

## Supplying the Lithuanian Army with Weapons in War Against Bolsheviks and Bermond-Avalov Formations in 1919 at the Clash of Interests Between the Entente and Germany\*

Lietuvos armijos apgāde ar ieročiem karā pret boļševikiem un Bermonta-Avalova karaspēku 1919. gadā, saduroties Entantes un Vācijas interesēm

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Western political, social and economic support to Ukraine in face of Russian aggression has aroused discussion and actualized historical episodes of weapons supply and military assistance. Historical analysis of weapons supply during military conflicts and wars in the past provides a good opportunity to become more familiar with the problem and may give fruitful insights for understanding this phenomenon in its broader sense. After the collapse of Russian Empire and after the end of the World War I Lithuania fought in wars for independence, and received military assistance consisting of weapons, ammunition, clothes, and food from the two opposing parties and former enemies – Allies and Germany.

In the current article, the author analyses the question of the weapons supply to Lithuania through the lens of foreign policy interests of England, France and Germany, and explores to what extent the supply of weapons depends on overlapping foreign policy interests of both appealing and providing country. During the War of Independence, Germany supplied armaments, when it needed to stop Bolsheviks and to counterweigh the influence of Poland in Lithuania, but refused to do that when Lithuania intended to promote its own foreign policy interests to capture Vilnius in 1919. The same happened with Allies, who refused to supply weapons to Lithuania despite its appeals in the first half of 1919, meanwhile, Lithuania received weapons

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from the Entente when it faced direct threat from the remaining units of German Army, which also became dangerous for the vital interests of France and England in Baltics.

**Keywords:** Baltic states, Wars of Independence 1919–1920, supply of weapons, diplomacy, Entente.

Rietumu politiskais, sociālais un ekonomiskais atbalsts Ukrainai, saskaroties ar Krievijas agresiju, izraisīja diskusijas un aktualizēja ar ieroču piegādi un militāro palīdzību saistītas vēsturiskās epizodes. Analizējot ieroču piegādes militāru konfliktu un karu laikā pagātnē, varam labāk iepazīties ar šo problēmu un izprast to plašākā kontekstā. Pēc Krievijas impērijas sabrukuma un Pirmā pasaules kara beigām Lietuva cīnījās Neatkarības karā un saņēma militāru palīdzību – ieročus, munīciju, apģērbu un pārtiku – no divām pretējām pusēm un bijušajiem ienaidniekiem: sabiedrotajiem un Vācijas.

Rakstā jautājums par ieroču piegādi Lietuvai analizēts caur Anglijas, Francijas un Vācijas ārpolitisko interešu prizmu, un ieroču piegādes ir atkarīgas no abu pušu – gan pieprasītājas, gan piegādātājas valsts – ārpolitisko interešu pārklāšanās. Neatkarības kara laikā Vācija piegādāja ieročus, kad tai vajadzēja apturēt bolševikus un līdzsvarot Polijas ietekmi Lietuvā, un atteicās to darīt, kad Lietuva plānoja veicināt savas ārpolitiskās intereses, lai ieņemtu Viļņu 1919. gadā. Tas pats notika arī ar sabiedrotajiem, kuri, neraugoties uz Lietuvas lūgumiem 1919. gada pirmajā pusē, atteicās piegādāt ieročus. Lietuva saņēma ieročus no Antantes, kad tā saskārās ar tiešiem draudiem no atlikušajām vācu armijas daļām, kas kļuva bīstami arī Francijas un Anglijas interesēm Baltijā.

**Atslēgvārdi:** Baltijas valstis, Neatkarības kari 1919–1920, ieroču piegāde, diplomātija, Antante.

Historiography notes that during the War for Independence Lithuania received military assistance including weapons, ammunition,

clothes and food from England, France and Germany,<sup>1</sup> which were adversaries during the World War I. Interwar Lithuanian officer and former commander of the Artillery unit who inventoried all military supplies received from abroad, Major Lubinas, revealed that military forces of Lithuania obtained unknown number of weapons from Germany, England and France. According to his memoirs, in January 1919 Lithuanian military forces from Germany received unknown quantities of weapons and munitions. In November–December 1919, when Pavel Bermond-Avalov forces were beaten, German government under the pressure of International Allied commission for the evacuation of German military forces from Baltic states, supplied Lithuanian military forces with the 24–77 mm and 12–105 mm artillery cannons, 120 mortars, 5000 rifles, 300 machine guns and 28 000 hand grenades. More to that, in August 1919 military delegation of Lithuania in France bought 10 500 rifles, 300 machine guns and 2.5 million cartridges, and it was considered as a military support of France. In October 1919, England supplied Lithuania military forces with 2996 rifles, 1.5 million cartridges, and 18 artillery cannons. Furthermore, at the beginning of 1920, England additionally provided 6 900 rifles and 2.7 million cartridges.<sup>2</sup>

Historian Tomas Balkelis has noted that since 24 December 1918 Germany began to provide military and financial assistance to Lithuania.<sup>3</sup> Regina Žepkaite emphasized that Germany, France and England supplied Lithuanian military forces with weapons and ammunition when it corresponded to the interests of those states<sup>4</sup>. As shown by historiography, in several cases appeals of Lithuanian government to get weapons and ammunition were not satisfied. The first Prime Minister of Lithuania Augustinas Voldemaras on 28 of November 1918 declared that “it is impossible to say

*something positive about money and weapons from Germany. Seems that it is easier to obtain a loan than weapons*".<sup>5</sup> Commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> German Army, which occupied Lithuanian territory during the World War I, General Erich von Falkenhayn also refused to provide weapons to military forces of Lithuania in December 1918.<sup>6</sup> Historian Zenonas Butkus has indicated that German government refused to arm and support Lithuanian military forces to execute an assault on Bolshevik-ruled Vilnius in March and April 1919.<sup>7</sup> Officer of Saxon volunteer units who fought in Lithuania in the first part of 1919, Major Shroeder mentioned that Lithuania would be able to recapture Vilnius with support of German volunteer units.<sup>8</sup>

Royal Navy officers who represented the 6<sup>th</sup> light cruisers squadron lead by Admiral Edwyn Alexander-Sinclair in December 1918 agreed to provide weapons to the military forces of Lithuania only with permission of London.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, it must be kept in mind that England had several policy lines regarding the Russia and Baltic, which were shaped by Prime Minister, Foreign Office, Admiralty and War Office. On November and December 1918, the Cabinet of War sent the Royal Navy to Baltics with the aim *"to show the British flag"*, and provide weapons according to the situation.<sup>10</sup> Later on, it was changed by the moderate policy of Prime Minister Lloyd George, which was based on *"April Thesis"*, as well as the firmer and more interventionist position of War Office and Admiralty, which sent the fleet to Baltic Sea under the command of Walter Cowan, and militarily supported anti-Bolshevik General Nikolay Yudenich's Northwestern Army's march to Petrograd.<sup>11</sup> The analysis of the actions of French military mission, which was dispatched on February 1919 by the French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon<sup>12</sup> to Lithuania shows that it provided only

*"minimal support"* to Lithuanian forces, despite the fact that the main instruction was to help Lithuania to organize its army<sup>13</sup> and to reduce German influence in the region.<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Alston mentions that in Baltic Commission in Paris Peace Conference A. Voldemaras asked for equipment, munitions, transportation facilities and military missions to assist them with organization of army.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, all the actors in the region had different foreign policy interests, and it indicates that the supply of weapons and ammunition to Lithuania was non-consistent, dynamic activity, which was integrated into the broader perspective of foreign policy. To date, it has not been analysed in the context of changing political interests of Germany, France and England in 1919. Therefore, the question is proposed – when and why did the aforementioned countries agree to supply military forces of Lithuania with arms, and on which occasions did they refuse to do that?

### **Germany as the most important source of weapons for the Lithuanian Army in the first half of 1919**

The World War I ended in November of 1918; as a result of war, the Russian Empire collapsed, and new national states emerged in Eastern and Central Europe. On 16 February 1918, Lithuania announced its independence, however, real capabilities to build the state, establish a government and military forces appeared only in November 1918. At the same time, on 17 November 1918, the Red Army started an assault on all the Baltic states, including Lithuania, on 5 January occupied Vilnius and north-eastern part of the projected territory of Lithuanian national state. The government of Lithuania was forced to move from Vilnius to Kaunas. In the face of Bolshevik attack,

organization and armament of Lithuania's military forces was fraught with difficulties, – there were only 3 000 volunteers, who lacked appropriate weapons to resist the Bolsheviks, and the remains of the 10<sup>th</sup> German Army, which should have remained in the former Russian territories, but did not comply with the Article XII of the Terms of Armistice, and started to withdraw.<sup>16</sup> In that situation, Lithuanian political leaders attempted to find ways how to get arms for military forces in order to stabilize situation on the frontline against Bolsheviks.

At the end of 1918 and the early 1919, the government of Lithuania formed two foreign policy directions, one towards Germany, and another towards England.<sup>17</sup> At first, the influence of Germany became dominant, and on 19 November 1918 Lithuania appointed Jurgis Šaulys as the envoy to Berlin, whilst on 5 November, Germany had appointed Ludwig Zimmerle a civil governor to Lithuania and later on, Verdy du Vernois as an envoy.<sup>18</sup> German government also granted a loan of 100 000 000 marks to Lithuania, which became the most important financial support for the newly created state. Nevertheless, it hesitated to provide armament for its military forces despite Lithuanian appeals.<sup>19</sup>

There were many contacts and attempts to obtain weapons from Germany in late 1918, but nothing was achieved, because the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> German Army General E. von Falkenhayn refused to provide weapons to military forces of Lithuania in December 1918. Situation changed only on 29 December 1918, when the Minister of National Defense of Lithuania General Mykolas Velykis talked with the commander of the Eastern front General Max Hoffman and L. Zimmerle. General M. Hoffman was against the provision of arms to Lithuania, and expressed the opinion that arms could only be given with a permission from Berlin. According to

him, there was a danger that the weapons could fall into the hands of Bolsheviks.<sup>20</sup> L. Zimmerle had a different perspective, he told that Chairman of Armistice Commission Mathias Erzberger had ordered arms to be given to Lithuania, as this was required by the terms of the Entente-German armistice. Notably, M. Erzberger adhered to the position that Germany should follow the Article XII of Armistice Agreement and to defend Eastern border of Germany.<sup>21</sup> Another important aspect was that Germany's favourable response was determined by the fact that in January 1919 M. Erzberger pledged to the Entente to create an anti-Bolshevik front.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, on 15 January German Army created Oberkommando Nord,<sup>23</sup> which was ordered to keep the Liepāja-Kaunas-Grodno line and send Freikorps military units to Latvia and Lithuania. Saxon volunteer units, which consisted of divisional and regimental headquarters, three infantry battalions (the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>), the 18<sup>th</sup> cavalry squadron and the 18<sup>th</sup> artillery group arrived in Kaunas.<sup>24</sup> VI Reserve Corps under the command of Rudiger von der Goltz were formed in Courland on 1 February 1919. Additionally, Baltische Landeswehr was already formed in Courland.<sup>25</sup>

Here we have to emphasize that German High command and Oberkommando Nord changed its political position on matter of weapons supply to Lithuania due to its interest to protect German border from advance of the Red Army and decision to keep the Article XII of Armistice conditions.<sup>26</sup> A few days later when political decision was made, on the 6 January 1919 the Minister of National Defense General M. Velykis submitted to Oberkommando Nord a request to provide with 30 920 rifles, 2036 carbines, 96 machine guns, 885 revolvers, 12 artillery guns, 1280 shells for cannons, 54 000 000 cartridges for rifles and 24 000 revolvers.<sup>27</sup>

On 10 January 1919, the Lithuanian Army received 2 Russian 76 mm cannons with 132 shells and 24 draft horses. Two days later, 100 training grenades were received. On the 17 January, Germany provided 200 hand grenades, 200 Russian-made rifles and 40 000 rounds of ammunition, and two German machine guns with ammunition. On 20 January, – another 200 Russian rifles and 40 000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>28</sup>

As stated in a letter of the 2 February 1919 from the headquarters of the German Volunteer Corps in Lithuania to the Minister of National Defense of Lithuania, the supply of weapons in January remained slow, but it became more active on February.<sup>29</sup> During the three weeks of February, Oberkommando Nord provided 200 Model 71 rifles and 100 boxes of ammunition, 100 Model 88 carbines and 10 000 rounds of ammunition. From the 7 February until the 22 February another 1950 units of Model 88 and 2120 Model 98 carbines, 30 Model 71 rifles, 17 Mauser pistols, 500 000 rounds of ammunition and 600 grenades.<sup>30</sup> On 27 February, 8 planes, 186 carriages and 855 sets of clothing for cavalrymen reached Lithuania.<sup>31</sup> The provided weaponry and ammunition was completely sufficient to arm 4000–4500 soldiers who then served in Lithuanian Army.<sup>32</sup> With the help of Saxon volunteer units, on the 9 to 13 February 1919, Lithuanian Army stopped the Bolsheviks in the battles of Kėdainiai, Jieznas and Alytus<sup>33</sup> and created conditions to hold the Liepāja-Kaunas-Grodno line.

After stopping the Bolsheviks, the Oberkommando Nord began to centralize the arms supply. On 3 March 1919, the officer of Oberkommando Nord F. Tschunke, who was responsible for the relations with Lithuanian Army, informed the government of Lithuania and the Minister of National Defense General M. Velykis, that all issues regarding the armament of the Lithuanian

Army, due to legal aspects, must be handled through the chief representative of Germany in Lithuania L. Zimmerle.<sup>34</sup> Therefore Oberkommando Nord limited the supply of weapons to the Lithuanian Army, and mostly provided only non-lethal military equipment and clothing.<sup>35</sup> Finally, on 28 March 1919, the headquarters of the German Volunteer Corps which was subordinate to the Oberkommando Nord refused to meet the request of the Ministry of National Defense of Lithuania concerning the supply of clothing, citing the fact that the clothing was needed for the German Army.<sup>36</sup>

This decision was made when the VI Reserve Corps and Baltic Landeswehr under the command of R. von der Goltz pushed off the Red Army and on 18 March captured Jelgava and Northern Lithuanian towns of Šiauliai and Šeduva.<sup>37</sup> Bolshevik threat was destroyed and Oberkommando Nord lost incentive to strengthen military forces of Lithuania in order to defend Eastern border of Germany. On 23 March, German Defense Minister Gustav Noske informed Weimar National Assembly that the Highest military staff and German government agreed that military forces of Germany would not take any offensive actions in Baltics.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, German government refused to support an assault by Lithuanian Army on Bolshevik-ruled Vilnius on 2–4 April 1919. According to the memoirs of German officer Maj Shroeder, with the support of Saxon volunteer units, military forces of Lithuania would have been able to capture Vilnius, but German government forbade to attack Bolsheviks, except in the cases when they themselves attacked beyond the demarcation line.<sup>39</sup> On 16 April, R. von der Goltz and Baltic Germans strengthened their positions, made a *coup d'état* against Latvian Provisional Government in Liepāja and created pro-German government led by Andrievs Niedra.<sup>40</sup> Presumably, they were not interested in either Latvia or Lithuania

having strong military forces, which could become an obstacle for colonization intentions of R. von der Goltz.

Just as likely, the negative position of German government could be associated with the complicated relations between Lithuanian and German military forces which came about when French military mission under the command of Colonel Celestin Reboule arrived to Lithuania. On the one hand, Paris believed that Colonel C. Reboul's mission would offset any chance of Germany dominating Lithuanian affairs,<sup>41</sup> whilst on the other, the Lithuanian government perceived the arrival of a mission as the first step to state recognition.<sup>42</sup>

The tension persisted between Lithuanian and German soldiers. On 18 March 1919, German soldiers shot a soldier of Kaunas commandant's headquarters Pranas Eimutis, who protected the headquarters of the French mission.<sup>43</sup> As far as can be determined from poor diplomatic sources, Officer F. Tchunke asked the Minister of National Defense of Lithuania, whether French aid to the Lithuanian Army was acceptable. If it were to be acceptable, then the Germans would no longer be able to work "*in parallel*", and help the Lithuanian Army to organize itself.<sup>44</sup> It was a serious warning and a proof that the attempt of the Entente to interfere with the German-dominated area began to affect the supply of weapons to the Lithuanian Army from Germany.

Tensions remained high during May, because on 7 May the Conditions of Peace were announced and inspired a vast alarm in Germany, and all parties decided to reject it.<sup>45</sup> On 22 May, the forces of R. von der Goltz captured Riga, later on attacked Latvian and Estonian military forces and were defeated in the battle of Cēsis on 21 June. Despite the events in Latvia, Saxon volunteer units supported operations of military forces of Lithuania until 3 June, but the level of violence against civilians increased.<sup>46</sup> Finally,

Germany signed the Peace Agreement on 28 June, and General Walter von Eberhardt evacuated its forces from Baltics.<sup>47</sup>

In the context of the high tensions, on 23 June, General W. Eberhardt refused to satisfy the request of the Minister of National Defense General M. Velykis to provide another 12 000 rifles, 100 machine guns and 5 000 000 cartridges.<sup>48</sup> The general justified his decision by the fact that the weapons were needed for the protection of German units.<sup>49</sup> On 28 June 1918, the German units withdrew from Kaunas and left behind an insignificant amount of ammunition, mines and grenades, which mostly were not suitable for use.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the withdrawal of the army, German companies continued to cooperate with the Lithuanian Army concerning the purchases of weapons and ammunition. On 29 July 1919, the Head Quarter of Armed Forces of Lithuania received a confirmation from the company Deutsche Handelsgesellschaft, that it agreed to sell 190 Mauser pistols and 45 000 cartridges.<sup>51</sup> Governmental and military contacts on that matter were, however, over. As far as it can be determined from archival sources, Lithuania repeatedly applied to German government for the purchase of weapons, but in the summer of 1919 Germany was already restricted by the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, therefore it refused to sell the weapons without the consent of the Entente.<sup>52</sup>

### **Appeals and obstacles to get weapons and ammunition from Entente**

As noted above, the second direction of the Lithuanian foreign policy was directed towards the Entente. In December 1918, a squadron of the English fleet led by Admiral E. Alexander-Sinclair supported

Latvia and Estonia by shelling Bolshevik positions and provided 5000 rifles, 4 artillery cannons and 500 machine guns to Estonia.<sup>53</sup> On 5 February 1919, Royal Navy provided 5 320 rifles, 52 machine guns and 4.3 million rounds,<sup>54</sup> and on 3 April – 20 000 rifles, 6 howitzers to Latvia.<sup>55</sup> In the spring of 1919, England supplied Estonia with machine guns, ammunitions and trucks.<sup>56</sup> The Prime Minister of Lithuania A. Voldemaras considered the orientation towards England unconditional and a priority, therefore he sent the missions to meet the English fleet that arrived to Baltics.<sup>57</sup> The Lithuanian delegation requested weapons and ammunition from one of the captains of the squadron of English ships as early as on 23 December 1918, but the latter replied that he could not give anything without the knowledge of London, and advised to apply to the government on these matters.<sup>58</sup> Due to the lack of resources, it is impossible to establish the name of captain of the vessel addressed, to find out the answer or content of their talk, but from the instructions delegated to Admiral E. Alexander-Sinclair “to show the flag and support British policy as circumstances may dictate”,<sup>59</sup> it is clear that the possibility to obtain weapons remained open. It should be remembered that British policy between December 1918 and February 1919 was dominated by the idea to stop the spread of the Bolshevism,<sup>60</sup> but execution of that policy was concentrated in Estonia and Latvia.<sup>61</sup>

On 3 January 1919, Prime Minister M. Sleževičius at the governmental meeting said that Lithuania would not receive help from England, but the orientation towards England must be retained.<sup>62</sup> The expression of that policy is well illustrated by the idea of an English protectorate, which was raised at a meeting of the Lithuanian government on the 23 January 1919.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the fact that contacts with England were difficult, on 6 April 1919 Herbert

Grant Watson, the first representative of England's diplomacy, visited Lithuania.<sup>64</sup> In a meeting with M. Sleževičius, the representative of the British diplomacy promised loan, weapons, ammunition and clothes for the soldiers. After this visit, M. Sleževičius instructed the Lithuanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference to “press England and America to give us ammunition, weapons and clothes as soon as possible”.<sup>65</sup> According to historian George Bennet, Grant Watson also established a connection with the Head of Lithuanian Mission to Paris Peace Conference A. Voldemaras, and told him that without an access to the sea, he could not promise a prospect of the Entente's assistance to Lithuania.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, the main problem was the policy of England and the Entente, which held a profoundly reserved and dual position regarding the Baltic states. Foreign Office, War Office and Admiralty maintained the firmer, interventionist line against the Bolsheviks and supported the Baltic states politically and military. W. Churchill had intentions to integrate the support for Baltic states and for White Russian General Nikolai Yudenich's assault on Petrograd. Politics of Prime Minister George Lloyd were different, at the beginning of March 1919 England and France decided to evacuate its forces from Russia<sup>67</sup>. On 16 April, Lloyd George announced that he supported the idea of *cordon sanitaire* and that all the local forces from Baltic Sea to Black Sea should be organized and armed. Therefore, Supreme War Council of Paris Peace Conference announced that it would create a Baltic commission to solve the Baltic problem, and formed Allied Military Mission under the command of British General Hubert Gough.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, on 26 May 1919, the Entente under specific conditions recognized General Alexander Kolchak's government, who was perceived as the leader

of the White (anti-Bolshevik) movement in Russia. The most important aspect was that General A. Kolchak's government held a firm position towards the Baltic states and did not agree to recognize their independence. They saw the Baltic nations as national minorities of Russia, worthy only of cultural autonomy status.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, conditions No. 7 and 8 of the recognition stated: "*if it should prove impossible to reach agreement with the governments of the Baltics, Transcaucasian and Transcarpathian territories, this question would be resolved by League of Nations*".<sup>70</sup> According to the member of Lithuanian delegation to Paris Peace Conference Petras Klimas, the Entente did not provide weapons to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, because it did not want to create obstacles for Russia. P. Klimas thought that the reason for that was the Entente's readiness to recognize anti-Bolshevik General A. Kolchak's government.<sup>71</sup>

In early May of 1919, M. Sleževičius stated that Lithuania had not yet received anything from the Entente despite their promises. M. Sleževičius soberly assessed Lithuania's military capacity and thought that Lithuania was not sufficiently strong to fight the Bolsheviks and Poles singlehandedly, therefore it was forced to maintain a *modus vivendi* with Germany due to its military support. According to M. Sleževičius, if Lithuania would receive weapons and money from the Entente, then it would also be able to demand that Germany withdraws its troops from Lithuania.<sup>72</sup>

As considered before, a problematic situation began to emerge in the months of April and May 1919, when the relations with Germany became more strained, the government of Lithuania correspondingly began to intensify its efforts towards the Entente. In the first days of May 1919, the government instructed the Lithuanian Delegation to Paris Peace Conference to appeal to the US Military Liquidation Commission with

a request for weapons, ammunition, as well as clothing for 30 000 soldiers.<sup>73</sup> On 13 and 15 May, Lithuanian Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference appealed to the Economic Commission for financial loans and military support, pointing out that without an urgent loan, Lithuania would not be able to withstand the military pressure of the Bolsheviks. The Entente was warned that the situation would become even more difficult when Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles and withdrew from Lithuania.<sup>74</sup>

On 31 May 1919, the member of Lithuanian Delegation to Paris Peace Conference Tomas Naruševičius informed the Lithuanian government that the US Liquidation Commission had agreed to sell weapons and clothes to Lithuania only through a private company, because, according to the decision of the US Congress, weapons could only be sold to states that fought against Germany, and this was not the case of Lithuania, at least in the first half of 1919. Hence, Lithuanian dependence on Germany had no alternatives, and in its turn became an obstacle for the supply of weapons from USA. According to T. Naruševičius, the USA agreed to sell Lithuania 100 armoured cars, 300 artillery guns, 100 locomotives, 1300 wagons, 60 000 pairs of shoes, 25 000 overcoats and 35 000 jackets.<sup>75</sup> However, France protested the arms transfer, because it treated all the US military assets kept in France as the property of this country.<sup>76</sup>

To intensify efforts to obtain weapons, on 18 June 1919 the Lithuanian Military Mission, which consisted of Colonel Mykolas Gedgaudas, Colonel Juozas Koreiva and Teodoras Biliūnas arrived in Paris. On 26 June 1919, its members met with the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, General Henri La Rond. The exact position of the general was unknown, but afterwards Lithuanian officers concluded



that the French “*really won't help, it would be good if they did not interfere*”. The meeting with US General Taske, H. Bliss was less encouraging, he made no promises, although he was also given a list of required weapons and military supplies. Analogous meetings took place with Italian General Ugo Cavallero and the Japanese General Takeji Nara. The meeting with the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, General Edward Spears, who was close to W. Churchill and followed the line of War Office, was much more positive – he asked to submit the lists of necessary weapons and ammunition, and promised to deliver everything that Lithuania needed.<sup>77</sup>

On 28 June 1919, Colonel J. Koreiva met with Captain Ulbe, the head of the French General Staff and of the Baltic States Department, and with Captain Dorozjen, the head of the supply of the French Army, with whom he talked about arming the Lithuanian Army. Captain Dorozjen said that the Entente had agreed to give aid to the Baltic states and asked for information on what weapons they were using. The next day, the Military Mission visited the member of the Council of Five, the French General Belen. The latter said that the weapons would be given to the Baltic states after the inspection by the commander of the Allied Military Mission, General H. Gough, who resided in Helsinki and who would make a decision concerning the items to be given. He did not promise anything and shifted all the responsibility onto General H. Gough and another member of the Council of Five, the English General John Sackville-West.<sup>78</sup> The Lithuanian military mission asked to provide 40 000 units of military clothing, 120 units of artillery guns, 10 000 rifles, 1 billion various cartridges, 54 units of airplanes, 2 000 000 units of canned food.<sup>79</sup> On 7 July 1919, the Lithuanian delegation in Paris once again appealed

to the Baltic Commission to support the army with weapons and ammunition, arguing that the Lithuanian Army depended on the German Army's supply, and the withdrawal of 40 000 German soldiers would complicate the situation with the Bolsheviks.<sup>80</sup> Despite the fact that on 9 May Baltic Commission at the Paris Peace Conference had been created, nothing was achieved in the matter of weapons supply. The commission only attempted to define the status of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as recommended to ask the German government to withdraw forces from Latvia.<sup>81</sup>

Good news were received only on 12 July 1919, when T. Naruševičius announced that the Chairman of the American Relief Organization Herbert Hoover agreed to transfer 15 000 boots and 35 000 military uniforms to the Lithuanian Army; these supplies were stored in the port of Saint Gervais in France. Emphatically, H. Hoover considered Lithuanians together with the other Baltic and Central European people as “*liberated nations*”, and understood humanitarian assistance as a tool to fight against the Bolshevism, but it had no influence on the President W. Wilson's politics.<sup>82</sup>

However, the situation was complicated by France, which required the permission of the Council of Five for the transport of the cargo, but after convincing the French that a very small amount of military supplies would be transported, they relented and agreed to let steamers take the cargo to the port of La Pallice.<sup>83</sup> According to the collected data, uniforms, canned goods, cigarettes and food reached Liepāja on the ship August Wilke in October 1919.<sup>84</sup>

According to T. Naruševičius, the situation regarding weapons remained unclear, since the Supreme Council of the Entente had not yet considered this issue<sup>85</sup> and neither had the Baltic Commission. The Lithuanian

delegation to Paris Peace Conference saw this situation as critical.<sup>86</sup> Germany did not agree to give weapons to Lithuania without the consent of the Entente, whereas the Entente stated that it would not give weapons to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Germans while they still remained in Lithuania.<sup>87</sup> Efforts of Lithuania were stuck in a never-ending vicious circle.

As the decision of the Entente regarding the supply of weapons came to a standstill, the Lithuanian government again turned to England. On 24 July 1919, M. Sleževičius asked the Head of English Military Mission to Lithuania, Colonel Stephen Tallents to arm 15 000 troops and grant a loan of one million pounds.<sup>88</sup> The same request was repeated in a letter to H. Grant Watson, emphasizing that Lithuania's reserves were exhausted, there was nowhere to obtain the weapons from, and the German Army, instead of withdrawing, increased its numbers in Northern Lithuania.<sup>89</sup> The issue of weapons was discussed by Minister of Economy and Trade Jonas Šimkus, who negotiated with England for a loan and purchase of 25 000 rifles, 15 000 000 cartridges, 16 batteries and 50 000 artillery shells.<sup>90</sup> Finally, on 15 August 1919, Prime Minister M. Sleževičius was able to announce that assistance was found in England.<sup>91</sup>

### **Danger of Bermond–Avalov formations encourage the supply of arms from France and England**

The change in British and French policy was mainly determined by the fact that German Freikorps, instead of evacuating from Latvia and Lithuania, had intentions to stay and colonize the Baltic area<sup>92</sup>. This situation threatened the interests of the Entente. In August and September 1919, German soldiers refused to withdraw from Latvia<sup>93</sup> and instead of evacuation began to

amass more soldiers and weapons, created an alliance with anti-Bolshevik Russians, formed North Western Volunteer Army and attacked Riga on 8 October 1919. A part of the so-called Bermond–Avalov forces occupied Northern Lithuania, and established frontline with the forces of Lithuania. France used this situation in order to increase its influence in Baltics.<sup>94</sup> In such circumstances, England recognized Lithuania *de facto* on 26 September 1919,<sup>95</sup> and so strengthened Lithuanian position by making it equal to Latvia and Estonia. On the same day, the Head of British Military Mission to Lithuania, Colonel Rowan-Robinson promised to provide weapons for the defense of Lithuania. Decision of England was based on several aspects: Lithuania disentangled from German influence, refused to transport German soldiers to Latvia, and it was also seen as British encouragement for Lithuanian efforts against Poland,<sup>96</sup> which helped to counterweigh the influence of France and her ally – Poland.

Despite the announcement of 15 August, the question of weapons supply remained complicated. On 4 October 1919, it was stated at the government meeting that England had previously promised to support Lithuania, but at present would not be able to give weapons, whilst undertaking to review this issue if the Bolsheviks would invade Lithuania.<sup>97</sup> The English General Frank Percy Crozier who served in the headquarters of the Lithuanian Army, stated that he had made every effort to obtain the weapons, but it turned out that the government of England supported General N. Yudenich and since Lithuania had started negotiations with the Bolsheviks, the British believed that Lithuania did not need the weapons. General F. Crozier concluded that Lithuania would not receive weapons from England in an official way, and proposed to use the services of private companies.<sup>98</sup>

Therefore, the representative of Lithuanian state in England Vincas Čepinskis and General F. Crozier began to investigate the means for acquiring arms from private firms in England.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, Colonel M. Gedgaudas and M. Yčas, who visited England regarding the purchase of weapons, came to the conclusion that the British authorities followed the official position of not handing out weapons, but entrusted this matter to private hands, set the prices and unofficially participated in this process.<sup>100</sup>

The obvious dependence of Lithuania on Germany's supply of weapons was a dangerous trend, which Prime Minister M. Sleževičius mentioned more than once. Consequently, in October and November 1919, during the Lithuanian Army's fights against the Bermond-Avalov forces in Northern Lithuania, the situation became critical, because Germany stopped all supply of weapons. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments had very little German ammunition, and there was no way to compensate for this lack without Germany, there was nowhere to replenish the ammunition. Then, on 1 and 7 October, 2996 Russian rifles and 1 488 300 rounds of ammunition were received from the British Military Mission in Riga.<sup>101</sup> These were the first weapons given to the Lithuanian Army by England, and reflected the attitude of War Office. At the same time, with efforts of the Head of the French Military Mission to Lithuania, Colonel C. Reboul, France provided 316 Maxim machine guns, 7535 rifles and 3 000 000 cartridges.<sup>102</sup> As it can be determined from the lists of received military equipment, France also provided the Lithuanian Army with 22 000 units of military clothing.<sup>103</sup>

The changed attitude of the Entente was supported by General Henri Niessel's position, who was the head of Commission of Allies and Associated Powers for Evacuation

of German Forces. On 10 November 1919, the commission stated that the Entente was determined to help the Baltic states and Lithuania with weapons, war materials, food, and, if necessary, with other things, and that ships with weapons were already being prepared and would arrive soon. According to General H. Nissel, the commission determined that the Germans must leave in Lithuania all the railway material that was in their possession.<sup>104</sup>

Under the pressure exerted by General H. Nissel, German Freikorps after their evacuation left the weapons and ammunition in place, and these goods were transferred to Lithuania in December 1919. Lithuania received about 19 026 rifles, 1827 carbines, 225 machine guns, 25 revolvers, 25 cannons and over 8 million cartridges and 33 621 shells for cannons.<sup>105</sup> It was the largest quantity of arms, ammunition and war supplies received from the Entente.

At the conference of the commanders of the Baltic states' armies held in Valka on 6 January 1920, the Head of the British Mission to Estonia, General Arthur Jervois Turner stated that the meeting was important for giving the weapons to the armies of the Baltic states, which meant that England retained an interest in the supply of arms.<sup>106</sup> This is evidenced by its actions, when on the 11 January 1920, twenty wagons of artillery shells were sent from Liepaja.<sup>107</sup> A week later, the assistant of chief of engineering of the Lithuanian Army, Second Lieutenant Jonas Steponavičius took over the English artillery guns in Riga.<sup>108</sup> On 24 January 1920, Lieutenant Petronaitis with his soldiers unloaded 8000 chests with artillery shells from an English ship and sent them to Kaunas.<sup>109</sup> On 27 January 1920, the representative of the British Military Mission in Lithuania, Colonel R. Robinson informed the Lithuanian Minister of National Defense

that a train left Riga with equipment and carriages for five howitzers and one million cartridges.<sup>110</sup>

Lithuania decided to use the momentum and to get more weapons and ammunition from England. On 20 January 1920, Deputy Minister of National Defense A. Merkys addressed General A. J. Turner with a request of 15 000 000 cartridges for carbines, 4 howitzers, 200 Maxim machine guns and 2 000 000 cartridges, 1000 revolvers and 10 000 cartridges for them, clothing, shoes, helmets and equipment for 35 000 soldiers.<sup>111</sup> However, the foreign policy of England had changed again, because Prime Minister since November 1919 had decided to return to detente policy with Russia, and on 13 and 17 November 1919 he strongly attacked Bolshevism for tactical reasons, whilst simultaneously emphasizing the economic importance of Russia. On 11 and 13 December, L. George and G. Clemenceu came to an understanding that intervention with Russia had been mistake, and in the future, the Entente policy would be “*to build the wall of the Bolshevism*”. By February 1920, the relations between Britain and Soviet Russia were changing from actual hostilities to a period of thaw.<sup>112</sup>

That policy affected the weapons supply to Baltic states, on 12 February 1920 the Head of the British Military Mission, Colonel Rowan Robinson proposed to the President of Lithuania to reduce the army to 15 000 soldiers and pointed out that it would be difficult to acquire the necessary items for the army of 27 000 men, besides, the political situation was safe, there was no danger of the Bolshevik front and the Germans.<sup>113</sup> On 28 February, the Lithuanian envoy to Latvia, Captain Ladas Natkevičius handed over this list to General Turner, who said that England would not continue to support the Baltic states with arms, however,

the material which had already arrived, and which was still awaited would be distributed.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

The analysis of weapons, ammunition and military hardware supply to Lithuania during the war against Bolsheviks and Bermond-Avalov formations indicates that it depended on overlapping foreign policy interests of both appealing and providing country. During the war against Bolsheviks, Germany supplied Lithuania with weapons, when it needed to stop Bolsheviks and protect its territory in February 1919, whereas refused to do so, when Lithuania intended to promote its own foreign policy interest to recapture Bolshevik-ruled Vilnius in April 1919.

German weapons supply to Lithuania military forces became one of the obstacles to acquire weapons and ammunition from the Entente in the first half of 1919. The Entente refused to supply weapons to Lithuania despite its appeals in the first half of 1919 due to Lithuania's dependence on Germany. Lithuania received weapons from the Entente, when her government was recognized *de facto* and faced direct threat of the remaining units of Bermond-Avalov formations in late 1919, which also became dangerous for the vital interests of France and England in Baltics. It is also possible to identify two ways whereby weapons and ammunition supply methods were related to the political position of donor state. When foreign policy goals overlapped, the states directly transferred armaments via their military forces to Lithuania, whereas when they intended to reduce or to cancel the supply of weapons, the private commercial partners of the weapons supply were offered as an option, avoiding direct political statements.

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## KOPSAVILKUMS

Lietuvos Neatkarības kara laikā Vācija, Lielbritānija un Francija atbalstīja Lietuvas armiju ar lielpabūliem un municiju. Lietuvas historiogrāfijā jau ir pētīts ieroču skaits un tipi, taču ģeopolitiskie apstākļi un mainīgā dinamika Lietuvas cīņā pret boļševikiem un krievu vācu formējumiem 1919. gadā nav tikuši ņemti vērā un analizēti. Tāpēc šajā pētījumā tiek analizēts jautājums, kad, kāpēc un kādā ģeopolitiskajā situācijā Vācija, Francija un Anglija piekrita apgādāt Lietuvas bruņotos spēkus un kad, neraugoties uz Lietuvas aicinājumiem, tās atteicās to darīt.

Analizējot ieroču, municijas un militārās tehnikas piegādi Lietuvai kara laikā pret boļševikiem un Bermonta-Avalova formējumiem, var secināt, ka tā bija atkarīga no abu valstu ārpolitisko interešu pārklāšanās: gan saņemotās, gan piegādātās valsts. Kara pret boļševikiem laikā Vācija piegādāja Lietuvai ieročus, kad tai 1919. gada februārī vajadzēja apturēt boļševikus un aizsargāt savu teritoriju, un atteicās to darīt, kad Lietuva plānoja veicināt savas ārpolitiskās intereses, lai 1919. gada aprīlī atgūtu boļševiku pārvaldīto Viļņu. Vācija bija galvenais Lietuvas militāro spēku atbalstītājs un 1919. gada februārī



piegādāja Lietuvas militārajiem spēkiem lielgabalus, artilēriju, lidmašīnas un municiju 4500 karavīriem, kā arī palīdzēja apturēt boļševiku armijas virzišanos.

Vācu ieroču piegāde Lietuvas bruņotajiem spēkiem 1919. gada pirmajā pusē kļuva par vienu no šķēršļiem ieroču un municijas saņemšanai no Antantes. Neskatoties uz aicinājumiem Londonas un Parīzes miera konferencē, 1919. gada pirmajā pusē Antantes valstis atteicās piegādāt ieročus Lietuvai, jo Lietuva bija atkarīga no Vācijas. Sabiedrotie baidījās, ka ieroči varētu nonākt Vācijas rokās. Vēl viens atteikuma arguments bija tas, ka Lietuva nebija *de facto* un *de jure* atzīta valsts.

Lietuva saņēma ieročus no Antantes pēc tam, kad tās valdība tika atzīta *de facto* un 1919. gada nogalē saskārās ar tiešiem draudiem no atlikušajām Bermonta-Avalova (krievu-vācu) vienībām, kas kļuva bīstamas arī Francijas un Anglijas interesēm Baltijā. Sabiedrotie piegādāja ieročus Lietuvas militārajiem spēkiem, kad tie bija nepieciešami vācu militāro spēku aizsardzībai, jo uzskatīja to par vitāli svarīgu apdraudējumu pēcvērsālas kārtībai. Francija un Anglija piegādāja ieročus 15 000 Lietuvas armijas karavīriem.

Iespējams identificēt arī divas ieroču un municijas piegādes metodes, kuru izmantošana bija saistīta ar piegādātājas valsts politisko nostāju. Ja piegādātājas un saņēmējas valsts ārpolitiskie mērķi sakrita, tad valstis nodeva ieročus Lietuvas bruņotajiem spēkiem tieši, bet, ja piegādātājas valstis plānoja samazināt vai atcelt ieroču piegādi Lietuvas bruņotajiem spēkiem, tās ieroču piegādei piedāvāja privātus tirdzniecības partnerus, izvairoties no tiešiem kontaktiem.



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