The article aims to show the different facets of these relationships and underline some less known aspects about them.

Latvian and Lithuanian Unity Societies and Latvian and Lithuanian Rapprochement Congresses

Along with the normalization of interstate relations the efforts of the Latvian and Lithuanian society to get closer began, and in 1921 two new organizations were founded in Riga and Kaunas almost simultaneously: in Riga it was a Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society, which was founded by construction engineer Jānis Rīters (1867–1945) (K a r p s 1967; *VLV* 1946), while in Kaunas it was a Lithuanian-Latvian Unity Society, initiated by Professor Eduardas Volteris (1856–1941) and Emīlija Prūsa (1878–1950) (P a l e c k i s 1936).

The new organizations set as their goal the cultural and economic rapprochement of the two nations (R e i n h o l d s 1921). For this purpose, language courses were opened already in 1921: Lithuanian language course in Latvia and Latvian language course in Lithuania. In 1921, the Lithuanian newspaper “Rygos balsas” (“Riga's Voice”) was issued in Riga, which was edited by Aleksandras Juodvalkis (Juodavalkis) (1883–1961), Vice-President of the Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society. Also, in 1921 the tradition of organizing social events started, and on November 19, 1921, the Musical Dramatic Evening was held in the Uleya Hall (*L* 1921 11 15).

The new quality for Latvian and Lithuanian rapprochement efforts was given by a very special form of cooperation, and throughout the interwar period in Europe

² Jēkabsons, for example, talks about the Congress of the Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society held in August 1924 (J ē k a b s o n s 2003, 85), although in reality it was the Latvian-Lithuanian Rapprochement Congress, which took place at the end of July 1924.

it is difficult to find something similar. These were the annual Latvian-Lithuanian Rapprochement Congresses, started in 1924, where politicians, scientists and the general public from both countries focused on different aspects of the relations between the two countries and acquainted with the culture and social life of the counterpart.

The first Latvian-Lithuanian Rapprochement Congress was held on July 25–27, 1924 in Riga. There were 156 representatives from Lithuania: 145 representatives from Kaunas and eleven from Klaipėda at Congress. Among the latter were Jonas Budrys (1889–1964), the highest representative of the Lithuanian government in Klaipėda region, the first president of the directory Erdmons Simonaitis (1888–1969) and the “patriarch” of the Lithuania Minor Martin Jankus (1858–1946) (*JZ* 1924 07 25; *S o l a r s* 1924). The work of the Congress was introduced by a plenary session with a report by Professor Juris Plāķis (1869–1942) on the efforts of the Latvian and Lithuanian rapprochement in the 19th century, followed by a separate work both in the Intellectual Rapprochement Section and the Economic Unify Section. At the end of the congressional work, ten resolutions were adopted, among which one can note the resolution on Intellectual rapprochement, which, by the way, intended to combine the terminology of both nations, instructing a special mixed commission to develop a project. Two resolutions deserve separate attention: the first one pointed out that in the future in the Latvian language the word “lietuvīs” would be used instead of the word “leitis”,³ while the second – the resolution on Vilnius – stressed that “the old Lithuanian capital city Vilnius, which was abducted by coarse power, must be returned to its legitimate owners” (*IV* 1924 07 30).

The second Latvian-Lithuanian Rapprochement Congress was open in Lithuania’s interim capital Kaunas on June 21, 1925 (*Ž i b e l i s* 1925). Approximately 170 people attended the congress from Latvia, among them Professor Plāķis, Professor Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938), literary historian Teodors Zeiferts (1865–1929). Professor Eduardas Volteris, Chairman of Kaunas’s Board of the Lithuanian-Latvian Unity Society, opened the congress with the address. Among the rapporteurs of the congress, alongside others, was the former Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Juozas Purickis (1883–1934) and linguist Antanas Salys (1902–1972), who spoke on the topic “Dictionary of Lithuanian Language and Work on it”. Interestingly, there were new topics in congress reports: Marija Andziulyte-Ruginiene (1896–1973), a doctor of philosophy, reported on the Lithuanian women’s movement, Major Petras Ruseckas (1883–1945) reported on Lithuanian freedom struggles, while lawyer Gustavs Ķempelis (1874–1940) reported on abstinence movement in Latvia. Among the resolutions adopted by the Congress, political issues were the widest place, calling on the governments of both countries to establish an association to protect their independence and to conclude a security treaty between countries.

³ Leitis – an older Latvian language term with a negative meaning.

The third congress held on June 17, 1926 in Riga, started with the first disagreement. On the opening day of the congress, the Lithuanian journalist Social Democrat Justas Paleckis (1899– 1980), congratulating the congress, complained that the right-wing “Latvju Nacionālistu Klubs” (“Latvian Nationalist Club”) with its flag came to meet Lithuanian guests at Riga station too (*L* 1926 06 18), but on the second day of the congress there was a conflict over the vote on a resolution on the suppression of Lithuanian schools in Vilnius area, after which one of the Latvian delegates proposed to adopt the same resolution with regard to Tilsit (Tilžē) area (*JZ* 1926 06 19; *IeMV* 1926).

The next congresses of Latvian and Lithuanian rapprochement (4th Congress on 15–16 July 1927 in Klaipėda, 5th Congress on June 17–18, 1928 in Riga, 6th Congress on June 21–22, 1929 in Kaunas) continued the traditions, sometimes accompanied them by new forms of rapprochement, for example, in 1929, the trip of the Latvian Motorcycle Association to Kaunas was matched to the Congress (*PB* 1929 06 21).

Three aspects can be highlighted when assessing the practical contribution of these congresses. First of all, they undoubtedly contributed to greater trust between the two nations, which at times was particularly important in the face of sharp political controversy. Secondly, they gave another opportunity for Lithuanian society to raise the issue of Vilnius, while for the Latvian society they allowed to express their support for Lithuania’s position on this issue. Thirdly, the congresses of the rapprochement between Latvians and Lithuanians had laid the foundations for a broader approximation, and they were followed by the Latvian-Lithuanian-Estonian Rapprochement Congresses, the first of which came to Riga on June 29, 1935.

The Baltic Kingdom

The most ambitious plan of the Latvian and Lithuanian unity appeared in the form of a very specific idea of the Baltic Kingdom. The very idea of establishing a unified Latvia’s and Lithuania’s state was not new: voiced in the late 19th century (Bērzis 2003, 56), it got a form of political plan in 1917 when a Lithuanian public worker and later in 1919, Lithuania’s first envoy to Latvia Dr. Jonas Šliūpas (1861–1944) via the US envoy in Sweden handed over a Lithuanian-Latvian Memorandum to the President of the United States and in 1918 issued a book “Lietuvių-latvių respublika ir Šiaurės Tautų Sąjunga” (“Lithuanian-Latvian Republic and Union of North Nations”) in Stockholm (*LA* 1963).⁴

⁴ The idea of the Lithuanian-Latvian republic popularized by Šliūpas was also discussed at the Latvians political circles in Moscow (Čermais 1993, 51) and at the last meeting of the first session of the Latvian Provisional National Council (LPNP) on November 19, 1917, generally evaluating it negatively: Jānis Zālītis (1874–1919), presenting a letter addressed to him by Šliūpas, admitted that there was no clarity in this project, but Pēteris Zālīte (1864–1939) pointed to a Lithuanians’ resolution in Stockholm, where they expressed their readiness to belong to Germany, see: Kļīve 1935, pp. 45–46.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the idea of a united state of Latvia and Lithuania sounded again. The main initiator and promoter of this idea was Jānis Aleksandrs Liberts (1888-?). Former soldier, in his own words, in 1918 one of the first volunteers of the Latvian Army, officer of the Staff; he was accused of his actions in 1919, when he was an ally of the Baltische Landeswehr in the struggle against the state of Latvia while serving for the pro-German Government of Andrievs Niedra (1871–1942) (Liberts *PB* 1929). However, with such a burden of the past, Liberts, at the same time, was also the author of sketch of the highest military award in Latvia – the Military Order of Lāčplēsis – established in 1919.

The first public presentation of Liberts on the Latvian and Lithuanian union was a report, read on March 26, 1922 at the annual meeting of the Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society and published in a separate brochure in 1923. He wrote the motto of the report: Real and systematic creation of national and political neighbourhood of Latvians and Lithuanians – Contemporary Common Categorical Imperative. He promoted the idea of the Balts Common-country with common public administration, the abolition of political borders, a unified army and fleet, common foreign, financial and traffic ministries (Liberts 1923, 22–23).

In 1926, the plan of the Latvian-Lithuanian political union was discussed in the article of Jonas Šliūpas “On the issue of the Latvian-Lithuanian Republic” (Šliūpas 1926). Recalling that he had already put forward a project of Latvian-Lithuanian Republic in 1917, but at that time remained unheard, Šliūpas now put forward the idea of establishing a federal state of Latvia and Lithuania. He saw the justification for a state idea related to economic benefits: the cost of maintaining a double administrative apparatus would disappear, while in the economy Latvia and Lithuania could complement each other. According to his project, the head of the federal state would be the president of the country, elected in turn from Latvians and Lithuanians, and the common parliament would have a similar number of deputies from both nations; the country would have common embassies abroad, common currency, common army and customs, both languages would have the same right in the country.

The idea of a political unity acquired a new content at the end of 1927. As an impulse for it was a new study of the Balts’ household culture (*PB* 1927 10 05), followed by a message about a new idea of a political unity, but already on the basis of the other – monarchistic – principles, denoting it as the Baltic Kingdom (*PS* 1927 11 07). It was planned to unite Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus in the Kingdom, at the same time recognizing that there are still many obstacles to the association with Belarus. Support for this idea was also expressed by the meeting of the Belarusian Rada held in Paris, and Professor Mikola Viaršynin (Микола Вершинин) (1866–1934), the plenipotentiary of the Belarusian Rada, fully agreed with it. The new country would have 22 million inhabitants and would be called the Baltia. As the King it was being intended to invite one of the English princes.

The last principled turn in the plans of the Baltic Kingdom followed in 1929. According to newspaper reports, there was an agreement on the composition of the

Baltia's "throne council" (*PB* 1929 04 05). The greatest support among the throne candidates had Count Folke Bernadotte (1895–1948), the son of the brother of the Swedish King. In turn, the Latvian royalists decided to unite in the organization "The Union of the Changers of the Constitution", which in its program marked the state system of Italy as a model of the political system of the new state (*PB* 1929 04 07).

Evaluating the idea of the Baltic Kingdom, two aspects need to be clearly separated. The idea of the Baltic Common-country itself was attractive enough to return from time to time to public judgments. This once more was reaffirmed by the idea of the Pan-Baltic state that was made public in 1933; according to this intention, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia would unite in the new state on a republican basis (*T a u t s k a l n s* 1933). But if we talk about the political content of the idea of the Baltic Kingdom, then we have to admit that in the real situation of the 1920s it sounds utopian and even not seriously. Furthermore, it seems that it was an idea which was preached only by one or a few people. However, this idea reflected two really important issues: concerns about the economic and especially the political future of the new countries and the protest against the existing democratic regimes. As it was formulated by one of the supporters of the Baltic Kingdom in 1927: "If democracy goes further along previous path then, the number of people seeking the expression of the sovereignty of the nation in other kind will grow more and more" (*PS* 1927 11 25).

Congress of Lithuanian Political Emigrants in Riga

On November 3, 1927, the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP) press organ "Sociāldemokrāts" ("The Social Democrat") published news that "the Congress of Lithuanian Independence and Democratic System Fighters" will be held in Riga on November 5–6, with the participation of Lithuanian political emigrants and representatives of Lithuanian democratic political groups (*S* 1927 11 03). The Congress was organized with the support of the left-wing groups of Latvia, which was evidenced by congratulations from the LSDSP Central Committee, the Central Bureau of Latvia's Trade Unions, the newspaper "Sociāldemokrāts", but with the special ovations was welcomed the congratulation from Bruno Kalniņš (1899–1990), the leader of the Social Democratic Youth Organization "Strādnieku Sports un Sargs" ("Workers' Sports and Watchman") or SSS, who, on behalf of the organization, promised the widest support to their Lithuanian comrades in their struggle (*S* 1927 11 06).

The main initiator and central figure of the congress was Jeronimas Plečkaitis (1887–1963), ex-member of the Social Democratic faction of the Seimas of Lithuania, participant of the Baltic states Socialists Congress on June 19–20, 1926 in Riga, who after Tauragė Revolt (Tauragės sukilimas) on September 9, 1927, escaped from Lithuania. Already on the first day of the congress there was a conflict: the emigrant and poet Kazys Boruta (1905–1965) accused the organizers

of the congress that a large part of the emigrants about this congress was not aware, that it was convened by the way of secret diplomacy, and the Lithuanian socialist-revolutionary-maximalists were not responsible for the decisions of the Congress. However, the scandal followed on the second day of Congress, when Plečkaitis reported on future goals: when speaking about Lithuania's foreign policy, he declared that Lithuania should stop hating politics against its neighbours – Germany, the Soviet Union, without excluding Poland – and a question of Vilnius is not an obstacle for the start of negotiations. Immediately after this proposal, the Social Democrat Pranas Vikonis (1897–1959) spoke with a sharp protest, declaring that Poland influences the decisions of the congress and expressing suspicion about “Judas’ pieces” in the pockets of some members of Congress. After the following vote, the opposition, just as the day before socialists-revolutionaries, left the congress, leaving Plečkaitis and his supporters alone (*JZ* 1927 11 07).

The reports of the Lithuanian press on the congress were critical, also condemning the position of the Latvian government, allowing the organization of such a congress (*JZ* 1927 11 09; *LK* 1927 11 10). Latvian press reviews on Congress were different: right-wing “Latvis” (“Latvian”) originally marked it as “Lithuanian coup-makers Congress” (*L* 1927 11 08), conservative “Latvijas Sargs” (“Latvia’s Guardian”) talked about “Lithuanian adventurers” (*LS* 1927), but in a more complicated situation turned out to be a “Sociāldemokrāts” for whom congressional results led to a sharp change of position. Pointing on the chaotic process of the Congress and evaluating it as a failure, the Social Democrats tried to refute accusations devoted to them and demonstrate their principles at the same time. Therefore, on November 8, “Sociāldemokrāts” formulated the principles of the LSDSP in relations with the activities of Lithuanian emigrants, firstly pointing out that the struggle for the democratic constitution of Lithuania is the task for the Lithuanian people themselves, and LSDSP supports this fight only morally, but particularly interesting was the judgement, that the differences between internal regimes should not be disincensive to the development of the country’s external relations (*S* 1927 11 08).

Nevertheless, the demonstration of principles did not change the fact that some contacts between the Lithuanian emigrant community and the Latvian left circles continued to exist. This was evidenced by a message about two SSS members going to Vilnius in December 1927, where they were promised about 50 thousand Latvian roubles for their participation at “some event”; as soon as this message was made public, the SSS Board decided to exclude both members from the organization (*LK* 1927 12 10).

All these events led to a more determined position of the Latvian government, and in 1928 more active actions of Lithuanian emigrants in Latvia began. At the beginning of 1928, it was announced that Lithuanian emigrants – a teacher Kazimieras Kiela and the member of the Lithuanian Popular Peasants’ Union Vincas Mickus – were arrested in Riga (*S* 1928 02 09; *S* 1928 03 23; *K a m p i n i n k a s*

1928), and at the beginning of July, the press reported sending a fugitive emigrant back to Lithuania (*S* 1928 07 10; *S* 1928 07 11).

However, the sharpest escalation of Lithuanian emigrants' question was followed in 1929 when, at the end of May, the newspapers published news about arresting a 29-year-old Izidorius Misiū-Misiulis, the Lithuanian fugitive, who had killed a policeman during the retention in Lithuania and whose searching was announced by the chief of Kaunas criminal police (*IV* 1929 05 27; *SSS* 1929). Immediately afterwards a discussion followed between the Minister of the Interior and the "Sociāldemokrāts". Characterizing the common situation, the Minister of the Interior admitted that there are about one hundred Lithuanian political emigrants in Latvia, most of whom have found an employment, but some have been involved in Latvia's internal political processes or movement against existing order in Lithuania, and these emigrants will have to be sent out from Latvia (*LK* 1929 05 31). In response, the "Sociāldemokrāts" certainly stated that "asylum should be given to political emigrants" (*S* 1929 05 29). The outcome of the discussion was followed on June 3, when six Lithuanian political emigrants were expelled from Latvia by a decision of the Minister of the Interior (among them were the members of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party Arkadijus Zakovičius and Albinas Letkauskas) (*JZ* 1929 06 05). The left press of Latvia rated it as a shameful work and explained that the Latvian government wishes to please Lithuania (*S* 1929 06 05). "Jaunākās Ziņas", avoiding direct political evaluation, however, emphasized that "the asylum rights of political emigrants in Latvia cannot be questioned or restricted" (*D i š l e r s* 1929). "Rigasche Rundschau", a German language newspaper in Riga, was also involved in the controversy, claiming that the "Sociāldemokrāts" wants to turn Latvia into another Switzerland, where every political emigrant is guaranteed asylum, but for Latvia it is not acceptable by its international situation (*S* 1929 06 06).

Lithuanian political emigrants' congress in Latvia and subsequent events well illustrate the different interests and contradictions in Latvian-Lithuanian relations. Ambiguous, in this situation, was the position of the Social Democrats – the largest parliamentary group in the Latvian Saeima – that balanced between the slogans of political freedoms and interference in the internal affairs of a neighbouring country. In turn, characterizing the position of the Latvian government on the issue of Lithuanian political emigrants, it can definitely be stated that Latvia chose a stately responsible approach, sacrificing the ideals of human rights and democracy. Whether such a choice was justifiable is a complex and controversial issue, especially since there were also great uncertainties and contradictions in the very existence of the Lithuanian emigrant movement.

Conclusion

As border countries, Latvia and Lithuania were related by objective and self-evident links. However, there was a special feature of this relationship: alongside

the intergovernmental relations at the official government level, there was a wide set of public relations and societal efforts among the two countries. Very special was not only the name chosen for these societal aspirations – the Unity Societies and the Rapprochement Congresses – but also their content, which was not limited to traditional cultural and sporting relations, but also formulated certain political demands. This model of relations between Latvia and Lithuania in the interwar Europe was a unique phenomenon, and there is an explanation of different views on the relations between Latvia and Lithuania: if from the aspect of traditional transnational relations one can agree with Andersons that Estonia was the only ally of Latvia, then from the aspect of these public efforts Latvia undoubtedly had closer relations with Lithuania.

It is more difficult to answer another question that is interesting in the development of this relationship: what considerations and arguments led Latvia to its choice of rapprochement with Lithuania? The reason for asking this question is that it was Latvia that took the first steps and showed more activity in the direction of rapprochement. An explanation can be sought in a number of circumstances. At the beginning of the relationship, in 1919/1920, Latvia's choice to get closer with Lithuania could be at least partially explained as a friendship when others were worse: Estonians' smugness and their separate peace talks with Soviet Russia repelled Latvia. Later, in the first half of the 1920s, we can find a guardian or older brother syndrome in Latvia's position. However, there was also something irrational in this choice of Latvia, which cannot be explained by pragmatic considerations. This irrationalism was most prominent in the idea of the Baltic Kingdom, which was completely foreign to both Latvian history and Latvian perception, but found its supporters in Latvian society. Perhaps this irrationalism – the consciousness of common ethnic and historical roots – was the key to explain Latvia's approach to Lithuania in the 1920s.

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Uldis Krēslinis

Regioninis tarpvalstybinių santykių veiksnys: XX a. pradžios Latvijos ir Lietuvos patirtis

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *Latvijos ir Lietuvos vienybės bendrija, Latvijos ir Lietuvos santykių suartinimo suvažiavimai, Baltijos Karalystė, Lietuvos politiniai emigrantai.*

1918 m. Latvijos Respublika turėjo sausumos sieną su keturiomis valstybėmis. Nors įvairiais istorijos etapais Estija ir Lenkija buvo artimiausios Latvijos sąjungininkės, bet per ilgą laiką susiklostė glaudūs santykiai ir tarp Latvijos bei jos pietinės kaimynės Lietuvos. Šiame straipsnyje nepretenduojama į išsamų Latvijos ir Lietuvos santykių tyrimą, dėmesys sutelkiamas į tam tikrus svarbius aspektus ir kai kurias mažiau žinomas šių santykių detales, atspindinčias jų daugiabriauniškumą, universalumą ir tam tikrą nenuoseklumą.

Didžiausia kliūtis santykiams tarp dviejų Baltijos šalių plėtotis 1920 m. buvo sudėtinga Lietuvos tarptautinė padėtis – ypač jos atviras konfliktas su Lenkija. Nors Latvija, bandydama išsklaidyti Lietuvos įtarimus, 1921 m. vasario mėnesį viena iš pirmųjų pripažino Lietuvą *de iure*, tačiau Lietuvos politiniuose sluoksniuose vis dar buvo juntamas atsargus nepasitikėjimas Latvija. Politinius nesutarimus kompensavo abiejų šalių visuomeninių organizacijų ir draugijų siekiai suartėti. 1921 m. Rygoje ir Kaune įkurtos Latvijos ir Lietuvos bei Lietuvos ir Latvijos vienybės draugijos, siekdamos suartinti abi tautas, organizavo kalbos kursus ir ekskursijas į kaimynines šalis. Ypatinga siekių suartėti raiška, kuriai lygių visoje Europoje tarpukariu sunku rasti, buvo kasmetiniai Latvijos ir Lietuvos santykių suartėjimo suvažiavimai, organizuoti nuo 1924 metų. Jie prisidėjo ne tik prie kultūrinių ir mokslinių ryšių tarp dviejų tautų stiprinimo, bet ir leido išsaugoti abiejų šalių politinės sąjungos idėją. Vis dėlto šiuos siekius temdė politiniai prieštaračiai ir Lietuvos politinių emigrantų veikla Latvijoje. Po 1927 m. lapkričio mėnesį Rygoje vykusio Lietuvos politinių emigrantų kongreso, kuriame išryškėjo politiniai prieštaračiai tarp pačių emigrantų, Latvijos vyriausybė sustiprino priemones Lietuvos emigrantų politinei veiklai apriboti. Šią vyriausybės poziciją smerkė Latvijos socialdemokratai: jie tai vertino kaip Latvijos vyriausybės norą įsiteikti Lietuvai. Tačiau Latvijos vyriausybė pasirinko valstybingumo prioritetą ir paaukojo demokratijos ir žmogaus teisių idealus. Vertinant Latvijos ir Lietuvos santykius 1920 m., kaip pagrindinį šių santykių bruožą reikėtų išskirti tam tikrą dualizmą: jei visuomeninės organizacijos ir bendrijos siekė suartinti abi šalis, tai nepalankiai susiklosčiusios aplinkybės Lietuvos užsienio ir vidaus politikoje trukdė sukurti glaudžią politinę Baltijos šalių sąjungą. Šiame konkrečiame tarpvalstybinių santykių modelyje reikėtų ieškoti skirtingų požiūrių į santykius tarp Latvijos ir Lietuvos tarpukario laikotarpiu: jei tradicinių tarpvalstybinių santykių požiūriu vyriausybės lygmeniu galima sutikti su kai kurių Latvijos istorikų nuomone, kad Estija yra vienintelė Latvijos sąjungininkė, tai, vertinant visuomenės nuotaikas ir siekius, artimiausi Latvijos santykiai vis dėlto buvo siejami su Lietuva.

Uldis Krēsliņš

Regional Factor in Transnational Relations: the Experience of Latvia and Lithuania in the 1920s

S u m m a r y

Keywords: *Latvian-Lithuanian Unity Society, Latvian and Lithuanian Rapprochement Congresses, the Baltic Kingdom, Lithuanian political emigrants.*

By the end of Latvia's struggle for freedom, the Republic of Latvia, proclaimed in 1918, acquired land border with four countries: and if in separate stages Estonia or Poland became Latvia's closest ally, then in the long term Latvia's closest relation formed with its southern neighbour Lithuania. This article does not claim to be the comprehensive study of Latvian-Lithuanian relations in the 1920s; it focuses on certain important aspects and some less known details of these relations, which reflect their universality, versatility and some inconsistency. The main obstacle in relations between two countries in 1920s was difficult Lithuanian foreign policy situation – especially its open conflict with Poland. In these conditions, Latvia made attempts to dispel Lithuania's suspicion of its intentions, and as an expression of its special friendship on February 1921, it was one of the first to give *de iure* recognition to Lithuania, but the Lithuanian political circles remained cautious about the intentions of Latvia. Political complications in the relations between the two countries were balanced by social aspirations of public organizations and associations to converge and society efforts starting in 1921 with the search for rapprochement. As early as 1921, Latvian-Lithuanian and Lithuanian-Latvian unity societies were established in Riga and Kaunas, which organized language courses and excursions to the neighbouring countries in order to bring both nations closer. The annual Latvian and Lithuanian Rapprochement Congresses held since 1924 were of particular importance: it became with special manifestation of social aspirations of both states, which would be difficult to find in all Europe during the interwar period; they contributed not only to cultural ties between the two nations, but also allowed the idea of a political union of the two countries to be supported in the form of the Baltic Kingdom. However, these aspirations and attempts for rapprochement failed to influence Lithuania's internal policy, and at the end of 1920s the activities of Lithuanian political emigrants in Latvia became a new stumbling block in the relations between the two countries, putting the Latvian government in front of a complicated political choice. After the Congress of Lithuanian's Political Emigrants, held in Riga on November 1927, which revealed the political contradictions of the emigrants themselves, the Latvian government stepped up measures to limit the political activities of Lithuanian emigrants. This government's position was criticized by the Latvian Social Democrats and provoked sharp condemnation of assessing it as the desire to convince the Latvian government to please Lithuania, but the government chose the priority of the Statehood, sacrificing the ideals of democracy and human rights in this name. This dualism is the main feature that characterized relations between Latvia and Lithuania in the 1920s: if social aspirations, organizations and communities, public efforts tried to bring the two countries closer together, the complication in Lithuania's foreign and internal (domestic) policies hindered the creation of closer political union of Baltic States. In this particular

model of interstate relations, one should also look for an explanation of the different views on the relations between Latvia and Lithuania in the interwar period: if from the point of view of traditional interstate relations at the government level, one can agree with the opinion of some Latvian historians that Estonia was the only ally of Latvia, then in terms of public aspirations, Latvia's closest relations were nevertheless associated with Lithuania.

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