

THE ROLE OF FRANCE IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LATVIA, 1921-1933

Latvia's diplomats perceived international affairs on the basis of the assumption that the guarantee of European peace and stability meant retaining the existing international order. The small Baltic States had to rely on the international security mechanisms much more than other European countries did and precisely for this reason the post-war period was characterized by their affinity to France, which, in its turn, had actively defended the system of collective security and its mechanisms, developed after WWI.

In the inter-war period Latvia was a small state – both in terms of territory and population and its goal was retaining the *status quo* in the region. Latvia was satisfied with the system developed after WWI. Being loyal to the Treaty of Versailles, Latvia was its proponent. Its diplomatic officials were satisfied with the borders. In contrast to Lithuania, Latvia had no serious disputes with its neighbors. Considering the fact that the powerful Germany and Soviet Russia (USSR) were in close proximity to Latvia, avoiding great powers' conflicts was one of the main tasks on Latvia's foreign affairs agenda during the inter-war period; moreover, Latvia wanted no involvement in the conflicts initiated by great powers; Riga was especially apprehensive by the contentions between Poland and Lithuania. Latvia's diplomatic representatives were interested in the relations between their country's neighbors and France.

The newly founded Baltic States were too small and located too far on the European periphery to attract significant attention from France and to attract a steady interest as well. The Baltic States were devoted minimum attention in the French foreign affairs and assigned limited tasks in the uncertain conception of the French Eastern European policy. It is impossible to talk about the French policy in relation to Latvia (or the Baltic States), because there was no prior policy with concrete aims and action plans formulated. It is possible, though, to study the political relations between France and Latvia in a broader context of European foreign affairs, the most significant aspects being the French Eastern European policy, French relations with its ally, Poland, and French relations with the Soviet Union and Germany.

Latvian – French relations were not equal. Even being weak, France was a great power, in contrast to Latvia, a small country. Latvia needed to take into account the fact that its neighbors were the revisionist and only temporarily weak USSR and Germany. The special geo-political status of the Baltic States forced them to rely on the international security mechanisms and hope for a possibility of support from the great powers. France judged the young states as second-class states.

The research relevance of the topic – the role of France in Latvia's foreign affairs in the inter-war period – is conditioned by the necessity to more thoroughly explore Latvian – French relations and an important aspect of these relations – the influence of France on Latvia's foreign policy. Although the foreign policy of Latvia in the inter-war period has been researched at length and historians have paid significant attention to its various aspects (Latvia's historiography traditionally focuses on Latvia's relations with Germany, the USSR, United Kingdom and Poland); the role of France in Latvia's foreign policy has been somewhat overlooked. Although contemporaries and politicians laid great hopes on the impact and importance of

France in the region, historical literature does not offer a comprehensive coverage of the issue; some of the research is outdated and tendentious (the respective works being written in the USSR), some issues have not been discussed at all. The relations of both countries need to be explored from the modern perspective.

The Versailles – Riga System and Latvian – French Relations in 1919-1920

The aim of the Latvian delegation in Paris (it was stationed in the French capital city since November 1918) was to accomplish the recognition of Latvia's independence, to arrange the delivery of war supplies and a loan, as well as to make the French society *au fait* with Latvia. The allies had not yet formulated their standpoint on the independence of the Baltic States. The support of France was mainly political, because it had too little military supplies and the idea of the Baltic independence did not fit into French foreign policy plans. The hopes pinned on G. Clemenceau's promise to support the recognition of the independence of the young states faded very quickly. In 1919 Latvia as a potentially ephemeral (*peut-être éphémère*¹) state could not expect from France anything but formal promises which meant that if bourgeois Russia was restored, Latvia, while retaining autonomy, would have to become a part of it.² Meanwhile France hoped to use the complicated situation of the Baltic States and their wish to gain recognition *de jure* in order to establish active trade and barter relations and to profit from the exchange of munitions required by Latvia in return for linen and timber.

In August and September 1919 French military support was minimal because there were concerns about the inexpedient use of arms. France wished for both P. Bermont forces and Latvian government to launch joint fight against the Red Army. It was only due to the position of P. Bermont that Latvia received the support of great powers for the liberation of Riga. Latvia did not want France to use the Baltic States as a support-base for the implementation of its plans of intervention into the Soviet Russia; in reality France had no logical or long-term intervention plans.

Hoping for the restoration of Russia's previous might, France wished the relations between the Baltic States and the Soviet Russia to remain unsettled (it was for this reason that the Latvian government kept secret its negotiations with the Soviet Russia about an armistice), but under the influence of A. Millerand *Quai d'Orsay* inclined towards the support of the young states and strengthening of relations with separate Eastern European states in the beginning of 1920.

Quai d'Orsay was convinced that Latvia should be satisfied with *de facto* recognition and continued avoiding full recognition of the Baltic States. This decision could not have been made without the formation of the bourgeois government of Russia; Paris did not want to make decisions which could later be contested or produce complications. French diplomats recommended that Poland too should refrain from *de jure* recognition of Latvia. In 1920 *Quai d'Orsay* emphasized the temporary status

¹ MAEAD, Lettonie 1, p. 142-143, March 10, 1919, telegram of R.Brugère, specialist in Baltic affairs, to the minister in Copenhagen

² MAEAD, Lettonie 1, p. 134-136, February 14, 1919, Note of the Section of Russian Affairs (*Service des affaires Russes*) about the policy, as it should be in relation to the Baltic States; Lettonie 21, p. 24, December 2, 1918, Letter of the French prime minister and military minister to the head of French military mission in Vladivostok

of the Baltic States, and the aim of supporting them was diminishing the influence of Germany. France believed that the idea of restoring the bourgeois and anti-German Russia does not contradict the self-determination of the Baltic States and saw no obstacles for the establishment of economic and political mission in Riga, as well as trade relations.

While in the first years after WWI the issues of the Baltic States in the French diplomatic circles was not clearly formulated (a popular idea was that the association of the Baltic States with the *de jure* recognized Poland or Finland would raise the status of the *de facto* recognized states), in 1920 Paris did not object to the possibility of support from the small states to Poland, so as to create power and counter-balance to Germany and prevent Moscow approaching Berlin. France saw Lithuania as the most significant, but least reliable out of the three Baltic States; Latvia was important due to the correspondence of its goals to the ones of Poland. France itself was in no way interested in a direct cooperation with the Baltic States (exc. economic cooperation in the post-war years, when France wished to sell arms to Latvia and get raw materials).

The Establishment of Latvian – French Diplomatic Relations and the Beginning of Embassy's Work in Paris

Politically the attempts of the Baltic States to achieve the realization of their aspirations from France were unsuccessful; one of the brightest examples thereof was the delayed *de jure* recognition. The hopes of France for the restoration of its former ally Russia vanished slowly, the position of France was not influenced by signing the peace treaty between Latvia and the Soviet Russia on August 11, 1920; a more important role was played by the defeat of P. Wrangel's army in November 1920. Although changes were manifest already at the end of 1920, it was a matter of time until they started taking root in the consciousness of the French.

Despite that Z. Meierovics believed that Latvia should seek support for its *de jure* recognition in Europe's largest capital cities, laying special hopes on France. At the end of 1920 and the beginning of the 1921 the Latvian press organized a successful campaign against France which attracted the attention of Paris, and French embassy requested Latvian government to stop the campaign directed against it.³

Despite the powerful opposition dominating in the French Parliament, in the end of December Z. Meierovics managed to receive a promise from A. Millerand to support the *de jure* recognition of the Latvian state. It was the first remotely concrete pledge of support from the French side, which was something more than the reserved position, which had been a characteristic feature of the Peace Conference in Paris. France began to realize that the issue of the Baltic States could be solved without the resolution of the Russian question. In the end of 1920, a change of the high state officials took place in France, causing a decrease of the role of Russia in the French foreign policy. Since the Baltic States were not admitted to the League of Nations,

³ The letter of Minister of Foreign affairs of France G.Leygues to Commissar of France in Kaunas L.de Sartigues and to the Consul of France in Riga R.Binet, December 25, 1920. In: *Documents Documents Diplomatiques Français. Série: 1920-1932*, Tome III: 24 Septembre 1920 – 15 Janvier 1921. Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main., New York, Oxford, Wien: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002. p. 497-498.

Moscow got the impression that Europe was disinterested in the young states' future. France also came to believe that in order to balance Germany, it would be useful to create a counter-balance in Eastern Europe. Latvia was intended to become a part of that barrier and to strengthen Poland. Warsaw experienced difficulties in creating a union with the Baltic States because Latvia was not satisfied with Warsaw's delay to recognize Latvia *de jure* and with Poland's ambitions in the Baltic States.

The political and social figures of that time especially emphasized the role of France in the *de jure* recognition of Latvia on January 26, 1921. Only few historians have noted the fact that the UK had several times proposed the recognition of the Baltic States, while France had categorically opposed it. It is worth mentioning that in the beginning of 1921 France was not ready to act on its own but would have recognized Latvia *de jure* in case the other allies did the same. The study of the process of recognition leads to the conclusion that the recognition became possible due to the change of the British prime minister D. Lloyd George's stand-point, because in the beginning of the Allied Supreme Council the secretary general of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ph. Berthelot announced that he was ready to concede due to the objection of the British government.⁴

Along with the *de jure* recognition of Latvia European great powers stopped associating Latvia's future with developments in the Soviet Russia, as well as revised their view about the accidental nature of Latvia's independence. By recognizing Latvia and Estonia France hoped to smoothen relations with Poland, in this way facilitating the establishment of the Baltic Union.

Along with the *de jure* recognition of Latvia its diplomatic and consular representatives gained an official status. In 1921 the embassy implemented an active propaganda campaign for Latvia in the French press; the lectures and publications by French professors, political and social figures constituted the greatest contribution to the popularization of Latvia's image. The strengthening of bonds between the two states required frequent visits of Latvian foreign minister to France, a lack thereof, however, testified that Paris was not in the range of the closest targets of Latvian diplomacy.

The Role of France in Latvian Foreign Policy in the Early 1920s

Already in the early 1920s the fundamental principles of the position of France towards the Baltic States began to take shape. On the one hand, Paris indirectly facilitated the establishment of the Baltic Union, but on the other hand it avoided any obligations that could possibly make France defend the Baltic States. The mission of the Baltic States after *de jure* recognition was to join the *alliance de revers* group of states initiated by France and to strengthen Poland, in this way counter-balancing the German threat to France. French politicians were attentively following the Baltic negotiations and assumed the role of an advisor in the relations of Poland with Riga. Estonia, Latvia and Poland were supposed to become the core of the region, which would engage also Lithuania and Finland in due time. France saw no sense in the union of three Baltic States; the involvement of Lithuania could become possible after the resolution of the conflict between Poland and Lithuania.

⁴ MAEAD, Russie 692, p. 165, January 26, 1921, Conference of the Allies in Paris, *de jure* recognition of the Baltic and Caucasian states

The French saw the increase of Polish influence in the Baltic States without assuming any concrete obligations as the most appropriate development, but there was no prerequisite for a successful creation of a union with the participation of Poland. France was not quite capable of reducing the Baltic States' fear of Polish hegemony in such a union. The Great Britain was dissatisfied with French obligations in Eastern Europe. England did not wish to get involved in conflicts eastwards from the Rhine; the increase of Polish influence in the Baltic States would also indirectly mean a greater involvement of France in the region.

France vetoed the creation of a military alliance between Poland and Finland in February 1922, because it would have reduced the significance of agreement between France and Poland and entangled France in the anti-Soviet politics. France was pleased with Warsaw Accord signed on March 17, 1922, which provided Poland with a political alliance without imposing any obligations on it.

Signing of Rapallo agreement between Germany and the Soviet Russia in 1922 undermined the strategic significance of the Eastern barrier constructed by France and strengthened its belief that it was necessary to consolidate the Baltic States and politically tie them with Poland. France saw the defense alliance between Latvia and Estonia as a basis for the Baltic States to come closer to Poland. D. de Martel, the French minister in Latvia, hinted that in this way Latvia might secure a certain political and even – to some extent – military support of France, and rejected Z. Meierovic's idea, those negotiations with Warsaw should be connected with the normalization of Polish – Lithuanian relations. France had assumed that after becoming Poland's ally Latvia would wish to benefit from Poland's alliance with France; in fact, however, Latvia was prevented from such a union by the fear of France's significant influence and Poland's wish to isolate Lithuania. Latvia wished no association with either Lithuania or Poland, to avoid the risk of gaining the other one as enemy.

Although there were no purposeful actions coming from the USSR in 1920-1933 targeted at the retrieval of the territory of the Baltic States, Latvia sometimes contemplated the position of France in the event of potential Soviet aggression; Latvian representatives tried to elicit the truth in official and informal conversations. France believed that the Baltic States exaggerated the Soviet threat, yet it was more responsive than the UK. Latvia was satisfied with the vague promise of Paris: if you are attacked, defend yourselves and we will defend you (*Si vous êtes attaqués, défendez-vous, et nous allons vous défendre*).⁵ As of the end of 1923 the French support became more reserved; it was announced that help would be impossible because France had no agreements with Latvia. France did not hesitate to remind that its attitude towards Latvia would change if the latter had an alliance with Poland. Latvia realized that in case of Soviet attack Poland would receive no active support from France. If Paris did not guarantee Poland's Eastern border, why should it guarantee Latvia's border with the USSR? Latvia would receive from France nothing more than arms, munitions and loans. In this situation Latvia's position was no worse than that of France's ally, Poland, because Latvia would be eligible for the above-mentioned support as a member of the League of Nations.

⁵ LVVA, 2574.f., 4.apr., 121.l., p.84, 85, August 20, 1921, the confidential letter of minister of Latvia in France O.Grosvalds to prime minister of Latvia Z.Meierovics

While in the beginning of 1920's French ministers propagated the creation of a union, starting with 1924 their attitude became reserved. It was influenced by the fact that France recognized the USSR and was ready, at least partly, to take into consideration the USSR's opinion concerning the situation in the Baltic States.

The Soviet Russia's aspect in Latvian – French relations manifested itself through France's request that Latvia should take on the responsibility to pay off a part of the debt of the former Russia, as well Paris' plans to recognize the Soviet Russia *de jure*. Although Latvian concern that France might force it to pay back a part of the former Russia's debt, was exaggerated, the handling of the issue demonstrated the attitude of France and influenced the Latvian attitude towards France as a potential reliable ally. In 1922 France tried to use this issue to get Latvia on its side at Genova conference; later it promised a closer cooperation with Latvia if it agreed to pay back its share of the debt. O.Grosvalds, Latvian minister in Paris, regarded with suspicion the *de jure* recognition of the USSR by France, believing that it would change Latvian situation. The Foreign Ministry of Latvia supported the recognition of the USSR in its own borders, which were determined in peace treaties between the Soviet Russia and the Baltic States and wished for the USSR to join the League of Nations.

French economic relations with Latvia were not consistent. France very quickly fell behind Great Britain and Germany in establishing economic contacts with Latvia because of contradictions between French foreign policy intentions in North-eastern Europe and the things that the French economy was actually ready to offer to its potential allies. The trade treaty of the two states was in fact a friendship agreement, which the Latvian representatives signed for political reasons rather than economic interests.⁶ The issue of military supplies purchase came to a deadlock, the French request for Latvia to pay for the help provided for two Latvian rifleman regiments to be stationed in Siberia and then transported back to Latvia left a negative impression. The only issue, in the solution of which Latvia could count on the French support, was the agrarian reform. Despite the requirements of three French citizens, A. Briand, guided by political calculations, took the Latvian side, because the reform was directed against Germans, and with its help France could maintain its fame as a liberator.

The Role of France in Latvian Foreign Policy in the Mid- and Late 1920s

In the second part of 1920's Paris followed Latvian foreign policy with favorable interest, appreciating its achievements in strengthening its independence. France believed that, being a democratic state, it ought to encourage the Baltic States to reach mutual understanding and consolidation, so as to jointly defend one another and retain their independence. It was important to harmonize the viewpoints of Lithuania and Poland on international events. While in the beginning of 1920's France treated the Baltic States in a paternal manner and tried to involve them into the system of its own alliances, in the mid- and late 1920's the French government avoided giving any open hints or exerting pressure on them to establish a union – fearing that the USSR could interpret it as a step against Moscow.

⁶ 13 Munters, V. Tirdzniecības līgumi. *Latvijas Republika desmit pastāvēšanas gados*. [Trade agreements. *The Republic of Latvia in 10 years of its existence*.] Rīga: a/s Golts un Jurjans, 1928. 267.lpp.

The idea of Geneva protocol determined a short-term change of Latvia's orientation in favor of Paris. Despite the difference of British and French positions, Latvian government, like the government of France, laid too much hope on the protocol's power to facilitate security. Although Latvia did not dare to bring out in public debate the issue of its own security – that France was particularly pleased with – it was interested in great powers' attitude towards North-eastern European region. Latvia observed Locarno negotiations with no particular involvement and France found it convenient, because it caused no trouble to include the issue of the Baltic States' security in the already complicated debates. Locarno policy caused contradictory evaluations in Latvia. The heads of the state realized that the new situation made the USSR and Poland nervous, in this way facilitating the decrease of Eastern European stability. On the other hand, however, Latvia found it a positive tendency that the situation stabilized in the west of Europe and hoped that with the signing of the Western guarantee pact at least partial French – British union would be restored. Latvian representatives relied on A. Briand as politician, who would seek for consensus between French interests and the goals of the small Eastern European states and try to apply the pact's ideas to Latvia, which, naturally, turned out to be empty promises. North-eastern European states received no support from France in developing Locarno treaty-like pacts; French diplomats deliberately limited the geographical borders of their activities, taking no initiative in proposing new agreements for the young states. Considering the Soviet foreign policy and due to the German – Polish and Lithuanian – Polish disputes France believed that the discussion of North-eastern European guarantee projects including the Baltic States was unjustified. France objected to Poland's exclusion from any plans (it needs to be noted that initially Paris fought for Prague's and Warsaw's interests).

France saw the non-aggression pacts that the USSR had proposed to the Baltic States as an attempt to weaken its alliances policy in North-eastern Europe. Although Paris stood in against signing the agreements – because it would distance the signing parties from the League of Nations and split the Baltic block – wishing to avoid being blamed for the rejection of the USSR's proposals, officially it declared that Latvia should itself decide which course of action best meets its interests. France believed that the harmonization of Baltic States' opinions and plans was important.

Only after F.Cielēns initialed four paragraphs of Latvian – USSR non-aggression pact, France officially remarked that the project did not comply with the pact of the League of Nations. France also disliked the Latvian – Soviet trade agreement, which hampered the economic approximation of the Baltic States and Latvia's cooperation with Poland. Latvian diplomatic circles grew increasingly impatient with the behavior of France.

The Eastern alliances policy of France started to change in 1924. France realized that Poland was unable to substitute its earlier alliance with Russia against Germany, but it was still an important factor in retaining the territorial detachment of both states, and Paris had not refused the idea of putting together Baltic States and Poland and stood in against Latvia coming closer to Lithuania. Officially France refrained from participation in any conferences among the Baltic States; its ministers' mandate was limited to making discrete hints and indirect encouragement of the young states. France paid special attention to the attitude of USSR and tried to disprove Moscow's reproaches about Paris' participation in organizing the Baltic States' cooperation.

France considered that Latvia, guided by economic motifs, would engage in the resolution of Lithuanian – Polish conflict. The actual policy of Latvia did not correspond to Paris' hopes, the impossibility of creating a powerful Baltic union lead Riga to attempt finding *modus vivendi* with Germany and the USSR. F.Cielēns' foreign policy shattered France's trust in the Baltic States, and in the time of negotiating the Latvian – USSR non-aggression agreement Polish – Latvian relations became aloof. In the end of the 1920s it appeared clear that the Baltic States would not be able to implement the mission ascribed to them by France – to create an effective political union with Poland. Latvia saw France as a state whose interests included retaining the *status quo*. After the change of foreign ministers in Latvia French officials expressed a hope that A. Balodis would restore the Latvian foreign policy traditions, work on a mutual agreement with Poland and restore Estonia's trust, but it did not have the importance it used to have.

The Role of France in Latvian Foreign Policy in the Early 1930s

In early 1930's French initiatives in North-eastern Europe grew even weaker, and the role of the Baltic region in Paris' foreign policy strategy decreased. France was still in high esteem in Latvian society because it was perceived as a favorable state with no aggressive intentions; apart from that the positive image of France was strengthened by the assumption that France was a defender of small states. It was in Latvia's interests that the great European powers, England and France, should be on friendly terms with each other; without them the resolution of major political issues was unthinkable. Paris' good relations with Eastern European states were of secondary importance. The Latvian government clearly understood that French allies had been unable to establish sufficient security and stability in Europe.

Paris' even further distancing from its Eastern European allies left an impact on the French policy in relation to Latvia. While in 1920's Paris would regularly remind of its wish for Latvia to politically cooperate with Poland, in early 1930's France barely mentioned it at all. Paris was less opposed to the idea of the union of the three Baltic States – if it eventually included Poland. French ministers showed a reserved reaction to the increased activity of Latvian officials on the issue of the union. In 1933 they saw any action of Latvia as an instinctive reaction towards Hitler's coming to power in Germany.

Although Latvia did not interest France in the political aspect, the French were not quite indifferent towards Latvia and the Baltic, because the small countries could play a certain role in the possible complications between Poland and the USSR. Poland and the Baltic States were still supposed to create a barrier between Germany and the Soviet Union because Paris was afraid of possible military co-operation between these two powers. Although with more caution in early the 1930s France would invariably see Poland as the main power in Eastern Europe. Latvia could politically strengthen Warsaw; France barely considered Poland's military cooperation with Latvia. In comparison with the second half of the 1920s, in the beginning of 1930's France would rather support Poland approaching Lithuania, than Latvia, because the latter two would perform the task of taming Germany in a more effective way. Considering the French disappointment in its policy of alliance with small states, the decrease of its interest in Latvia was logical.

In early the 1930, in order to reduce the influence of the USSR, in Latvian political circles there began to circulate ideas about the necessity to intensify Latvian – French political cooperation, but soon Latvia concluded that it would not increase *Quai d'Orsay's* interest, same as its closer cooperation with Poland would help it to achieve greater favor from the part of France. Along with signing the non-aggression pact between France and the USSR in 1932, Latvia lost the hope to receive France's support in case of USSR aggression. In early 1920's due to the tense relations between Paris and Moscow the possibility of assistance theoretically existed. In 1932 the likelihood of French support was vanished. After A. Hitler's coming to power in Germany French diplomatic circles saw no motifs for the possibility that Hitler might threaten Latvia. Despite that Latvia hoped for Paris' help in case of danger – at least in the framework of the pact of the League of Nations.

Conclusion

Paris' attitude towards the Baltic States can be well illustrated by the letter of French prime minister and foreign minister R. Poincaré of February 28, 1924: the existence of a French embassy in Riga is a sufficient indication of the interest we have in the independence and friendship of the small Baltic States.⁷

The policy of France in Eastern Europe was a consequence of the system of international relations developed after WWI. France had been Russia's ally and the idea of losing a partner was accepted slowly. The vague future of North-eastern Europe and doubts about the sustainable existence of the young states explain the hesitation of France in recognizing Latvia. G. Clemenceau's promise to stand in for the self-determination of the young states soon enough proved to be deceptive. The idea of the independent Baltic States did not correspond to France's goals. The hope for the restoration of Russia, which would definitely want to have a sea gate, prevented France from giving Latvia more than just formal guarantees in the post-war years. Paris did not wish to make any decisions which later could be contested or create complications for France itself. While in 1919 France had vague plans of intervention in the Soviet Russia, in 1920 its attitude towards Latvia became more serious, although Paris still thought that the small states were a temporary phenomenon, whose future had to be decided with Russia's participation, therefore in the early post-war years Latvia's foreign policy aspirations encountered considerable resistance. The attitude of France towards Latvia could not be influenced by its signing a peace treaty with the Soviet Russia, the defeat of Wrangel's army played a more important role.

The change of France's position that lead to *de jure* recognition of Latvia was firstly determined by the change of high officials in France in the end of 1920; secondly, by the actual political situation in Eastern Europe; and thirdly, by Moscow's stand-point that denying Latvia admission to the League of Nations, Paris leaves them in Soviet Russia's will. Although a number of historians and the politicians of that time ascribed the credit of *de jure* recognition of Latvia to France, one cannot claim that the decision of France was of decisive importance. Secretary General of *Quai d'Orsay* Ph. Berthelot

⁷ MAEAD, Russie 695, P.97, February 28, 1924, the letter of prime minister and Minister of Foreign affairs of France R.Poincaré to minister of France in Riga D.de Martel

announced that he was ready to concede if the British government raised substantiated objections.

The decision of *de jure* recognition meant the inclusion of Latvia in the international system of post-war Europe. Although it did not eradicate the idea dominating in some French circles about the accidental nature of Baltic independence, France refused to tie the future of the young states with the issue of Russia. In general, the French political influence facilitated the strengthening of the Latvian Republic because the interests of Latvia and Western European countries coincided on a number of significant foreign policy issues, especially in early 1920's. It is self-evident that France engaged in the political events of the Baltic States due to its own interests, placing diplomatic and political relations with Latvia in a wider context of Eastern European region. In the 1920s and early 1930's, due to the uncertain nature of French support, Latvia did not gain great successes in establishing the planned multilateral union or getting great powers' guarantees. France was favorable towards continued existence of independent Latvia, but the most significant question was, what France was ready to do and how far to go, in order to help it to happen. Regarding the policy of France in relation to the Baltic States, one ought to note a large gap between showing interest and undertaking obligations, between words and actions. While the potential aggression of the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s was just a topic of bilateral negotiations and a reason for Latvia to probe for the limits of France's obliging attitude – which, considering declarations, were quite wide and relatively satisfying for Latvia – it was unclear, what would happen if the threat was justified. Although France believed that the concern of Latvia was exaggerated, it responded with a vague “if you are attacked, defend yourself, and we will defend you”, Latvia was satisfied. As of 1923 France became more reserved. Perhaps the influence of Rapallo agreement caused France to grow intolerant towards the inability of Latvia, Estonia and Poland to create a union, and each time the issue of the support of France for Latvia was raised, it was reminded that there were no agreements between the two states, and the situation could be changed by Latvia's union with Poland.

The aim of French support for the Baltic States was reducing the German threat for France and preventing cooperation between Moscow and Berlin. As the idea of Polish – Lithuanian confederation vanished because of the Vilnius issue, France set its hope on Latvia due to the coincidence of its goals with the ones of Poland. France had never considered signing a direct agreement with Latvia because it avoided all possible commitment that would oblige it to defend the Baltic States. Only in France's very first plans Latvia was supposed to become a part of *alliance de revers* established by Paris to strengthen Poland. France assumed the role of an advisor in the relations among North-eastern European states, of which Latvia, Estonia and Poland were supposed to become the core, which could later include Finland and Lithuania. Apart from that France would prefer the increase of Poland's influence without it assuming particular obligations. The idea of Poland assuming any military obligations *vis-à-vis* the Baltic States was unacceptable to France as it would involve it in conflicts that it deemed unimportant. Paris was fully satisfied with the vague Warsaw accord.

The attempts of France to consolidate the Baltic States were most definitely demonstrated in 1922-1923. Paris hoped that the agreement between Latvia and Estonia would become the basis for Poland's involvement. France believed that a union with Poland would be beneficial for Latvia, allowing it to profit from the alliance

with France, but Latvia wished no connection with Poland, thus gaining Lithuania for an enemy – , and vice versa. Starting with 1924 French activity in Latvia decreased. In the second half of the 1920's *Quai d'Orsay* had to put in significant effort in order to dismiss the reproaches of diplomatic circles concerning the French policy of cornering the USSR. While in the early 1920's France did not hesitate to openly give advice and recommendations to Latvia, towards the middle and end of the decade *Quai d'Orsay* avoided giving any open hints or exerting pressure, fearing the reaction of the USSR. The study of Latvian and French archive documents demonstrate that the idea of some historians, e.g., E. Andersons, V. Sīpols and K. Počs, that France wished to associate Latvia with Poland against the USSR was a mere invention.

In mid-1920's the French policy in North-eastern Europe showed a tendency towards change, but France still retained the original idea about cooperation between Latvia and Poland. It hoped that Latvia, guided by economic interests, could facilitate the elimination of controversies between Poland and Lithuania. By the end of 1920's it became evident that Latvia had not fulfilled the mission planned out for it by France; in the beginning of the following decade France retained interest in the advancement of the Baltic States and Poland, but it had lost its original significance. France would pay more attention to the issues of collective security systems and less object to the idea of the union of the three Baltic States – if it envisaged the possibility of including Poland. In early 1930's France would rather support the approximation of Poland towards Lithuania, than Latvia, as such development would more effectively hinder the cooperation between Moscow and Berlin. Considering the disappointment of France in alliances policy, the decrease of its interest in Latvia was logical.

In 1923 Latvian foreign affairs services realized that already since 1921 the interests of French political leaders in Eastern Europe had not extended further than Polish – German border. Despite the French – Polish alliance signed in 1921, in case of Soviet aggression the support of France for Poland would be limited to arms and munitions supply and money loans. Latvia would receive from France nothing more, considering that it had no political agreements with France – even if it had an alliance with Poland. It was important for Latvia that, in case of danger, France fulfilled its duties as a member of the League of Nations. The likelihood of French intervention on behalf of the Baltic States French in case of Soviet aggression (if such possibility had ever existed) vanished after 1932, when France signed a non-aggression pact with the USSR.

The change in the policy of France in Eastern Europe was also triggered by signing Locarno treaties. France found it convenient that during the drafting of Geneva protocol and Locarno treaties Latvia did not discuss its own security issues and created no additional trouble in an already complicated debate. Latvia liked the stabilization of Western European situation brought about by Locarno treaties. Considering that the alliance between France and England was a guarantee of peace in Europe, Riga relied on A.Briand as a politician who had previously shown positive attitude toward the young states and hoped that he would not forget Latvia in the

future. Due to the political situation in Eastern Europe France saw the “Eastern” ideas expressed in the framework of Locarno treaties as impossible to implement and especially objected against the exclusion of Poland from all projects. France wished Poland and Czechoslovakia to be included in a similar guarantee pact but was not ready to support broader agreements.

The non-aggression pact proposals initiated by the USSR hampered even further the implementation of France’s intentions in North-eastern Europe and shattered its trust in Latvia. Although Paris objected against the signing of the pact because it did not correspond to its goals and would potentially reduce the significance of the League of Nations, it avoided expressing an official position. While during the negotiations the French press reproached the Baltic States about their lack of unity, *Quai d’Orsay* internal correspondence points out that the negotiations were not desirable. France did not approve the trade agreement between Latvia and the USSR in 1927 either, because it distanced Riga from economic cooperation with Poland.

The correspondence of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Latvia’s diplomatic representatives in Paris demonstrates that foreign ministers in Riga, when making decisions concerning concrete steps in foreign policy, realized the limits of the unrecorded interests of France. They understood that Paris was not interested in Latvia, they had no false illusions about the intentions of France in relation to Latvian security, and they did not expect French support to exceed the frames of the treaty of the League of Nations. Although Latvian diplomatic representatives in Paris would regularly raise the question of the necessity to intensify the bilateral economic relations, increase the amount of orders of military supplies in France, or encouraged Latvia to probe for closer cooperation possibilities with Poland, in this way indulging France, the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not seriously discuss the issue of cooperation with France. The attempts of diplomatic representatives to find out, what the achievements of Latvia would be if it advanced France, were not met enthusiastically in Paris. Additionally, a rapid change in the orientation of Latvian policy would have only complicated the existing diplomatic relations; France would not have been able to give Latvia more significant security guarantees, than the ones it already enjoyed as a member of League of Nations.

Latvian attitude towards Paris was influenced by certain selfish aspects of France’s foreign policy. Paris attempted to use the issue of the old Russian debts in order to get Latvia’s support in Genova conference. The promise of Paris for a closer cooperation in return for the pay of a part of the debt was incomprehensible. Although the fear Latvia had from the requirements of France, was exaggerated, because the peace treaty between Latvia and the Soviet Russia signed on August 11, 1920 set out the relevant parties’ obligations, the way of dealing with the issue reflected the arrogant attitude of France and the subjection of the young states’ interests to its own interests. It was also unpleasant for Latvia to receive bills for the maintenance of two regiments of Latvian riflemen in Siberia and in the Far East and their transportation back to Latvia. It was only on the issue of agrarian reform, which was directed against ethnic German residents of Latvia, that Latvia could rely on the support of France. In this way France attempted to retain its positive image in the eyes of Latvians that was created in the time of *de jure* recognition of Latvia.

If in the very beginning of the 1920’s Latvia hoped for an important role of France in its economy, which would then create a basis for closer political relations, it soon

realized that France was incapable of strengthening its political interests by means of economic cooperation. The economic and political competition between France and England for influence in Latvia (and in the rest of the Baltic States) was evident only in the very beginning of 1920's, when France attempted to develop active trade relations by exchanging arms for linen and timber. The concluded trade treaty between Latvia and France was in fact a friendship agreement, which Latvian officials signed for political, rather than economic reasons.

One should note that in some aspects Latvian politicians overestimated the significance of the events and development of the Baltic States for France. The attitude of France towards Latvia (and towards Lithuania and Estonia, as well as Poland that claimed the status of a great power) depended on its political relations with other European great powers and was subject to the development of these relations and complications therein. Despite the decrease of France's political interest in Latvia in the course of the 1920s, one should not underestimate the military support that France provided to Latvia during the struggle for independence, the initiative of France in *de jure* recognition of Latvia and the role of France as the guardian of *status quo* in Europe.