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The British Role in the German-Lithuanian Dispute over Klaipeda in 1930's: the Neumann-Sass Case

Diplomová práce

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Anotace

Území Klajpedy se na jaře roku 1924 stalo navzdory versailleskému systému a plánu dohodových mocností autonomní oblastí pod správou Litevské republiky. Vzhledem k nejednoznačné skladbě obyvatelstva vytvářely v průběhu meziválečné doby Německo i Litva na místní populaci tlak, který přispěl k postupné nacionalizaci a radikalizaci obyvatelstva. Klíčovým vyústěním těchto tendencí byl kaunaský proces na přelomu let 1934/35. V rámci zákona na ochranu republiky došlo k odsouzení 87 příslušníků klajpedských nacionálně-socialistických organizací CSA a SOVOG, což vedlo k hospodářské blokádě Litvy ze strany Německa a masivní propagandistické kampani. Velká Británie se pokusila situaci urovnat zvýšenou obchodní aktivitou s Litvou a zároveň diplomatickým nátlakem na Litvu. Na přelomu let 1936/37 dochází po udělení amnestií k obnovení německo-litevských hospodářských vazeb. Litevská republika se v druhé polovině třicátých let stává skrze německou menšinu snadno vydíratelným a diplomaticky izolovaným státem. Proti narůstajícím nacionálně socialistickým tendencím německého i litevského obyvatelstva v Klajpedě nemohla litevská vláda podniknout žádné další kroky. Klajpedská autonomie, která měla chránit regionální identitu tzv. Memelländer, byla definitivně zničena v březnu 1939, kdy bylo území Klajpedy připojeno k Německu a regionální identita ustoupila říšské – velkoněmecké identitě.

Annotation

In the spring of 1924, the Baltic sea coast territory of Klaipėda, formerly a region of East Prussia became an autonomous area administrated by the Republic of Lithuania. Given the mixed nationalities of the population, during the interwar period, Germany and Lithuania both pressured citizens to prefer one or the other nationality, which contributed to gradual radicalization and growing nationalist tendencies. The key outcome was the Kaunas process at the turn of 1934/35. Under the Law for the Protection of the Republic, 87 members of the Klaipėda national-socialist organizations CSA and SOVOG were convicted of conspiracy to annex the territory to Germany. The convictions led to an economic blockade of Lithuania by Germany and a massive pro-German propaganda campaign. The

United Kingdom tried to settle the situation by increasing its trade activity with Lithuania, accompanied by diplomatic pressure on Lithuania to ease its stance against Germany. After Lithuania agreed to grant amnesties to those convicted of conspiracy, in 1936/37, German-Lithuanian economic relations were restored. However, in the late 1930s, the Republic of Lithuania became an easily blackmailed and diplomatically isolated state, forced to grant numerous concessions to its German minority population. The Lithuanian government was unable to act against the growing national-socialist tendencies of the German and Lithuanian populations in Klaipėda. Klaipėda's autonomy, which was intended to protect the regional identity of the so-called Memelländer population, was definitively destroyed in March 1939, when Klaipėda was annexed to Germany and its regional identity supplanted by the identity of the Third Reich.

Klíčová slova

autonomní území, území pod mezinárodní správou, Klaipėda, kaunaský proces, britská diplomacie v Pobaltí

Keywords

Autonomous regions, Internationalised territories, Klaipėda region, Neumann-Sass trial, British diplomacy in the Baltics

Title/název práce

Role Velké Británie v německo-litevském sporu o Klajpedu ve 30. letech dvacátého století: Kaunaský proces

Obsah

Introduction

The Klaipėda Territory, or Memel in German, was created after the First World War by secession from Germany and brought under the international administration. The main reasons for the separation of the territory were ethnic and economic. While the first reason was to protect the local community, which had evolved over the centuries under the German-Lithuanian influence, the second reason was to ensure the viability of the newly formed republics in the region through access to the port of Klaipėda. Specifically, it was a matter of providing the Republic of Lithuania's with access to the Baltic Sea and thus facilitating foreign trade.

The Lithuanian occupation of Klaipėda and the simultaneous annexation of the entire region in 1923 disrupted the international administration. By 1924, the territory's status changed to an autonomous region under sovereign Lithuania and under the international supervision of Signatory Powers – Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan that signed the Klaipėda Convention the same year.

The states that played the main role in the fate of Klaipėda after 1924 were Lithuania, Germany, and Great Britain. The Republic of Lithuania saw the Klaipėda autonomy under the Lithuanian administration as the first step towards the complete annexation of Klaipėda to Lithuania. On the contrary, Germany considered the change in 1924 as an opportunity for the future easier reunification of the Klaipėda territory with Germany. The last key player, Great Britain, performed several roles in the region. In the first place, it was the guarantor of the Klaipėda autonomy, to which it committed itself by signing the Klaipėda Convention in 1924. Secondly, it sought to ensure the viability of the Baltic republics as a protective barrier against the German and Soviet influence in the region. It maintained stability mainly through investments and tariff preferences in the Baltic republics. At the same time, the United Kingdom was a significant trade rival of Germany, on which Lithuania was economically dependent. However, the ambiguous approach of Great Britain in the 1930s led to measures and actions that may seem illogical and difficult for an outside observer to understand.

With growing German-Lithuanian tensions in Klaipėda, efforts by these countries to increase the influence in this region escalated in the first half of the 1930s. They culminated

in 1934 with the Lithuanian arrest of members of the Klaipėda Christliche - Sozialistische Artbeitsgemeinschaft (CSA) and Sozialistische Artbeitsgemeinschaft (SOVOG), including their representatives Theodor von Sass and Ernst Neumann. The arrests pursued by Lithuanian authorities, the investigation, and the subsequent trial in Kaunas at the turn of 1934 and 1935 were combined with a massive propaganda campaign on the German and Lithuanian sides. The Lithuanian press and authorities considered the trial justified given the alleged attempted armed coup in Klaipėda with German assistance. The German side responded by accusing Lithuanian efforts to suppress Klaipėda's regional identity and punish the inhabitants of the Klaipėda region for their pro-German position.

From the beginning of the crisis, the United Kingdom tried to calm the situation. The UK offered several times to mediate the negotiations between Germany and Lithuania. Together with other Signatory Powers, the UK attempted to mitigate Lithuania's intention to impose heavy penalties in the Neumann-Sass trial based on circumstantial evidence. The United Kingdom continued its efforts to calm the situation even after the verdicts were issued in March 1935, mainly by increased pressure from British diplomacy on the Lithuanian government. Along with the German economic blockade, British diplomatic activity forced Lithuania to abandon heavy penalties through President Smetona's amnesty gradually.

Another shift in the issue of Klaipėda occurred in 1935. Lithuania's failed attempt to reverse the elections in September 1935, which violated the Klaipėda Convention, turned the international scene, led by Great Britain, against Lithuania. Any further Lithuanian attempts to increase its influence in Klaipėda were thus perceived as an effort to undermine Klaipėda's autonomy. Pressure from the local people in Klaipėda and Nazi Germany gradually crowded out Lithuanian power and control. As early as mid-1938, local organizations formerly proclaiming to belong to the regional "Memelländer" identity openly committed themselves to Nazi ideology and efforts to join Germany. This trend was confirmed by the overwhelming victory of German candidates in the December 1938 regional elections. In March 1939, the Lithuanian government agreed to a German ultimatum. On March 22, Klaipėda was occupied by Wehrmacht troops and officially annexed to the Third Reich. This completely suppressed Memelländer's identity, which was a key reason for creating the autonomous Klaipėda Territory under international

administration after the First World War.

Methodology

This diploma thesis examines the theory of autonomous territories within a sovereign state under international administration on the example of the interwar autonomous Klaipėda region. The primary methodological approach is a case study.

The first chapter deals with the theory of autonomous territories in international law and the historical context. The second chapter emphasizes the perspective of internal factors that influenced the development in the Klaipėda region and the escalation of the German-Lithuanian conflict. The third chapter deals with the foreign policy view and the role of key actors in this region. Specifically, the chapter evaluates the position of two countries that made claims to Klaipėda: Germany, which tried to revise the Versailles system, and Lithuania, which attempted to integrate Klaipėda into its state. The objective of this thesis is to explain the position of Great Britain and British diplomacy between the world wars on the case of Klaipėda. The thesis examines the point of view of a superpower that aimed to protect the autonomy of Klaipėda and Lithuanian independence.

Research questions

What events led to the escalation of the German-Lithuanian conflict?

Why and with what purpose did the United Kingdom intervene in the German-Lithuanian conflict?

Time Period Covered by the Thesis

The thesis covers the time period of two cases of Klaipėda autonomy, i.e., the period 1919-1923 and 1924-1939. Emphasis is placed on the first half of the 1930s when there was a critical turning point in the German-Lithuanian dispute over Klaipėda. The scope of the diploma thesis ends with the occupation of Klaipėda by Wehrmacht in March 1939 and its annexation to the Third Reich a week after the break-up of Czechoslovakia.

Reasons for Choosing the Topic

Although the thesis deals with a case that occurred more than eighty years ago, it can be placed in the context of the sustainability of autonomous territories in disputed areas. This

issue is still relevant and key to maintaining peace in the world.

In the secondary literature dealing with the Klaipėda dispute, the British influence on the Baltics and the question of Klaipėda are described only marginally. However, the authors often state that the role of Great Britain was crucial. Another reason for choosing the topic is the parallels with disputes with the Sudeten German minority in Czechoslovakia, which is closer to the Central European reader than the events in Klaipėda.

One of the main reasons for choosing the diploma thesis topic is a significant divergence in the view of the authors of secondary literature on the issue of internal politics in Klaipėda and the attitudes of the participating states. The differences are considerable in the very perception of the Klaipėda region and the meaning of its origin, autonomous status, and demise. The assessments of the actions of Lithuania, Germany, and the United Kingdom in the Klaipėda dispute are often very different. In some articles, there are evident remnants of contemporary German or Lithuanian propaganda and information warfare. There are also differences in the interpretation of data available from the interwar period.

Literature analysis

The literature dealing with the theory of autonomy, investigated in the first chapter, largely agrees in critical attitudes to the role of autonomous territory under international administration. Klaipėda is cited as a typical example of dysfunctional autonomy under international supervision. The key is a publication by Hurst Hannum, where the Klaipėda case is set in an international context and compared with similar cases.[1]

The publications used in the second chapter differ on the question of the composition of the Klaipėda population and its ethnonational and political preferences. For this reason, their views on the legitimacy of Lithuanian and German interventions in the interwar period also diverge significantly. As in the 1920s, there was a different perception of the population group referred to in the census as "Memelländer", and similar differences exist in the literature to this day. Early articles by Piotr Łossowski state that 51% of the population in the Klaipėda region was Lithuanian in the interwar period.[2] This figure is at

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[1] Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, And Self-Determination: The Accommodation Of Conflicting Rights*, Revised Edition, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
[2] Piotr Łossowski, "National Minorities In The Baltic States", *Acta Poloniae Historica* 25, no. 1 (1972): 87-107,

least disputable and does not correspond to the reality in Klaipėda. In his later biography "Kłajpeda vs Memel",[3] however, he further analyses the composition of the population and leans towards the numbers on which recent works agree.

In 1993, the Lithuanian diplomat Vytautas Žalys published the book "Ringen um Identität: Warum Litauen zwischen 1923 und 1939 im Memelgebiet keinen Erfolg hatte".[4] He concludes that since the beginning of the Lithuanian administration, efforts to Lithuanize the population in Klaipėda had been in vain, the Neuman-Sass trial had been exaggerated, and it had accelerated Memel's journey to the Third Reich. His research was extended by the article "Germany and The Memel Germans in the 1930s "[5] published by the current president of the Lithuanian National Historians Committee, Alvydas Nikžentaitis, who emphasizes that Lithuania had no choice in the mid-1930s if it did not want to lose Klaipėda. He considers it wrong that, with the amnesty, Lithuania gave in to superpower influences, and the trial thus sounded like a Lithuanian failure and a denial of its institutions.

The German historian and director of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, Ruth Leiserowitz, continues in the spirit in which Žalys and Nikžentaitis describe the internal situation in Klaipėda. She uses the testimonies of witnesses and in her work "Childhood in the Memel Region"[6] from 2017 distinguishes, unlike other authors, the Klaipėda region in villages and towns.

The Neumann-Sass trial has long been divided into German and Lithuanian perspectives. The historian Alvydas Nikžentaitis describes this division with a statement:

"German historians, especially in studies written earlier, frequently treat this trial almost as a Lithuanian attempt to destroy the German democratic movement in Klaipėda. Lithuanian historians often allege (without evidence) that this was the first anti-Nazi trial,

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https://rcin.org.pl/Content/5608/WA303_19701_1972-25_APH_04_o.pdf.

[3] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007).

[4] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993).

[5] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783.

[6] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83.

a 'Little Nuremburg'."[7]

This is evidenced not only by the titles of academic articles,[8] but also by the article "Neumann-Sass-Prozess als Ausdruck fundamentalen Wandels in den Beziehungen zwischen Litauen und Deutschland"[9] by Vasilijus Safronovas from the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archeology at Klaipėda University. He draws attention to this difference, integrates individual views, and concludes that Lithuania's efforts to take on the role of the victim are odd in the case of the German-Lithuanian conflict until the first half of the 1930s. On the other hand, Ingrida Jakubavičienė (sometimes uncritically) takes the Lithuanian side in her articles on the Neumann-Sass trial.[10] Some passages are strongly influenced by the statements of the then Lithuanian propaganda. For this reason, I decided not to use this author's evaluation for the diploma thesis.

The foreign policy impact of the German-Lithuanian conflict is described in the third chapter. Specifically, the steps of Great Britain form another dividing line in the existing literature. The British role in the German-Lithuanian conflict is mentioned as crucial, but it is often not discussed in more than one sentence. However, the United Kingdom's attitude towards the events in the Baltics is addressed in detail by John Hiden and Patrick Salmon in the 1994 book "The Baltic Nations and Europe".[11] On the economic side, they focus on Britain's efforts to compete with Germany in the Baltic markets. They further examine Britain's attempts to control German re-armament. Both authors elaborate on the relationship between Lithuania, Great Britain, and Germany in their other articles dealing

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[7] Alvydas Nikžentaitis. 1996. "Germany and the Memel Germans in the 1930s (On the Basis of Trials of Lithuanian Agents before the Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)". The Historical Journal 39 (3): 771-783. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. 777.

[8] The "older" German perspective is represented in the diploma thesis by the author Mrtin Broszat: Martin Broszat, "Die Memeldeutschen Organisationen Und Der Nationalsozialismus 1933 - 1939", *Vierteljahrshefte Für Zeitgeschichte* 5, no. 3 (1957): 273-278, http://vfz.ifz-muenchen.de.

[9] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Neumann-Sass-Prozess Als Ausdruck Fundamentalen Wandels In Den Beziehungen Zwischen Litauen Und Deutschland", *Annaberger Annalen* 2013, no. 21 (2013): 9-35, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2013/05SafronovasAA21.pdf.

[10] Ingrida Jakubavičienė, "Dar Kartą Apie Ernsto Neumanno Ir Theodoro Sasso Procesą / Another Look At The Trial Of Ernst Neumann And Theodor Sass", *Darbai Ir Dienos / Deeds And Days* 12, no. 57 (2012): 31-63.; Ingrida Jakubavičienė, "Der Neumann-Sass-Prozess 1934/35 Aus Litauischer Sicht", *Annaberger Annalen Über Litauen Und Deutsch-Litauische Beziehungen* 2012, no. 20 (2012): 220-254, https://www.lituanistika.lt/content/47962.

[11] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994).

with the position of the Baltic republics in the interwar period.[12] They conclude that, although the United Kingdom had a serious interest in protecting the Baltic republics, it always had a higher priority agenda, whether within the British Commonwealth or other European countries.

The third chapter is supplemented by the findings of diplomats Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys in the book "Lithuania in European Politics".[13] In passages where they assess the role of Germany, Lithuania, and Great Britain, they often side with Lithuania. At the same time, they draw attention to the paradox of the Neumann-Sass trial, which put Lithuania in a worse light in the world than Nazi Germany, which in the second half of the 1930s stood in the "protection of Klaipėda democracy".[14]

The most recent contribution, addressing Britain's role in the Baltics, is Douglas Ford's 2020 article "From Limited Military Commitment to the Concerned Observer: Britain's Relations with the Baltic States During the First Period of Independence 1918-40".[15] Ford concludes that Britain's main priority was to keep Germany and the USSR in check. At the same time, the United Kingdom had very little room for manoeuvre due to a lack of political will and resources to participate directly in protecting the Baltics. Thus, other than purely economic intervention or diplomatic pressure, it could not have affected the Baltic without a significant change in British priorities.

Findings from secondary literature are supplemented by available online archival materials and their online edited publications. The periodical articles of the daily press, especially The New York Times, serve as a complementary primary source. The editors published many articles during the interwar existence of Klaipėda, and the journalists of this newspaper

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[12] John Hiden, "British Policy Towards The Baltic States: 1939–1945", *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 75-87.; Patrick Salmon, "British Security Interests In Scandinavia And The Baltic 1918 - 1939", *The Baltic In International Relations Between The Two World Wars: Symposium Organized By The Centre For Baltic Studies At The University Of Stockholm, November 11 - 13, 1986* 1986, no. 1 (1988): 113-136.

[13] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997).

[14] Ibid. p. 161.

[15] Douglas Ford, "From Limited Military Commitment To Concerned Observer: Great Britain's Relations With The Baltic States During The First Period Of Independence, 1918–40", *The International History Review* 42, no. 5 (2020): 913-929.

directly participated in the observation of the 1935 elections and the Neumann-Sass trial.

Autonomous Regions from the Perspective of International Law
The Concept of Territorial Autonomy

Territorial autonomy is a key concept throughout this diploma thesis. It can be defined as the formal independence of an autonomous entity in political decision-making processes. More specifically, an autonomous territory is characterized by partial or complete administrative and legislative sovereignty, i.e., some part of the governing powers are held by the local citizens.[16]

"´Autonomy´ is not a term of art or a concept that has a generally accepted definition in international law."[17] The extent of autonomy is determined in each individual case based on its founding treaties and agreements and can evolve through time via ongoing legal actions instigated and influenced by its own and other stakeholders. Recognizance of and respect for existing territorial autonomy is also dependent upon the involvement of individual entities (states and international communities) and their efforts and ability to maintain the status quo. Due to the lack of a universal definition, according to American lawyer John Chipman, "on no subject of international law has been so much loose writing and nebulous speculation as on autonomy."[18] It is precisely this lack of a clear and internationally recognized definition that contributes to the instability of autonomous territories, as their status is difficult to enforce in the real world, particularly in times of change and challenges.

Internationalized Territories

Internationalized territory is a type of territorial autonomy. It has a form of administration in which part of the local sovereignty is handed over to an international community, a group of states, or an international organization. It is characterized by the partial or complete

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[16] Michael Tkacik, "Characteristics Of Forms Of Autonomy", *International Journal On Minority And Group Rights* 15, no. 2 and 3 (2008): 369-402. p. 372.
[17] Hurst Hannum, "The Concept Of Autonomy In International Law", *The American Journal Of International Law* 74, no. 4 (1980): 858-889. p. 859.
[18] John Chipman Gray, The Nature and Sources of the Law 122 (1909) source: Hurst Hannum, "The Concept of Autonomy In International Law", *The American Journal Of International Law* 74, no. 4 (1980): 858-889. p. 860.

involvement of local citizens in the administration of the territorial unit under the supervision of representatives of an international organization or group of states. Meir Ydit defines internationalized territory as follows:

"An internationalized territory, somewhat analogous to a guaranteed or protected state, is an entity that has been created under international supervision or control in response to a particular political situation. It may or may not be considered a state in international law, although it generally retains full authority over local affairs and is restricted only by its international constituent document."[19]

The main purpose for creating internationalized territories has been to supress nationalist tendencies in ethnically or religiously heterogeneous areas and to bolster economic stability in the region. [20] Internationalized territories are often created in a post-conflict period. It is clear from international evidence that in most cases it is not a sustainable framework over the long-term. [21] In practice, internationalizing territory is usually a temporary solution which often does not calm conflict in the region and in some cases, it can actually be a driver for further escalation through ethnic mobilization.[22] This concern is confirmed by several historical examples.

In Europe, the city of Kraków gained partial autonomous status in the nineteenth century, becoming the Free City of Kraków. This status was granted by the members of the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The city was under the joint control of Austria, Prussia, and Russia until 1846, when it was annexed by Austria after an unsuccessful uprising in Kraków.[23]

The end of the First World War instigated creation of several internationalized territories in Europe. In the interwar period, the semi-autonomous Free City of Danzig was established with partial self-government under the control of the League of Nations. Between 1920 and

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[19] G. Schwarzenberger, Internationalised Territories: From the 'Free City of Cracow' to the 'Free City of Berlin'. A study in the historical development of a modern notion in international law and international relations (1815–1960), *International Affairs*, Volume 37, Issue 3, July 1961, Pages 364–365.

[20] Lindsey Cameron and Rebecca Everly, "Conceptualizing The Administration Of Territory By International Actors", *European Journal Of International Law* 21, no. 1 (2010): 221-244. p. 222.

[21] Kavus Abushov, "Autonomy As A Possible Solution To Self-Determination Disputes: Does It Really Work", *International Journal On Minority And Group Rights* 22, no. 2 (2015): 182-201. p. 185.

[22] Shane Joshua Barter, "Rethinking Territorial Autonomy", *Regional Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 298-309. p. 300.

[23] Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, And Self-Determination: The Accommodation Of Conflicting Rights*, Revised Edition, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). p. 17.

1935 there was the Territory of the Saar Basin under the administration of Great Britain, France, and the League of Nations. In 1935, the Saar Basin was reunited with Germany based on the results of a plebiscite.[24] In the 1919-1923 period, the Klaipėda Territory can also be considered to have been under international administration.

The second wave of the formation of internationalized territories was brought about by the end of World War II. Unresolved ethnic and territorial conflicts on the Italian-Yugoslav border initiated the creation of the Free Territory of Trieste under the direct responsibility of the United Nations Security Control. This arrangement existed in a *de facto* sense for only seven years before it was divided between Yugoslavia and Italy.[25] In the same period, 1947-1950, plans were made to internationalize Jerusalem under a separate and permanent international status. However, this United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, called the Corpus Separatum of Jerusalem, was not ultimately implemented.[26] In Europe, since 2008, when Kosovo declared independence, there has been no territorial unit under international administration.

A subcategory of internationalized territories includes autonomous territories within a sovereign state under the guarantee of the international community or of a group of states. In the first half of the twentieth century, two examples can be found in Europe: Klaipėda as an autonomous region of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Åland Islands as an autonomous region of Finland.

In 1923 *de facto*, and *de jure* in 1924, the Klaipėda Territory passed into Lithuanian hands. The Allied Powers, led by France and Great Britain, acceded to Klaipėda's affiliation with Lithuania on the condition that it retained territorial, economic, and judicial autonomy. Lithuania agreed to these conditions. However, the Klaipėda Convention of 1924 stipulated that Klaipėda's autonomy was subject to the Lithuanian constitution, the Lithuanian representative held a veto over the actions taken by local executive bodies, and Klaipėda's actions could not run counter to Lithuanian foreign policy. In practice, the extent of

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[24] Ibid. p. 392f.

[25] Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, And Self-Determination: The Accommodation Of Conflicting Rights*, Revised Edition, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). p. 400ff.

[26] James Alan. "The Proposed Internationalization Of Jerusalem (1947–1950)." In *Peacekeeping In International Politics*, 149-151, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990. p. 150.

Klaipėda's autonomy was debatable and influenced by the Lithuanian interpretation of the Klaipėda Convention. Between 1924 and 1939, the Klaipėda region was thus technically an autonomous territory under a sovereign state. However, its autonomous status remained guaranteed by the Signatory Powers – Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, which, together with Lithuania, signed the Memel Convention in 1924.

In the same period, in the early 1920s, the Åland Islands became an autonomous region with a majority Swedish population under Finnish administration and international supervision. Unlike Klaipėda, territorial affiliation was established and evolved under the influence of neighbouring states, and the individual initiatives of Klaipėda's population were fragmented by their differing nationalistic affiliations, the majority of the local population of the Aland Islands voted for an autonomous status under Finnish administration via an extensive petition as early as 1919.[27] In the case of the Åland Islands, full cultural and language autonomy was clearly defined in the founding documents, which Finland unequivocally respected and did not attempt to undermine. These criteria seem to have ensured that the autonomous status of the Åland Islands would survive World War II, and the Islands remain an autonomous territory under Finland today.[28]

The question remains what framework can ensure the sustainable viability of an autonomous territory under international administration and provide protection against escalation of ethno-national conflicts and economic disputes. This is a complex issue, which is not the core of this thesis and requires deeper research. This thesis instead explores the case of Klaipėda in order to illuminate viability of a specific internationalized territory in the interwar period.

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[27] Michael Tkacik, "Characteristics Of Forms Of Autonomy", *International Journal On Minority And Group Rights* 15, no. 2 and 3 (2008): 369-402. p. 377
[28] Ibid.

The Case of Klaipėda

The Treaty of Versailles and the Origin of the Klaipėda Condominium

The Klaipėda region was defined and demarcated during the Paris peace negotiations after the First World War. Historically, it was a part of Lithuania Minor (Prussian Lithuania), which was located in the region of East Prussia. The centre of the Klaipėda region was the sleepy port city of Klaipėda, home to about 35,000 inhabitants.

Prior to the First World War, Klaipėda was not a strategic port in comparison to surrounding Baltic Hanseatic towns, since the town was at the periphery of Prussia. For Prussia, it was a peripheral port in the shadow of Kaliningrad and Gdansk. Due to the close proximity of Tsarist Russia, Russian raw materials (especially wood) flowed through Klaipėda, and fish and other sea products moved to Russia.[29]

The port became more important at the end of the First World War, when the treaty powers decided to separate the Klaipėda region from Prussia. With the disintegration of Tsarist Russia and the German Empire, new states emerged in the region, for whom foreign trade access to the Baltic Sea through Klaipėda was crucial, and was key to the stability of the region. Klaipėda was to be controlled by the victorious powers, which would allow the passage of goods to the newly formed republics in the region. Further, it was strategically useful for Western powers that the eastern borders of Germany and the surrounding territory were under Allied surveillance. For these reasons, on the basis of the Treaty of Versailles, the Klaipėda region was established in 1919 as a condominium.[30]

Due to the strong regional identities of Prussian Lithuanians, Prussian Germans, and the Memelländer, administration of the region was very difficult. Discrepancies in regional and national identities significantly influenced the population data available at the time. This opened a space for completely different positions by negotiators during the Paris peace negotiations and also in the following years, when the status of Klaipėda was redefined.

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[29] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 90.

[30] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83. p. 68.

The Role of British and Polish Delegations in Establishing the Klaipėda Condominium

During the peace negotiations, there was a debate about how best to draw the eastern/Baltic border of the defeated German Empire. Several delegations, including the Polish delegation, gradually took part in the negotiations. The Polish approach advocated separation of Klaipėda from Germany, for mainly economic reasons. They held that Klaipėda should allow access to the sea to non-German states in the region – the emerging Lithuania and Poland. In February 1919, Roman Dmowski, who represented Poland at the Paris Peace Conference, spoke in favour of redefining the borders of Lithuania Minor and East Prussia in favour of Lithuania, which was expected to become a close partner of Poland.[31]

The Polish delegation began to talk openly about the division of Lithuania Minor in March 1919. This became one of two key moments that influenced the fate of the territory. The second moment was when it was decided that the Klaipėda area should fall within the borders of the Polish state as a separate and probably autonomous area. These proposals were welcomed by France as it sought to bring Germany under control of the Allies as much as possible. In such a case Klaipėda would lie within a clear demarcation of the Neman and Vistula rivers.[32]

For the Lithuanian delegation, it was initially unthinkable for Lithuania Minor to be partitioned and only partially controlled by the Lithuanian administration. However, the position of the Lithuanian delegation was very weak during the Paris Conference, mainly because for a long time it was not certain whether an independent Lithuania would be created at all.

Historical and Political Perspectives of the Region

Several different strategies to determine the fate of Klaipėda and the surrounding area could be pursued. The first aspect to consider was the strategic location of the area and its importance in the region. The second approach might stress the ethnic and national

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[31] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 15.
[32] Ibid., p. 16f.

composition of the population of the territory. Last but not least, the historical affiliations of the region could play a decisive role.

Historically, the territory was primarily under German administration. The German language predominated in public space and offices. However, the population was historically an ethnic and national mix. In the town of Klaipėda there was a German majority, while in rural areas Lithuanians dominated. The economic sustainability of the emerging Lithuanian state necessitated unrestricted access to the sea and thus to international trade. The port also had to be made available to the Polish side. The ongoing conflict between Lithuania and Poland over Central Lithuania and Vilnius weakened Lithuania's position in the negotiations on the status of Klaipėda region. In 1922, Lithuania had severed all diplomatic relations with Poland. Lithuanian revisionism was perceived by the victorious powers as a disruptive element in the region.

The Klaipėda territory, defined by Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles, fell under the international administration of the Entente Powers, primarily under the administration of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. The United States did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles and therefore did not participate in administration. Klaipėda comprised an area of 2,443 square kilometres of land[33] and 405 square kilometres of the northern half of the Gulf of Curonia.[34] The borders were the Memel River on the south and the village of Nemirseta (Nimmersatt) on the Baltic coast.[35] This area formed an artificially created territorial unit around the town of Klaipėda. This redrawn the border of the so-called Lithuania Minor, which was unchanged for the previous 500 years.

The first mention of the settlement of this area dates back to the 13th century, when the Livonian Brothers of the Sword and the Teutonic Knights founded a fortress in Klaipėda in 1253, which served both as a defence and a centre for control of trade.[36] In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the city of Klaipėda was burned several times by the surrounding Lithuanian tribes. Since the fifteenth century, the port city was under German

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[33] This is approximately the area of the Liberec Region – the smallest region in the present Czech Republic.

[34] Władysław Wielhorski, *Litwa Współczesna*, (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut geograficzny, 1938). p. 79.

[35] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83. p.65.

[36] Władysław Wielhorski, *Litwa Współczesna*, (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut geograficzny, 1938). p. 79.

administration. Before the First World War, the territory of Klaipėda was located on the border between the German and Russian empires. Due to its geographical position on the periphery of the German Empire, the city prospered from trade with Russia. Klaipėda depended on Russian imports of raw materials, and on exports of fish.[37]

From 1919, the Klaipėda region was under the administration of the Entente powers as a condominium. The United Kingdom together with the Commissioner of the League of Nations officially should have played a key role in the administration of Klaipėda. In practice, however, the territory was controlled by the Allies and led by the French, which was to the great displeasure of the Germans.[38] The Allies exercised their rule through a military governor and the head of a civilian board, the so-called prefect, who was subordinate to the governor, and three district inspectors-officers. These officials were all French.[39] The 21st Independent Battalion of Foot Riflemen from St. Dié-Gerardmere, which was deployed to control the area, played a rather symbolic role in the Klaipėda region.

The entire security agenda was gradually handed over to local police and security forces.[40] The governor established a National Directorate from the local population, constituting the district's executive authority. The National Directorate was subordinated to the governor through the prefect. In this manner, the Allies ruled Klaipėda and its environs for three years. The destabilization of this temporary arrangement occurred when the Allies began to discuss the longer-term direction of the region. Germans were opposed to permanent French supervision, and Lithuanians intervened against the planned changes by engaging in an armed uprising in 1923.

Population composition in the Klaipėda region

The non-homogeneous ethnic composition of the population played a crucial role in deciding the fate of the Klaipėda territory. Historical and current sources often report contradictory data on the composition of the population, and the Treaty of Versailles

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[37] Emanuel Chalupný, *Slovník Národohospodářský, Sociální A Politický*, (Praha: Otakar Janáček, 1931). p. 512.
[38] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 21f.
[39] Władysław Wielhorski, *Litwa Współczesna*, (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut geograficzny, 1938). p. 79.
[40] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 22.

decreed the separation of the East Prussian region from Germany without consulting the local population. The decision was justified by their assumption that there was a Lithuanian majority in the area, based on the data available to the decision-making process in Paris.[41] According to the Prime Minister of France, George Clemenceau, the Klaipėda territory had always belonged to the Lithuanian nation. Yet, Clemenceau described the city of Klaipėda as primarily German, saying, however, that in his opinion, this should not be an obstacle to secession from Germany.[42] From a record from June 1919, we learn about the position taken by the head of the British delegation, Prime Minister David Lloyd George. According to a conversation reported by the Polish Prime Minister, Ignac Paderewski, Lloyd George was dubious of entrusting the administration of Klaipėda to Lithuania precisely because of the German majority in the port city. Paderewski replied that this was common in Baltic port cities, but the Lithuanian village population was very little Germanized, and Lithuanian national consciousness prevailed in the East Prussian region.[43]

According to the September 1920 census, there were 150,746 residents in the Klaipėda region. Lithuanian nationality was declared by roughly 67,000, while 71,000 stated that they were German nationals.[44] As a result of the pro-Lithuanian policy, the Lithuanian population gradually increased up to 1938.[45] As the years progressed, relationships between Lithuanians and Germans in the region deteriorated. Both nationalities fought for the administration of Klaipėda, especially after its accession to Lithuania. In this atmosphere, the Germans declared that only 16% of Germans spoke Lithuanian in 1932 and that the percentage of Germans in the total Klaipėda region was as high as 72.5%. However, according to Lithuanian data from 1925, only 42% of residents there were Germans and 24.2% were so-called Memelländer.[46] According to German sources, the

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[41] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83. p. 68.

[42] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 19.

[43] Remigiusz Bierzanek, *Sprawy Polskie Na Konferencji Pokojowej W Paryżu W 1919 R. Dokumenty I Materiały*, (Warszawa: Warszawa, 1965). p. 214f.

[44] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 20.

[45] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p. 198.

[46] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 78.

Memelländer were automatically counted as Germans, while Lithuanian sources listed them as a separate group of strongly Germanized Lithuanians who lived in the Klaipėda region.[47]

Prussian Lithuanians differed from those in Greater Lithuania in many ways, particularly by religious faith. While the majority of Lithuanians were Roman Catholic, Prussian Lithuanians and their German neighbours more often professed themselves to be Evangelical Lutherans.

From a cultural point of view, Klaipėda was also a very diverse area. Since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a large part of the population was bilingual.[48] German and Lithuanian languages were intertwined in ordinary conversation by much of the population. Although the city of Klaipėda was predominantly German, during the period after the Third Division of Poland, there was a Lithuanian cultural centre, where Lithuanian press was printed and smuggled into Tsarist Russia. Lithuanian and German efforts towards acculturation were ongoing at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, but were not particularly successful. These efforts intensified after the First World War.

Although representatives of neither nationality were invited to take part in the decision-making process during the Paris Peace Conference, both the German and Lithuanian populations sought to influence decisions on East Prussia. Their aim was to change the existing complex cultural composition in favour of either Lithuania or Germany by exerting political pressure. Pressure from the German side was more influential and had local support due to the larger Germanized population in the area.[49] The Klaipėda Germans unsuccessfully tried to create a Klaipėda Republic with a constitution and parliament linked to Germany. Prussian Lithuanians wanted to join Lithuania, and launched petitions to this end.[50] These conflicting initiatives did not fade in the years following the Versailles

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 92.

[49] Ibid. P.93.

[50] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 22.

conference, as the French administration was declared an interim solution from its onset.[51] Due to the fact that the condominium arrangement was intended to be temporary, it did not address the nationality problem, but only postponed it by a few years.

The situation of Klaipėda began to be discussed by the Allies in 1923, when the status of the condominium was planned to be redefined and stabilized. The Lithuanians reacted by annexing Klaipėda, which was accompanied by pro-Lithuanian demonstrations in the Klaipėda region and Lithuania on 10-15 March 1923. The region's accession to Lithuania was confirmed by the Convention of Paris on May 8, 1924, which concerned the Memel Territory and the annexed status of the Memel Territory.

Lithuanian annexation of Klaipėda

In fall 1922, a decision was made by the Allies to revise the current positions and to grant independent status to Klaipėda, along the lines of the status of Gdansk. The decision provoked a negative reaction in Lithuania, given the large share of the Lithuanian population in Klaipėda, and the fact that Klaipėda was the only port Lithuania could hope to obtain. The Lithuania's only seaside town of Palanga was a recreation area, and unsuitable for port activities. Lithuanian resistance to Klaipėda's independence was not taken into account to any significant degree during the Allied decision-making process. Underestimation of the Lithuanian position by the Conference of Ambassadors fuelled extensive demonstrations in Lithuania and Klaipėda, which resulted in the occupation of the city of Klaipėda on 15 January 1923 and expulsion of the French Battalion.[52]

The occupation of the city was carried out mainly by Lithuanian volunteer units from Greater Lithuania. The German population of Klaipėda did not resist, and the occupation was tacitly approved by Germany and the Soviet Union.[53] Lithuanian Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas was assured by German diplomats that taking control of the

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[51] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83. p. 68.

[52] Emanuel Chalupný, *Slovník Národohospodářský, Sociální A Politický*, (Praha: Otakar Janáček, 1931). p. 512.

[53] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Der Anschluss Des Memelgebietes An Litauen : Die Tilsiter Akte Und Der "Aufstand" Als Symbole Des Legitimationsmythos", *Annaberger Annalen Über Litauen Und Deutsch-Litauische Beziehungen* 17, no. 1 (2009): 5-40,

territory was expected to go smoothly, before the demonstrations in Klaipėda and Lithuania broke out.

The Lithuanian government formally distanced itself from the Klaipėda incident.[54] Nevertheless, after extensive negotiations, Klaipėda's connection to Lithuania was acknowledged. The Allies viewed the incident negatively, but they viewed the occupation of Klaipėda as compensation for the annexation of Vilnius by Poland in 1922. The Allies expected Klaipėda to help settle relations between Lithuania and Poland. However, these expectations were not fulfilled and a rapprochement between Lithuania and Poland did not occur until the end of the 1930s. In the long run, Klaipėda's annexation damaged Lithuania's position in the international field.[55]

At the time of the occupation of Klaipėda, the prevailing opinion in Lithuania was that occupation constituted a "liberation" of the local Lithuanians from the German influence that had been imposed on them for centuries, but most Prussian Lithuanians were not thrilled with the 1924 changes. Culturally and economically, the inhabitants of the Klaipėda region were significantly closer to Germany. Despite Lithuanian expectations, this resulted in the fact that political loyalties did not shift in a pro-Lithuanian direction in the interwar period. For the inhabitants of Klaipėda and the surrounding area, Lithuania was perceived as culturally and economically backward, and after the annexation they rightly feared a reduction of their living standards.[56]

The economic and monetary situation in Lithuania greatly influenced the separatist and pro-Lithuanian tendencies of the local population in the Klaipėda region throughout the 1923-1939 period. During the French Administration under the League of Nations mandate, the so-called Memel Mark, which was linked to the German Mark, was in circulation in Klaipėda. In January 1923, the French administration planned to open a French bank of

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[54] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p.207.

[55] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p. 96.

[56] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 80.

issue, which would be followed by the introduction of a new currency unit controlled by the French.[57] These plans were thwarted by the occupation of Klaipėda in 1923.

In 1923, when Lithuania occupied Klaipėda, value of the German Mark was sinking on international markets, and a period of hyperinflation ensued in both Germany and in Klaipėda Territory. As early as February, both German Marks and Lithuanian Litas were in circulation as parallel currencies in Klaipėda.[58] In June 1923, in order to protect the local economy from German hyperinflation and to increase Lithuanian influence, Kaunas declared that payments would be accepted only in more stable Litas.[59] It can be argued that pegging the Klaipėda economy to the Lithuanian currency helped to limit the economic disruption caused by hyperinflation in neighbouring Germany. The Klaipėda population was thus spared many of the consequences of hyperinflation. At the same time, the shift to Litas and tariffs imposed in the process made trade with Germany, Klaipėda's largest trading partner, more difficult.

Convention between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and Lithuania respecting the Memel Territory

After long negotiations, the "Convention between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and Lithuania respecting the Memel Territory" was signed in May 1924. The document passed the territory of Klaipėda into the hands of the League of Nations under the administration of the Republic of Lithuania. The Convention thus amended part of the Treaty of Versailles in favour of Lithuania. According to Article 2, "[t]he Memel Territory shall constitute, under the sovereignty of Lithuania, a unit enjoying legislative, judicial,

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[57] Robertas Žiugžda, "Lithuania In International Relations In The 1920S", *The Baltic In International Relations Between The Two World Wars: Symposium Organized By The Centre For Baltic Studies At The University Of Stockholm* 1986, no. 1 (1988): 59-78. p. 63.

[58] Anton Hesse, "Schlußbericht Über Die Entwicklung Des Memelgebietsrechts", online, *Zeitschrift Für Ausländisches Und Internationales Privatrecht* 13, no. 1/2 (1940): 160-181, www.jstor.org/stable/27872810. p. 173.

[59] The exchange rate of the Litas to the Dollar was 10/1 at the time of its inception in 1922, i.e. $1 for 10 Litas. This exchange rate along with the U.S. dollar – German Mark exchange rate determined the value of the German Mark to Litas exchange rate. These ratios then defined the final exchange rate between the German Mark and Litas on the Berlin Stock Exchange in June 1923. At that time, the exchange rate of the German Mark to the dollar was 353,412 / 1. Source: "Die Hyperinflation in Deutschland (1923)", Boerse.de. Berlin: boerse.de. 1994. https://www.boerse.de/boersenwissen/boersengeschichte/Die-Hyperinflation-in-Deutschland-1923-70-seite,4,anzahl,20.

administrative, and financial autonomy."[60] Subsequent articles defined the position of individual nationalities, citizenship, and the possibility of military service, from which the citizens of Memel were exempted until January 1930.[61]

All parties agreed to grant the status of an autonomous unit to the Memel Territory. As the area remained under the sovereignty of Lithuania, the President of Lithuania was entitled to appoint a Governor of the Memel Territory. Elections in the territory of Klaipėda were to be held in accordance with the electoral law of the Republic of Lithuania.[62]

According to Annex 1, the Autonomous Territory of Klaipėda would have only partial judiciary autonomy. "Civil legislation (including proprietary rights) and criminal, agrarian, forestry, and commercial legislation (including weights and measures), it being understood that all operations effected by the credit and the insurance institutions and the exchanges shall be subject to the general of the republic, regulations governing organizations officially representing the economic interests of the territory."[63]

According to Article 24, the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Lithuania would extend over the whole territory of the republic, including the Memel Territory.[64] The degree of judicial autonomy was restricted because of the Smetona coup in 1926 and subsequent constitutional reforms in Greater Lithuania in 1933.[65]

Within the Convention, political functions were created to administer Klaipėda: a Governor, a Chamber of Representatives, a Directorate, and a President of the Directorate. The Governor was appointed by the Lithuanian president and given the right to veto any laws approved by the Klaipėda Chamber of Representatives (the Seimelis) if they exceeded the competence of local authorities, or contradicted the Lithuanian Constitution or Lithuanian international obligations. The Governor ruled along with the five-member Directorate and

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[60] *Convention between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and Lithuania respecting the Memel Territory*. 1924. Vol. 736. Geneva: League of Nations. Art. 2.

[61] Ibid., Art. 13

[62] John A. Grade, "The Memel Controversy", online, *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1924): 410-420, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20028310. p. 413.

[63] *Convention between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and Lithuania respecting the Memel Territory*. 1924. Vol. 736. Geneva: League of Nations. Annex. 1.

[64] Ibid., Art. 24.

[65] Sigita Černevičiūtė, "Political Crimes Phenomena: Courts' Practice Of Espionage Crimes In Lithuania 1919–1940", online, *Právněhistorické Studie / Legal History Studies* 47, no. 2 (2017): 94-105, https://karolinum.cz/data/clanek/5202/PHS_47_2_0094.pdf. p. 96.

appointed the Chairman of the Directorate, who in turn appointed the other members of the Directorate. The supreme legislative body was called the Seimelis – Chamber of Representatives – which consisted of twenty-nine members. Parliamentary elections were universal, equal, direct, and secret, and deputies were elected for a period of three years. The Klaipėda parliament sent five deputies to the Kaunas Parliament to represent local interests at the national level.[66]

The Position of Prussian Germans, Prussian Lithuanians, and Lithuanians in Klaipėda

Although Germany still claimed part of the annexed Lithuania Minor, the relationship of Germany with Lithuania remained strong. This suited Germany since it eliminated any danger of the territory becoming a "French Gibraltar", and strengthened the chances that Germany could ultimately reclaim the area, given that it is generally less difficult to obtain territory from a small and militarily weak republic than from the international community, whose members have much larger armies and budgets.[67] However, due to Kaunas' efforts to Lithuanize the newly acquired territory, the German attitude gradually changed during the 1920s and 1930s, when local political activists and Germany's Foreign Office began to support an anti-integration policy among the local population.[68]

Until the annexation of Klaipėda to Lithuania, the population of the German minority in the Lithuanian republic was not substantial, consisting only of thousands of inhabitants, mostly residing on the border with the former East Prussia. With the annexation of the port city and its surroundings, the German minority in Lithuania grew by tens of thousands of Prussian Germans, not all of whom were satisfied with the governing arrangements in the Klaipėda region. Despite Klaipėda's autonomous status, the Lithuanian government in Kaunas made significant efforts to Lithuanize Klaipėda and to favour Lithuanians in national

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[66] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p. 207.

[67] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p. 207.

[68] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 92.

and economic affairs.[69] From the beginning of the Klaipėda autonomy under Lithuanian administration, the people of Klaipėda were affected by economic difficulties associated with the reorientation of exports and connections to Lithuanian markets. While industrial production recovered relatively quickly, peasants and farmers from villages in the Klaipėda region were often undercut by cheaper competing goods from the rest of Lithuania. Due to Kaunas' policy, Lithuanian farmers from Greater Lithuania were favoured in sales of agricultural products.

Under pressure from the Allies and due to individual initiatives by Germany and Lithuania, governance negotiations continued after 1924, aimed to resolve asymmetries in autonomous Klaipėda, resulting in a German – Lithuanian citizenship agreement. On February 10, 1925, a treaty was signed between Germany and Lithuania in Berlin, clarifying citizenship in the territory of Klaipėda. According to the agreement, people in Klaipėda could choose German or Lithuanian citizenship. 13,238 people applied for German citizenship,[70] which amounted to less than 10 percent of the population in the region. Germany itself did not support or initiate applications for German citizenship, as for the most part, this was the first step to leaving Klaipėda.[71] The rest of the Klaipėda Germans and Memelländer received Lithuanian citizenship.

Although most Prussian Lithuanians spoke Lithuanian at home, in public spaces, German remained the predominant language. Based on data from a survey for education purposes commissioned by the Directorate in the 1920's, 62% of the population in the (most populous) Klaipėda district was primarily Lithuanian-speaking. In the district of Šilutė (Hedekrug) it was 39% and in the southernmost district of Pagėgiai (Pogegen) only 24% spoke Lithuanian. According to the same survey, it is clear that locals were heavily Germanized. When parents were asked which language they preferred to be used at school, 97% of respondents requested German. Another question concerned language in the teaching of religion, where 88 percent of respondents preferred German, which is

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[69] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 29.

[70] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 78.

[71] According to contemporary statistics, 9,792 people eventually left Klaipėda. Source: Žostautaitė, Petronėlė. *Klaipėdos Kraštas: 1923-1939*, Mokslas, 1992. p. 55.

probably related to the fact that the majority of the local population professed the evangelical faith.[72]

In the Klaipėda region, residents' political orientation did not always correspond to their national self-identification. Despite the efforts of Kaunas, locals generally did not support centralization of the state, and regional preferences overshadowed national tendencies, especially among Lithuanian voters. This corresponds, for example, to disproportionate representation of Germans in the local Seimelis parliament. Prussian Lithuanians even elected Germans who promoted local (regional) interests at the expense of Lithuanian (national) interests. This is illustrated by Parliamentary elections, in which Lithuanian representatives never won more than five out of twenty-nine seats.[73]

After the Lithuanian annexation of the Klaipėda region, neither emigration to Germany or strengthening of ties to it were popular, likely due to the poor economic situation in Weimar Germany and the possibility of self-government through the autonomous status of Klaipėda. Nevertheless, the beginning of the rule of the Republic of Lithuania did experience nationalist tensions. A significant element was the renaming of streets with Lithuanian names. However, the 1920s passed without significant incidents, signalling the ability of the Klaipėda Autonomous Region to resist both German and Lithuanian nationalist tendencies.

Klaipėda's lack of a strong commitment to Lithuania became particularly serious for Kaunas after the military coup in 1926, which replaced the democratically elected government with a conservative authoritarian regime. The new regime needed to find reliable supporters who would obediently pursue government policy in the region. From the Lithuanian government's point of view, there were very few trustworthy citizens among the local (mostly Prussian) Lithuanians in the Klaipėda region.[74]

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[72] Władysław Wielhorski, *Litwa Współczesna*, (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut geograficzny, 1938). p. 80.

[73] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 9.

[74] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 95.

Kaunas therefore openly supported migration of Lithuanians from Greater Lithuania to the Klaipėda region, which spontaneously began in 1923, with most migrants relocating to the city of Klaipėda. Their reasons were mainly economic, as Klaipėda had become the largest industrial centre in Lithuania, offering many job opportunities. Lithuanians from Greater Lithuania and the inhabitants of Klaipėda held the same Lithuanian citizenship, so the influx can be seen most accurately from increases in the number of members of the Catholic Church in Klaipėda, which indicate that 10,000–15,000 Lithuanians gradually moved into the city. Contrary to the expectations of Kaunas' authoritarian regime, the newly arrived Lithuanians had little influence on the pro-German attitude of the overall Klaipėda population.[75]

The balance in the region was also affected by the economic situation in Lithuania and Germany. One key cause of national conflicts and the escalation of nationalist tendencies was the Great Depression at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s and the associated protectionist tendencies that led to more economically isolated individual states.

The Growing Influence of Nationalism and National Socialism in Klaipėda

The representatives of the Republic of Lithuania realized that the policy of Lithuanisation in Klaipėda had failed, despite all its efforts, which intensified after 1926.[76] Pressure towards Lithuanian nationalism, the Great Depression and its impact on Klaipėda industries, and developments in neighbouring Germany all influenced relations between the population groups in the Klaipėda region. Relationships were further strained by nationalist waves on both sides. At the beginning of the 1930s, Kaunas observed increasing pro-Nazi tendencies in the Klaipėda region. At the same time, the Republic of Lithuania saw that they were losing the battle to transform the local population in the direction of Lithuania. The result was an effort to suppress German influence as much as possible, at

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[75] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 96.

[76] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 771.

both economic and political levels. However, these efforts were not without international notice and consequences.

The first major incident in Klaipėda after annexation that received international attention was the dismissal of the President of the Directorate, Otto Böttcher, in 1932. Böttcher was appointed in 1931. He was clearly anti-Lithuanian and his activities exceeded his established powers. As a consequence of his economic negotiations as the official President of the Directorate in Klaipėda in Germany, he was removed from office, and the Chamber of Representatives was dissolved by the Governor.[77]

The procedural dispute over the dismissal of Otto Böttcher's Directorate was resolved by the Permanent Court of International Justice in den Haag. The Court acknowledged that Böttcher's dismissal was justified. However, the dissolution of the Chamber of Representatives was not accepted. The dispute over Böttcher's dismissal was evidence of growing tensions in German-Lithuanian relations in the region. The process showed the limits of Klaipėda's autonomy, and the boundaries of Kaunas' influence. The local Klaipėda population reacted with record support for German candidates in elections to the fourth local parliament in the summer of 1932.[78]

Sharp reactions on both the Lithuanian and German sides were provoked by Hitler's rise to power in 1933. In Klaipėda, undemocratic and pro-Nazi support grew, resulting in both stronger separatist tendencies and in attempts to reconnect to Germany. Lithuania as a trading partner gradually became Lithuania as prey for the "Drang nach Osten" program.

The activity of nationalist organizations increased significantly. Lithuania and its secret police controlled German organizations through trusted infiltrators. As members of individual Klaipėda organizations, the infiltrators aimed to collect data on the activities of the membership base, connections to Germany and German finances, and any plans to change the status of Klaipėda. The infiltrators gathered information mainly from the Christliche Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (CSA) and the Sozialistische Volksgemeinschaft (SOVOG), and earlier, from the German Kulturbund. The Lithuanian

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[77] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 55.
[78] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 57.

State Security Police had been accumulating information on the German environment in Klaipėda for ten years.[79]

Among the most active pro-German organizations in Klaipėda was the Memeldeutscher Kulturbund, founded in 1923, which had about 20,000 members. In the 1930s, financial support to it from Nazi Germany increased significantly. Other organizations, including the CSA, also benefited from German support, though due to its extreme separatist tendencies, the German side preferred to support the more moderate organization SOVOG, which accepted Prussian Lithuanians into their ranks and did not make their separatist aims public. After the accession of Hitler in 1933, the German NSDAP's efforts to control events in Klaipėda through German associations and organizations increased. In the early 1930s, however, the time was not yet deemed right to reconnect Klaipėda to Germany, and the so-called Memelfrage was relegated to a second tier of importance.

The Christliche Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (CSA) was founded by Pastor Theodor von Sass in 1933, and in the same year on 22nd May, the CSA won 18 out of 29 seats in Klaipėda city-council elections.[80] Their successful campaign was directed not only against the Lithuanians, but also against the "traditional" German parties,[81] which were "detached from the Nation" according to the CSA. A more moderate nationalist wing led by veterinarian Ernst Neumann campaigned against von Sass. Following ideological and power disputes, Neumann founded his own party, the Sozialistische Volksgemeinschaft (SOVOG) in June 1933. At the beginning of 1934, the SOVOG party had 6,000 members, while the CSA had around 2,000.[82] About 30% of Klaipėda's teachers and 51% of its civil servants were members of these organizations at the beginning of 1934.[83]

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[79] Ingrida Jakubavičienė, "Dar Kartą Apie Ernsto Neumanno Ir Theodoro Sasso Procesą / Another Look At The Trial Of Ernst Neumann And Theodor Sass", online, *Darbai Ir Dienos / Deeds And Days* 12, no. 57 (2012): 31-63. p. 33.

[80] Martin Broszat, "Die Memeldeutschen Organisationen Und Der Nationalsozialismus 1933 - 1939", online, *Vierteljahrshefte Für Zeitgeschichte* 5, no. 3 (1957): 273-278, http://vfz.ifz-muenchen.de. p. 274

[81] These four "traditional" political parties, the Volkspartei, the Landwirtschaftspartei, the Sozialdemokraten, and the Kommunisten, were replaced in 1933 by the CSA and subsequently by the SOVOG. The new parties were automatically considered Nazi. Source: Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", online, *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 777.

[82] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 101.

[83] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 79.

Although national socialist tendencies in Germany manifested themselves through the unity of members of the "Aryan race" and "high culture" movements, in the case of Klaipėda, local pro-German political activists and Germany's Foreign Office activities focused on regional identity and the uniqueness of Memeländerism. According to their rhetoric, Memeländerism was the source of "high culture" in the region.

It was this connection to the regional identity, which was not promoted by the central Lithuanian authorities, that fuelled wide acceptance of German ideology across the population of the Klaipėda region.[84] The idea of Memeländerism was also widely supported among the Prussian Lithuanians, who felt connected to Klaipėda through Memel-German culture and language. It was also believed that autonomy was important to preserve this "high culture" and that any Lithuanian intervention would disrupt its uniqueness.

The regional NSDAP organisation in the German border town of Tilsit had the greatest impact on the development of nationalist and separatist tendencies in Klaipėda. Tilsit, which was the centre of smuggling on the German-Klaipėda border, partially dominated the growing National Socialist scene in Klaipėda. NSDAP district leader Hans Moser had a great deal of influence.[85]

The German consulate in Klaipėda, headed by Consul Reinhold von Saucken, also played a major role in the rise of Nazi tendencies. Through the consulate in Klaipėda, the Auswärtiges Amt Deutschlands and Gauleiter Ostpreusens Erich Koch controlled pro-Nazi movements in the region.[86] SOVOG, CSA, and Kulturbund were in direct contact with the consulate and were controlled by the Third Reich Consulate in Klaipėda.

Since 1933, the Kulturbund in Klaipėda had turned in a pro-Nazi direction. Changes in financing offered opportunities to re-orient the Kulturbund. Financing changes took place via the Bund Deutscher Osten (BDO) established in 1933 and the NSDAP–connected

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[84] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 92.

[85] Hernmann Pölking, *Das Memelland: Wo Deutschland Einst Zu Ende War - Ein Historischer Reisebegleiter*, (Potsdam: be.bra verlag, 2012). p.168.

[86] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Neumann-Sass-Prozess Als Ausdruck Fundamentalen Wandels In Den Beziehungen Zwischen Litauen Und Deutschland", online, *Annaberger Annalen* 2013, no. 21 (2013): 9-35, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2013/05SafronovasAA21.pdf. p. 20.

Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (VDA). However, the first attempts to control local organizations occurred between 1929 and 1931, when the leadership of the NSDAP Ostpreußens sought to coordinate the activities of pro-German organizations in Klaipėda.[87]

The organizations under the control of the consulate oversaw sabotage activities in the territory of Klaipėda, especially in the period before elections to the Seimelis. Disruptions of Radio Kaunas and its replacement by broadcasting from East Prussia, which contained mainly anti-Lithuanian propaganda, were gradually increasing. Before the elections of 1933, 250 radio receivers were purchased using German funds and smuggled into Klaipėda. They were not set to Lithuanian broadcasting frequencies.[88] German propaganda thus managed to reach the poorer areas of the Klaipėda region.

Lithuania's response to the intensification of pro-Nazi tendencies was to appoint Jonas Navakas as Governor of Klaipėda in November 1933. Within a few months, this close associate of Lithuanian President Smetona enforced laws restricting German influence. One example is a law governing the nationality of civil servants and public officials, which stated that teachers with German citizenship could not teach in Klaipėda.[89] This was aimed to limit the direct influence of Nazi Germany on youth, as Klaipėda Germans who lived in Klaipėda before 1923 had automatically received Lithuanian citizenship unless they specifically applied for German citizenship on their own initiative. The law also aimed to end German financial support for Klaipėda teachers and civil servants supporting German patriotism in the region.[90] However, the Lithuanian government's steps to suppress German influence in Klaipėda were not effective enough, and German and Nazi influence continued to grow.

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[87] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Neumann-Sass-Prozess Als Ausdruck Fundamentalen Wandels In Den Beziehungen Zwischen Litauen Und Deutschland", online, *Annaberger Annalen* 2013, no. 21 (2013): 9-35, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2013/05SafronovasAA21.pdf. p. 20.

[88] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", online, *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 779.

[89] Ruth Leiserowitz, "Childhood In The Memel Region", in *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies*, Machteld Venken, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 65-83. p. 71.

[90] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", online, *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 776.

Everything indicated that Lithuania had lost its battle for Memel. Its final attempt to reverse the situation was to imprison representatives of SOVOG and CSA under the Law for the Protection of the Republic. This was the largest anti-German and anti-separatist legal weapon, and came into force in February 1934.[91] The law imposed heavy penalties for any separatist actions or steps that could lead to disintegration of Lithuania including Klaipėda autonomous territory. Klaipėda's Governor Navakas thus gained an effective means of combating Klaipėda's anti-Lithuanian tendencies.[92] In the course of 1934, the nationalist press of the Lithuanian nationalists, Tautininkai, had already drawn attention to violations of the Law for the Protection of the Republic by the Klaipėda Germans and the German-Memel organizations. An attempted Nazi coup in Vienna in July 1934 was a further important catalyst for Lithuanian anti-German actions.[93] The goal was, if not to make the population pro-Lithuanian, then at least to weaken the German position in the region as much as possible.

"The World's First Nazi Trial" – the Neumann-Sass Case

Based on information from infiltrators, 128 people suspected of being connected to the Nazis and violating the Law for the Protection of the Republic were arrested during 1934. In the process, through home searches and subsequent investigations, a number of documents were discovered that proved anti-state activities, illegal trade, and political ties with Germany. Hundreds of illegally held weapons were found. Von Sass and Neumann's ties to the Consulate of the Third Reich in Klaipėda were discovered. [94]

The chairman of the Klaipėda Directorate, Ottomar Schreiber, protested against the arrests and other interventions, although he himself opposed Nazi tendencies. In a letter to Governor Navaskas, Schreiber attacked the legality of anti-Nazi interventions, which in his opinion exceeded the powers of the February 1934 law. In June 1934, Schreiber was

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[91] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 65.

[92] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 107.

[93] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 99.

[94] Helmut Jenkis, "Der Neumann-Sass-Kriegsgerichtsprozess In Kaunas 1934/1935 Aus Deutscher Sicht", online, *Annaberger Annalen Über Litauen Und Deutsch-Litauische Beziehungen* 17, no. 1 (2009): 53-103, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2009/6_Jenkis.pdf. p. 61.

removed from office because of his stance on the arrests.[95] However, Schreiber was not the only Lithuanian to openly question the investigations and arrests. As early as February 1934, the former pro-German Prime Minister, Augustinas Voldemaras, spoke out explicitly against pressure being applied to Memel Germans, stressing that good relations with neighbouring Germany should be a priority.[96]

Despite German protests and threats, a three-month Neumann - Sass trial started in December 1934. It took place in Kaunas in the Ministry of Justice building in front of the military tribunal, and lasted until March 1935, and was the most significant political process in interwar Lithuania. 128 people were charged with various crimes against the Lithuanian government and over 500 witnesses were called. More than 32 volumes of evidence were collected during the investigation, and the investigation record itself amounted to more than 500 pages.[97]

The Lithuanian side featured testimony mainly from infiltrators – loyal Klaipėda Germans, who had collected evidence and cooperated with the Lithuanian secret police. Lithuanian secret services also obtained correspondence and other evidence from house searches.

The Kaunas process, i.e., the Neumann–Sass process, was utterly unprecedented. It was the largest strike against members of German organizations in the whole of interwar Europe. The process received unparalleled attention, which was one of the reasons why Lithuanian courts strictly complied with national and international standards. The defendants had Kaunas lawyers at their disposal, and the trial was closely monitored by foreign observers, including Germans.[98]

87 Germans from Klaipėda were convicted in the Kaunas process. The key reason for the arrests and conduct of the entire trial was the alleged preparation of the forced secession of Klaipėda from Lithuania by local and German forces. However, the idea that a push for

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[95] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 108.

[96] Helmut Jenkis, "Der Neumann-Sass-Kriegsgerichtsprozess In Kaunas 1934/1935 Aus Deutscher Sicht", online, *Annaberger Annalen Über Litauen Und Deutsch-Litauische Beziehungen* 17, no. 1 (2009): 53-103, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2009/6_Jenkis.pdf. p. 81.

[97] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 117.

[98] Ingrida Jakubavičienė, "Dar Kartą Apie Ernsto Neumanno Ir Theodoro Sasso Procesą / Another Look At The Trial Of Ernst Neumann And Theodor Sass", online, *Darbai Ir Dienos / Deeds And Days* 12, no. 57 (2012): 31-63. p. 53.

secession was in the works was questioned many times during the trial and in later studies of it.

Pastor Theodor von Sass was accused of leading a separatist organization that conducted military training and prepared for a violent coup in the Klaipėda region. At the organization's meetings, he was reported to talk about the need to annex Klaipėda to Nazi Germany with the assistance of Nazi armed forces. Von Sass's convicted collaborators had been in the process of joining the NSDAP, SA, and SS.

Ernst Neumann was accused of similar offenses. He was charged with leading an illegal Nazi organization with separatist plans. With the financial and ideological assistance of the NSDAP, Neumann and his associates were found to be leading an anti-Lithuanian campaign in the Klaipėda region. Neumann and his organization were charged with preparing combat units in preparation for a planned uprising.[99] Neumann had a major influence on the legislative process in Klaipėda, as he controlled the activities of the local parliament and other Klaipėda autonomous institutions, and thus was in an influential position.[100] However, no direct evidence of the main point of the indictment, an upcoming armed coup, was ever found. The accusation was supported mainly with circumstantial evidence, i.e., organized defensive exercises led by von Sass and discussion of a coup in correspondence from Neumann.[101]

The defendants were represented by Kaunas lawyers, and the trial was conducted under international supervision.[102] One of the most prominent figures who significantly influenced the view of foreign countries on the Neumann–Sass case was the British lawyer Alexander Lawrence. He observed most of the trial except when Lithuania prevented him from accessing it. He would have been responsible for issuing a declaration of the independence of the trial, however, according to his reports, the investigation and trial

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[99] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Neumann-Sass-Prozess Als Ausdruck Fundamentalen Wandels In Den Beziehungen Zwischen Litauen Und Deutschland", *Annaberger Annalen* 2013, no. 21 (2013): 9-35, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2013/05SafronovasAA21.pdf. p. 24.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ivydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 778.
[102] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 118.

were manipulated and purposefully anti-German. According to available records, Lawrence was hired by the German embassy in London and paid from German funds. Thus, it is certainly not possible to speak of him as an independent observer.[103] Lawrence made efforts to disrupt and question the process by all means. Some of his statements were perceived as exaggerated even by the Germans.[104]

The process was accompanied by massive propaganda from both sides. There were reports from the Lithuanian nationalist Tautininkai about the planned armed coup, the fight against Nazism, and the expansionist tendencies of Nazi Germany. Caricatures in the press reflected the reactions of foreign states, especially the victorious Allied powers, illustrating Lithuania as struggling on its own in foreign policy, and trapped in a domestic political conflict. On the other hand, a massive propaganda campaign also came from Nazi Germany, denigrating not only the process and the reasons for the trial, but also the Lithuanians themselves, who they depicted as illegally suppressing the right to self-determination of the Klaipėda Germans. The German view drew particular attention to what they designated an obvious and politicized attempt to crush Germans in Memelland.[105] Propaganda clichés arose on both sides, which have been broken down by numerous historians over the decades since the conflict.

A military court in Lithuania declared the organizations led by Theodor von Sass and Ernst Neumann criminal, because they intended to annex Klaipėda to Germany through an armed uprising. Individual members of these organizations were found guilty of conducting illegal military training in the Memel area, which was under Lithuanian military law. Ultimately, 87 members of CSA and SOVOG were convicted, and four were sentenced to death. Theodor von Sass was sentenced to 8 years in prison and Ernst Neumann to 12 years.[106]

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[103] Ivydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 778f.
[104] Ibid., p. 778f.
[105] Werner Essen, "Litauen, Ein Europäisches Erschütterungsgebiet", *Osteuropa* 11, no. 4 (1936): 248-259, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44930487. p. 250.
[106] Piotr Łossowski, *Litwa*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001). p. 143.

Current Perspectives on the Neumann-Sass Case

The remaining question is whether the organizations whose members were convicted were really Nazi-oriented. The NSDAP had not yet been established in Klaipėda in the first half of the 1930s. There were no SS or SA units in the region. The Klaipėda Hitlerjugend, which retained its original name, Memelländische Wandervogel, was closest to the Nazi organizations. This youth organization fell directly under the CSA and exhibited close ties to the Nazi Hitler Youth.[107] The composition of the NSDAP was more similar to the CSA, which accepted only Klaipėda Germans of Aryan descent.

More financial support from NSDAP was received by SOVOG as a counterweight to the CSA, although SOVOG was not openly anti-Jewish until 1938. SOVOG was mainly against the so-called Großlitauer – Lithuanians east of the Klaipėda region, though, peculiarly, Germanized Lithuanians – Memelländer – were allowed to join the organization. The possibility for Prussian Lithuanians to participate in running pro-Nazi organizations proves the power of regional (Memel) identity, which in many ways prevailed over national identity. This is an anomaly in pro–Nazi movements, since similar opportunities were not available to non-German residents of Nazi Germany.[108]

Lithuanian historians and journalists have often described the Neumann-Sass process as the first trial against the Nazis in Europe. It occurred long before the famous Nuremberg Trials[109] which condemned National Socialism for the bloodiest conflicts in the history of the world. In the first half of the 1930s, there were many indicators of the devastating nature of Nazism. *Mein Kampf,* which certainly included no peaceful rhetoric, already existed and was widely distributed. There were reports of concentration camps and anti-Jewish laws coming from embassies in Berlin. Countering these ominous signals, there was a skilful German foreign policy at play that produced bilateral non-aggression treaties and focused on economic cooperation.

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[107] Alvydas Nikžentaitis, "Germany And The Memel Germans In The 1930S (On The Basis Of Trials Of Lithuanian Agents Before The Volksgerichtshof, 1934-45)", *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 771-783, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639972. p. 777.

[108] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Neumann-Sass-Prozess Als Ausdruck Fundamentalen Wandels In Den Beziehungen Zwischen Litauen Und Deutschland", *Annaberger Annalen* 2013, no. 21 (2013): 9-35, https://annaberger-annalen.de/jahrbuch/2013/05SafronovasAA21.pdf. p.14f.

[109] Ibid.

Klaipėda's trade ties with the Weimar Republic developed further after the Nazi takeover of power in Germany in 1933. None of the real and official acts of German foreign policy suggested controlling Klaipėda or changing the geopolitical status quo in Eastern Europe. Germany officially recognized Klaipėda's connection to Lithuania in 1928, and according to official reactions, nothing should have challenged this reality.[110]

International Reaction to the Kaunas Trial

The German response to the arrests and subsequent trial was very sharp. Immediate steps were taken to stop the flow of goods between Lithuania and Germany. The German economic embargo hit Lithuania hard, as a large part of their overall trade was oriented towards the German market. Another tool of German pressure was massive propaganda, which was especially visible in the daily press. Lithuania was also denigrated by Germany to third countries, as German officials complained that Lithuania's actions suppressing Nazism were illegitimate. In its defence, Lithuania launched a retaliatory propaganda campaign, which was published mainly in media controlled by Lithuanian nationalists – Tautininkai.

The Lithuanian government expected support for its suppression of Nazism from the signatories of the 1924 Convention and other important European countries, and from the Soviet Union. However, to the great disappointment of Lithuania, actual reactions were rather the opposite. In order to settle Lithuania's relations with Germany in the region, the United Kingdom and France in particular pressured Lithuania to ease its approach to the trial defendants. Lithuania also did not find support from the Soviet Union, whose representatives expressed interest in resolving the tense atmosphere in the Baltics at Lithuanian expense. All major European players involved discouraged Lithuania from imposing the highest penalties that could be employed by the Act on the Protection of the Republic.[111]

Throughout the conflict in Klaipėda, British officials sought to gather data and information on Germany's position and plans. The British Foreign Secretary, John Allsebrook Simon, was

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[110] Halina Beresnevičiūtė-Nosálová, *Litva*, (Praha: Libri, 2006). p. 76.
[111] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p. 160f.

in regular contact with German officials and also with Hitler. Simon documented the German reactions to the Kaunas process and to the overall situation in Klaipėda. He asked the German Foreign Ministry about the plans for German armed forces assistance to Klaipėda in the first half of the 1930s, which was the main point of the indictment. According to their answer, Germany did not plan an entry of armed forces into the territory of Klaipėda in the 1934 period, or during the trial. German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath made a statement to this end. As a consequence, the position of British diplomacy was based largely on the German stance.[112]

Until the end of 1934, the Republic of Lithuania held an uncompromising and hard stance on the Kaunas process. Pressure from the European Powers eventually forced Lithuania to ease access to those accused in the trial. Lithuania ultimately withdrew, mainly in response to the results of the Saar status referendum in January 1935, after which Saarland was re-joined to Germany. Lithuania saw the move as acknowledgement of Germany's claims. Support from European powers was expressed on a much smaller scale than expected by Lithuania.[113]

At the end of the trial process, there were German military manoeuvres on the German-Lithuanian border. Between 12 and 22 March 1935, a military exercise south of the Neman River took place under the supervision of German Minister Göring, which included repeated unauthorized entry of aircraft into Lithuanian airspace.[114]

The issuance of the trial verdict engendered a significant response, due to the extent and number of sentences. Four death sentences, and several long sentences of as much as twelve years were applied. The degree of the punishments provoked another wave of the propaganda campaign, describing the Neumann-Sass process as the "Kownoer Bluturteil" aimed at suppressing Germans in Lithuania and promoting Lithuanian nationalist policy in the Klaipėda region. German and international pressure eventually forced Lithuania's President Smetona to reduce the death penalties to long prison terms. In 1936, as a result

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[112] Himmel, Richard Lynn. "Years Of Crisis Diplomacy: German-Lithuanian Relations, 1933-1939", 1975. p. 30.
[113] Ingrida Jakubavičienė, "Dar Kartą Apie Ernsto Neumanno Ir Theodoro Sasso Procesą / Another Look At The Trial Of Ernst Neumann And Theodor Sass", online, *Darbai Ir Dienos / Deeds And Days* 12, no. 57 (2012): 31-63. p. 56.
[114] Ibid. p. 56.

of international pressure to settle the German-Lithuanian dispute, amnesties were granted en masse. Neumann was the last prisoner released, in 1938 on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Lithuania.

The United Kingdom in particular played a major role in resolving the dispute over the harshness of the sentences, with a view to maintaining a geopolitical balance in the region. It intervened not only through diplomatic pressure but also through international trade relations, which sought to prevent the Soviet Union from increasing its influence in the region. In addition to attempts to regulate Russian and German influence, Britain increased its economic participation in Lithuania. For Lithuania, this was a concern as it was economically dependent on trade with Germany. Economic relationships are analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

Anglo-German-Lithuanian Relations in the Interwar Period

The United Kingdom, along with other Western Powers, was very dismissive of Lithuania's Neumann-Sass case. Although Lithuania expected support from the Western Powers, it received none. In order to maintain peace and stability in the region, the representatives of the Signatory Powers pressured the Lithuanians not to impose severe sentences and advocated for reconsideration of the seriousness of the defendants' actions. This pressure did not cease after the verdicts, and eventually led to Lithuanian concessions in the form of several waves of presidential amnesties in 1936-1938.

However, Lithuanians generally saw the reactions of the Western Powers, led by Great Britain, as violations of their rule of law and sovereignty. From today's point of view, and especially from the perspective of the Nuremberg trials after World War II, it is almost inconceivable that the Western Powers sided with the Nazis in the Neumann-Sass case. Closer examination of the motivations of Great Britain in the Baltics, Lithuania, and Klaipėda, suggests that its steps taken and diplomatic pressure applied were not surprising. The paradox remains, however, that the more the United Kingdom sought to balance the conflicting interests in the region and to maintain the status quo with Germany, the wider space it opened for the later German occupation of the Klaipėda region in March 1939.

Aspects of the British role in Lithuania and the Baltic region

The role of Great Britain in Lithuania and in the German-Lithuanian conflict can be characterized in several dimensions. Great Britain was the first power to recognize Lithuanian independence in 1919. Great Britain thus signalled its belief that Lithuania was a viable entity, even though some British representatives questioned the potential for Lithuania's long-term existence.[115] The participation of British troops in any potential armed conflict had been excluded since 1919, and Great Britain never openly guaranteed military support for Lithuania.

Another dimension was connected to economic relationships. Germany was Klaipėda´s major trading partner, and a traditional trade rival to the UK in the Baltic states, where Germany ranked first in overall import and export relationships. The aim of Great Britain was to replace German trade ties with its own trade activity, though this policy endangered stability in the region.

From a security point of view, the United Kingdom together with the Western Powers made great efforts to create a buffer zone in Eastern Europe. This "cordon sanitaire" was intended to span from Finland to the Balkans, and to reduce the influence of Bolshevik Russia and the expansionary tendencies of Germany. The main destabilizing element of this plan was the dispute between Lithuania and Poland. Lithuania had long refused to establish any diplomatic or trade ties with Poland, which was actively used by Russia (later the Soviet Union) for establishing closer relations with Lithuania.[116]

Great Britain allowed partial rearmament of Germany in the 1930s, and it tried to loosen some other restrictive measures. This policy was aimed to slow arms races, as the United Kingdom did not have sufficient resources and support from its domestic population to bolster its own armaments.[117]

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[115] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 80f.

[116] Vasilijus Safronovas, "Population Of The Klaipėda Region And The Balance Of Power In The Eastern Baltic Region, 1919–1960.", in *Population Displacement In Lithuania In The Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities And Legacies*, Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliute, (Leiden: Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 91-111. p. 98.

[117] Harold Nicolson, "Modern Diplomacy And British Public Opinion", *International Affairs* 14, no. 5 (1935): 599–618, www.jstor.org/stable/2601839. p. 605f.

As one of the signatories of the Klaipėda Convention, Great Britain was a guarantor of Klaipėda's existence and its autonomous status. Regular complaints from the German side shone a negative light on Lithuania. There was a threat that the Signatory Powers would become involved in the affairs of Klaipėda. The resulting British reluctance to intervene in the Baltic area was later used by Germany to expand Nazi influence in Klaipėda and to suppress Lithuania.[118]

Unlike Poland, Germany and, ultimately, the Soviet Union, Great Britain was not interested in controlling the port of Klaipėda, and did not take actions to oppose Lithuanian administration of it. This British approach increased the viability of the young republic by helping to ensure Lithuania's access to the important Baltic port.

Economic aspects

The First World War caused economic devastation in the Baltic region.[119] The Republic of Lithuania was also severely affected by the loss of Vilnius and the Central Lithuanian region. In addition to the loss of communication routes and part of its productive population, Lithuania lost its direct border with Russia and hence, unlike Latvia and Estonia, ceased to be a transit country for Russian goods.

Unlike the other Baltic republics, Lithuania lacked access to some foreign markets for political reasons. Since the early 1920s, the ongoing Polish-Lithuanian conflict had partially isolated Lithuania at both political and economic levels. Although Lithuania tried to diversify its foreign trade and aimed to increase trade with countries with which it had no territorial disputes, the largest stream of trade cooperation continued to take place with neighbouring Germany. Lithuanian exports to Germany rose sharply across the 1920s, reaching a record value of 200,000 Litas[120] in 1929. Imports from Germany were stable at around 130,000 Litas per year until the Great Depression. During the premiership of Augustinas Voldemaras (1926-1929), this cooperation was extended to the political level.

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[118] Douglas Ford, "From Limited Military Commitment To Concerned Observer: Great Britain's Relations With The Baltic States During The First Period Of Independence, 1918–40", *The International History Review* 42, no. 5 (2020): 913-929. p. 920.
[119] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 77.
[120] In the interwar period, the value of 1 US dollar corresponded to 10 Litas.

The United Kingdom aimed to compete with German influence in the Baltics. Britain was the leading trading partner of both Estonia and Latvia in the 1920s, investing massive amounts into these countries. In the case of Lithuania, the United Kingdom remained in the second place behind Germany until the early 1930s.

Chart 7 shows a significant initial increase in Lithuanian exports to the United Kingdom in 1924, which may have been influenced by Lithuania's annexation of Klaipėda. This level was not exceeded until 1931, when the British supported imports of Lithuanian goods into Great Britain in order to limit economic destabilization of the Baltic region.
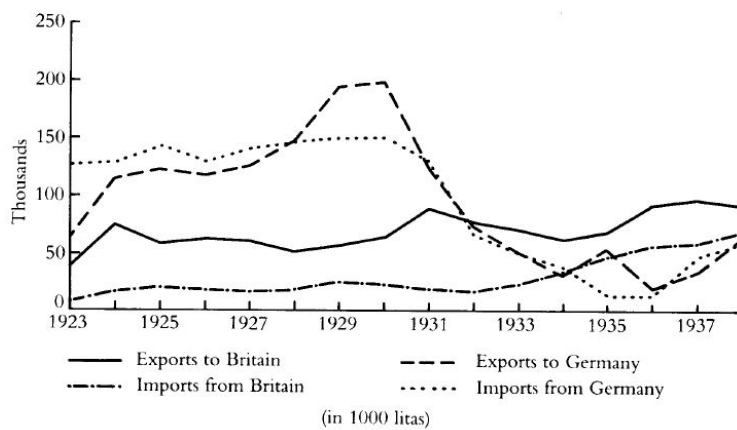

Chart 7 Value of British and German trade with Lithuania, 1923–38

Source: Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 212.

In the subsequent period, Lithuanian exports to Great Britain fell due to general disturbances in international trade. In 1936 and 1937, British trade initiatives compensated for Lithuanian trade losses caused by the economic blockade of Nazi Germany. The embargo against Germany was imposed as a corollary of the Neumann-Sass case. The United Kingdom therefore replaced Germany as Lithuania's top trading partner in the second half of the 1930s. In neighbouring Latvia and Estonia, Germany continued to dominate trade despite significant British investments in the 1920s.

In the early 1930s, Europe was hit hard by the Great Depression. Compared to more industrialized countries, Lithuania had an advantage as it mainly exported agricultural products, which were less impacted by the protectionist measures of some European countries than were industrial products. However, the economic crisis severely disrupted the flow of goods between Lithuania and Germany. In an effort to improve its trade balance, Germany increased tariffs on trade goods in April 1930, which impacted a large part of Lithuanian exports.

The Great Depression was particularly painful in restrictions on its industrial products. The second source of economic disruption was the fact that trade in the Klaipėda region was closely linked to Germany, which enacted increasingly more isolationist the Klaipėda region. As the largest industrial centre in Lithuania, it was severely affected by export policies. This resulted not only in huge drops in employment and sales, but also in overall social unrest. Higher German tariffs explicitly marked the border between the Klaipėda region and Germany, and highlighted the fragility of the autonomous status of the region.

The reaction of Lithuania was to search for new markets with lower trade barriers on agricultural products. Poland was not an option due to the ongoing conflict over Vilnius. Lithuanian animal products could not be exported over long distances due to their limited shelf life. The only country to which Lithuania was able to consistently increase exports across the Great Depression was the United Kingdom.[121]

Increased British trade activities consolidated the UK's position in the Baltics. The relatively small Baltic economies and their exports posed no danger to UK labour markets, though the asymmetry in market size guaranteed that any British trade intervention would have a significant impact on the Baltic countries. Trade ties extended the influence of the UK without implying military pressure, as any intervention of the British army or navy in the Baltic countries was unthinkable.[122]

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[121] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 210.
[122]Douglas Ford, "From Limited Military Commitment To Concerned Observer: Great Britain's Relations With The Baltic States During The First Period Of Independence, 1918–40", *The International History Review* 42, no. 5 (2020): 913-929. p. 915.

In the interwar period, the United Kingdom focused its attention mainly towards its own colonies and Commonwealth countries. Trade relationships with the Baltic republics and the Nordic countries were an exception. The same was true with respect to British security interests, as expenditures on defence were directed primarily at the British Empire.

Despite British trade priorities lying primarily outside of continental Europe, a number of trade agreements were negotiated with Lithuania, including the Baltic Trade Agreement in 1934. This and other agreements opened the British market for Lithuania. At the same time, 80 percent of the coal imported to Lithuania came from Great Britain.[123] Thus, reduction of tariffs and other steps expanding free trade took place on both sides.

The background for the Trade Agreements from 1934 dates back to 1931, when the British pound ceased to be tied to gold. British currency was purposefully devalued, encouraging exports, which had fallen sharply during the economic crisis. The support for exports was consistent with British protectionism, confirmed at the Ottawa Conference of 1932. The United Kingdom reaffirmed its imperial preference system here. The small size of the Lithuanian market made it possible to develop trade with the United Kingdom, despite its protectionist tendencies.

In 1930, imports from Britain accounted for 8.5% of Lithuania's international trade. In 1935, this share sky-rocketed to 37.3%.[124] Britain thus succeeded in replacing Germany as Lithuania's main supplier. In 1929, imports from Germany represented 49% of the total, but gradually declined as the economic crisis wore on. In 1936 they fell sharply, to just 9.2%, as a consequence of the German economic blockade. When the restrictions were lifted, Germany was not able to regain its prior dominance on the Lithuanian market. In 1938, German exports to Lithuania accounted for only 24.5% of the total.[125]

The business success of the United Kingdom in Lithuania can primarily be explained by the failures of Germany. Declines in trade with Germany mirrored the catastrophic relations

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[123] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 92.
[124] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 91.
[125] Ibid. 91.

between Lithuania and Germany in the 1930s, with the dispute over Klaipėda as the most painful point.

Foreign Policy Aspect - Lithuania as a Means for Holding Russian and German Influence in Check

In Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Baltic region, there were two major threats to Great Britain after the First World War - Bolshevik Russia, later the Soviet Union, and Germany. In the first years after the fall of the Romanov dynasty in Russia, Bolsheviks tried to spread their political revolution into continental Europe. In addition to direct interventions by Great Britain that supported anti-Bolshevik forces inside Russian territory, efforts were made to suppress traces of bolshevism in post-war Europe. The second threat, from Germany, was exacerbated, as Germany lost large areas on its eastern border after the First World War. Fears of German revisionism and revenge were justified, though the victorious powers tried to limit Germany's influence to prevent future problems.

The approach of Great Britain to Lithuania was based on the idea that the influence of Germany and Russia in the Baltic territory could be diminished through British support of Baltic republics. According to the historian John Hiden, "British governments have always believed that the only meaningful protection against undue Soviet influence was through lasting stability and prosperity in the Baltic region as a whole."[126]

During the time when the Republic of Lithuania was established and sought to be recognized by the world, military clashes were taking place in its immediate vicinity. During this period, the Western Powers were inclined to fill the power vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe themselves. Ideally, they envisioned the emergence of states that would be under their influence. The French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau strongly advocated for the creation of a "cordon sanitaire", a buffer system that would extend from Finland to the Balkans, including Lithuania.[127]

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[126] John Hiden, "British Policy Towards The Baltic States: 1939–1945", *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 75-87. p. 82.p. 80.

[127] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p. 199.

The creation of this buffer zone was also supported by Great Britain, as it reflected British interests in the Baltics. This justified the fact that the United Kingdom recognised the new Baltic republics as early as possible. Great Britain was the first great power to acknowledge the independence of the new Lithuanian republic. This act took place *de facto* on 24 September 1919. In this respect, the United Kingdom can be considered a "patron of the Baltic republics", although British diplomatically waited until 1921 to recognize Lithuania *de jure.*

One of the greatest difficulties associated with recognition of Lithuania was the demarcation of its borders. From the beginning, Lithuania expected to rely on British support on this issue. However, the United Kingdom never officially accepted or fulfilled this role. Britain was not explicitly involved in territorial matters in the region, as evidenced by the transfer of the Klaipėda Region administration to the hands of the French in the early 1920s, nor did the United Kingdom openly support Lithuania in the matter of Vilnius. British diplomacy essentially stood against Lithuanian revisionism.[128]

The plan to create an effective defensive belt between Russia and Germany was partially thwarted by the Polish-Lithuanian dispute over Central Lithuania and Vilnius. Trade and diplomatic tensions between the two states lasted until 1938. Lithuanian revisionism and Polish reluctance to give up Vilnius made creation of a stable buffer zone more difficult.[129] Disputes within the small states of Central-Eastern Europe prevented effective cooperation against ideologically hostile Bolshevik Russia and later Nazi Germany. The idea of the *cordon sanitaire* was never fully realized.

Since 1933, when Hitler came to power, Lithuania and other European states shared serious concerns about potential armed conflict between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Lithuania was located between these two large countries, and a conflict would therefore by definition include its territory. Compared to Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania had the most combat-ready army.[130] Yet there were only tens of thousands of Lithuanian soldiers, who

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[128] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 62f.

[129] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p. 60.

[130] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p.200.

would have very little chance to prevail in any way against the German or Soviet armies. As became apparent later, Soviet-German cooperation was much more dangerous for the Baltic region. It is generally agreed that this cooperation, when it occurred, sparked the world's largest armed conflict and erased Lithuania from the map of Europe for more than fifty years.

British Efforts to Revise Its Relations with Germany

The Versailles system was created with the aim of never repeating a bloody world-wide conflict. After the unconditional surrender of Germany after World War I, the Versailles Treaty imposed huge financial reparations payments, reduction of German armaments to an absolute minimum, and a significant loss of its territory. The Great Depression and the subsequent rise of Nazism exposed the fragility of the Versailles system. Complete humiliation of Germany turned out to have been short-sighted.

The early 1930s are associated with German efforts to revise its international standing. In February 1932, the Second World Disarmament Conference, organized by the League of Nations, took place in Geneva. One of its main points was a debate on the revision of the German position in Europe. During this time, there were concerns about re-armament not only in Germany, but also in France and Russia.[131] German representatives tried to equalize German armed forces with those of other European countries either by increasing Germany's army or reducing those of other countries. Delegates of other nations did not agree with this approach, which resulted in German representatives leaving the meeting. Germany left the conference definitively for the second time in October 1933. After Germany's departure, the disarmament agenda and armed forces control were discussed only in smaller groups of states and at a bilateral level. The United Kingdom also supported the ongoing dialogue on a smaller scale.

Great Britain tried to avert any future armed conflict by all possible means. At the same time, there was neither the political will nor was there support from the British population to re-arm. Based on an extensive questionnaire organized by the League of Nations in 1934, more than 80% of British respondents opposed any UK involvement in an armed conflict.

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[131] Pavlína Civínová, "Cesta K Paktu Čtyř Velmocí, 1933", *Dvacáté Století - The Twentieth Century* 2018, no. 2 (2018): 89-99. p. 93.

96% of respondents were in favour of remaining in the League of Nations, which was perceived as the guarantor of the status quo in Europe. One third of the British adult population participated in this "Peace Ballot", clearly showing the reluctance of the British public to engage in further costly armed conflicts.[132]

The United Kingdom made strong efforts to settle relations with Germany and loosen arms restrictions, hoping to prevent future arms races.[133] Great Britain not only wanted to maintain peace in Europe; the policy reflected a purely pragmatic assessment of the state of the British army, which had been underfunded since the first half of the 1930s and was unready to engage in any possible conflict in continental Europe.

In 1933, Britain, together with France, Italy, and Germany, discussed a similar agenda as that in the disarmament conference. Negotiations were initiated by Benito Mussolini, and the main goal was to revise the Versailles system. The German side held that negotiations with a smaller number of states would be more efficient, and Germany should have a more equal position in relation to the other powers. The Four Power Pact emerged from these negotiations in 1933. It bypassed the League of Nations, which was disturbing to the governments of smaller European states.[134]

However, with the rise of Hitler, demands for the rearmament of Germany began to be pushed more loudly, though they were automatically blocked by France. However, the United Kingdom did not push back on controlled increases in German armaments. In the final form of the Four Power Pact in Article 3, disarmament was mentioned only marginally.[135] For this reason, France never ratified it, and the pact therefore never entered into force. Germany continued to focus on bilateral agreements with individual European states and the United Kingdom was very proactive in the negotiations.

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[132] Martin Ceadel, "The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot 1934-5", *The English Historical Review* 95, no. 377 (1980): 810-839. p. 813.

[133] Allowing re-armament of Germany might seem paradoxical. Yet, it is perfectly consistent with the following approach. Britain rather permitted Germany to create a predefined size of its army, which might have been greater than the initial level. However, this limit restricted creation of an even larger army that would grow unboundedly.

[134] Pavlína Civínová, "Cesta K Paktu Čtyř Velmocí, 1933", *Dvacáté Století - The Twentieth Century* 2018, no. 2 (2018): 89-99.p. 94.

[135] Ibid. 96.

The United Kingdom responded to the question of influence in the Baltics by concluding that its naval forces were not sufficient to control the Baltic Sea. At that time, larger British spending on the defence of the Baltic states would have been unacceptable to the domestic population.[136] These were pragmatic reasons the United Kingdom eventually acceded to a bilateral agreement with Germany, the so-called Anglo-German Naval treaty in June 1935.

According to the Naval treaty, a quota was set for the German navy, which should not exceed 35% of the British naval forces.[137] Britain thus gained an overview and partial control over the German navy, which began to massively arm itself before signing the Treaty. However, the agreement enabled legal rearmament of the German navy, which significantly affected the balance in the Baltic by creating German superiority in this territory.

This development greatly frightened smaller Baltic republics and the Nordic states. As the British press put it at the time:

"It is curious that the available British documents do not reflect concern with this aspect of the problem despite Britain's historic concern with the naval balance of power in both the Baltic and the adjoining North Sea."[138]

The British move to allow Nazi Germany to take partial control over the Baltic was pragmatic. Its economic and political interests outside Europe outweighed those in the Baltics.[139]

Tensions between Lithuanians and Germans in Lithuania, and especially in the Klaipėda region, caused disagreements between the Republic of Lithuania and Nazi Germany. For this reason, Germany refused to involve Lithuania in bilateral agreements, but continued to negotiate solely with Lithuania's neighbouring countries. Among the most important outcomes of the first half of the 1930s was a non-aggression treaty, which Germany signed

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[136] Martin Ceadel, "The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot 1934-5", *The English Historical Review* 95, no. 377 (1980): 810-839. p. 817.

[137] Richard A. Best, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement Of 1935: An Aspect Of Appeasement", online, *Naval War College Review* 34, no. 2 (1981): 68-85, www.jstor.org/stable/44635939. p. 68.

[138] The Times (London), 6 July 1935, p. 11Source: Richard A. Best, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement Of 1935: An Aspect Of Appeasement", online, *Naval War College Review* 34, no. 2 (1981): 68-85, www.jstor.org/stable/44635939.

[139] John Hiden, "British Policy Towards The Baltic States: 1939–1945", online, *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 75-87. p. 78f.

with Poland in January 1934. However, Germany refused to sign a similar treaty with Lithuania.

Lithuania's defence response led to the signing of the Baltic Treaty in the autumn of 1934. However, cooperation between the Baltic states on defence had never guaranteed stability in the region, not only because the States each had only small armies and low defence budgets, but also because of their disagreements over who to identify as their common foreign partners and enemies. Lithuania was engaged in a long-running conflict with Poland, which both Latvia and Estonia perceived as a partner. Attitudes towards the Soviet Union also differed, with Lithuania considering it a closer partner than either Estonia or Latvia. This is evidenced by the 1926 non-aggression pact between the USSR and Lithuania, which was renewed in the 1930s. In 1931, it was supplemented by a secret agreement on mutual exchange of information, including information on other states. Moscow thus acquired a deeper overview of the Baltic republics. Nevertheless, a USSR proposal for a military alliance was declined by Lithuania. [140]

It is no coincidence that the authoritarian regime of Lithuania expressed positive attitudes towards the Soviet Union. In the first half of the 1920s, when Lithuanian Tautininkai nationalists held only two seats in the Kaunas parliament, the Soviet Union financially supported their anti-state and anti-Polish activities, and promoted materials aimed at undermining the democratic regime in Lithuania.[141]

Great Britain as a Guarantor of Klaipėda's Autonomy

The United Kingdom aimed to play a significant role in the administration of Klaipėda as part of Allied control. Ultimately, however, the primary role fell to France, to the great displeasure of the German side. After 1924, with the signing of the Klaipėda Convention, however, the United Kingdom became the guarantor of Klaipėda's autonomy, as part of the Conference of Ambassadors together with France, Japan and Italy.

Since the beginning of the Klaipėda Autonomy under Lithuanian administration, Great Britain needed to deal with numerous complaints of violations of Klaipedia's autonomous

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[140] Luboš Švec, Vladimír Macura, and Pavel Štol, *Dějiny Pobaltských Zemí*, Dějiny Států, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996). p. 202.
[141] Alfonsas Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona And His Lithuania*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015). p. 143.

status. The Klaipėda region was united with less-developed Lithuania. The discontent of Klaipedia's locals was reinforced by their negative prejudices towards the Lithuanian culture, which was considered inferior to Memelländisch and German. Lithuanization efforts by the central government in Kaunus were perceived negatively in Klaipėda.

Klaipėda's population was exposed to both Lithuanian and German nationalism. Complaints by locals are documented by their displeasure with Lithuanian renaming of the streets. On the other hand, the rising influence of Germany in the region, intensified after Hitler´s rise to power, was the main driver of Lithuanian initiatives sent to the Signatory Powers.

Great Britain had no observers in Klaipėda, so it could not accurately assess the relevance of either Lithuanian or local-Klaipedian complaints. It had no direct representation similar to the German consulate in Klaipėda. British ambassadors and foreign office experts were responsible for dealing with a wide range of European conflicts, and the one in Klaipėda was analysed only marginally.[142] Information about Klaipėda was thus received mainly through the complaints of competing groups, and in the case of more serious conflicts, it was acquired via materials prepared for trials or newspaper articles.

The permanent Court of International Justice in den Haag judged that the removal of Otto Böttcher from office in 1932 was legal. In the course of considering this judgement, the court also considered the nature of the autonomous status of Klaipėda. Lithuania and the Signatory Powers stood as counterparties in the process. Great Britain was represented by Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office, Sir William Malkin.[143] The court found that Lithuania had exceeded its mandate in Klaipėda, which undermined its position in the eyes of Signatory Powers.

Lithuania's negotiation position weakened further when Hitler came to power in 1933. Artful Nazi diplomacy softened British concerns about German expansionism.[144] German

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[142] Patrick Salmon, "British Security Interests In Scandinavia And The Baltic 1918 - 1939", *The Baltic In International Relations Between The Two World Wars* 1986, no. 1 (1988): 113-136. p. 120.

[143] Interpretation of Statute of Memel Territory (U.K. v. Lith.), 1932 P.C.I.J. (ser. A/B) No. 49 (Aug. 11).

[144] In March 1934, documentation commented specifically on the case of Klaipėda: „Meeting of the Cabinet to be held at No. 10, Downing Street, S.W.1. on Wendsday, 7th March, 1934 at 11.0 a.m.": „2: The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs advised his colleagues to keep an eye on the telegrams from Memel, which was a point where German Nazi activity appeared to be breaking out at the moment. There seemed to bet he

Foreign Affairs Minister, Konstantin von Neurath, himself disproved rumours of an annexation of Klaipėda into German hands in a presentation to the German Cabinet of Ministers. He justified his position by pointing to the German effort to maintain good relationships with Lithuania as a neighbouring country to Poland. Von Neurath repeated this position to British diplomats in Berlin in the same year.[145]

The most aggressive protests to the Signatory Powers about Lithuanian actions took place in 1934 and 1935, in response to the arrests ensuing from the Neumann-Sass Case and the local Parliamentary Elections in September 1935. Complaints were complemented by a massive German propaganda campaign against Lithuania. Kaunas responded with retaliatory press releases, which demonised the persons who had been arrested in an effort to justify the criminal investigations. Both Germany and Lithuania tried to persuade the Signatory Powers that they had real power over the fate of Klaipėda. This was the main reason pressure was directed at Great Britain in particular.

On April 4, 1934, Lithuania sent an informal negotiating text to the Signatory Powers to clarify Lithuania's steps in Klaipėda and their legitimacy.[146] The British response made it clear to the Lithuanians that stability in the region should be maintained, and that there should be no conflict with Germany. The Director of the Political Department of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stasys Lozoraitis, received a communication from Ambassador Thomas Preston urging him to take all possible steps to prevent the deterioration of German-Lithuanian relations caused by disputes in the Klaipėda region. Preston also offered involvement on the part of Great Britain as a possible independent mediator in resolving the disputes.[147]

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posiibility of a movement in Memelland to seize this territory for Germany." Source: The National Archives' reference CAB 23/78/8, p. 221. ordered from The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

[145] Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945. Serie C: 1933-1937. Das Dritte Reich: Die ersten Jahre. Band I.1: 30. Januar bis 15. Mai 1933, Göttingen 1971, Nr. 142, p. 259.

[146] Lithuanian National Archive, zesp. 383, inw. 7, t. 1609, k 755. Source: Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 110f.

[147] Lithuanian National Archive – 732-764, aide-memoire z 4 kwietnia 1934 r. Source: Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 110f.

A few days later, Laurence Collier, a director of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, indicated in a meeting with the Lithuanian envoy in London, Juozas Kajeckas, that Lithuania had likely exceeded its mandate in autonomous Klaipėda.[148]

Due to fear of further escalation of the situation, a subsequent British reaction to the German-Lithuanian conflict was even stronger. In mid-June 1934, the British Foreign Office commented on the situation, emphasizing that any armed conflict in Europe was undesirable and that every effort must be made to prevent one.[149] The British Cabinet came to the same conclusion and emphasized the need of investigations of the Lithuanian steps in Klaipėda.[150]

For the Lithuanians, Preston's and the British official responses were an unpleasant surprise, as they had expected direct British support. In this period, Lithuanian press produced cartoons in which Great Britain, along with other Signatory Powers, were denounced as traitors to the Lithuanian sovereignty for their lack of willingness to confront national-socialism in Klaipėda.

During the process of the Neumann-Sass trial, the Western Powers continued to pressure against death sentences and long-term prison sentences for the defendants. The pressure intensified after the convictions in March 1935, further reinforced by strong German opposition. Numerous accusations were made in the German press and by German diplomats to undermine the legitimacy of the verdicts.[151] According to eyewitnesses, top officials of Nazi Germany, including Hitler, reacted very sharply. However, hostile reactions were filtered by German officials to avoid alienatingthe Signatory Powers. As early as March 1935, Hitler told the head of the British diplomat's office John Simon that he did not want to provoke a conflict with Lithuania at any cost over "a few Germans in Memelland".[152]

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[148]Lithuanian National Archive. 744-745. Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 110f.

[149] J. Skirius, Lietuvių visuomeninkas ir diplomatas Bronius Kazys Batulis (1888-1967). Tevynei paaukotas gyvenimas, Vilnius 2001, p. 346. Source: Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 112.

[150] Meeting of the Cabinet to be held at No. 10, Downing Street, S.W.1. on Wendsday, 17th October, 1934 at 11.0 a.m Source: The National Archives' reference CAB 23/80/3, p. 221. ordered from The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

[151] „Osteuropa", vol. 8, (May 1935).

[152] Notes of Anglo-German Conversations, held at the Chancellor's Palace, Berlin, on March 25 and 26, 1935. In: Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939. Second Series, Vol. XII: European Affairs, August 5, 1934

Economic restrictions from Germany and diplomatic pressure from Western Powers, led by Great Britain, resulted in the removal of Jonas Navakas, the Governor of the Klaipėda Region, from office on April 4 1935. He was replaced by a less radical politician, Vladas Kurkauskas. Further, some of the penalties imposed after the Neumann-Sass trial were reduced. President Smetona revoked all four death sentences. Instead, those convicted were sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison.

1935 and Elections to the Klaipėda Seimelis

Another important milestone for Great Britain as a patron of Klaipėda's autonomous status was the 1935 election for the Seimelis. The Lithuanian government struggled to accept that, despite all its Lithuanization attempts in the Klaipėda region, most locals preferred representatives with regional interests to those from other parts of Lithuania. Preferred representatives were therefore mainly those on German ballots. Shortly after the Neumann-Sass trial in 1935, a fifth election cycle for the local Klaipėda parliament was planned. The Lithuanian government postponed the election for almost six months, to September 1935, despite the disapproval of Klaipėda's citizens. The delay violated the Klaipėda Convention signed in 1924 and therefore drew the ire of the Signatory Powers as well.

The most significant changes in the election process took place in August 1935, just a month before the elections. These changes have been criticized for their lack of transparency and because they were made in close proximity to the election date. The most significant change was the election of slates of candidates, rather than political parties. The method for selecting candidates was thus less clear.

Two days before the elections, a meeting between the Signatory Powers and German Ministerial Director Gerhard Köpke took place in Berlin. Köpke drew the attention to the alleged false accusations by the Lithuanian administration against Germany and German accusations that Lithuanian officials had bullied the local population because of their pro-German attitude, especially since Hitler came to power. He considered all anti-German

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– April 18, 1935. London 1972. n. 162 p. 712.

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actions taken by the Lithuanian administration to be unjustified and against the Klaipėda Convention.[153]

On the election day, foreign observers were present in the Klaipėda region, including Germans and independent observers sent by the Signatory Powers and about thirty foreign journalists. It was mostly Western journalists who reported on complaints and on the efforts of several groups to disrupt the electoral process.[154] Similar disruptions were reported by foreign observers even before the elections, as the Lithuanian authorities tried to curb the election campaigns.

During the election day, attempts were made to influence its results. Among the most prominent challenges to a fair election were an insufficient number and capacity of polling stations. German-speaking activists further slowed the election process by several hours, by bringing pensioners and the disabled to polling stations early on election day, to deliberately block and delay the election process. For this reason, the elections were prolonged through the following day.[155] Despite these actions, turnout was high, exceeding 90 percent of registered voters,[156] as the Germans succeeded in mobilizing almost the entire German-speaking electorate.

Regardless of Lithuanian and local-German efforts to influence the election results in their favour, the results did not differ much from previous elections. German representatives won over 80 percent of the votes and twenty-four of the twenty-nine seats in Klaipėda's Chamber of Representatives. Despite the clear dissatisfaction of the Lithuanian side with the results, the Signatory Powers pushed Lithuania to accept the election and to consider it a step towards the normalization of German-Lithuanian relations.[157]

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[153] Auswärtiges Amt. 1962. Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. no. 385. p. 610ff.

[154] New York Times, "Germans in Memel Claim a 90% Vote," 1 October 1935. p. 18.

[155] H. L., "The Elections In Memel", online, *Bulletin Of International News* 15, no. 25 (1938): 9-11, www.jstor.org/stable/25642389. p. 9.

[156] Petronėlė Žostautaitė, *Klaipėdos Kraštas: 1923-1939*, (Mokslas, 1992). p. 70f.

[157] Ieva Deviatnikovaitė, "Klaipėdos Krašto Seimelis: 1935 M. Rinkimai: Chamber Of Representatives Of The Memel Territory: The Election In 1935", online, *Logos* 20, no. 98 (2019): 181-194. p. 185.

The Silence before the Storm 1936/1937

Lithuania partially acknowledged that its position regarding Klaipėda was weakened, and the years following the 1935 elections were marked by significant concessions to the Klaipėda Germans and their demands. At the turn of 1936 into 1937, the economic blockade of Nazi Germany gradually eased, but German imports and exports to Lithuania still did not outweigh those of Great Britain.

In the Klaipėda region, Lithuanian authorities had very little room to manoeuvre. At any attempts to further Lithuanize the region, the German side threatened to complain to the Signatory Powers. Lithuania feared international oversight, and therefore succumbed to many of the German demands. Nevertheless, on December 6, 1935, the Bill for the Safety of the State was repealed, which was the basis for conviction of the Klaipėda Germans in the Neumann-Sass case.[158] This meant that persons charged and convicted in the case were legally allowed to engage in political activities. Neumann was released from prison in February, just a few months before the election, based on President Smetona's amnesty on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Republic of Lithuania's.[159] In the following elections to the Chamber of Representatives in Klaipėda in 1938, the Unified German Lists (Memeldeutsche Einheitsliste), led by Ernst Neumann, won 25 seats. The Lithuanian government could not object to the appointment of Neumann to the Seimelis.

The Lithuanian administration also waived its restrictions on the use of the German language in public spaces and regulations pertaining to the employment of German citizens in the local administration. The numbers of Lithuanian secret police in the Klaipėda Region were kept to an absolute minimum.[160] When any non-compliance with German requirements were noticed, the German side threatened to make an official complaint to the Signatory Powers. However, the Germans themselves did not want to allow the presence of foreign observers. The status quo suited them, as Lithuania was restricted from

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[158] H. L., "The Elections In Memel", online, *Bulletin Of International News* 15, no. 25 (1938): 9-11, www.jstor.org/stable/25642389. p. 10.
[159] On the basis of this law, all imprisoned enemies of the Republic were to be released.
[160] Vytautas Žalys, *Ringen Um Identität: Warum Litauen Zwischen 1923 Und 1939 Im Memelgebiet Keinen Erfolg Hatte*, (Lüneburg: Verlag Norddeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993). p. 83.

fully protesting the growing German influence in the region. However, international supervision would not allow Nazi tendencies in Klaipėda to develop fully.

The relationship between Klaipėda's administration and Germany stabilized in 1936 after significant personnel changes during which both the local (pro-German) Parliament and the (former pro-Lithuanian) Directorate supported pro-Nazi activities in the region. The government in Kaunas lost much of its influence over these two institutions. Lithuania found it very difficult to come to terms with the ideological loss of Klaipėda. However, Lithuania had no international support from either the surrounding Baltic states or the Western Powers in the Klaipėda Territory. Thus, Lithuania was isolated in its attempts to retain sovereignty over Klaipėda.

Since 1938, Germany openly supported Nazi activities in Klaipėda. In the summer of 1938, Nazi influence in the region was so significant that the local police (loyal to Kaunas) were no longer able to suppress or control it.[161] Many Klaipėda Lithuanians also took part in anti-Kaunas activities, as evidenced by Klaipėda's Lithuanian newspaper, Lietuviszka Ceitunga. The content of this newspaper was very similar to that of the anti-Lithuanian German press.[162]

The End of Klaipėda's Autonomy

From mid-1938, the German consulate had gained more influence in the autonomous Klaipėda region than its local parliament wielded. General Consul Reinhold von Saucken intervened not only in the activities of the local parliament, but also in the local press and at social and political events. In contrast, the territory's Lithuanian Governor, Jurgis Kubilius, was rarely seen in public spaces.[163]

For Lithuania, like other small states, the Munich Agreement at the end of September 1938 was a critical moment in its history.[164] The involvement of Great Britain and France in the annexation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia to Germany signalled the likely fate of

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[161] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p.162f.

[162] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p. 168.

[163] Ibid. 163.

[164] Saulius Kaubrys, "Osudové Okamžiky Československa Očima Litevců V Letech 1938-1939", *Auc Studia Territorialia* II, no. 1 (2011): 207-218. p. 209.

other territories Germany claimed.[165] Another signal was Germany's reluctance to discuss Lithuanian proposals to resolve the situation in Klaipėda. The German side pushed to wait for the results of local elections in the Klaipėda region in December 1938, which, as expected, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the German candidates. Further, Germany refused to commit to a non-aggression pact with Lithuania.[166] Even at the end of 1938, German diplomacy hoped Klaipėda would voluntarily submit to Germany in light of Lithuania's unsolvable situation in the international field. However, Lithuania did not offer to allow Klaipėda to move to sole German governance, though Lithuania began to build a new port north of Nimersatt, possibly signalling that they expected to lose Klaipėda.[167]

Local organizations which had proudly claimed the identity of Memelländer in the mid-1930s, were gradually absorbed by unifying Nazi organizations, and "Memelländer" was transformed into "Memeldeutsch". While in 1935, Klaipėda Germans ran for the "Memelländische Einheitsliste", in 1938 there were the Memeldeutsche Einheitsliste, with a list of German-speaking candidates.[168]

Nazi invasion to Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939 and its subsequent occupation indicated and marked possible end of the Klaipėda autonomy. British diplomacy responded promptly to this German aggression in Czechoslovakia. Prime Minister Chamberlain delivered a self-critical speech on March 17. The speech criticized Germany for breaking its promises to Britain on a territorial issue.[169] At the same time, he expressed concern about the further approach of Nazi Germany towards small states.[170]

Nevertheless, German occupation of Klaipėda took place on 22 March 1935, when the Lithuanian central government accepted a German ultimatum. From the Klaipėda side, the

[165]Saulius Kaubrys, "Osudové Okamžiky Československa Očima Litevců V Letech 1938-1939", *Auc Studia Territorialia* II, no. 1 (2011): 207-218. p. 212.

[166] Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, *Lithuania In European Politics: The Years Of The First Republic, 1918-1940*, (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donneley, 1997). p. 162.

[167] Liekis, Šarūnas. 1939: The Year That Changed Everything In Lithuania's History (On The Boundary Of Two Worlds), Amsterdam - New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2010. p. 23.

[168] Richard Lynn Himmel, "Years Of Crisis Diplomacy: German-Lithuanian Relations, 1933-1939" (1975). p. 68.

[169] V projevu přímo cituje část Munich Agreement, ve které stojí: "The final determination of the frontiers will be carried out by the international commission". Source: Speech by the Prime Minister at Birmingham on March 17, 1939.

[170] "Is this the last attack upon a small State, or is it to be followed by others?" Source: Speech by the Prime Minister at Birmingham on March 17, 1939 https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/blbk09.asp. see also in: Vít Smetana, *In The Shadow Of Munich: British Policy Towards Czechoslovakia From The Endorsement To The Renunciation Of The Munich Agreement (1938-1942) / Vít Smetana*, 2014. p. 113.

occupation was directly managed by Ernst Neumann, when crowds of his Nazi supporters greeted the Nazi army on Klaipėda's territory. The next day, Hitler himself arrived at the port on a cruiser. In a speech, Hitler officially announced that Klaipėda had been handed over to the Third Reich.[171] The Klaipėda region was renamed Memel and all traces of Lithuanian influence in the port city and the surrounding areas were gradually replaced by German names and labels.[172]

Shortly after the occupation of Klaipėda, British diplomacy responded with a modest protest.[173] Director of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, Laurence Collier, urged the British Cabinet to condemn this Nazi action, but no such condemnation ensued.[174]

The sixteen years of an autonomous Klaipėda under Lithuanian administration and the twenty years of the existence of the Klaipėda Territory created at the Versailles Conference had ended. The ultimate demise of the Memelländer identity was marked by the end of the World War II. The port city was destroyed and evacuated, and the majority of the original population either escaped or moved away.[175]

Conclusion

Though many Lithuanian authors have been inclined to depict interwar Lithuania as a victim of German aggression and betrayal by Great Britain, this thesis notes that there were other important factors that led to Klaipėda's being annexed by Germany in 1939.

During the annexation of Klaipėda to Lithuania, it became clear that much of its population did not want to join the economically less-developed Lithuania. On the contrary, they

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[171] "Official text of Chancellor Adolf Hitler's address from the balcony of the Memel Civic Theatre" – NYT: March 24, 1939.

[172] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 173ff.

[173] Patrick Salmon and John Hiden, *The Baltic Nations And Europe*, Revised Edition, (London and New York: Longman, 1994). p. 100.

[174] Foreign Office general correspondence -- political, 1938-1966, FO 371/22265, p. 243. ordered from The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

[175] Piotr Łossowski, *Kłajpeda Kontra Memel: Problem Kłajpedy W Latach 1918-1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2007). p. 210ff.

resisted intensive Lithuanization efforts. This certainly constituted a significant complicating factor in Klaipėda's governance by Kaunas.

Since 1926, Lithuania had been an authoritarian state. Its representatives were generally in favour of cooperation with Germany and profitable German-Lithuanian relations. At the same time, the Lithuanian administration placed great emphasis on Lithuanization. Their nationalistic efforts directed at the citizens of Klaipėda intensified in the first half of the 1930s and upset the precarious balance in the Klaipėda Territory.

From the beginning of the Lithuanian occupation of Klaipėda, the Germans intended to reconnect Memel to Germany. An ultimate German takeover was expected to be more easily accomplished when Klaipėda was in Lithuanian hands than it would have been to take it from the oversight of the international community. Officially, Germany had relatively warm diplomatic and trade relations with Lithuania, which were disrupted only by the Klaipėda issue. As a result of the Great Depression and Hitler's rise to power, these relations changed. In the early 1930s, the Germans, by providing secret financial and ideological support for organizations and associations in Klaipėda, helped to strengthen anti-Lithuanian and separatist sentiments in the region, to which Lithuania responded by arresting and putting on trial the most prominent anti-Lithuanian individuals.

Lithuania's response to the Neumann-Sass trial and subsequent changes to its electoral laws in 1935 showed that its attempts to use hard power failed. Lithuania expected the support of the Signatory Powers in its legal actions, but this support did not materialize. On the contrary, Lithuania was pushed by Great Britain to make concessions and compromises in the trial outcomes, which Great Britain hoped would calm the turmoil.

However, calming of the unrest under pressure by Germany and the Signatory Powers never truly came about. This was the last attempt to reverse the growing separatist sentiment in Klaipėda. Lithuania had lost its international support in resolving the Klaipėda issue.

Artful German diplomacy significantly influenced the behaviour of the Signatory Powers, led by Great Britain. The Powers explicitly ruled out any reunification of Klaipėda with Germany. However, the Powers also condemned Lithuania's discriminatory treatment of the Klaipėda Germans and efforts to influence changes in the regional identity of its citizens

in Lithuania's favour. In contrast, German rhetoric resonated with the Signatory Powers and with Klaipėda's population.

This all ensured Lithuania's gradual retreat from Klaipėda and the *de facto* departure of Klaipėda from Lithuania. The pro-German attitude of Klaipėda's citizens and growing German nationalist sentiments in Klaipėda could not be affected in any meaningful way by Lithuania due to German threats to complain to the Signatory Powers. As Lithuanian influence in Klaipėda waned in the second half of the 1930s, Klaipėda was swallowed by a German national-socialist wave.

The United Kingdom played an unfortunate role in the Klaipėda issue and in the fate of Lithuania, by trying to maintain the stability of the region across several dimensions at once. During the escalation of the German-Lithuanian conflict, Great Britain played the game laid out by skilled German diplomacy and often acted in favour of German interests, which were presented as being in the interests of Klaipėda's autonomy.

Overall, the concept of territorial autonomy within a sovereign state under international control had many shortcomings. Primary among them was a lack of on-the-ground information delivered to the Signatory Powers, which resulted from an absence of Signatory Power Representatives in the Klaipėda Territory. International supervision was thus influenced by pressure from both the Lithuanian and German propaganda campaigns. Apart from the Signatory Powers, none of the participants, including Lithuania, Germany, or the citizens of the Klaipėda region themselves, considered the autonomous status of Klaipėda to be a final solution, which contributed to the end of its autonomy.

Summary

Území Klajpedy se v roce 1924 stalo autonomní oblastí pod správou Litvy. Německý a litevský tlak přispěl k postupné nacionalizaci a radikalizaci obyvatelstva. Vyústěním těchto tendencí je kaunaský proces z přelomu let 1934/35. V rámci zákona na ochranu republiky došlo k odsouzení 87 příslušníků organizací CSA a SOVOG, a následným změnám ve volebním zákoně v roce 1935, což vedlo k hospodářské blokádě Litvy ze strany Německa a masivní propagandistické kampani. Velká Británie se pokusila situaci urovnat zvýšenou obchodní aktivitou s Litvou a zároveň diplomatickým nátlakem na Litvu. Na přelomu let

1936/37 dochází po udělení amnestií k obnovení německo-litevských hospodářských vazeb. Klajpedská autonomie, která měla chránit regionální identitu tzv. Memelländer byla definitivně zničena v březnu 1939, kdy bylo území Klajpedy připojeno k Německu a regionální identita ustoupila říšské – velkoněmecké identitě.

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Teze Diplomové práce

ZÁVĚREČNÉ TEZE MAGISTERSKÉ PRÁCE NMTS	
Závěrečné teze student odevzdává ke konci Diplomního semináře III jako součást magisterské práce a tyto teze jsou spolu s odevzdáním magisterské práce do SIS předpokladem udělení zápočtu za tento seminář.	
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Bc. Veronika Homolová	
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Specializace (uveďte zkratkou)*:	
NSS	
Semestr a školní rok zahájení práce:	
LS 2020	
Semestr a školní rok ukončení práce:	
LS 2021	
Vedoucí diplomového semináře:	
PhDr. Miroslav Kunštát, Ph.D.	
Vedoucí práce:	
Doc. PhDr. Vít Smetana, Ph.D.	
Název práce:	
The British Role in the German-Lithuanian Dispute over Klaipéda in 1930's: the Neumann-Sass Case	
Charakteristika tématu práce (max 10 řádek):	
Území Klajpedy se v roce 1924 stalo autonomní oblastí pod správou Litvy. Německý a litevský tlak přispěl k postupné nacionalizaci a radikalizaci obyvatelstva. Vyústěním těchto tendencí je kaunaský proces z přelomu let 1934/35. V rámci zákona na ochranu republiky došlo k odsouzení 87 příslušníků organizací CSA a SOVOG, a následným změnám ve volebním zákoně v roce 1935, což vedlo k hospodářské blokádě Litvy ze strany Německa a masivní propagandistické kampani. Velká Británie se pokusila situaci urovnat zvýšenou obchodní aktivitou s Litvou a zároveň diplomatickým nátlakem na Litvu. Na přelomu let 1936/37 dochází po udělení amnestií k obnovení německo-litevských hospodářských vazeb. Klajpedská autonomie, která měla chránit regionální identitu tzv. Memelländer byla definitivně zničena v březnu 1939, kdy bylo území Klajpedy připojeno k Německu a regionální identita ustoupila říšské – velkoněmecké identitě.	
Vývoj tématu od zadání projektu do odevzdání práce (max. 10 řádek):	
Téma bylo oproti původnímu plánu rozšířeno až do března 1939, tedy do připojení Klajpedy k Německu. Vzhledem k pokračující pandemické situaci nebylo možné navštívit The National Archives v Kew pro sběr archivních materiálů a zpracování je tak odkázáno na digitalizované části archivů a sekundární literaturu. Přidán byl dobový denní tisk, a to především deník The New York Times.	
Struktura práce (hlavní kapitoly obsahu):	
1. Autonomous Regions from the Perspective of International Law 2. The case of Klaipéda 3. Anglo-German-Lithuanian Relations in the Interwar Period	

Hlavní výsledky práce (max. 10 řádek):

Již od začátku litevské správy Klajpedy existovala velmi nízká ochota místního obyvatelstva identifikovat se s hospodářsky méně vyspělou Litvou. Obyvatelé se bránili snahám o politevštění, které zesílily po převratu v Litvě v roce 1926 a dále ve třicátých letech.

Ani Litva, ani Německo nepovažovaly status autonomní Klajpedy za konečný.

Pro Litvu byl kaunaský proces neúspěšným pokusem o zvrácení proněmeckých tendencí v Klajpedě, pro který nezískala mezinárodní podporu.

Velká Británie měla v Pobaltí příliš mnoho rolí, které se vzájemně vylučovaly. Zároveň získala o regionu relativně malý přehled a byla ovlivněna informacemi německé diplomacie. Ta využila regionální memelské identity pro postupné vzdálení Klajpedy od Litvy. Identita Memelländer byla nejpozději v roce 1939 pohlcena ideou jednotné Velkoněmecké říše.

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Etika výzkumu:**		
Jazyk práce: Angličtina		
Podpis studenta a datum 4.5. 2021		
Schváleno	**Datum**	**Podpis**
Vedoucí práce		
Vedoucí diplomového semináře		
Vedoucí specializace **Garant programu**		

*   BAS – Balkánská a středoevropská studia; ES – Evropská studia; NRS – Německá a rakouská studia; RES – Ruská a eurasijská studia; SAS – Severoamerická studia; ZES – Západoevropská studia.

**   Pokud je to relevantní, tj. vyžaduje to charakter výzkumu (nebo jeho zadavatel), data, s nimiž pracujete, nebo osobní bezpečnost vaše či dalších účastníků výzkumu, vysvětlete, jak zajistíte dodržení, resp. splnění těchto etických aspektů výzkumu: 1) informovaný souhlas s účastí na výzkumu, 2) dobrovolná účast na výzkumu, 3) důvěrnost a anonymita zdrojů, 4) bezpečný výzkum (nikomu nevznikne újma).