

Soviet Union to Latvia, 16-06-1940

In September 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union renegotiated their agreement of the secret protocol to the 23 of August 1939 Soviet-German Treaty. They agreed that the Baltic States fell in the Soviet sphere of influence.¹ After exerting considerable pressure, the Soviet Union had concluded pacts of mutual assistance with Estonia (28 September), Latvia (5 October) and Lithuania (10 October).² On 1 October, Latvian Foreign Minister Munters was summoned to Moscow for talks. The Soviet Union demanded naval and air bases at Liapaja and Ventspils and between Ventspils and Pitragi. A secret protocol to the treaty stipulated that 30,000 Soviet forces would be allowed to be deployed in these bases. Similar to the treaties that the Soviet Union concluded with the other Baltic States, it also included a mutual assistance pact as well as a trade agreement while explicitly guaranteeing the independence of Latvia.³ The talks in Moscow were characterised by a more or less friendly tone, and 'there was neither haste, nor threats', according to the Latvian Prime Minister, although the outcome was more or less preordained.⁴ Seven months later, after Germany had launched its invasion of Western Europe, the government of the Soviet Union decided to steer a more aggressive course and set upon annexing the Baltic States. It started with Lithuania on 14 June 1940 (see case Soviet Union to Lithuania, 14-06-1940) and almost immediately followed on with Latvia and Estonia (see case Soviet Union to Estonia, 16-06-1940). On 15 June, Soviet forces killed five Latvian border troops in an incident that the Latvian government ignored. The next day around 14:00 the Soviet Union presented the Latvian representative in Moscow with an ultimatum demanding the formation of a new government and the unfettered admission of Soviet troops on Latvian soil. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had mobilised troops on Latvian borders and blocked the harbour of Riga.⁵ The government of the Soviet Union accused the government of Latvia, amongst other things, of violating the mutual assistance pact by conspiring with the other two Baltic States against the Soviet Union. It was falsely claimed that this had been learned from the Lithuanian Prime Minister Merkys.⁶ In the ultimatum, the Soviet government expressed that it considered this situation 'not only unpermissible and unbearable, but also seriously dangerous and menacing to the security of the frontiers of the Soviet Union'. The ultimatum continued:

The Soviet Government considers the following completely indispensable and not to be postponed: 1. The establishment in Latvia immediately of a government capable of and ready to ensure the honest execution of Latvian-Soviet pact of mutual assistance; 2. To ensure without delay the free of entry of Soviet troops into Latvian territory, in order to place them in the most important centers of Latvia in such numbers as to secure the possibility of realizing the Latvian-Soviet pact of mutual assistance and to avoid possible provocative acts against Soviet garrisons in Latvia. The Soviet Government considers compliance with this demand to be the elementary stipulation without which it is impossible to achieve the honest and loyal execution of the Latvian-Soviet pact of mutual assistance.⁷

¹ Sužiedēlis, 'The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: The Documents'.

² Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, 43–44.

³ Toynbee, 45–46. See also Alfred Bilmanis, *Latvian-Russian Relations* (Washington: Latvian Legation, 1944), 192–99.

⁴ Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, 50.

⁵ United States. Congress. House. Select Committee on Communist Aggression, *Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Communist Aggression and the Forced Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R. Third Interim Report of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session, under Authority of H. Res. 346 and H. Res. 438*, 297.

⁶ Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, 54.

⁷ Bilmanis, *Latvian-Russian Relations*, 202–3.

A reply was demanded within eight hours.⁸ Attached to the time limit was the threat communicated verbally that unanimous agreement amongst Latvian ministers was demanded 'otherwise the U.S.S.R. would open hostilities and bomb all Latvian cities.'⁹ With Soviet forces on the borders, the Latvian government decided not to resist and accepted the terms of the ultimatum, giving 'its consent to the Soviet demand for the admission of Soviet military forces upon Latvian territory in the same spirit of mutual trust in which it had hitherto fulfilled the stipulations of the treaty of mutual assistance.'¹⁰ Subsequently it helped coordinate the Soviet invasion in order to prevent unwanted escalation. Over the next month, the government resigned, and the top echelon of the civil service was replaced as were the editors of national newspapers. Following fraudulent elections in mid-July, the newly elected communist government asked to be allowed accession into the Soviet Union which the Soviet Union granted on 5 August 1940.¹¹

⁸ Smulkstys, 'The Incorporation of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union', no page number provided. United States. Congress. House. Select Committee on Communist Aggression, *Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Communist Aggression and the Forced Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R. Third Interim Report of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session, under Authority of H. Res. 346 and H. Res. 438.* Another source speaks of six hours, see Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, 54.

⁹ United States. Congress. House. Select Committee on Communist Aggression, *Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Communist Aggression and the Forced Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R. Third Interim Report of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session, under Authority of H. Res. 346 and H. Res. 438*, 296.

¹⁰ United States. Congress. House. Select Committee on Communist Aggression, 296.

¹¹ David James Smith, *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (Psychology Press, 2002), 24–25.