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Plans and actions for the creation of a Baltic union in the inter-war period

*Silviu MILOIU**

The end of the Great War brings along the dissolution of those four empires, which dominated Europe. On the basis on the national independent determination, political-moral principle has born a great number of states. Their security interests were yet endangering by general discordance, minorities repartition and border lines. North-East Europe was not an exception from this rule. The proclamations of independence by that little four states riparian to Baltic Sea - Finland (6 December 1917), Lithuania (16 February 1918), Estonia (24 February 1918), Latvia (18 November 1918) - following the national revolutions has not lack by emotions. The Bolsheviks had proclaimed alternative soviet republics.¹ The popular hostility and anti Russian feelings of the population, as the support of the Great Britain as, has bring the success by national forces.²

The need of identity was important in the policies of those new four states. The Russophobia and the untrustworthiness in German politics were the two constants in policy of these states. They were caught, after expression of Romanian minister in Riga Mihail R. Sturdza, between "hammer and anvil". Lithuania has a more complicate situation because conflict with Germany for Memel (Klaipeda) and with Poland in Vilna. Finland claimed East Carelia from the Soviet Union and Latvia and Lithuania were afraid by an aggression from East.

The adherence to League of Nations principles and the collaboration with the democratic western power was a permanency of foreign policy of the Baltic States in the inter-war period. In this respect, the Baltic States looked for the strengthening of political and diplomatic links between themselves. After remarking of the French deputy and ex-minister Gaston Bazile in the newspaper "Le Messenger Polonais" in 27 December 1929 with nine years before a Baltic union seems to be realize.³ A Latvian politician, Siegfried (Anna) Meierovic, did the first step. Acting like Take Ionescu in Central and South East Europe, he image a Baltic block

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constituted by Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. This alliance was destined to be a peace instrument.⁴

The Latvian attempt, sustained by Estonia, was not realized. Gaston Bazile distinguished in this failure the impact of the foreign intrigues, the Lithuania's resistance, the Poland's opposition and the Finland indifference.⁵ From this trial has preserved some solidarity between this state (with one exception: the Poland Lithuanian tense relations). The Estonian minister in France, M. Pusta, has-been foreign minister, declared to a conference at Carnegie Foundation in London that "we can not talking by a failure: although the Baltic Union does not formal realize, it already virtual exist".⁶

In 1920 was taken place the Conference of the Baltic States in Riga. At this meetings of politicians was discussed the general status of Baltic Sea and East part of North Europe. The principles on the basis which it will statute the Baltic union were coagulated surroundings the concluding of economic conventions, organization of a central agency of railways, the protection of the literary and artistic works, the fighting against epizootic and the creation of an umpire permanent organism named The Baltic States Plenipotentiary Council. Already in 1922, the most from Parliaments were ratifying the treaty.⁷

In 1922, Holsti, the Finnish Foreign Affairs minister, took the initiative of a concentration of the states, which were completely or partially submitted by Russia. Its country Parliament does not accept this direction of the Finland foreign policy and Holsti resigned. Finland was orientated itself to collaboration with the Scandinavian states.⁸

Another step in the direction of the creation of a security aria in Baltic States it was doing by signing on 1 November 1923 in Riga the Defensive Alliance Treaty between Latvia and Estonia.⁹ In the same time, in Warsaw was carrying on a conference of the military delegations of the states bordering Russia. In this conference it was discussing the project of "proportional disarmament" proposed by Moscow. The project was rejected by the Poland, Estonian, Finland, Latvian and Romanian delegations because their army forces were situated on the lower level necessary to maintain the security of the frontiers. The signatories - generals P. Lill, O. Eneckell, E. Penikis, S. Haller and N. Petala - were require to beginning with concluding a mutual pact of non-aggression on the status-quo basis and with diminishing of the Russian fleet from Baltic Sea and North Sea. These conditions were not accepted by the soviets.¹⁰

In 1925, the opposition of Poland to an approaching between Lithuania and Baltic States¹¹ has provoked in Kowno a firm reaction. "Lietuva", officious newspaper of the governments published on June 1 a sensational article which stimulating a connection with German politics.

The newspaper had recorded emotional reactions of all Lithuanian society, which seems to be segregated. More, the article stated that Germany will defeat the France and will dominated the Europe. Therefore, Lithuania must to change its foreign policy and to associated with the future *factotum* in the continent.¹²

The approaching of the positions of Estonia and Latvia has continued. On 5 February 1927, it was created a mixed commission of the delegates of those two countries. The role of this was to elaborate a common border tariff, to unifying the border and the monopoly legislation, the transport and communication tariff, fiscal and trade patents legislation and to coordinate politically the count of the two central banks. It must, too, to examine all trade treaty and to unifying the treaty system of the two parts. The energy spent by the two states three years was not successful. The private interests, a scarce demography and lacking of a great sort of different products are the explaining of that unsuccessful.¹³

An important role in this attempt to constitute a customs union was played by travel of the Estonian Foreign Affairs minister Lattik in Riga. On daily order of the conversation with his Latvian homologue, Balodis,¹⁴ were put forward the convention of the fiscal assistance, the conventions for reviewing the tariffs in harbors, the convention for work and residence rights of the two countries citizens each other and the project of the customs union.¹⁵ The trials to ousting all differences were failure again.

On 11, February 1930 was another important evening: the visit of the Estonian President Otto Strandmann¹⁶ accompanying by a numerous delegation in Latvia. This travel following on a visit in Poland. The Estonian guests were very well received. The Estonian President discussed with a Latvian political delegation guidance by his Latvian homologue, Gustav Zemgals. Following the conversations decided to convoke a commission which to analyze and to harmonization the divergent positions of the two states. The Estonian foreign minister declared to journalists that "Estonia is always where is Latvia".¹⁷

The 1930 year meanings the shaping of two different directions regarding Baltic alliances. Corresponding to Eastern Politics Direction Bulletin of Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister which analyze the politics of the Baltic States and their relations with Poland, in Riga grown the trends stipulated a closer approach between Latvia and Estonia, on a hand, and Lithuania, on the other hand. It was a realistic perforation of a Baltic little union. The partisans of such an alliance were the Social-Democrat Party members and the anti-Communist, which support more economic relations with Russia and Germany. On the contrary, Estonia promoted a policy by alliance with Poland. Such a policy corresponded to the diplomatic scopes of Warsaw, which wanted to dominate the Baltic aria.

Those divergent options could bear tensions in Latvian-Estonian relations.¹⁸

The Latvian Prime-Minister and Foreign Affairs minister visit in April 1930 to Reval has contributed to relax the atmosphere after the failure of customs union. Hugo Celminš, considerate by Romanian plenipotentiary minister in Riga Mihail R. Sturdza like an "eminently conciliatory personality" was a promoter of creation of customs union. He understood yet that the prevalence of some temporary economic interests could not hamper the need of a common position of the two states in all problems. One of the Latvian-Estonian differences - the special taxis of the wares, which transited Riga - was stipulated to get over through negotiations with the new Latvian plenipotentiary minister in Reval, Sarin. The Celminš policy was strong sustain by Latvian Parliament.¹⁹

The Great Depression has caused a closest collaboration between agrarian states from Eastern Europe. In this way, in August 1930 has taken place in Warsaw a conference, which were participate Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Estonia and Latvia. It was adopted a resolution which stated a preferential treatment in Europe for cereals exported by these states.²⁰ In the same time, the aggressive policy of the new German chancellor, Adolph Hitler, provoked rumors in the Baltic States. For Lithuania, this implies the reopening of the complicated Memel statute question. For Latvia stand by a new obstacle in the preserve of its security at Baltic Sea. For Estonia, the dangers were identically. Therefore, in 1933 the plans for creation of a large zone alliance renewal. Already in February 1933, the last foreign minister of Latvia, Cilen, an opponent of a pro-Poland policy and an apostle of a firm Latvian-Lithuanian alliance, beginning to impel for a approaching between Lithuania and Poland. Cilen was afraid of an understanding between Germany and Poland regarding so-called Polish corridor, the latest obtained a portion from Latvia or Lithuania.²¹

From this cause, Cilen, the Socialist Party leader, was sent as the Latvian plenipotentiary minister in France. He expressed in Paris the worrying of Latvia and Soviet Union concerning a settlement between France and Germany, as so a German-Polish agreement. He has been, after Mihail Sturdza opinion, a partisan of a Baltic union which to comprise the Soviet Union and Germany, but expelling Poland. In the new international conditions, his opinions were strikingly changed. He wanted a common action of the Soviet Union, Baltic States, Poland and France against Germany. Cilen thinking that was possible a diplomatic concerted action with the Little Entente too, if Romania is more concessive concerning Bessarabia, after he said to Romanian plenipotentiary minister in Riga, Mihail Sturdza.²² Anyway his trials were unsuccessful because the capacity

of Germany to agreement with Poland, the delicate relations between Poland and Lithuania and so.

Finland was kept his reserve attitude in the creation of a Baltic union. The travel of the Finish Foreign Affairs minister, Andreas Werner Hackzell, in Riga demonstrated this fact. Hackzell has declared if that through Baltic states understands an alliance with other states from Europe, this not seems to be durable. An approach "through a serious work" was yet wanted. Hackzell promoted an agreement between the states riparian to Baltic Sea on the neutrality basis, which to include Sweden and Denmark, too.²³ In this respect, at the beginning of 1934, after the Hackzell travel, was risen the idea of a politic statement between Baltic States and Scandinavian States. The new emerging direction was demonstrated by the visit of the new Latvian Foreign Affairs minister, Salnais, in Helsingfors and Stockholm in January 1934. The Scandinavian - Baltic States formula on the basis of complete and solidarity neutrality of the Baltic Sea seems to substitute a pure Baltic block. In the meetings from Stockholm was pointed out the community of interests between Scandinavian and Baltic states.²⁴

Finally, on 12 September 1934 in Geneva was concluded The Collaboration and Well-Understanding Treaty between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In the preamble of this treaty, the three contractual parts had declared "firm to contribute to mention and guaranteed the peace and to coordinate their foreign politics in the spirit of the League of Nations principles". Those states obliged to give a political and diplomatically mutual aid in their international relations (the first article). The three states decided to institute a periodical Foreign Affairs ministers Conference who meet two times on year and to mention a regular contact between the three states, under the presidency of host-country representing (the second article). Another provisions of the treaty stipulated a diplomatic strong cooperation (articles 5th and 6th), a friendly understanding in all divergent problems (article 4th). It was recognized some specifically aspects in their policies (it is a reference to Lithuanian problems with Poland and so -art. 3rd). The treaty was concluded on 10 years, but if none of the contractual parts denounce it automatically elongate it.²⁵

By the end of 1934, maybe because the treaty conclude between the three Baltic states, it was observe in Helsingfors a more favorable attitude concerning those states,²⁶ although the Lithuanian Foreign Affairs minister visit in Finland had finished without positive results.²⁷ Anyway, the failure of other important plan to created a Mutual Guaranty Eastern Pact in 1934-1935 produced a change in some aspects of the policy of the Great Power toward Baltic States. Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, the Romanian plenipotentiary minister in Germany, who had talking with Rosenberg, the Foreign Policy Office chief of the N.S.D.A.P., remarking in 1936 a trial of

Nazi Germany to create and to use a cordon by states between Baltic Sea and Black Sea against Russia.²⁸ In the same time and Poland tried to manipulated in his own scope the Baltic Union. Finland put the alliance with the Scandinavian States and the neutrality above the association with Baltic policies.²⁹

The Baltic Union actions were in 1934-1939 for peace, international cooperation and the right of his members to not decided nothing about them without to be consulted. The idea of creation of a great Scandinavian - Baltic block preserve yet in many politics ideology. Therefore, the travel of Latvian Foreign Affairs minister Wilhelm Munters in Helsingfors in 1937 was aspect with many interest and hopes. Yet, the discussions between Munters and his Finish homologue, Holsti, had not produce palpable results,³⁰ though in some questions like the general collaboration between Oslo Group's States and Baltic States and the preserve of peace in North Europe the two officials was agreed each other.³¹ The Great Britain was very interest by the cooperation of the states riparian to the Baltic Sea. The British policy tried to improve the relations between Baltic States and Soviet Union (see the Holsti's visit in Moscow) and insist in Kaunas and Warsaw for appease the spirits in the Vilna's question.³² The British minister, Lord Plymouth, traveling in Baltic States in June 1937 where called for neutrality in the German - Soviet ideological conflict, cooperation between the Scandinavian States and the Baltic States and fidelity for the League of Nations. The editorial of the "Rits" newspaper from Riga, on 6 June 1937, underline that the Baltic States, including Scandinavia, were strength connection with British policy and their interests coincided with the peace and security aspirations of the Great Britain in the North-West of the Europe.³³ Similar observations found in the Polish newspaper "Echo de Varsovie" who remarked the interest of the British diplomacy for Baltic and Scandinavian regions.³⁴

In conclusion, the actions for creation of a Baltic States alliance in the inter-war period were a constant policy. It can be discern three periods in which the efforts in this scope were more intense: 1920-1922, 1927-1930, and 1933-1934. The first period was connect with the searching for a statute in the international relations of the new recognized states, the second with the intense activity of Latvia and Estonia for creation a customs union as a foundation for a future political alliance and the third has recorded the changes in the European politics after 30 January 1933. In 1934, the trials for a large agreement between Oslo States Group and Baltic States failure, but was conclude a pure Baltic treaty signed by Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

Notes:

1. Edgar Mattisen, Searching for a dignified compromise. The Estonian-Russian border: 1000 years, ILO, Narva, 1996, pp. 30-31.
2. Evald Uustalu, The Birth of Estonian independence, in "History of Estonian Culture", Finland, 1960 (Evald Uustalu-acting editor), p. 54.
3. The Archives of the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affaires, fond 71, Letonia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 49-50, Tel. no. 3675 from 28 December 1929 from Varsovia Legation, for Romanian Minister for Foreign Affaires, Bucharest, cited as A.R.M.F.A.
4. Idem, f. 101, the article from 31 October 1930 from "Le Temps" signed Henri de Montfort.
5. Idem, f. 49-50.
6. Ibidem.
7. Ibidem.
8. Idem, f. 82-90, Tel. no. 240, 16 April 1937, from Helsinki Legation, for Romanian Minister for Foreign Affaires.
9. Idem, f. 49-50.
10. Viorica Moisuc, Premisele izolarii politice a Romaniei 1919-1940, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 135-136.
11. Until 1934 the most diplomats considered like Baltic States just Estonia and Latvia.
12. Central National Romanian Archives, fond Casa Regala-Regenta, Dossier 22/1930, f. 120, Tel. no. 2250, 4 June 1925, from Alexandru Iacovaky (Varsovie), for M.A.S., Bucharest, to be cited as C.N.R.A.
13. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 49-50.
14. He was the vice-president of The League of Nations, too.
15. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 48, Tel. no. 298, 21 October 1929, from Riga, Legation for Sturdza Palace, Bucharest.
16. Otto Strandmann was the Estonian special envoy and plenipotentiary minister in Warsaw and Bucharest.
17. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 51-53, Tel. no. 96, 12 February 1930, from Riga Legation, for M.A.S., Bucharest.
18. Idem, f. 54-56, Bulletin no. 5 of East Political Direction, 1930.
19. Idem, f. 57-58, Tel. no. 165, 3 April 1930, from Mihail R. Sturdza to Bucharest.
20. I. Puia, Relatiile economice externe ale Romaniei in perioada interbelica, Ed. Academiei, Bucharest, 1983, p. 46; P. Barbulescu, I.

Closca, Repere de cronologie internationale: 1914-1945, Ed. Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 223-224.

21. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 120-121, Tel. nr. 82, 26 February 1933, from Riga Legation, for M.A.S., Bucharest.

22. Idem, f. 103-104, Tel. f.n., 5 June 1933, from Sturdza, Riga, for Nicolae Titulescu, M.A.S., Bucharest.

23. Idem, f. 62-64, Tel. no. 625, December 12, 1933, from Theodor Scortzescu, Riga, for M.A.S., Bucharest.

24. Idem, f. 67-69, Tel. no. 47, January 24, 1934, from Mihail Sturdza to Bucharest.

25. C.N.R.A., fond Vasile Stoica, Dossier I/68, f. 1-4, Tratat de intelegere si colaborare intre Letonia, Lituania si Estonia, Geneva, September 12, 1934.

26. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 72, Tel. no. 688, 15 November 1934, from Scradeanu, Helsingfors Legation, for Sturdza Palace, Bucharest.

27. Idem, f. 73, Tel. no. 728, 8 December 1934, from Scradeanu for M.A.S., Bucharest.

28. Eliza Campus, Din politica externa a Romaniei 1913-1947, Ed. Politica, Bucharest, 1980, p. 350.

29. A.R.M.F.A., fond 71, Latvia, 1923-1940, Relations with England, Argentina, Bulgaria..., vol. 7, f. 75, Tel. no. 722, 13 august 1935, from Helsingfors (Bossy), for M.A.S., Bucharest.

30. Idem, f. 78-79, Tel. no. 107, 19 March 1937, from Romanian Legation from Riga (Vasile Stoica), for M.A.S., Bucharest.

31. Idem, f. 82-90, Tel. no. 147, 9 April 1937, from Vasile Stoica, Riga, for M.A.S., Bucharest.

32. Idem, f. 10-11, Tel. no. 153, 10 April 1937, from Vasile Stoica, Riga, for M.A.S., Bucharest.

33. Idem, f. 18-26, Tel. no. 354 from 12 June 1937, from Riga, for M.A.S., Bucharest.

34. Idem, f. 28-29, Tel. no. 360, 17 June 1937, from Riga Legation for Victor Antonescu, M.A.S., Bucharest.