THE OCCUPATION, ANNEXATION AND SOVIETIZATION OF LITHUANIA

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1. **The foreign policy of the USSR in preparation for Lithuania's occupation**. In 1939, the neighbouring aggressive states of Germany and the Soviet Union posed a real threat to the statehood of Lithuania. The conclusion of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Treaty on the Transfer of Vilnius and Vilnius District to the Republic of Lithuania, as well as the Lithuanian-Soviet Mutual Assistance Treaty which Lithuania signed on 10 October 1939, restricted the Republic's independent foreign policy; Lithuania lost its status as a neutral country. Having taken advantage of the favourable international circumstances and by implementing a foreign policy directed against Lithuania's independence, the Soviet Union created the conditions for the occupation of Lithuania.

2. **The military plan of Lithuania's occupation**. The diplomatic preparations for occupying Lithuania were conducted whilst preparing the requisite military measures. Regarding the military aspect, Lithuania's situation deteriorated from the autumn of 1939 when the Red Army bases were set up across the country. The implementation of the Soviet military plan of Lithuania's occupation began in the spring of 1940. The final discussion on the Soviet plans for Lithuania's military occupation took place on 11 June 1940. After Lithuania accepted the ultimatum issued by the Soviet Union, the military operation proved unnecessary because the Red Army entered the country unopposed.

3. **Lithuania's internal political situation on the eve of occupation**. The country's internal political development was much affected by the ultimatums, which Poland and Germany delivered to Lithuania in 1938-1939, by the outbreak of World War II and by the aforementioned Soviet-Lithuanian treaty of 10 October 1939. The return to Lithuania of the Vilnius District and the deployment of the Soviet troops raised tensions among the public. The Soviet Union began interfering in the internal affairs of Lithuania. The State Defence Council of Lithuania discussed the rising threat in February 1940, once again in May 1940, and came to the decision to oppose Soviet aggression by force of arms. Disillusioned by the failure to consolidate the nation's political forces in the face of the threat to its independence, members of the opposition parties sought to instigate a political crisis in order to form a new government.

4. The President of Lithuania, who was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces in charge of organizing the defence of the country, took no action. After the Soviet ultimatum was received, it was clear that a military occupation of the country was inevitable. The President proposed to debate only one item in the ultimatum, the issue of the formation of a new government, and then urged the cabinet to reject the ultimatum and offer armed resistance. The majority of the cabinet, as well as the military leaders invited to the meeting, rejected the option of armed resistance as unrealistic. The absence of democratic traditions encouraged a situation in which the opposition were more concerned with the possibilities which the ultimatum offered for eliminating Smetona's regime rather than with the fate of the country. The cabinet did not condemn the aggression and a proposed statement of protest was excluded from the text which accepted the Kremlin's ultimatum. The Soviet Union took advantage of the complicated political situation in the country, thus sharpening the tension, dividing the political elite of Lithuania, and then initiating the occupation of the country.

5. **The occupation of Lithuania**. On 15-16 June 1940 the Red Army occupied Lithuania, including parts of southwest Lithuania, which had previously been ceded to Germany by the Soviet-German treaty of 28 September 1939. On 10 January 1941 the Soviet Union was formally granted this territory in return for 7.5 million dollars in gold.

6. An authorised agent of the Soviet government, Vladimir Dekanozov, coordinated the military occupation and annexation of Lithuania. A special group of the Soviet Legation was formed to assist in the operation, including NKVD officials who had arrived in Lithuania, the leadership of the Red Army garrisons and members of the Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee, all of whom were engaged in solving the issues of a new government's formation and policy. The plan aimed to complete Lithuania's annexation by the USSR while formally following the Constitution and laws of Lithuania. After this failed due to Smetona's departure, it was decided to violate the Constitution and appoint, Justas Paleckis, known to favour the Soviet Union, in order to form a new government.

7. On 17 June 1940, a new government, known as the so-called People's Government was formed and approved by Acting President Antanas Merkys. The aim of this Government was to serve the goals of the Soviet Union, to conceal the fact of military occupation, and to appease the people of the country. Gradually, the Communists appointed to the

Government occupied the major ministries. After 5 July, non-Communist ministers played virtually no role in governing the country.

8. In order to present the appearance of constitutional legitimacy, Justas Paleckis took the post of the President of the Republic and swore to uphold the state's Constitution. The President of Lithuania was ostensibly to lead an independent and sovereign state of Lithuania without any influence from outside. The People's Government initiated the destruction of the political and public structures of the independent Lithuanian state, while, at the same time, limiting the rights of the people. Anti-state Communist organizations controlled by Moscow were legalised, and all former political, public, cultural and religious organizations, and student fraternities were banned. Disbanding the Seimas which had been elected in 1936 accelerated the political reorganization of the state. Thus, the way was being paved for Lithuania's annexation. The new Law on Elections in July 1940 established the preconditions for Lithuania's annexation.

9. **Elections to the so-called People's Seimas [Diet] as a means of preparing Lithuania's annexation**. The new Law on Elections to the so-called People's Seimas was not in compliance with Lithuanian legislation, according to which an interval of two months between the announcement of elections and the vote was required. The law on elections was not democratic. It stipulated that everyone was required to vote (§ 24), stamps would be placed in voters' passports (§ 35) to mark compliance with this order, and candidates would be nominated only in meetings of "working people". There were no registration lists of voters. In order to cover up the fact that the Lithuanian Communist Party would seize power, a fictitious Lithuanian Working People's Union was founded and was the only party allowed to participate in the elections.

10. "The Working People's Union Election Platform" promised tax relief and debt liquidation for farmers, better pay and working conditions for workers, free social services, the development of health care and education, etc. The platform said nothing about the change of the political system or Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR. Before the elections, the police carried out arrests and engaged in repressions.

11. The previous authoritarian regime had failed to create a civic society in Lithuania. As a result, a considerable portion of the Lithuanian population participated in these rigged elections. The most recent research suggests that 85.2 percent of the total electorate participated. The election commission "improved" these results by approximately ten percent, and an estimated 55 percent of the voters cast their ballots for the listed

candidates. Each candidate stood separately and only those who received over 50 percent of the votes could be elected. The absolute majority of the candidates were not elected in accordance to the provisions of the Law on Elections, but were announced as such nonetheless. The results of the election were clearly rigged.

12. **The role of the People's Seimas in Lithuania's annexation**. The major push to accomplish the country's annexation began after the elections with the convening of the so-called People's Seimas. The Soviet representatives drew up the plans and led the process, while the Lithuanian Communists carried out the organizational work of the annexation. The work of the Seimas was organized in a way which violated almost all parliamentary rules and, at the same time, ensured that no one would be able to resist the planned annexation. A voting system was created whereby no one counted the actual votes (resolutions were accepted by acclamation). Commissions would not discuss draft laws, which could only be adopted during a third reading. The Seimas did not have the right to change the state's political system and abolish the country's sovereignty. The Constitution of 1938 had explicitly stated that "the Seimas is not competent to decide issues of sovereignty… [and] shall not have the legal power to decide the fate of the State".

13. The issues of the political system and Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR were debated on 21 July 1940. The decisions of the People's Seimas were in fact inspired by the Soviet Union and were promulgated by violating parliamentary procedures as well as the Constitution of Lithuania. The People's Seimas thus liquidated Lithuania's independence, and began a rapid transformation of the political and economic life of the country. The Sovietization of Lithuania had been under way even before the country become part of the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian Communist Party played the decisive role as the executor of the Soviet plans.

14. The final annexation was formalised on 3 August 1940, when the Supreme Soviet of the USSR approved the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR.

Chairman Emanuelis Zingeris

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