

Latvian Exile Government Proposals

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The last government of the independent Republic of Latvia did not empower formation of a government-in-exile and none was ever established during the entire period that Latvia was under foreign occupation. The only state institution that survived legally intact, though greatly diminished in size and scope was the Foreign Service of the Republic of Latvia, comprising diplomats, consular staff and honorary consuls. They were sceptical and dismissive of various discussions by exile political activists on the subject of an entity akin to a government-in-exile. Such proposals focussed on legitimating a single individual to lead the lobbying for restoration of Latvian independence. Argumentation was largely emotional since the question was unclear as to whether the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia was in force from 1934 onwards. An Estonian Government-in-exile was established on the basis of solid constitutional arguments. Without gaining recognition, it was sustained from the early 1950s until 1991. It is not evident that the Estonian exile government contributed to restoration of independence. It was the United States, which through the non-recognition policy influenced Soviet behaviour ultimately compelling the latter to free the Baltic states.

Keywords: exile government, Latvian Parliamentarians, Acting President of Latvia, *Saeima* of the diaspora, State continuity.

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Introduction

The USSR, acting in the person of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic and through the Riga Peace Treaty, acknowledged the Republic of Latvia to be a sovereign independent state to which the RSFSR renounced any future claim. The actual behaviour of the USSR throughout the twenty years of independence of the three Baltic states in fact contradicted this legal engagement. Regaining control of Tsarist territories was an unquestioned axiom of Soviet leaders. The reaction of competent authorities in each Baltic state was different. Only the President Antanas Smetona left the country rather than come under control of the Soviet invaders of his country, appreciating the hidden agenda of the USSR. He was not successful in establishing a government-in-exile, nor was the Lithuanian post-war exile community. The Latvian government empowered on 17 May 1940 its diplomats to represent the national interest in case they were unable to contact the Latvian Government under war-time conditions. No Latvian government-in-exile was formed for several reasons that are the subject of this paper. In the case of Estonia, its diplomats appear never to have received formal empowerment akin to that for the Foreign Services of Latvia and Lithuania. An Estonian Government-in-Exile was established in 1953, in part, so as to bolster legally the state continuity of the independent Republic of Estonia; it sustained itself through to 1991 without ever gaining official recognition. The state continuity of all three Baltic states resulted from the policy of non-recognition sustained by the leading political and military power in the world, the USA¹, as well as by its principal allies.

Governments in exile in the form of governments who have been forced to leave their homelands are historically scarcely an unusual occurrence; however, during the Second World War a bevy of governments-in-exile came about which sought to represent countries that they no longer controlled. For the three Baltic states forming a government in exile could look to the example of such entities resulting from conquest by Nazi Germany of European states in 1940–41. Most relevant to the Baltic case was the Polish Government-in-exile that was formed when Germany overran most of Poland, with Soviet Russia taking its fair share (as foreshadowed by the Secret Protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939). However, not all entities that appeared at that time gained recognition with the proviso that such an entity referred to an existing state. The fact of the Soviet occupation and incorporation of the Baltic states may have been denounced as illegal and unacceptable; yet the Soviet Union was meticulous in dismantling all vestiges of sovereign statehood.

On 17 September 1939 the last legal President of Poland authorised members of government to go abroad to continue resisting the attack on the Polish state; A Polish a government-in-exile was recognised by all of the Allies fighting Nazi Germany. This entity benefitted from several considerations, namely, the tangible armed resistance being offered internally to German occupation forces, as well as the presence of substantial Polish military units alongside the Allies. Legally, the attack by Germany on Poland had been the *casus belli* for UK its declaration of war against Germany. Recognition of the Polish government-in-exile was withdrawn on 5 January 1945 with the Western Allies accepting *de facto* and later *de jure* that

¹ The Welles Declaration of 23 July 1940 was the basis for this policy, which was reviewed several times, but which ultimately only lapsed after the USA recognised in September 1991 that all three Baltic states had sovereign governments in place.

the interests of the people of Poland would be best represented by a government formed under the auspices of and enjoying the military protection of the USSR. The Western Allies recognised the irreversible reality once this was manifest and recognised as legal the Communist government that of post-war Poland, severing diplomatic links with the Polish government-in-exile. The latter, however, persisted as a political lobbying group until it was finally wound up on 22 December 1990, conferring its approval of Lech Walesa as the President of Poland. On 21 September 1939, Vilhelms Munters, the Latvian Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, officially informed the head of the Polish Embassy in Latvia that it would have to be closed, diplomatic status revoked, but that Polish diplomats could be able to remain in Latvia *ad personam*.² Neither of the other Baltic states expressed any official opinion.

Governments-in-exile of the Baltic region

The oldest longest-running government-in-exile of a state that, although it is not a Baltic Sea littoral state, nonetheless belongs to the region, is that of Byelorussia, i.e., descendants of émigrés resident in North America have kept alive this entity as representing the Belarusian People's Republic, which existed fleetingly in 1918–1919. The Latvian diaspora in the United States occasionally contacted representatives of the Belarusian community in the United States, with whom they shared a common anti-communist political platform.

A. Smetona was the only Baltic President-in-office to escape abroad in 1940. Once he arrived in the USA, he attempted to form a government in exile, notwithstanding the US *a priori* official position that such an entity would not be legally recognised. His efforts attracted lukewarm support and encountered some opposition by the large Lithuanian community in the USA. He proved unable to rally prominent individuals to join his cause.³ These activities terminated with the death of A. Smetona in 1944. Undoubtedly, his compatriots in Lithuania did not then appreciate President Smetona abandoning his post. Lithuanians sought to form in-country an armed political opposition to the administration imposed by Germany. The first meeting of this opposition, the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (VLIK) occurred in Kaunas on 25 October 1943. The government established during a brief inter-regnum between departure of German forces and arrival of Soviet forces was short-lived. Members of the organisation escaped to Germany in 1944, where they continued their endeavours without interruption. They never gained official recognition. Open feuding by VLIK with Lithuanian diplomats who were still in post caused not a little consternation at the West German Foreign Office, which VLIK had chosen as a venue for airing their dissension. In 1955, VLIK moved the focus of its activities to the USA.⁴ In 1990, VLIK made its peace with the Government in place in Lithuania, and subsequently

² See: *Feldmanis, I., Stranga, A., Virsis, M.* Latvijas ārpolitika un starptautiskais stāvoklis (30. gadu otrā puse) [The international context of Latvian foreign policy, during the late 1930s]. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1993. 435 p, at p. 361.

³ An extensive and disparaging report on Baltic American communities' political efforts was made in April 1944 to the UK Foreign Office, see NA file FO 371/43056. A FO official concluded in a note in the margins that, "As we thought, Baltic American opinion is not important."

⁴ See: *L'Hommedieu, J. L.* Exiles and Constituents, Baltic Refugees and American Cold War Politics, 1948-1960. Ph. D. Thesis, Turku University, 2011. Available: http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/72414/Annales_B338.pdf?sequence [last viewed 01.12.2015].

was dissolved.⁵ The surviving remnants of the Lithuanian Foreign Service abroad re-integrated with that of the restored independent republic in early 1990.⁶

The Estonian diaspora in 1953 succeeded in establishing a government-in-exile that was active in lobbying Estonian national interests during its uninterrupted period of existence through to the early 1990s. The origin of this entity may be traced to the politically-led resistance to Soviet occupation that began in-country from the first days of the occupation in 1940, and which continued through to creation of a very short-lived restored government during the inter-regnum between departure of the German occupying forces in 1944 and arrival of Soviet military forces and administration. It would appear that the Soviet authorities were less successful in neutralising the top echelon of individuals empowered to act in case of a national catastrophe in Estonia than they were in the case of Latvia. Post World War II, the idea of forming a government in exile was nurtured by distinguished former members of the Estonian government who had found refuge in Sweden. The effort was welcomed by the Estonian exile community, although some dissension was voiced. Once created in Oslo, this entity failed to receive international recognition, nor was it recognised by members of the Estonian Foreign Service still accredited as diplomats in various Western countries.⁷ The Estonian government-in-exile, symbolically reunited with the Government of Estonia on 8 October 1992, was a noteworthy reflection of the legal basis for state continuity, the illegality of the Soviet occupation and annexation in 1940 (threat of the use of force).⁸

Empowerment of the Latvian Foreign Service

All three Baltic states were strong-armed into signing a Pact of Mutual Assistance in the autumn of 1939, the confidential addenda of which foresaw entry and stationing on their territories Soviet military contingents that each exceeded the size of the local standing armies.⁹ Simultaneously, Soviet intelligence services stepped up the activities in the Baltic states with the special task of identifying

⁵ This organisation was one of the six signatories on 6 August 1989, including a senior representative of the Communist Party of Lithuania, of the Gotland Declaration, wherein all declared common cause to work for international recognition of restored Lithuanian independence. The venue was an information meeting organised by the Lithuanian diaspora in Sweden, the smallest by far of the resident Baltic exile communities.

⁶ A formal decision was taken to this effect on 11 March 1990, with no similar gesture by the other two Baltic states who waited until international recognition happened and reintegrated their diplomats starting in the autumn of 1991.

⁷ For an exposition of the history and impact of this entity, see: *Made, V.* The Estonian Government-in-Exile, a controversial project of state continuation. In: *Hiden, J., Made, V., Smith, D. J.* The Baltic Question During the Cold War. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, 208 p.

⁸ See: *Mäilksoo, L.* Professor Uluots, The Estonian Government in Exile and the Continuity of the Republic of Estonia in International Law. *Nordic Journal of International Law*, March, 2000. No. 69(3), pp. 289–316.

⁹ Text of Treaty in English is available at <http://www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19391005-1.pdf> [last viewed 12.06.2016], for the text of the Protocol concerning the military bases to be established in Latvia, see: Konfidencial'nyj protokol Pakta o vzaimopomoshhi mezhdru Sojuzom Sovetskikh Socialisticheskikh Respublik i Latvijskoj Respublikoj ot 5 oktjabrja 1939 goda. V.: Polpredy soobshhajut... Sbornik dokumentov ob otnoshenijah SSSR s Latviej, Litvoj i Jestoniej. Avgust 1939 g. – avgust 1940 g. Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija, 1990, s. 86.

potentially dangerous anti-Soviet individuals.¹⁰ Although the government of Latvia prevented news of these activities from appearing in the public media to any significant extent, it is likely that it was well aware of this increasing security threat, if not the Soviet intention to put an end to the very existence of Latvia as a state. The government took a single step, very late in the day, less than one month before the arrival of additional Red Army contingents on 17 June 1940, to ensure that its voice could be heard abroad by its empowered diplomats. Article 1 of the special powers conferred on Kārlis Zariņš, Envoy of Latvia to the UK, indicated that that they were to apply if, “in case of war”, the government of Latvia become unable to contact its Diplomatic representatives abroad.¹¹ Official protocols of the interrogation of President K. Ulmanis have survived and one statement attributed to K. Ulmanis is revealing about his actions prior to the first days of Soviet occupation:

“I was concerned about the people of Latvia coming to the conclusion that these treaties [stationing Soviet bases] meant that Latvia had lost the ability independently for independent political activity, in particular in view of the international situation then prevailing. My thoughts were that through implementation of this treaty Latvia retained and was able freely to exercise its authority internally and in its international relations excepting certain areas listed in the treaty.”¹²

The terminology of these records corresponds to a position maintained by the Soviet Union then, and by current apologists for its actions, that the Soviet Union responded to Latvian demands to terminate their independent existence and become again a province of the Russian Empire, and that the Soviet Union respected the sovereign will of the Republic of Latvia, rather than instigated the contrary. As M. Gorbachev very pithily explained to Prime Minister Thatcher, the territory inhabited by the Baltic peoples, in fact, became part of Russia through the conquest of Peter the Great;¹³ apparently, for M. Gorbachev all Russian conquests were irreversible, unless Russia decides, or is forced to decide otherwise. It appears, however, that President Ulmanis never entertained the idea that the independence of Latvia would be annulled by the USSR, a failing shared by most if not all individuals in positions of authority in all of the Baltic states.

K. Zariņš and attempts to set up a Latvian government in exile

K. Zariņš (Charles Zarine), whose authority among Latvian refugees was considerable, being empowered by the Latvian Government decision of 17 May 1940, took early a negative stand of the need to form any Latvian

¹⁰ See: Weiner, A., Rahi-Tamm, A. Getting to Know You, The Soviet Surveillance System, 1939–57. In: Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, (Winter 2012). Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 5–45. Forum: The Soviet Order at Home and Abroad, 1939–61. Available: <https://kritika.georgetown.edu/past/13-1> [last viewed 15.12.2015].

¹¹ See the original text, available at: <http://www.old.historia.lv/alfabets/L/la/okupac/dokumenti/1940.05.18.htm> [last viewed 12.01.2015]. English translations of this document were given to various Foreign Ministries, e.g. the NA files 371/24761; N5833/1224/59, in support of Latvian diplomats who refused to recall the orders issued by the puppet government of Latvia during the summer of 1940.

¹² See: Kārlis Ulmanis trimdā un cietumā: Dokumenti un materiāli [Kārlis Ulmanis in exile and in prison: documents and other materials]. Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1994, p. 392.

¹³ M. Gorbachev's report on the state visit of Prime Minister Thatcher, cf minutes of the CPSU Central Committee meeting of 16 April 1986. Available: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB422/docs/Doc%20202%201987-04-16%20Politburo.pdf> [last viewed 01.08.2015].

government-in-exile. Referring to an opinion received from the Foreign Office in October 1940, K. Zariņš insisted that any Latvian government-in-exile would fail to receive recognition, and that his own position as an accredited diplomat might be made untenable, were this to happen. This was a view shared by his fellow Latvian diplomats. Whether in fact such a threat to their positions would derive from their countries of residence is unclear; later experience shows that the latter would only not tolerate Latvian diplomats taking direction from a Latvian government-in-exile, or their compatriots.¹⁴ Certainly popular misunderstanding among Latvian exiles of the US policy of non-recognition and the imagined power of the Latvian diplomats to achieve international pressure on the USSR *apropos* restoration of Latvian independence was endemic through to the late 1980s. This issue needs serious academic attention, now that many more US archival materials relevant to this policy are available.

In June 1942, the UK government, independent of the non-existence of any Baltic exile government, took the step of de-listing the Baltic diplomats accredited to the UK, although thereafter they were included in an appended list, "List of persons not included in the foregoing list but still accepted by Her Majesty's Government as personally enjoying certain diplomatic courtesies". The US continued to include in its Diplomatic List members of the Baltic Legations in the USA without any impact on this position resulting from the creation of, and continued activities of the Estonian Government-in-Exile.

The issue of a Latvian government in exile preoccupied K. Zariņš, who on several occasions after the end of the war met with the Foreign Office to discuss this subject, notably in 1951 to discuss the case of a Latvian in the USA whose identity was obscure,¹⁵ and in 1954, when K. Zariņš mooted that one of the leading members of the Latvian Veterans Organisation (*Daugavas Vanagi*) might be seeking to establish such an entity.¹⁶ In either case, no exile government was formed, notwithstanding speculative discussions. A later entirely scurrilous campaign was launched in 1964, wherein a Latvian resident in the UK (unknown to the Latvian community) alleged to have been empowered by K. Zariņš, who had passed away in 1963, with 'credentials' and to act on behalf of a 'Provisional Government of the Republic of Latvia' attempted to seek international recognition. The USA and Canada were approached in June 1964; in both cases their decision was not to accept in future any calls, or any written submission from this individual.¹⁷ One can only speculate about the underlying motives for this curious event (the Nigerian High Commission in the UK was also approached).

¹⁴ When it became necessary in 1953 to nominate a Charge d'Affairs in the USA to succeed Jules Feldmans, two Latvian-Americans as private persons sought (unsuccessfully) to circumvent the authority of K. Zariņš, Memorandum of Conversation, Hartman, Vaivada, Johnson, and Dillon 17 August 1953 "Folder: La711b Replacement for Feldmans" Records Relating to the Baltic States, 1940-1961. Box 7, RG 59, Stack Area 150, Row 69, Compartment 25, Records of the Department of State, NAI.

¹⁵ See: an Aide Memoire of 8 September 1951 in NA collection FO 371 94473.

¹⁶ See: NA collection 371/111381 for notes by the FO about a meeting on 24 May 1954 and a copy of the Aide Memoire submitted on that date by K. Zariņš.

¹⁷ See the letter submitted by R. G. Strads, Esq. (Oxon), styling himself as Chief Representative held in the National Archives of Canada, File 20.1.2.LATV (collection F1232), as well as the instruction sent to the High Commission in London not to acknowledge the letter and to refuse future contacts.

Issue of Acting State President of Latvia

Akin to the organized clandestine political resistance to German rule in Estonia during the Second World War a group of influential members of Latvian society formed the Latvian Central Council (*Latvijas Centrālā Padome, LCP*) and adopted their Programme of activities on 13 August 1943, and a Memorandum on 17 March 1944, calling for immediate renewal of Latvian sovereignty in advance of arrival of Soviet armed forces. This democratic political resistance movement was reduced by arrests, but nevertheless maintained contact with US diplomats in Stockholm, informing them of the depredations of German occupation authorities in Latvia.¹⁸ After the end of the Second World War the LCP whose centre was in Stockholm and closely linked to the Foreign Committee of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (LSDSP) sought to identify in the person of Bishop J. Rancāns, the Deputy Speaker of the Last Convocation of the *Saeima* (the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia), dissolved following the coup of 15 May 1934 led by K. Ulmanis, to be the acting President of the Republic of Latvia.¹⁹

Bishop Rancāns used his considerable authority as a senior Roman Catholic cleric to lobby for resolution of Latvian refugee interests. His reputation among Latvian refugees was tainted by two facts: very many political activists were fervent supporters of the regime led by K. Ulmanis (one axiom being that the anarchy of Latvian political parties more than justified disbanding the *Saeima*); leading members of the LSDSP, the principal political party supporting Bishop Rancāns, had collaborated with the Soviet installed regime in 1940–41, including assessing political reliability of Latvian military officers. An unfortunate contributing reason for his failure to appeal to Latvian exiles was that the overwhelming majority, including the intellectual elite in exile, were dismissive of their fellow Latvian Catholic exiles who by and large were working class or small farm holders in contrast to the educated and formerly wealthy members of the majority.

Relations between Bishop Rancāns together with a group of former parliamentarians and K. Zariņš were fractious, with the latter refusing to acknowledge the title of “acting President of Latvia”. A meeting in London in 1947, including a visit by Bishop Rancāns to the UK Foreign Office, failed to resolve matters. Officials repeated that no government in exile would be officially recognized, but were not entirely appreciative of the action of K. Zariņš in trying to engage the FO in an internal Latvian wrangle. Ultimately, Bishop Rancāns emigrated to the United States in 1951, where he had to respect the general Roman Catholic Church position that its clergy could not engage in political activities of the kind expected of an acting President of an independent state. Bishop Rancāns continued to lobby Latvian interests in a manner that respected these constraints.

When compared to the Estonian government-in-exile, the Latvian demarche comprised empowering a single individual. The Estonian exile community felt the need to have a tangible instrument that would symbolically represent continuity of the legal existence of the independent republic, in particular, as the last sovereign

¹⁸ Swain, G. Latvia's democratic resistance: a forgotten episode from the Second World War. *European History Quarterly*, 2009. No. 39(2), pp. 241–263.

¹⁹ In addition to support by the LCP of which Bishop Rancāns was a founding member, legal arguments were advanced by surviving members of the equivalent of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia, see: Pleps, J. Biskaps Rancāns un Satversme [Bishop Rancāns and the Latvian Constitution]. *Jurista Vārds*, 3 March 2009. Available: <http://www.juristavards.lv/doc/188357-biskaps-rancans-un-satversme/> [last viewed 15.12.2015].

Estonian government had not formally empowered its diplomats to the same extent as had the Latvian government.²⁰ In the Estonian case, a number of ministers constituting a government-in-exile were identified, as well as a Governor-in-exile of the Estonian Central Bank. Another difference among Latvian exiles as opposed to Estonian exiles was the rather minimal support among Latvians for the acting President of Latvia; his flimsy legal credentials were tainted by reason of his being associated with the parliamentary turbulence that was anathema to an overwhelming majority of Latvian exiles.

Latvian political activists

Two former ministers of the Government headed by K. Ulmanis survived Soviet and German occupation and involved themselves in refugee politics almost immediately after the end of hostilities in Europe in 1945. The first of these, Alfrēds Jānis Valdmanis (1908–1970) had briefly been Finance Minister (1938–1939) before leaving the Latvian government under circumstances that were obscure.²¹ The second was Alfrēds Jēkabs Bērziņš (1899–1977) who was in office as Minister for Public Affairs the day Red Army troops arrived in Riga. He quickly left the country via Estonia and Finland, arriving ultimately in Switzerland where he led far from a quiet life. After the end of the Second World War he turned to Latvian refugee politics, consistently being in the background in terms of leading political campaigns, but definitely involved behind the scenes. This approach continued when he emigrated to the United States, where he was well known to competent US government officials.

These highly ambitious men were unable to cooperate, being exceptionally united only in their opposition to efforts by the LCP to designate an acting President of Latvia, and the LSDSP trying to orchestrate Latvian political campaigns to regain independence. They were both sufficiently astute to realise that the international situation during the post-war period weighed against renewal in the near-term of Latvian independence.

Alfrēds Valdmanis was visibly involved in organising Latvian political life in the Displaced Person camps of the UK and US occupation zones in Germany. Without describing his personal goals in other than general terms, A. Valdmanis sought leadership of the principal Latvian refugee organisations starting in late 1945. He had overwhelming public backing, but came into conflict with the two Latvian envoys, Zariņš (UK) and Bilmanis (USA) whose mandate to represent the interests of Latvia was officially accepted by their countries of residence. The astute observers of official and public opinion prevalent in their countries of residence pointed out more than once, starting in early 1946, that the wartime record of A. Valdmanis was tainted by his overly zealous cooperation with the German occupation authorities in Latvia. His leadership of any Latvian campaign to regain independence would

²⁰ The US State Department sought already in 1944 to understand the reason for Estonian exiles' insistence on forming a government-in-exile – which would not gain international recognition – and were informed that part of the reason was the universally high regard of the Estonian people for legal propriety, see: Memo 724 Report on Estonian Government in Exile 14 July 1944 “Folder: E801 General Political Affairs – External” “Folder: Estonia 1502” Records Relating to the Baltic States, 1940-1961. Box 4, RG 59, Stack Area 150, Row 69, Compartment 25, Records of the Department of State, NAI; and the presence outside of Soviet captivity of the last legal Prime Minister of Estonia, Jiri Uluots, gave adequate grounds for forming such an entity based on the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia.

²¹ See: *Bassler, G. P. Alfreds Valdmanis and the politics of survival.* Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000.

be more than detrimental to a successful outcome.²² This opinion was rejected by a majority of Latvian exiles during the immediate post-war period. However, leading members of the intellectual elite present in the refugee camps accepted the message and A. Valdmanis was prevented from taking a leading role from 1947 onwards.

The political platform of A. Valdmanis for restoration of an independent Republic of Latvia first asserted that suspension by K. Ulmanis of the Latvian Constitution of 1922 had been *de facto* approved by the people, and also, that the authoritarian regime of K. Ulmanis was in no way illegal.²³ This view broadly coincided with majority opinion among rank-and-file Latvian refugees. When reflecting about his post-war political experience, Valdmanis denies having any goal other than to strive for independence,²⁴ however, his ambition was clearly to become leader of the restored State. Valdmanis did not support restoration of a parliamentary-based system in Latvia, without giving details of his preferences. He was particularly contemptuous of efforts by former members of the Latvian political elite to lead Latvian exile political organisations. After his arrival in Canada in 1948, A. Valdmanis turned away from active participation in Latvian émigré politics, unlike A. Bērziņš, who was an *eminence grise* up until very late in his life.²⁵ The latter was publically discrete about the role he saw for himself in the restored independent state. In the light of his political track record before fleeing from Latvia, it is unlikely that he was partial to restoration of parliamentary rule based on the 1922 Latvian Constitution (*Satversme*). K. Ulmanis, in whose government A. Bērziņš served, had suspended the 1922 Constitution and had ruled to the very end without adopting an alternative constitution; toleration by the general public of this situation was remarkable and indicative of the popular disrepute that the parliamentary period left as an unhelpful legacy.

Democratic legitimization of any political leadership of the Latvian exile community was relevant during the early years of exile, but progressively became less important given that rather few individuals were willing to take on this difficult and thankless task, essentially at their own expense. Nevertheless, various organisations were set up that had a strong regional (Western European) or even a global character. Of the last of these, the Association of former Latvian Soldiers (*Daugavas Vanagi*) was the one with a genuine network of chapters world-wide, whereas the World Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL, originally the Federation of Latvians in the Free World) had the better credentials to engage in political lobbying. In fact, the WFFL led lobbying efforts outside the USA.

The *Saeima* of the diaspora

The great dispersal of Latvian exiles that peaked as a process during the late 1940s and terminated with closure of the last refugee camps in Germany in the early 1950s brought changes to Latvian political organisations. The centre of political activities shifted to the United States, but less than one-half of all refugees migrated there. The need for a global political structure resulted in ideas being offered that a kind of Government be set up to act in the name of the widely-scattered exile/

²² See: *Bassler, G. P.* Alfreds Valdmanis and the politics of survival ..., p. 188.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁴ See the unpublished manuscript *Trimdinieka domas* [Reflections by an exile] in the Alfred Valdmanis papers held at the Latvian National Archive, fund 2067, description 1, case 21, pp. 18–38.

²⁵ See, for example, the CIA FOIAA database of reports filed by and about A. Bērziņš. Available: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search/site/Berzins> [last viewed 12.12.2015].

diaspora communities. The respect accorded by most Latvian exiles for K. Zariņš as bearer of special powers diminished once it became apparent that Latvian Legations surviving in several Western countries were powerless to effect restoration of Latvian independence. A presentation by K. Zariņš of what the Latvian Legation in the UK was able to achieve to a meeting of leading activists of the Latvian community in the USA in 1952 was met with derision.²⁶ This popular judgement rather showed up the parochial misunderstanding by the exile community of what exiled diplomats could realistically achieve. However, this view did not detract from the respect most Latvians living abroad retained for the efforts made by K. Zariņš on their behalf, as well as his spirited defence of Latvian national interests, particularly during the immediate post-war period.

The issue of legitimating leaders of various Latvian émigré organisations in their political activities arose only from time to time. Most representatives of the Latvian community were elected on a local basis, i.e. at individual refugee camps whilst in Germany, and later at regional centres that developed once Latvians migrated to their countries of more or less permanent residence. It became glaringly obvious that once Latvian refugees settled into their new environment, starting in the early 1950s, and progressively thereafter, fewer and fewer individuals took an active part in their community organisations, including participating in regular elections for community leaders. The leadership recognised this early on. Delegates to the 1951 Congress founding the American Latvian Association (ALA) possessed a mandate (variously expressed) from no more than one-fifth of the number (60 000) of Latvians estimated then to reside in the USA. J. Feldmans, Chargé d'Affaires of the Latvian Legation in the USA, stated that all decisions, particularly those with political import, taken by ALA would unequivocally represent the views of the overwhelming majority of Latvians resident in the USA (and by extension elsewhere in the world).²⁷ Although never expressed explicitly, this became an unspoken axiom for global political actions undertaken starting in the 1970s by the World Federation of Free Latvians. Broadly speaking this was true, although not a few of the antics in which leading members indulged themselves in the United States (and elsewhere) were more of an embarrassment than reflecting the political sophistication of most Latvians concerning their kith and kin in Latvia.

A singular reflection of a need to buttress credentials of community representatives in the previously mentioned political campaigns was a proposal in mid-1976 to set up a Provisional *Saeima* of the Republic of Latvia by holding elections addressing the Latvian diaspora.²⁸ It was not evident that this body, were it to be constituted and meet in person rather than via postal procedures, would have any impact on the political campaigns in favour of Latvian independence. These campaigns became particularly acute during the late 1970s, early 1980s, even desperate, since the Helsinki Final Act was viewed by most émigré Latvians

²⁶ At the annual American Latvian Association Congress of 7–9 March, 1952, cf. *Ruņģis, A.* Kaut šķirti nešķirami [Although we live separated, we are still united]. In: The collection of essays. *Ruņģis, A. (ed.)*. Studiju Grupas Biļetens, 1965, pp. 12–32.

²⁷ See minutes of this meeting in: *Albats, B., Klīve, V. V.* Amerikas Latviešu Apvienība 1951–1986 [The American Latvian Association, 1951–1986]. The American Latvian Association (Augstums Publishing Company), Rockville, 1986, at p. 201.

²⁸ The proposal was argued in considerable detail due to Dr. A. M. Šteins (Canada) and discussed at a meeting held by the WFFL 26 June 1976 to discuss a range of matters by national-political activists (*nacionālpolitiskie darbinieki*). Materials in support of the idea were widely disseminated and one copy was obtained by the Baltic Strategic Studies Center during preparation of this paper.

as signalling an irreversible loss of independence (provisions on the inviolability of state borders). Implicit in this proposal for a Provisional *Saeima* was the *de facto* stand taken by the WFFL that it was the government-in-exile of the Latvian nation. Interestingly, the Administration of President G. H. W. Bush in 1990–91 qualified these individuals simply as (Americans) supportive of Baltic independence.

The WFFL in May 1989 recognised the leading role that mass political movements in Latvia would play any successful campaign to regain independence. After 4 May 1990, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia was accepted by the WFFL as legitimate heir to the government of the Republic of Latvia, the latter set aside under duress in 1940. It is interesting to note that this coalescence of political efforts to regain independence took place earlier for Latvians,²⁹ than a similar event for Lithuanians (the Gotland Declaration of 6 August 1989). These dates predated declarations of independence adopted in 1990 by both countries. Coalescence of the political aspirations of diaspora Estonians with those of in-country political activists took place somewhat later, in mid- to late 1990, i.e. after the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR on 30 March 1990 adopted a declaration embarking on the road to full independence.

Conclusions

The governments of all three Baltic states were painfully aware of pressure that the USSR was exerting on their freedom of independent manoeuvre from 1939 onwards. They also were quite aware, thanks to their diplomats serving abroad, of exile governments being formed and recognised for Western and Central European countries attacked and overrun by Nazi Germany. Of the three countries, only the President of Lithuania took seriously enough the advice offered to him that, once he had escaped from Lithuania after its occupation by the Red Army, he sought to create a government-in-exile. Most likely, the idea of empowering an individual to form a government-in-exile might have posed a future challenge to the personal authority of A. Smetona, were such a government to prove decisive in reversing the fortunes of Lithuania. Given that all three Baltic Presidents had been self-propelled into their posts in an anti-constitutional manner, such considerations might well have prevented their acting to create a serious reserve authority outside the writ of the USSR.

Two senior Latvian diplomats were officially empowered by the Latvian government on 17 May 1940 to act to defend national interests were the Government of Latvia cut off from communicating with them. Their powers were circumscribed geographically and were limited to 10 years duration. The Lithuanian government issued a less formal order for its diplomats to work independently. By contrast, no comparable steps appear to have been taken by the Estonian government even to the extent of empowering its diplomats to act were the Government of Estonia cut-off from communicating with them. However, a Government-in-Exile was formed by the Estonian exile community in the mid-1950s, and manifested its existence by lobbying Estonian national interests. It did not receive official recognition, nor did its formation prejudice the standing of accredited members of the Estonian Foreign Service. Nevertheless, this entity preserved a competence in legal argumentation that was absent from the Latvian exile community.

²⁹ Further to this, see: *Deksnis, E. B., Jundzis, T.* Restoration of the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Latvia 1986–1994. Riga, 2015, p. 68.

Several Latvian diplomats living abroad were energetic and made legally sound efforts during the Second World War to manifest the legal continuity of the Republic of Latvia, yet they failed to elicit from the USA, and even less from the UK, support for immediate post-war restoration of Latvian independence.

During the first decade after the end of the Second World War, members of the Latvian exile community engaged in a heated and short-lived discussion about creating if not a full-blown government-in-exile, then identifying an acting President-in-exile. The designate for this post was recognised by a number of authorities, including surviving members of the High Court of the Republic, but rejected by the majority of the Latvian exile community. His actions were strenuously opposed by surviving members of the Latvian Foreign Service. Latvian organisations that sought to represent themselves as speaking authoritatively on behalf of their occupied homelands were recognised as interested and informed entities though not granted recognition akin to a government in exile.

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