

Vytautas Žalys, *Lietuvos diplomatijos istorija 1925–1940 metais, II tomas, pirmoji dalis*, Vilnius: leidykla „Edukologija“, 2012, 380 p. ISBN 978-9955-20-801-3

Idem, *Lietuvos diplomatijos istorija 1925–1940 metais, II tomas, antroji dalis*, Vilnius: leidykla „Edukologija“, 2012, 376 p. ISBN 978-9955-20-802-0

To write a review of only part of a single-‘volume’ treatise, even if consisting of two separate books, at first glance, is not quite a usual endeavour. However, the thematic structure of the study by Vytautas Žalys (separate volumes devoted to research on separate issues) seems to allow one to undertake such a task. All the more so, as the author himself has noted more than once that it is not clear when the other parts of the work will be published.

Two parts (and a third part is planned) of Volume II of the book ‘A History of Lithuania Diplomacy, 1925–1940’ which appeared in 2012 are the continuation of a work of which the first volume was released in 2007. The topics of both parts of Volume II are different to those of Volume I, because basically, at its epicentre are only Lithuanian-German relations in 1928–1931, with the Klaipėda region (the territory around Memel) being the main problem in these relations. The author of the treatise has since 1993 been in the diplomatic service of the Republic of Lithuania, and was appointed Lithuanian ambassador to Canada in 2012. Here he shows that he is a gifted historian with great experience in completing long-term works. For more than two decades, Žalys has been investigating Lithuania diplomacy in the interwar period, and is connected with Klaipėda not only by his published studies on the problem of the Klaipėda region¹, but also by elements of his biography. The author not only graduated from high school in Klaipėda, but in 1979 he also began his career as an academic there.

The problem of the Klaipėda region in 1928–1931 in no way belongs to those fields of historiography which have so far not attracted the attention of historians. One could name more than one study in which the

¹ The main works: V. Žalys, *Kova dėl identiteto: Kodėl Lietuvai nesisekė Klaipėdoje tarp 1923–1939 m.* = *Ringeln um Identität: Warum Litauen zwischen 1923 und 1939 im Memelgebiet keinen Erfolg hatte* (Lüneburg, 1993); V. Žalys, ‘Das Memelproblem in der litauischen Außenpolitik (1923–1939)’, J. Tauber (Hrsg.), *Zwischen Staatsnation und Minderheit. Litauen, das Memelland und das Wilnagebiet in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Nordost–Archiv, Bd. II/ 1993, Heft 2) (Lüneburg, 1993), pp. 235–278.

issue during the mentioned period was discussed from various perspectives: beginning with the book by Rudolfas Valsonokas, published in 1932 and so far not losing its relevance², and ending with works of the last decade that appeared in different countries³. Vytautas Žalys, it appears, seems to be acquainted with most of the earlier historiography, and supports some statements, although the references in his monograph show a clear desire to demonstrate the priority given to sources. In fact, only in rare cases, when there are polemics with some of the earlier statements by historians, or when no original source confirming the information was found, does one or another earlier work by other authors slip into the references.

Providing preference to sources, Žalys has done an immense job, not only reviewing backwards and forwards the documents stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives. The author has also laboured seriously in Great Britain's Public Record Office, and the archives of Germany and Russia have also attained his interest. In assessing what has been done so far, one has to state that, with such a volume of sources, the problem of the Klaipėda region during this period has not up to now been covered. The large array of sources attracted for the research has allowed the author to reveal in very great detail the relations between Lithuania and Germany in 1928–1931. In addition, he did this from different perspectives, shedding light on the views of different states on the same phenomenon. The study also distinguishes itself by the fact that Lithuania's foreign policy is presented here, linking it with the country's internal contexts and peer evaluations, both official and oppositional. True, in some cases, the author's choice of which particular documents to use appears difficult to understand. For instance, in summarising the content of the negotiations between Lithuania and Germany held at the end of 1929 and the beginning of 1930, Žalys relies mainly on documents collected in Britain. Overall, it would appear that the author is familiar with the documentation preserved in German archives only to a relatively low degree, although the analysis of the relations between Lithuania and Germany, which are covered in this study, would seem to require it. For example, the documents from Germany's Consulate General in Klaipėda (Memel), stored in the *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes* in Bonn, in writing the monograph, are in fact bypassed. Also essentially unused are the 75-volume set of documents released in postwar Germany, 'Germany's Foreign Policy Documents' (*Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen*

² R. Valsonokas, *Klaipėdos problema* (Klaipėda, 1932).

³ U. Pferr, *Die Verfassungskrise im Memelgebiet 1931/32: insbesondere unter Würdigung der Memelkonvention und deren Auslegung im Urteil des Ständigen Internationalen Gerichtshofs in Den Haag vom 11. August 1932* (Würzburger rechtswissenschaftliche Schriften, Bd. 59) (Würzburg, 2005); P. Łossowski, *Kłajpeda kontra Memel. Problem Kłajpedy w latach 1918–1939–1945* (Warszawa, 2007).

Politik)⁴. Relations with sources in this book also appear quite strange: very often documents are simply continuously quoted or retold.

Žalys has managed to construct a detailed and intriguing narrative full of piquant details. The history of diplomacy and foreign policy in today's historiography does not belong to the circle of 'avant-garde themes' at all, but the 'History of Lithuania's Diplomacy' by Žalys is by far not assigned to the genre of 19th-century 'wars and rulers histories'. Here, history is presented from the perspective of the people, and not of processes, showing the significant impact of personalities, and the networks of patrons and rivals in which these personalities had to operate, with much attention devoted to the environment in which the activity evolved, with special attention given even to women who were linked to Lithuania's diplomacy. If the main hero of Volume I was the eccentric Augustinas Voldemaras, the main role in Volume II was played by the quite forgotten Dovas Zaunius, the longest-serving of all the foreign ministers of the interwar period leading the diplomatic service of Lithuania (1929–1934). Zaunius, the only Lithuanian from East Prussia who managed to reach such career heights in Lithuania, is presented here as a solid diplomatic figure, skilfully acting in the complex conditions of internal intrigues and foreign policy challenges. In short, Žalys has managed to reveal the four-year stage of Lithuania's diplomacy in an interesting manner. Considering further the fact that this work was written in his free time from the diplomatic service, the author really deserves compliments.

The theses and arguments, in almost all cases, are the strong side of this work. The author frequently raises questions, bravely expresses doubts, states views about stereotypes in historiography, discusses both the historiography and the testimony of contemporaries, and tries to refute some of the prevailing provisions, for example, about the political disengagement of the prime minister of Lithuania Juozas Tūbelis. It would take several pages to list what is new, announced for the first time, in this study.

Žalys himself would, apparently, consider one of his major discoveries the so-called 'Voldemaras protocol', which allowed him to take a totally new look at the agreements reached between Gustav Stresemann and Augustinas Voldemaras at the beginning of 1928. As the material provided in the reviewed book show, the secret commitment of Lithuania to coordinate policies with Germany in the Klaipėda region, made during the 1928 negotiations in Berlin, both in the interwar period and after the Second World War, was not an unknown fact. Many details of this commitment were also an open secret. In the study by Žalys, this important document from Lithuania's diplomatic history is presented for the first time in Lithuania not by hearsay or the intuition of a historian, but by discovering the very archival document in which the agreements between Lithuania

⁴ Chronologically for the study volumes VIII–XVIII of the B series would have been appropriate.

and Germany were written in black and white. To tell the truth, in one of the volumes from 'Germany's Foreign Policy Documents' the published telegram of Germany's Foreign Ministry State Secretary Carl von Schubert to the embassy in Paris, dated 31 January 1928⁵, shows that the agreements between Voldemaras and Stresemann, at least in Germany, were revealed much earlier. In the mentioned telegram, essentially all the agreements, including those Žalys calls 'totally secret', were listed. In Polish historiography, the historian and diplomat Sergiusz Mikulicz disclosed in great detail the contents of the protocol only on the basis of reports by Poland's consulate⁶. Thus, in this case, one can consider Žalys the discoverer of the document in Lithuania's archives, but not the discoverer in general.

Other things deserve attention. Žalys argues that Voldemaras decided to give the commitments (which he later failed to keep to) in exchange for the German-Lithuanian border agreement. In the first volume assessing the value of this treaty with reservations, in this volume Žalys firmly asserts that the treaty meant that Germany recognised the Klaipėda region as belonging to Lithuania, which is argued in the assessments of contemporary diplomats. The author shows that the entire inheritance of German-Lithuanian relations, which the Lithuanian foreign minister Dovas Zaunius had received in 1929 from his predecessor, was mainly associated with the agreements reached in Berlin in January 1928, which an attempt was made to overcome, both in response to Germany's foreign policy changes occurring after the death of Gustav Stresemann, and by the effort to integrate the Klaipėda region, which was joined to Lithuania in 1923 and had an element that was disloyal to the state. One can say that the rest of the further narrative of Žalys is built by focusing on the 1930 crisis in relations between Lithuania and Germany, during which the commitments given by Voldemaras were renounced, and for which the Klaipėda region became the second problem, after the Vilnius problem, in Lithuania's foreign policy, and the subsequent events during which attempts were made to overcome the 1930 crisis in every way.

As he prepares the third part of this impressive work, I would like to wish the author more thorough work by the editors, both in the Lithuanian language and in the topic. A few examples of obvious inaccuracies: Finland did not have a consulate general in Klaipėda, as the author states (part I, p. 109), but Latvia did, which Žalys does not note. *Freistaat*, translated from German, means a free state, rather than a free city (part II, p. 101), and so on. A subject editor knowing the German language would certainly have been helpful for the study.

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⁵ Telegramm des Staatssekretärs des Auswärtigen Amts von Schubert an die Botschaft in Paris, 31.1.1928, *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, Serie B, Bd. VIII, (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 115–117, Nr. 55.

⁶ S. Mikulicz, *Kłajpeda w polityce europejskiej 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 1976), pp. 165–167.