Relations between Poland and Lithuania in the interwar period were determined by an abundance of events which differed in complexity and importance. These events had to a smaller or greater degree an influence on the shape of the conscience of the ruling elite and also the conscience of both Lithuanian and Polish citizens. The consequences of the mostly unfortunate events were issues which caused some differences in adopted positions on important social and political matters. The efforts for normalization of diplomatic relations between Poland and Lithuania were undoubtedly taken by both of the countries, thus, on different levels of engagement. It was, however, the problem of different positions they adopted that unfortunately prevented them from reaching the goal of normalization in their diplomatic relations. The lack of agreement led to the Polish ultimatum note directed at Lithuanian government. The ultimatum note of 17th of March 1938 for Lithuania concerned the normalization of relations between Poland and Lithuania according to the international customs since the previous lack of the relations through Lithuania’s fault created a very unfavorable situation. Since the end of the I World War, the relations between Poland and Lithuania had not been correct. The two neighboring countries did not have direct railway, post or road connection. In modern times it was something unusual and unheard of. It is worth mentioning that
it was in 1938 that the diplomacy of the two countries tried to make a first step towards the normalization of mutual relations but did not succeed due to the beginning of the II World War.

Keywords: Poland, Lithuania, Diplomatic Relations, 1918-1939, Ultimatum Note.

Complicated and multithreaded relations between Poland and Lithuania through many years were determined by multiplicity of events which differed in complexity and importance.¹ The events had more or less of the influence on the shape of the conscience of ruling elite and also the conscience of both Lithuanian and Polish citizens. The consequence of the various events there were issues which caused some differences in adopted positions on important social and political matters.

It is worth mentioning that the authors of this work had no intention of characterizing the complicated origins of relations between Poland and Lithuania from 1918 in detail. It seems, however, that a brief factual description of the most important events is crucial in this case. That is why in the effort to better present normalization in diplomatic relations between Poland and Lithuania in 1938, the beginning of the article will assume this particular character.

In order to fully grasp the essence and character of the conflict between Poland and Lithuania, it is crucial to know the ethnographic and social relations in the large part of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania that were formed at the beginning of the 20th century. They constituted the inseparable background for the events and to a large extend determined the actions of the two conflicted parties. It is also worth mentioning that at that time the ethnic relations were changeable and the process of assimilation still lasted. Moreover, it is important to note that back then the nationalistic system was more and more noticeable.²

First contemporary population census in the Russian Empire was conducted in 1897. The census covered the area within the borders of the present day Lithuania. The Kaunas Governorate (Kauno gubernija), western part of the Vilnius Governorate (Vilniaus gubernija) and northern part of the Suwałki Governorate (Suvalkų gubernija)
had 2,671 inhabitants, of which 10% declared Polish language to be their native language.

The biased censuses were verified 20 years later by Professor Włodzimierz Wakar from Warsaw, who proved that in the discussed area 18% of inhabitants were from Poland. The process of polonization of Lithuanians was successfully stopped in the first decade of the 20th century due to the actions of the Lithuanian clergy. The ethnic borders became more stable, polonization escalated among the Catholics who spoke Belarusian language.

The German census in the Vilnius Region (Vilniaus kraštas) – carried out during the I World War from 1916 – proved that even in Vilnius 50% inhabitants are Polish people, 43% are Jews, 2,6% Lithuanians, 1,3% Belarusians and 3% other nations. The surroundings of Vilnius were inhabited by 90% of the total population. The official from the German occupation government, von Beckerath, in the confidential report from 1917 claimed: “Our census from 1916 proved that the importance of Polish people is far greater than we thought and not less, that Polish people are the only element there with extraordinary political and creative qualifications. If it is possible to govern without them in the time of war, then at the time of peace policy against them seems to be not only difficult but even dangerous.”

I World War brought the idea coming true closer – the independent Lithuania. The Lithuanian’s conference in Stockholm and the summit in Voronezh in 1917 both called for Lithuania’s independence. The German occupation government in Lithuania “Ober-Ost” gave permission for the summit of 222 Lithuanians in Vilnius where the National Council (Taryba) was appointed with Antanas Smetona as its leader.

The capitulation of Germany and the Soviet army marching in the Vilnius region removed the provisional Lithuanian government (created from “Taryba”) which on the 28 December 1918 moved from Vilnius to Kaunas. After occupying Vilnius by the Red Army, the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (Lietuvos-Baltarusijos Tarybinė Socialistinė Respublika) was created on
the 27 February 1919 with the Chairman and Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vincas Mickevičius leading it.

Such state of affairs was changed by the Polish offensive and by seizing Vilnius on 19 April 1919. Polish Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, made a speech – for the inhabitants of the former Great Duchy of Lithuania (Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė): “For several centuries your country has not known what freedom is, oppressed by the hostile violence of Russia, Germany, Bolsheviks. The violence which did not ask the people of anything and yet imposed on them foreign patterns of conduct which hindered the will and often broke life. This state of permanent slavery, which I know very well personally as I was born in this unfortunate land, must be abolished and once at last this land in a way forgotten by God has to be free and there has to be freedom of unfettered expressing the goals and needs”\(^5\).

The Lithuanian Government could not accept the seizure of Vilnius by Poland and the Prime Minister of Lithuania of that time, Mykolas Sleževičius, still stressed the significance of Vilnius in foreign policy. He said, “Vilnius has to be ours. We cannot let Poland have it”\(^6\).

Władysław Wielhorski researched the problems of Lithuania and was for a long time a head of the Research Institute of Eastern Europe in Vilnius. In 1947, on emigration to London, he published his work titled “Polska a Litwa. Stosunki wzajemne w biegu dziejów” in which he told that the conflict between Poland and Lithuania in years 1919–1923 regarding Vilnius Region significantly exceeded the scope of interest of both Poland and Lithuania. In 1920, apart from these two countries, there were also certain strong powers in the area of Western Europe such as Germany or Soviet Russia. It is worth mentioning that the conflict affected the well-being of Eastern Europe and, what is more, decided about the existence of Baltic countries and was important for Poland’s independence.

At the end of 1930’s, the breakthrough in Polish and Lithuanian relations was the Polish ultimatum for Lithuania in 1938 which was preceded by the incident on the 11\(^{th}\) of March in the watchtower of the Border Protection Corps near Wiersze Radówka (Viršurodukis).
During the patrol, a shooter Stanisław Serafin was deadly shot. Such incidents happened on both sides of the border. This tragic incident Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw as an opportunity to stand strongly against Lithuania which could at last make Lithuanians establish diplomatic relations with Poland.7

The decision to make use of the soldier’s death as an excuse was not taken immediately in Warsaw. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck was in Italy at that time. The deputy head of the Political and Economic Department and at the same time the head of the Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tadeusz Kobylański, took care of this matter. Consequently, the deputy of minister Beck at that time Jan Szembek was informed in detail about the incidents on Polish and Lithuanian border by Kobylański, who conveyed the message about the incident.8

Szembek immediately got in contact with Marshall Edward Rydz-Śmigły. He presented in the message a draft of a press release in which all the blame would be put on Lithuania – also the blame for the abnormal diplomatic relations between the two countries. During a telephone conversation with Szembek, minister Beck recommended to not get into incidents with Lithuania and informed about a certain “plan on the Lithuanian matter”.9

During the meeting between Szembek, Rydz-Śmigły and the Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the last of them questioned the text of the message and suggested a change in the last paragraph: “The Government reserves the right to make a statement after a thorough examination of the case according to the gravity of the situation” for a “further investigation”. Rydz-Śmigły thought that “if you announce certain consequences referring to something, then you have to put them into practice. At the moment, it is not possible for the investigation can reveal that we are to blame.”10 Unfortunately, it was too late for a change because the text had already been sent to the press. A strong in its contents message attracted attention in Poland and other countries. Minister Beck was required to return to the country.11
At the same time, a turn of events in Lithuania was observed where the Lithuanian government, troubled by the escalation of the conflict, was looking for a way to hush the border incident up. On 14 March, a meeting was held in the office of the Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona during which the participants were looking for a way to come into agreement with Warsaw. Sejm was also trying to find an explanation of the incidents of the 11th of March on the Polish and Lithuanian border.

Lithuanian Minister of Internal Affairs Julius Čaplikas, replying to parliamentary questions of members of parliament, gave an extensive review about unfolding of the event, highlighting that Lithuanian party does not feel liable for it. At the same time, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took actions to appease relations with Poland on European forum. The result of it was the meeting of Szembek with the British ambassador Howard Kennard. The ambassador was earlier informed by the British charge d’affaires from Kaunas and he knew that “in Lithuania the air was heavy with panic and that Lithuanians would like to resolve the matter amicably, that conditions for reaching Polish-Lithuanian amicable settlement are rather favourable. British government does not want to meddle in or interfere in our relations with Lithuania. It is only interested in maintaining peace, hoping that the matter will be regulated on friendly terms.”

However, the content of dispatch from Warsaw to Polish embassy in London stated that “panic atmosphere in Kaunas will lead Lithuania to the greatest pliability, provided that we do not place demands which would have to lead to the desperate acts of self-defence.” This difference reflected the course of actions and way of thinking of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, on the very same day, the ambassador of France Leon Noël talked to Szembek, who noted this fact in his booklet as follows: “In any case, in light of the moods of panic prevailing in Lithuania, today’s situation would exceptionally facilitate introducing normal relations between Poland and Lithuania. French government does not impose any intermediary action and was not asked to do anything similar whatsoever. However, he
implies that his government would be ready to undertake such an action”.15

During the conversation, Szembek noted that in relations with Lithuania, really “unbearable” are border incidents, multiple breakings off of the ongoing negotiations, and most important – adopting the article of the former constitution considering Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania in the new Lithuanian Constitution. Berlin, on the other hand, after the meeting between Józef Lipski and Herman Göring, gave Poland free rein in resolving the question of Polish-Lithuanian disputes, noting that the Reich was oriented towards the issues of Klaipėda.

Maksim Litwinow being the leader of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs claimed that his country would not interfere in the conflict. Lithuanian efforts to get diplomatic support from European monarchies with regards to resolving the disputes ended in a fiasco. Lithuania could only wait for the next step of the Polish government. The Warsaw press at the time reported: “The uniform attitude of the Polish nation which stood firmly unified behind the Supreme Commander, Marshall Edward Rydz-Śmigly, ready to suffer death for the honour and significance of the Republic of Poland influenced panic moods which increasingly invaded Lithuania. On 16 March, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, a historical meeting between the President of Poland, Commander-in-Chief, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister Beck was organized.

The decision was made during it and resulted in sending an ultimatum note by Minister Beck, which was served by Polish Member of Parliament Waclaw Przesmycki to Lithuanian Member of Parliament Bronius Dailidė on 17 March. The only message disclosed in public was that the note specified conditions necessary to maintain the peace. Such a turn of events made a huge impression on the entire world. Our friendly countries, Estonia and Latvia, started to put the pressure on Lithuania to give an inch on Polish demands.16

It was also not accidental that handling of the note took place in Tallinn. After the meeting with President Smetona in Kaunas on 14 March, Lithuanians via their Member of Parliament in Estonia
conveyed the governmental message including proposal of explaining the incident on the border and the ways of preventing similar events in the future. In the same way, on 17 March, through Tallinn, Lithuanians received a document consisting of two parts: relevant note (ultimatum) and response prepared to fill in and sign. The document was drawn up in two languages: Polish and French, whereby the Polish version prevailed. After reading the document twice, Dailidė asked Przesmycki if “refusal will mean war”.

The silence of Polish Member of Parliament left no doubt about it. “Monitor Polski” issue no. 64 from the 19th of March, 1938 published the summary of Polish note sent to Lithuania two days earlier: “Polish government cannot accept Lithuanian proposal from the 14th of March as it does not provide the safety guarantee. In its opinion, the only solution corresponding to the seriousness of the situation is immediate establishment of diplomatic relations without any preconditions. For acceptance of these proposals, Polish government gives Lithuanian party a time of 48 hours, that is, counting from the moment of handover of the note to Lithuanian Member of Parliament in Tallinn. Accreditation of Members of Kaunas and Warsaw must take place before the 31st of March, and the exchange of appropriate notes, which would determine it, must be carried out in Tallinn on the 19th of March, i.e. before the deadline of 48 hours.”

The texts of these notes were attached to the ultimatum. In addition, the Polish government stated that these proposals cannot be the subject of discussion, neither regarding the content nor the form; that is to say, they must be ne varietur adopted, and the lack of answers, or any additions or objections shall be deemed as refusal. In such case, Polish Government would by its own resources secure the fair interest of its country. During those difficult moments, Lithuanian authorities wished for their country to remain calm and to not provoke Poland which was seen in lack of announcement of mobilization of the Lithuanian army. Polish secret service informed that in some garrisons in Kaunas and Marijampolė, state of emergency was announced and was cancelled straight after accepting the Polish ultimatum.
On the other side of the border, in Poland, alert troops were also placed. They were stationing in Vilnius voivodeship and in part of Białystok and Nowogródek voivodeships. The foreign press reported a high concentration of Polish troops in the region of Suwałki and Vilnius. At the airport Porubanek in Vilnius, air units were transferred from the district of Poznan and Warsaw. On 18 March, in Grodno, Vilnius and Suwałki big military parades were organized and parades, in which i.e. numerous units of the Border Protection Corps participated, were held.

III Corps of the Polish Army, which stationed near the Lithuanian border, corresponded numerically to the size of the entire Lithuanian Army (in peacetime), the number of which could be doubled in case of mobilization (but reserve divisions would be very poorly equipped). General Bogislav von Studnitz, German military attaché in Warsaw, informed Berlin that the Polish III Corps forces would be insufficient in the event of military action against Lithuania. Bringing a minimum of 10 infantry divisions and the corresponding amount of cavalry to the underdeveloped communications network in Vilnius and Białystok voivodeships and the limited peacekeeping division statuses, mobilizing reservists required a lot of time.

The force used to threat by Poland (in case of rejection of ultimatum by Lithuania) was at the time difficult to achieve. It was rather a symbolic demonstration of force, for which it was enough to use the Vilnius and Grodno garrisons.¹⁷

Lithuanian government immediately informed its diplomatic institutions abroad as well as foreign representations accredited in Kaunas that it is still searching for the support from European capital cities. Lithuanians’ efforts to gain allies were doomed to fail. London and Paris stimulated the Kaunas government to accept Polish ultimatum unreservedly. London “Times” claimed that Lithuanian government did not understand so far that “the entire Polish nation is ready to support every step leading to finish the abnormal state of affairs between Lithuania and Poland. Sudden deterioration of the situation in Europe demands from the Polish government to undertake steps in order to put an end to the abnormal relations with Lithuania.”¹⁸
French journals highlighted that it was of great importance for Poland to normalize relations between both countries, whose border and railways have been “overgrown with grass” for the past 20 years.\(^{19}\)

On the other hand, Berlin after the meeting between Ambassador Józef Lipski and Herman Göring gave Poland a free hand to solve the question of Polish-Lithuanian disputes, specifying that the Reich is Klaipėda issue oriented. It refused to give any help to Lithuanians; moreover, Germans (in case of entering Polish armies to Lithuania) wanted to conquer not only Klaipėda but also a huge part of Western territory of the country.\(^{20}\)

Waclaw Grzybowski, Polish ambassador in Moscow, on the 7\(^{th}\) of March, 1938, within a coded telegram to Minister J. Beck informed about the meeting with People’s Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Maksymilian Litwinow: “Litwinow invited me tonight and said that in the light of the ultimatum made by us to Lithuania, he wants in a friendly way to declare that the USSR is interested in peaceful resolving of the matter. He stressed that he did not want to interfere either in our older or new disputes with Lithuania.”\(^{21}\)

Italian – Agenzia Stefani – announced on the 20\(^{th}\) of March, 1938 the following message from Rome: “The Italian public opinion, which followed closely the tightening of the crisis in the Polish-Lithuanian relations was aware of the fact that Poland toward the resistance of the Lithuanian has been revealing a proof of good faith for a long time and it could no longer tolerate a situation that there is no contribution of Europe. Therefore, the responsibility for the consequences of this state of affairs may not impose loyalty of Polish politics.”\(^{22}\) Italian political circles also stressed that the Polish-Lithuanian conflict effectively hampered cooperation between the Baltic States. Swiss – Havas Agency – announced in Geneva that the League of Nations will not deal with the conflict.

It was already clear for the President A. Smetona that they had to adapt Polish conditions. On 19 March, early in the morning, he convened an extraordinary extended meeting of the government. At the outset there was foreign minister of Lithuania Stasys Lozoraitis, who spoke in favour of the Polish demands in full (justified it
with the information about passivity abroad towards resolving the conflict).

He criticized the government and the president for negligence in connection with correct relations with Poland, which resulted in a strong and aggressive speech in Warsaw. Stasys Raštikis (graduate of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas), Supreme Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces who also performed a function of the Minister of National Defence, was also in favour of accepting the ultimatum. General Raštikis informed the government that Lithuanian army was not able to fight alone with the Polish army; therefore, the leadership was in favour of a peaceful solution to the conflict.23

Stasys Putvinskis, Minister of Agriculture, voted against the agreement claiming that Lithuanian honour had been violated and that in the light of the offence, Lithuania should respond with fire. In this conviction, Putvinskis’s position was also held by the acting Prime Minister of Lithuania, Jokūbas Stanišauskas. In favour of rejection of the ultimatum was also the Minister of Justice, Stasys Šilingas. During a heated argument opinion of the army prevailed, the government decided to accept the ultimatum and presented the matter to the Lithuanian Sejm. At noon on the 19th of March, after several minutes of the meeting, parliament passed a resolution which ended with the statement announcing that “because of the actual state of affairs and necessary need to preserve peace in such a critical time for Europe, the Sejm believes that the government was forced to accept the ultimatum given by the Polish government in the present circumstances”.24

Adoption of the Polish conditions on the 19th of March was of symbolic significance, it was a name day of the deceased Marshal Józef Piłsudski. Upon exchanging diplomatic notes, Polish and Lithuanian governments announced the establishment of diplomatic representations in Warsaw until 31 March.

The atmosphere of Polish-Lithuanian crisis in the second decade of March, 1938 caused stormy reactions in Polish society, street demonstrations and numerous rallies, partly inspired by the initiative of the authorities at the time. In Warsaw, it resembled more of a nature
festival or picnic, the real hostility towards Lithuanians could not be seen. It looked differently from the perspective of Vilnius – Anti-Lithuanian mood prevailed here, and was particularly evident during the visit of Marshal Rydz-Śmigły on the 18th of March.

The following day, “Monitor Polski” reported that “... already at 1 o’clock, large numbers of people were seen in the streets of Vilnius approaching the Orzeszkowa square, where ostentatious, protesting rally against the provocative transgression of Lithuanian government was to take place. At 2 o’clock, in the square, one great sea of heads is visible ... behind the heads of the crowds numerous banners inscribed with slogans sway, categorically protesting against the Lithuanian provocation and demanding satisfaction ... out with the Polish soldier murderers, we demand revenge for Polish blood.”

In addition to this, there were some acts of vandalism as well: the excited crowd was breaking windows and doors, i.e. in the buildings of Vytautas Magnus secondary schools and the Lithuanian Union of Students (Lietuvos Studentų Sąjunga). Anti-Lithuanian slogans showed up on walls and fences: “Lithuanians deserve thrashing”, “Death to Lithuanians”, etc. After only a few days, the attitude of the society and media towards the Lithuanian conflict changed completely. Journalists who had been encouraging people to “march on Kaunas” rapidly changed their minds. They spoke in kind, almost friendly manner. Lithuania was dubbed “our little sister” who returned home. This set the ground for the incoming friendly relations.

However, not everyone was fine with cooperating with Lithuania. Nationalists blamed the Polish government for not making enough demands; according to them, establishing diplomatic relations was not the ultimate solution for the Lithuanian cause. They tried to continue the anti-Lithuanian movement by organizing demonstrations and protests, which were quickly seized by the firm counter-actions of the police.

A role of particular importance in various debates regarding the future of the Polish-Lithuanian relations was played by Vilnius. The public opinion on this matter differed. Although people of Vilnius
voivodeship claimed Vilnius to be a Polish city, inhabited by Poles, Jews and a small percentage of Lithuanians, in other Polish provinces, the attitude towards Vilnius was almost neutral. The attitude of the Polish government on this matter was uncompromising – it recognised the independence of Lithuania, except for Vilnius.

A completely different reaction towards the Polish ultimatum was observed among the inhabitants of Kaunas. Accepting it caused a strong and unpleasant shock, people were feeling angry and humiliated, their pride was injured. Lithuanian youth was in combative mood; they didn’t hide their anger and resentment towards the army leaders. It was said that the Lithuanian army spent more time on preparation for the parades than on defending their own country.

On the 21st of March, few thousand people gathered between the War Museum (Karo muziejus) and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Nežinomo kareivio kapas) in Kaunas demanding the change of the government and the creation of a coalition government. Riots and demonstrations continued for over a week in many larger Lithuanian cities. The capital press, e.g. “Lietuvos Aidas”, “Trimitas” or “Karys”, deplored that Poland forced Lithuania to make concessions under a threat of intervention, and emphasised that Lithuanians would never renounce Vilnius.

Michał Römer (Mykolas Römeris) wrote about it in one of his letters: “On the 19th of March, Lithuanians, even those (who are in majority) who were rather certain about the necessity and usefulness of normalization of relations with Poland and even wished for the Polish-Lithuanian union, were in solemn moods ... Capitulation and humiliation are always a rough experience and whoever claims that they can be used as means of winning the hearts and the kindness of a nation, must know nothing of psychology. So if those moral values were thought to bring about reconciliation, then this method failed in terms of psychology. Lithuanians do not easily forget the harm that had been done to them and once their trust is betrayed, it is not restored fast.”

Unfortunately, what Michał Römer claimed in his letter in 1938 was confirmed by the Kaunas Lithuanian history textbook for
common and lower-secondary schools written by Juozas Geniušas (the textbook was approved by the Ministry of Education), issued around 1940.

The same author, who was also the editor cooperating with many Lithuanian newspapers, wrote, “During the last 20 years, Vilnius – our dear old capital – remained under a foreign rule. The Polish government persecuted Lithuanian schools, publishing, educational and cultural associations: almost all schools and educational and cultural associations were closed. Purchasing Lithuanian books and newspapers was forbidden, as well as communicating with those who lived in free Lithuania. Lithuania missed its old capital and its oppressed brothers, but while missing, Lithuanians did not lose hope for retaking by force the capital and a third of the Lithuanian land that was taken from them. For all this time, the League for the Liberation of Vilnius (Vilniaus vadavimo sąjunga) operated in Lithuania – an organization which reminded the Lithuanian nation of the duty to take care of their fellow countrymen in the Vilnius region, to keep their spirits up and assured them that better times were yet to come. And so, those better times finally came. On 10 October 1939, the dreams of the Lithuanian nation came true: The Soviets re-acknowledged Lithuania’s rights to Vilnius as its old capital city, they gave us back Vilnius, the iron-railway and part of the land. From that time, people of Vilnius region entered the collective Lithuanian family and started to share their lives with the entire Lithuanian nation, as in the old days.”

The freshly established cooperation with Lithuania had difficulties in May. Just as in Constitution of 1928, the Constitution of May 1938 contained the article on Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania. The Constitution of August 1922 allowed creating independent units on the territory of Lithuania, which was associated with the hope to retake Vilnius and maybe be granted the Klaipėda region. Lithuania considered granting sovereignty to the Vilnius region if it was to be incorporated into the country. The Constitution of 1938 allowed for the possibility to move the seat of the government to a different place.
The main goal of the Lithuanian policy – incorporating Vilnius and the Vilnius region – was still blocking the political dialogue with Lithuanians. Some thought that establishing official relations with Poland did not exactly mean making new connections, on the contrary, connections should be avoided and the “Vilnius case” should be fought for. During the ceremony of proclamation of the Constitution in 1938, Deputy Franciszek Charwat left to Palanga to avoid taking part in the celebration. Polish side only issued a démarche. The Vilnius case was effectively influencing the mutually negative relations of the governments and citizens, even twice-elected President of Lithuania Antanas Smetona avoided contacting with deputy Charwat, but knew Polish (although used it reluctantly) and his wife Sofija Chodakauskaitė-Smetonienė of the Dołega coat of arms came from a Polish family allied with the Piłsudski family. Jadvyga Chodakauskaitė-Tūbelienė, the sister of Sofija, was the wife of the Prime Minister of Lithuania, Juozas Tūbelis.

The Polish press claimed both sisters had influence on the Smetona’s decision on accepting the resignation of the office of his brother-in-law Tūbelis. During that time, the Prime Minister was seriously ill and his duties were performed by Minister Jokūbas Stanišauskas. Tūbelis was in charge from the 23rd of September 1929 to the 24th of March 1938 unceasingly. His predecessor Augustinas Voldemaras, who after the coup in December 1926 was made the government’s leader, was very badly received in Poland. He was accused of the fact that the first months of his ruling brought about a wave of repressions to the Polish minority in Lithuania, that was visible when closing down Polish schools in the Republic of Lithuania (Kauno kraštas) and in the failure of the conference in Königsberg (Karaliaučius) in 1928. Voldemaras participated in this conference and categorically refused to engage in conversations about resolving the Polish-Lithuanian conflict. He commented on the Polish efforts to establish diplomatic missions in both countries, saying that as a Lithuanian Prime Minister he could receive Polish deputies only in Vilnius.

Polish people were under the impression that the Prime Minister was looking for an excuse to break off the negotiations.
The Lithuanian side chose a tactic of connecting every issue, even technical, with the Vilnius case. The only benefit of the five-day length meeting in Königsberg was an agreement on local border traffic agreement, drawn up by a Committee of Legal Affairs. Voldemaras was often a target of derision in the Polish press. He experienced it especially after the Geneva Convention in 1927 which was unsuccessful for Lithuania and during which he met with Marshall Piłsudski. Polish people considered Voldemaras’s government to be a threat to the European peace. His constant comments on the state of war with Poland and on retaking Vilnius at any cost annoyed Piłsudski who personally went to Geneva to meet the Prime Minister of Lithuania.

On the 10th of December, during a well-known meeting in the League of Nations, Piłsudski sat in front of Voldemaras and according to an eye-witness refused to talk to him for a long time, he just wanted to know one thing – whether Lithuania wanted war or peace. The Prime Minister said that Lithuania does not wish for a war with Poland, to which Piłsudski responded – “you want peace, so your journey to Geneva was not in vain. I will now order “Te Deum” to be sung in every church in Poland.”

Voldemaras’s resignation that followed the conflict with Smetona was gladly accepted. On the 24th of March 1938, a new cabinet was formed, with a priest Vladas Mironas, an activist of the Lithuanian independence movement, in charge. During his term, the Polish-Lithuanian relations were actually normalized.

An important issue was, without a doubt, removing the obstacles that stood in the way of developing proper relations with Poland. What was particularly well received in Warsaw was the ruthless liquidation of the League for the Liberation of Vilnius and their press organ “Mūsų Vilnius”, a periodical that made firm anti-Polish claims. The newspaper’s last issue contained an important message that contradicted the prevailing way of thinking: “We want to be on good terms with Poles. The old traditions of our past remain alive, the past in which we shared our joy and sorrow. It is true that our joint past had been a source of much trouble to our nation. That being said, we
would be one-sided and unfair if we blamed only Polish people for this state. Our nation’s leaders of that time would be equally guilty, but what really should be blamed is the entirety of ideas and concepts of that time. Now, if the leaders of both countries let themselves be guided by good will, we believe that a common solution may be found, especially if both parties aim at healing the old wounds and establishing good neighbourly relations, basing on justice and mutual respect.”

On 28 March, a Polish-Lithuanian communication agreement was signed in Augustów; on 30 March, the telephone network was connected at the border. As a result of previous decisions about communication and connectivity made in Augustów, a telecommunication convention was signed on 2 May 1938 in Kaunas, on 14 May – a navigational convention, and on 25 May – a railroad communication agreement.

In the beginning of 1939, notes regarding creation of main embassies in Klaipėda and Vilnius were exchanged. Furthermore, an agreement was reached regarding restrictions for imported press. Both official press agencies – Polish PAT (Polish Telegraphic Agency / Polska Agencja Telegraficzna) and Lithuanian ELTA (Lithuanian News Agency / Lietuvos naujienų agentūra) accredited their representatives in Kaunas and Warsaw. A military attaché, Col. A. Valušys came to Warsaw, Col. Leon Mitkiewicz had already been in the Lithuanian capital. Lithuanians continued the policy of removing obstacles in mutual relations as quickly as possible.

The result of this action was the dismissal of deputy Kazys Škirpa (a politician of visibly pro-German sympathies), who fulfilled his mission with full responsibility, although distancing it from Poland, and who was also blamed for suppressing the trade agreement. His successor was a professional diplomat Jurgis Šaulys, one of the few Lithuanian diplomats with pro-Polish sympathies. While handing letters of credence to president Mościcki, he emphasised that “as long as I am performing the duties of a representative of Lithuania, my efforts shall be aimed at the successful development of the renewed relations and at their further deepening in the atmosphere of mutual friendship and mutual trust.”
By the end of 1938, Lithuania was already feeling the German threat in Klaipėda. Facing the German aggression, Col. Konstantinas Dulksnys, the Chief of the Lithuanian General Staff, looked for Warsaw support: he asked for Poland’s military assistance in case of German attack and for assuring own borders, including Klaipėda. Lithuanians, represented by General Raštikis, offered a military agreement with Poland, although Beck did not want to risk an open conflict with the Third Reich and hesitated about giving an answer thinking that things would work out on their own and the peace would be maintained.

Unfortunately, that was not the case and the war ensued, however, the previous caution, if not hostility between neighbours – Poland and Lithuania – was replaced with normalization, real close relations, and cooperation for the mutual benefit of both nations.37

“The word ultimatum is always connected with some kind of conflict that brings about war. The Polish ultimatum to Lithuania delivered on the 17th of March was – contrary to the common custom – a dove symbolizing peace. It demanded the normalization of Polish-Lithuanian relations, as was in the international customs, because the existing lack of any kind of relations which was Lithuania’s own fault was in this part of Europe the source of a chronic inflammation that could have unpredictable and shattering consequences. For twenty years there had been no international relations between Poland and Lithuania. Two neighbours, two adjoined countries did not have joint railway, mail or road connection. In the modern history, such a situation was unprecedented and unheard of. ... Thus, the first step towards the normalization of Polish-Lithuanian relations was undertaken. A frame was set that had to be filled with hard but persistent work of both nations, carried out in good will. From our part, we can say that we have the good will, we have always had it. There is no and there has never been any hatred in our hearts towards the Lithuanian nation. We are not an enemy of the sovereignty of the Lithuanian country.”38
NOTES

1 Some said that Polish-Lithuanian relations were specific as, in fact, they did not exist at all. Łossowski, P. *Ultimatum polskie do Litwy 17 marca 1938 roku. Studium z dziejów dyplomacji*. Warszawa: Trio, 2010, p. 11.


7 The Lithuanian part attempted to resolve the matter of incident via direct discussions between borderland authorities, however, the representatives of the Border Protection Corps declared that „the matter shall be resolved by Polish government”. Por. Łossowski, P. *Ultimatum polskie do Litwy…*, p. 23 and next.


9 Łossowski, P. *Ultimatum polskie do Litwy…*, p. 36 and next.


11 Beck did not wish to return to Warsaw immediately as post Austria’s Anschluss it could cause an impression of panic in Poland.


13 Ibidem, p. 84.

14 Łossowski, P. *Stosunki polsko-litewskie…*, p. 315.


18 Zagranica o zatargu polsko-litewskim // *Republika*, 1938, Nr 75, p. 2.


22 Bezskuteczne demarches Francji w Warszawie rozbroiło szowinistycznych zaślepieńców // *Dziennik Polski*, 1938, Nr. 80, p. 5.
23 Łossowski, P. Po tej i tamtej stronie Niemna..., p. 286.
24 Łossowski, P. Stosunki polsko-litewskie..., p. 327.
25 Marszałek Edward Śmigły-Rydz z wizyta w Wilnie // Monitor Polski, 1938, Nr. 64, p. 8.
32 Łossowski, P. Po tej i tamtej stronie Niemna..., p. 229.
33 Łossowski, P. Stosunki polsko-litewskie..., p. 346.
37 A remarkable Lithuanian lawyer Michał Römer (Mykolas Romeris), a member of the National Assembly and the Lithuanian Supreme Court, who for many years was the rector of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, in 1927 wrote in his journal: “I would be the happiest – in fact, I would be happy only then – if I could witness a reconciliation and an honest dialogue of Poland and Lithuania.” The same author wrote in 1930 in one of his letters to a well-known historian, professor Władysław Semkowicz from Jagiellonian University: “I, who myself am as much a Lithuanian as I am a Pole, suffer particularly badly from this conflict. For I am not only unable to hate Poland while loving Lithuania with all my heart, but I also have an abiding love for Poland. I – and there are more like me – we are epigones of this psychological type that is dying out today, for whom the ideal example was Adam Mickiewicz, the type who managed to blend together two nations in our souls, who was as much a Lithuanian, as much he was a Pole, but was not solely a Lithuanian and not solely a Pole.”
38 Sprawa litewska // Biuletyn Okręgu Stołecznego Związku Legionistów, 1938, Nr. 4, p. 2.
Santrauka


Reikšminiai žodžiai: Lietuva, Lenkija, nota, ultimatumas, normalizacija.