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## TOWARD THE BALTIC UNION 1920-27

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[See also "[Toward the Baltic Union: The Initial Phase](#)" *Lituanus*, vol 14:1, 1968 and "[Toward the Baltic Union 1927-1934](#)" *Lituanus*, vol. 13:1, 1967]

Geographic factors and historical developments have created strong preconditions for the closest possible cooperation between the three Baltic nations — the Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, but only during the last fifty years have these nations had an opportunity to create the basis for such cooperation of their own free will. Their powerful neighbors, of course, have not been interested in supporting a strong union of the Baltic nations so long as this has not suited their special interests. Their principle has been the old **divide et impera**. Baltic nations, united in friendship, could have spoiled secret expansionist plans of their neighbors. Distant European powers have been interested in the Baltic bloc only as a pawn in their own games. Fierce Baltic nationalism and pride after achievement of independence has also been a formidable obstacle in seeking mutual cooperation of the Baltic States. Having suffered terribly during World War I, the Baltic nations were too involved in their own nation to pay much attention to the problems of their neighbors. Having separated themselves from the clutches of Russia and Germany, they did not want to sacrifice any portion of their sovereignty and interests for the sake of their neighbors and for common Baltic interests. They were still largely strangers to one another, had little knowledge of each other's history and culture, and had no close cultural contacts. It took time to get acquainted with one another and to appreciate and understand each other's problems and interests. After the initial unsuccessful attempts to form a Baltic alliance within a larger framework of a Scandinavian - Baltic - Central Eastern European system or systems, there followed a long period of trial and error until finally the more organic Baltic Entente was created. The Vilnius issue loomed formidably over all the discussions and attempts to arrive at some sort of a Baltic Union.

As far as available historical records show, the Lithuanians, a nation with a long and proud history of independent life and an important role in European history behind them, were the first among the Baltic nations to advocate their union. As early as 1885, the venerable Lithuanian publicist Dr. Jonas Šliūpas advocated a federative Lithuanian - Latvian state and published this bold proposal in the United States. His idea was echoed in the demand of the participants of the American-Lithuanian congress held at Chicago on September 21 - 24, 1914, shortly after the beginning of World War I. During the war some Estonian and Latvian statesmen and journalists broadened the concept to include the entire Scandinavian - Baltic area in a federative or confederative system. Such a union, of course, could not be materialized.

During the wars of independence the Baltic States missed two good opportunities to conclude a mutual political, commercial and military alliance. The first one occurred after January 6, 1920, when at Valka the Baltic military leaders agreed to a very close collaboration. The second opportunity arose before or during the first Baltic conference from August 6 to September 6, 1920, held at Bulduri and Riga. At the time of this conference even the Vilnius question was not an issue. Unfortunately, the statesmen of the young states wanted to start the building from the roof, not from the foundations.<sup>1</sup>

At the early stage of their independence the individualism of the states which emerged after World War I was so great that they could not and would not form a federation, although their economic problems, and the future defense needs clearly pointed to just such a necessity. They preferred isolated existence, jealously guarding their complete freedom of action, quarrelling with their neighbors and refusing to sacrifice any portion of their sovereignty for the sake of common interests. Their social and economic cooperation was hampered by economic barriers, endless sets of regulations and the need for

special permits, passports and visas. The unsettled economic and political conditions in post-war Europe, of course, militated against greater laxness in international relations.<sup>2</sup>

Lithuania considered herself abused by the Entente's considerably pro-Polish attitude in the Lithuanian-Polish border dispute, and she even estranged herself from her northern Baltic neighbors, who were still strongly pro-Allied. The Lithuanian government demanded that the other Baltic States assist Lithuania diplomatically, and possibly militarily, in her quarrels with Poland. Latvia and Estonia had already dealt with two strong enemies, Russia and Germany, and they could not afford a third one, Poland, whose very existence ensured their own. Poland had also helped Latvia to liberate Latgale. A group of influential Lithuanians, among them Dr. Jonas Šliūpas, Count Oscar de Lubicz Miłosz (Milašius), Dr. Juozas Gabrys, Ernestas Galvanauskas, Dr. Juozas Purickis, continued to argue for the idea of a Baltic Entente, however. The British also had not yet given up the idea of the Baltic union. Their interest in the Baltic States and their support depended on the ability of these states to get along with one another. The British organized a British Baltic Association, whose first meeting took place on January 14, 1921.<sup>3</sup>

The Scandinavian - Baltic bloc, visualized by some British, Finnish, Estonian and Latvian statesmen, could not be materialized for a while. The Scandinavians felt safe and undisturbed in their peninsular isolation and had made a fortune by staying neutral and dealing with all the big powers — Germany, Russia and Great Britain. They had no wish to become involved in the difficulties that seemed to lurk in every corner of the Baltic area. On the other hand, Poland and Lithuania were anathema to one another. Since the schemes to unite all the Baltic States and Poland could not be carried out, the healthy thought of a union of at least the three "authentic" Baltic States arose. In order to encourage the formation of a Baltic Union, a Latvian — Lithuanian Society was founded in Riga on February 1, 1921. The goal of this society was echoed in a speech of the influential Lithuanian statesman Mykolas Sleževičius on February 4. He pointed out the sad fact that Lithuania had isolated herself from other countries and needed closer ties with Finland, Estonia and Latvia, none of which had any aggressive plans.<sup>4</sup>

The statesmen of the Baltic nations realized that without the independence of one of their states there would be no independence for other Baltic States. They were highly unwelcome by Russia, Germany and many other states, which either considered German and Russian imperialistic tendencies as more reasonable than the struggle for independence of the Baltic nations, or simply did not want to become involved in the difficulties which would arise in the League of Nations, if the Baltic States were invaded by one of their larger neighbors.

The Baltic States were soon rudely reminded of their position and their common destiny. On January 21, 1921, the German Foreign Minister Dr. W. Simon described them officially as an undesirable barrier between Germany and Russia. This charge was easily picked up by the world press without considering the possibility that independent Baltic States between the two great powers could provide a greater guarantee of peace than an expansionist Russia and Germany confronting one another at common borders. On February 8, Latvian Foreign Minister Zigfrids A. Meierovics declared that the Baltic States wanted to be an economic bridge, not a barrier between Germany and Russia, with their ports open to all countries. He also pointed out that Latvia strongly opposed the incorporation of Lithuania into Poland. The Latvian statesman further emphasized the need for an alliance between the Baltic States and Finland.<sup>5</sup>

When the Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish statement met in Tallinn on February 24, and the Polish representative Prof. Witold Kamieniecki suggested another conference to create a five power bloc, Meierovics, still remembering the ill - fated conference at Bulduri, listed the following three conditions for the success of the Tallinn meeting. First, he said, all participating states should be in a state of peace, second, conventions adopted by the previous Baltic conference should be ratified or rejected, and third, all disputes between the participating states should be amicably settled before convening still another conference. The Polish - Russian war, the Polish - Lithuanian dispute, the Latvian - Estonian frontier controversy and the Estonian - Finnish commercial disagreement militated against harmonious action and amicable deliberations. One could perceive, however, an increasing sentiment among the participating states for closer and stronger mutual relations and for a more effective cooperation in the matters of common interest. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania demonstrated effective cooperation in the First Conference of the League of Nations on Communications and Transit at Barcelona in March and April, 1921. The border disputes between the Baltic States were settled amicably, not without some sacrifices from each country to its neighbors. The borders they drew were there to stay and caused no friction afterwards.<sup>6</sup>

The Lithuanian Foreign Minister Dr. Juozas Purickis tried to solve Lithuania's problems with Poland and arrived in Tallinn with a fresh proposal for an alliance between the three Baltic States, which would ensure common defense and common economic and diplomatic guidelines. The Baltic States signed arbitration treaties. In the Lithuanian - Latvian conference at Riga on May 2-7, 1921, the Latvian Foreign Minister Zigfrids A. Meierovics promised to support a Baltic alliance but not before the settlement of the Polish - Lithuanian dispute. The Estonians were unwilling to spoil their relations with Poland, however, and tried to avoid an alliance with Lithuania. The meetings produced a number of conventions between the three states, and the mutual exchange of visits by Baltic journalists greatly increased friendship between the Baltic nations and their understanding of each other's problems. Close cooperation between the American Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians bore some fruit in the United States. On May 31, President Warren Harding promised their delegates that the United States would recognize the Baltic States de jure. The cooperation of the Baltic nationals in the United States also

helped to influence the American press which devoted much space to the Baltic problems and familiarized the American reader with the Baltic countries.<sup>7</sup>

Many Estonians still preferred a union with their blood relatives, the Finns. In May 1921, the Estonian Foreign Minister, Professor Ants Piip, suggested that in the event of Bolshevik aggression against Finland or Estonia, an understanding between these states in matters of commerce and defence could be easily worked out. The Estonians also welcomed the suggestion of the Soviet Russians to channel most of the Soviet transit through the Estonian ports instead of those of Latvia. Thus they played into the Russian hands. The Russians caused some harm to Latvia by routing most of their transit through Estonia which benefited from the re-channeling and, to a certain extent, became dependent on the Russian good will. When later the Estonians were not obedient enough, the Soviet government re-channeled its transit to Latvia causing harm to Estonia. A common stand by Estonia and Latvia could have eliminated such difficulties.<sup>8</sup>

Estonia and Latvia were drawn together by special geographic and political factors. They were weaker in territory, population and resources than their neighbors and they also directly barred Russia from outlets to the Baltic Sea. They preferred an alliance with the Scandinavian countries but the Scandinavians did not want to burn their fingers with Soviet fire. The impasse, reached in Polish - Lithuanian relations, also brought Estonia and Latvia closer together. On July 2-3, 1921, Piip and Meierovics agreed on an Esto - Latvian military alliance, but Piip was against inclusion of Lithuania in such an agreement. Such an act could be interpreted as turning all the Baltic States against Poland in her dispute with Lithuania. Piip had no objections, however, to a separate Lithuanian - Latvian alliance. This could create *eo ipso* an alliance between the Baltic States without creating too much fuss. On July 7 Estonia and Latvia signed a military and political agreement in Tallinn. On July 12-13, the foreign ministers of all three Baltic States discussed the possibility of a military alliance between Latvia and Lithuania for the protection against Soviet Russia, but due to Purickis' insistence on a "solid front" of the Baltic States against a "common enemy — Poland" nothing came of these conversations. However, Purickis, Meierovics and Piip signed several bilateral conventions (consular, extradition, postal, telegraph and telephone).<sup>9</sup>

Influential groups in Finland wanted to steer their country away from the Baltic States into the orbit of the Scandinavian states, but the Finnish Foreign Minister Dr. Rudolf Holsti realized that Finland remained the border country of Russia and as such had to be allied with other European countries in a similar situation or at least cooperate with them in the interests of her survival. He did not believe in effective Scandinavian support. Thanks to his initiative, the representatives of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland met again in Helsinki on July 25 - 28, 1921. Lithuania did not participate. On July 29, a protocol was signed which obliged the participating states to arrange for periodical conferences of their foreign ministers. The admittance of Lithuania to the League of Nations along with Estonia and Latvia made it paramount, however, to include her in further deliberations. The Estonians and Latvians made it clear that they would welcome an alliance with Poland but only in the case that Lithuania were also a partner in it. On the other hand, Lithuania wanted no participation in an alliance with Poland as long as Vilnius was still under Polish control. Both Russia and Germany attempted to frustrate all plans involving one or another form of a Baltic alliance.<sup>10</sup>

On March 13 - 17, 1922, another Baltic conference was held in Warsaw, again without Lithuania. The foreign ministers of Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland — Constantine Skirmunt, Meierovics, Piip and Holsti — attempted to avoid any agreements, which would be to the direct or indirect disadvantage of any of their respective states, but agreed to inform each other about treaties made with other states, and furthermore, to protect each other's minorities and to resolve conflicts by peaceful means. The military representatives of the participating states also met, but Latvia was unwilling to sign any military alliance with Poland, even a defensive one, so long as the Polish - Russian frontier was not remapped according to the principles of self-determination of nations and a solution to the Vilnius question was not found. Although Latvia and Estonia ratified the Warsaw agreement, Finland rejected it. Poland began to realize that within the planned framework a Baltic union might never materialize.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile on March 22, 1922, the private Latvian-Lithuanian Society in Riga proposed the liquidation of political boundaries between Lithuania and Latvia, the equalization of rights and privileges of both nationalities in both countries, the establishment of a common representative body, a common army and navy, a customs union and several common ministries — foreign affairs, finance, agriculture, trade and commerce, and defense.<sup>12</sup> On March 29 - 30, the Soviet Russian, Polish, Latvian and Estonian representatives (Grigorii Chicherin, Witold Jadko - Narkiewicz, Meierovics and Piip) confirmed in Riga their desire for universal peace, agreed on demilitarization of frontier zones, supported the principle of limitation of armaments in the world, and, since they did not feel responsible for the debts of Czarist Government, agreed on common action in the European Economic Conference at Genoa. When the Russians refused to honor Czarist debts and demanded compensation for damages incurred during Allied intervention, and when the Soviet and German Governments signed the Treaty of Rapallo, the French and British renewed their interest in the Baltic States, and their navies began appearing in Baltic harbors.<sup>13</sup>

On June 12, Litvinov invited the Polish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Governments to a conference in Moscow to discuss questions of mutual disarmament and non - aggression. After several preliminary conferences of the Baltic and Polish representatives, the Conference on Disarmament took place on December 2 - 12, 1922. The meeting was held, however, in an atmosphere of mutual distrust and no agreement on disarmament could be reached.<sup>14</sup>

The Latvians extended considerable diplomatic support to the Lithuanians during the Klaipėda (Memel) crisis of 1922 - 23. In the hope that after the solution of the Klaipėda problem the Polish-Lithuanian relations would normalize, even the Estonian Minister in Riga, Julius Seljamaa, envisioned on February 24, 1923, a possible inclusion of Lithuania in the alliance between Estonia and Latvia. The Baltic States again signed a number of conventions. When on March 14, 1923, the Allies recognized the eastern boundaries of Poland and, by indirection, the Polish occupation of Vilnius, the Poles were encouraged to ask the Ambassadors' Conference for six Latvian communes in the District of Ilukste. The Allies dismissed this request, but this Polish threat actually brought the three Baltic States even closer together.<sup>15</sup>

In May of 1923, the Estonian Foreign Minister Alexander Hellat made a trip to Latvia and Lithuania to establish better trade relations and to test attitudes toward the proposed Baltic union. The Lithuanian Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas was convinced that the difficulties between Lithuania and Poland were not so great as to preclude closer relations between the Baltic States. He rejected, however, the Estonian idea to invite Poland into the proposed league. On June 26, Meierovics declared that he would concentrate his main efforts on the rapprochement between the Baltic States, especially on preventing competition in the economic field. The Latvian Government decided to speed up the conclusion of a military alliance with Estonia, extending it, if possible, to Finland. At the same time, it sought close economic, political and cultural cooperation with Lithuania, on condition that such cooperation would not damage good relations between Latvia and Poland.<sup>16</sup>

In July, 1923, a new proposal was launched in the Baltic States regarding the neutralization of the entire Baltic Sea, in which Finland, the Soviet Union, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden would participate. The Scandinavian and Baltic States reportedly favored the idea, but the Soviet Union refused to attend the planned negotiations. A conference of this nature was actually held at Riga on July 9-11. The Foreign Ministers of Finland, Estonia, and Latvia — Vennola, Hellat and Meierovics, and the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Marian Seyda — agreed to support proposals laid down at Washington and Geneva for a reduction of armaments in combination with a general treaty of mutual guarantees. The reduction of naval as well as land armament was a question of great importance to the Baltic States. On August 18 - 20, the Polish, Estonian, Latvian and Finnish military representatives met at Riga, mostly to coordinate the cooperation of their navies. They decided to enlarge their naval ports in order to serve larger navies. Although there was no military alliance between these countries, their general staffs continued to cooperate and exchange information. On August 25, the former Chief of the British Military Mission in the Baltic, Sir Alfred Burt, also appeared in the Baltic States and had secret conversations with the military leaders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.<sup>17</sup>

On July 25, the Latvian Minister to Lithuania, Ludvigs Seja, announced that Latvia abandoned the idea of establishing a Baltic union composed of all the states on the Baltic coast. The reasons for the abandonment of the idea were two: lack of interest by some nations and the distrust of the resulting neutralization of the Baltic Sea. Instead of the larger plan, Latvia was now seriously endeavouring to form a Baltic Union composed of the three Baltic States. This project was to be started with trade treaties. Seja did a great deal to bring the Lithuanians and Latvians closer together.<sup>18</sup>

When the Estonians invited Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Soviet Union to attend the Baltic Financial Conference to be held at Tallinn, the Russians refused to attend it, but acceptance of the invitation by the Poles forced the northern Baltic States to be careful in regard to Lithuania. Galvanauskas made a sudden visit to Riga and Tallinn on October 8 - 10, and suggested the establishment of a Baltic Triple Entente and a convocation of a meeting of Baltic Foreign Ministers not later than December 10, at Kaunas. So long as the Klaipėda question remained unsolved, the other Baltic States were somewhat chary of entering into a union with Lithuania. It is interesting to note that to them the Vilnius question seemed to be already a dead issue. The Finns had hoped for a close cooperation with Sweden and were shocked when the Swedish Foreign Minister M. Hedenstierna, who had suggested in October a defensive alliance between Sweden and Finland, was forced to resign on the next day. This forced the Finns to look again for closer contacts with their Baltic brethren.<sup>19</sup>

From October 25, to November 1, 1923, a historic Estonian - Latvian conference took place at Tallinn. It ended with six agreements, covering the final establishment of the border between the two countries, the settlement of mutual claims arising from military operations against common enemies, a provisional agreement regarding economic matters and the customs tariff, an agreement for the unification of port dues and harbor rights, and, lastly, a treaty of defensive alliance, which was ratified on February 21, 1924. The alliance was shaped by the Latvian and Estonian Foreign Ministers, Zigfrids Anna Meierovics and Dr. Friedrich Akel.

The treaty included eight articles:

- 1) The High Contracting Parties undertake to follow a wholly pacific policy, directed towards maintaining and strengthening the bonds of friendship and developing their economic relations with all nations, more respectfully with the Baltic States and neighboring countries.
- 2) The two Governments undertake to coordinate their efforts for peace by consulting each other on such questions of foreign policy as are important to both, and by affording each other political and diplomatic assistance in their international relations.
- 3) The High Contracting Parties undertake to afford each other assistance should either of them suffer an unprovoked attack on its present frontiers. Accordingly, should one of the High Contracting Parties suffer an

unprovoked attack, the other shall consider itself in a state of war and shall furnish armed assistance.

4) The competent technical authorities of the Estonian Republic and of the Latvian Republic shall determine by common agreement the manner in which the two countries will assist each other, and shall establish the necessary provisions for the execution of Article 3 of the present Treaty.

5) Should the High Contracting Parties, notwithstanding their efforts for peace, find themselves in a state of defensive war, as defined in Article 3, they undertake that neither will separately negotiate or conclude an armistice or peace.

6) All disputed questions which may arise between the High Contracting Parties, and which can not be settled by diplomatic means, shall be laid before the Court of International Justice or submitted to international arbitration.

7) Neither of the High Contracting Parties shall conclude an alliance with a third power without the consent of the other Party. Each undertakes to communicate to the other forthwith the text of any treaties which it may have concluded with any other State or States.

8) The present Treaty shall remain in force for ten years from the date of the exchange of ratifications, thereafter either of the two Contracting Parties may denounce it on giving one year's notice to the other Party.

A special convention elaborating this alliance provided for the periodic calling of conferences between the two foreign ministers to coordinate the general policy of the two states, and to deal with all the questions relating to their joint foreign policy. It also attempted to coordinate the activity of their several diplomatic and consular representatives abroad, and provided for joint efforts to coordinate the legislation of the two countries and for the establishment of joint commissions for the study of economic questions. The combined Estonian and Latvian peace time armies consisted of 40,000 men with 250 guns, 18 tanks, 91 airplanes with 747 airmen, and 15 warships with 1280 men. In the wartime they could muster up to 300,000 men.

The friendship treaty was signed on December 14, 1923, for ten years and renewed in 1933, but the economic treaties were never fully implemented. The two states desired the support of Western Europe, especially of Great Britain. The British Government was disinclined, however, to accept any definite commitments or to make any engagements outside the obligations involved in the membership of the League of Nations. The relations with France were to a large extent governed by those with Poland. Military alliance with Poland would probably assure French support in case of war. In case of serious danger of aggression from Russia, the Baltic States would depend largely on Polish support, but on the other hand, Latvia and Estonia were suspicious of Polish policy, although not to the same extent as Finland and Lithuania, and were disinclined to commit themselves to anything that might involve them in a war caused by Polish aggression. There was also a strong feeling of sympathy for Lithuania in her struggle. Like Finland, Estonia and Latvia preferred to pursue a moderate foreign policy, while at the same time, by commercial treaties with other countries, establishing themselves in the general European system. From the first they supported international peace organized by the League of Nations. They also did their utmost to foster transit trade between the Baltic ports and the Soviet Union. The alliance of Estonia and Latvia was anything but a threat to anybody.<sup>20</sup>

Spurred by the Estonian and Latvian achievement, for two weeks starting on November 11, 1923, the Lithuanian Cabinet discussed the possibility of creating a Baltic union. The Lithuanians proposed an extremely close alliance with common monetary system, transportation, communications, military organization, reciprocal customs privileges, and the abolition of visas. They suggested a conference of the Baltic Prime Ministers at Kaunas in January, 1924. The Latvians preferred a Baltic union to an alliance with much more influential Poland. However, Polish diplomatic pressure, the fall of Meierovic's Cabinet in Latvia, the Scandinavian orientation of Finland and the unwillingness of Estonia to enter a Baltic union without Poland made the convention of the Baltic Prime Ministers impossible. Poland suggested a military alliance between Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>21</sup>

The British were interested in a Baltic alliance without the French ally Poland and acted accordingly at the end of January, 1924. Their efforts were spoiled by the unfounded Lithuanian fear that Latvia may have concluded a secret alliance with Poland. Latvia, on the other hand, was unwilling to effect a union "with any of the states so long as peaceful relations had not been established with all of its neighbors." Lithuania was formally at war with Poland. The Latvians were also interested in Lithuania's opening of the Liepaja - Romni railroad. The line ran through the Vilnius territory and was closed by the Lithuanians on the demarcation line. Smetona considered such a suggestion as an extremely unfriendly act, overlooking the fact that Liepaja, second largest Latvian harbor, was almost strangled to death.<sup>22</sup> Fearing the Latvian - Lithuanian rapprochement, Poland convoked another Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Polish conference on February 16 - 18, 1924. The principal items on the agenda were the removal of economic barriers between these countries, joint action at the next session of the League of Nations, and the conclusion of an arbitration treaty between the four states. There was a considerable disagreement between the participants and little was achieved. The delegates decided, however, to create a close and permanent contact between the Polish and Baltic intelligence agencies to exchange information about the increasing activities of Communist agents. On March 11, a conference of Latvian, Estonian and Polish general staff officers took place in Riga.<sup>23</sup>

The Latvian Minister to Poland warned his government, however, not to enter into too close relations with Poland, and the Latvian Chief of Staff suggested closer cooperation between Latvia and Lithuania. On May 19, 1924, the conference of the three Baltic States took place in Kaunas. Latvia was still unwilling to enter into a political alliance with Lithuania as long as the feud between Lithuania and Poland remained uncomposed. She was eager, however, to strengthen the economic links

between the two countries. The delegates agreed to appoint a special commission of experts to work out a practical scheme for tariff and customs unification, and suggested a concerted foreign policy in the League of Nations. Galvanauskas pointed out that the Baltic States had three alternate choices. They could either enter the orbit of one or several great powers (a combination which might be useful in certain areas, but was always accompanied by dangers) or they could resort to triple isolation as sterile as it would be splendid (which would run the risk of resulting sooner or later in the seizure of the little fellows by big ones) or they could unite and coordinate their efforts in order to maintain their independence and security. On their own initiative the Lithuanians removed the question of borders with Poland from the agenda. Even though the conference did not succeed in producing direct results, it had not been in vain. The mere fact that the representatives of the three states were able to meet and to talk over matters of common interest was a step in the right direction. The Latvians and Lithuanians signed conventions on frontier traffic and inland navigation. The conference was followed by the first Latvian - Lithuanian Congress at Riga on July 24 - 26.<sup>24</sup>

However, the new Estonian Foreign Minister Kaarel Robert Pusta steered closer to Poland and France. On September 15-17, 1924, another four power conference was held in Warsaw, from which the Lithuanians were excluded. An arbitration treaty was negotiated and signed on January 25, 1925.<sup>25</sup>

While for a time the lessened Soviet aggressiveness against the Baltic States made the Polish participation in the Baltic Union seem to appear no longer essential, the Communist uprising in Tallinn on December 1, 1924, indicated, that the Communist danger was not yet over and that the military alliance between Estonia and Latvia had not been effective. The interest in a larger union, including Poland, was activated again. During the Christmas season the President of the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) Fridrichs Vesmanis visited the President of Poland Stanislaw Wojciechowski and the Foreign Minister Count Alexander Jozef Skrzynski. The Poles asked the Latvians to mediate their dispute with the Lithuanians and promised to dismantle plans for the incorporation of six Latvian border communes of the District of Ilukste into Poland. They also dropped the demand for compensation of some disowned Polish landed aristocrats in Latvia, which had spoiled the relations between the two countries for some time. Vesmanis, however, did not like Wojciechowski's remarks that Poland resented to see Soviet transit running through Latvian territory. He already knew that Poland had requested the Soviet Union to direct all of its transit solely through Polish territory. On January 2, 1925, Skrzynski openly spoke in favor of a Polish - Baltic military alliance. He was supported by the French and Polish military representatives in Latvia and Estonia. On January 4-7, Vesmanis was embarrassed by the flat rejection by the Lithuanians of the Polish proposal to partition the Vilnius territory between Poland and Lithuania. On January 3-4, the Estonians and Latvians discussed the possibility of a Polish - Baltic military alliance. Since Finland was unwilling to enter into such an alliance, Pusta suggested only an Estonian - Latvian - Polish military alliance. While the Latvian military circles favored the suggestion, the Latvian Government was opposed to this idea, influenced, as it was, by the fact that the Soviet Union, Germany, Sweden and Lithuania would take a dim view of such a course of action. The British, too, were opposed to the dominant role of France and Poland in Eastern Europe, and still favored a Scandinavian - Baltic bloc, including Lithuania and excluding Poland. Thus the major Western European powers presented a divided front against the Soviet Union, which, in contrast, had now begun to play the role of a peaceful neighbor.<sup>26</sup>

It developed at the Helsinki Conference on January 16 - 19, 1925, that a large Baltic alliance could not be established and that none of the Baltic statesmen expected such an alliance to be consummated until the Vilnius conflict could be finally settled. The revolutionary events in Tallinn had demonstrated the dangers to which the Baltic States were exposed but security was not now sought in a regional league, but in the realization of the principles of the Geneva Protocol, which was not yet adopted. The representatives of the four powers, Hjalmar J. Procope, Kaarel R. Pusta, Meierovics and Skrzynski, signed a treaty of conciliation and arbitration, and agreed on the usefulness of acting together in all questions relating to security that might arise in international conferences. However, Poland could not grant the Baltic States those economic advantages which the Soviet Union could, and Finland, with her Scandinavian orientation, was a hopeless prospect for the Baltic Entente. The Soviet Union also created ill-will between Estonia and Latvia by stopping all its transit trade through Estonia and directing it through Latvia. Nevertheless, the Baltic States signed agreements relative to communications facilities, passport formalities, and cultural cooperation. The system of periodic conferences with the participation of Finland and Poland collapsed because no definite arrangements were made at Helsinki for another conference.<sup>27</sup>

The Finns tried to ease the disappointment caused by their refusal to enter a Baltic Alliance by telling the Latvian Minister Karlis Zarins that in case of an attack on the Baltic States nothing could stop the Finnish youth from coming to their rescue. At this Zarins requested to see it in black and white and caustically remarked that he could not yet promise similar enthusiasm of the Latvian youth toward the Finns if they were to become the victims of aggression. He brushed off the Finnish argument that their country was not endangered in any way by pointing out that nobody could foresee where their Eastern neighbor would strike next.<sup>28</sup>

Poland now turned her attention toward Central European problems and the Western Powers were beginning to consider the Soviet Union as a trading partner. The policy of the Baltic States during 1925, was thus condemned to become uncertain and vacillating, seeking to win the friendship of one antagonist without incurring the hostility of the other. The Latvians and Estonians attempted to strengthen their friendship by the visits of the President of Latvia, Janis Čakste to Estonia on February 23 - 25, and the President of Estonia Juri Jaak-son on May 9- 11, 1925, to Latvia. Toward the end of March the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Voldemaras Čarneckis also visited Riga.<sup>29</sup>

On March 2- 11, 1925, the representatives of the Polish, Latvian and Estonian general staffs met in Riga again and discussed a variety of questions of a military nature. In a broader conference, held from March 26 to April 2, the Rumanian representatives, two French officers and a Finnish observer also participated. It was decided to coordinate the intelligence services of the participating states and it became the responsibility of those states bordering on certain areas of the Soviet Union to keep these borders under their surveillance in order to avoid surprise attack by their aggressive neighbor. The participants also agreed to coordinate plans for the development of their armed forces and for possible future disarmament. They also decided to meet again in the fall and to work on plans for a possible military alliance. Russian revelations of the conference caused a minor diplomatic scandal.<sup>30</sup>

On March 28, 1925, Meierovics informed Dr. Adolf Koster, the German Minister in Latvia, about "rumors" of the plans for three blocs: 1) Western, containing Great Britain, Belgium, France, and Germany; 2) Southern, containing France, Poland, and the Little Entente, and 3) Eastern, containing France, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and later Lithuania. He expressed his interest in joining a bloc which would be under the British and French leadership. On May 2, the German Chancellor Gustav Stresemann suggested a German, Soviet Russian and Baltic cooperation without Poland, and pointed out that the Western leaders were not particularly interested in the Baltic area.<sup>31</sup>

On April 28-30, Meierovics and Čarneckis agreed to arrange for a conference of the three Baltic States in June. Poland, however, tried to influence Estonia and Latvia not to attend this conference and Aleksander Ladosz, the Polish Minister in Riga, even threatened a Polish boycott of the four power conference scheduled for August in Tallinn. The Chief of the Eastern Department of the Polish Foreign Ministry, Stanislaw Janikowski, now made quick visits to Tallinn and Riga. The British, considering their difficulties in the Far East, also changed their attitude and suggested now that the Baltic States should cooperate with Poland. This change of attitude was also caused, at least partially, by the increasing role of the British capital in Polish enterprises. A visit of R. V. A. Litemar of the British Foreign Office and the appearance of fourteen British warships under the command of Rear Admiral W. A. H. Kelly in the Estonian waters created the basis for speculation that the Estonian islands might be leased as the bases to the British Navy. The President of Finland, Lauri Relander, visited Estonia on May 21, 1925, and afterwards travelled to Sweden.<sup>32</sup>

The makers of the German foreign policy decided on June 8, 1925, that an alliance of states from Estonia to Rumania was not in Germany's interest. Such an alliance could shut off Germany more firmly from Russia's borders and both Poland and the small states could impede the fulfillment of Germany's Eastern aspirations. Poland could also increase her influence in the League of Nations by counting on her Baltic allies. The Soviets shared the German views. Poland, on the other hand, exerted considerable pressure on Estonia and Latvia to make them less willing to cooperate with her adversary — Lithuania.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the Latvian Foreign Minister Meierovics visited Kaunas on June 30, and July 1, and signed with his Lithuanian counterpart a protocol which contemplated the conclusion of economic and arbitration treaties between the two countries on the basis of the existing Estonian - Latvian treaty. While the Estonians preferred a Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Polish alliance, the Latvians wanted to include Lithuania in it in order to fill a dangerous gap in the system. As a result of this relations between the three Baltic States became cooler.<sup>34</sup>

With the continued slackening of Soviet Russian activities in the Baltic and the improvement of relations with Germany, the desire for such protection as Poland could afford again became less acute. At the request of Finland and as a result of the sudden death of Meierovics the conference of four powers scheduled at Tallinn for August 25, was postponed. Skrzynski had also pointed out that he would participate only if the Polish - Baltic alliance could be signed at the conference. The Latvian Government definitely decided against such an alliance on August 31. The regular periodic conference of the four powers held on September 6 - 21, 1925, at Geneva, was the last such conference. Although measures were discussed for accelerating the implementation of the arbitration and conciliation conventions concluded at Helsinki in January, the arrangements for holding the next conference to be hosted by Latvia were left indefinite. Shortly before his death Meierovics had stated that the question of the formation of a quadruple coalition between Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland was no longer urgent and expressed his opinion that "sooner or later a close alliance between Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania would come." In order to become independent of both Lithuania and Poland, the Latvians started building a new railroad line between Riga and Liepaja, thus making Liepaja less dependent of the Romni line. Because of the formal state of war that still existed between Lithuania and Poland, the other Baltic States were less enthusiastic than Latvia over the prospect of becoming allied to Lithuania, but the Warsaw accord was dead by now.<sup>35</sup>

On October 16, 1925, the "Western" Locarno treaties were signed which guaranteed the existing Franco -German boundary. Germany refused to guarantee, however, the boundaries with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. Great Britain was now interested in Europe only so far as the Rhine River, and France also became less interested in the East. On November 14, the Secretary General of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, Hermanis Albats, suggested an Eastern Locarno Pact which would guarantee the Baltic States by Soviet Union and Germany. On November 17 the former Prime Minister of Finland, Professor Rafael Erich, came out for a Scandinavian - Baltic bloc, but the Polish Minister in Finland suggested the inclusion of Poland into such a bloc. The Scandinavian states were not interested in Erich's suggestion. England was not interested in guarantees to the Baltic States, and the Soviet Union condemned the whole idea as a basis for a coalition

against it. Instead, the Russians invited Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to sign bilateral pacts of non - aggression.<sup>36</sup>

The new Latvian Foreign Minister Hugo Celmiņš informed the press in November that he preferred a union of five states, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and failing that, an Estonian - Latvian -Lithuanian alliance. On December 2-5, the representatives of the Polish, Rumanian, Latvian and Estonian general staffs met in Warsaw, but on December 14 Karlis Ulmanis visited Lithuania and signed a most -favored nation clause to be applied in the economic relations between Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>37</sup>

While the Soviet Government invited the Baltic States to sign non-aggression treaties with it, the Soviet Minister in Latvia Alexei Chernikh reportedly declared to the Collegium of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs that the efforts hitherto made to separate the Baltic States from one another had failed and that the Soviet Government had not profited from the divergences which separated Poland and Lithuania. He suggested first the separation of Latvia and Lithuania from their neighbors by propagating the idea of political and economic union of the two countries with the Soviet Union. The Baltic States, however, maintained a united front against any attempts to separate them. In the proposed treaties they wanted to avoid anything calculated to disturb friendly relations between the parties or which might create a conflict with their obligations to the League of Nations. They wanted to settle all disputes by arbitration or conciliation. They also condemned the propaganda which might be aimed by one against the other. Janikowski again visited Tallinn and Riga and assured the Baltic States of Polish support. On May 12 - 16, 1926, the President of Latvia, Gustavs Zemgals, visited Finland and on June 21 -14 the Finnish President Relander visited Latvia. Relander pointedly declared: "The responsibility for the security of the vital interests of our nations lies on each of us separately and on all of us together."<sup>38</sup>

After Pilsudski's seizure of power in Poland, the German ministers in Finland and Latvia informed their governments in May, 1926, that the Poles had generously offered an alliance to Estonia and Latvia, which would obligate Poland to come to their rescue, but would not obligate Estonia and Latvia to do likewise. Only their benevolent neutrality was expected. Finland was also considered an ally on these terms.<sup>39</sup>

On July 13 - 14 the Baltic representatives met again in Tallinn to discuss further policy toward the Soviet proposals, but the Lithuanians did not come. On July 27 the Latvian Foreign Minister Ulmanis went to Kaunas to conclude treaties of arbitration and commerce with Lithuania and to bring her back into the Baltic community. His visit to Kaunas prompted the Polish Foreign Minister August Zaleski to announce that Poland was willing to resume diplomatic relations with Lithuania. On September 28, 1926, the Lithuanian Prime Minister Mykolas Sleževičius broke the Baltic chain by signing a separate treaty of non - aggression and neutrality with the Soviet Union. The Baltic solidarity thus collapsed completely. Supported by benevolent attitudes toward her by the Soviet Union and Germany, the Lithuanian government saw no need for close relations and friendship with the Baltic States, which had maintained a cautious attitude toward the Lithuanian quarrels with Poland. Russia and Germany, on the other hand, had serious border problems with Poland.

One should say that the attempts at establishing a Baltic Union had failed due to the exceptional positions taken by Lithuania and Poland in regard to Vilnius, the Soviet and German intrigues, the British - French rivalry in the Baltic and exalted individualism of each of the Baltic States. The Soviet Union had been able to split up the Baltic concord by inducing one of them to sign a separate pact with her. The Estonians and Lithuanians also hesitated signing commercial and customs treaties with Latvia, fearing the possible domination of Latvian industry and commerce in the entire Baltic area. The coup d'etat in Lithuania in December, 1926, resulted in an autocratic regime that at least at first caused even more obstacles in the mutual cooperation of the Baltic States.<sup>40</sup>

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