

Lietuvos ir Lenkijos diplomatiniai santykiai 1938–1940 metais: dokumentų rinkinys, compiled by Algimantas Kasparavičius and Paweł Libera, Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2013. 624 p. ISBN 978-9955-847-65-9

Continuing its series of publications of sources *Lietuvos užsienio politikos dokumentai*, the Lithuanian Institute of History, together with its partners in Poland (the Polish Institute of International Relations), has issued a carefully prepared collection of documents of impressive scope, comprising a brief but very significant period, especially for Lithuania, of three years and three months. The book consists of an introduction, documents, an English-language summary, and an index of names. The bright red colour of the book's cover, obviously inhibiting the depiction of the main symbols of the two states, the Vytis and the Eagle, attracts attention. Apparently, in this way, the compilers wanted to represent symbolically the very complicated, but rather tense Lithuanian and Polish relations in the last year of the existence of these countries, even when diplomatic relations had been established between them. In preparing the collection, most work fell to the well-known researcher of Lithuania's diplomat service Dr Algimantas Kasparavičius, and the Polish historian Dr Paweł Libera. The official opponents were: the diplomat and professor Alfonsas Eidintas, and Vilnius University docent Nerijus Šepetys (but the opponents from the Polish side are not listed). Conceptually and chronologically, the publication covers the situation from March 1938, i.e. from the presentation of Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania and the establishment of Lithuanian-Polish diplomatic relations, and the trends in their further genesis and development until June–July 1940, when the Bolshevik USSR resorted to open aggression against Lithuania, destroying its statehood. This is the first Lithuanian-language publication in which diplomatic sources of Lithuania and Poland are integrally provided, revealing Lithuanian foreign policy towards Poland, and Polish foreign policy towards Lithuania, on the eve and at the beginning of the Second World War. Attention is drawn to the Introduction written by the compilers that can lay claim to being a serious study. Here, in the light of the new documents gathered in this collection, based on published studies, once more, the relations between Lithuania and Poland, the attitudes and behaviour, deliberations and decisions of the drivers of the diplomat services of both countries to these same important questions for both Poles and Lithuanians, are conceptually discussed. It is essential to note that the authors of the introduction, in their intuition, do not lose sight of the European context, and especially of the threatening

neighbours: the Third Reich and Bolshevik Russia. Because the compilers did not group the collected documents by the resolution of the most important problems, but present them in a consistent chronological order, the introduction acquires even more substantial significance, even becoming a kind of methodological tool. Thus, readers of the documents, even those who are not confronted every day with history, already receive a well-thought-out, quite broad and clear, context, uncluttered by second-rate material, which will 'guide' them through the documentary texts. We also welcome the information provided by the Index of Personal Names (pp. 587–622). All the people mentioned in the documents are thoroughly recorded, and by each one of them the most important facts about their activities and their posts at that time are succinctly presented.

The collection consists of 288 archival documents, the vast majority up to now not published and original. None of the documents published are shortened. They are numbered according to chronology. Each published document has a title and an explanation. After reading the document, we can see from which archive it was taken, in what fund the original or a copy is stored, the inventory, the file and page number. If the document has already been published previously, then the publication and the number of pages are indicated. Lithuanian-language documents taken from archives in Lithuania are published without editing, in order to maintain as far as possible the authenticity of the language, so that the reader feels the spirit of the epoch. This also applies to documents translated from the Polish, French and English languages. It is interesting to note that the translators were scholars who know the languages very well and who are well acquainted with the problems of that period: Prof. Tamara Bairašauskaitė, Dr Regina Matuzevičiūtė and Dr Saulius Antanas Girnius. The compilers themselves note in the introduction that 'in the collection first of all originals were selected with international scholarly significance and strategic long-term value, up-to-now unpublished historical sources of the state or institutional archives of Lithuania and Poland, conveying best the development, issues, direction of development, progress at that time of mutual relations between the two adjacent countries, and the peculiarities of the political culture and the mentality of the two neighbouring nations, which are relevant to the idea of today's politically united Europe and the historical memory of the two nations' (p. 10).

The collection begins with the confidential report of 13 March 1938 by the Lithuanian envoy Jurgis Savickis to the minister of foreign affairs, Stasys Lozoraitis, about the Latvian standpoint on relations between Poland and Lithuania. Apparently, in the opinion of the compilers, this is the most dramatic document, which can predict the possible radical reaction of Poland, i.e. the already-known ultimatum of 17 March to Lithuania. We should assume that the Latvian foreign minister, Vilhelms Munters, had more specific information about possible Polish actions. It was very

important for Latvia, anticipating problems, to create a strong barrier out of the Baltic countries and Poland against aggressive neighbours. The minister persistently, through Savickis, asked as swiftly as possible 'for Lithuania to normalise its relations with Poland [...] Tomorrow may perhaps be too late.' Savickis personally added, 'In the opinion of the Latvians, the situation is very difficult' (p. 1, 74–75). And indeed, after the incident at the Polish-Lithuanian demarcation line on the night of 11 to 12 March, Polish pressure on the Lithuanian government began, concluding with the ultimatum on 17 March. This very important issue is abundantly documented in the collection: in effect, the first 52 documents are devoted to it, highlighting not only the circumstances of the presentation of the ultimatum, and the positions of representatives of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, but also the reaction of foreign diplomatic services and the Lithuanian diaspora to the ultimatum. Basically, the authors of the introduction note that the ultimatum had to create not only the foundations for diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland, but also to show the world the increasing political power and prestige of the Polish state, and help it to win a more important place on the European political scene. But the actions of Lozoraitis after the acceptance of the ultimatum, according to the authors, were 'part of a quietly well-thought-out and carried-out foreign policy concept', not only normalising relations with Poland, but which also 'sought to align Lithuania's foreign policy with Western countries' (p. 1, 14–15). However, even though the importance of good neighbourly relations with Poland in the conditions of that time was understood, the ultimatum deepened the wound to Lithuanian society, and its southern neighbour was not accepted as a friendly country. The historian V. Žalys in time noted that the establishment of Lithuanian-Polish diplomatic relations in the spring of 1938 did not open up possibilities to conclude a union of the Baltic States and Poland, because in 1938–1939 Poland was already more likely to be a risk factor than a force for stability in Eastern Europe.¹ We should note that internationally, the ultimatum to Lithuania did not receive an unambiguous assessment. Apart from the indignation of the Lithuanian diaspora, some foreign countries understood it as a brutal act against Lithuania. It is understood that Polish diplomats had to find explanations to justify the ultimatum. The main argument was the need for active and rapid political action, the aim of which was to consolidate agreement among East European countries, because that was the only way to slow down Germany's actions (doc. 36, 46, 49). Polish archives also reveal the prior diplomatic preparations. For example, Poland's Ambassador to Washington, Jerzy Potocki, in a secret report to the Polish foreign minister Jozef Beck on 18 January 1938, wrote that everywhere, in conversations with Americans

¹ V. Žalys, 'Lietuvos neutralumas ir jos saugumo problemos 1938–1939 m.', *Lituanistica*, no. 1 (1990), p. 43.

and people from other countries, he identifies Poland as a good example, which handles internal affairs excellently and raises the economic level of the country, in spite of the difficult conditions, and in the same way stresses the efforts to maintain good contacts not only with neighbouring countries, but also with the world's major democratic states. Potocki noted that at a meeting the US secretary of state, Cordell Hull 'praised our independence and our highly successful policies carried out by Mr Minister, as exclusive and suitable for states which in the march of totalitarianism might lose their balance.'² What was even more interesting was that the US ambassador to Poland, Drexel Biddle, during a brief visit to America, in meetings with the US president, US State Department employees, and senators, stressed Poland's great role and significance in Eastern Europe, while also drawing attention 'to Poland as a democratic state, rather than one with Fascist tendencies.' Potocki valued very highly the activities of the US ambassador, saying that his arrival in the US was 'huge and very positive propaganda for Poland'.³ Similar Polish propaganda took place in other capitals of major states. In this way, the basics were being laid to justify any steps taken by Poland in seeking peace and stability in the region of Eastern Europe, and at the same time suppressing the 'obstinate' small Lithuanian state hindering the formation of an efficient bloc of the Baltic countries and Poland.

The forced establishment and development of diplomatic relations, even though they were marked by mistrust, saw relations between the two countries develop in different directions: postal, telephone and telegraph connections were restored; and communication by road and the possibility to fly from one country to another were discussed (doc. 56, 57, 58, 83). Readers will get interesting information from the abundantly published reports to Warsaw by the first appointed Polish ambassador Franciszek Charwat. The reports reveal in detail the Polish position regarding Lithuania, the view being formed and the response to Lithuanian actions by Polish diplomats, and impressions from meetings with the political and public elites of Lithuania. All this essentially supplements the earlier memoirs of Poland's military attaché to Kaunas, Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz,⁴ reaching the Lithuanian reader, which allowed us to look at Lithuania, its society and the capital Kaunas at that time through the eyes of the statesman of a formerly hostile state.

² 18 January 1938 Poland's ambassador to Washington Jerzy Potocki in a secret report No. 3/sz-tajn. -2 'Audience with USA secretary Hull' to Poland's Foreign Minister Jozef Beck, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Warsaw), MSZ 322, 5000 (B21236), p. 2.

³ 10 February 1938 Poland's ambassador to Washington Jerzy Potocki in a secret report No. 3/sz-tajn. -5 'Meeting with Ambassador Biddle in America' to Poland's Foreign Minister Jozef Beck, *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ L. Mitkiewicz, *Kauno atsiminimai (1938–1939)*, tr. R. Žepkaitė (Vilnius, 2002), p. 196.

The collection does not ignore the fate of the Union for the Liberation of Vilnius (ULV). Although the Polish government was not happy with the activities of this union, the Lithuanian government still for a long time did not rush to liquidate it. However, there was pressure from the Polish side (doc. 99, 101, 105), until at the end of October 1938 Lozoraitis promised and committed himself to Charwat to liquidate the union. On 31 October, the Lithuanian envoy Kazys Škirpa told Beck that the Lithuanian government was properly prepared for the improvement of relations, and it would close the ULV. On 25 November, by a decision of the internal affairs minister, the ULV and its offices were closed. In December, the last number of the ULV's *Mūsų Vilnius* (Our Vilnius) was issued.⁵ This, one can say, was a sort of concession by the Lithuanian government to the Poles. But as a counterweight to that, and in a propaganda and legal sense, Vilnius was established as the Lithuanian capital in the new version of the Lithuanian Constitution published on 12 May 1938. This provoked dissatisfaction in political circles in Poland and halted cooperation. In fact, the ULV was closed only in Lithuania, and its units abroad, mainly in the United States, continued to operate. We could say that the centre of the ULV moved across the Atlantic. The activities of Lithuanians in the USA supporting the Vilnius region in 1938–1939 were treated as private initiatives. However, the emigres' activities (propaganda, commemorations, sending resolutions, collecting money) in this area were coordinated and supported, albeit informally, by Lithuania's representatives in America.

The collection has many documents on the very important issue also to Poles of relations between Lithuania and Germany during the period analysed. A number of documents clearly show Poland's fear that Nazi Germany, having torn off the Klaipėda Region from Lithuania, would make efforts to subordinate Lithuania economically and politically for its own interests (doc. 125–128, 130–133). In Polish diplomatic circles, the non-aggression pact signed between Lithuania and Germany was seen as a pact directed against Poland and the USSR.⁶ Of course, as is noted in the latest research, Lithuania's diplomats hastened to deny it, even though it was not clear whether this 'resolved Warsaw's doubts about Lithuania's commitment to neutrality.'⁷ One cannot doubt that Lithuania's diplomats took care to maintain neutrality, and did not become involved in armed conflicts. And this caution, after the beginning of the German-Polish war, forced it to wait for 'grace' from the Bolshevik USSR, from whose hands, for a tragically high price, the much-dreamed-of Vilnius, with a significantly reduced region, was recovered. Fearfully obeying the pressure from Great Britain and France, which

⁵ R. Žepkaitė, *Diplomatija imperializmo tarnyboje: Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai 1919–1939 m.* (Vilnius, 1980), p. 271.

⁶ Mitkiewicz, *Kauno atsiminimai*, p. 196.

⁷ A. Kasparavičius, *Lietuva 1938–1939 m. Neutraliteto iliuzijos* (Vilnius, 2010), pp. 104–106.

had never basically supported Lithuania's national interests, the Lithuanian government did not make use of the opportunity given by fate to take back the Vilnius region itself. This step by the Lithuanians, in a legal, moral and ethnic sense, would be justified.⁸ True, Lithuanian historiography is quite controversial on this issue. After the Red Army invaded Poland, and occupied its eastern territories, including the Vilnius region, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a diplomatic action to recover the territory and the capital Vilnius (doc. 184–191). Meanwhile, Polish political circles made efforts in the West to obtain inviolable territorial integrity for Poland (doc. 192, 193, 195, 200). Research by historians shows that the English and French only nominally supported Poland's integrity. For example, the British Foreign Office official L. Collier told the Lithuanian envoy Bronius K. Balutis: 'Maybe we will have to protest formally, but this would be only for form.'⁹ Historian Vilma Bukaitė, having analysed this issue in her dissertation, noted that the position of the French was quite favourable towards the Lithuanians having received the Vilnius region from the USSR.¹⁰ All this shows that the ruling circles of Britain and France already valued the USSR as a future ally in the war.

Documents also disclose the circumstances of the closure of the Polish Embassy and Charwat's departure (doc. 196–198). It is interesting to note that the British Embassy in Kaunas agreed to take care of the affairs of Poland and its citizens in Lithuania (doc. 199, 232). Charwat went to Sweden and settled in Stockholm, where he observed and analysed the situation in Lithuania, and wrote reports to the Polish government-in-exile in France. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish government-in-exile took care that Poland as an entity should not disappear from the international arena during the war, and that all the lost territory be returned; it paid considerable attention to the resolution of problems of military and civilian war refugees in Lithuania. A large bundle of documents demonstrates how the Lithuanian government supported war refugees and interned Polish troops: it allocated part of the national budget, sought economic and financial support from the International Red Cross and other organisations; and cared for the fate, release and return to their homeland of former Polish citizens, residents of the Vilnius region forcibly removed to the depths of the USSR.

⁸ J. Skirius, 'Ministro Juozo Urbšio laviravimas tarp Rytų ir Vakarų (1938 12 05–1940 06 16)', *Lietuvos užsienio ministrai 1918–1940*, ed. A. Gaigalaitė (Kaunas, 1999), p. 359.

⁹ J. Skirius, *Lietuvių visuomenininkas ir diplomatas Bronius Kazys Balutis (1880–1967): Tėvynei paaukotas gyvenimas* (Vilnius, 2001), p. 507.

¹⁰ V. Bukaitė, *Lietuvos Respublikos politiniai ir diplomatiniai santykiai su Prancūzija 1919–1940 m. Unpublished doctoral dissertation* (Vilnius, 2013), pp. 245–246.

The collection of documents closes in a certain sense with a lonely document; the 24 July 1940 protest by the Polish ambassador in London, Count Edward Raczyński, about the USSR for the continuing occupation of Vilnius and the Vilnius region, handed to the British foreign minister Lord Halifax (doc. 288). The term 'lonely' is used in the sense that the penultimate document is dated two months earlier, 24 May. The question thus arises whether during those two months there were no contacts between Lithuanians and Poles, or did the Polish government in exile forget Lithuania, the Vilnius region, and its citizens in Lithuania? They could not forget, because the Lithuanian state still existed practically until 15 June, and nominally after 15 June. It is known that the delegation from the Polish government in exile to the League of Nations more than once in this period reproached Lithuania, which, as a neutral state, did not have the right to accept territory from the USSR which belonged to Poland.¹¹ If not official, then personal contacts between Lithuanian and Polish diplomats were also maintained. And where are the positions of Polish politicians on the issue of the Lithuanianisation of churches in Vilnius and the parishes in the region? The raising of these and other issues is also to be commended in this collection of documents. The publication of the collection, without doubt, will contribute to the greater clarification of historical relations between the two neighbouring countries. The carefully and professionally prepared collection of documents is a great support to researchers, and the preparers of chrestomathies and textbooks, who will find answers to the main questions or resolved problems raised in diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland in the years 1938 to 1940. They will have excellent opportunities to add to the portraits of the key players, and maybe even to assess their achievements in defence of the interests of their country, nation and citizens. The published documents create reliable foundations for all of this. The 19th-century German pioneer of academic history Leopold von Ranke said that secret documents reveal best the truth of the past. One can hope that the splendid and very necessary work publishing documents of this kind will not end, and that relations between Lithuania and Poland until 1938 will receive a no less interesting collection or collections.

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¹¹ Žepkaitė, *Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa: 1939 m. spalio 27 d.–1940 m. birželio 15 d.* (Vilnius, 1990), p. 127.