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THE LITHUANIAN-POLISH DISPUTE AND THE GREAT POWERS, 1918-1923

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BY

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RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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The Lithuanian-Polish Dispute and the Great Powers, 1918-1923

In the wake of World War I, Europe was a political nightmare. Although the Armistice of 1918 effectively ended the Great War, peace in Eastern Europe was far from assured. The sudden, unexpected end of the war, combined with the growing threat of communist revolution throughout Europe created an unsettling atmosphere during the interwar period. The Great Powers—the victorious Allied forces of France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States—met at Paris to reconstruct Europe. In particular, the Great Powers had numerous territorial questions to resolve. One of the most fascinating territorial struggles concerned the city of Vilnius (Vilna in Russian, Wilno in Polish), located at the confluence of the Neris (Russian Viliya) and Vilnia rivers. Possession of the city of Vilnius, the ancient and current capital of Lithuania, and its surrounding region sparked an intense conflict between Poland and Lithuania.

On Feb. 16, 1918, the Lithuanian National Council (Taryba), which had been formed in 1917, proclaimed Lithuania's independence and set up a national government. Although formal German recognition was secured in March, real independence was not achieved until the German collapse in the west in November. At that time, Lithuania’s frontiers had not been clearly established, and unresolved border questions characterized Lithuania's foreign relations throughout the interwar period. As the Germans began to withdraw after the armistice of November 11, 1918, the newly independent Lithuanian government was faced with an invasion by the Soviets from the east. On January 5, 1919, the Red Army occupied Vilnius and a communist Lithuanian government was installed. The national government was evacuated to the city of Kaunas. The national government, protected by German forces that remained in western Lithuania on instructions from the
Great Powers, succeeded in organizing an army, which began to push the Soviets out of the country.

The problem of Vilnius and its surrounding region bedeviled Polish-Lithuanian relations. Modern Lithuanian nationalism was based on a fusion of ethnicity and historic identity. Vilnius, the capital of the historic state, was a multiethnic city with a heavily Polish cultural veneer. Many in Poland, while not averse to Lithuania's claim, felt that Lithuania itself had historically become a part of a wider Polish cultural realm and sought to resurrect some form of the common political entity that had existed until 1795. For many Poles, Lithuania had become a part of their country. Others considered that, if the Lithuanians were to set up an independent state based on the principle of ethnic population, Vilnius—with its large Polish population—should become a part of Poland. One strong supporter of Vilnius' incorporation into Poland was the Polish head of state, Marshal Józef Pilsudski, who stemmed from a Polonized Lithuanian noble family. On April 20, 1919, the Polish army took Vilnius from the Red Army and prevented the Lithuanians from reoccupying the city. The Lithuanians rejected the demands for union with Poland, and hostilities were avoided only by the Great Powers' creation of a demarcation line (the Foch Line) to separate the armies of the two countries. According to the Foch Line, Vilnius was left in Polish hands.

In the June 1920 the Red Army reoccupied Vilnius while pushing the Poles back to Warsaw. On July 12 1920, Soviet Russia ceded the city to Lithuania. Subsequently, violence broke out between Lithuania and Poland. The League of Nations arranged a partial armistice (Oct. 7, 1920) that put Vilnius under Lithuanian control and called for negotiations to settle all remaining border disputes between the two countries. Two days
later the Polish general Lucjan Zeligowski drove the Lithuanian troops out, proclaimed the independence of central Lithuania, and established its government at Vilnius. For the next year and a half, negotiations continued under the aegis of the League of Nations, which finally abandoned its role as mediator on Jan. 13, 1922.

Five days earlier, however, General Zeligowski, again prompted by Pilsudski, called for elections for a regional Diet, which on February 20, 1922 voted to incorporate central Lithuania into Poland. Subsequently, Poland unilaterally incorporated the city and its surrounding region. That arrangement was later accepted by the League's council, which set the border almost along the Foch Line (Feb. 3, 1923)—a decision that was confirmed on March 15 by the conference of ambassadors of the Allied Powers. Lithuania, however, rejected the settlement and, on the basis of the continuing Vilnius dispute, refused to arrange regular diplomatic relations with Poland. Only in 1938, under the pressure of a Polish ultimatum (issued March 17), did Lithuania agree to receive a Polish representative. Vilnius was restored to Lithuania on Oct. 10, 1939. The Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius prevented the formation of an effective bloc of eastern European countries between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The Vilnius question was a more important issue to Lithuanian historiography than to Polish historiography. As a result, there is a heavier concentration of Lithuanian sources and scholarship on the subject. Along with heavy Lithuanian scholarship, also comes a heavy Lithuanian bias. The essays by Alfonsas Eidintas¹ and Vytautas Zalys², both Lithuanian, are the most complete and objective studies of Lithuanian history

² Zalys, “The Return of Lithuania To The European Stage,” Ibid.
available, especially concerning Lithuania during the interwar period. Under Soviet rule, the work of Lithuanian historians at home had to pass through a severe filtering and molding process that limited what they could say. Lithuanian scholars in the Soviet Union were only permitted to study Lithuania in the narrow and contrived confines of the “Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.” As a result, distortions of scholarship occurred. Furthermore, émigré and foreign historians did not have the documentary materials to produce quality analytical work. The works by Eidintas and Zalys established the new benchmark for Lithuanian historiography. Equally valuable are the monographs written by the American scholar, Alfred Erich Senn, whose father lived in interwar Lithuania. Senn’s scholarship of modern Lithuanian history is well researched and he presents his arguments in a clear and unbiased manner.

**Early History**

The Lithuanian people lived in relative obscurity along the Baltic coast for centuries, attracting little attention from other European countries. As one of Europe’s last pagan outposts, Lithuania came under heavy attack from the hostile Teutonic knights in the thirteenth century. Abandoning its loose communal system for a monarchical form of government, Lithuania became aggressive and powerful, spreading its conquests throughout Eastern Europe, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. In the early fourteenth century the Grand Duke Gediminas founded the city of Vilnius (Vilna in Russian, Wilno in Polish) to serve as the royal capital. Establishing their nation as one of the wealthiest and most powerful in Europe, the Grand Dukes of Lithuania ruled an
enormous territory in which only approximately one-tenth of the people were Lithuanian of origin.³

**Union with Poland**

The roots of the Vilnius question are found in the evolution of Polish-Lithuanian relations since the fourteenth century. In 1386 Janiello (Jogaila), the Grand Duke of Lithuania, married Jadwiga, young Queen of Poland. The dynastic union of the Lithuanian and Polish thrones resulted in the Christianization of the Lithuanian people in the Roman Catholic rite and the Polonization of the Lithuanian nobility. Initially, the political union between Poland and Lithuania was an artificial creation, aimed at checking the German advance into the Baltic.⁴ The union of Lithuania and Poland remained a loose alliance by virtue of a common ruler until the Lublin General Union Act of 1569.

On July 1, 1569, a common Polish-Lithuanian parliament meeting in Lublin transformed the loose personal union of the two states into a Commonwealth of Two Peoples. The Lublin General Union Act of 1569 federated the Lithuanian-Polish union into a single Commonwealth.⁵ (See Map 1.) According to its provisions, Lithuania was to retain its own territory, separate government officials and administrative apparatus, its own standing army, legal systems and laws, treasury, and schools. In common with Poland were to be the sovereign, elected jointly and crowned in Cracow, the Sejm and the Senate, and the two countries’ foreign policies.

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Over time the two peoples became unified into one. Within the two countries, Polish language and culture came to dominate. The Lithuanian language, which loosely resembled Sanskrit, was hard to understand and seldom used in writing. In contrast, the Polish language was a Slavic tongue more easily understood by the surrounding nations and was more conducive for printing. Little by little, the Polish language came to be the language used in government, academia, and religion. Educated Lithuanians were forced to use Polish as the language of culture. As a result, the Lithuanian language slowly became relegated to the unwritten jargon of an oppressed peasantry who knew little of the world beyond their village. This point is illustrated by the examples of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, the Polish national hero, and Adam Mickiewicz, the great Polish poet, who were both born in Lithuania, but were assimilated into Polish culture. Poland's cultural assimilation of Lithuania was gradual and actually increased the harmony among the two peoples. The harmony was further supported by a common religion, Roman Catholicism. Religion was such an integral part of the lives of both peoples that it was common for peasants to confuse their nationality with their religion. When asked their nationality, peasants would often reply “Catholic.” Four centuries of a common political life and a common religion generated a community of common interests among the Poles and Lithuanians.

**Russian Rule**

During the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth declined as a political power. Attempts at reform triggered foreign intervention from Prussia, Austria-
Hungary, and Russia. Following three partitions, the old state ceased to exist. During the first two partitions, in 1772 and 1793, Lithuania lost only lands inhabited by East Slavs. The third partition in 1795 resulted in a division of the land inhabited by ethnic Lithuanians. The bulk of it went to Russia. Upon acquiring this territory, Russia designated the four provinces of Vilnius, Kaunas, Grodno, and Sulwalki as "the Lithuanian Provinces." (See Map 2.) Despite Russian political control of Lithuania, "Polonization" continued through the school system and the Catholic Church. After both Poles and Lithuanians launched unsuccessful revolts in 1830-1831 and 1863 against Russian rule, the imperial Russian government tried to free the Lithuanian people from the perceived dangerous and seditious influence of the Polish intelligentsia. The passive Polonization of Lithuania was now replaced with a policy of active "Russification." This policy of eliminating the "Lithuanian identity" was especially harsh in Vilnius, where Governor-General Nikolai Muraviev administered it. Vilnius University, the only institution of higher learning in Lithuania, was closed; use of Russian language in schools and government was mandated; and Russian law replaced the Statute of Lithuania, the code of law for Lithuania's nobles that had been in force since 1529.

It was during this time period that that first substantial statistics on the ethnic composition of the Lithuania were compiled. These numbers were taken from parish censuses conducted during the 1850s. The first person to make use of such parochial statistics and apply them to the Vilnius province was Mikhail Lebedkin, who published the census figures for Lithuania in 1862. His findings are presented in Table 1:

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9 Eidintas, "Restoration of the State," 12.
Table 1: Ethnic Composition of the Vilnius Province in 1862 (according to Lebedkin)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>418,880</td>
<td>49.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>154,386</td>
<td>18.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarussians</td>
<td>146,432</td>
<td>17.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Russians</td>
<td>14,950</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krivichi</td>
<td>23,016</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>76,802</td>
<td>9.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tartars</td>
<td>2,416</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>838,485</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Lebedkin's census, Lithuanians were over twice as numerous as the Poles in the Vilnius region. Unfortunately, Lebedkin—more accurately, the sources he utilized—did not explain the criteria for designating each ethnic group, which casts doubt upon the findings. One can only assume that the decisive factor was language.¹¹ Lebedkin, himself, was a Great Russian, and there is no basis for thinking that he had any pro-Lithuanian tendencies.

Roderik D'Erkert, a member of the Imperial Geographic Society of Russia, published an atlas in 1863 attempting to explain the expansion of the Polish nation.¹² He relied upon figures from the 1858 census obtained by the Russian Statistical Committee and from information gathered by clergymen. His findings are presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Ethnic Composition of Vilnius Province in 1863 (according to D'Erkert)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>212,000</td>
<td>24.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>178,000</td>
<td>20.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>386,000</td>
<td>45.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>77,000</td>
<td>08.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>00.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Inhabitants</strong></td>
<td><strong>856,700</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹ Ibid., 299.
¹² Robert D’Erkert, Atlas Ethnographique de provinces habitées en totalité ou en partie par des polonais (St. Petersburg, 1863), in Budreckis, 300.
It is important to note that D'Erkert considered Belarussians and Ukrainians as Poles. According to his statistics, Lithuanians comprised 44.8% of the inhabitants of Vilnius. D'Erkert was himself a Polonized German, thus his figures for Lithuanians are likely to be minimized in favor of Poles. In comparing the ethnographic maps of Lebedkin and D'Erkert, both have approximately the same number and similar percentages. Moreover, they both agree that the Vilnius province had a Lithuanian majority and that the region was mainly a Lithuanian-speaking area. Since Polish Catholic priests and Russian Orthodox clergymen gathered the data that each scholar used, there is no evidence of the authors or the sources having pro-Lithuanian tendencies.

In 1887, the Polish ethnographer Edward Czynski published a comprehensive study on the Poles and the Polish ethnographic area. A Polish nationalist, the purpose of Czynski's work was to delineate Poland's ethnographic boundaries and to determine the members of the Polish nation. Czynski does not include the Vilnius region in Poland's ethnographic boundaries, rather, he considers Suvalki the easternmost "Polish town." His results are shown in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>417,200</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>281,312</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>176,416</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarussians</td>
<td>239,592</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>77,480</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,192,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He found that 44 percent of the population of the city of Vilnius was Polish in 1880. This number is unreliably high because he labeled all Roman Catholics as Poles. Despite this

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bias, however, he did point out that Lithuanians constituted the plurality in the Vilnius province.

In 1897 the Russian Tsar conducted the First General Census of the Russian Empire. This census tabulated the results not only by province, but by county as well. (See Map 3.) This census was more-or-less-scientific, using native tongue as the basis for nationality. The results of that census, indicating ethnic differentiation of the Vilnius province are shown in Table 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lithuanians</th>
<th>Poles</th>
<th>Orthodox</th>
<th>Old Believers</th>
<th>Belarussian</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vilnius</td>
<td>76,916</td>
<td>25,293</td>
<td>7,524</td>
<td>3,670</td>
<td>82,527</td>
<td>15,377</td>
<td>1,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vileika</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>4,492</td>
<td>118,972</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>60,138</td>
<td>16,962</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysna</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>4,562</td>
<td>106,118</td>
<td>9,161</td>
<td>59,074</td>
<td>13,088</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyda</td>
<td>17,700</td>
<td>8,298</td>
<td>50,025</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100,319</td>
<td>19,522</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmena</td>
<td>8,757</td>
<td>3,556</td>
<td>70,304</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>116,561</td>
<td>24,373</td>
<td>2,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svenionys</td>
<td>57,869</td>
<td>9,080</td>
<td>16,522</td>
<td>7,472</td>
<td>65,484</td>
<td>9,128</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trakai</td>
<td>118,161</td>
<td>21,990</td>
<td>8,198</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>29,179</td>
<td>18,664</td>
<td>1,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>276,226</strong></td>
<td><strong>77,274</strong></td>
<td><strong>377,663</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,391</strong></td>
<td><strong>513,282</strong></td>
<td><strong>117,124</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,240</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Serious doubts have been raised as to the objectivity of this report. Local Russian officials, who enthusiastically sought to show the central authorities that under their administration the “Russification” of the “Northwest Territory” was progressing, conducted the census. The census takers sought to list as many Russians and Belarussians as possible.

The Tsarist government undertook a second census at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was the Police Statistical Inquiry of 1909. The results of this inquiry are given in Table 5:

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14 Pervaja vseobscaja perepis naselenenija Rossijskoj imperij, 1897 (St. Petersburg, 1904), in Budreckis, 306.
15 Budreckis, 312.
### Table 5: Ethnic Composition of Vilnius Province (according to Russian Census 1909)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lithuanians</th>
<th>Poles</th>
<th>Orthodox</th>
<th>Old Believers</th>
<th>Belarussian</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vilnius</td>
<td>16,283</td>
<td>107,887</td>
<td>7,311</td>
<td>3,758</td>
<td>55,623</td>
<td>38,392</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vileika</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6,057</td>
<td>105,448</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>69,119</td>
<td>15,484</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysna</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>3,838</td>
<td>121,602</td>
<td>12,735</td>
<td>85,091</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyda</td>
<td>4,238</td>
<td>12,461</td>
<td>48,812</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>127,282</td>
<td>18,528</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmena</td>
<td>12,154</td>
<td>3,538</td>
<td>72,325</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>136,279</td>
<td>21,557</td>
<td>951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svencionys</td>
<td>73,336</td>
<td>3,698</td>
<td>19,386</td>
<td>5,260</td>
<td>74,587</td>
<td>10,256</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trakai</td>
<td>124,735</td>
<td>51,452</td>
<td>8,024</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>22,370</td>
<td>25,349</td>
<td>1,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>231,828</strong></td>
<td><strong>188,931</strong></td>
<td><strong>382,908</strong></td>
<td><strong>25,909</strong></td>
<td><strong>570,351</strong></td>
<td><strong>146,066</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,064</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences are noticeable between the 1897 and the 1909 tables. In just over twelve years, the overall population increased, but the number of Lithuanians decreased by about forty-five thousand. The number of Poles, however, more than doubled although there is no record of any mass migration of Poles to the Vilnius region at this time. Why? Did the Poles "Polonize" so many other people?

Two major explanations can account for these numbers. First, the 1909 questionnaire was issued without specific instructions. As a result, the data was collected haphazardly without any uniformity from district to district. Secondly, political motivations existed for falsification. During the 1909 census, the police in many localities relied upon documents gathered by the Polish clergy. The pastors attempted to list all Catholics as Poles, not only to show their numerical ascendancy in order to gain more influence in the area, but also because of religious motives. Therefore, where intentionally or not, the pastors listed the people as Poles in order to protect Catholic locales from the encroachment by the Russian Orthodoxy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of non-Polish Catholics in many locales were listed as Poles.

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17 Budreckis, 310.
18 Ibid., 308.
19 Ibid., 311.
After centuries of gradual erosion of the Lithuanian language by the Poles and formal edicts outlawing Lithuanian by the Russians, Lithuanians began to value and develop their tongue.\textsuperscript{20} In 1883 the modern national movement began in Lithuania with the underground publication of the \textit{Auszra} (The Dawn), the first Lithuanian newspaper in the Russian Empire. Other publications soon appeared, including books and magazines published by Lithuanians in America. The goals of this movement were to educate all illiterate Lithuanians to read and write in Lithuanian, increase appreciation of Lithuanian literature, and to organize the masses against future exploitation.\textsuperscript{21} The revival of Lithuanian culture and literature was met with stiff resistance. The clergy, mostly Polish, utilized its authority to persuade many Lithuanians, especially in the southeast, to use Polish as their religious and vernacular language. These efforts by the Catholic Church further blurred the line between language and national origin.\textsuperscript{22}

By the late nineteenth century, the Lithuanian national movement was enlarging the scope of its efforts. Building upon the revival of the Lithuanian language, the movement was soon advocating the restoration of Lithuania as a separate country. At the heart of the movement was a nostalgia to rekindle the glorious history of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania.\textsuperscript{23} Attempting to establish a clear connection with the past, activists made their headquarters in Vilnius, the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A gathering of the region's leading professors, students, and civil servants formed the so-called Twelve Apostles' circle of Lithuanian intellectuals in 1895. The initial goal of this group was to restore a distinctly Lithuanian identity for the town. From

\textsuperscript{20} Eidintas, "Restoration of the State," 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Brockelbank, 484.
\textsuperscript{22} Eidintas, "Restoration of the State," 13.
\textsuperscript{23} Eidintas, "Restoration of the State," 14.
this point onward, Vilnius would become the center for most Lithuanian nationalist activities and the heart of the Lithuanian nationalist movement.

With the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1905, active russification of the Lithuanians came to an end. The harsh restrictions imposed upon the Lithuanian language and press were revoked. During this period of relaxation by the Russians the Lithuanian national movement gained momentum. In November 1905, for the first time in modern Lithuanian history, representatives from all social groups met in Vilnius to shape the national movement. The Vilnius Diet, later referred to as the "Great Vilnius Assembly" of 1905, met to discuss grievances and formulate formal demands to present to the Tsar. The convention of over 2,000 delegates quickly went beyond its initial purpose and called for a restoration of an autonomous Lithuanian state within ethnic Lithuanian boundaries (the areas of Vilnius, Kaunas, Grodno and Suwalki), which would be governed by a democratically elected parliament in Vilnius. The resolutions of the Vilnius Diet were of extreme importance as they outlined the constitutional and international aims of Lithuanian nationalism and broadly defined the political evolution that Lithuania would follow along the path to statehood. The Russian Tsar formally denounced these resolutions.

In 1907 the Russians reformed the process by which the Duma elected its representatives. Lithuanians, in a voting block with Jewish voters, managed to elect several representatives. All of Lithuania's electoral victories came in the provinces of Kaunas and Suwalki, and that they failed to win any seats in Vilnius. As members of

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26 Ibid.
the Duma, Lithuanian representatives worked tirelessly for Lithuanian national interests, pleading for autonomy. These efforts, however, were of little importance to the Russians with the prospect of World War looming on the horizon.

**World War I**

Although not a willing participant in World War I, Lithuania was hit hard by the Great War. (See Map 4.) The German army mobilized thousands of Lithuanians living in East Prussia (Lithuania Minor). Over half a million Lithuanians fought for the Allied cause in Russian, British, and American units (over the course of the war, 11,700 Lithuanians died fighting in the Russian Army alone.\(^{27}\)) Situated on the strategic Russian-German border, the Russian army hastily mobilized Lithuania for war. The Russian army not only confiscated horses and food from the Lithuanian peasants, but also deported those peoples considered unreliable, or sympathetic to the German cause, especially Jews, away from the Lithuanian front deep into Russia. On August 17, 1914, Russian General Pavel Rennenkampf led an offensive into East Prussia. The unexpectedly quick defeat of General Alksander Samsonov forced the Russians into a disorganized retreat. To hinder German advancement into Russia, Lithuanian peasants were ordered to burn their farms, abandon their crops, and head east into Russia. Approximately 500,000 inhabitants were evacuated to the interior of Russia.\(^{28}\) The German forces poured into Lithuania, laying siege to and capturing the fortress of Kaunas in the spring of 1915 and occupying Vilnius on September 19, 1915. Upon entering Vilnius, the German commander Alexei Pfeil called Vilnius the "the prettiest pearl of the Polish kingdom." To

\(^{27}\) Eidintas, "Restoration of the State," 18.

\(^{28}\) Budreckis, 314.
the new conquerors, Vilnius appeared to be a Polish city. Its architecture was western European, showing Gothic, Baroque and classical influences. Poles controlled the city's previous local administration and religious services in the city's many Roman Catholic Churches were held in Polish. Lithuania was now under German military occupation. In 1915 the German army created Ober Ost (Oberbefehlshaber Ost) to utilize Lithuania's resources to benefit the German army.

The simultaneous movement of large groups of peoples across Lithuania's borders altered Lithuania's ethnic composition immeasurably. The mobilization efforts by the Russian Army, the removal of Lithuanian Jews, and the retreat of ethnic Lithuanians into Russia all shaped Lithuania's ethnic composition. Shortly after the Germans occupied the country, a special committee under Captain von Beckerath was ordered to determine the actual proportions of the various nationalities in Vilnius, in both the city and the province. On March 3, 1916, he reported that both Vilnius and Grodno provinces showed a large majority of Poles and Jews, against a small percentage of Lithuanians. His statistics are shown in Table 6.

| Ethnic Composition of Vilnius Province in 1916 (according to von Beckerath) |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Poles                        | 70.0% |
| Jews                         | 23.9% |
| Lithuanians                  | 3.5%  |
| Belarussians                 | 2.6%  |
| Russians-Others              | --    |

How can we account for such a complete ethnic transformation in less than 10 years? The vast majority of German military police who aided von Beckerath to “interpret”

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nationality were Poles from Silesia. Furthermore, in 1916 the German imperialists were considering the idea of a "Polish Kingdom" in order to win over the Poles to their military efforts. The Vilnius region or "Russland [Russia] Poland" would have been an important addition to such a Polish kingdom.

During this period of reorganization, the Germans merged the Vilnius District and Lithuanian District (Kaunas) into "Militarverwaltung Litauen" in June 1916. As well as conscripting war resources from the Lithuanian population, the army also employed an active policy of "Germanization." The German military administration put a restriction on movement, mandated that German be used in all schools (closing those that did not comply), and closed all Lithuanian language newspapers except for the Dabartis (The Present), which was reduced to printing solely pro-German propaganda.

Independence

The war also had a tremendous effect upon the Lithuanian national movement. Initially, Lithuania actively supported the Russian war effort. In the Russian Duma, Martynas Ycas, a deputy from Kaunas, pledged Lithuanian support in the defense of Russia against the attacking German army. In August 1914 Lithuanian leaders in Vilnius organized a Lithuanian Center, under the leadership of Antanas Smetona, with representatives from all the Lithuanian political groups except the Social Democrats. Once Vilnius fell to the Germans, contact with Ycas and other prominent Lithuanians in Russia was cut off. A third center for Lithuanian nationalism was located in Lausanne, Switzerland, where Juozas Gabrys directed the "Lithuanian Information Bureau." Gabrys,

32 Budreckis, 315.
33 Ibid.
a Lithuanian émigré, had dealings with United States intelligence officers in Switzerland as well as the French Deuxième Bureau. In 1916, a conference of Lithuanians met at Bern and demanded "absolute autonomy." Smetona, Ycas and Gabrys were all Lithuanian nationalists and were in close contact with one another. Their different environments, however, affected their respective views of Lithuania's future.

Rallying around the leadership of Antanas Smetona, the Lithuanian Center sought cooperation with the Germans. Having occupied Lithuania, the German government intended to annex it by either of two ways: Direct annexation, colonization, and Germanization of Lithuania; or the creation of a formally independent state that would be completely dependent on Germany. This issue polarized the Kaiser William II, the chief military authorities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Reichstag centrists. The issue became further charged as the Lithuanians insisted upon independence for the historically ethnic Lithuanian lands of Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwalki, and Grodno. In August 1917, the occupation administration granted permission to the Lithuanians to hold a conference, in cooperation with the German authorities, to discuss the future of Lithuania. The Vilnius Conference was held on September 18-22, 1917, with 222 participants representing all of the major political parties and social groups. These were among the most active people in Lithuanian politics at this time. From the outset, the delegates displayed strong anti-German attitudes and firm determination for an independent Lithuania. The Conference elected a twenty-member council, the Council of Lithuania (Lietuvos Taryba), to act as the executive authority of the Lithuanian people.

34 Eidintas, Restoration of the State," 22.

The Taryba, in turn, chose Antanas Smetona as its chairman. In the following months, conferences of Lithuanians in Stockholm, Bern, Russia and the United States officially recognized the Taryba as representing the will of the Lithuanian people.

In December 1917 a Lithuanian delegation was permitted to travel to Berlin to discuss the fate of Lithuanian. The Germans offered Lithuania autonomy from Russia, but Lithuania would then be required to enter into a particular type of federation with Germany, bound by conventions on military affairs, transportation, customs union and finance. Using a text prepared by the Germans, the Taryba tentatively approved the document with some minor changes on December 11, 1917. The resolution proclaimed the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania with Vilnius as the capital. Furthermore, Lithuania requested the protection and aid of the German Reich and the Taryba declared itself to be “in favor of the Lithuanian State’s firm and perpetual bond of alliance with Germany.”

Upon its publication, Lithuanians were outraged with the agreement. While they applauded the severing of Lithuania’s ties to Russia, they viewed the “permanent and firm alliance” with Germany as a retreat from the decisions of the Vilnius Conference. Frustrated that Germany had yet to recognize the Declaration of December 11, the Taryba reconvened on February 16, 1918, and approved a new resolution. This second declaration of independence made no mention of ties to any foreign country. It boldly proclaimed Lithuania an independent, democratic state with its capital in Vilnius. All

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37 Eidintas, “Restoration of the State,” 22.
38 Ibid., 28.
39 Ibid., 29.
40 Ibid.
existing political ties to foreign nations were abolished (including Germany, as well as Russia) and if future political ties with foreign powers were to be established, a democratically elected Constituent Assembly must first approve the terms. February 16 was soon hailed as the national holiday of Lithuanian Independence. Angered by Lithuania’s second declaration, Kaiser William II refused to recognize it. Rather, on March 23, 1918, he officially recognized Lithuania on the principles of the original declaration of independence from December 11, which emphasized close ties to Germany.  

Rumors began to circulate of a German plan to incorporate Lithuania into a union with Saxony or Prussia. Fearing such an action, on July 13, 1918, the conservative wing of the Taryba, in an attempt to maintain Lithuania’s independence, proposed the revival of a monarchy. They extended an invitation to Duke Wilhelm von Urach, Count of Wurtemberg, to rule as King of Lithuania.  

Urach, who was notoriously favorable to Lithuanian independence, accepted the throne and adopted the name Mindaugas II. Since this invitation was not agreed upon by a democratically elected Constituent Assembly, as was stipulated in the February 16 declaration, a newly elected Taryba condemned this move as illegal and annulled it on November 2, 1918.  

Post World War I

The Armistice of 1918 brought no peace to Eastern Europe, as war would continue into 1920. Allied victory, the German revolution and the Bolshevik advance all followed with lightning rapidity. Lithuania was a country in crisis. In an attempt to

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42 Eidintas, “Restoration of the State,” 30.
43 Ibid., 32.
44 Ibid.
establish stability, the Taryba invited Augustinas Voldemaras to become Prime Minister on November 5, 1918. A brilliant scholar, Voldemaras had been Docent of History from the University of St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, his tendency to antagonize people, along with his egoism and his quick temper, handicapped his political career. Voldemaras inherited an economically devastated country that lacked any fixed boundaries, and was plagued by rogue bands of demoralized German military units that pillaged the countryside. Since the government had no system of local administration, was unable to collect taxes, or even organize an effective police force, it lacked real power to alleviate any of the country’s problems. Furthermore, any efforts to address these problems were constantly being challenged by local Poles who were actively trying to form a Lithuanian union with Poland. While the Lithuanian government was trying to bring stability to the domestic situation, hostile neighbors forced Lithuania to fight a continuous series of wars to maintain its independence.

On November 13, 1918, the Soviet Russian government annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, by which it had surrendered any claims to Lithuania, and the Red Army began to push west. Joseph Stalin, Commissar of Nationalities of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R.), envisioned Lithuania as part of the Soviet union. To reassert Russian control in the region, he ordered Lithuanian Bolsheviks to form a communist government and proclaim Lithuania a Soviet Socialist Republic. Vincas Kapsukas and Zigmas Aleksa-Angarietis proceeded to Lithuania to oversee the

45 Senn, The Emergence of Modern Lithuania, 47.
process. On December 8, 1918, the self-proclaimed provisional Lithuanian Revolutionary Government, headed by Kapsukas, was established. And on December 16, 1918, the Soviet (Bolshevik) regime in Lithuania was officially proclaimed by manifesto. The plan was for the Lithuanian Soviet government to then greet the Red Army as its own and not an occupational force. With the Bolsheviks in place, the Red Army invaded Lithuania.

Grasping the urgency of the situation, the first task of the Voldemaras government was to organize an effective defense against the Bolshevik advance. On November 23, 1918, the government ordered the creation of a Lithuanian army, mobilizing Lithuanian soldiers returning from Russia. Lithuanian peoples throughout the countryside rallied to defend their homeland. Approximately 12,000 Lithuanian volunteers would enlist in the army between 1918 and 1920, of which approximately 1,444 soldiers, militiamen, and guerillas would die. As volunteers gathered in Bolshevik-free parts of the country, the biggest problem was equipping the army. To overcome this lack of arms, the Lithuanian government was able to purchase limited amounts of supplies from the German army. On December 20, with the Bolshevik Army nearing the outskirts of Vilnius, Smetona and Voldemaras departed to Germany to seek financial assistance. The leadership of Lithuania and its defenses fell to Mykolas Slezevicius, who encouraged all Lithuanians to resist the invading Soviet units. With the Red Army drawing ever closer, the Lithuanian Government was obliged to withdraw to Kaunas, from where the defense of the country against the Bolsheviks was directed. Russian units subsequently occupied Vilnius on

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48 Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania*, 64.
49 Ibid., 51.
January 5, 1919. The Lithuanians were able to work with several German units that remained in western Lithuania on instructions from the Great Powers, who were concerned about a possible Bolshevik advance into East Prussia, to halt their retreat line at Kaunas. This allowed Lithuania to reorganize their military units. Meanwhile, the Red Army overran most of eastern Lithuania, penetrating as deep into Lithuania as Siauliai in the north, but was eventually stopped by German troops stationed in Latvia. (Map 5.)

Having occupied Vilnius, the Red Army installed a communist Lithuanian government and renamed the region the Lithuanian-Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic in February 1919.\(^{51}\) This move proved extremely unpopular among the Lithuanian populace for several reasons. The Bolsheviks declared a progressive policy of designating five official languages: Lithuanian, Polish, Belarussian, Yiddish, and Russian. Since few people spoke all of these languages, only Russian was used. This indirect attempt at “Russification” angered most Lithuanians and quashed any support for the Bolshevik cause.\(^{52}\) Furthermore, the Red Army was very poorly supplied and was forced to live off the land. They conscripted food, clothing and livestock, which the Lithuanians viewed as robbery. These harsh policies of the Russian invading Army drove many peasants to enlist in the Lithuanian army.

The Russian Red Army, fighting on foreign soil, did not prove to be as spirited as the Lithuanian army, which was fighting to defend its homeland. Despite early setbacks, the Lithuanian army received a boost in March when Colonel Warwick Greene and fourteen United States army officers visited Lithuania.\(^{53}\) Colonel Greene brought much

\(^{51}\) Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania*, 81.


\(^{53}\) Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania*, 97.
needed military and medical supplies along with him. Furthermore, many Lithuanians considered this visit as the possible beginning of diplomatic relations with the Great Powers. The visits of Colonel Constantin Reboul, who led joint French and British troops, and of unofficial diplomat Herbert Grant Watson to Kaunas, also raised spirits and helped the Lithuanian army reorganize.\textsuperscript{54} By April 1919, nearly 6,000 armed Lithuanian soldiers began to repulse the seemingly invincible Red Army, pushing it all the way back to Vilnius.\textsuperscript{55} On the eve of the recapture of Vilnius from the Bolsheviks, the national army of Lithuanian was forestalled by the Polish army, which was advancing from the southeast and occupied the city. The Poles justified their move into Lithuania not just as an anti-Bolshevik action, but also on the basis of self-determination of local Poles. Thus, by April 19, 1919, Vilnius was under Polish control. The Lithuanian government wishing to avoid an armed conflict with Poland addressed itself to the Allied Powers with a protest against this Polish action. Despite this setback, the Lithuanian Army continued to pursue the Russians and by late August 1919, the Red Army was expelled from its last Lithuanian holding, the city of Zarasai. Realizing their rapidly diminishing position, on September 11, 1919, the government of the Russian S.F.S.R offered to negotiate for peace with Lithuania. These talks would not open until early 1920. More good news came on September 26, 1919, when Great Britain awarded \textit{de facto} recognition to Lithuania.\textsuperscript{56}

While Lithuania viewed the Bolshevik Red Army as the primary threat to its independence, there was still the problem of German troops in the area. German troops were slow to withdraw from Lithuania, as the Armistice of November 1918 obligated

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 98.  
\textsuperscript{55} Eidintas, "The Nation Creates Its State," 35.
German troops to remain on the territory of the former Russian Empire, until further Allied instruction.\textsuperscript{57} As Germany’s Western Front collapsed, this problem was further complicated as volunteers from Germany joined Russian refugees to form new military units in the struggle against Bolshevik Russia. General Rudiger von der Goltz was given command of all German units in the area. During the summer of 1919, a splinter group of Goltz’s forces, led by Pavel Bermondt-Avalov, moved south into Lithuania from Latvia. Lithuanians viewed Bermondt’s efforts as a German attempt to maintain a foothold in the Baltic. While the Lithuanian national army was already facing the Bolsheviks and the Poles on numerous fronts in the south, Bermondt overran the Siauliai region in the north. When Lithuania received assurances that Poland would not attack its rear in October 1919, they proceeded to move its Army north and directly engaged Bermondt. The Allied powers had expressed similar concerns that the German forces were no longer fighting Bolsheviks and had demanded a swift German withdrawal.\textsuperscript{58} An allied military mission, headed by a Frenchman, General Henri Albert Niessel, supervised the evacuation of the Bermondtists from Northern Lithuania.\textsuperscript{59} Fighting alongside Allied forces, Lithuania reclaimed the city of Radviliskis on November 21-22 1919, which forced a rapid evacuation of Bermondtist units. By mid-December the last Bermondtist troops, pursued by Lithuanian forces, evacuated Lithuanian territory.

As difficult as it was for Lithuania to defend its independence on the battlefield, it was equally difficult for it to defend its independence in the eyes of the world. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Lithuanian delegation, led by Augustinas Voldemaras, was

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{59} Senn, \textit{The Emergence of Modern Lithuania}, 188.
denied its request for official status. This setback did not change Lithuanian goals for the Conference; it still demanded international diplomatic recognition, a clear demarcation of its frontiers, and assistance in rebuilding their war-ravaged economy. Of particular urgency were their frontiers, as Lithuania’s territorial aspirations directly collided with German and Polish interests. The Lithuanian delegation first had to determine on exactly what foundations—historical or ethnological—the restoration of Lithuania would be accomplished. They soon rejected the historical concept of Lithuania, that is, the grandiose concept of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and opted for the principle of a national state, that is, a state founded on a union of ethnologic areas. Unfortunately, this concept of ethnologic Lithuania was rather nebulous. Since Lithuania does not have any natural national frontiers, such as mountains, rivers, swamps, or deserts, it is difficult to establish ethnic boundaries. Generally speaking, ethnologic Lithuania had to encompass the former Russian provinces of Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwalki, and Grodno. Furthermore, but less fervently, the Lithuania delegation hoped to annex Lithuania Minor (northern East Prussia) and reunite that region’s large Lithuanian population with Lithuania proper, which angered Germany. Also, both Lithuania and Poland claimed the city of Vilnius and the surrounding region. On March 24, 1919, Voldemaras formally demanded recognition of an ethnologic Lithuania, based on the above territories, as well as parts of the province of Courland, totaling 125,000 square kilometers of territory and a population of approximately six million. (Map 6.)

Although the Great Powers denied Voldemaras’ demand and never specifically mentioned a “Lithuanian state,” the Versailles treaty did contain several articles that

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60 Zalys, 65.
61 Ibid.
directly affected Lithuanian territory.\textsuperscript{62} In Article 433, the provisional government of Lithuania was considered an already “existing” but not yet an “established” government. Article 87 postponed the demarcation of Poland’s eastern frontiers. Articles 28 and 99 both provided for the detachment of territory of Klaipeda (Memelland) from Germany. Article 116 officially annulled the Russian-German agreements at Brest-Litovsk. Article 117 obliged Germany to respect all future treaties that the Allied powers might conclude with the successor states of the Russian Empire. Also several articles internationalized the Nemunas (Neiman) River. Although the Lithuanian delegation left the Peace Conference disappointed that it had failed to win international recognition, it could take solace in the fact it had used the opportunity to make the world aware of its existence.

**Lithuanian Wars of Independence**

Specifically, Lithuania wanted to make the world aware of the Polish occupation of Vilnius, which they viewed as a Lithuanian city. In contrast, Poland objected to Lithuania’s claim to the region, asserted that the majority of inhabitants were Polish-speaking. The two sides both claimed what has subsequently become known as the Vilnius territory, the region that has traditionally formed the eastern part of Lithuania, of which the city of Vilnius is only a small part. The Vilnius region contained an ethnically diverse population. Any data concerning the region from the late nineteenth century was unreliable and contradictory. For example, the Russian census of 1897 reported the population of Vilnius and its surrounding territory to have a Belarussian majority (56 percent) and a small Polish minority (8 percent.)\textsuperscript{63} In 1919, the Poles conducted their own census of the approximately the same region and recorded the contrary, a dominant

Polish majority (53 percent) and a small Belarussian minority (7 percent). Each census of the Vilnius region during this time period reflected the biases of the census takers. It has been estimated that approximately 30 percent of the region's population, who were alternatively classified as Poles or Belarussians, lacked a clear national consciousness. The Lithuanians, basing their claims that the Vilnius region had been populated in ancient times by Lithuanian tribes also claimed this group. In fact, until both Poland and Lithuania disputed the ownership of the region in the early twentieth century, no one had ever questioned that Vilnius had always been the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This was the only way Lithuanians had ever viewed Vilnius, as their capital. To the Lithuanians, not only was territory at stake, but more importantly, the fate of their capital city. The problem was that over the centuries, the Lithuanian language and culture had eroded away within the region. Lithuanian censuses could never claim more than 17 percent of region’s population during the early twentieth century.

With Poland and Lithuania unable to reach an agreement concerning rightful ownership of the Vilnius region, the Lithuanian government asked the Allied Supreme Council to fix a line of demarcation between Polish and Lithuanian military forces. As the regional Lithuanian-Polish dispute became an issue of international concern, Lithuania was at a clear disadvantage for two major reasons. First, Lithuania’s independence had yet to be officially recognized by the Western powers. Sharply contrasting interpretations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Lithuania’s unsettled

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63 Vytautas Zalys, “Notes,” in Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918-1940, 220.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 220-221.
66 Ibid., 221.
67 Ibid.
68 Senn, The Emergence of Modern Lithuania, 131.
frontiers and a weak central government all served as major obstacles to Lithuania’s recognition.\footnote{Zalys, 71.} France was actively supporting a large and strong Poland, which it hoped would serve as the dominant power in Eastern Europe. The first such line was set by the Western powers on June 18, 1919, and was subsequently violated by Polish forces.\footnote{The Vilna Question: Consultations of MM. A. De Lapradelle, Louis le Fur, and André N. Mandelstam Concerning the Binding Force of the Decision of the Conference of Ambassadors of March 15, 1923 (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1929), 12.} A second line was drawn, the so-called “Marshal Foch” line, on July 27, 1919.\footnote{Ibid., 12-13.} The line accurately reflected the military situation on the ground, and thus assigned to the superior, occupying Polish forces large amounts of ethnically Lithuanian territory, including the Vilnius region. On December 8, 1919 the Supreme Council reassessed the situation and fixed a provisional eastern boundary of Poland on ethnic grounds, reassigning the Vilnius and Grodno regions to Lithuania, establishing the so-called “Curzon line.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} (See Map 7.) The Poles found this move to be unacceptable and proceeded to launch a military campaign against Soviet Russia in April 1920, in the hope of establishing their sovereignty over the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After initial Polish success, the Red Army turned the tide and began to repulse the Polish forces, threatening the very existence of the Polish state. These developments alarmed the Great Powers, specifically Great Britain, who feared that the German Army might invade Poland to defend German frontiers from the Red Army.\footnote{Zalys, 72.} In early July, the Great Powers met at Spa to save Poland.

The Conference in Spa, July 9-10, 1920, recommended to Poland that it must withdraw behind the Curzon line, and the Red Army must remain 50 kilometers east of
that frontier.\textsuperscript{74} In turn, the Lithuanians would take control of the Vilnius region. Furthermore, the Great Powers would settle any future disputes in the region. Polish Prime Minister Władysław Grabski agreed to negotiate all the proposals, but refused the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuania. British Prime Minister Lloyd George made it quite clear that Vilnius was too far from Poland’s ethnographic frontier, and that the Great Powers viewed the Vilnius dispute as a matter for the Lithuanians and the Russians to settle, not the Poles.\textsuperscript{75} The Great Powers presented Poland with an ultimatum: either agree to all their proposals and the status of Vilnius would be finally settled by the Allied Supreme Council; or, the issue would be settled between Lithuania and Russia. The Poles reluctantly agreed, but the ever-changing situation on the ground and the Russian diplomatic overtures to the Lithuanians would make it a moot point.

Concurrently as the Great Powers and Poland were negotiating at Spa, Soviet Russia and Lithuania were concluding their own conference in Moscow. Although the Western powers refused to recognize Lenin’s regime, the formal negotiations between the Lithuanians and Soviet Russia solidified Lithuania’s claim to legitimacy, which was important considering the failure of the Lithuanian delegation to win anything substantial in Paris.\textsuperscript{76} The Lithuanian delegation, headed by Thomas Narusevicius, demanded recognition of continuity with the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania and asked for formal recognition of Lithuania by a separate document, not as part of a general peace treaty. The Soviet delegation headed by Adolf Joffe, however, viewed Lithuania as a new political unit. The Russians won out and, according to Treaty of Moscow, Russia unequivocally recognized the independence and sovereignty of Lithuania and renounced

\textsuperscript{74}Grauzinis, 480.
\textsuperscript{75}Zalys, 72.
all historical claims to the region.\textsuperscript{77} This recognition was based not on any historical continuity of the Lithuanian state, but on the principle of national self-determination, which was a much weaker basis of recognition.\textsuperscript{78}

The bulk of negotiating focused upon territorial issues. The Russians agreed to the Lithuanian demand that ethnic boundaries serve as the basis of Lithuania’s frontiers. The treaty clearly defined the borders between Lithuania and Russia, with Russia recognizing the sovereignty of Lithuania over the former Russian provinces of Vilnius, Kaunas, Sulkwki, Grodno, Augustow and Lida, which both sides considered to have an ethnically Lithuanian population. (See Map 8.) The territory given to Lithuania by Russia, however, overlapped the “Curzon Line” drawn by Supreme Council on December 2, 1919, and awarded territory to Lithuania that was under Polish control. In exchange for having most of its territorial demands satisfied, Lithuania had to agree that the entry of Soviet forces into Lithuanian territory in the event of Russian conflict with Poland would not be considered a violation of the treaty or an “unfriendly act” toward Lithuania. The treaty was contingent on Lithuania remaining neutral in the context of the Russo-Polish war. The Treaty of Moscow was signed on July 12, 1920.

The following day, July 13, 1920, Poland agreed to transfer control of Vilnius to the Lithuanians, based upon the Spa agreements. British and French mediators were on hand in Vilnius to oversee the transfer of the city’s control from Poland to Lithuania, as well as to ensure that the Bolsheviks did not take control.\textsuperscript{79} The Polish, however, delayed their withdrawal from Vilnius, which prevented Lithuanian troops from entering the city.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{78} Zalys, 67.
as the Red Army advanced from the east. As a result, the Bolsheviks were the first to enter Vilnius on July 14, and occupied the city. In spite of the newly signed Lithuanian-Soviet peace treaty, it appeared that the Soviets had no intention of returning Vilnius to the Lithuanians.\(^{80}\) The Soviets then pushed westward and advanced to Warsaw.

At the gates of Warsaw, the tide of the Russo-Polish war turned yet again, and the Red Army was dealt a crushing defeat. On August 6, 1920, the Soviets signed over Vilnius to the Lithuanians, which the Lithuanian national army occupied on August 26.\(^{81}\) The following day, the last Russians withdrew from Lithuanian territory. The Soviets had been compelled to abandon Vilnius not on the basis of any treaty obligations, but in the course of retreat after the Battle of Warsaw.\(^{82}\) As the Red Army hastily retreated back towards the Russia, the Polish forces were in close pursuit and came upon territory occupied by Lithuanian troops, where some fighting occurred. The Poles complained to the Allies about the passage of Russian troops through Lithuania, specifically the transport of Soviet prisoners-of-war, as well as an alleged secret Russian-Lithuanian military pact. Although the Red Army’s passage through Lithuania did little to affect the military situation, it did weaken Lithuania’s international position. British and French diplomats were immediately sent to investigate Lithuania’s declared neutrality. Their investigation reported no evidence of a Russian-Lithuanian military alliance, but they did confirm that Soviet prisoners-of-war were being transported across Lithuania. Enraged, the Poles used this as an excuse to invade Lithuania.\(^{83}\)

\(^{80}\) Zalys, 73.
\(^{81}\) Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania, and the Vilna Question*, 34.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 70.
\(^{83}\) Debicki, 42.
In late August, Lithuanian and Polish military advisors met for talks in Kaunas.\textsuperscript{84} Poland made the same demands that the Soviets made in July, free passage for their troops in the Vilnius and Grodno regions and control of the Grodno-Lida-Molodechno railroad. If agreed to, this demand would violate Lithuanian neutrality, which would force Russia to renounce the Treaty of Moscow. The Lithuanians, as in their talks with the Soviets, demanded respect for their frontiers. As the talks progressed, Polish forces pushed deeper into Lithuania and occupied the regions of Augustow, Seiny and Suwalki, which led to further clashes with Lithuanian troops. Poland viewed Lithuania’s resistance as an alliance with Russia.\textsuperscript{85} On this basis, the Polish forces proceeded to attack Lithuanian forces on a wider front.

When the talks at Kaunas stalled, the Polish foreign minister, Prince Eustachy Sapieha, telegraphed the League of Nations to complain about the Lithuanian military concessions to Russia and pleaded for international intervention to end the bloodshed.\textsuperscript{86} Similarly, the Lithuanians appealed to Great Britain to help resolve the Polish-Lithuanian differences. The British advised Lithuania to accept the League’s mediation. On September 16, 1920, the case was formally submitted to the League of Nations in Paris for arbitration, with Ignance Jan Paderewski presenting the Polish arguments, and Voldemaras, presenting the Lithuanian perspective.\textsuperscript{87} After lengthy discussion, Paul Hymans of Belgium submitted a resolution that both governments tentatively accepted. The resolution essentially called for both governments to honor the “Curzon Line” and that an international commission, appointed by the Council, would oversee that both

\textsuperscript{84} Grauzinis, 481.  
\textsuperscript{85} Zalys, 74.  
\textsuperscript{86} Grauzinis, 482.  
\textsuperscript{87} Brockelbank, 485.
governments abided by it. On October 4, 1920, the international commission composed of Colonel Chardigny of France, Major Hersé of Spain, Major Keenan of Great Britain, Captain Yanamaki of Japan, and Colonel Vegera of Italy arrived in Vilnius.\(^8\) Despite the tentative agreement reached in Paris, fighting intensified along the disputed areas between Lithuanian and Polish forces.

The Poles and Lithuanians also attempted direct negotiations, meeting at Suwalki on September 30, 1920.\(^9\) Both sides agreed to cease hostilities and seek peaceful resolutions to their disputes. Throughout the negotiations, neither side directly mentioned the city of Vilnius, although it was the main point of the discussions.\(^9\) Both sides agreed, once again, to accept the Curzon Line, but only as far as the city of Bastunai, about 40 miles south of Vilnius, awarding Vilnius to the Lithuanians.\(^9\) The security of the city was far from guaranteed, however, because the line of demarcation did not extend past Bastunai, Polish forces could skirt the line without actually violating it. Both sides also agreed to a mutual exchange of prisoners. The Treaty of Sulwalki was signed on October 7, 1920.

**The Zeligowski Coup**

On October 5, 1920 Poland and the Soviet Union had reached a provisional agreement for a cease-fire and the preliminary conditions for peace, which gave Poland a free hand in respect to Lithuania.\(^9\) The Polish National Democratic Party favored openly attacking Lithuania and occupying as much of its territory as possible, especially Vilnius. Polish leader Jozef Pilsudski, however, chose a more subtle way of obtaining the same

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88 Ibid., 486.
89 Grauzinis, 483-84.
90 Ibid.
result; he ordered one of his generals to “mutiny” and seize Vilnius. On the same day the Sulwalki agreement was signed, the Polish General Lucian Zeligowski attacked Lithuanian troops at Orany. Two days later on October 9, 1920, the day before the Sulwalki agreement was to take effect, Zeligowski invaded Vilnius. General Zeligowski’s raid was actually anticipated by the British forces in the region. British observers were initially deceived by the misinformation emanating from Polish sources and believed that this was a “mutinous” action not sanctioned by the Polish government. Zeligowski triumphantly proclaimed Vilnius and the surrounding territory “The Republic of Central Lithuania” and furthermore declared himself head of state. Although the Polish government continually denied their connection with Zeligowski, it kept Zeligowski well supplied with Polish troops and weapons. Not surprisingly, the local Poles in Vilnius, who had no desire to join Lithuania, welcomed Zeligowski as a national hero. In contrast, the Jews in Vilnius, who were constantly harassed by Polish forces, fled Vilnius as refugees to Kaunas. Zeligowski declared his objective to be the “Marshal Foch” line of demarcation of 1919, but he did not rule out an attack on Kaunas. This prospect was intended to force the Lithuanian government to accept Zeligowski’s demand for negotiations. Not only did Lithuania lose its capital to a foreign army, but also with their troops deployed in the Southwest, the heartland of Lithuania was open to further Polish advance from the east. In desperation, the Lithuanian government expressed a willingness to negotiate with Zeligowski. Realizing the implications of such an action, it

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92 Zalys, 75.
93 Colonel Ward (Vilnius) to Earl Curzon, 8 October 1920, United Kingdom, Foreign Office, British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print; Part II: From the First to the Second World War; Series F: Europe, 1919-1939; vol. 51: Poland, 1919-1920, ed. Keith Sword (University Publications of America, 1996), 280.
94 Sir P. Loraine (Warsaw) to Earl Curzon, 14 October 1920, Ibid., 295.
95 Brockelbank, 487.
quickly retracted the offer, not wanting to "legitimize" Zeligowski's actions. Although the Allied powers disapproved of Zeligowski's coup de force, they lacked the means and the will to intervene and restrain Poland and they passed the issue on to the League of Nations. In an official declaration of October 11 to the Allied Powers, the Polish government asserted that the territory seized by Zeligowski was now part of Poland.

At the next meeting of the Council in Brussels on October 26, 1920, Lithuania appealed that Poland's actions violated Articles 12, 13, and 15 of the Treaty of Versailles; specifically that Poland, as a member of the League of Nations, had "resorted to war in disregard of its convenants." The head of the Polish delegation to the League, declared that Zeligowski had acted on his own, but that his action had the approval of the entire Polish nation. On one hand, the League of Nations refused to legitimate Zeligowski's actions. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the provisional Polish-Soviet peace, the League considered the situation in Eastern Europe to have "changed." M. Léon Bourgeois of France, who was mediating the discussion, saw no alternative but to declare that the territorial dispute between Poland and Lithuania over the Vilnius region should be decided by a plebiscite. The League subsequently ordered an official Plebiscite Commission to determine what territory was to be included in plebiscite, to prepare the regulations, and to supervise the administration of the plebiscite. The inability of the League of Nations to negate the consequences of Zeligowski's actions demonstrated the impotence of the League in resolving international disputes. Although neither Poland nor Lithuania favored a plebiscite, both formally agreed to one. The largest obstacle to

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96 Zalys, 75.
97 Ibid, 76.
98 Quoted in Brockelbank, 487.
overcome during the talks for the plebiscite was the military occupation of the Vilnius region, where General Zeligowski and his troops were still stationed.\textsuperscript{102} How could the Allies disarm them so as to allow a free expression of opinion? Furthermore, both sides disagreed on the actual boundaries of the territories to be included in the plebiscite.

As the talks continued in early November, General Zeligowski launched a surprise offensive with the objective of reaching the line held by Poland at the end of June 1920, which extended well beyond the city limits of Vilnius to encompass the entire Vilnius region. Once again, the prospect of a Polish occupation of Kaunas reappeared. By mid-November the Lithuanian army managed to regroup and halt Zeligowski’s advance at the cities of Sirvintos and Giedraiciai. The Lithuanian national army proceeded to push Zeligowski’s forces back to Vilnius. Although most of their diplomatic efforts to gain control of Vilnius had failed, the possibility now existed of occupying it militarily. Despite the opportunity to do so, the Lithuanian government deferred to the League of Nations Military Commission under French Colonel Chardigny, which ordered all hostilities to cease immediately. In hindsight, this would be viewed as Lithuania’s last real opportunity to retake Vilnius.\textsuperscript{103}

The League’s Military Commission called for cease-fire talks to be held in Kaunas. On November 29, 1920, an armistice was signed by the Lithuanian and Polish governments, which established a neutral zone between the opposing forces.\textsuperscript{104} During the negotiations, Poland refused to recognize Lithuania’s borders set by the Treaty of Moscow, or to have Zeligowski’s troops withdraw from Vilnius. These plebiscite
negotiations caused great concern for the Soviets. According to the terms of the proposed plebiscite, Zeligowski’s troops were to be replaced by a League force of over 1,500 troops. Moscow made it clear to the Lithuanians that it would consider such a dispatch of international forces to the region a threat to Russia’s security and a breach of Lithuania’s declared neutrality and, thus, a violation of the Moscow Treaty. Soviet Russia went as far as to threaten direct intervention. The talks reached a deadlock, as neither side wanted a plebiscite. Lithuania feared an unfavorable result and Poland saw no need to change the status quo. On December 31, 1920, the two governments informed the Plebiscite Commission that they regarded an agreement among themselves as impossible.105

In light of the many difficulties, the Council asked both Polish and Lithuanian governments if it could rely on their support in the task of carrying out the plebiscite. In a letter to the League on Nations on January 21, 1921, Lithuania replied that it would allow a plebiscite only on specific terms.106 First and foremost, they demanded a complete withdraw of Polish troops from the territory in question, including Zeligowski’s units. The plebiscite must be administered by states not directly involved in the dispute. Lithuania needed a guarantee that another coup de force of General Zeligowski would not take place. A delay must take place before the plebiscite was administered to allow Polish propaganda to subside. The League of Nations must grant de jure recognition of Lithuania, which Poland already had. Finally, Lithuania also stressed the fear of Soviet interference in the region. In view of this attitude as well as the many difficulties arising from the presence of General Zeligowski in the region, the League decided to change its tactics. On March 31, 1921, both nations agreed to negotiate all territorial, economic and

104 Grauzinis, 485.
105 Brockelbank, 488.
military issues under the arbitration of Paul Hymans, the Belgian Foreign Minister. (See Map 9.)

**Intervention of the Great Powers: The Hymans Plan**

As the conference approached, the Great Powers believed the only solution to the Lithuanian-Polish dispute was a federation between the two states.²⁰⁷ Warsaw welcomed this arrangement, but for Lithuania, whose sole aim was their own nation-state and who viewed the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in a negative light, this proposed federation was unacceptable. The Lithuanians, however, had no alternative to offer. In Poland, there were three main views on the future of Lithuania. Pilsudski advanced the idea of reviving the historic “Lithuania” with Vilnius as the capital, but federally linked to Poland. Alternatively, some favored a separate, but small Lithuania centered on Kaunas, with Poland annexing the Vilnius region. The most extreme option was the direct annexation of Lithuania into Poland.

The Conference opened in Brussels on April 20, 1921, with Count Sobanski and Simon Askenazy heading the Polish delegation and Finance Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas as head of the Lithuanian delegation.²⁰⁸ Galvanauskas was authorized to use all means necessary to reach agreement with Poland, as long as he accomplished Lithuania’s only goal of returning Vilnius and surrounding territory to Lithuania. Askenazy offered his “federation” proposal and wanted to discuss the overall relations between Lithuania and Poland, rather than Vilnius in particular. Lithuania was wary about joining into any federation with Poland, finding it difficult to see how the arrangement would truly be equal; thirty million Poles would overwhelm the three

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²⁰⁶ Ibid., 489.
²⁰⁷ Zalys, 78.
million Lithuanians. Nevertheless, Lithuania was willing to discuss the entire spectrum of options with Poland, as long as Warsaw recognized the independence of Lithuania with its capital at Vilnius.

After a month of intense discussion, Hymans, who was mediating the Conference, submitted a proposal on May 20, 1921. The “first” Hymans plan called for the formation of a Lithuanian Federal State with two equal autonomous cantons of Vilnius and Kaunas based on the Swiss Model. Lithuania and Poland would share a common council for foreign affairs, a defensive military convention, an economic convention with free trade, and Polish commerce would have free use of Lithuanian ports and territory. Although neither side favored the proposal, both sides agreed to accept it as a basis for discussion. Lithuania voiced its concerns to the Conference on May 24. Galvanauskas doubted that the Swiss model could apply to Lithuania. He also argued that Poland would dominate the various institutions of the proposed federation. He feared Lithuania would be drawn into Polish conflicts that did not concern Lithuania. Overall, Galvanauskas felt that the Hymans Plan would infringe upon Lithuanian sovereignty. The Lithuanians would neither adopt nor reject the proposal, but use it as a basis of discussion. Poland also accepted the Hymans Plan as basis for discussion, but demanded that Zeligowski’s statelet of Central Lithuania be included in negotiations. Lithuania strongly objected to this request, as it would violate the resolution of March 3, 1921, which stipulated that there would be direct negotiations between Lithuania and Poland without the influence of

109 Zalys, 80.
111 Sir G. Grahame (Brussels) to Earl Curzon, 3 May 1921, United Kingdom, Foreign Office, British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print; Part II: From the First to the Second World War; Series F: Europe, 1919-1939; vol. 52: Poland, 1921-1922, 157.
third parties. Furthermore, Lithuania did not want to legitimize Zeligowski's actions. Hymans ultimately rejected the Polish request. Thus, the first Hymans Plan resulted in stalemate and ultimately failed.

Lithuania and Poland met again at the next Council meeting at Brussels on July 27, 1921, to resume negotiations. As soon as the talks began, it became clear that some way had to be found to get around the situation caused by Zeligowski and his troops. On June 28, the Council adopted a resolution that stated any agreement must be approved by the diets of both Lithuania and Poland, as well as a subsequent diet to be formed in Vilnius. The resolution also proposed that Zeligowski's troops should be replaced by a police force under the Military Commission of Control of the League of Nations. The League would also create a local militia in Vilnius. Finally, the League called for the partial demobilization of the Lithuanian Army. Although Poland accepted the resolution, the Lithuanian government felt unable to accept it, finding the provision for ratification by the Vilnius Diet the chief objection. After yet another failed peace conference, both sides became frustrated and retreated to their original positions. Lithuania demanded that Poland observe the Suwalki agreement and restore the status quo before Zeligowski's military seizure of Vilnius. Poland considered Vilnius as a part of Poland and claimed to respect the local population's right to self-determination.

Hymans invited the two governments to meet at Geneva on August 25, 1921, to continue the peace process. On September 3, Hymans submitted his "second" proposal. According to the new proposal, Vilnius would become autonomous rather than a canton, although the links between Lithuania and Poland as foreseen in the first plan would

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112 Brockelbank, 491.
remain. Aware of the outcome of the first proposal, Hymans instructed the sides to give an opinion on the plan as a whole, not just separate provisions. The Lithuanian delegation accepted the plan as a basis of discussion, with the intention of editing numerous articles. Poland rejected the Hyman plan and made it known that it would not accept anything less than the June 28 resolution, which it had conditionally accepted.114

Paul Hymans, after having exerted much energy and effort, was forced to capitulate in the face of historic Lithuanian-Polish enmity. On one side, the Poles were unwilling to recognize a Lithuanian separate state based on continuity with the historic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and they tended to look down upon anything Lithuanian.115 On the other side, the Lithuanians were stubborn, impatient, and suspicious of their negotiating partners.116 At the following Council meeting on September 10, 1921, Hymans gave a long account of the dispute and asked the League Council to approve his second plan not as a basis for discussion, but as a draft treaty. The League Council endorsed Hymans’s revised plan and referred the matter to the League Assembly. The League Assembly heard both Polish and Lithuanian delegations and approved the second Hymans plan. In an attempt to win Lithuanian support for the second Hymans plan, the League of Nations admitted Lithuania on September 22, 1921, although the Western powers had yet to grant it de jure recognition. Despite this small victory, Lithuania had little faith in the organization.117 Lithuanian public opinion was clearly against the negotiations in Brussels and Geneva, as well as the Hymans plan. After reevaluating the most recent of Hymans’s draft proposals, the Lithuanian government sent a letter to the

114 Grauzinis, 489.
115 Zalys, 82.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
League on December 24, 1921, stating it also found it impossible to accept the “second” Hymans plan. Thus, after many efforts, the Council found its proposals unacceptable to both governments.

On November 16, 1921, the parliament (Sejm) in Warsaw announced elections in the Vilnius district for members of an assembly that would decide the fate of the district, to be held on January 8, 1922. The right to vote was given to all resident adults. The results were not surprising; the region’s Poles participated quite enthusiastically, whereas the Lithuanians, Jews, and Belarussians either boycotted the polls or participated minimally. In the city of Vilnius, only 54.8 percent of the registered electorate voted; of Jews eligible to vote, only 1.4 percent participated.118 Of Lithuanians who according to official statistics made up 7.2 percent of the region’s inhabitants, only 7 percent voted.119 The Lithuania government did not recognize the legitimacy of the vote nor its results. The League of Nations Military Commission, which observed the vote, complained about flagrant irregularities.120 The election was organized and managed exclusively by Poles, most voters did not show their cards of identity, and the elections were carried out under Polish military occupation. They concluded that the Vilnius Sejm (Diet) could not be considered a “true and sincere expression” of the region’s inhabitants.121

On January 13, 1922, the Council officially ended its efforts to mediate the dispute, acknowledging its failure and its inability to change the fact of Polish occupation. Furthermore, it also announced that it would withdraw the Military Commission of Control within one month. In its decision the League added, “It [the

119 Ibid.
120 Grauzinis, 491.
121 Zalys, 84.
League] cannot recognize a solution of a dispute referred to the League of Nations by one of its members, if that solution was made without regard to the proposal of the Council or without the agreement of both interested parties.\textsuperscript{122} On February 17, 1922, the Military Commission withdrew, and the neutral zone fell into a state of anarchy. The population was abandoned to its fate, having neither a government nor a regular administration. Attempting to seize the opportunity, propagandist organizations from both Poland and Lithuania entered the zone under the guise of “militias.” These bands were heavily armed and desired less to keep the peace than to conquer the zone.\textsuperscript{123}

The Vilnius Sejm thus elected was composed exclusively of Polish delegates. At the first session there was only one item on the agenda, the determination of relations with Poland. On February 20, 1922, the Vilnius Sejm adopted a resolution on formal union with Poland, which passed with a vote of 96-6.\textsuperscript{124} The Sejm immediately send a dispatch to Warsaw proclaiming that the Vilnius district was to be incorporated into Poland. On March 24, 1922, the Warsaw Sejm ratified the act of union. The Lithuanians offered various proposals, from continuation of direct talks to adjudication at the International Court of Justice at the Hague, but Polish-Lithuanian relations were now at a stalemate. Proclaiming that Vilnius Sejm of Central Lithuania supported unconditional incorporation into Poland, Warsaw refused any further talks on the question.

During the Council Meeting at Geneva on May 16, 1922, the Council requested that both governments establish a provisional border and release all political prisoners. During the meeting, Lithuania made a final plea to the Council to protect the neutral


\textsuperscript{123} Brockelbank, 494.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
zone. Furthermore, the Lithuanian government asked the Council to draw the attention of the Great Powers to the urgent necessity of tracing the eastern frontiers of Poland under the power given to them by Article 87 of the Treaty of Versailles. Lithuania continued to insist upon the supremacy of the Treaty of Suwalki, however Poland refused to acknowledge that treaty. The League refused, citing the fact that the neutral zone no longer existed, and that the responsibilities were too great for the League to handle. The League, however, did send in August of 1922 Pedro Saura of Spain and Dr. Stojan Lasic of the Yugoslavia to observe the situation in Vilnius first hand. In December, Saura presented his report to the League. It gave a brief history of the violence and anarchy that had existed in the region since the withdrawal of the Military Commission of Control in February. He recommended the drawing of a provisional line, which gave practically the entire Vilnius region to Poland.

Resolution

On February 3, 1923, the Council adopted a resolution laying down a provisional line of demarcation to be observed by the Lithuanian and Polish governments after February 15. This line followed the one recommended in the Saura report and awarded the Grodno-Vilnius-Daugavpils railway to Poland. The cities of Sirvintos and Giedraiciai were returned to Lithuanian control. Poland immediately accepted this resolution and proceeded to occupy the portion of the zone assigned to it. Organized Lithuanian opposition clashed with Polish forces near the cities of Lejpuny and Klepaczi, where

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125 Grauzinis, 493-93.
126 Brockelbank, 495.
127 Grauzinis, 493.
128 Ibid.
fighting continued for ten more days. To finalize the incorporation of the Vilnius region into Poland, Poland asked the Conference of Ambassadors, which was meeting in Paris, to recognize its eastern borders with Lithuania and the Soviet Union. On March 15, 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors made its momentous decision regulating the whole Vilnius question. The Conference recognized the Russo-Polish frontier as fixed by the Treaty of Riga of 1921, which was signed by both Poland and Russia, and recognized the Lithuanian-Polish frontier as fixed on February 3, 1923. This final stroke was a victory for Poland, who had gained approximately 6,000 square miles.

On April 16, 1923, Lithuania addressed a note to Raymond Poincaré, President of the Conference of Ambassadors, formally refusing to recognize the validity of the decision of March 15. Lithuania’s objections can be summarized into six major categories. (1) Any right of the Conference of Ambassadors to fix Lithuania’s boundaries came from Article 87 of the Treaty of Versailles, which Lithuania did not sign, and thus the treaty does not apply to Lithuania. (2) The Conference of Ambassadors was aware of this principle, and had recognized it in regard to Russia because its decision followed the line specified by the Treaty of Riga. (3) The Conference of Ambassadors referred to Lithuania’s note of November 18, 1922, as being a voluntary submission of the question to the Conference. This note, however, asked the Great Powers to use the right conferred on them by Article 87 of the Treaty of Versailles to fix the Eastern boundaries of Poland “taking into account the solemn engagement of that state towards the Lithuanian state and the vital interests and rights of Lithuania.” The Conference of Ambassadors quotes only

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129 Brockelbank, 496.
131 Brockelbank, 497.
the first part of the note and does not quote the part quoted here. Since the decision did not take into account the "solemn engagement of Poland towards Lithuania" (the Sulwalki agreement) the decision was beyond the powers given by the note of November 18, 1922. (4) The right to be exercised by the Great Powers naturally involved the assumption of an agreement by the states involved, deriving its power from the Treaty of Versailles. Lithuania, however, did not sign this agreement. (5) Any reliance by the Conference of Ambassadors on the resolutions of the Council of the League of Nations of January 13, 1922, May 17, 1922, or February 3, 1923, was invalidated by the fact that Lithuania never accepted them and the Council had no power to impose them without Lithuania's consent. Thus the Conference was trying to legalize a de facto situation. (6) There was no representative of Lithuania at the Conference of Ambassadors, and Lithuania was given no chance to be heard. Although Lithuania refused to recognize the legitimacy of this decision, Poland and the Great Powers considered the Vilnius dispute settled. 132

Polish occupation of the Vilnius province (1920-39) did not radically change the ethnicity of the area. Three demographic changes, however, were noticeable in the region. 133 (1) Overall decreases in both rural and urban populations due to seven years of warfare. (2) A decrease in the Jewish population because most of the 1915 evacuees to Russia did not return. (3) An influx of Polish soldiers, administrators, civil servants, and their families to fill various administrative and commercial positions created by Polish imperialism. During the occupation, an intense "Polonization" propaganda campaign was conducted. As a result, every census from this period conducted by Polish authorities was

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132 Zalys, 85.
133 Budreckis, 316.
extremely pro-Polish. Over zealous Polish census takers would list all Catholics and all Polish speakers as Poles.\textsuperscript{134} These inflated figures were then relied upon to justify their claims to the region. In 1921, the Poles claimed that Vilnius County had only 10,738 Lithuanians; contrasted by local Lithuanian leaders who said that Lithuanians numbered 41,050.\textsuperscript{135} Unfortunately, no objective data for the differentiation of the population of the Vilnius region during the interwar period is available.

The Warsaw government did conduct two official republic-wide censuses, on September 30, 1921 and December 9, 1931.\textsuperscript{136} The official figures are in Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population 1921</th>
<th>Population 1931</th>
<th>Poles 1921</th>
<th>Poles 1931</th>
<th>Polish-Speaking 1921</th>
<th>Polish-Speaking 1931</th>
<th>Non-Poles 1921</th>
<th>Non-Poles 1931</th>
<th>Non-Polish-Speaking 1921</th>
<th>Non-Polish-Speaking 1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bresiauja</td>
<td>124,036</td>
<td>142,475</td>
<td>70,554</td>
<td>93,947</td>
<td>53,482</td>
<td>48,501</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysna</td>
<td>139,569</td>
<td>159,546</td>
<td>59,688</td>
<td>62,513</td>
<td>79,881</td>
<td>97,033</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmena</td>
<td>70,021</td>
<td>104,633</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>85,299</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>19,334</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastovis</td>
<td>83,466</td>
<td>99,836</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>47,857</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>51,979</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svencionys</td>
<td>118,819</td>
<td>136,305</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>68,424</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>67,881</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vileika</td>
<td>103,914</td>
<td>130,927</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>59,636</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>71,291</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trakai</td>
<td>159,229</td>
<td>214,070</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>180,569</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>33,501</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyda</td>
<td>148,073</td>
<td>183,431</td>
<td>123,342</td>
<td>145,732</td>
<td>24,731</td>
<td>37,699</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every Polish census found fewer and fewer Lithuanians in the Vilnius region. Even so, the 1931 census shows that after eleven years of Polish rule, 40.1 percent of the inhabitants of Vilnius still could not speak Polish.\textsuperscript{137} These figures are suspect, since the Polish census takers were fitting the facts to their predetermined conclusions.

The March 15, 1923, decision of the Conference of Ambassadors not only left Lithuania and Poland in a state of "no peace, no war," but had the effect of erecting an

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 317.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} "Ludnosc polska i niepolska Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na podstawie powszechnych spisow z dnia 30 wrzesnia 1921 r. i 9 grunia 1931," Sprawy Narodowosciowe (Warsaw, 1932), in Budreckis, 317.
impenetrable barrier along the line of demarcation between Lithuania and Poland. No traffic or mail passed through the border, and communications remained cut off for fifteen years. Until Nazi Germany’s expansionism of the late 1930s, no two European states exhibited such open mutual hostility.\textsuperscript{138} In an attempt to ease this tense situation, the Conference of Ambassadors urged the two governments to begin direct negotiations in order to open normal relations. Negotiations began on September 1, 1925, in Copenhagen and continued from September 15 until October 15 in Lugano, Switzerland, but they yielded no results.

As the threat of war arose in 1927 and relations became more strained, Lithuania appealed to the League of Nations. On December 10, 1927, the League Council adopted a resolution that announced peace between the two countries and proposed that direct talks should begin with the purpose of achieving good relations, while leaving out of account questions on which the two states differed. Talks were held in Konigsberg, Warsaw, and Kaunas. During the discussions, Polish representatives recognized and respected the sovereignty of Lithuania.\textsuperscript{139} The only other result was an agreement, signed on November 7, 1928, concerning the improvement of the condition of farms that were divided or separated by Poland’s acquisition of the Vilnius region. At the insistence of Poland, the League Council sought the opinion of the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague about restoring communications between Lithuania and Poland. Specifically, Poland was inquiring as to whether the circumstances at the time under international agreements required Lithuania to open the railroad between Lentvaris and Kaisiadorys.

\textsuperscript{137} Budreckis, 317.
\textsuperscript{138} Zalys, 85.
\textsuperscript{139} Suziedelis and Vasaitis, 170.
On January 24, 1931, the Hague Court responded that current international agreements did not require Lithuania to do so.

This hostility continued until 1938, when on March 7 a Lithuanian sentry shot and killed a Polish border-militiaman who was hiding on the Lithuanian side of the border. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the Polish government delivered an ultimatum to Lithuania on March 17. Threatening force if Lithuania did not comply, Poland demanded that Lithuania restore rail and road communications, telephone and telegraph communications for diplomatic representatives, and it had to send a representative to Warsaw and accept a representative of Poland in Kaunas. Lithuania complied with the ultimatum, observing that it was yielding to force, not to what was right. Poland and Lithuania signed a treaty in Augustavas on March 30, 1938.140 The question of Vilnius arose at the international level again after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed on August 23, 1939. In the secret protocol attached to this agreement, Germany and the Soviet Union recognized the rights and interests of Lithuania in the Vilnius region.141 After Poland collapsed and the Soviets occupied Vilnius in the fall of 1939, the city was handed over to Lithuania on October 10 in accordance with a treaty made in Moscow.142 By this treaty Lithuania had to give up extensive territory for the benefit of the Soviet Union, although under the Moscow Treaty of 1920, that territory belonged to Lithuania.

The Vilnius question was but one of the many territorial conflicts that plagued Eastern Europe between the World Wars. Parallels to the dispute can also be found more recently in Israeli-Arab or Indian-Pakistan relations. What makes the Lithuanian-Polish

140 Ibid.
dispute so unique is that the Lithuanians insisted that the contested region included their capital. The heart of the problem lay in the ideology of Lithuanian nationalism. Lithuanian nationalism had to justify itself, and its proponents based their case for political independence on the glories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which had its capital in Vilnius. To renounce Vilnius was the equivalent of renouncing independence itself. Even after gaining their long-sought-after independence, most Lithuanian leaders still could not free themselves of this mindset.

Vilnius, however, was a diverse city that contained numerous nationalities. The Vilnius province was a cultural frontier where linguistic and cultural boundaries mingled and blurred. Nationalism, both political and cultural, among the inhabitants, appeared only during the last years of the nineteenth century. Vilnius was a problematic nightmare to the ethnologist, diplomat, and historian alike, as it defied any delineation of national-ethnic boundaries. Demographic data, mainly because of the national bias of various census takers, have only added to the ethnological confusion, as scholars were confronted with contradictory statistical data.

The Lithuanian nationalists insisted on the formation of their own national state, and in a multi-national region, this inevitably had to bring conflict. Even though Lithuanians had enjoyed considerable sympathy among Vilnius’s Jews, the Lithuanians failed to win the loyalty of the city’s entire population, or even a majority. They could offer no defense of the city against Zeligowski’s *coup de force* in October 1920. Unable to regain Vilnius by themselves, Lithuania’s leaders considered all international problems in the context of the Vilnius question, and this attitude persisted into the first year of World War II. Despite Lithuania’s lip service to the League of Nations; its foreign policy
was based entirely on anti-Polish feelings. In the long run, however, the resolution of the Vilnius question was in hands of neither the Poles nor the Lithuanians, but in the hands of the Great Powers.
The Province (Gubernia) of Vilnius and other Lithuanian provinces according to the tsarist Russian administrative divisions.
MAP 3
THE LITHUANIAN REGION
1914

- State boundaries
- Guberniya boundaries
- Rivers

Riga
COURLAND GUBERNIYA
Western Diva

RUSSIAN

KAUNAS
GUBERNIYA

LUZHANIA

MAJORITY

Suwalki
GUBERNIYA

Vilna
GUBERNIYA

 Vilna
MAP 6

Girziška, "The Eastern and Southern Boundaries of Lithuania", 570.
REFERENCES.

Frontier line of the Lithuanian Republic

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