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The „hard" borders in the Baltic Sea Region, 1917-1922

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Abstract

The British sociologist Gerard Delanty's conception of "boundary and identities of exclusion" in European history shall be remembered when approaching "hard borders." This concept takes into account the "cultural dynamics of self-identification through exclusion" and is germane when considering the interwar interactions between the countries of the Baltic area and Russia. The works of Reece Jones and Alec Murphy on "the hardening of borders" and "the fetishization of territory" as national traits are equally pertinent to the perception of frontiers during the duration of the 20th century, including the years 1917 to 1922. In every occasion in which war and violence (ultimatums, threats of force) were employed in the Baltic Sea Region to award borders in favor of one state or another or to settle accounts, the arrangements were not permanent and a cycle of warfare with terrible effects on local people followed. The combination of universalist ideologies (such as Communism) with imperial goals frequently resulted in both domestic and international conflicts. Civil unrest (sisällissota) *and clashes with and between foreign troops (Russian and German) marked Finland's journey to independence. Comparable conditions existed in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In each case, the upshot was not just an obsession with boundaries, but also an increase in otherness and loss of life.*

Rezumat

Concepția sociologului britanic Gerard Delanty despre „granițele și identitățile excluderii" în istoria europeană trebuie readusă în memorie atunci când este abordată problematica „frontierelor dure (hard)". Acest concept ia în considerare „dinamica culturală a autoidentificării prin excludere" și este relevant atunci când se analizează interacțiunile interbelice dintre țările din zona baltică și Rusia. Lucrările lui Reece Jones și Alec Murphy despre „întărirea granițelor" și „fetișizarea teritoriului" ca trăsături naționale sunt la fel de pertinente pentru percepția frontierelor pe aproape întreaga durată a secolului al XX-lea, inclusiv în anii 1917-1922. În fiecare caz în care războiul și violența (ultimatumuri, amenințări cu forța) au fost folosite în Regiunea Mării Baltice pentru a atribui granițe în favoarea unui stat sau a altuia sau pentru a regla conturile dintre acestea, aranjamentele nu au fost permanente și a urmat un ciclu vicios cu efecte teribile asupra civililor. Combinația dintre ideologiile universaliste și obiectivele imperiale a dus frecvent la conflicte atât interne, cât și internaționale. Tulburările civile (sisällissota) *și ciocnirile cu și între trupele străine (ruse și germane) au marcat drumul Finlandei către independență. Condiții comparabile au existat în Estonia, Letonia și Lituania. În fiecare caz, rezultatul nu a fost doar o obsesie pentru granițe, ci și o creștere a alterității și pierderi de vieți omenești.*

Keywords: Baltic Sea Region, 20th century, hard borders, hardening of borders, border and identities of exclusion, fetishization of territory
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Introduction

In the previous issue of the *Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, I debated the "soft" border approaches in the Baltic Sea Region between the breakup of the Swedish-Norwegian union and the upheavals of the Second World War, a time when many countries in this region lost their independence or large portions of their territories.[1] I looked into several occasions in which tensions erupted in the area but were resolved without resorting to violence and offered an explanation as to why this occurred in each of these situations. In this article I will examine the international crises that were handled by the use of threats and armed force. The cases that follow will also indicate that the likelihood of a repetition of a crisis scenario increases when ideological opposition or violent identity disputes are added to the territorial kernel that causes the conflict between nations. Staying in the Baltic Sea Region, I will first explore the conflicts which opposed Finland and the Baltic states to Soviet Russia in 1918-1920. Then, I will examine the interwar Vilnius crisis, which combined the characteristics of a territorial and an identity confrontation.

When dealing with „hard borders", we must not overlook the concept of "border and identities of exclusion" in European history that was proposed by the British sociologist Gerard Delanty. This notion takes into consideration the "cultural dynamics of self-identification through exclusion," and it is relevant when investigating the relationships between the nations of the Baltic region and Russia during the interwar period.[2] „How do we locate and conceptualize territory and borders in a world characterized by the conflicting, yet coexisting, phenomena of globalization, populist-nationalist movements, and de/re-territorialization?" is the central

[1] Silviu Miloiu, „The „soft" borders in the Baltic Sea Region, 1905-1940," *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 13, issue 2 (2021): 85-120.

[2] Gerard Delanty, " The Frontier and Identities of Exclusion in European History , " *History of European Ideas* , 22, no. 2 (1996): 93, 95-96.

question posed in a recent article co-authored by a number of distinguished specialists in border studies. The article alludes to Reece Jones and Alec Murphy's studies on "the hardening of borders" and "the fetishization of territory" as national characteristics.[3] In point of fact, „the hardening of borders" has been a more widespread phenomena in the Baltic Sea Region at least since the late 1880s, when the naval competition between Russia and Germany first got underway.[4] There were, however, deviations in this regard as a result of international and domestic circumstances.[5] This damaged - and continues to do so in light of the Russian attack in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and Russia-Belarusian threats on the Baltic nations - the ideal of the cross-border mobility of goods, people, and ideas, which, twenty years ago, was still considered to be achievable.[6] Thus, "the hardening of borders" and "the fetishization of territory" should be recalled as crucial concepts to comprehending the situation in the Baltic Sea Area prior, during, and after the First World War.

After the First World War, when the region self-perceived itself as a European border zone, each newly established nation in the Baltic region attempted to construct the most impenetrable barrier possible between themselves and Russia (the Soviet Union). In the democratic quarters of Europe in the 1920s and later in the right-leaning circles, some elite groups

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[3] Anssi Paasi, Md Azmeary Ferdoush, Reece Jones, Alexander B. Murphy, John Agnew, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, Juliet J. Fall, Giada Peterle, „Locating the territoriality of territory in border studies," *Political Geography* 95 (2022).

[4] Michael Epkenhans, „1870–1914: A military empire turns to the sea," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, eds. A. Mombauer & W. Deist, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 16-26; Idem, „Wilhelm II and 'his' navy, 1888–1918," 12-36.

[5] Karsten Brüggemann mentions, for example, the views of Russian nationals in the Baltic region, such as Anton S. Budilovich and Ivan Vysotskii, who, in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, advocated for a hardening of Russian borders in the eastern Baltic and the need to tighten the grip in these areas by radical means that included colonization, Karsten Brüggemann „Defending the Empire in the Baltic Provinces: Russian Nationalist Visions in the Aftermath of the First Russian Revolution," in *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation. Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905-1915*, eds. Darius Staliūnas, Yoko Aoshima, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022), 327–356.

[6] Marta Grzechnik, "Making Use of the Past: The Role of Historians in Baltic Sea Region Building", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012): 4.

attributed positive or even heroic connotations to belonging to a border region, sometimes emphasizing the characteristics of an outpost of European culture and civilization and other times emphasizing the position of a cordon sanitaire preventing the export of revolution.[7]

1. Finland: statehood, internal strife and the hardening of borders

Part of the Russian Empire since the 18th century and dominated by foreign elites (Germans in the case of Latvia and Estonia and Polish in the case of Lithuania), the three Baltic states declared independence from Russia in 1918 in the context of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Civil War, the new concepts of self-determination heralded by Wilson and Lenin, and the emergence of their national consciousness in the second half of the 19th century. Finland had been the only province in Russia to enjoy real autonomy, and its separation from it on December 6, 1917, would be based on the already functioning institutions of the Grand Duchy. As a consequence, I will first analyze the situation in Finland, which is unique in terms of both its history and its institutions, before moving on to the other Baltic states.

Finland's independence must be viewed in the context of both the chaos in the Russian Empire and the schism between right-wing and left-wing ideology that almost cut Finnish society in half. When the Finnish Parliament (Eduskunta) gathered on December 6, 1917 to discuss the proclamation of Finland's independence, it had both the government's and the Social Democrats' pronouncements before them. The first was ultimately accepted by a vote count of 100 to 88.[8]

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[7]See also Iver B Neumann, "The Geopolitics of Delineating Russia and Europe." The Creation of the `Other 'in European and Russian Tradition", in *Is Russia a European power? The Position of Russia in a new Europe*, eds. Tomi Casier, Katlijn Malfliet (Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1998), 34-35; Kalervo Hovi, *Alliance De Revers: Stabilization of France's Alliance Policies in East Central Europe 1919-1921* (Turku: Turun Yliopiston julkaisuja, 1984); Kalervo Hovi, *Cordon sanitaire or barrière de l'est? : the emergence of the New French Eastern European alliance policy, 1917-1919* (Turku: Turun Yliopiston julkaisuja, 1975).

[8] Osmo Jussila, Seppo Hentilä and Jukka Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State. A Political History of Finland since 1809* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), 103.

Since then, the Senate started working to secure international recognition for the country's new independent status. The governments to whom it had addressed, however, conditioned this decision on Russia's approval of Finland's independence. In this respect, the Nordic countries and Germany specifically asked that the Council of People's Commissars be approached. The Senate, despite its mistrust, resolved to send the head of the bourgeois group, Pehr Evind Svinhufvud (1861-1944), to Lenin to request the acknowledgment of Finnish state independence. Surprisingly, these efforts were successful, with the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party recognizing the independence of the new state on December 27. Willing to show the Soviet government's dedication to the principles of national self-determination, which it had formally declared soon after its installation, Lenin authorized the recognition of his new state as early as December 31, 1917. The Council of People's Commissars, as well as Commissioners Leon Trotsky or Joseph Stalin acknowledged Finnish independence "in full agreement with the principle of national self-determination." The practical steps arising from Finland's independence from Russia were to be dealt with by a special committee comprised of members from both parties.[9] The second document of recognition was dated January 5, 1918 (December 23rd, 1917, in the Julian calendar). It was signed by its chairman, J. Sverdlov, and validated the decision made by the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies the day before. Stalin, the People's Commissar for Nationalities, was incensed when he told the Central Executive Committee that, due to the inactivity of the Social Democrats, Soviet Russia was forced to offer recognition of independence to "bourgeois parties." In the Soviet socialist ideology, accepting Finland's independence

[9] „In reply to the request of the Finnish government concerning the recognition of the independence of the Finnish republic, the Soviet of People's Commissars, in full agreement with the principle of national self-determination, has decided to present the Executive Central Committee with the proposal : (a) to recognise the political independence of the Finnish republic. (b) to organise, in agreement with the Finnish government, a special commission of representatives of both parties to deal with the practical measures necessitated by the separation of Finland from Russia", in D. G. Kirby, *Finland and Russia: 1808-1920-from Autonomy to Independence a Selection of Documents* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), 210-212.

had anti-revolutionary overtones.[10] As we will see, however, freedom of self-determination for Lenin meant that small nations would eventually voluntarily join the Russian Socialist Federation. Thus, Lenin expected the Finns would submit this application among the earliest.[11]

Despite the Diet's decision on January 8, 1918, to proclaim Finland neutral, the presence of Russian troops in Finland demonstrated that the country's future rested on both Russia's decisions and the ultimate fate of World War I.[12] In January 1918, around 40,000 Russian troops had remained in Finland. Midway through January 1918, the Bolshevik government informed the head of the military section of the Russian Regional Committee in Finland that this forum should continue to serve as the governing body for the Russians in Finland. As a consequence of Russian efforts to postpone its work, the Russian-Finnish Joint Committee tasked with addressing practical issues emerging from the split of the two nations was unable to commence its duties.[13]

In 1918, the Social Democrats alternated between intra- and extra-parliamentary methods of political struggle. Specifically, the dissolution of the Diet, which the Social Democrats deemed illegal and which was supported by bourgeois parties, radicalized the Social Democratic movement, which shifted its emphasis from the legalist to the revolutionary strife based on class consciousness.[14] Finally, by the end of January 1918, a deadly civil war between the right and the left broke out, claiming around 30,000 lives, including approximately 25,000 Social Democrats.[15] The Senate, the White Army of General Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, the young

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[10] Jukka Pastela, *Finnish communism under Soviet totalitarianism. Oppositions within the Finnish Communist Party in Soviet Russia 1918-1935* (Helsinki: Kikimora Publications, 2003), 62.

[11] „The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic (now general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole: if so, it must be rejected", Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London: Merlin Press, 1975), 271-272.

[12] Juhani Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe. The early years of independence, 1917-1939* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallainen Seura, Studia Historica, 1988), 131.

[13] Jason Edward Lavery, *The History of Finland* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2006), 86.

[14] Marvin Rintala, " The Problem of Generations in Finnish Communism," *American Slavic and East European Review* 17, No. 2 (Apr., 1958): 193.

[15] Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 111-112.

Finnish volunteers (*jägers*) trained in Germany, and the German Ostsee Division of Brigadier General Gustav Adolf Joachim Joachim Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz led the right to victory in this war[16], while the left fought under the leadership of the Delegation of People's Commissars (*Suomen kansanvaltuuskunta*) and was supported by a portion of the Russian soldiers who were on the territory of Finland.[17]

During the Finnish Civil War (*Suomen sisällissota*), both sides concluded accords with surrounding great powers. The Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic and Soviet Russia reached a treaty on March 1, 1918, wherein Finland relinquished part of the Karelian Isthmus to Russia and guaranteed Russian connections with Sweden on its territory.[18] The pact was heralded by Bolshevik officials as the first of its kind to be ratified by two socialist republics, although discussions for its completion were not as simple as official speeches and press releases implied. Citizenship and the possession over the northern area named Petsamo (Pechenga), which allowed Finland access to the Arctic Ocean, were the two most obvious difficulties. In the end, the Finns decided to establish minimal requirements for awarding Finnish citizenship to Russians, while Russia returned Petsamo to Finland. Lenin expressed surprise that a revolutionary government displayed such bourgeois sensibilities.[19]

In response, the Finnish delegation in Berlin signed three agreements with Germany: a treaty, a commerce and marine pact, and a secret guarantee that Finland would compensate Germany for any military assistance-related expenditures. The March 7 pact prohibited Finland from granting advantages to other parties without prior consultation with Germany.[20] The commerce and navigation agreement stipulated that Finland would provide preferential commercial treatment for Germany. An exchange of diplomatic

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[16] Holger H. Herwig, "German Policy in the Eastern Baltic Sea in 1918: Expansion or Anti-Bolshevik Crusade?", *Slavic Review* 32, No. 2 (Jun., 1973): 341-343.

[17] Sirkka Arosalo. „Social Conditions for Political Violence: Red and White Terror in the Finnish Civil War of 1918", *Journal of Peace Research* 35, No. 2 (Mar., 1998): 147-166

[18] Paasivirta, 143.

[19] Pastela, 66-67.

[20] The content of the treatise in Kirby, document 139, 235-236.

notes was to facilitate the reimbursement of expenses. Finland was obligated to provide Germany, at its request, the possibility of establishing naval bases wherever in Finland, transforming it into a German military stronghold.[21] These documents were accepted by Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, the political leader of the Whites.[22] With the support of Germany, by article 6 of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, signed on March 3, 1918, Russia pledged to cease its agitation and propaganda directed against the Finnish government and public institutions. The Russian forces were to withdraw immediately from Finland and its territory.[23] Due to ice, only the Russian Baltic fleet was stuck in Helsinki.[24]

At the conclusion of the Civil War, the predominant view among bourgeois groups in Finland was that Germany would emerge triumphant in the global conflict, with the Finnish Whites eager to gain the confidence and sympathy of the continent's future rulers. Regent Svinhufvud initiated preparations for a military alliance with General von der Goltz. The Senate then requested German assistance in „crafting" the Finnish army. Approximately one hundred German officers participated in the formation of the Finnish military. Initially, a German commander, Colonel von Redern, and a Finnish officer, Colonel N.G. Procopé, shared leadership of the new army. In August, Redern took complete command of the force.[25] In addition, the nomination of a German prince to the office of King of Finland was proposed. One of the advantages of a monarch's position as an outsider was the capacity to serve as a mediator between opposing political groups, which added to the image that he was unbiased.[26] Initial plans considered Oscar, the son of the Kaiser. However, Wilhelm II's advisors believed that the

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[21] United States, *Proceedings of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Conference. The Peace Negotiations between Russia and the Central Powers. 21 November, 1917-3 March, 1918* (Washington: United States. Department of State, 1918), 27-41.

[22] Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 117.

[23] John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Forgotten Peace, Brest-Litovsk, March 1918* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 271, 406-407.

[24] Tony Griffiths, *Scandinavia* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1993), 137.

[25] Paasivirta, 153.

[26] Jason Lavery, " Finland 1917-1919: Three Conflicts, One Country." *Scandinavian Review* 94, No. 3 (Spring 2007): 13.

situation in Finland was too unstable to undertake such a step. Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse (who was given the name Väinö I) was requested to take the throne of Finland at the end of August 1918. The prince was chosen king of Finland on October 9, ironically the same day Germany initiated armistice negotiations with the Entente.[27] Soon, he became a liability for Finnish foreign policy. Prince Friedrich Karl understood Finland's sensitive position on December 14 and announced his resignation with dignity and discretion. Two days after his resignation, German forces departed Helsinki.[28]

In August 1918, Finland and Soviet Russia commenced peace negotiations in Berlin to discuss East Karelia and the Petsamo area. East Karelia had a population of 200,000 in 1897, of whom 60 percent were Karelians and 40 percent were Russians. Karelia was of symbolic and cultural significance to the Finns, but its idiosyncrasies made its incorporation into Finland challenging. According to Anatole Mazour, the most significant obstacle was the schism between Russian and Swedish influence. This province had been under the control of Russia for around eight centuries. In addition, Karelia was Orthodox, while Finland was Lutheran. Since 1809, West Karelia had been acquired by Finland, while East Karelia had remained a part of Russia.[29] Some Karelian groups resolved to separate from Russia on July 13, 1917, with the support of Finnish nationalists, while the Uhtua National Assembly chose to merge with Finland on March 17, 1918, an internationally unrecognized vote.[30] Three weeks of discussions resulted in a failure. A Finnish border battalion crossed the frontier into Russia in East Karelia at the end of August and arrived at Repola, whose inhabitants had opted to join Finland. A volunteer mission from northern Finland was organized to take over Petsamo in early April.

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[27] *Helsingin Sanomat* , special issue, http://www2.hs.fi/extrat/digilehti/kuukausiliite/arkisto/2002/08 (accessed 28.10.2010).

[28] Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, 124-125.

[29] Anatole Mazour, *Finland between East and West*, D. (Princeton, New Jersey, Toronto, London, New York: Van Nostrand Company, 1956), 62-63.

[30] Thorsten Kalijarvi, "The Question of East Karelia," *The American Journal of International Law* 18, No. 1 (Jan., 1924): 94.

However, upon encountering British forces in Murmansk, the Finns chose to withdraw. Finland had sent similar expeditions to Russian Karelia in the following months as well.[31]

The wartime defeat of Germany had a dramatic effect on the Finnish political landscape. Professor Lauri Ingman (1868-1934) formed a new pro-coalition liberal administration, and Regent Svinhufvud resigned and was replaced by General Mannerheim on December 12. The democratic triumph in the March 1919 elections convinced countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States to recognize Finland internationally. Despite the electoral setback of pro-German political parties, Finland was still awaiting approval from the European Great Powers to act militarily in Russia and conquer Russian Karelia. In April 1919, a 1,000-member Finnish volunteer army reached East Karelia at Aunus (Olonets). They arrived to the Syvävi River.[32] Mannerheim considered the liberation of Estonia necessary because the territory of Estonia, once in the hands of anti-Soviet forces, facilitated an assault on Petrograd, a policy that persisted with varying degrees of vigor throughout 1919.[33]

In the spring of 1919, Nikolai Yudenich, one of the leaders of the White Russians, settled in Helsinki to recruit Russian officers for his army. He sought to convince the Finnish government to use the 100,000 soldiers Finnish force to attack Petrograd. Yudenich even assured Mannerheim in June that Russia would be willing to acknowledge Finland's independence, grant the right of self-determination to East Karelia, and provide the region with cultural autonomy. In addition, the Yudenich promised Mannerheim that he would transfer command of the campaign to seize the old Russian imperial capital to the Finnish general. The regent of Finland had the opportunity to play a significant historical card. The majority of the new Eduskunta backed the annexation of East Karelia, while solely extreme nationalists supported the assault on Petrograd. The opposition believed

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Kalervo Hovi, *Interessenspharen Im Baltikum: Finnland Im Rahmen Der Ostpolitik Polens, 1919-1922* (Helsinki: SHS, 1984), 40-43.

[33] Heino Arumäe, *Eesti ja Soome suhted 1920-1925: dokumentide kogumik* (Tallinn: Eesti Riigiarhiiv, 1997), 12-70.

that Mannerheim would delay approval of the newly approved constitution, disband Eduskunta, and call new elections. In the meanwhile, the Finns would expel the Russians from Saint Petersburg. This was the coup plot planned by the so-called Activists in early July. Mannerheim endorsed the plan, but made it plain that he required the support of the Western countries prior to an invasion of St. Petersburg. The Finnish conservatives opposed the agreement, and Britain and France's assurances remained ambiguous. In addition, Alexander Kolchak, the supreme ruler of Russia, rejected the arrangements because he would not tolerate a partitioned Russia. Therefore, on July 17, 1919, Mannerheim approved the Constitution.[34]

At the moment, realistically, the non-socialist coalition headed by Rafael Erich of the National Coalition Party, which came to power in March 1920, saw the conclusion of peace with Russia as imperative. In June, peace negotiations with the Soviets started in Tartu. The Finnish delegation was led by Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1870-1956) and included delegates from each parliamentary party. Soviet Russian delegation was headed by Jaan Antonovich Bērzinš.[35] Finland made extensive territorial claims, demanding a boundary from Lake Ladoga to the White Sea through Lake Onega. This meant that East Karelia, Petsamo, and the Kola Peninsula would become part of Finland. As a concession, only the right to self-determination was required for East Karelia. The Finns looked in vain for assistance from the Western Powers and Poland in their endeavors. All of their requests were denied by the Russians. The Soviet delegation argued that the Karelian people had already been given sovereignty in the Karelian Workers' Commune, which was founded on June 8 under the leadership of Finnish communist Edvard Gylling (1881-1938).[36] On the Petsamo area and numerous islands in the Gulf of Finland, both of which were vital to the Russian defense of Petrograd, it

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[34] Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 663; Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 130-131.

[35] The first meeting of the negotiators, in which they expressed their views, took place on June 12, 1920, see Kirby, document 151, 253-255.

[36]This was exactly the day when the Finnish delegation had arrived in Tartu, Kalevi Holsti *The Origins of the Finnish foreign policy, 1918-1922. Rudolf Hoslti's role in politics* (Microfilm, Ann Arbor University Microfilms International, Stanford University, 1961), 233.

was almost impossible to strike an agreement. On August 12, an armistice agreement based on the status quo ante was signed.[37] President Kaarlo Juho Ståhlberg (1865-1952) opposed concessions to the Russians, although Paasikivi was ready to bargain. In July, the negotiations halted, but by August, both parties were eager to make compromises. Secret negotiations between the Social Democrat Väinö Tanner and the Soviet delegation's leadership were crucial to achieving a compromise settlement. On October 14, 1920, the peace treaty was signed in Tartu, Estonia.[38]

This treaty reaffirmed Finland's independence and provided it with Petsamo and an Arctic Ocean corridor.[39] Nonetheless, Helsinki was required to surrender the Repola and Porajarvi districts it had seized the year before (Article 10 provided for the withdrawal of Finnish troops within 45 days). On the other hand, Soviet Russia promised amnesty to the residents of these territories. They had one month to leave Russian territory, and those who remained were given certain rights and liberties (art. 11). Instead, Russia consented to Finland's acquisition of Petsamo. In addition, the Finnish government established the boundary barely 30 kilometers from Petrograd and Kronstadt - a provision that would cost Helsinki dearly in the future.[40] Although the Finns demolished some of the fortifications they had constructed in the area, this circumstance fueled a persistent (or at least potential) state of hostility with Russia. Moscow regarded this border as a danger to its security interests. The process, which was marked by unprecedented ideological and security tensions, led to the "hardening of borders" and to "border and identities of exclusion" largely known as *cordon sanitaire*.

The Social Democratic Party and the Progress Party, as well as individual members of the National Coalition Party and the Agrarian Party, supported the Tartu treaty in parliament. However, the far right opposed it.

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[37] Ibid., 246.

[38] The text of the treatise in Kirby, document 152, 256.

[39] Ståhlberg considered obtaining the Petsamo region to be of the utmost importance and had been willing to make concessions in Karelia, see Paasivirta, 150.

[40] Väinö Tanner, *Tarton rauha, sen syntyvaiheet ja-vaikeudet* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi, 1949).

The pact would be seen by the nationalist right as a sign of treachery against the legacy of 1918.[41] A former Repola police chief committed suicide after being ordered to withdraw within Finland's new boundaries.[42] This international legal document was ratified by a substantial majority of 163 to 27 on December 1, 1920, after a lengthy parliamentary deliberation.[43]

This pact represented the position of the two powers at the conclusion of the First World War, the time of its signature. On the one hand, Finland, having emerged from civil war and been internationally acknowledged, approached the bargaining table ready to make peace with the Soviets and establish a border that would be simple to defend. In contrast, Soviet Russia's maneuvering range was far shorter. The Soviet administration had crushed the whites in the civil war, just as the Finnish whites had defeated the reds. In contrast to Finland, Russia perceived itself to be encircled by foes and globally isolated. Despite the fact that the deal with Finland was deemed incapable of preserving Soviet security interests in the area, its completion resulted in a significant breach in the surrounding *cordon sanitaire*. Consequently, Kremlin was prepared to make concessions. In turn, Finland made compromises that were unpopular with its patriots. Long-term effects of this treaty were, on the Finnish side, the nationalist outbursts of youth aiming for the annexation of East Karelia, particularly those enrolled in the Karelian Academic Society (*Akateeminen Karjala-Seura*), the Lapua Movement (*Lapuan liike*). and in the Patriotic People's Movement (*Isänmaallinen kansanliike*). At the conclusion of the fourth decade, however, Soviet security concerns over the border route with Finland presented themselves with special severity. As we shall see in a future article, the end of Soviet isolation and the development of its power during this period made it intolerable for Moscow to abide by this deal. In less than two decades after the signing of the Treaty of Tartu, a new conflict broke out.

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[41] Lauri Karvonen, *From White to Blue-and-Black. Finnish Fascism in the Inter-War Era* (Helsinki, Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1988), 17.
[42] Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 138-139.
[43] Paasivirta, 226-227.

2. The emerging of Border States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the wake of World War I

The relationship between Soviet Russia and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania attributed a similar "hard" meaning to boundaries. The conditions surrounding Finland were to some extent analogous to those encompassing the Baltic states. After the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia proclaimed their independence (Estonia on February 24, Lithuania on February 16, and Latvia on November 18, 1918), and they were at a crossroads where the interests of Soviet Russia and Germany overlapped. As a consequence of Finland's unique institutional setting inside the Russian Empire, there are several differences between these two regions. They enabled Finland to take advantage of a number of governmental institutions that did not exist in the Baltic republics. In addition, the Baltic republics endured a more threatening German occupation, open involvement by the Red Army in domestic conflicts, etc.

Latvia faced a peculiar circumstance. The German-Russian front was set on the Daugava River near Riga for two years (1915-1917). During the first weeks of the war, around 20,000 Latvian troops were recruited and transported to East Prussia. By the autumn of 1915, over 10,000 Latvians had perished in combat. The German army's occupation of the western Latvian region of Courland displaced 570,000 inhabitants, who sought sanctuary in Livonia, Latvia, Estonia, or even Russia. Numerous Latvians, along with Poles and Lithuanians, were among the approximately 3 million refugees that relocated in Russia. The Latvians established the Central Committee for Refugee Relief in September 1915. In March 1917, the number of Latvian migrants on the committee was at least one million.[44]

Following the declaration of independence, Estonians and Latvians were subjected to a German occupation that was equally grievous with the preceding Tsarist and Soviet occupations. The Germans, like the Russians, were unwilling to support the national aspirations of these nations. Under these conditions, the Baltic national forces decided to send emissaries to the

[44] Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians. A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 115-116.

West in an effort to raise awareness of their right to self-determination among members of the Entente. In this respect, the most active Estonians were Ants Piip (sent to the United Kingdom), Kaarel R. Pusta (France), and Jaan Tõnisson (Scandinavia).[45] The German occupation of Estonia and Latvia depended on the support of local Baltic Germans and the new German military leadership contemplated Germanizing these newly independent republics. Among the measures taken were the reestablishment of the German domain police, the restoration of German dominance at the level of municipal administrations, the dissolution and disarmament of local military units, the closure of Baltic newspapers and associations, the persecution of local national leaders, etc. In the case of Estonia, the Maapäev (Estonian Provincial Assembly) set up a Committee of Seniors, which in turn chose a Rescue Committee consisting of three national members (Konstantin Päts, Jüri Vilms, and Konstantin Konik) deemed undesirable by the new regime. One of them, Jüri Vilms, who sought to join the Estonian delegation abroad, lost his life in still unclarified circumstances.[46] From June, Konstantin Pats was detained in Belarus until November.[47]

In April 1918, a Landesrat assembled by the military authorities in Riga (and composed of citizens of Livonia and Estonia) overwhelmingly advocated for a personal union with Prussia, despite concerns from Estonia and Latvia. The plan gained the support of the German emperor Wilhelm II. The Prussian Ministry of State strongly advocated for the incorporation of Courland, Livonia, Estonia, and Lithuania into the Reich. However, these policies were contested in Germany by the political centre and left wing, with the front reversals increasingly providing a rationale for the latter.[48] In spite of the fact that Soviet Russia ceded control of the governments of Estonia and

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[45] Jean-Jacques Subrenat, *Estonia: Identity and Independence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 116.

[46] For a long time, the Germans were held accountable for his death, but fresh evidence appears to indicate otherwise, Seppo Zetterberg, *Jüri Vilmsin kuolema: Viron varapääministerin teloitus Helsingissä 13.4.1918* (Helsinki: Otava, 1997).

[47] Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 104-106.

[48] John Hiden, and Martyn Housden, *Neighbours of Enemies?: German, the Baltic and Beyond* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 14-16.

Livonia at the end of August, it was not until November 1918 that the German authorities resolved to annex these provinces to Prussia.

Despite the negative effect played by the loss of revolutionary-era accomplishments, the German occupation paradoxically had a good function: it led to the total departure of Soviet armed troops and the elimination of the Communist organizational networks. This was highly relevant in Latvia, where Latvian internationalist communists like as Pēteris Stučka (1865-1932) initially enjoyed widespread support until a rift developed between them and the mass of the populace.[49] There were parallels and variances in the development of relations with Soviet Russia amongst the three Baltic nations, thus we will refer to them individually.

2.1. Estonia

In Estonia, both the Estonian interim government and the Tallinn Soviet government resumed their activities immediately after the armistice. The Estonian Communist leadership strongly supported the Red Army's attacks on Estonia, which began on November 22 in Narva.[50] The first assault was repelled by German forces remained in Narva. Later, the Germans abandoned the city to a feeble Estonian national army. As a consequence, on November 28, the Soviets captured Narva. The next day, an Estonian Workers' Commune headed by Jaan Anvelt was proclaimed (1884-1937). The Soviet military action, which demonstrated that Lenin's ideal of national self-determination was merely propaganda, may be seen in the light of Lenin's 12 May 1917 declaration: „we Russians must emphasise freedom to secede, while the Poles must emphasise freedom to unite."[51] This right could only be employed to achieve political independence from an oppressive regime (under the colonial control of the British, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires). Instead, independence from Soviet Russian territory was

[49] I. Ijabs, „The Nation of the Socialist Intelligentsia: The National Issue in the Political Thought of Early Latvian Socialism," *East Central Europe* 39, issues 2-3 (2012), 181-203.
[50] Hans Kruus, *Histoire de l'Estonie* (Paris: Payot, 1935), 258.
[51] Stanley W. Page, *The Formation of the Baltic States : A Study of the Effects of Great Power Politics upon the Emergence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 58.

neither conceivable nor practical. In effect, the separation had to be "in the interests of the masses."[52]

The Estonian interim government, headed by Konstantin Päts, was faced with very tough tasks: essentially, it had to create a state from nothing. On December 23, the government started working toward the formation of an Estonian army under the direction of the exceptionally skilled Colonel Johan Laidoner (1884-1953), who had recently returned from Petrograd. In December 1918, the Soviet assault continued to advance. British sailors supplied Estonians with arms and ammunition and stopped a Soviet landing at Tallinn or on the north shore owing to the assistance of a fleet of 12 ships.[53] In exchange, the Finns supplied funds to the caretaker administration and permitted the recruitment of volunteers to aid the Estonian cause.[54]

Although by the end of December 1918 the Soviets had controlled half of Estonia and by the beginning of January 1919 they were just 35 kilometers from Tallinn, the Red Army's advance was stopped. The Estonian counterattack started on January 7. Soviet army swept the Estonian area in under one month The youthful Estonian army performed well despite numerical inferiority. On January 3, 1919, for instance, 4,800 Estonians engaged against around 6,200 Soviets, the majority of whom were not Estonians (only 4 regiments were Estonian, and the remaining 31 were Russian and Latvian). Both sides subsequently boosted their numbers. A 1,000-man regiment of Estonian communists fled at the end of May 1919, along with a division commander. In the meanwhile, the Estonian army had grown to 74,500, consisting of 2,750 white Russians, 1,500 Latvians (East Baltic warriors), 300 Hungarians, and 300 Finns (during the campaign about 3,700 Finns fought on the side of national forces). In addition to Swedes and Danes, 700 Baltic Germans fought against Russian Leninists.[55]

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[52] Rudolf A. Mark, "National self-determination, as understood by Lenin and the Bolsheviks," *Lithuanian Historical Review*, no. 13 (2008): 28-29.

[53] Donald Stoker, *Britain, France and the Naval Arms Trade in the Baltic, 1919 -1939. Grand Strategy and Failure* (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), 21.

[54] Subrenat, 116.

[55] Raun, 107-108.

All through the spring and summer of 1919, sporadic combat persisted on the Eastern Front. In June, Estonian soldiers also had to contend with Baltic German armed formations known as the Landeswehr. On June 23 in Cēsis in northern Latvia, the Estonians defeated the Landeswehr and the Iron Division of the Baltic and Reich Germans headed by General Rüdiger von der Goltz.[56] Subsequently, the Entente countries exerted pressure on the Estonian government to assist white General Nikolai Yudenich in capturing Petrograd. In Estonia, there was little remorse for Yudenich, who continued to yearn for a complete restoration of Russia. Therefore, the Estonians merely provided him with symbolic assistance, and they were not particularly upset when he was defeated in November 1919 by the Soviets. By resolution of the Estonian Constituent Assembly, his soldiers that retreated to Estonia were disarmed and imprisoned. In July 1919, Viktor Kingissepp, the communist leader of Estonia, declared the dissolution of the Estonian Workers' Commune. The battle costed Estonia 2,236 lives, 13,775 injuries, and 178 million Estonian kroons.[57]

The Soviet-Estonian negotiations began in September 1919. As they led to the first treaty signed by Soviet Russia with one of the Baltic nations, we shall analyze in further depth how the agreement was achieved between the two countries. The Estonian delegation in these negotiations was led by Jaan Poska (1866-1920), along with Ants Piip (1884-1942) and Julius Seljamaa (1883-1936), and the Soviet delegation by Leonid Krassin (1870-1926), People's Commissar for Trade.[58]

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[56] Count Rüdiger von der Goltz left a recollection of this battle, empasizing that „The Iron Division's attack finally had to be given up, though, because no great restoration of the earlier position could be expected through the purely frontal advance it was making, and also because Estonian warships were threatening the mouth of the Daugava and the Rīga bridges, the only rearward connection that the troops had that were fighting east of the Daugava", Rüdiger von der Goltz, *My Mission in Finland and the Baltic* (Leipzig: verlag von K.F. Koehler, 1920), 207.

[57] A synthetic pictured account of the Estonian Army, in Nigel Thomas and Toomas Boltowsky, *Armies of the Baltic Independence Wars, 1918–20* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2019), 13-22.

[58] Evald Uustalu, *The History of the Estonian People* (London, 1952), 191.

The first Estonian and Soviet proposals regarding the delimitation of the border between the two states were presented on December 8, 1919. The Estonian proposal called for the strategic boundary to be situated to the east of the ethnic border. This proposal also included the decisions taken by the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian commanders-in-chief at their mid-September 1919 summit in Tallinn, when they urged their respective governments to demand the withdrawal of Soviet forces behind the line Petrograd–Dno–Veliki Luki–Vitebsk–Orsha as a condition for signing the peace treaty, the internment of the Russian Baltic Fleet in a neutral port or one of the Entente's harbors, and the establishment of a neutral zone between Russia and the Baltic states. Russia characterized Estonia's plan as a "strategic aggression completely unacceptable." Russian delegates objected that Russia ought to have relinquished 10,000 square kilometers of the Iamburg and Pihva regions, which are home to 250,000 Russians and 40,000 Estonians. The Estonians, for their part, rejected the Russian suggestions, which they termed "annexationist," but they accepted the idea to create a 10-kilometer-wide neutral zone and demilitarize Lake Peipsi. The Estonians were unwilling to accept the Russian plan in its entirety since it would have left Russia with all of the natural resources and industrial potential of the northeastern region, in addition to the Setumaa region south of Lake Peipsi.[59]

The next day, the Russian delegation presented a revised plan to extend the Estonian border to the east. It would have followed the Narva River (which was to be neutralized[60]), traversed the Peipsi and Pihva lakes, and proceeded 10-15 kilometers east of the original project till the Latvian border. This was unsatisfactory to the Estonians since it divided the city of Narva into two halves and left Russia with two-thirds of the Setumaa.[61] Both delegations offered revised boundary designs on December 10th. The Russian offer was quite similar to the previous day, however the Estonian proposal allowed a 10-15 km westward adjustment from the first draft

[59] Edgar Mattisen, *Searching for a dignified compromise. The Estonian-Russian border, 1000 years* (Tallinn: Ilo Print, 1996), 35-38.

[60] On the pledge to neutrality, Eero Medijainen, „Article 5: the permanent neutrality in the Tartu Peace Treaty, 1920," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, issue 2 (2010): 201–214.

[61] Mattisen, 35-38.

proposed to the Soviets. After a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars attended by V.I. Lenin, L. Trotsky, Georgy Chicherin, and L. Krassin, the Russian side made further concessions on Narva and other disputed territories. Edgar Mattisen, a renowned expert on the subject, considers this fourth Soviet project to be the most suitable for Estonia, as the country could have retained Ivangorod and the territories between the Rosson River and the mouth of the Pliussa River, as well as the ethnic areas inhabited by the Setu and Estonians in the province of Petserimaa next to the city of Petseri. On December 31, a compromise between Estonian and Soviet desires was struck. On February 2, 1920, the Republic of Estonia and the Russian Soviet Republic signed the Tartu Peace Treaty.[62]

As Kaarel Piirimäe rightly suggests, the most significant benefit for Estonia was contained in Article 2, which stipulated that

> „On the basis of the right of all peoples to freely decide their destinies, and even to separate themselves completely from the state of which they form a part, a right proclaimed by the Federal Socialist Republic of Soviet Russia, Russia unreservedly recognises the independence and autonomy of the State of Estonia and renounces voluntarily and forever all rights of sovereignty formerly held by Russia over the Estonian people and territory of Estonia by virtue of the former legal situation, and by virtue of international treaties, which, in respect of such rights, shall henceforth lose their force. No obligation to Russia devolves upon the Estonian people and territory from the fact that Estonia was formerly part of Russia."[63]

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[62] "Peace Treaty of Tartu, 2 February 1920", *League of Nations Treaty Series*, Vol. XI, 51–52. The Estonian version of the treary at the Estonian National Archives, https://www.ra.ee/dgs/browser.php?tid=68&iid=110701832602&img=era0957_018_0000004_00001_t.jpg&tbn=1&pgn=1&prc=80&ctr=0&dgr=0&lst=2&hash=c91ed5da616cfbf3951255b17e5aa164 (accessed on 20 January 2022). Russia was pleased with the signing of the treaty, which Izvestia dubbed on February 3 the first breach in the diplomatic blockade put on Soviet Russia by the Entente and the bourgeoisie. Albert N. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy toward the Baltic States 1918-1940* (Paris: Notre Dame Press, 1959), 57.

[63] Kaarel Piirimäe, „The Peace Treaty of Tartu: The Postcolonial Situation 100 Years Later," *Ajalooline Ajakiri, The Estonian Historical Journal* 173/174, issues 3/4 (2020): 192.

Figure 1: The signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty by Jaan Poska, the head of the Estonian delegation, who stated: „ "Today is the most important day of the past 700 years for Estonia, because today, for the first time, Estonia alone will determine the future fate of its people.""
Source:The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://vm.ee/en/tartu-peace-treaty-2-february-1920 (accessed on 10 January 2022)

The boundary between Estonia and Russia was 276 kilometers long, including 129 kilometers on land and 147 kilometers along the Peipsi and Pihva lakes. In addition, the two governments agreed to establish a demilitarized zone that would avoid conflict between the two neighbors.[64]

2.2. Latvia

After the defeat of Germany in World War I, across the border to the south of Estonia, representatives of all Latvian parties (including the Social Democrats), excluding the Bolsheviks, met in secret on November 18, 1918, and declared the existence of the Republic of Latvia and the Latvian Provisional Government. Kārlis Ulmanis (1877-1942) presided over the

[64] Estonian National Archives, https://www.ra.ee/dgs/browser.php?tid=68&iid=110701832602&img=era0957_018_0000004_00001_t.jpg&tbn=1&pgn=1&prc=80&ctr=0&dgr=0&lst=2&hash=c91ed5da616cfbf3951255b17e5aa164 (accessed on 20 January 2022), Mattisen, 45-59, 119-121; Medijainen, 201-214.

Provisional Government and reinvented himself from an agronomist to a state figure.[65] Given that Riga remained under German control, the government's mission was challenging. In December, the government started operating, with a number of Baltic Germans assuming positions of authority. The regime also established an army.[66]

On November 13, 1918, the Soviet Russian government rescinded the treaty negotiated with Germany and began preparations for an attack to "export" the Communist revolution. However, the Red Army's commander-in-chief, the Latvian Jukums Vācietis, a former commander of the 5th Latvian Rifle Regiment, ordered that the Bolshevik advance be synchronized as closely as possible with the German withdrawal. Until May, the non-German-occupied Latvian lands (Letgalia and Vidzeme) were governed by an interim Soviet Latvian government led by Pēteris Stučka. Even Latvian Bolsheviks opposed the creation of this administration because they did not comprehend its relevance to the survival of Communist Russia. Pēteris Stučka used harsh measures against his political opponents: shutting and killing bourgeois adversaries and "counter-revolutionaries" was the most common method employed by the Communist regime.[67]

In the meanwhile, Ulmanis and his administration sought sanctuary in the German-held port of Liepāja (Libau). In these circumstances, Ulmanis proceeded to seek stronger internal and external support. However, the Germans desired control of the Latvian government, so in mid-April 1919 they established their own administration under the leadership of Andrievs Niedra. The new administration was most likely backed from behind the scenes by General Rüdiger von der Goltz, who aimed to damage the legitimacy of the Ulmanis government.[68] In late April, German and Latvian

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[65] Jordan Tyler Kuck, "“The Dictator without a Uniform: Kārlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia”, (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2014), 202.

[66] T. G. Zazerskaiâ, *Latvia's Ordeal: Nation Building in War and Revolution* (Washington: Academic Press, 2021), 45-46.

[67] Aivars Stranga, "Communist Dictato Rship in Latvia: December 1918 – January 1920. Ethnic Policy", *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 161-178.

[68] Hiden and Housden, 21. Gustav Noske (1868-1946), member of the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party, visited the Baltic countries in April 1919. On April 28, 1919,

soldiers seized Riga from the Communists. In addition, by the end of April, the Communists had been driven to Letgalia, where they stayed for an additional year. The Niedra administration established itself in Riga without much domestic backing, since it was seen as an appendage of the German troops. This helped Ulmanis in his attempts to establish a national army. On June 23, 1919, the Estonian triumph against the Germans provided relief. In October, the administration of Ulmanis already commanded 11,500 soldiers. The Latvian army was eventually able to mount a counteroffensive and clear Latvian territory of these forces in November.

Figure 2: Soldiers of the Latvian forces from the 2nd Regiment who participated in the Battle of Cēsis, Latvian War Museum

Source: https://www.dveseluputenis.lv/lv/laika-skala/notikums/109/nodibinata-ziemellatvijas-brigade (accessed 20 November 2018)

On 3 January 1920, Latvian national troops headed by General J. Balodis and backed by a corps of 20,000 Poles led by General Rydz-Smigly

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he attempted to convince the Cabinet that the new administration was legitimate. „Bericht Noskes über seine Reise im Baltikum. Kabinettssitzung vom 28. April 1919, 11 Uhr," https://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/sch/sch1p/kap1_2/kap2_61/para3_5.html (accessed on 22.01.2021).

launched a new attack. The cities of Daugavpils, Abrene, and Rēzekne were liberated one by one. By the end of January, the whole region of Letgalia was freed. Latvia and Russia signed an armistice in Moscow on February 1, followed by peace negotiations between the two countries.[69]

On August 11, 1920, Adolf Jofe and Jakov Haniecky of Soviet Russia and Jānis Vestmanis, Pēteris Berģis, Ansis Buševics, Eduards Kalniņš, and Kārlis Pauļuks of Latvia signed the Treaty of Riga.[70] It resembles the Estonian-Soviet one in terms of both the negotiating procedure and the legal consequence. In the treaty, Soviet Russia vowed to maintain Latvia's independence and sovereignty "without reservations," with the boundary between the two countries being established in accordance with the ethnic map and with adjustments that did not prejudice the Latvian state. The most significant accomplishment was Latvia's recovery of Latgale (Latgalia), a province from which it had been separated for centuries (art. 2). At the request of the Russian side, the two nations agreed not to permit foreign troops at war with the other state to enter their territory or to establish governments claiming to be the rightful leaders of the other state. Different sections accounted for the transfer of prisoners of war, the resolution of financial issues, the citizenship choice, the expansion of the economic, commercial, and transit relations, etc.[71]

Similar to the Finnish-Soviet pact, the Estonian-Soviet and Latvian-Soviet treaties provided the signing governments with relatively brief gratification. Soviet Russia saw a path out of isolation and Estonia and Latvia were satisfied with ensuring the integration of the majority of their citizens into their national boundaries and obtaining borders that were simpler to defend. A consequence of several open conflicts, these accords had not survived the power dynamics of international relations, and Moscow had

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[69] Silviu Miloiu, Edgar Plētiens, Krīstine Ante, Valters Sčerbinskis, *Istoria Letoniei* (Bucureşti: Eikon, 2018), 277-279.

[70] No. 67 Traité de Paix entre la Latvie et la Russie, fait à Moscou, achevé et signé à Riga, le 11 août 1920 - Communiqué par le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de Latvie - Enregistré le 16 décembre 1920 (Recueil des Traités, Vol.II no.3).

[71] Ibid.

called them into question when it believed it had earned sufficient might to enforce its viewpoint. The outcome was catastrophic for two little nations.

2.3. Lithuania

Unlike Finland, Estonia and Latvia, which first appeared on the world's political map as independent states in 1917-1918, Lithuania kept the legacy of a recognized Middle Ages regional power. On this bases, Lithuanians aspired to the re-creation of an independent Lithuanian state as a result of the revolutionary changes in Russia and the revival of nationalist aspirations. This desire was articulated by the National Council (*Lietuvos Taryba*), the entity that declared Lithuania's independence.[72]

According to the stipulations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March 1918), which was reinforced by the Treaty of Berlin in August, the Soviets were compelled to accept the loss of almost one million square kilometers, including Courland and Lithuania.[73]

After the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, Lithuanians realized that independence could only be achieved under German conditions. The Kaiser acknowledged the independence of Lithuania on March 23, 1918, but under the provisions of the proclamation of December 11, 1917, which turned the nation into a German protectorate, and not the conditions of the Act of Independence of February 16, 1918, which allowed for complete independence. On September 22, 1918, Germany, which had already acknowledged the independence of the Duchy of Courland, sanctioned the independence of what remained of the province.[74]

The Lithuanians quickly mastered the art of diplomacy on the run and were able to use dynastic rivalries in the Reich to counter German

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[72] Joachim Tauber, „Stubborn collaborators. The politics of the Lithuanian "Taryba", 1917-1918," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 37, issue 2 (2006): 194-209.

[73] Trotsky accused Germany and Austria-Hungary of violating the idea of national self-determination in the specific examples of Poland, Lithuania, Courland, Latvia, and Estonia in a press interview on January 2, 1918., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy , Vol. 1 1917-1924* , Selected and edited by Jean Degras, Issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951), 21-22.

[74] Kinga Dudzińska, and Renata Runiewicz-Jasińska, "The Development of Lithuanian Statehood in Years 1918-1940," *Polish Political Science* 36 (2007): 233-254.

annexationism. Similar to what the Finns had done, the Conservative wing of Taryba declared the Catholic Duke Wilhelm von Urach as king of Lithuania in July 1918. He was to be known as Mindaugas II. As with Finland, the conclusion of the war rendered this arrangement obsolete. In November 1918, Taryba renounced the monarchical experiment and reverted to the republican constitution paradigm.[75]

The nationalist scholar Augustinas Voldemaras (1883-1942) was chosen prime minister by Taryba on November 5. The new government assumed office on the day Germany capitulated. Already on November 2, Taryba enacted a temporary constitution that delegated administrative authority to the Taryba Presidium headed by President Antanas Smetona (1874-1944) and the Cabinet of Ministers while retaining legislative authority.[76]

Stalin ordered the Lithuanian Bolsheviks to organize a Lithuanian communist government on November 13, 1918, after the Soviets proclaimed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty null and void. On December 8, a temporary revolutionary government chaired by Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas was installed in Lithuania (1880-1935). On December 16, the Soviet regime was established in Lithuania. The Mickevičius-Kapsukas government advocated moderate policies comparable to those of Finland's *Kansanvaltuuskunta*. In February 1919, the Bolsheviks created the Soviet Republic of Lithuania-Belarus (Litbel), a buffer state whereby the Soviets attempted to earn Berlin's assistance. The Bolsheviks upheld their "mass revolution" strategy until the second half of 1919, when the "export of revolution" to the West failed and territorial ties with Lithuania were severed.[77]

On Voldemaras's instructions, on November 23, 1918, a Lithuanian national army consisting of Russian-returned troops and commanders was

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[75] Wilhelm von Urach was a relative of the King of Württemberg, and had been recommended by Mathias Erzberger, the leader of the German Catholic Party, see Alfonsas Eidintas, Vytautas Žalis, and Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania in European Politics. The Years of First Republic, 1918-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 31.

[76] Ekaterina Makhotina, "Die Nähe Smetonas: Nationale Identitätskonstruktion und Demokratie in Litauen," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 66, no. 2 (2018): 326-328.

[77] Česlovas Laurinavičius, "Once again on Soviet statehood in Lithuania in 1918-1919", *Lithuanian Historical Studies* , no. 13 (2008): 179-189.

formed to fight against the Soviets. As the Red Army approached Vilnius one month later, Smetona and Voldemaras fled to Germany in pursuit of financial assistance.[78] Mykolas Sleževičius (1882-1939) seized government leadership and urged all people to protect the government. It relocated its headquarters to Kaunas. On January 5, 1919, the Red Army entered Vilnius, but the Lithuanians were able to convince five German battalions, fearful of the Soviet advance in East Prussia, to stop their withdrawal and join the Lithuanian war effort. In the summer of 1919, the Lithuanians defeated the Soviets in a series of victories after being supplied with between 5,000 and 6,000 troops in April 1919. In August, the Red Army abandoned the last occupied city. The Soviet leadership proposed to negotiate a peace settlement with Lithuania on September 11.[79]

The peace treaty between the two countries was signed in Moscow on July 12, 1920, and it served as the basis for good relations between the two parties throughout the interwar era. Lithuanians believed they secured Soviet Russia recognition of their rights to the Vilnius area, together with the namesake city, the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy. However, as Loreta Daukšytė points out, the text of the treaty is unclear on this issue. Vice-Foreign Minister Petras Klimas (1891-1969) was the primary architect of the Lithuanian border. According to article 2 of the treaty, the border between the two countries began at Druja on the Daugava River, continued south along the river and Lake Naroch (Narach), circled Maladetchna, and then headed southwest along the Nemunas, leaving Grodno on the Lithuanian side and ending at Sztabin on the Polish border. Therefore, it is not at all evident from the terms of the treaty that Vilnius belonged to Lithuania, and the boundary with Poland had to be decided by the two surrounding governments, Lithuania and Poland. We can detect no ambiguities in the treaties of Finland, Estonia, or Latvia with the Soviet Union. Russia also drafted the contents of this international legal document, including an addendum that permitted the Red Army to use sections of Lithuanian

[78] Vasilijus Safronovas, „Who fought for national freedom? On the significance of the great war in interwar Lithuania," *Acta Baltico-Slavica*, 42 (2018): 197.
[79] Eidintas, Žalis, and Senn, 34-36.

territory during the conflict with Poland, beginning with Vilnius, which had been re-occupied by July 14.[80]

In order to govern the status of the Lithuanian areas occupied by the Red Army, officials of the two armies signed an agreement on August 8 dividing them into three districts. The Red Army was to depart the first territory immediately, the second, which contained Vilnius, by September 1, and the third upon the signing of an additional agreement. The loss at the gates of Warsaw compelled the Soviets to abide by their agreements, restoring Vilnius to Lithuania on August 28[81] and sowing the seeds of conflict between Poland and Lithuania.

Each of the three situations described above entailed several stages. The declaration of independence in 1918 was the first step. They were however not acknowledged by Germany or Soviet Russia. Each of the two great powers attempted to further its own agenda in this area, notably Germany's territorial and imperial expansion and Soviet Russia's export of revolution accompanied by a disguised form of imperialism and economic and commercial interests. The defeat of Germany and the isolation of Soviet Russia was an unanticipated turning point for the nationalist governments of these small nations, who were able to prevail over their internal and foreign opponents (Germans, Soviets) and harvest unexpected benefits from the 1920 treaties with Russia. Soviet. At the time of the signing of these accords, Soviet Russia was eager to make substantial concessions in order to break out of its international isolation, as it was ideologically disdained owing to its regional wars and previous imperial history under Russian dominance. Even greater success was achieved by Soviet diplomacy in bringing Lithuania to its side without paying a significant price. If, in the short term, the Soviet Russia was ready to accept some aspects of an agreement that were detrimental to its security interests, it would subsequently strive to abolish them, first by diplomatic methods then, beginning in the late 1930s, through political and military pressure. As we

[80] Loreta Daukšytė (ed.), *The borders of Lithuania. The history of a millennium* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2010), 109-110.
[81] Ibid.

will see in a future article, the re-annexation of these provinces will be guided by a combination of territorial imperialism, ideological ambitions, ideological missionaryism, and security concerns.

3. The Golden Apple of Discord: the ownership of Vilnius and the Polish-Lithuanian strife

The case of Vilnius is distinctive due to its multicultural identity. Vilnius (Vilnius after its Russian name and Wilno after its Polish name) was founded formally in 1323 by Gediminas (the Grand Duke between 1315 / 1316 and 1341), who constructed a fortress and made it the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Gradually, the strong Polish culture tempted a portion of the urban people of Vilnius to forsake the Lithuanian language.[82] After the third partition of Poland in 1795, Russia acquired the city, which thereafter became the province capital. Under Russian administration, the city drew an increasing number of Jews, who established the groundwork for a vibrant culture in the area. Thus, Vilnius became the epicenter of the Haskalah Jewish renaissance movement. In Vilnius, Jews inhabited many streets in the 18th century, and their synagogues and places of worship were located alongside their Christian neighbors. Anti-Semitic outbursts did not become severe until the 19th century. By the end of the 18th century, the ratio of Jews in the general population[83] was remarkably high[84], and on the eve of the First World War, there were around 60,000 Jews in the historic Lithuanian capital. According to the 1897 census, the population of Vilnius consisted of 40% Jews, 30% Poles, 20% Russians, 4% Belarusians, and 2% Lithuanians. [85]

Based on its prominence in the history of the Grand Duchy, Vilnius

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[82] Robert I. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania Volume 1: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385-1569* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018).

[83] John D. Klier, "Traditions of the Commonwealth: Lithuanian Jewry and the Exercise of Political Power in Tsarist Russia," in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, eds. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliūnas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 10.

[84] Eliyahu Stern, "Genius and Demographics in Modern Jewish History," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* , Vol. 101, No. 3 (Summer 2011): 358-366.

[85] Saulius Žucas (editor), *Lithuania: Past. Culture, Present* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 1999), 82 and 142.

was chosen as the capital of the new state at the time of Lithuania's independence proclamation. After failing to sway Poland to its side, Germany was ready to back some of Lithuania's imperial ambitions within the constraints of its imperial interests.[86]

However, Poland never came to terms with the circumstances. Marshal Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935), born in Lithuania, was descended from a Lithuanian aristocratic family; he considered himself a "son of Lithuania" throughout his life and learned Lithuanian from an early age; he supported the restoration of the old Polish-Lithuanian Rzeczpospolita founded in 1569. As a consequence, Polish forces invaded Lithuania in the spring of 1919 from the directions of Bialystok, Lida, Vilnius, Augustov, Suwałki and Sejny, spurred to fight against the Bolsheviks and accused Lithuania of being a German puppet. In this setting, Lithuania appealed to officials of the Entente, who established a preliminary line of demarcation between Lithuanian and Polish forces on June 18. After leaving Augustow to Poland, it followed the southern line of the Suwałki government, proceeded along the Nemunas River to Drunskininkai, and then ran in a straight line 5 kilometers west of the Grodno-Vilnius-Daugavpils railway. Poland was particularly angry with the delineation that left Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania. Therefore, on July 26, a new demarcation line (the "Foch Line") was sketched, leaving Suwałki, Sejny, and Punsk in Poland. Lithuania emphatically rejected these provisions. On December 8, six months later, the Supreme Council of the Entente drew the Entente's interim boundary. It began at Lake Vištytis, following the Foch Line to the Nemunas, crossed the Nemunas at Grodno, and then proceeded south to Galicia. Once again, Vilnius was ceded to Lithuania. However, the tensions caused by territorial and identity issues between Lithuanians and Poles endured, with Vilnius having a high potential to evoke "pools of emotions, anxieties, and memories." The combat did not begin until the spring of 1920, when the conflict between Poland and Soviet Russia erupted. They continued "after the Vistula miracle" after the Polish army had advanced into Russian territory. On September 22/23, 1920,

[86] Joachim Tauber, "German eastern policy, 1917-1918", *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, no. 13 (2008): 71.

the Polish army crossed the Entente's provisional border to pursue the Red Army and repel Lithuanian soldiers. The Suwałki Accords of October 7, 1920 called on both sides to halt hostilities and set a demarcation line that returned Vilnius to Lithuanian control.[87]

Two days later, under the orders of Józef Piłsudski, Polish soldiers commanded by General Lucjan Żeligowski (1865-1947) captured Vilnius. The general declared the establishment of the Republic of Central Lithuania, which had an area of 13,500 sq.km. and a population of 500,000 people. Nevertheless, the Polish government denied culpability for the incident. The official stance of Warsaw was that Żeligowski led a rebellion of Vilnius residents. Nonetheless, the general resumed his campaign in an attempt to seize all of Lithuania and unite it with Poland. On November 19 and 21, 1920, during the engagements of Širvintos and Giedraičiai, the Lithuanian army was able to halt Żeligowski's soldiers and compel them to retreat. The general himself was on the verge of being captured.[88]

The League of Nations' Military Control Commission intervened and demanded a cessation of hostilities. The armistice was struck in a train car between Kaunas, Lithuania and Poland on November 29, 1920. A neutral zone of 12 kilometers has been created between the two countries. It began on the right bank of the Nemunas and followed the December 8 line. It proceeded along the Grodno-Vilnius railway, which at this point had left Poland, from the left bank of the Nemunas. The boundary line then moved towards the Vilnius-Daugavpils railway.[89]

The League of Nations attempted mediation in the spring of 1921, delegating the task to Belgian Foreign Minister Paul Hymans (1865-1941).[90] His first plan was to divide Lithuania into two cantons, Vilnius and Kaunas, and to conclude an agreement between that country and Poland, which was

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[87] Daukšytė, 108-109.

[88] Theodore R. Weeks, *Vilnius between Nations, 1795-2000* (Ithaca, NY : Cornell University Press, 2021), 119-123.

[89] Žucas, 163.

[90] The Ph.D. thesis of Chiara Tessaris discusses at lenth the activity of the Hymans Commission, Chiara Tessaris, *Peace and Security Beyond Military Power: The League of Nations and the Polish-Lithuanian Dispute (1920-1923)* 2014, <https://doi.org/10.7916/D81G0JXW>.

to be Lithuania's guarantor. As a reward for Lithuania, Klaipėda was to be attached to the canton of Kaunas.[91] However, neither side was satisfied: Poland because Vilnius was attributed to Lithuania, and Lithuania because of the excessive decentralization of the country and the ties it had to maintain with Poland. A second plan was drawn up by Hymans in the autumn of 1921 and provided for the incorporation of the Vilnius region into Lithuania as an autonomous territory and its guarantee by the League of Nations. Poland rejected the plan and conflicts erupted between the two states.[92] Finally, on January 13, 1922, the League of Nations declared itself incapable of resolving the dispute. Further negotiations planned by the League of Nations in Brussels in May 1920 and later under the mediation of Hymans failed to compromise the two sides.[93]

Under these circumstances, Poland instigated the annexation of the Republic of Central Lithuania, a decision voted in Vilnius by the Polish-dominated Sejm on February 20 and ratified by Warsaw on March 24, 1922. Following the annexation of Memel by Lithuania, the League of Nations abolished on February 2, 1923 the neutral zone between Poland and Lithuania. Lithuania did not recognize this decision, and Poland took advantage by occupying that part of the territory as well. The new border line was recognized by the Council of Ambassadors, a body of the Entente powers, on March 15, 1923.[94]

The border between the two countries was sealed[95], and Kaunas was only regarded the interim capital of Lithuania and the frozen war lingered

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[91] Vilma Bukaitė, „Pamirštos Paulio Hymanso derybos: Vilniaus krašto klausimas Briuselyje ir Ženevoje 1921m.," *Lituanistica* 64. Nr. 1/111 (2018): 14–20.

[92] Ibid., 22-24.

[93] United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, „Le différend polono-lithuanien - Conseil de la Société des Nations - Les gouvernements polonais et lithuanien sont invités à engager entre eux des négociations directes sur la présidence de M. Hymans à Bruxelles. Résolution adoptée par le conseil. XIIe Session, Paris, 3.03.1920, Dossier R588/11/11397/11397.

[94] Daukšytė, 112-114.

[95] Estonia tried to mediate between Lithuania and Poland, gaining the gratitude of Warsaw, Philip V. Cannistraro, Edward D. Wynat, Jr., Theodore P. Kovaleff (editors), *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War. The Diplomatic Papers of AJ Drexler Biddle Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland 1937-1939* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1976), document 4, Report of Drexler Biddle Jr. to State Department, 19 June 1938, 213.

on until March 1938. Therefore, the scenario in interwar Vilnius may be compare to that of Jerusalem. Declared the capital of a state, Vilnius was a significant cultural hub for another state as well as the world's most renowned minority: the Jews.

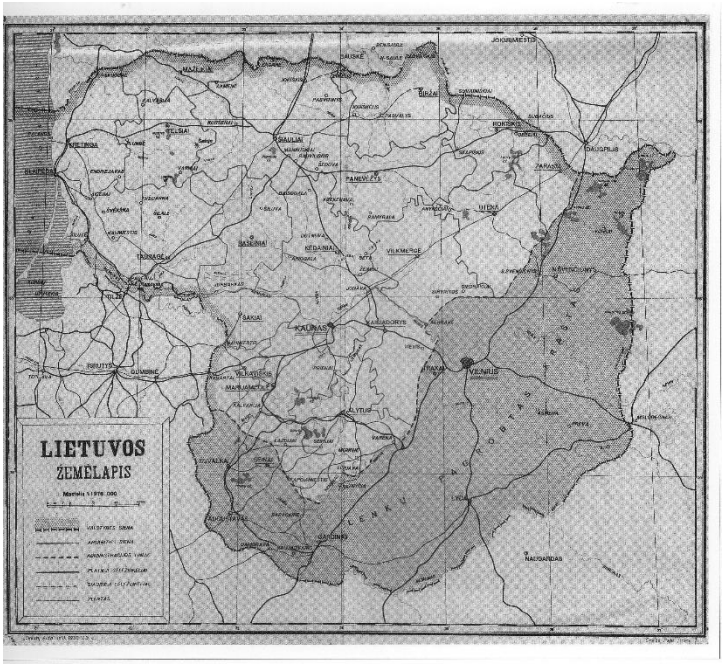

Figure 3: Lithuania and the contested region of Vilnius in the interwar period
Source: *The Borders of Lithuania. The history of a millennium* (Vilnius Baltok lankos, 2010), 135

However, conflicts over the area and city of Vilnius continued, with events from 1938 to 1940 shifting its formal control first "definitively" to Poland, then "definitively" to Lithuania, and eventually to Kremlin, along with the remainder of Lithuania and Poland. Everything looked to be a reversed reenactment of events from the start of the interwar era. Thus, on March 17, 1938, the Polish plenipotentiary minister in Tallinn issued a 48-hour ultimatum to his Lithuanian counterpart, demanding that Lithuania immediately establish unrestricted diplomatic relations with Poland. Lithuania, understanding it could not expect support from a foreign power, bowed down, so ending the legal state of war and resuming diplomatic

relations.[96] This did not imply that Lithuanian dreams of ownership of Vilnius had ended. This ultimatum gravely wounded Lithuanian nationalism, which will seek the earliest chance to reclaim a land that struck a powerful chord of identification in the Lithuanian psyche.

Figure 4: Scandinavia and the Baltic Lands. Copyright, The New Matthews-Northrup Global atlas of the World at War. Cartography and manufacturing by J. W. Clement Co., Matthews-Northrup Works, Buffalo, N.Y. Published in the United States of America..

[96] Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor, "The Polish-Lithuanian Crisis of March 1938. Some Romanian and Western reactions," *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (2010): 83-92.

Conclusions

The situations addressed in this article and the empirical examples it contains originate from a specific geographic region and a single historical five-year period in the aftermath of World War I (1917–1922); consequently, the conclusions that may be drawn must be generalized with some caution. Nonetheless, we recognize that some of these assessments deserve reflection from scholars of these phenomena as well as politicians, diplomats, strategists, and other decision-makers in international relations.

We began with the premise that borders are not merely imaginary lines that separate one state from another, but rather are discourses, practices, symbols, institutions, and processes related to power; that they are local, regional, state, and supranational; and that they involve collective actions such as "acquisition, exclusion, protection," as well as decisions based on feelings such as "love, hate, and violence." We therefore emphasized the significance of their historical perspective in addressing the difficulties of the present.

The consistency and regularity of the conclusions based on these examples are particularly startling. In every instance in which war and violence (ultimatums, threats of force) were employed to grant boundaries in favor of one state or another or to settle accounts, the treaty settlements were not long-lasting, and a cycle of conflict with devastating consequences for local communities ensued. Of course, it might be argued that this was owing to the fact that we dealt with small nations dealing with great powers during a period of weakness. When big powers overcame their position of powerlessness, boundaries had to be redrawn. Every new change of frontiers resulted into „identities of exclusion" and „fetishization of territory". This is undeniable, but we must not lose sight of the reality that states are analogous entities while having distinct demographic, military, and economic capabilities. Even at the height of their subjugation as a consequence of annexation and deportation, the Baltic nations conserved the concept of statehood, which they restored when offered the opportunity.

We may hypothesize on what would have happened if the Soviet Union had behaved reasonably towards them between 1918 and 1920 and

1939 and 1940. Despite their ideological abhorrence of communism, it is plausible that these nations would have had no interest in hardening their borders, but rather in softening them in order to promote the growth of trade and commerce. A genuine collaborative connection might have evolved from this situation.

Excluding conjecture, one of the findings of this study is that when geographical, economic, geopolitical, and ethnic incentives are added to ideological or identity motivations, the stakes of the clash grow and the cycle of violence becomes more uncompromising. In this regard, the examples of East Karelia, Narva, and Vilnius are compelling. In the latter instance, the border remained closed to people, businesses, and even correspondence for almost two decades.

The combination of universalist ideologies with imperial objectives often leads in both internal and international confrontation. The Finnish path to independence was characterized by confrontations with and between foreign troops (Russian and German), as well as civil strife (*sisällissota*). The situation in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was comparable. In all of these instances, the result was not just a fixation with boundaries, but also an increase in otherness and loss of human lives.

Thus, we land on the "cultural dynamics of self-identification through exclusion," one of the distinguishing features of the interwar period with its *cordon sanitaire*, Border States, and export of revolution. As a result of Russian aggressions in the Ukraine, the illusionists of war have resurrected the skeletons from the closet, and borders are once again fraught with hatred and yearning.

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