

# Franco–Lithuanian Relations in the Context of Geopolitical Confrontation, 1918–1923

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*Abstract.* This article is devoted to Franco-Lithuanian relations after the proclamation of the independence of Lithuania in 1918 and before the revolt in Memel in 1923. Efforts and contradictions, which emerged in the process of involving Lithuania in the sphere of French interests in the context of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict, and geopolitical confrontations of the states interested in establishing influence and control in the Baltic region are considered and evaluated. Based on the analysis of archival documents, the goals set before the military mission in Lithuania, which were not realized because of the French support for Poland in the Polish-Lithuanian territorial dispute, were identified.

*Keywords:* Lithuania, France, Germany, Soviet Russia, United Kingdom, Poland, foreign influence, Polish-Lithuanian conflict, independence of Lithuania.

*Anotacija.* Šis straipsnis skirtas Lietuvos ir Prancūzijos santykiams po Lietuvos Nepriklausomybės paskelbimo 1918 m. ir prieš Klaipėdos sukilimą 1923 m. aptarti. Jame svarstomos ir įvertinamos pastangos bei prieštaravimai, kilę mėginant įtraukti Lietuvą į Prancūzijos interesų sritį Lenkijos ir Lietuvos konflikto kontekste, bei geopolitinės konfrontacijos tarp įtakos ir kontrolės Baltijos regione siekusių valstybių. Remiantis archyvinių dokumentų analize, buvo nustatyti tikslai, iškelti prieš karinę misiją Lietuvoje, kurie nebuvo įgyvendinti dėl Prancūzijos paramos Lenkijai Lenkijos ir Lietuvos teritoriniame ginče.

*Esminiai žodžiai:* Lietuva, Prancūzija, Vokietija, Sovietų Rusija, Jungtinė Karalystė, Lenkija, užsienio įtaka, lenkų ir lietuvių konfliktas, Lietuvos Nepriklausomybė.

## Introduction

Franco–Lithuanian relations in the interwar period have often been the subject of multiple studies; their various aspects were considered in the works of Bukaitė<sup>1</sup>, Kriauciūnienė<sup>2</sup>, Gueslin<sup>3</sup>, Plasseraud<sup>4</sup>, Chandavoine<sup>5</sup>. Schramm<sup>6</sup>, Łossowski<sup>7</sup>, Laurinavičius<sup>8</sup>, Kasparavičius<sup>9</sup> pay great attention to the conflict between Lithuania and Poland in the interwar period. Despite a wide range of studies devoted to Franco–Lithuanian relations, not all documents have been involved in a scientific review up to now.

This study was carried out on the basis of unpublished sources (*Center des Archives de la Courneuve* and *Service historique de la Défense*)<sup>10</sup>, which were in Lithuania from December 27, 1920 to January 14, 1921 at the invitation of the leaders of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party. The notes of French abbot Charles Quénet are of particular interest. These notes allow us to consider the events of those years from the point of view of an eyewitness who evaluated them from the position of an outside observer. The analytical reports of French diplomats on the situation in Lithuania, which reveal their point of view on the situation of the tacit rivalry of foreign states for establishing

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- <sup>1</sup> BUKAITĖ, Vilma. *Lietuvos Respublikos politiniai ir diplomatiniai santykiai su Prancūzija 1919–1940 m.: daktaro disertacija*. Vilnius, 2013. 333 p.; Lietuvos politinių ir diplomatinių santykių su Prancūzija užmezgimas (1918–1920): nepasitikėjimo mainai. Iš: *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*. T. 27. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2011, p. 61–80.
  - <sup>2</sup> KRIAUCIŪNIENĖ, Živilė. Contacts politiques et culturels franco–lituaniens en 1918–1920. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1995, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 57–66.
  - <sup>3</sup> GUESLIN, Julien. La France et les petits États baltes: réalités baltes, perceptions françaises et ordre européen (1920–1932). In: *Thèse Université Panthéon Sorbonne – Paris*. Paris, 2004; Que faire au «Mémelland» après Versailles? La France entre nationalisme lituanien, particularisme allemand et Realpolitik (1920–1924). *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, 2009, Vol. 41, p. 59–74; *Sécurité baltique et sécurité européenne: une synthèse problématique? Sécurité et coopération militaire en Europe, 1919–1955*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, p. 128–137.
  - <sup>4</sup> PLASSERAUD, Yves. France–Lituanie 1918–2004: sympathies réelles et occasions manquées. *Cahiers lituaniens*, 2008, No. 9, p. 7–11.
  - <sup>5</sup> CHANDAVOINE, Isabelle. *Les Français à Klaipėda et après (1920–1932)*. Vilnius: Žara, 2003. 208 p.
  - <sup>6</sup> SCHRAMM, Tomasz. *Francuskie misje wojskowe w państwach Europy Środkowej: 1919–1939*. Poznań: UAM, 1987. 315 s.
  - <sup>7</sup> ŁOSSOWSKI, Piotr. *Konflikt polsko–litewski 1918–1920*. Warszawa, 1996. 250 s.
  - <sup>8</sup> LAURINAVIČIUS, Česlovas. Probleminiai Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykių 1920 m. aspektai. Iš: *Suvalkų sutartis: faktai ir interpretacijos*. Vilnius, 2012, p. 41–71.
  - <sup>9</sup> KASPARAVIČIUS, Algimantas. Współcześni historycy litewscy o sprawie Wilna i stosunkach polsko–litewskich w latach 1918–1940 oraz zmiany w potocznej świadomości Litwinów. In: *Historycy polscy, litewscy i białoruscy wobec problemów XX wieku. Historiografia polska, litewska i białoruska po 1989 roku*. Białystok, 2003, s. 102–113.
  - <sup>10</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 58. Note de M. Charles Quénet sur voyage en Lituanie (27 décembre 1920–14 janvier 1921), p. 174–194.

influence in Lithuania, are of particular interest<sup>11</sup>. The secret instruction<sup>12</sup> for the head of the military mission is an important source revealing the goals of France in Lithuania.

*The purpose of this article* is to consider the efforts and contradictions, which emerged in the process of involving Lithuania in the sphere of French interests in the context of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict, and geopolitical confrontations of the states interested in establishing influence in the Baltic region based on the analysis of archival documents.

## Lithuania as a territory of interests of foreign powers in the domination game

The First World War, the German occupation of the western territories of the Russian Empire, the revolutionary events of 1917 and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks were the turning points for the outlying ethnic regions of Russia. The Declaration of the Rights of Peoples proclaimed by the Bolsheviks on November 15, 1917, which recognized “the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia, Russia’s peoples’ right to free self-determination, including secession and formation of an independent state”, as well as “the free development of national minorities and ethnic groups living in the territory of Russia”<sup>13</sup>, served as a legal basis for the delimitation of national territories and the realization of the principles of state sovereignty.

The subsequent collapses of Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires led to the emergence of new states on the political map of Europe and to the large-scale changes not only in the regional foreign policy situation but also in the whole system of international relations and security. The proclamation of independence by the “small states” of Europe created the prerequisites for the subsequent repartition of the world, since many of these states withdrew from the zone of influence of their former geopolitical centers, which only for a time resigned to their loss and found themselves in the border zone of their active clash. Young states were not able to resist the pressure of the world’s leading powers and, as French historian Julien Gueslin aptly put it, embodied “vulnerability and instability”<sup>14</sup>.

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia declared sovereignty in the Baltic region. However, it was much more complicated for the young states to get true independence than to proclaim it. As correctly noticed by Gueslin, “Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania are indeed the

<sup>11</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 59. Etat général de la Lituanie, p. 32–100; AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 1. L’Etat de Lituanie, p. 12–13 turn.

<sup>12</sup> *Service historique de la Défense*. Département de l’Armée de Terre (onwards – SHD/DAT). Fonds 17. Mission militaire française (onwards – MMF) dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. Correspondence avec Lituanie et la Finlandie. Instruction pour le Chef de la Mission Française Lituanie.

<sup>13</sup> Декларация прав народов России 2 (15) ноября 1917. Из: *Декреты Советской власти*. Москва: Гос. изд-во полит. Литературы, 1957, т. 1, с. 40.

<sup>14</sup> GUESLIN, Julien. *La France et les petits États baltes...*, p. 15.

states whose advent in 1919 most surprised the contemporaries in the post-war years”<sup>15</sup>. According to French researcher Giles Dutertre, “Just after the First World War, the sudden appearance of the Lithuanian nation seems in the eyes of the French public opinion as a German machination” and “Very few Frenchmen were able to find Lithuania on the map”<sup>16</sup>. Despite the fact that the French government formally approved the principle of self-determination of peoples in 1918, it opposed the independence of Lithuania: “Everyone or almost everyone [in France – L.S.] believed that Lithuania was a Russian province and once belonged to Poland.”<sup>17</sup>

The influence of the foreign powers increased particularly in Lithuania, and it was no coincidence that Lithuania became an arena of confrontation between the great powers. The unique geopolitical situation made the Lithuanian state an advantageous strategic bridgehead and was considered by the Entente countries along with Latvia, Estonia and Poland as a “sanitary cordon” between Germany and Soviet Russia through which the Allies hoped to weaken their foreign policy influence as well as to cut Russia off from Europe. In addition, the victorious powers sought to expand the advantages gained as a result of the war and consolidate their special status in the new system of international relations. They made decisions on all the most important political and territorial issues. The United Kingdom, as well as the United States, considered Lithuania as the possibility of strengthening their own positions in the Baltic region through mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation and did not want the strengthening of the position of France, especially in the face of confrontations over the role of the world’s leading power.

In turn, for Germany, Lithuania was a part of the “Eastern policy”. Even during the Great War, Germany encouraged national movements in the occupied territories and played a significant role in their politicization. For Russia, Lithuania was an important geopolitical beachhead and a kind of a bridge or gateway to Europe. All that makes it possible to assert that Lithuania was not accidentally the object of claims made by foreign powers.

After the First World War was over, France became the strongest state of continental Europe and, with its obvious military and political superiority, hoped to take revenge on its long-standing enemy, i.e. Germany. To that end, it intended to create a Baltic bloc uniting under its auspices a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the young Baltic states. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, Poland became the main ally of France in continental Europe. The French government considered Poland as a kind of a buffer between Bolshevik Russia and Germany. “Vilno-Kovno-Grodno – this triangle of fortresses in the hands of the vassal of France is the most important strategic point for creating a wall between Moscow and Berlin, which will be able to prevent assis-

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<sup>15</sup> GUESLIN, Julien. *La France et les petits États baltes...*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> DUTERTRE, Gilles. *Les Français dans l'histoire de la Lituanie (1009–2009)*. Paris, 2009, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 144. See also: СЛУЦКАЯ, Людмила. Выбор между Польшей и Литвой: дилемма французской дипломатии 1918–1920 гг. Из: *Многовекторность во внешней политике Республики Беларусь: материалы междунар. круглых столов*. Под ред. А. В. Русаковича, Минск, 2016, с. 58–67.

tance from Moscow for the crushed Germany. The independent Lithuania, which France considers to be Germany's friend, is, according to Paris, a bridge between Moscow and Berlin."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Lithuania was of particular interest, since it was given the key role of the "watershed" between Germany and Soviet Russia in the Baltic bloc. "As early as 1918, and especially since 1920, the creation of the Polish state could have been a welcome remedy for the problems of French politics in the Eastern Baltic. While the instability of Eastern Europe still seems great, Poland can, by supporting the small Baltic states, ensure the stability of the Eastern Baltic."<sup>19</sup> During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, France explicitly supported the Polish claims to the Lithuanian territories, and, most importantly, Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Under such conditions, the idea of Lithuania's independence was not taken into account by the French government. In its desire to establish itself in Lithuania as a leading power capable of influencing its policy, France was not alone. It had to enter into a struggle for influence with Germany, Soviet Russia, and the United Kingdom. This goal could only be achieved by solving the problem of the Vilnius Region.

## French presence in Lithuania

To implement its plan, in March 1919 Paris sent a military mission headed by Colonel Constantin Reboule to Kaunas. The mission sought to intensify economic and also military and political cooperation between the two countries, minimize pro-German sentiments, and normalize Lithuanian-Polish relations. In the light of these factors, the General Staff issued a secret instruction which defined the actions of the head of the French mission in Lithuania in the following way: "Due to the rather delicate political situation, Commander Rebol will have to use a lot of circumspection and tact in his relations with the civil and military authorities. The attitude of absolute submission adopted until the armistice by the Lithuanians vis-à-vis the Government of Berlin, although not without extenuating circumstances, should incite us not to give them an exaggerated credit. We must apply each and every effort and encourage the goodwill in order to become a strong center of resistance against German influence in this country, on the one hand, and against Bolshevism, on the other hand. This is the aim pursued by the French Government, which, for this purpose, considers the rapprochement between Lithuania and Poland highly desirable."<sup>20</sup> The official version of the dispatch of the military mission was as follows: "The French military mission, which will soon leave Paris, will include a dozen officers under the command of Colonel Rebol. His task is to study the

<sup>18</sup> ШУБИН, Исидор. *Париж–Варшава–Вильно*. (Виленищина на перекрестке империалистических путей Франции). Москва: Красная новь, 1923, с. 14.

<sup>19</sup> GUESLIN, Julien. *La France et les petits États baltes...*, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. Instruction pour le Chef de la Mission Française Lithuanie.

military situation on various fronts of Lithuania and to find out whether France should support Lithuanians.”<sup>21</sup>

In comparison with other foreign missions, France had more favorable conditions of staying in Lithuania as, in accordance with Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles, the main part of the territory of Memelland (Klaipeda Region) was placed under control of the French Administration until the status of Lithuania was recognized de jure. This circumstance enabled France to expand its influence in the Lithuanian territories, especially since there were “two areas where the French authority was great: culture and the army”<sup>22</sup>.

The French military mission was actively propagandized in a variety of sectors (military, political, cultural) and in different ways. At first, it was necessary to convey positive information about France, which, according to the French military mission, was facilitated by the translation of French films, the presentation of the latest trends in culture, literature and music, and the increase in the teaching of French in Lithuanian educational institutions. At the same time, the military mission assisted in the training of the Lithuanian army and mediated the supply of French arms to Lithuania. However, without the French recognition of the Lithuanian state de jure or at least de facto, all the efforts of the military mission were reduced to zero. The head of the French military mission, Colonel Reboul repeatedly drew attention to the need of recognition of the Lithuanian state: Lithuanian leaders “look forward with great impatience to the recognition of their country by France”<sup>23</sup>. As it was written by Reboul in his report, General Zhukovsky<sup>24</sup> believed that the French had to recognize “the independence of Lithuania, as it was already done by England and Italy”<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, Franco-Lithuanian relations were hindered by the dispute between Lithuania and Poland over the ownership of the Vilnius Region. Paris secretly provided significant material and military assistance to Poland and did not intend to move to the side of Lithuania in this conflict. The daily reports of the French military mission show that during 1919–1920 the negative image of the French Republic, which contributed to the expansionist aspirations of Poland, became more and more consolidated in the Lithuanian public conscience. Thus, the report stated that “the ultra-Polonophobic party claims that we support Poland in all matters”<sup>26</sup>; a small part believed that “France does not recognize the independence of Lithuania, while it did everything for Poland”<sup>27</sup>, and the people, in turn, “know and see

<sup>21</sup> Les événements de Russie. Missions alliées en Lituanie. *Le Temps*, 13.03.1919, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> PLASSERAUD, Yves. *France-Lituanie 1918–2004...*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 42-ème rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre France et Lituanie, 18.01.1920.

<sup>24</sup> *Žukauskas Silvestras (1861–1937)* was the general of the army of Lithuania.

<sup>25</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 49-ème rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre France et Lituanie, 03.03.1920.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 47-ème rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre France et Lituanie, 18.02.1920.

only all sorts of benefits made to Poland by France”<sup>28</sup>. One of the French agents wrote in the early 1920s: “When [Lithuanians – L.S.] ask in Warsaw, ‘Why these campaigns? Why the war?’ The entourage of the National Democrat Dmowski answers, ‘France, Paris orders.’”<sup>29</sup> In October 1920, the troops of the General Zheligovsky, with the tacit consent of Paris and Warsaw, occupied Vilnius and a part of South-Eastern Lithuania and proclaimed an independent state – Middle Lithuania. The occupation of Vilnius buried “the hope for consolidating the region”<sup>30</sup>.

The pro-Polish position of France was beneficial to Germany and Soviet Russia, which, in pursuit of their interests in the region, supported Lithuania in the Lithuanian-Polish conflict and used it to strengthen their positions in that country. Even during the occupation, the German Administration opposed the Polish claims to the Lithuanian territories. France’s position prompted Lithuania to seek a rapprochement with Berlin. “Most of the intellectuals are of the opinion that by wishing to unite Lithuania with Poland by force and supporting Poland on the Vilna issue, France pushes Lithuania towards Germany”<sup>31</sup>, French abbot Quénet stated<sup>32</sup>.

Indeed, Germany did not fail to take advantage of the conflict between Lithuania and Poland. Despite the withdrawal of German troops from Lithuanian territories, the German influence was sensed in every sphere: economic, political, and military. “It’s worth fearing,” wrote Quénet, “that Germany is too involved in Lithuanian politics,” and “some intellectuals, especially priests, believe that Germany is a country of order, authority, and organization”<sup>33</sup>. He advised to attract Lithuanian students to France through scholarships and send French professors to Kaunas University to minimize German influence; otherwise, “a place we do not take today will be occupied by Germans or Germanized Lithuanians tomorrow”<sup>34</sup>.

It was repeatedly stated in French diplomatic documents that “Germany also seeks to maintain the Lithuanian-Polish enmity and to take advantage of it to gain political and economic advantages”<sup>35</sup>; it seeks to “tune against France those Lithuanians who are extremely negative about the Poles”<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 25-ème rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre France et Lituanie, 11.09.1919.

<sup>29</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 14. Lituanie–Pologne. D’un agent volontiers tendancieux, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> ŁOSSOWSKI, Piotr. *Konflikt polsko–litewski 1918–1920*. Warszawa, 1996, s. 21.

<sup>31</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 58. Note de M. Charles Quénet sur voyage en Lituanie, p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> For more details, see: Pettinaroli, Laura *La politique russe du Saint-Siège (1905–1939)*. Rome, 2016. 937 p.

<sup>33</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 58. Note de M. Charles Quénet sur voyage en Lituanie, p. 185–186.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 59. Supplement aux articles 3–4 (Politique intérieurs et extérieurs). L’influence française, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 49-ème rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre France et Lituanie, 03.03.1920.

Initially, only Britain managed to establish contact with Lithuania. Particularly favorable relations with the Lithuanian government took shape in the economic and military spheres. According to French abbot Quénet, “the only foreign influence that is currently growing in Lithuania is the influence of England”<sup>37</sup>. The reason for this Frenchman was that “the English, more than other peoples, showed some demonstrative sympathy to the young Baltic States and the cause of their independence”<sup>38</sup>. Prior to Paris, London recognized the independence of the Lithuanian state, but never managed to consolidate its success. The project on the exploitation of Lithuanian forests, proposed by the British, according to which the UK became the only concessionaire in this area, did not find support from the Lithuanian government. “All of Tariba and all Lithuanians engaged in commercial activities are hostile to this project, since it will entail the unconditional subordination of Lithuania to the UK economically”<sup>39</sup>, Colonel Reboul of the French military mission wrote in a daily report. In addition, the British, according to French historian Gueslin, “certainly wanted the Neman to be internationalized (starting from Grodno). This condition was also misinterpreted by Lithuanians: as the coastal state Poland would become a part of the International Council, it would manage the navigation over the Neman and thus unconditionally compel to recognize its rights in the region”<sup>40</sup>.

As a result, following the unsuccessful attempts to weaken France’s position in Lithuania by using the Lithuanian-Polish opposition, “England returned to the neutral policy towards Lithuania”<sup>41</sup> in order to establish economic cooperation.

Soviet Russia did not want Lithuania to fall outside its focus of interests as well, but the obligations under the Brest Peace Treaty of 1918, the outbreak of the Civil War and foreign intervention prevented it from full participation in the struggle for Lithuania. However, as soon as the Brest Peace Treaty was terminated, Russia had the opportunity to regain its former influence in the lost territories.

In 1922, France granted its de jure recognition to Lithuania almost two years later than Latvia and Estonia (in January 1921), which was associated with Warsaw being under its auspices. Despite the recognition, Paris did not prevent the accession of Middle Lithuania to Poland in 1922 and even conducted secret negotiations with the latter planning to transfer the Memel Region to it. In the report on Lithuanian domestic and foreign policy prepared in early 1923 it was stated that “the French influence suffers mainly from the Polish-Lithuanian conflict and from the existing friendly relations

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<sup>37</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 58. Note de M. Charles Quénet sur voyage en Lituanie, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> SHD/DAT. Fonds 17. MMF dans les pays baltes. Dossier 578. 51 rapport hebdomadaire. Relations entre l’Angleterre et Lituanie, 17.03.1920.

<sup>40</sup> GUESLIN, Julien. Entre illusion et aveuement: la France face à la question lituanienne (1920–1923). *Cahiers lituaniens*, 2001, No. 2, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 59. Supplement aux articles 3–4 (Politique intérieurs et extérieurs). Action des puissances étrangers et leur propagande; ses formes et ses résultats, p. 69.



between France and Poland<sup>42</sup>. Abbot Quénet was right when he noted that “any policy aimed at imposing on Lithuania an alliance or federation with Poland as the starting point is doomed to failure. The policy which begins with the recognition and consideration of Lithuania as an independent state ... has every chance to success<sup>43</sup>. The result of France’s short-sighted diplomatic game was the uprising against the French forces in Memel in January 1923 inspired by the Lithuanian authorities, which was suppressed only in February 1923 owing to the joint Franco-British actions. This uprising had long-term consequences: the Council of Ambassadors of the Entente decided to transfer the Memel Region to Lithuania. It was stressed at the informal level that the transfer was a kind of compensation for the loss of the Vilnius Region.

These events clearly demonstrated the failure of French policy. The Lithuanian government wanted not only to gain the recognition of its independence, but also to guarantee the security of its sovereign existence. Lithuania needed support for the territorial dispute, which was a key problem of the Lithuanian foreign policy. However, Kaunas did not find understanding and support on the part of France. Paris relied on Poland, which largely predetermined the subsequent rapprochement of Lithuania and Germany, Soviet Russia.

## Conclusions

The Great War and the subsequent collapses of the empires led to the new configuration of the European regional system. New states appeared on the map of Europe. With the attainment of independence by the “small states” of Europe, the foreign influence on them increased. Thus, Lithuania became a bone of contention not only for the Entente countries, but also for Germany and Soviet Russia. The attainment of Vilnius was a key to the victory in this rivalry.

The pro-Polish policy of Paris completely disregarded Lithuanian interests and contained prerequisites for new conflicts not only in the Baltic region; it also had a negative influence on Franco-Lithuanian relations. France could not achieve the creation of strong Poland, which would play the role of its main ally in Eastern Europe, and the so-called Baltic Bloc. None of the goals set by the General Staff before the French military mission in Lithuania were achieved. The Polish-Lithuanian territorial contradictions prevented the implementation of the plans of the French diplomacy, and its intrigues contributed to the strengthening of pan-German sentiments and Soviet diplomacy in this region.

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<sup>42</sup> *AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 59. Supplément aux articles 3–4. L’influence française, p. 67.*

<sup>43</sup> *AMAE. Série: Europe 1918–1940. Lituanie. Vol. 58. Note de M. Charles Quénet sur voyage en Lituanie, p. 193–194.*

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# Prancūzų ir lietuvių santykiai geopolitinės konfrontacijos kontekste 1918–1923 metais

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## Santrauka

Lietuvos Nepriklausomybė po Pirmojo pasaulinio karo buvo paskelbta ir Rusijos imperija žlugo įtakos ir kontrolės Baltijos regione siekusių valstybių geopolitinės konfrontacijos kontekste. Unikalią geopolitinę padėtyje buvusi Lietuva Antantės šalims atrodė kaip patogus strateginis placdarmas. Lietuvą kartu su Latvija, Estija ir Lenkija siekta paversti „sanitariniu kordonu“ tarp Vokietijos ir Sovietų Rusijos, kuris turėjo padėti Sąjungininkams susilpninti Vokietijos užsienio politikos įtaką ir atkirsti Rusiją nuo Europos. Šis straipsnis skirtas Prancūzijos ir Lietuvos santykiams Lenkijos ir Lietuvos konflikto bei valstybių politinės konfrontacijos 1918–1923 m. kontekste – nuo Nepriklausomybės paskelbimo iki Klaipėdos krašto sukilimo – aptarti. Remiantis neskelbtais šaltiniais (*Center des Archives de la Courneuve* ir *Service historique de la Défense*), buvo nustatyti Prancūzijos karinės misijos tikslai ir Prancūzijos pozicija dėl neoficialaus valstybių varžymosi siekiant įtvirtinti savo įtaką Lietuvoje. Prolenkiška Prancūzijos politika neleido įtvirtinti savo įtakos Lietuvoje ir sukurti stiprios Lenkijos, kuri būtų tapusi pagrindine Prancūzijos sąjungininke Rytų Europoje. Prancūzijos vykdoma politika Lietuvoje ne tik sudarė prielaidas naujiems konfliktams Baltijos regione, bet ir neigiamai paveikė Prancūzijos ir Lietuvos santykius. Ginčė dėl Vilniaus priklausomybės Paryžius palaikė Varšuvą. Teritoriniai nesutarimai tarp Lenkijos ir Lietuvos sutrukdė įgyvendinti Prancūzijos diplomatijos planus, o jos intrigos prisidėjo prie provokiškų nuotaikų bei sovietų diplomatijos sustiprėjimo šiame regione.

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