

INTRODUCTION

The armistice signed on 11 November 1918 in a forest near Compiègne in Picardy in France ended more than four years of the fiercest fighting that mankind had ever seen. But it did not mean the end of the violence and the destruction for all of Europe. A political struggle for domination, inspired by national movements and socialist ideas, commenced in the collapsed empires of the Romanovs, Ottomans, Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns. Across a vast area, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, the new political elites that had emerged either during or before the war, quoting slogans about democracy, national self-determination and social equality, tried to realise their ideas to (re)establish new political entities, and these attempts met the challenge from Bolshevik Russia almost from the very beginning.

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In Western Europe, the agreement signed in Compiègne not only put an end to the fighting, but also established a rather clear new order: Germany was recognised as the loser of the war, and the powers of the Entente, with France at the head, came out as the winners. However, the situation in Eastern Europe at that time was not so unambiguous. In the huge German-occupied area, from Reval (Revel, Tallinn) to Kiev, rebellious German soldiers formed councils (Soldatenräte) on 10–13 November. They took power without causing bloodshed in Dorpat (Yur'yev, Tartu), Riga, Mitau (Mitava, Jelgava), Dünaburg (Dvinsk, Daugavpils), Kowno (Kovna, Kaunas), Wilna (Vil'na, Wilno, Vilnius), Grodno (Hrodna), Minsk and other cities. The rebellious mood also spread among sailors in Reval, Riga and Libau (Libava, Liepāja).¹ The Lietuvos Taryba (Council of Lithuania) declared Lithuania's independence on 11 December 1917, and again on 16 February 1918. On 24 February 1918, the Salvation Committee of the Ajutine Maanõukogu (Estonian Provincial Assembly) also published the Estonian Independence Manifesto. But the Estonians and the Latvians were also represented in the Vereinigter Landesrat (Provincial Assembly), albeit disproportionately, which in April 1918 was composed of representatives from the former Russian governorates of Liflandiia, Estlandiia, the city of Riga, and the island of Ösel (Saaremaa). Just a few days before the signing of the armistice at Compiègne, on 5–8 November, the Landesrat met in Riga for its last session. Together with representatives of the Duchy of Courland (Herzogtum Kurland), which was reestablished in March 1918, and authorising the joining of the areas of Latgale and Pechory (Petseri), the session decided to establish one Baltic State (Baltischer Staat), and constituted the Regentschaftsrat (Regent Council) for this purpose. In March 1918, the German Kai-

¹ For more, see KLUGE, Ulrich. *Soldatenräte und Revolution. Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19*. Göttingen, 1975, S. 94–105.

ser had already recognised both the Duchy of Courland and Lithuania (the latter under the terms of the Declaration of 11 December 1917), while on 22 September he also recognised the independence of Liflandiia, Estlandiia, Riga and Ösel. Although William II abdicated on 9 November 1918, the political entities that he recognised shared hopes for a continued existence.

As a matter of fact, the armistice altered their determination, so it would be wrong to assume that it had no influence in the east at all. Firstly, Chapter 12 of the armistice stipulated that the German army would withdraw from former Russian areas which Germany had occupied during the Great War, as soon as the Allies 'shall think the moment suitable'. However, due to the deterioration of discipline in the long war, revolution in Germany, the mood of defeat, and socialist ideas, military units began to withdraw in November, without waiting for the approval of the Allies. As a result, in November and December, the area claimed by the national governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was filled with troops that were not loyal to those governments. In addition to units of the Ober Ost deployed in the Lithuanian Military Government (Militärgouvernement Litauen), the 10th Army, retreating from present-day Belarus, moved there, whereas the even more powerful 8th Army was still deployed in Estlandiia, Liflandiia and Latgale. It is true that the plenipotentiaries (Generalbevollmächtigte) of the democratic German government, Ludwig Zimmerle in Lithuania and August Winnig in the former Baltic governorates, supported the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national governments. Zimmerle agreed that the Lithuanians should start forming their own military units. On 19 November, the Estonian Provisional Government (Eesti ajutine valitsus), led by Konstantin Päts, who had just been released from a prisoner of war camp, signed an agreement with Winnig in Riga allowing the Estonian national government to take control over the Estonian ethnographic area. Similarly, on 25–26 November, he agreed that control of the Latvian ethnographic area should be taken over by the government of Kārlis Ulmanis.² But this was a calculated move. It did not necessarily match the ambitions of the local Germans,³ let alone the war-warmed and still not entirely cooled-down expansionist ideas backed both by some members of the German army and the Ger-

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² In fact, in the latter case, it was foreseen that authority would be handed over to the Latvian Provisional Government 'in accordance with more detailed agreements' (*nach Maßgabe näherer Vereinbarungen*), while the Latvian Provisional Government was conditionally recognised only until the final decision on this matter was made by the peace conference. See VOLKMANN, Hans-Erich. Probleme des deutsch-litauischen Verhältnisses zwischen Compiègne und Versailles. *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung*, 1965, Jhg. 14, Hf. 4, S. 715–716. For the content of the agreement with the Estonian Provisional Government, see VOLKMANN, Hans-Erich. Das Deutsche Reich und die baltischen Staaten 1918 bis 1920. In *Von den baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten: Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Republiken Estland und Lettland 1918–1920*. Hrsg. von Jürgen von HEHN, Hans von RIMSCHA, Hellmuth WEISS. Marburg an der Lahn, 1977, S. 381–382.

³ For details, see TAUBE, Arved, Freiherr von. Von Brest-Litovsk bis Libau. Die baltisch-deutsche Führungsschicht und die Mächte in den Jahren 1918/1919. In *Von den baltischen Provinzen ...*, S. 70–236.

man government. For this reason, the withdrawn units had to be replaced by units made up of volunteers, committed to fighting Bolshevism and Germany's influence in the East; General of the Infantry Erich von Falkenhayn, the commander of the 10th Army, had already formulated the idea on 14 November 1918.⁴

However, the armistice did not change the situation only in this sense. Under Chapter 15 of the armistice, Germany had to annul the treaty signed with Bolshevik Russia on 3 March 1918 in Brest-Litovsk. In Russia, the supreme authority of the Bolsheviks, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, reacted immediately. As early as 13 November, the committee declared that the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 'ceased to be valid and important', noting separately that all the clauses in the treaty by which Russia denounced the withdrawal of part of its territory were no longer effective. The Bolsheviks invited the workers of Russia, Liflandiia, Estlandiia, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Finland, Crimea, and the Caucasus to decide their own destiny.⁵ What this meant in practice came to light few days later, when the 7th Army was ordered to occupy Pskov and Narva, and the newly formed Western Army received orders to move to the eastern part of present-day Belarus that was abandoned by the German 10th Army.⁶

The attempt by the Bolsheviks to take over the former 'western margins' of Imperial Russia became the most important challenge to any alternative political projects that these 'borderlands' hoped to implement. In the initial stage, the ambitions of the Bolsheviks were still blocked by the German military contingent. And this was only because it was immediately decided to replace the withdrawn troops that were no longer capable of fighting with new troops composed of volunteers, the decision was made to halt the withdrawal of the 8th and 10th armies at the request of the Entente on 4 January 1919,⁷ and the Oberkommando (Grenzschutz) Nord (Army High Command North), newly created in mid-January in East Prussia, was able to replace the Ober Ost and take over the command of the entire German military contingent. The first attempt by the 7th Army of Bolshevik Russia to occupy Narva, which was still defended by German units, on 22 November 1918 was unsuccessful. But Narva did not withstand a new attack by the Reds on 28–29 November after the Germans had handed control of the Estonian-inhabited area over to the Päts government: at that time, irregular (Kaitseliit) and regular military units loyal to the Estonian government were still being developed. In Latvia, although the Tautas Padome (Latvian People's Council), together with the newly formed Latvian government, appealed

⁴ *Darstellungen aus den Nachkriegskämpfen deutscher Truppen und Freikorps*. Bd. 1: *Die Rückführung des Ostheeres*. Hrsg. von der Forschungsanstalt für Kriegs- und Heeresgeschichte. Berlin, 1936, S. 116.

⁵ *Декреты Советской власти*. Т. IV: 10 ноября 1918 г. – 31 марта 1919 г. Москва, 1968, с. 15–18.

⁶ *Директивы Главного командования Красной армии (1917–1920)*: сборник документов. Отв. сост. Т.Ф. КАРЯЕВА. Москва, 1969, с. 172–177.

⁷ *Darstellungen aus den Nachkriegskämpfen ...*, S. 121.

to the people with the declaration of independence (Latvijas pilsoņiem!) on 18 November, the second day of its existence, the defence of the territory claimed by this government was actually left in the hands of the Germans. This was officially provided for in an agreement with Winnig, concluded on 29 December 1918. The situation was similar in Lithuania. At the end of October, the Lietuvos Valstybės Taryba (State Council of Lithuania), as well as the cabinet of Augustinas Voldemaras, formed in early November, intensified its actions to take control of the area it claimed. The army started developing, and at the end of the year, Lithuanian citizens were approached with a request to defend their country.⁸ However, before mid-1919, the defence of this area from the Bolsheviks depended largely on German military units: the Landwehr Corps, composed of the remnants of the 10th Army, and the Volunteer Reserve Corps, whose main units were the 45th Reserve Division and the 46th Saxon Volunteer Landwehr Division.

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The Red Army took Narva and Tartu at the end of 1918, and Vilnius and Riga in the first days of January 1919. As soon as it entered Narva on 29 November, the Temporary Revolutionary Committee announced the establishment in the city of the Estonian Workers' Commune, and appointed Jaan Anvelt to lead the Commune's soviet. Pēteris Stučka's provisional government, established by the Central Committee of Latvian Social-Democracy, proclaimed Soviet power in Valka in Latvia on 17 December 1918. At the same time, the Central Committee of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Communist Party appointed Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas, a former activist in the Lithuanian national movement, who had gravitated towards Bolshevism from his socialist views, to lead the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which proclaimed Soviet power in Lithuania on 19 December 1918 in Moscow (formally on 16 December in Viliejka). Vladimir Lenin encouraged the Red Army to help the pro-Bolshevik governments, as, according to him, it would deprive the 'chauvinists' of these countries of 'the possibility of treating the movement of our forces as an occupation, and creates an atmosphere conducive to their further movement'.⁹ The successful attack by the Reds threatened to entirely eliminate the influence of national governments. The army loyal to the Päts cabinet was able to keep Tallinn, and drive the Reds out of the areas inhabited by Estonians relatively quickly, with support from Finnish volunteers, the British navy, and the Pskov (Northern) Corps, a White Russian fighting force equipped by the withdrawing Germans.¹⁰ Both the Lietuvos Valstybės Taryba

⁸ | Lietuvos piliečius. *Lietuvos aidas*, 1918-12-29, Nr. 165 (213), p. 2.

⁹ Телеграмма В. И. Ленина Главкому И. И. Вацетису, 29.11.1918. In *Директивы Главного командования...*, с. 179.

¹⁰ For more on the Estonian War of Independence and its links with the Russian Civil War, see BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten. *Die Gründung der Republik Estland und das Ende des „Einen und unteilbaren Rußland“. Die Petrograder Front des Russischen Bürgerkriegs 1918–1920*. Wiesbaden, 2002; BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten. 'Foreign Rule' during the Estonian War of Independence 1918–1920: The Bolshevik Experiment of the 'Estonian Worker's Commune'. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2006, vol. 37, No 2, pp. 210–226.

and the Lithuanian government were evacuated from Vilnius to Kaunas, and had to rely on the help of the Germans. The Ulmanis cabinet was evacuated to the port of Liepāja, where its life seemed to be over after a coup by German military units and the Baltic Landeswehr on 16 April 1919 paved the way for the government of Andrievs Niedra, a pro-German and conservative priest, for a period of two and a half months.

In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the war with Bolshevik Russia later became an essential part of the story of the struggle for independence. However, in late 1918 and early 1919, the political agendas of the Reds in these countries did not seem unrealistic, and received some support from the local population. This was evident in Latvia more than elsewhere, where the Red Army was assisted by the Red Latvian Riflemen. But it was not difficult to become a Bolshevik at that time: in fact, many Bolsheviks were not consistent ideological followers of Lenin; they simply endorsed slogans which, compared to the situation before the First World War, seemed to be no less revolutionary than those declared by the governments installed by the national movements.

The articles in this collection by Jānis Šiliņš and Igor Kopõtin not only tell us about the fiercest phase of the war between the two camps, but also touch on the issue of shifting loyalties, the relevance of which does not disappear until 1920. A supporter of the national government in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, especially in the initial phase of the Red Army's invasion, could become a supporter of the Bolshevik government, and later change his or her loyalty again. Baltic Germans who fought against the Bolsheviks under the command of the Estonian national government in Estonia (in the ranks of the Baltenregiment) were not willing to do so in Latvia. A few months after Winnig announced the initiative to invite the Freikorps (volunteer corps), the Anwerbestelle Baltenland succeeded in recruiting thousands of volunteers in Germany. Combined with the military units of the German volunteers formed in Latvia (the Baltische Landeswehr and the Iron Brigade, formed from part of the German 8th Army), they tried to act independently for some time, and even managed to occupy Riga on 22 May 1919.¹¹ The Poles asserted a claim to the south-eastern part of the Lithuanian Military Governorate that was formally abolished on 20 December 1918, and in the summer of 1919 they tried to stage a coup in the rest of Lithuania, similar to what they had managed to organise in the Province of Posen (Poznań) half a year earlier, seizing this former German territory even before the Treaty of Versailles. Another prospect of loyalty was formed by the Western Volunteer Army, which brought together some White Russian formations, but mostly

¹¹ For more on political perspectives related to this attack, see WAITE, Robert G.L. *Vanguard of Nazism: the Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923*. Cambridge, MA, 1952; SCHULZE, Hagen. *Der Oststaat-Plan 1919. Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1970, Jhg. 18, Hf. 2, S. 123–163; SAMMARTINO, Annemarie H. *The Impossible Border. Germany and the East, 1914–1922*. Ithaca and London, 2010, pp. 45–70.

German military units that joined it in July 1919, after their defeat at Cēsis (Wenden, Võnnu). In fact, it was only in 1920 that it became clear that all 'alternative projects' would not be implemented in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Soviet Russia concluded treaties in 1920: in February with the Estonian, in July with the Lithuanian, and in August with the Latvian national governments (the latter returned to Riga only after the Armistice of Strazdumuiža [Strasdenhof] was signed on 3 July 1919, although the Western Volunteer Army expelled it temporarily in October–November). Nonetheless, it did not guarantee fully the security of the states that these governments were now beginning to create. This is evidenced by the documents published in the sources section of this collection. By taking the case of Lithuania, the authors of the introduction to this section raise the question whether the struggle for independence actually ended in 1920 (and if not, when), a question which, although perhaps to a lesser extent, is also relevant to Latvia and Estonia. Three articles in the collection (by Lina Kasparaitė-Balaišė, Waldemar Rezmer and Zenonas Norkus) discuss the Lithuanian case as well, but they deal with aspects relating to the security issue, which were also characteristic of Estonia and Latvia.

In interwar Lithuania, the issue of security was different for two reasons. Firstly, the fact that there was no formal peace treaty with Poland after the Lithuanian-Polish war broke out in mid-1920. Lithuania called its 525-kilometre border with Poland a 'temporary administrative line', and did not open diplomatic relations, at least officially, with its southeast neighbour until 1938. The military operation in the Vilnius area led by General Lucjan Żeligowski in the autumn of 1920, which resulted in the Polish occupation of the city that Lithuania considered its capital, promoted deliberations and agitation for 'the liberation of Vilnius' in Lithuania for 19 years. The analysis of Lithuanian military strategy during the interwar period shows that in the 1920s, Poland was considered to be the only potential enemy. This strategy implicated not only defensive but also offensive operations. Of course, they were anticipated only in the event of a conflict in the wider region. It was believed that Poland's eastern border would inevitably change in the future, for it exceeded its ethnographic boundary by about 200 kilometres, and Poland would not be able to contain millions of Ukrainians and Byelorussians for long. It was especially hoped that the Lithuanians would get Vilnius and Gardinas (Hrodna) back as the result of an eventual conflict between the Poles and the Ukrainians. All this led to the fact that in Lithuania, the Treaty of Moscow, which was concluded with Soviet Russia in 1920, was not considered the end of the struggle by the nation-state, and that for a long time Poland, and not the USSR, was considered the main threat.¹² The late stage of

¹² For more on the assessment of military threats in Lithuania in the interwar period, and on Lithuanian operations plans, see JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. Lietuvos kariuomenės „R“ planas (1939–1940 m.). *Istorija*, 2014, t. XCIII, nr. 1, p. 5–47; JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. „Mažųjų kariuomenių“ galia ir paramilitarizmas. *Tarptukario Lietuvos atvejis*. Klaipėda, 2014, p. 54–78, 299–329, 476–493.

planning a conflict with this threat is revealed by one of the sources published in this collection, the Lithuanian Armed Forces Operation Plan No 3 'L' (for Lenkija, Poland). Hence, unlike Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania saw the USSR as an ally, despite underground communist activities, and it remained so until the autumn of 1939.

The second factor that determined the exceptional state of Lithuania's security was the Klaipėda (Memel) issue. In 1923, the Lithuanian government succeeded in implementing a military and diplomatic operation to annex Klaipėda. Nevertheless, it did not succeed in integrating the autonomous Klaipėda region, where it had relatively little support among the local population. Therefore, the struggle to establish itself in Klaipėda, and the fight against German domination of the region, was seen as an integral part of the struggle by the Lithuanian nation-state throughout the interwar period. Of course, the struggle had to mobilise the internal resources of the country primarily for the cultural entrenchment of Lithuanians in Klaipėda. Not until 1933–1934, when the National Socialists usurped power in Germany, and control over the situation in Klaipėda was rapidly slipping out of the hands of the Lithuanian government, did Lithuania begin to prepare for a military conflict with Germany.

Latvia and Estonia believed in Poland's 'super powers', and estimated clearly that the main threat for the future came from the east, from the USSR. In the late 1930s, Latvia was already expecting possible German military action, and prepared Operation Plan 'D' (for Dienvidi, South), under which it prepared to defend itself on the banks of the River Daugava. However, it seems that Operation Plan 'A' (for Austrumi, East) was much more relevant to Latvia. This foresaw the defence in Latgale, maintaining a line along Lake Lubāns and the River Aiviekste. Even though Estonia also recognised the potential threat from Germany, it expected a war with the USSR as well: the Estonians intended to defend themselves along a border marked by a line of lakes, so that they would only need to concentrate their land forces on the Narva and Petseri (Pechory) sections. They considered how to block the Gulf of Finland with a barrage of mines and naval artillery in cooperation with Finland, thus 'blocking' the Soviet navy in Kronstadt. Nevertheless, although Estonia and Latvia both understood the main threat as the same, and even signed an agreement on a defence union on 1 November 1923, they failed to harmonise their defence interests,¹³ whereas the possibility for a wider coalition in the region stretching from Poland to Finland was destroyed by General Żeligowski's military operation in Vilnius.

Despite their differences, it was clear to the governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that the 'stability' brought by the treaties of 1920 might be temporary. In Estonia, this foreboding was fuelled further by the unsuccessful attempt by the com-

¹³ Cf. SALO, Urmas. Estimation of Security Threats and Estonian Defence Planning in the 1930s. *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 2008, vol. 12, pp. 35–74; JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. „Mažųjų kariuomenių“ galia..., p. 312–319.

munists to stage a coup in December 1924. Simultaneously, the Lithuanians were thinking along the following lines: 'In the event of war, we would be threatened with a lethal blow, and no one will save us from it, just as no one saved Georgia.'¹⁴ (This refers to the invasion of Georgia by Soviet Russia and Turkey in 1921, and the partition of its territory.) As a result, all three 'Baltic countries', and Finland, prepared for a future conflict, not only by investing in their armed forces, and not just by planning exactly how their troops would defend their territory, but also by strengthening paramilitary organisations that would be able to defend the idea of the nation-state. All these countries developed paramilitary forces that tried to involve as many citizens as possible in the country's defence. On the eve of the Second World War, these forces accounted for 3 to 9 per cent of the entire population. National militarism was promoted, and the threat of war and the need to prepare for it were constantly recalled.

For instance, the Lithuanian territorial defence system, which was developed actively throughout the 1930s, assumed that a future war would be total and inclusive. Therefore, it emphasised the importance of guerrilla warfare, and developed military training accordingly.¹⁵ These skills were revealed clearly during the uprising of June 1941, and the anti-Soviet guerrilla resistance of 1944–1953. Of course, if we compare it with the interwar concept, the different conditions led to some changes to the guerrilla action. However, it is important to study the partisan resistance of 1944–1953 in Lithuania precisely because, among other things, it helps us to understand the methods of warfare developed by the Lithuanian armed forces during the interwar period. That explains why this book includes an article by Gediminas Petrauskas, Aistė Petrauskienė and Vyktintas Vaitkevičius which at first glance belongs to an entirely different context in time and warfare.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the societies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia knew what the future war would be like, and what the fighting and the economic conditions would be like, not from written works but from their own experience: they had all survived the Great War and their own wars of independence. The foreboding of the unfinished war, a future war, a war that had to be prepared for, permeated not only groups of professional officers and active servicemen, but also a large part of the paramilitarised society. This explains why the words pronounced by Marshal Ferdinand Foch after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (This is not a peace. It is an armistice for twenty years) could have been understood rather literally in the interwar period by the 'Baltic' people, in spite of the completely different context.

¹⁴ DZŪKŲ PARTIZANAS. Mūsų kovos būdai. *Kardas*, 1925-06-01, nr. 10, p. 5–6.

¹⁵ Cf. JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. The Concept of Guerrilla Warfare in Lithuania in the 1920s–1930s. *Baltic Region*, 2012, No 2 (12), pp. 32–43; JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. „Vieni vieni“: šaulių rengimas partizaniniam karui 1924–1940 m. Lietuvoje. *Istorija*, 2012, t. LXXXVI, p. 11–24.

During the period between the two world wars, the new political entities that emerged in the space between Germany and the USSR were seen by these two countries as weak, dependent, menacing, limitrophe, marginal or borderland states (Randstaaten), lost territories. This was especially true of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. When Germany and the USSR divided the region into spheres of influence in August 1939 a conventional war (the Polish campaign) began, which had been expected by many. It involved the same people, territories, roads and cities. During the Second World War, the German generals repeatedly looked back in their diaries and memoirs to the years 1914 and 1915, when they had fought on the Russian front as junior officers, unintentionally joining the two world wars into one; just as if there had been no peace, merely a respite for regrouping and consolidating forces...

Vasilijus Safronovas and Vytautas Jokubauskas