CHAPTER FOUR

INCORPORATION INTO THE SOVIET UNION

§ 1. The Events of 1939–1940: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its Consequences

The changes taking place in Nazi Germany created a deep feeling of insecurity in the Soviet Union. From this perspective, Moscow proposed the Baltic governments to conclude bilateral agreements providing for mutual aid in the event of aggression by a third country. The Baltic Foreign Ministers, however, refused to enter into special arrangements with one of the Great Powers and preferred to maintain a policy of strict neutrality.\(^{137}\) Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov responded that neutrality was “too insecure” and “too unreliable”.\(^{138}\) Accordingly, the Soviet Union insisted on guarantees to the territorial integrity of the Baltic States during negotiations with France and Great Britain in the summer of 1939. These guarantees implied that in case of direct or indirect aggression, the Soviet Union would have the right to intervene. Whereas the French and British were prepared to discuss the Soviet demands, they refused to accept the inclusion of references to “indirect aggression”.\(^{139}\) According to British diplomats, such a position would have allowed Soviet troops “to enter the territory of the Baltic States under almost any pretext”.\(^{140}\) The trilateral negotiations came to an end when the parallel Soviet-German negotiations resulted in the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August 1939. For Stalin, this Pact offered better conditions for the pursuit of his security policy in the Baltic area whereas Hitler managed to avoid Soviet interference in case of German aggression against Poland.\(^{141}\) The conclusion of a

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\(^{137}\) Von Rauch, *op. cit.*, footnote 57, p. 189.

\(^{138}\) Lane, *op. cit.*, footnote 11, p. 35.


\(^{140}\) Hiden, Salmon, *op. cit.*, footnote 2, p. 104.

supplementary, secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet Pact affected the fate of the Baltic States. The first paragraph of this document stipulated that:

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilnius area is recognized by each party.\footnote{S. Suziedelis, “The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: The Documents”, 35 \textit{Lituans} 1 (1989), http://www.lituans.org/1989/89_1_03.htm.}

A second secret protocol, attached to the German-Soviet Border and Friendship Agreement of 28 September 1939, transferred Lithuania from the German to the Soviet sphere of influence in exchange for the renunciation of Soviet claims to the Polish provinces of Lublin and Warsaw.\footnote{Ibid.} The Soviet Union quickly asserted its control over the territories assigned to it by the deal with Germany. The escape of a Polish submarine from Tallinn harbour in September 1939 was the first occasion to argue that Estonia was incapable of defending its neutrality.\footnote{Von Rauch, \textit{op. cit.}, footnote 57, p. 211.} The Soviets insisted on effective security guarantees and therefore demanded a mutual assistance treaty that would allow the establishment of Red Army troops on Estonian territory.\footnote{Kirby, “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact”, \textit{op. cit.}, footnote 139, p. 73.} Under pressure of a possible military intervention, bordering on an ultimatum, the Estonian government accepted the proposed agreement. The Estonian-Soviet treaty provided for “mutual assistance of every kind, including military assistance, in the event of direct aggression or threat of aggression on the part of a European Great Power” and granted the Soviet Union the right to maintain naval and air bases on Estonian soil.\footnote{Articles 1 and 3 of the Mutual Assistance Treaty; K. Marek, \textit{Identity and Continuity of States in Public International Law}, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1968, p. 377.} Significantly, the treaty also referred to the previous bilateral agreements and included a statement that it would “in no way impair the sovereign rights of the Contracting Parties or, more specifically, their economic system or political structure”.\footnote{Art. 5 of the Mutual Assistance Treaty, \textit{Ibid.}} This Soviet-Estonian Treaty was the model for similar agreements with Latvia and Lithuania. Concerning the latter, the Soviet Union offered the return of Vilnius to promote Lithuanian