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## THE LITHUANIAN–SOVIET TREATY OF OCTOBER 1939

The Lithuanian–Soviet Treaty of October 10, 1939, despite its significance and serious consequences affecting Poland, so far has not attracted the attention of Polish researchers. E.g. the three-volume documentary publication *Agresja sowiecka na Polskę w świetle dokumentów. 17 września 1939. Geneza i skutki agresji (Soviet Aggression Upon Poland in the Light of Documents. September 17, 1939. The Origin and Consequences of the Aggression)* does not take into account the text of the treaty at all<sup>1</sup>. And yet it determined the division of one part of the Second Republic of Poland and the annexation of its large area, including Wilno (Vilnius), by the Lithuanian Republic.

Following the Ribbentrop–Molotov Treaty of August 23, 1939, Lithuania found itself in the German sphere of influence. The respective fragment of the secret supplementary protocol said that the northern border of Lithuania “will be at the same time a boundary line between the German and Soviet spheres of interest”. It is striking that the protocol did not mention the eastern border, while the next sentence said only that “both sides acknowledge Lithuania’s interest in the Wilno region”<sup>2</sup>. It seemed that the problem of Lithuania’s eastern border remained open and had not been solved.

Soviet troops entered Wilno on the morning of September 19. The same day the Lithuanian envoy in Moscow, Ladas Natkevičius, received an order to inquire of Molotov whether the Soviet government intended to return Wilno to Lithuania. The Soviet prime minister replied that he did not see any “principal ob-

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, Warszawa 1994.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 41, p. 88.

stacles" in this matter, but did not give any concrete answer. It could be seen that he was playing for time<sup>3</sup>.

One can suppose that at this very moment, i. e. about the 20th of September, the Soviet government regarded giving Wilno up to Lithuania as inconvenient. Indeed, the change of Lithuania's eastern border would at the same time mean the shifting of the sphere of influence to the detriment of the Soviet Union.

Officially, the occupied Wilno and its region started to be treated as part of Western Byelorussia. To maintain order, an organ of military administration was established in Wilno, under the name of the Temporary Board of the Wilno Region. Similar boards were created in the districts, while committees were established in the communes. A "workers' guard" was also formed. The only paper that appeared in print was the Byelorussian "Vilenskaya Prauda".

At the beginning of the third decade of September the Germans were still thinking of consolidating their influence in Lithuania. On September 20 in Berlin a draft was prepared of a treaty between Lithuania and Germany which said that "Lithuania, without any detriment to her state independence, remains under the protection of the German Reich". The next paragraph spoke of a conclusion of a military convention which would hand over the control of the Lithuanian Army to Wehrmacht. A German military commission was to be sent to Kaunas for the supervision of this process.

On September 21 the Lithuanian foreign minister Juozas Urbšys received an invitation to Zoppot (now Sopot), where Hitler and Ribbentrop stayed at that time. At this meeting the German side most probably wanted to hand him in the draft of the treaty.

The next day the Lithuanian government agreed to their minister's departure. However, he was instructed to stick to the principle of neutrality<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, although the Germans insisted on the confidential character of this invitation, the Lithuanian government informed the Soviet representative in Kaunas about it. The envoy notified his authorities. Soviet diplomats inquired of the German Embassy in Moscow about the prospective visit. This did not meet with a favourable reaction in Berlin. As soon

<sup>3</sup> R. Žepkaitė, *Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa 1939–1940*, Vilnius 1990, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

as September 23 Urbšys was informed by an envoy of the Reich that his visit had been postponed.

However, the reasons for the German *volte face* lay deeper. The same day (September 23) Ribbentrop decided to set off for the USSR to finalize a treaty for a new boundary line with the Soviet Union. At the root of this decision lay the information passed to him from Moscow that "the previous design, both of the Soviet government and Stalin personally, of allowing the remnants of Poland to exist, now gave way to a design on Poland's division"<sup>5</sup>.

This was even more clearly confirmed on September 25 in a telegram directed to Auswärtiges Amt by Ambassador Werner von Schulenburg, who said that Stalin "thinks it wrong to conserve the remnants of the Polish state. He proposes to annex to our portion, out of the territory east of the demarcation line, the whole of the Lublin region and the part of the Warsaw region which reaches the Bug River. In return for this we shall renounce any claims on Lithuania"<sup>6</sup>.

Such a proposal was not convenient to Hitler, principally for strategic reasons, however, he was compelled to agree. He did not succeed in isolating Poland. Germany was still in a state of war with Great Britain and France, with whom she expected a general struggle. In this situation Hitler did not want to leave things unsettled in the east, and the Soviet side pressed hard. Besides, he was very anxious to get supplies of raw materials from the USSR.

Ribbentrop, who came to Moscow on September 28, acceded to the Soviet proposals. The "treaty about friendship and borders" signed at that time was enriched by a new secret protocol on the strength of which Lithuania, while obtaining Wilno, passed to the Soviet "sphere of influence", with the exception of a strip near the border, south of the Niemen River. This was accompanied by the above-mentioned changes in Poland<sup>7</sup>.

With Lithuania already within his reach, on October 3 Molotov notified Schulenburg that the Soviet government was going

<sup>5</sup> ZSRR — Niemcy 1939–1941. Dokumenty i materiały dotyczące stosunków radziecko-niemieckich w okresie od kwietnia 1939 r. do lipca 1941 r. (USSR — Germany 1939–1941. Documents and Materials Concerning Soviet-German Relations from April 1939 to July 1941), Wilno 1990, doc. 52–53, pp. 100–101.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 54, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> Dokumenty vneshney politiki 1939 god, part 2, Moskva 1992, doc. 643, p. 136.

to give up Wilno together with the western part of its region to Lithuania "within the framework of the regulation of their mutual relations". On this occasion, wishing to place Germany in an awkward position, the Soviet prime minister informed the German ambassador that the Kremlin wanted to give Lithuania to understand that she would have to give up some part of her territory to Germany on the strength of the German-Soviet Treaty. In this context Molotov inquired what procedure Germany would like to apply. On his part, he suggested carrying out these territorial changes on the basis of two protocols, signed simultaneously. Such a solution, however, would place Germany in an awkward situation. Schulenburg saw it immediately and reacted to Molotov's suggestion with much restraint. He promptly informed Auswärtiges Amt that in the eyes of the world Germany would seem "to capture the Lithuanian territory", while the USSR would be presented as "a generous donor"<sup>8</sup>.

As it could have been expected, Ribbentrop rejected Molotov's suggestions and ordered to tell him that it was none of his business to negotiate the matter of the Lithuanian border strip and its passing to Germany. On the other hand, the Reich minister demanded that Moscow sign a guarantee that the Soviet troops, when entering Lithuania, would not invade the area assigned to Germany. As is well-known, the Soviets did not fulfil this condition. While committing an aggression upon Lithuania in June 1940, they seized, without any exceptions, the whole of her territory. This had its political and diplomatic consequences in later German-Soviet relations.

Meanwhile, in its relations with Lithuania, the Soviet government did not waste time. On the second day after signing a treaty on Lithuania's passage into the Soviet sphere of influence — on September 29, 1939 — envoy Natkevičius was summoned to the Kremlin. He was received by Molotov in the presence of deputy commissar Vladimir Potemkin. Molotov emphasized that he knew of the friendly attitude of Lithuania to the USSR and valued it highly. Now the time came to make this friendship more concrete. He expressed a wish that one of the leading Lithuanian politicians, e.g. premier Antanas Merkys, come as soon as possible to Moscow. The envoy informed that this demand was not categorical, however, it was no accident that Molotov remarked that

<sup>8</sup> ZSRR — Niemcy, as above, doc. 4, pp. 123-124.

“politically, Lithuania almost in hundred per cent depends on the Soviet Union, and Germany has no objections to Lithuania’s coming to an understanding with the Soviet government”<sup>9</sup>.

Natkevičius immediately left for Kaunas, where he informed his superiors of what he had heard in Moscow. The information could not but arouse the highest anxiety of the Lithuanian government. They had already known that on September 28, 1939, the USSR imposed on Estonia a “treaty of mutual assistance”, on the strength of which Soviet military bases were to be installed in the territory of Estonia, hence the sovereignty of this state was violated and its safety threatened. They had also known that the Latvian foreign minister “was invited” to come to Moscow on October 2. A similar proposal to Lithuania could not augur well.

On September 30 and October 1 sessions of the government took place where it was decided that not the premier, but foreign minister Juozas Urbšys would go to Moscow. Directives for his conduct were also settled. He was not authorized to sign a treaty, but was to defend the principle of Lithuania’s neutrality.

Urbšys came to Moscow on October 3. He was immediately summoned to the Kremlin. There he was received by Stalin and Molotov. Urbšys recollects: “Stalin spoke first, and without any evasions declared that the Soviet Union had come to an understanding with the Germans. According to their agreement the major part of Lithuania would be annexed to the USSR, while a narrow border strip — to Germany”. Stalin put a map on the table, with “a demarcation line” crossing the territory of Lithuania. “I tried to protest”, Urbšys writes, “against such a division of an independent state. I said the friendly Soviet Union was the last country Lithuania would expect to do something like this”<sup>10</sup>.

According to data contained in Natkevičius’s note of October 4, the Soviet–German demarcation line was to run from Naumiestis through Vilkaviškis, west of Marjampole, through Liudvinavas–Simnas–Seirijai–Leipalingis–Kapčiamjestis. Thus it enclosed a large area of the northern Suwałki region<sup>11</sup>.

Next Stalin informed Urbšys that the Soviet Union was ready to give up Wilno with a part of its region to Lithuania. This, however, must be connected with signing “a pact of mutual

<sup>9</sup> Žepkaitė, as above, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> J. Urbšys, *Lietuva lemtingaisiais 1939–1940 metais*, Vilnius 1988, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija 1939/1940. Dokumentu rinkinys*, doc. 22, p. 72.

assistance", which envisaged the introduction of military bases in the territory of Lithuania.

At the next meeting, having seen the draft of the respective document, Urbšys (according to his own words) cried out: "This will be the occupation of Lithuania!" Whereupon Stalin commented that this was what the Estonians had said at the beginning. And he went on to say that "The Soviet Union has no intention to threaten Lithuania's independence. On the contrary. Soviet troops introduced to Lithuania will in fact guarantee that the Soviet Union would defend her, if attacked". Then, perhaps as a joke, Stalin said: "Our crews will help you stifle a communist rebellion, in case it breaks out"<sup>12</sup>.

Minister Urbšys did not want to continue talking about the distribution and strength of the bases, saying he had to contact his government. He immediately returned to Kaunas by plane.

Meanwhile German diplomacy did not stay passive in face of events taking place in Lithuania. Ribbentrop ordered his envoy in Kaunas Erich Zechlin to reassure the Lithuanian government that a correction of the German-Lithuanian border was not envisaged at that moment at all. Moreover, he ordered the envoy to inform the Lithuanian side "in strict confidence" that during the latest German-Soviet negotiations in Moscow it was him, Ribbentrop, who called for the annexation of the Wilno region to Lithuania, and the Soviet government agreed to that<sup>13</sup>.

While the Germans presented their role to the Lithuanians in such a way, Stalin, on his part, also discredit the behaviour of his German allies. In his talk with Urbšys he disclosed that Ribbentrop had postulated an annexation of a major part of Lithuania to Germany and recommended recompensing the Lithuanians with a large part of the Wilno region. Apart from that, Ribbentrop mentioned that there were many Germans in Lithuania who could be brought to the area which would fall to the Third Reich<sup>14</sup>.

In any case the Lithuanian government could still hope that the Germans would support Lithuania in the face of Soviet claims. On returning to Kaunas minister Urbšys immediately met the envoy Zechlin and inquired about the German stand. Zechlin's

<sup>12</sup> Urbšys, as above, pp. 25-27.

<sup>13</sup> ZSRR — Niemcy, as above, doc. 7, pp. 126-127.

<sup>14</sup> Lietuvos okupacija, as above, doc. 22, p. 73.

reply dispelled all illusions. He said, the political situation did not allow the Germans to make any moves in favour of Lithuania. The Lithuanian envoy in Berlin also learnt that the Germans "washed their hands of this matter"<sup>15</sup>.

Under the impact of this news, the attitude of the Lithuanian government, initially negative towards Moscow's claims, started to change.

After a long discussion, held on October 5–6, the following position was adopted: the Lithuanian government agreed to accept the Soviet proposal of a treaty on mutual assistance, with one exception, however: no Soviet bases on the Lithuanian territory. The Lithuanian delegation, enlarged by vice-premier Kazys Bizauskas and army commander Gen. Stasys Raštikis was instructed to propose to the Soviet Union an exchange of military missions, an increase in the numbers of Lithuanian troops for the defence of Lithuanian frontiers, and only in case of necessity to ask the USSR for assistance<sup>16</sup>.

Thus there were two different projects for treaties with the USSR. One concerning the annexation of Wilno and part of its region in line with the Soviet proposals. Another, embracing an agreement on mutual assistance and military co-operation, however without the installation of Soviet bases under the conditions of the existing peace. The latter proposal was unrealistic already at the very moment of its declaration. Naturally, the authorities in Kaunas were bound to know that on September 28 the Soviet side imposed a treaty on Estonia, while quite recently — on October 5 — a similar treaty was signed by the government of Latvia. Both envisaged the installation of numerous military bases — of land, air and sea troops — in those countries. It was improbable that Lithuania would avoid a similar fate. It was becoming obvious that the task posed to the delegation clearly surpassed its abilities. Nevertheless, minister Urbšys did his best to carry it out.

On October 7, at a meeting in the Kremlin where the Soviet side was represented by Molotov and Potemkin — minister Urbšys delivered a long speech, in which he referred to the past, and to the friendly relations between Lithuania and the USSR. Passing on to the project of a treaty he spoke of the Lithuanian

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<sup>15</sup> Urbšys, as above, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Žepkaitė, as above, p. 35.

government's conviction that the introduction of Soviet troops and installation of their bases in Lithuania — at a time when neither Lithuania nor the Soviet Union waged any wars against anybody — would only sow the seeds of distrust and would stir among the population hostile feelings towards the Soviet Union. Lithuanian nation could not but assess the introduction of foreign troops into its territory as a foreign occupation.

According to Urbšys, during his speech Stalin entered the room. The Lithuanian minister started briefly to recapitulate his exposition. Stalin listened for a while, but then broke in: "You prove too much" (*Vy slishkom mnogo dokazyvayete*). Neither Stalin nor Molotov showed any interest in Urbšys's further exposition. "Troops have to be introduced" — this was their claim.

On the second day of negotiations — October 8 — Urbšys in despair, seeing his arguments were of no avail, started simply begging the Soviet side, in the name of Lithuanian-Soviet friendship, to give up the design of introducing its bases into the Lithuanian territory. He was interrupted with another, firm refusal. The word *niet* spoken with emphasis left no room for further discussion. At this point Urbšys thought his task was finished. However, he still asked whether the Soviet side would be satisfied with their bases being installed only in that part of the country which was to be returned to Lithuania. Stalin, without budging an inch, answered that his troops must be installed in both areas<sup>17</sup>.

On October 9 there was a break in negotiations. Bizauskas and Raštikis left for Kaunas.

During these difficult and irritating negotiations the Lithuanian delegates were exposed to strong pressure. One of the methods was to inform them of meetings being held in Wilno, where demands were voiced to annex this city to Byelorussia. Papers with this news were thrust into the delegates' hands. These were not vain threats.

In fact, actions then started in Wilno clearly aimed at the annexation of this city to Byelorussia. On October 6 the Wilno Temporary Administration Board expressed its consent to take part in the elections to the People's Assembly of Western Byelorussia. An election committee was formed, with Polish communist Jerzy Putrament among others. On October 7 meetings were

<sup>17</sup> Urbšys, as above, pp. 30-33.



held all over the city, allegedly attended by up to 75,000 people. There resolutions were passed on the annexation of Wilno to the Byelorussian SSR. On October 8 the order of the elections was announced. However, the next day, the action was suddenly cut. All this was certainly stage-managed to achieve a weapon of additional pressure on the Lithuanians.

On the same day, October 9, in Kaunas, the Lithuanian government gathered together with Bizauskas and Raštikis. It was then that the final decision was made. It resolved that negotiations with the Soviet Union could not be broken. The delegation was authorized to sign two agreements: one concerning the transference of Wilno and another on the treaty of mutual assistance, meeting the demands of the Soviet side.

Immediately following this resolution Bizauskas and Raštikis set out back to Moscow, where they arrived at 18 hrs. No Soviet representative met them at the airport. Negotiations were resumed immediately and the meeting at the Kremlin started at 19.30 hrs.

The chairman of the Soviet side Molotov proposed to sign only one agreement which combined the matters of the treaty on mutual assistance and the passing of Wilno to Lithuania. Natkevičius wrote: "The climate of negotiations changed. Even the slightest remarks irritated Molotov. He accused us of protracting affairs, while — he said — Wilno became very much Sovietized"<sup>18</sup>. The Soviets dictated all the course of events. To all remarks and requests for introducing changes and corrections, Molotov replied briefly "it has been decided by Stalin himself, and nothing can be changed".

Stalin appeared at the very end of negotiations. Molotov hurried to inform him that "we have already settled everything with our Lithuanian friends". While documents were being prepared in the chancellery, the visitors were invited to the bar. Informal talks started. Stalin was in the best of his mood. Urbšys recalls that the Soviet dictator referred to recent events in Poland and jeered at the Polish ambassador Grzybowski who dared to protest against the action of Soviet troops on September 17.

It was 2 o'clock in the morning of October 10, 1939, that the signing of the treaty began. It was strictly stage-managed and

<sup>18</sup> L. Natkevičius's memorial of October 11, 1939, in: *Lietuvos okupacija*, doc. 26, pp. 93-95.

documented by photographers. Later Stalin invited everybody to his cinema<sup>19</sup>. At 17 hrs. in Georgiyevskaya hall in the Kremlin a solemn reception was held in honour of the Lithuanian delegation.

How can we define the treaty of October 10, 1939, imposed on Lithuania by Moscow, for whose content and resolutions Lithuanian diplomacy fought such a desperate, unequal and finally lost battle?

The treaty led inevitably to the infringement of Lithuania's sovereignty by the very fact of distributing foreign troops in her territory, which, as minister Urbšys rightly argued, was absolutely needless under the conditions of peace. It must be emphasized that, formally speaking, neither Lithuania nor the USSR could feel menaced within their frontiers. Lithuania had a non-aggression treaty with Germany, signed on March 22, 1939, within the framework of an agreement about giving up Memel (Klaipeda) to the Third Reich. The USSR had already concluded two treaties with the Germans and on every possible occasion emphasized its friendly relations with them.

Thus the main resolution concerning the bases could not be treated otherwise than as a violation of Lithuania's independence, a manifestation of her far-reaching subordination to the Soviet Union. This could not be changed by the declarations of art. VII, saying the treaty did not infringe the sovereign rights of either country, and especially their state orders, economic and social systems, and the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs.

There were more such empty declarations in the text of the treaty. Its very preamble referred to the Lithuanian-Soviet Russian treaty of July 12, 1920, and emphasized the intention to develop "friendly relations, based on the recognition of the state independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other side".

The treaty in the first place dealt with the problem of transferring by the USSR to Lithuania the city of Wilno and its region "which will be included into the territory of the Lithuanian state", as well as to the establishment of a new border between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. These formulations were very misleading. What Wilno region could here be meant? The transferred territory did not cover the old Wilno *gubernya*, or the later

<sup>19</sup> Urbšys, as above, pp. 34-37.

Wilno voivodeship. In fact, Lithuania received only a narrow strip running for 220 kilometres along her eastern border, which only slightly widened in the region of Wilno itself. However, this widening was small, since the Soviet border ran at a distance of merely 50 kilometres east of the city. The transferred area covered about 6,880 km<sup>2</sup>. It was incomparably smaller than the territory accorded to Lithuania by the treaty of July 12, 1920, which embraced 32,400 km<sup>2</sup>. Stalin was much more stingy than Lenin, to the extent that he did not surrender such areas to Lithuania as Święciany (Švenčionys) and Hoduciszki (Adučiškis), inhabited by the Lithuanian population.

It was important, however, that Wilno was transferred to Lithuania indefinitely although the treaty of mutual assistance had been concluded for 15 years (the Lithuanian delegation demanded 10 years).

The problem of bases was dealt with in art. IV of the treaty. It said that Lithuania was granting the Soviet Union a right to maintain its land and air troops, in a strictly defined number, in agreed places and at the Soviet expense. The treaty said that the exact distribution and strength of troops at each place, as well as matters connected to it, would be regulated in separate agreements. This much was said in the open part of the treaty. Its secret protocol, an integral part of the treaty, said that the general number of troops distributed in Lithuania could amount to 20,000 people. The secret protocol also said that a Mixed Commission would be established in order to implement the resolutions of the treaty<sup>20</sup>.

The treaty was ratified without delay. On October 12 by the Supreme Council of the USSR, on October 14 by the Lithuanian Parliament. Ratification documents were exchanged in Kaunas on October 16.

A few days elapsed, however, before the Soviet delegates to the Mixed Commission arrived. This was probably not accidental. Without concluding an agreement about the bases the Soviet side did not want to transfer the promised area to Lithuania. And each day of delay counted.

In fact, at that time the city was plundered, and since October 10, when it was announced that Wilno was going to be given up

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<sup>20</sup> The treaty and the secret protocol have been discussed according to the text published in: *Dokumenty vneshney politiki*, as above, doc. 672, pp. 173–175 and 175–176.

to Lithuania, the process aggravated. The equipment of the modern "Elektrit" factory, the pride of the city, built under the Polish rule, started to be evacuated. Two thousand ready radio sets were taken away from its stores. What is more important, its two hundred workers were deported<sup>21</sup>. According to a researcher into this problem, Regina Žepkaitė, the equipment of a paper factory, oil refinery, an alcohol distillery, a cannery, tannery, major printing offices and a radio broadcasting station was disassembled and taken away. Even university clinics were not spared, but robbed of their X-ray apparatus as well as physiotherapeutic equipment. Also the rolling-stock of the Wilno railway station was carried away — 97 engines, 1,500 carriages, as well as new rails that were in store. Many public buildings were robbed of their furniture and equipment. The objects of culture were not spared, museum, library and archive collections, including 16th–19th c. records were taken away. The Wróblewski Library was robbed of its many most valuable books<sup>22</sup>. Let it be enough to testify to the dimensions of the robbery, greed and implacability of the Soviet authorities.

Two other questions, resulting from the treaty, remained to be settled. The first concerned the demarcation of a new border. A joint border commission tackled this job in the course of a few days. A protocol was prepared about settling the boundary line, signed by Natkevičius and Molotov in Moscow on October 27<sup>23</sup>.

The other question — the distribution of Soviet military bases in the territory of Lithuania — turned out to be much more difficult. Of prime importance was where and in what numbers these troops were to be located.

On October 18 the directives were worked out for the Lithuanian delegation to talks with Soviet representatives. It was thought desirable for the majority of Soviet troops to be located in the Wilno region, and the rest in the south of Lithuania. Placing the bases in Samogitia was treated as the worst eventuality. The Lithuanians wanted the smallest number of bases, but larger in size. The directives mentioned among other places Podbrodzie (Pabradė), Niemenczyn (Nemenčinė), Nowa Wilejka (Naujoji Vil-

<sup>21</sup> The list of objects taken away from Wilno by Soviet authorities, October 19, 1939, in: *Lietuvos okupacija*, doc. 31, pp. 105–106.

<sup>22</sup> Žepkaitė, as above, pp. 28–29.

<sup>23</sup> *Lietuvos okupacija*, as above, doc. 39, pp. 118–124.

nia) and the Alytus (Olita) region as convenient places for bases. It was recommended to try to make the Soviet side give up placing permanent aircraft bases in the territory of Lithuania and satisfy itself with temporary runways, used only in cases of need<sup>24</sup>. Generally the Lithuanian side wanted to reduce to a minimum the negative effects of the installation of Soviet bases, and especially to protect from them the western part of the country. The confrontation with the postulates of the Soviet side shows, however, how difficult this matter was.

The first meeting of the bilateral commission took place on October 23 in the stately House of the Lithuanian Officer in Kaunas. The Lithuanian delegation was headed by Div. Gen. Mikas Reklaitis. He was backed among others by an experienced diplomat, Voldemaras Čarneckis. The Soviet group was headed by a second rank comandarm Mikhail Kovalev. At the outset he informed that the contingent of Soviet troops in Lithuania would be "only" 18,680 people. It would be made up of a rifle division, an armoured brigade, an anti-aircraft artillery group, a group of fighter planes and a group of fast bombing planes. The comandarm mentioned Wilno, Kaunas, Alytus, Ukmergė and Šiauliai, i.e. the main urban centres of Lithuania, as places where these troops would be stationed. Yet he emphasized that these proposals were not final.

Another session took place on October 24. It was devoted to a detailed analysis of places where the Soviet troops would be stationed. The Lithuanian side proposed to locate them in the regions of Alytus and Pabradė. Kovalev rejected the proposal of Pabradė, but approved of Alytus, a locality with a large firing ground, dating back to Russian times. At the same time he stressed that the troops already stationed in the Wilno region should remain there. Apart from that he mentioned the distribution of fast troops in the Šiauliai region, and that of anti-aircraft artillery in Wilno and south of Kaunas.

Kovalev addressed the Lithuanian delegates with a reproach that they would like to see the Soviet units centred too much, and yet, he explained, the tasks of mutual defence required a suitable decentralization of the troops. Minister Čarneckis entered into a polemic with him, providing his own explanation of the essence of the treaty on mutual assistance<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* doc. 29, pp. 101-104.

At the third session on October 25 discussion went on about the places of distribution. Ever new place-names were mentioned — such as Prienai on the Nemen, or Ukmergė. At the fourth session on the same day an important agreement was accepted to locate the armoured brigade in the firing ground at Gaižiūnai near Jonava. At the same time some members of the commission went into the field to see the places assigned for the future bases<sup>26</sup>.

On the next days, October 26–27, fierce discussions continued. However, it could be seen that the Soviet side was imposing its own solutions. It placed special emphasis on the bases at Prienai and Gaižiūnai, as well as on taking over the airport at Porubanek near Wilno.

On October 28, the same day that the Lithuanian army marched into Wilno, the final version was signed of the secret agreement on the distribution of Soviet bases in the territory of Lithuania. Thus, it was agreed that the headquarters as well as the detachments of infantry and artillery, together 4,500 soldiers, would be placed at Nowa Wilejka. Infantry, artillery, and fast mechanized units — 8,000 soldiers together — would be stationed in Alytus, infantry and artillery, 2,500 people, at Prienai, and a motor-unit of 3,500 people, over a hundred tanks — in the firing ground at Gaižiūnai. Aircraft bases were to be established at Gaižiūnai and Alytus, however before they had been built, Soviet fighter planes and bombers were to be stationed at Porubanek. Troops were to march into the bases on November 3, and to Nowa Wilejka and Porubanek — immediately (in fact they were there already). The surplus of Soviet troops were not to be withdrawn from the Wilno region until December 15, 1939<sup>27</sup>.

The distribution of the bases imposed by the Soviet side showed clearly that Moscow was not after a defence against a possible foreign attack, but after seizing the crucial points directed against Lithuania's government; the Soviets wanted to hold Lithuania in check, and to carry out her quick occupation, if need be. The main Soviet bases at Gaižiūnai, Prienai and Alytus encircled Kaunas — the centre of the country's political life —

<sup>25</sup> Probably this was what the Bolsheviks did not forgive him. Čarneckis was arrested on June 14, 1941 and shot at Sverdlovsk on November 4, 1942.

<sup>26</sup> *Lietuvos okupacija*, as above, doc. 40–47, pp. 125–139.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 48–50, pp. 140–147.

from two sides. Gaižiūnai was situated 30 kilometres north-east of Kaunas, Prienai was at the same distance to the south, Alytus was 60 kilometres away. The tanks from Gaižiūnai, going along a highway straight as a line, could enter Kaunas within an hour. The bases at Prienai and Alytus allowed the Soviet troops to block Kaunas from the south and at the same time to maintain their fords on the Nemen River. On the other hand, the base at Nowa Wilejka, situated 10 kilometres away from Wilno, could serve them to quickly seize the city.

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The treaty of October 10, 1939, was doubtless an essential event for Lithuania, leading to the loss of her independence. The Lithuanian government was helpless in face of the solutions imposed by the Soviet Union. The Second Polish Republic, which shielded Lithuania from the east, did not exist any longer, and other Baltic states were undergoing the same crisis as Lithuania. What was really at work, was the mechanism of German-Soviet agreement, the division into the spheres of influence in face of which these small states turned out to be defenceless.

*(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)*

