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Realism, Fascism, and Australia's Cold War: The Whitlam Government's de jure Recognition of the Baltic Annexation

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Murray Bourchier was displeased with his government. The year was 1974 and, as head of Australia's Diplomatic Mission to Seoul, he was not privy to decisions concerning his country's relations with the Soviet Union. Although he had only held the post for about three years, his position in the Republic of Korea, his first appointment as a diplomat, had proven to be a taxing one. One year earlier, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam had unexpectedly recognised the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, South Korea's northern communist neighbour. The decision placed Australia (which decades earlier had been a part of the United Nations coalition that fought in the Korean War) at odds with the South Korean Government. Putting his misgivings aside, Bourchier had loyally ridden the storm and, despite South Korean threats of downgrading diplomatic and trade relations, kept the Australian-South Korean relationship afloat.[1]

However, now another storm was brewing, one which would haunt the Whitlam Government until its abrupt end in November 1975, and this time Bourchier was powerless. In July 1974, his country had taken the bizarre step of recognising the 1940 annexation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union *de jure*, a step that almost no other Western states had taken or ever would take.[2] The decision had been highly controversial, triggering protests by Baltic diaspora not only in Australia, but in Canada and the USA as well. Hounded by the press and the Liberal-Country Party Coalition (then the Opposition at a federal level in Australia), the decision seemed to follow

[1] Garry Woodard, "Bourchier, Murray Goulburn Madden (1925–1981)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (2007), https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bourchier-murray-goulburn-madden-12235 (accessed 23.08.2023).

[2] A notable exception was Sweden, which accorded the annexation *de jure* recognition during World War II.

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Whitlam wherever he went. He was picketed by Balts, who were incensed at his apparent betrayal of their homelands, from Bonn and Ottawa to the United Nations in New York and even Niagara Falls.[3]

Though stationed on the other side of the Eurasian landmass, Bourchier maintained a keen interest in the Soviet Union that would later culminate in his career ambition of becoming Australia's ambassador to Moscow in 1977. But for now, the best he could do was register his disapproval with what was, in his eyes, Canberra's error.

True, the Whitlam Government had insisted that in enacting this recognition, it was not indicating approval of the 1940 annexations, nor was it legally sanctioning the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that precipitated it. Instead, it was a matter of laying aside ideological prejudice and recognising "existing realities", a fundamental principle in the government's foreign policy direction for Australia. But as the events of the recognition unfolded, it was becoming clear that some within both the government and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA, or simply "The Department") held questionable views on the Baltic republics, and a line had to be drawn somewhere.

The battlefield was a briefing paper on the historical context to the present-day situation in the Baltic SSRs, rushed together at the last minute by Bourchier's colleagues at the DFA's Political and Social Research Section.[4] Bourchier, concerned about certain "vulnerabilities" in the paper's portrayal of the circumstances surrounding the 1940 annexation, was keen to correct his government's understanding of the historical record.

He warned Canberra:

> "To say 'Governments in the [Baltic] states, shocked by [the] Nazi destruction of Poland, tended to the view that Soviet Occupation would be easier to tolerate than occupation by Nazi Germany' is to suggest that there was some element of positive choice on the part of the three

[3] National Archives of Australia (henceforth NAA), A1209, 1974/6558, Department of Foreign Affairs (henceforth DFA): Record of conversation with Mr V. L. Suslov, 13.11.1974; NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: DFA inward cablegram 0.BN1549, 17.01.1975; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "The Prime Minister meets UN Press Correspondents", *Australian Foreign Affairs Record* 45, 10 (October 1974), 660–665, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-923041773 (accessed 23.08.2023); University of Melbourne Archives, 2006.0015, 2006.0015.00006 (2006.0015 Unit 1): "Boos for PM", *Sunday Mail*, 06.10.1974.

[4] "Rushed together", as worded by the DFA itself; NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Handwritten note dated October 24, 1974.

> countries in favour of incorporation into the USSR. Indeed the passage could hardly have been included for any other purpose."[5]

Bourchier pointed out quite rightly that by the time of the Soviet re-occupation in 1944, many Balts would have preferred to remain under German rule which, for some, had been less traumatic. The key point, however, was that "at no stage […] were [the Balts] offered the slightest degree of choice as to the relations they might have either with the USSR or Germany". He also took issue with the DFA's portrayal of wartime atrocity. The paper, he continued, "speculates on the loss of life suffered during the Nazi occupation […] but to mention only German atrocities in the history of the Baltic states in the forties, and to make no mention of Soviet atrocities, particularly the mass deportation to concentration camps in which so many perished, is to leave such a gap as to render the impartiality of the paper questionable".[6]

Bourchier further dismissed the idea that Soviet imperialism deserved any special treatment from Australia when compared with other instances of decolonisation, or that a mere 30 years of Soviet rule should preclude Australia from supporting the legal principle of Baltic independence. Bourchier concluded that Australia owed an obligation to Balts and "well-intentioned Russians", suggesting that Australia make it clear that its recognition had been a matter of pragmatism, rather than a compromise on Baltic aspirations to self-determination.[7]

The recognition in historiography

This outspoken ambassador's role in Australia's Baltic recognition was a minor footnote inside a minor footnote. This largely forgotten episode from the most explosive government in Australia's history spanned from the beginnings of the Whitlam Government in December 1972 until its demise in the biggest controversy in modern Australian political history, Whitlam's dismissal by Governor General John Kerr. One month later in December 1975, Whitlam was defeated by his successor Malcolm Fraser in a federal election. Just days later, Fraser annulled the recognition which, having been implemented in July 1974, ultimately lasted a mere sixteen

5 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Memo no. 579 from Australian Embassy Seoul (Ambassador M.G.M. Bourchier) to DFA Secretary, 17.10.1974.
6 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Memo no. 579 from Australian Embassy Seoul (Ambassador M.G.M. Bourchier) to DFA Secretary, 17.10.1974.
7 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Memo no. 579 from Australian Embassy Seoul (Ambassador M.G.M. Bourchier) to DFA Secretary, 17.10.1974.

months. That he did so was largely thanks to the domestic outcry generated by the decision, most notably in the press and political backlash from the Opposition. These factors were themselves brought about by a concerted and persistently loud protest campaign against the decision by Balts living in the West, both inside Australia and elsewhere.[8]

Almost fifty years on, Australia's Baltic recognition has made little impact on the historiographical record. The Latvian émigré and University of Melbourne Emeritus Professor Edgars Dunsdorfs wrote a two-part monograph entitled *The Baltic Dilemma* (1975 and 1982 respectively) even as the events were unfolding. Dunsdorfs entertained media speculation and a good deal of guesswork to explain the Whitlam Government's actions, at times even sinking to the level of personally insulting Whitlam and his ministers. Still, Dunsdorfs' work holds up as a chronicle of the Baltic protest movement against the recognition, as well as the media coverage and parliamentary debates concerning the affair.[9]

Perhaps the only scholarly work to consider some of the wealth of materials from the DFA and other government institutions available from the National Archives of Australia (NAA) is Tõnis Märtson's 2011 article on the matter.[10] Märtson's claims that the recognition resulted from pressure applied by the Soviet Union, and that the recognition was intimately linked with the then ongoing Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) negotiations, are addressed at length in this paper. In truth, as this paper reveals, Australia's Baltic recognition was overwhelmingly a domestic political phenomenon. This was no extraordinary act of appeasement stemming from shadowy, backroom deals, but a poorly contrived and rushed policy. It was primarily, but not entirely, a product of Australia's foreign policy philosophy.

Drawing on the vast archival paper trail left by these events, as well as subsequent testimony from politicians and public servicepeople involved

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[8] Outside of Australia, Balts in the United States and Canada represented the greatest sources of popular opposition to the recognition. For an idea of how the Balts effected this change in policy by pressuring the Federal Opposition into promising to reverse the decision, see: John Knight, "The Baltic States: Foreign Policy and Domestic Response, 1974–78", *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 25:1 (1979), 18–28.

[9] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma: The Case of the De Jure Recognition by Australia of the Incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union*, 2 vols (New York: R. Speller, 1975), i; Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma: The Case of the Reversal of the De Jure Recognition by Australia of the Incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Baltic Council of Australia, 1982), ii.

[10] Tõnis Märtson, "Balti riikide annekteerimise tunnustamine Austraalia poolt", *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 1 (2011), 65–84.

in the recognition, this paper seeks to explain why the ill-fated policy ever came about. The idea that the driving force behind the recognition came from beyond Australia's borders is rejected, while suggestions of Soviet interference and the significance of the CSCE negotiations are downplayed. The emphasis is instead laid on how the policy fit into the broader Australian foreign policy framework of the time, and especially the government's realism and support for détente. Beneath this lay several, less savoury explanations for the government's actions, such as those that Bourchier challenged. These included misconceptions about the Balts and their homelands which, in the case of Prime Minister Whitlam himself, bordered on ethnic prejudice.

Given this focus on the reasons why this recognition occurred, this article is not a comprehensive look at the entire recognition saga. With some exceptions, the majority of the sources used herein come from the period of late 1972 until May-July 1974, spanning the beginnings of the Whitlam Government until the decision to accord *de jure* recognition was made. This was before news of the rather secretive recognition exploded into the public sphere, and thus before the subsequent international protest movement by the Balts against the decision took place.

Similarly, subsequent attempts by the government to retrospectively justify the decision, including eyebrow-raising attempts to tie the recognition with preventing World War III, are not considered.[11] Nor are the annulment of the policy by the Fraser Government or the policy's broader international legal aspects. These factors are omitted because they became relevant only long after the decision had already been reached. This is, fundamentally, an attempt to answer the question of why this recognition happened, a question which demands a smaller timeframe of 1972 until mid-1974.

Australian recognition before 1972

Prior to 1974, Australia's Baltic recognition had undergone few substantial changes since 1945. Like almost all other Western states, Australia's policy was one of *de facto*, but not *de jure* recognition of the 1940 annexation.[12]

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[11] Such claims were circulated within the DFA and by Whitlam himself, but for a more expanded version see: Senator Wheeldon, "Censure of Minister for Foreign Affairs", *Historic Hansard* (September 18, 1974), https://historichansard.net/senate/1974/19740918_senate_29_s61/#subdebate-1-1-s7 (accessed 23.08.2023).

[12] For more information about which states did or did not recognise the incorporation, see: Toomas Hiio, "Legal Continuation of the Republic of Estonia and the Policies of Non-Recognition", *Estonia, 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission*

This policy had been "inherited" from the United Kingdom, a result of the political relationship between London and its dominions. While dominions like Australia exercised sovereignty in internal affairs, London controlled foreign policy. Thus, Australia had automatically followed British recognition of both the independent Baltic republics and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and similarly adopted the British post-war position of according the 1940 annexation only *de facto* recognition by default.[13]

The ALP, which held government from 1941 until 1949, supported this policy, as did the conservative Liberal-Country Coalition, which ruled from 1949 until Whitlam took power back for the ALP in 1972. As articulated by Sir Garfield Barwick as Acting Minister for External Affairs in 1961, the policy was that Australia did not "recognise the juridical incorporation of the Baltic states into Soviet territory".[14] In 1969, Gordon Freeth, the Minister for External Affairs, added that Australia had "never withdrawn recognition from the Governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which were forced into exile by the USSR's invasion and occupation of those states in 1940". Nor did Australia recognise the "validity" of the incorporation.[15]

Despite infrequent requests to "tidy up" Australia's policy among the various branches of the Australian public service, particularly the DFA, the question of moving away from this policy of vague *de facto* recognition was never seriously considered. Australia's steadfastness on the issue was, like other Western countries, mostly due to the brutal and highly illegal nature of the 1940 annexations.[16] Indeed, the Balts corresponded with the sitting government so frequently with all manner of pamphlets, greetings, committee resolutions, and invitations to Baltic community events that it is hard to see how the issue could have been ignored by those in power. In part, there was an element to this policy of wariness of upsetting the Balts

for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, ed. by Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, Indrek Paavle (Tallinn: Estonian Foundation for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, 2006), 196–198; Kristina Spohr Readman, "West Germany and the Baltic question during the Cold War", *The Baltic Question during the Cold War*, ed. by John Hiden, Vahur Made, David J. Smith (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 100–133 (120).

13 James T. McHugh & James S. Pacy, *Diplomats Without a Country: Baltic Diplomacy, International Law and the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 119–120, 135.

14 NAA, A1838, 1506/2 PART 1: L. W. Herron's note 'Status of Baltic states' to Attorney-General's Department, 22.03.1973.

15 NAA, A1838, 1506/2 PART 1: 'Governments-in-exile Question No. 1317' Hansard clipping, 09.09.1969.

16 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note on Australia's recognition of various Soviet territories, undated c. 1971. Interestingly for an Australian public service official, it expressed a good grasp on how the Baltic annexations differed from those of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Finnish Karelia, among others.

and, by extension, other communities from Eastern and Central Europe. Many of these former displaced persons were naturalised, and therefore voting, citizens.[17]

What happened in 1974 that could upset such a precarious status quo? Australia's Baltic recognition was, first and foremost, a product of its time. It was an act that can only be understood within the context of Australian domestic politics in the 1970's and, by extension, its foreign policy. This foreign policy itself was intimately linked with the international *zeitgeist*.

Australia in the détente era

When Whitlam's ALP government came to power in 1972, both Australia and its Western allies were undergoing substantial changes in the foreign affairs sphere. Domestically, the perception of blind allegiance to the country's traditional allies, Great Britain and the United States, and especially Australia's controversial intervention in the Vietnam War, was leading many to question the past two decades of anti-communist foreign policy overseen by the conservative Liberal-Country Party Coalition. Meanwhile, the Cold War was entering a more relaxed phase of more-or-less peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding, commonly known as détente.

Whitlam's election brought a promise of a more independent and assertive Australia that would be less partisan in the Cold War and would assume its natural place as a regional leader in the Asia Pacific. Although the interpretation of Whitlam as a radical reformer is a popular one, recent research has qualified this view by identifying the receptiveness of his government to trends in international relations. Under this interpretation, foreign policy in this era was broadly aligned with that of Whitlam's conservative coalition predecessors, which had been changing gradually before it lost government in 1972 and would become generally in-line with the ALP in the coming years. This foreign policy was also quite consistent with Whitlam's counterparts in the Nixon administration, though it sometimes placed Canberra at odds with Washington where Australian and American interests competed.[18]

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[17] Once, when Baltic communities apparently misread statements made by the foreign minister in 1969 regarding Australia's recognition policy, an incensed community leader wrote in threatening to "call on our people to register their protest through the ballot box". See NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: A. Abolins letter to B. M. Snedden, 08.09.1969.

[18] Dan Halvorson, "Internationalist or Realist? Australia's Foreign Policy under the Whitlam Labor Government (1972–75)", *The International History Review*, 46:1 (2023),

Meanwhile, there are competing interpretations of Whitlam's foreign policy as "idealistic" or "realistic". More idealistic and internationalist interpretations look to significant changes that were occurring globally, and the responses to these changes by the Great Powers, as an influence on Australian policy making in this era.[19] Particularly notable here was the influence of Richard Nixon's policy of détente, a lens through which Whitlam perceived a world that was more stable, less dangerous, and rewarding to those less rigidly constrained by outdated security concerns. Accordingly, he approached the Cold War with a view to removing ideology from the equation; to take "an ideological holiday", as he told an American audience in July 1973.[20]

Despite this receptiveness to the international situation, Whitlam was first and foremost a pragmatic realist who was aware of Australia's power and limits as a middle power in the Asia Pacific.[21] Previous studies have noted the influence of British-trained scholars schooled in classical realism on the study of Australian international relations in this era, and the utility of realism *à la* Hans Morgenthau (stressing power, context, and pragmatism in relations between states) in interpreting Whitlam-era foreign policy.[22] Other commentators have gone so far as to describe Whitlam as a Machiavellian opportunist, who would readily abandon the principles he publicly professed to support should the need arise.[23]

Indeed, normalising relations with communist states with poor human rights backgrounds was given priority. Immediately upon taking power, Whitlam relocated Australia's embassy in Taipei to Beijing, ending decades of Australian non-recognition of the People's Republic of China. Diplomatic relations with other communist states, such as North Korea, North

55–72.

19 This view is ties in with the ALP tradition of "Liberal Internationalism" in foreign affairs, a philosophy which stressed the role of the United Nations, human rights, and international law, along with regional engagement in Asia and a less submissive relationship with Great Britain and the United States. See Adam Hughes Henry, "Gough Whitlam and the Politics of Universal Human Rights", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 24:6 (2020), 796–827.

20 For two discussions of détente in the Whitlam era, see: Changwei Chen, "Realism in Whitlam's Foreign Policy", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 46:4 (2022), 465–481; Alan Renouf, *The Frightened Country* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1979).

21 Chen, "Realism in Whitlam's Foreign Policy", 473–474.

22 Richard Higgott, Jim George, "Tradition and Change in the Study of International Relations in Australia", *International Political Science Review*, 11:4 (1990), 423–438.

23 Chen, "Realism in Whitlam's Foreign Policy", 473.

Vietnam, and East Germany, were also established under the Whitlam Government.[24]

It would be wrong to categorise Whitlam's centre-left government as pro-communist, as its contemporary critics on the right often did. Rhetorically idealistic but pragmatic in practice, this foreign policy platform was heavily informed by *realpolitik*. Australia's approach to diplomatic recognition, once dominated by ideological concerns, was to be no exception. From now on, recognition and diplomacy were to be handled with ideological neutrality towards the government or country in question.[25] Indeed, as Minister for Foreign Affairs Don Willesee pointed out to those accusing the government of being 'soft' on communism, the militant anti-communist Pinochet Junta of Chile had also been recognised. This government, Willesee stressed, thought it necessary to "recognise and deal with existing realities regardless of ideological preconceptions".[26] The basis for this drive was the intellectual assessment that the ideological assumptions informing Australian (and indeed American) foreign policy since the 1950s had been proven wrong, and that practical change was needed.[27]

Australia's Baltic recognition must, therefore, be taken as one step in a paradigm shift in Australian foreign policy, rather than as some isolated incident. It was part of a wider effort to redefine Australian foreign policy by putting ideology aside and having practical relations with states relative to their assessed importance to Australia's national interests. This drive was, in a sense, a logical extension of pre-existing domestic and international trends away from the ideologically charged climate of the Cold War and of the assertion of Australian independence in international relations.

The two stages of recognition

The final decision to accord *de jure* recognition was reached on 2 July 1974. It was signalled by a visit by Australia's ambassador to the Soviet Union, Sir James Plimsoll, to Tallinn, as well as by removing the Latvian Honorary Consul in Melbourne from the consular register.[28] These steps were them-

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24 T. B. Millar, "From Whitlam to Fraser", *Foreign Affairs*, 55:4 (1977), 854–872.

25 Hilary Charlesworth, "The New Australian Recognition Policy in Comparative Perspective", *Melbourne University Law Review*, 18:1 (1991), 1–25 (4–5).

26 Senator Willesee, "Baltic States", *Historic Hansard* (13.08.1974), http://historichansard.net/senate/1974/19740813_senate_29_s61/#debate-18 (accessed 24.08.2023).

27 Halvorson, "Internationalist or Realist?", 2–6.

28 The Consul was the only formal diplomatic representation of the Baltic republics in Australia. Established in 1931, it had been allowed to continue its functions after the

selves the culmination of two distinctive phases. The first phase occurred immediately after Whitlam's government took power in 1972. It was one of unilateral action by Whitlam himself to refine Australia's policy on the Baltic states, bringing it into line with his new foreign policy direction for Australia.

This was initiated in September 1972, some months before Whitlam even came to power, when a Mr. and Mrs. Rehardt, directors of the House of Flags Museum in Queensland, wrote to Whitlam's predecessors in the Liberal-Country Government. The Rehardts asked why, exactly, they should be flying the flags of the functionally non-existent independent Baltic republics in their exhibition, as opposed to their Soviet republican counterparts. Presumably, the museum had been displaying the independent Baltic flags since it first opened due to Australia's non-recognition policy, and its directors had begun to wonder why they should do so. They were informed that since Australia had never recognised the "juridical validity of the incorporation", it would be incorrect to fly the Australian flag alongside that of the Lithuanian SSR.[29]

Dissatisfied with this answer, the Rehardts wrote in again. This time, they wrote directly to Whitlam himself, who had just been elected Prime Minister and who, by reason of his authoritative approach to governance in the early months of his administration, was also foreign minister at the time. The Rehardts, apparently Cold War geopolitics aficionados in their free time, argued that Whitlam "should extend recognition" to the Baltic SSRs. Why they did so is unclear. It is likely they were unfamiliar with the relevant historical context to the Baltic annexation, and that they did not understand the position of the Baltic SSRs as constituent republics within the Soviet federative structure.[30] Regardless, the motivation behind their suggestion seems to have been that flying the flags of functionally non-existent states made for confusing business.[31]

The DFA, advising Whitlam on his response, told him to reaffirm Australian non-recognition of the "juridical validity" of the incorporation. As Acting First Assistant Secretary F. B. Cooper advised Whitlam, to change

war, as was the case for Baltic diplomatic representatives in many Western countries.

[29] NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA memo 'Background to the decision to recognise Baltic states', undated c. 1975. Presumably, this statement was intended to extend to the Estonian and Latvian SSRs as well.

[30] The most logical way to "phase out" the independent Baltic flags would not have been to fly the SSR flags, but to remove the independent republican flags altogether and to simply fly the Soviet national flag, which presumably the museum already did anyhow.

[31] NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Letter from B. C. Hill to Mr and Mrs. A. Rehardt, 19.01.1973.

the long-standing policy would "cause considerable distress to the Baltic communities in Australia and put us out of step with other Western countries… without any commensurate gain in terms of our relations [with the Soviet Union]".[32]

Whitlam chose to spurn this advice, and directed the Department instead to tell the Rehardts that:

> "While technically Australia has never recognised the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the USSR in 1940, the practical position is that Australia accepts the actual situation."[33]

Subsequent letters to the Rehardts and a Mr. Eglite, President of the Baltic Council of Australia, clarified that there was to be no objection to the flying of "the present flags" of the three "constituent republics".[34] Whitlam's remark about the "practical situation" was a clear statement of *de facto* recognition, one much less vague than that of his predecessors. However, with his deliberate reference to the Baltic states as "constituent republics" of the Soviet Union, Whitlam had also paved the way for the second phase: *de jure* recognition of the incorporation. As one DFA officer noted at the time, Whitlam's new phraseology "represents a significant change in our position".[35]

In this second phase, the impetus actually came from below Whitlam. Though Whitlam alone had altered the decades-old policy, he was not the only one who believed that Western "strategic ambivalence" on the Baltic issue was the wrong approach. Some within the DFA, including the head of the East Europe Section, Philip Peters, were of the view that the policy should be further revised towards a stronger "recognition of realities". By early May 1974, preliminary research into the Baltic issue was being done on the grounds that the question "could come up again at any stage".[36]

This assessment was based on a conversation between the DFA Secretary Alan Renouf and the New Zealand High Commission to Australia, during which Australia and New Zealand had compared notes on the Baltic

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32 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA memo 'Background to the decision to recognise Baltic states', undated c. 1975.

33 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Letter from E. G. Whitlam to F. B. Cooper, 12.01.1973.

34 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA memo 'Background to the decision to recognise Baltic states', undated c. 1975.

35 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Letter from B. C. Hill to Mr and Mrs. A. Rehardt, 19.01.1973.

36 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note to John Dauth from Philip Peters, 02.01.1974. It was stressed that any new policy should, however, refer to Australia's objection to the incorporation.

question. New Zealand had reached out because it sought advice on how it should react to a Soviet proposal that a New Zealand Parliamentary Delegation, which was soon due to visit Moscow, should also visit Estonia. The Australians informed the New Zealanders that, although less senior Australian officials did sometimes visit Estonia, they avoided contact with Estonian officials.[37]

Days later, Renouf spoke with F. Corner of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Corner informed Renouf that, in the end, the delegation had not visited Estonia because of the advice Australia had given. Probing Renouf for more information on Australia's position, Corner remarked that it was "rather extraordinary" that Australia, decades later, still had not recognised the annexation. This was, he noted, perhaps due to the sizeable minority of Australian-Balts. Seeing as New Zealand faced no such Baltic minority "problem", he told Renouf that he intended to ask his own Department to review the question of according *de jure* recognition. Renouf, agreeing that continued Australian non-recognition did seem "rather extraordinary", committed to also have the DFA review the question. However, no action would be taken until after the forthcoming federal election, scheduled for just 8 days later on 18 May.[38]

Meanwhile, apparently unaware of the conversations taking place within the DFA, Whitlam was on the campaign trail promising the Balts that, if re-elected, Australia's *de facto* policy would remain untouched. At least two separate promises were given to this effect. The first came in written form, a letter signed on Whitlams's behalf to Vytautas Bukevicius, President of the Council of the Lithuanian Community in Australia. Some weeks before the election, Bukevicius had written to Whitlam asking him to clarify his government's stance on the Baltic states.[39] In his response, Whitlam assured Bukevicius that Australia's position was one of *de facto* recognition of Soviet rule, underscoring his government's commitment to the protection of civil liberties and human rights. This commitment, he concluded, was something the Soviets were well aware of.[40]

Whitlam's second commitment was given verbally to Emils Delins, founder of the *Australian Latvian* newspaper and future Latvian Honorary Consul, at an election press conference in Melbourne. When Delins

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37 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note by Philip Peters, 06.05.1974.

38 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Record of telephone conversation between Alan Renouf and F. Corner of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 06.05.1974.

39 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 4: Letter from V. Bukevicius to E. G. Whitlam, 28.04.1974.

40 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 4: Letter signed on Whitlam's behalf by Kep Enderby to V. Bukevicius, 17.05.1974.

asked Whitlam about his government's policy on the Baltic states, Whitlam asserted that it was "the same as that of our predecessors", meaning *de facto* recognition. When asked if he expected this attitude to change in the future, Whitlam replied "No, not under any circumstances." He said so, Delins later wrote, "firmly and with emphasis".[41]

On 18 May, the federal election took place, and Whitlam secured his second term as Prime Minster. Days later, the DFA was on the move, touching base with Foreign Minister Don Willesee who agreed with the recognition in principle, but felt that it should be "low key". The plan was to survey the British, Americans, and Canadians for their views on the Baltic issue. Whitlam would then make a "carefully worded" passing reference to the fifteen union republics (as opposed to twelve, minus the Baltic republics) in a prepared speech he would give during his forthcoming visit to Moscow.[42]

This plan was altered after Whitlam's visit was delayed until 1975, and it was instead decided that Ambassador Plimsoll would make an official visit to "one or more" of the Baltic republics.[43] Plimsoll himself was included in the decision-making process, and the Department apparently valued his views quite highly.[44] A submission advising that *de jure* recognition be accorded was written up for Whitlam, who was acting foreign minister at the time with Willesee overseas. It was signed by Renouf personally and returned with Whitlam's signature and a single word of agreeance, dated 3 July 1974, "Agree".[45]

"Off we go then!" remarked one DFA officer cheerfully.[46] Had he been aware of the substantial fallout that was to follow from this miscalculation, he perhaps would not have been so excited.

The timeline sketched above makes clear that Australia's Baltic recognition was fundamentally a result of internal processes. It stemmed primarily from the Whitlam Government's foreign policy direction, and not from any form of external pressure. The Australian diplomat John Dauth later

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41 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: English translation of an *Australijas Latvietis* article entitled 'In the Election Whirlwind', 10.05.1974 (trans. copy dated 29 October).

42 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Interview with the minister by F. B. Cooper, 21.05.1974; Confidential note from Alan Renouf to Mr. Cooper, 21.05.1974; F. B. Cooper's memo to Australian Embassy Moscow, 11.06.1974.

43 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note 'Baltic states', 20.06.1974; F. B. Cooper's memo to Australian Embassy Moscow, 11.06.1974.

44 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note 'Baltic states', c. early June 1974; F. B. Cooper's memo to Australian Embassy Moscow, 11.06.1974.

45 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf's submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.06.1974.

46 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Confidential handwritten note, c. July 1974.

recalled that the policy was, "a minor thing… a tiny ripple". Australia was "just sweeping away the unreality of the past… [the recognition] looked like the sort of thing that we should be doing".[47]

Moreover, it was a decision reached by a select few, high-level officials: Whitlam, Renouf, and Plimsoll. Such exclusivity in foreign affairs was characteristic of Australian foreign policy under Whitlam. True, unlike his first "phase" of recognition, Whitlam was this time following the advice of his public service rather than ignoring it. Still, it was he who approved the recommendation in lieu of his foreign minister Don Willesee, whose authority was circumvented in a manner that was typical of Whitlam's domineering approach to foreign affairs.[48]

In fact, Willesee was an initial supporter of the policy, agreeing early on in the process that "something" should be done to recognise the "formal incorporation" of the Baltic republics. However, before leaving for his trip abroad, he had urged that any action undertaken should be discreet, so as to minimise the anticipated backlash from the Balts.[49] He became sceptical when the decision was made, in his absence, to make the more bold move of sending Plimsoll on an ambassadorial visit.[50] As one of his colleagues later noted, he was "not convinced of the correctness of the decision… at that time and in that way".[51] Later, he privately even criticised aspects of the government's public line of reasoning.[52] Other DFA officers shared his scepticism. Some were concerned with the potential backlash the Balts could bring to bear, and thus favoured simply maintaining the status quo.[53] Others thought the move unnecessarily risked domestic crit-

47 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

48 Peter Edwards, "Australia's Forgotten Foreign Minister: Don Willesee", *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (1 August 2016), https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-forgotten-foreign-minister-don-willesee/ (accessed 28.08.2023).

49 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Confidential note from Alan Renouf to F. B. Cooper, 21.05.1974; F. B. Cooper's memo to Australian Embassy Moscow, 11.06.1974.

50 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Confidential handwritten note, c. July 1974.

51 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Letter to Sir James Plimsoll from R. H. Robertson, 03.03.1975.

52 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Letter to Sir James Plimsoll from J. R. Rowland, 23.06.1975.

53 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Record of telephone conversation between Alan Renouf and F. Corner of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 06.05.1974. In this case, as indicated in a handwritten message scrawled in the margins of the paper.

icism with little apparent gain, especially considering the lack of Soviet pressure to change the policy.[54]

Why, then, was the policy changed at all? There was undoubtedly an element of opportunism to the recognition. Though the government had expected some limited criticism from the "relatively small" Australian-Baltic minority, the scale of the protests and media attention that followed had not been anticipated.[55] This underestimation led the government to believe that the pros of the recognition would outweigh the cons. There were two discernible "pros" to the decision that, in the government's eyes, made it worthwhile. These had to do with the government's firmly realist outlook on international relations and vague, generally unfounded concerns about bi-lateral relations with the Soviet Union.

Realism, détente, relations

In the government's mind, Australia's Baltic recognition was largely just a matter of applying realist principles to the Baltic case, a move that was consistent with its new foreign policy trajectory. The realism point featured heavily in Renouf's submission of 2 July to Whitlam, recommending *de jure* recognition some days after the election. Renouf suggested Australia's new position be phrased as:

> "…whilst Australia has never approved of the way in which Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were incorporated in the USSR, nevertheless Australia recognises the fact that the Soviet Government has had effective jurisdiction over these areas for over 30 years, and that the decision therefore accords with the realities of the situation."

The restoration of Baltic independence was in his opinion unlikely, and the recognition would thus be "consistent with political realities and would remove a longstanding anomaly".[56] This commitment to recognise what the government saw as "existing realities" became the official, publicly stated line of reasoning for the policy. Plimsoll, whose opinions the Department actively sought and highly valued, supported the recognition on the same

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[54] A view expressed on at least two occasions: NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note 'Baltic states' for Greet and Philip Peters, 21.05.1974; Interview with the Minister by F. B. Cooper, 21.05.1974.

[55] NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974.

[56] NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf's submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974.

grounds.[57] Like Renouf, Plimsoll believed, as he told the West German ambassador to the Soviet Union, that it was "more realistic always to proceed on the basis of a factual situation".[58]

Many rather unfairly accused the government, as Liberal Senator Ivor Greenwood put it, of attempting to "curry favour" with the Russians, especially ahead of Whitlam's forthcoming visit to the Soviet Union.[59] There is no evidence of any kind of deal reached with the Kremlin, nor is there any reason to think that the recognition was some act of "appeasement" by the Australians, an accusation sometimes levelled against Whitlam's moderate-left Government. In fact, Renouf had argued against seeking any kind of *quid pro quo* arrangement on the grounds that "the Russians" probably didn't view the issue as negotiable anyhow, a view that was later vindicated in discussions with the Soviet embassy.[60]

Even privately, the government was adamant that the decision not be interpreted as some sort of favour to the Soviets. Indeed, John Dauth later described the policy as "dumb… in retrospect" for the very reason that Australia should never have offered the recognition "without extracting some price in return". To not do so, he continued, was "not the way in which you do business".[61]

Although there was no *quid pro quo* arrangement, there was a general expectation that the recognition would be well received by the Soviets, and that this would be a positive step in the détente process as a general principle. Dauth recalled that the recognition occurred "at a time when we thought that the Soviet Union was here to stay", a time when the Department saw the world as "bi-polar". He continued, "If the Soviets were offering, as appeared to be the case, some hand of friendship, we should match that." The recognition was not a matter of approval or disapproval of the 1940 annexation. Rather, "It just seemed silly not to recognise a reality about one of the superpowers."[62]

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57 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: F. B. Cooper's memo to Australian Embassy Moscow, 11.06.1974; 'Baltic states' handwritten note from various contributors, c. early June 1974.

58 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: J. Plimsoll's memo to Alan Renouf, 10.06.1974.

59 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Clipping from *The Australian* newspaper "Willesee trying 'curry favour with Russians'", undated. This was also a very common accusation levelled by Baltic protesters.

60 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf's submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974; NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Record of telephone conversation between Philip Peters and N. Poseliagin, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, 16.09.1974.

61 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

62 *Ibid.*

Both Whitlam and Renouf were themselves vocal advocates of détente, and their support for it appears to have influenced the recognition decision.[63] Speaking to the press at the United Nations in New York, Whitlam directly linked the Baltic issue with reducing "unnecessary tensions", invoking instances of what he perceived as the West stoking unrest in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia to support his case. The West, he claimed, could not help those countries then, and would not "lift a finger" to help the Baltic states now.[64]

Plimsoll was similarly confident that the policy would pay dividends regarding détente. He was especially excited about his new capacity to visit the Soviet Baltic republics, which he later described as the "principal advantage" of the recognition.[65] In his mind, such visits contributed both to bi-lateral Australian-Soviet relations and the relaxation of East-West relations more broadly, as he believed it helped those living inside the Soviet Union to maintain contact with the outside world.[66]

These views later resurfaced in full force when the time came to reverse the recognition in December 1975, at which time he predicted a disaster in Australian-Soviet relations, suggesting that even a complete break in diplomatic relations was possible. As explored later in the paper, these predictions turned out to be unfounded, though Plimsoll was still very annoyed that his advice had been ignored by the new government.[67]

This general expectation regarding easing East-West tensions should not be confused with fear of or coercion from the Soviets. True, three aspects of Australian-Soviet relations were mentioned in passing as potential points of tension that could be eased by the recognition. These were Australia's blossoming relationship with rival communist power China, Australia's recent refusal to entertain a Soviet-proposed joint space tracking station on Australian soil, and the continued listing of the Latvian Honorary Consul

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63 See: Renouf, *The Frightened Country*, 476–477; Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975* (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking, 1985), 30.

64 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "The Prime Minister meets UN Press Correspondents", 664–665.

65 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA Inward Cablegram 0.MS1426 from Moscow, 01.02.1975.

66 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Despatch No. 3/74 to Dr. Willesee from J. Plimsoll, 08.08.1974.

67 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 6: Letter to Alan Renouf from J. Plimsoll, 14.11.1975; Malcolm Fraser, Margaret Simons, *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* (Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2015), 456.

in Melbourne. However, these concerns were ambiguous, and were at best secondary considerations.[68]

What's more, the Australians did not even formally notify the Soviets when enacting the recognition, as would be expected if the recognition had been meant as some act of submission or accommodation. Rather, the Soviets were left to infer it from Plimsoll's visit. This was pointed out by a DFA officer when the New Zealanders announced their own *de jure* recognition, who noted that "unlike us [New Zealand] have decided to tell the Russians of the change".[69] Still, allegations of Soviet intimidation of Australia have persisted in the decades since the recognition, and in recent historiography these allegations have taken on the added element of an alleged, causal connection of the recognition to the CSCE negotiations. These claims are worth addressing in detail.

The Helsinki question

Both at the time of the recognition and historiographically, much has been made of the relationship between the recognition and the then ongoing CSCE negotiations, which were an important aspect of the détente process and resulted in the Helsinki Final Act (1975). Years later, Renouf defended the *de jure* recognition on the false grounds that the CSCE had led to the West taking "in effect the same decision" that Australia took in 1974.[70] Whitlam also referenced the conference in his correspondence with Madeleine Shuey, a University of Tasmania student who researched the recognition in the early 2000s.[71]

The most extensive claims, however, came from Tõnis Märtson, an Estonian researcher who claimed that there was a causal link between the CSCE and Australia's policy shift. Märtson argued that Australia, anticipating a general shift in Baltic policy towards *de jure* recognition following from the conference, sought to get ahead of events and implement its own recognition first. This argument is compelling considering Australia's desire to be, in Whitlam's words, "in the vanguard" rather than "in the

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68 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf's submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974. These points were not raised at any time before this submission, when discussions were underway to recommend *de jure* recognition.

69 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Confidential telex from Wellington, 18.07.1974.

70 Renouf, *The Frightened Country,* 19–21.

71 Madeleine Shuey, "The Quest for the Truth", *Lithuanian Papers*, 18 (2004), 57–59.

rearguard" in foreign policy matters.[72] What's more, Märtson also indicated proof of some Soviet influence in the decision, suggesting that *varjatud survet* ("covert" or "secret pressure") was applied to both Australia and New Zealand, and influenced the decision making of both countries. The Soviets, he argued, sought recognition from countries that were not party to the conference in the hopes that some sort of "reverse domino theory" in Baltic recognition would pressure other countries to follow suit.[73] This idea, interestingly, was also circulated by Baltic protestors and the Australian press at the time.[74]

Compelling as these claims are, the author's findings do not concur with Märtson's. There are several reasons for this. Most importantly, there is the simple matter that, as outlined above, this was an Australian domestic political phenomenon, and any evidence implicating either the CSCE or covert Soviet pressure is imprecise or contextual at best. All available evidence indicates that the Australians viewed the policy as nothing more than a minor piece of housekeeping, a "marginal issue" as John Dauth later described it.[75] It does not appear to have formed any part of a broader strategy towards Australian-Soviet relations outside of a general belief in the merits of détente.

An in-depth archival investigation of Australia's attitude towards the conference in the period of 1973–74 raises further questions regarding this "Helsinki theory". One year before the discussions around *de jure* recognition began, Australia's attitude towards the Helsinki negotiations had been one of a disinterested observer. For instance, when Canada enquired as to Australia's position on the Baltic issue *vis-à-vis* the conference, the issue was nonchalantly passed around various DFA branches before it was decided that, since Australia was "not a party to the CSCE… the Canadians will just have to make up their own minds as to how they play it".[76] One DFA officer described Australian views on any final settlement resulting from the negotiations as a policy consideration "that [falls] outside this

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72 Department of Foreign Affairs, "Prime Minister's Press Conference 19 December Relations with East Germany", *PM Transcripts*, 22.12.1972, https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3120 (accessed 30.08.2023).

73 Märtson, "Balti annekteerimise tunnustamine", 65–84.

74 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Clipping from *Sun News Pictorial Melbourne* 'Gough goes for 'realism'', 06.08.1974.

75 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

76 NAA, A1838, 1506/2 PART 1: Handwritten note 'Baltic states- Canadian note', 10.05.1973.

department's responsibilities".[77] Another noted similarly that the problem was "for us… a theoretical one".[78]

This ambiguous, disinterested position changed only after the decision was made to revisit the Baltic issue in May 1974, whereupon the "relationship" between the conference and Australia's position on the Baltic issue was noted.[79] Even then, it was not until after Whitlam had already finalised the *de jure* decision that the Department began to use the conference as a retrospective justification.[80] One officer later lumped the CSCE point in with other "*ex post facto* justifications" that had not been part of the original motivations for the recognition.[81] What this suggests is that the DFA was looking for retrospective justifications for a hastily improvised policy. After all, as one DFA official noted in private, as late as May 1974 "we did not know that there would be a policy change".[82]

It is also extremely unlikely that the DFA really anticipated a general revision of the West's position on the Baltic issue following from the conference. The Department was, for instance, certain that neither the United States nor Canada were considering the possibility of revising their respective recognition policies following the conference.[83] One DFA officer responded to his colleague's comment on the "probability" of widespread *de jure* recognition resulting from the conference by simply annotating it with "NO" in capital letters.[84] In any case, subsequent counsel in August 1975 from a departmental legal adviser dispelled any misconception that *de jure* recognition should be expected to arise from the conference.[85]

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77 NAA, A1838, 1506/2 PART 1: Attorney-General's Department note from A. H. Body to DFA Secretary Renouf, undated.

78 NAA, A1838, 1506/2 PART 1: Letter from H. Gilchrist to Counsellor of Canadian High Commission C.D. Fogerty, 08.06.1973.

79 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974.

80 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: 'Baltic Republics' background paper, c. early August 1974; NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: J. Plimsoll memo to Alan Renouf, 10.06.1974.

81 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA memo 'Background to the decision to recognise Baltic states', undated c. 1975.

82 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 4: Handwritten note 'Balts: Senator Greenwood's Questions', 31.10.1974.

83 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Letter from Assistant Secretary of State Linwood Holton to the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 31.05.1974; NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: DFA Inward Cablegram 0.OTo495 from Ottawa, 19.07.1974.

84 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Confidential 'Baltic Republics' background paper, undated.

85 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: 'Recognition of the Baltic states' paper by legal advisor E. Lauterpacht, 25.08.1975.

Meanwhile, allegations of "covert" Soviet pressure can similarly be dismissed using the available archival evidence. First and foremost was the hasty manner in which the recognition was implemented. This became quickly apparent after news of Plimsoll's visit to Tallinn, which had never been announced by the government, had leaked to the Australian public, courtesy of a story run by Reuters Moscow that reached the Australian press.[86] Whitlam's own Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, caught out in the unfolding political storm, complained to the DFA of having been "overtaken by events" and was confused about what Australia's new position actually was.[87]

The DFA itself was struggling to keep up with its own decision, undoubtedly due in part to the decision having been reached not by those usually responsible for such matters (the DFA's East Europe Section and Willesee), but by the Renouf, Whitlam, and Plimsoll clique. On 8–9 August, Canberra sent cables to several Australian diplomatic missions across the globe, asking them to "Please advise urgently" on their respective host countries' stance on the Baltic issue.[88] In the end, Willesee, eager to make a statement about the recognition to Parliament to address the controversy his government was facing, had to delay his statement because he was still waiting on this information to be returned to the DFA.[89]

This evidence of discord and muddled views within the Whitlam administration resulting from the recognition does not lend itself to some shadowy, undocumented arrangement with the Soviet Government. If such an agreement had been made, perhaps one relating to trade terms, immigration permits to Australia, or diplomatic support at the United Nations (and whichever other topics might have been relevant to some backroom arrangement), one would have expected better preparation by the Australians. This would have been instrumental in avoiding suspicion as to why the recognition decision was made.

Theories of Soviet coercion are further undermined by an analysis of the DFA's impressions of the Soviet position prior to the recognition, as well as the reaction to the recognition by the Soviets themselves.

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86 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: DFA Outward Cablegram 0.CH93587 to Moscow & Copenhagen, 04.08.1974.

87 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Handwritten note 'Conversation Kelly/ Peters FA', 05.08.1974.

88 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: DFA Outward Cablegrams from 1974; 0.CH95728 to Bonn (8 August), 0.CH95685 to Stockholm (8 August), 0.CH95683 to Berne & Vienna (8 August), 0.CH95727 to Copenhagen (8 August), & 0.CH95726 to Tokyo (9 August).

89 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Handwritten 'Note for File', 7 August & Handwritten note to Mr. Anderson from R. Kalnins, 8 August.

The red reaction

Unfortunately, evidence of direct Australian-Soviet interaction concerning the recognition issue is scarcer, but this is unsurprising considering that the recognition was an Australian domestic phenomenon. Most of what is known comes from general feelings felt by DFA officers and indirect statements by Soviet embassy officials. Regardless, there is sufficient evidence to dismiss speculation around Soviet meddling in Australia's Baltic recognition policy.

It is true that various DFA officials had some nebulous concerns about the Soviet view towards Australia's *de facto* recognition policy before July 1974. Philip Peters, the head of the East Europe Section, stated that he would "not be surprised" if the Soviets would approach Australia for clarification on its position.[90] Peters later offered vague statements about general Soviet efforts to push for Western recognition of the incorporation, but offered no evidence of how this had impacted Australia. Moreover, he acknowledged to N. Poseliagin, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, that Soviet "pressure" had played no role in the recognition.[91]

The more widespread feeling was that, as one DFA officer expressed, although "the Russians have never to my knowledge sought to persuade us to change our position", it would "accord with our broad foreign policy interests if we were to comply" in the event that they did.[92] Renouf similarly noted that the Soviet embassy had informally drawn attention to the "anomaly" of the continued listing of the Latvian Honorary Consul in Melbourne, though with the caveat that the Soviets had never pressured Australia towards "formal" recognition.[93]

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the lack of any kind of pressure to recognise the incorporation had upset some within the DFA in the lead-up to the *de jure* decision. To make such a concession while facing no tangible pressure to do so and without gaining anything in return, some felt, made the decision untactful, especially considering the potential for backlash from

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90 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note 'Baltic states' from Philip Peters to Mr. Greet and Mr. Dauth, c. May 1974.

91 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Record of telephone conversation between Philip Peters and N. Poseliagin, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, 05.08.1974.

92 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note for Secretary entitled 'The Baltic states', c. early May 1974.

93 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf's submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974.

the Balts.[94] As such, some, including Foreign Minister Willesee himself, preferred to "watch and wait", either to see if the Soviets approached them, or to gauge the reaction to the anticipated New Zealand recognition.[95]

This general impression within the DFA thus indicates Soviet dissatisfaction with Australia's policy, but no more than would be expected of any other Western country that continued to withhold *de jure* recognition, as indeed the vast majority did. The archives demonstrate that the Australians were generally wary of this dissatisfaction, and felt that the recognition, which seemed to progress the government's foreign policy agenda anyhow, could be a positive step in Australian-Soviet relations within the broader détente environment. This can in no way be construed as coercion on the part of the Soviets.

Moreover, the Soviet reaction to the policy, as well as its eventual annulment, was underwhelming. The only sign of any appreciation for the policy was, as reported by Australia's embassy in Moscow, that Soviet officials in Estonia had been "glad to assist with arrangements" for Plimsoll's visit, and that the Soviet foreign ministry had been "quick to realise the significance of the visit…".[96]

The reaction from the Soviet embassy in Canberra was muted, with First Secretary N. Poseliagin simply noting that there had been "no change whatsoever" in the Soviet position following the *de jure* recognition because the Soviets had always assumed that Australia recognised the incorporation anyhow.[97] Indeed, the embassy's first instinct upon learning of the recognition was not to show gratitude, but to stress to the Australians that they had not pressured them to change their policy.[98]

When it came to the Fraser Government's "de-recognition" in December 1975, the most tangible reaction from the Soviets came during an informal conversation between the Soviet ambassador, A. V. Basov, and East Europe Section head Philip Knight, at a farewell party for the embassy's Second Secretary V. I. Yushin. The ambassador, Knight reported, "went out of his way to raise with me the [recognition] question…". The ambassador said he did not understand why so much importance had been attached to the

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94 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Handwritten note 'Baltic states' for Greet and Peters, 21.05.1974.

95 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 2: Interview with the minister by F. B. Cooper, 21.05.1974.

96 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558, DFA brief entitled 'Baltic Republics', c. August 8, 1974.

97 NAA, A1209, 1974/6558, Record of telephone conversation between Philip Peters and N. Poseliagin, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, 16.09.1974.

98 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3, Record of telephone conversation between Philip Peters and N. Poseliagin, First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, 05.08.1974.

question and went on to explain the historical links between Russia and the Baltic region. Knight urged him to view the question "in its Australian domestic context". The ambassador interjected with an understanding "Da, da" (*yes, yes*), but complained that to act as Australia had done would be as if "the USSR were to declare that Tasmania was not truly part of Australia". The conversation was then interrupted, but Knight left the party feeling that there would be no reprisals from the Soviets, a hunch that later proved to be correct.[99]

Thus, in the end, the biggest protest by a Soviet official was a tired "Da, da" at a party, presumably with some drinking involved. The Soviets were reportedly second only to the Canadians in congratulating the newly elected Malcolm Fraser on his election victory.[100]

By far the biggest opposition to the withdrawal of *de jure* recognition came from the DFA itself, and especially Ambassador Plimsoll. Speaking with Canberra from the Moscow Embassy, Plimsoll asserted the move would be "very badly received here" with "serious adverse effects" on the Australian-Soviet relationship, perhaps even a complete break in diplomatic relations.[101] He even personally lobbied Fraser while in Australia, predicting a diplomatic disaster and urging him to reconsider. Fraser told him, "Look Jim, I just don't believe you…. [the Soviets] will try to behave as though it hasn't happened." He was so annoyed with Plimsoll that he almost asked him to leave.[102]

This lack of Soviet opposition to the withdrawal is yet further evidence against the "Soviet coercion" thesis. There was no coercion, but simply a general expectation by the Australians that the recognition would be warmly received in Moscow, a useful gesture in progressing the détente process. The lack of any real reaction by the Soviets to the recognition and its withdrawal is the *coup de grâce* for the coercion thesis: There is no trace of any Soviet involvement. The recognition was above all a product of the often-dull Australian domestic political scene.

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99 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 6: Record of conversation between Phillip Knight, Head of East Europe Section, A. V. Basov, USSR Ambassador, & V.I. Yushin, Second Secretary (Interpreter), 18.12.1975.

100 As reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. See: Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma*, 361.

101 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 6: Letter to Alan Renouf from J. Plimsoll, 14.11.1975.

102 Fraser, Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*, 456.

Lessons in Baltic history and fascism

This explanation for Australia's Baltic recognition begs the question: Why did Australia's ambassador to South Korea have to correct his bosses in Canberra on Soviet and Baltic history? Where could such an outlandishly simplified view of 1940 and all that followed, which would seem more at home in the annals of World War II according to Soviet historians than in an Australian diplomatic cable, have come from?

The "realism, détente, relations" explanation does reveal the fundamental reason why the recognition happened. But there were further underlying prejudices that seem to have informed the final decision. The first was a general belief that small nation states such as the Baltic republics had no place in contemporary international relations, and that it was better for them to exist within larger federations such as the Soviet Union. This was itself tied to fantastically simplified interpretations of the complexities of Baltic history.

The view that the three small Baltic states were troublesome and unnecessary was not unique to the Australians. Indeed, it is convincing that wartime British analysts, many of whom held deep reservations regarding the long-term economic and political viability of those republics, held some sway over the thinking of the Australians on the Baltic issue in 1974. Kaarel Piirimäe has written on the criticism by some British commentators that the republics were unfit to survive in modern international relations and should be encouraged to join larger economic or political unions and federations. E. H. Carr was one such proponent of the aforementioned "small state *realpolitik*", noting on the Baltic states specifically that their independence had come in the euphoric enthusiasm for self-determination of 1919, and that such "midget states" offered "limited economic opportunities of life" and were better off surrendering their economic and security needs to a great power like the Soviet Union. Carr described Baltic independence as "almost accidental", and had advised the British Foreign Office to accept the legitimacy of Soviet hegemony in the region on the grounds that it was the region's "chief arbiter".[103]

Recalling the usefulness of classical realist theory in explaining Whitlam's foreign policy, under Whitlam's government, Australia prioritised its relations with larger states and blocs at the expense of its relations with

[103] See especially: Kaarel Piirimäe, *Roosevelt, Churchill and the Baltic Question: Allied Relations during the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 85–92; Kaarel Piirimäe, "Liberals and nationalism: E. H. Carr, Walter Lippmann and the Baltic States from 1918 to 1944", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 48:2 (2017), 183–203.

smaller non-communist Asian states like Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, and Malaysia, which had once occupied an important space in Australian foreign policy. The basis for this was a practical assessment of who was larger and more powerful, rather than who identified with which ideology.[104]

But this policy was also underpinned by the view, held by Whitlam and many within the DFA, that small nation states were a "stupid" and backward entity in modern global politics, a view that became very apparent in the Baltic case.[105] One of Whitlam's own senators, John Wheeldon, later stated:

> "Whitlam believed small countries like Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia couldn't survive and shouldn't survive… The progressive thing to do was to see that they were incorporated into a big country where they would be better off."[106]

In this, the Baltic issue was tied closely with that of East Timor. This former Portuguese colony, whose prospects for independence were abruptly quashed by its brutal annexation into Indonesia in 1976, was a much more pressing issue in Australian foreign policy at the time than were the distant Baltic republics. John Dauth recalled that "micro-states" like East Timor, subject to various economic and political pressures, were regarded as undesirable because they "just made trouble". He viewed the Baltic issue as a "logical extension" of this line of thought in Whitlam's mind.[107]

Renouf's submission of 2 July to Whitlam referred to the Baltic republics as mere "territories", comparing the recognition he was proposing to international recognition of Soviet acquisition of Finnish territory following from the Soviet-Finnish Winter War (1939–40) and Continuation War (1941–44).[108] Philip Peters also regarded the republics as "territories" that "have been historically parts of Russia".[109] Whitlam himself made the same claim in his United Nations press conference mentioned earlier.[110] Departmental memos passed around many weeks after Plimsoll's visit to Tallinn

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104 Halvorson, "Internationalist or Realist?", 7.

105 "Timor invasion plan 'condoned by Whitlam'", *Canberra Times*, 19.03.1976, 1, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110808894 (accessed 01.09.2023).

106 Anthony R. G. Griffiths, "'Free the Baltics:' Australian Opinion on the Baltic States", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 25:1 (1994), 89–98 (90).

107 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

108 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Alan Renouf submission to Acting Minister Whitlam entitled 'Status of Baltic republics', 02.07.1974.

109 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 3: Australian Embassy Tokyo memo to Alan Renouf, 06.08.1974.

110 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "The Prime Minister meets UN Press Correspondents", 664–665.

even went so far as to describe questions of Baltic sovereignty and Soviet imperialism as subjective and "philosophical".[111]

So it was that Bourchier found himself, as he saw it, politely amending his superiors' erroneous understanding of Baltic history. This line of reasoning sought to minimise the trauma and injustice of Soviet rule in the Baltic states and simplify hundreds of years of complex history into broad statements about "Russian" territories. Though their existence within the Whitlam administration is noteworthy, such statements really only began to surface sometime after the recognition decision had already been made.

With this in mind, these impressions are best interpreted not as a fundamental impetus to accord *de jure* recognition, but as a general, background prejudice that, in the minds of those who held them, legitimised the recognition. This was, after all, a decidedly realist government. It was not interested in getting bogged down in the finer points of World War II history and international law theory, but in dealing with what it interpreted as the present-day reality.

However, there is a second, more distasteful prejudice that appears to have factored more directly into Australia's Baltic recognition. This was an apparent ethnic prejudice against Balts held by Prime Minister Whitlam himself. The evidence for this stems partially from new archival materials, but predominantly from second-hand testimony from persons somehow involved in the recognition. The first signs of this prejudice emerged in Brisbane on 22 November 1974, when Whitlam was giving a speech amidst a state election in Queensland. The speech was attended by Baltic protestors, one of whom, an Estonian named Tiina Taemets, had her placard destroyed following some kind of confrontation in the crowd. When she approached Whitlam after his speech, he leaned in and, whispering into her ear, called her a "dirty Nazi bitch". Taemets signed a Statutory Declaration to this effect, though Whitlam denied the exchange, claiming she was "a little hysterical".[112]

The second was a verbal clash on Baltic history with a geography teacher named Tom McGlynn at a Tasmanian high school on 26 June 1975. Whitlam was speaking before the school on the campaign trail for a local by-election. When the recognition issue was raised by a student in the crowd, Whitlam defended his government's decision on the grounds that the Baltic republics had enjoyed independence only for the twenty-year interwar

[111] NAA, A1209, 1974/6558: Foreign Affairs report from R. A. Woolcott to Acting Minister, 24.09.1974.

[112] Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma*, 311–312.

period. When McGlynn, who himself had lived in Eastern Europe for some years, pointed out that none of the republics had voluntarily surrendered their sovereignty, Whitlam erupted. He shouted before the crowd, which included many students who would soon be voting for the first time in their lives, that the interwar republics had all been "fascist". The argument continued for some time, and Whitlam went on to deride both McGlynn as a "disgrace to [his] profession" and the inter-war republics as "as much a democracy as Hitler's Germany".[113]

Correspondence between Whitlam and the National Library of Australia, contained within Whitlam's personal archive, demonstrates that these outbursts were not simply a product of Whitlam's infamous temper.[114] In fact, Whitlam was actively researching the topic of interwar Baltic fascism, having requested a search for the terms "fascist" and "democratic" in connection with the interwar Baltic republics.[115]

Whitlam was correctly informed that the interwar political situation in the three states had been quite different from one another and was much more complicated than he had portrayed them in his outbursts. He may have been disappointed to learn that, for instance, both Estonia and Latvia "were successful in diminishing the power of the radical right" and that, as the library informed him in its final report, Latvia was "not fascist, nor by any stretch of the imagination as bad as Hitler's Germany".[116] Given this very specific wording, and that these search results were returned to Whitlam just days after his spat with McGlynn, the Prime Minister was presumably looking for ammunition for any future impromptu history lectures on Baltic history he might be forced to give. Whitlam did make another enquiry with the library a few days later regarding Baltic history during World War II, but what exactly he was looking for this time is unclear.[117]

Whitlam's animosity towards Australian-Balts could have been informed by the popular, well-placed belief within the Labor Party that the overwhelmingly anti-communist displaced persons consistently voted for the Liberal-Country Coalition, shunning the mildly left-wing Labor

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113 Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma*, 312–313.

114 As John Dauth noted, Whitlam "spoke off the cuff a bit too frequently": John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

115 NAA, M522, B.1: Letter from G. Chandler, National Library of Australia Director-General, to E. G. Whitlam, 04.07.1975.

116 NAA, M522, B.1: Clipping from *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1974) & National Library summary for Whitlam 'The Baltic states between the two World Wars', c. July 1975.

117 NAA, M522, B.1: Letter from G. Chandler, National Library of Australia Director-General, to E.G. Whitlam, 10.07.1975.

Party because it smelled vaguely communist. Indeed, the Balts in particular were known to vote conservatively, with many of them having come to Australia to get as far away from the Soviet Union as possible after the war.[118]

This would explain Whitlam's direct identification of Australian-Balts with refugees fleeing South Vietnam. One of Whitlam's own ministers later recalled how Whitlam's Government was under pressure to give refuge to those Vietnamese people who were facing persecution as Saigon fell to the communists in April 1975. Why, Whitlam asked two of his ministers, should Australia risk "opening [its] doors to war criminals?" When pressed, he exploded, saying, "I'm not having hundreds of fucking Vietnamese Balts coming into this country with their religious and political hatreds against us."[119] This was, notably, not the only recorded instance of his use of the term "Vietnamese Balts" or "Asian Balts".[120]

Whitlam's use of the term "Balts", once a general, derogatory word in Australia used to describe post-war migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, in the context of Vietnamese refugees fleeing communist persecution is quite damning in itself. Similarly, this mention of anti-communist war criminals was undoubtedly in reference to cases of German collaborators and alleged war criminals being resettled in Australia after the war, taking advantage of Australia's rather lax screening process for refugees from the region.[121]

Whitlam had a tendency to lump all refugees from Eastern Europe into one group, a monolithic category of people who, in his own words, "had collaborated with Hitler and Mussolini and who therefore could not return to their countries of birth…".[122] Balts, John Dauth recalled, "… tended to be lumped in with Croatians and other small communities", a noteworthy observation with Ustaše terrorism being such a topical issue under the Whitlam Government.[123]

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118 Griffiths, "Free the Baltics", 90.

119 Clyde Cameron, *China, Communism and Coca Cola* (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1980), 230.

120 Brian Carroll, *Whitlam* (Kenthurst, New South Wales: Rosenberg, 2011), 193.

121 For two discussions on the failings in the screening process, see: Mark Aarons, *War Criminals Welcome: Australia, a Sanctuary for Fugitive War Criminals since 1945* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2001); Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: Newsouth, 2017), 21–74.

122 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 167.

123 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022. Multiple terrorist attacks and other forms of political violence in Australia were attributed to the Ustaše in the early 1970s. This prompted a crackdown on known activists and sympathisers in late 1972 by the newly elected Whitlam Government.

If other members of Whitlam's government or the DFA shared such opinions about Balts, they kept them to themselves. Labor Senator John Wheeldon distanced himself publicly from such generalisations, correctly noting that German collaborators were a minority among displaced persons communities.[124] However, it should be noted that such views were probably not limited to Whitlam himself, and indeed similar prejudices were held on the political left in other countries where Baltic displaced persons settled.[125]

Still, it was Whitlam, in his capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1973, who had set the events of Australia's Baltic recognition in motion with his unilateral revision of the formerly vague *de facto* recognition. Moreover, he alone signed the DFA recommendation to formally move to *de jure* recognition despite his very recent promises to the Balts against doing so. Such prejudices against the Balts and their homelands, in particular the implicit judgment that these peoples ruled by formerly "fascist" regimes were better off in the Soviet Union than as independent states, thus provide one more reason why Whitlam might have favoured *de jure* recognition in the Baltic case.

Conclusion

Going off the Australian archives alone, the implications of Australia's Baltic recognition for our understanding of Soviet diplomatic history are difficult to determine. Given the lack of forewarning regarding the recognition and their muted response to it, it seems the Soviets were just as surprised as everybody else by the recognition and were unsure how to react. There were no expressions of appreciation; instead, the Australians were met with a response that could be summed up as "Well yes, but this issue has been long-since resolved anyway". It does not seem the Soviets expected other countries to follow suit. If they had, one would have expected more than mild grumbling following the Fraser Government's withdrawal of this policy, the policy itself being something the Soviets had neither asked for nor expected.

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124 NAA, M522, B.1: Hansard clipping featuring Senator Wheeldon, 18.09.1974. He himself claimed to know a Latvian family, former social democrats now living in Perth, who partook in anti-German resistance in occupied Latvia and were "rewarded" with arrest by Soviet troops after the Red Army re-occupation. He did, however, stress that the recognition decision had been one of recognising "an unpalatable fact".

125 Such views were also found, for example, in the Swedish labour movement. See: Anu Mai Kõll, "Baltic Refugees and Policy Formation in Sweden, 1940–1950', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 46:4 (2015), 427–434 (432).

The most likely explanation seems to be that the Soviet Union was not anticipating any Western country to accord *de jure* recognition by this point and did not know how to react when one did. In the end, the subsequent withdrawal was water under the bridge. Mere weeks after Fraser took power and rescinded the *de jure* recognition, Plimsoll was reporting that Australian-Soviet relations would seemingly "continue to be quite good despite the change of government in Australia".[126] This could indicate that the matter of Western non-recognition of the Baltic incorporation was, by this point, of marginal significance to the Soviet Government, though such a conclusion is tempered by the marginality of Australia itself as a diplomatic force in the Cold War.

The implications for Australian history are more readily apparent. Australia's new, pragmatic approach to relations with the Eastern Bloc under Whitlam is generally considered to have been effective in pursuing its intended goals.[127] The Baltic recognition, clearly, was one exception, with the Soviets reacting reservedly, and almost dismissively in contrast to the Australians' expectations. The recognition also lends credence to realist interpretations of the Whitlam Government's foreign policy, especially the tendency to disregard the idealist rhetoric that underpinned this foreign policy in cases where Whitlam, ever the opportunist, believed it would progress Australian national interest.

The recognition also demonstrates that the ideological foundations of the Cold War were inescapable even in the détente era. Though tensions were at an all-time low and compromises could be reached in certain facets of international relations, the West's fundamental refusal to recognise the Soviet Union's ill-gotten wartime gains in Eastern and Central Europe as legitimate remained steadfast. No one followed Australia and New Zealand's lead in "upgrading" from *de facto* to *de jure* recognition, and the Balts loudly made their moral outrage at the two countries' actions known to the world.

Finally, the Australian recognition is an interesting case study in the broader history of the Baltic issue during the Cold War. Here was an instance where realism won out in a Western country's assessment of the merits of according *de jure* recognition, an assessment that turned out to be poor. The issue turned into a minor disaster for the government because it failed to adequately grasp both the issue's historical context and the sensitivities surrounding it, both domestically and internationally. The

126 NAA, M1129: Plimsoll/J, Plimsoll's letter to Lord Casey, 12.01.1976.
127 Halvorson, "Internationalist or Realist?", 10.

ever-hawkish Balts' ability to mobilise themselves against any move to *de jure* recognition by a country where a Baltic minority existed (principally the USA, Canada, and Australia) was "underestimated", in the words of one DFA officer, to the government's detriment.[128] This was a mistake that would not be repeated since, even as late as 1989, foreign affairs officials were noting that "the Australian Baltic community is well aware of the political clout it is able to wield…".[129]

By late 1974, some of Whitlam's advisers were, apparently, conceding that the policy had been a mistake.[130] John Dauth later agreed with this assessment. Although lauding the other foreign policy innovations engineered under Whitlam, he "acknowledged many times afterwards that we did the wrong thing in 1974". However, he continued, "We were not to know that, though." He added that "Hindsight is a wonderful tool".[131] If any Western country had been considering following Australia, the substantial reaction by Balts worldwide against it must have convinced many policy makers that to do so simply would not be worth the trouble. That this recognition "domino theory", a concern many of the protestors shared, never came to fruition is noteworthy in assessing the policy's failure, even if in May 1974 Australia did not really anticipate that other countries would follow its lead (barring New Zealand). The Government was not helped by its own lack of preparation in implementing the policy, which translated into a sloppy defence and an apparent aura of secrecy that was heavily criticised by the press, the Opposition, members of the public (Balts or otherwise), and even in some cases the Whitlam administration's own officials and public servicepeople.

In the end, Bourchier's dissent had little effect on the government. Whatever vindication the Australians might have felt from the announcement of New Zealand's *de jure* recognition (also on the grounds of acknowledging the "realities of the situation") was undoubtedly overshadowed by a feeling that the policy had been more trouble than it was worth.[132] Little-to-no preparation of a coherent explanation outside of "recognising existing realities", and the unexpectedness of the international protest movement

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128 NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: DFA memo 'Background to the decision to recognise Baltic states', undated c. 1975.

129 NAA, A9737, 1990/3788 PART 3: Minute paper 'Latvian Honourary Consulate: Vice Consul Position', 28.11.1989.

130 As reported in the *Washington Post*. See: Keith Suter, "Australia's New Policy on Recognising Governments", *The Australian Quarterly,* 61:1 (1989), 59–71 (68).

131 John Dauth, Interview with author, 10.12.2022.

132 Dunsdorfs, *The Baltic Dilemma*, 101.

had, by this point, done their damage. Those who read Bourchier's memo agreed it was too late to amend the original paper, and though agreeing that Bourchier's suggestions were "good ones", the general feeling was that "we should [not] wake the subject up again".[133] Canberra, not wishing to draw further media or protest attention to this controversial subject, preferred to let sleeping dogs lie.

Keywords: Australia; Baltic; recognition; Soviet; Cold War

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Kokkuvõte: *Realism, fašism ja Austraalia külm sõda: Balti riikide annekteerimise de jure tunnustamine Whitlami valituse ajal*

1974. aastal tunnustas Austraalia 1940. aastal toimunud Eesti, Läti ja Leedu annekteerimist. Austraalia poliitilise suuna muutumine leiboristide partei moodustatud valitsuses peaminister Gough Whitlami ajal oli külma sõja kontekstis veider vahejuhtum, mida pole piisavalt uuritud. See paljastab mõndagi nii Austraalia kui Nõukogude Liidu suhtumise kohta Balti küsimusse *détente*'i perioodil. See oli samuti märgiline hetk tuhandete Balti riikidest Austraaliasse põgenenud baltlaste jaoks, kes protesteerisid selle otsuse vastu. Sellises olukorras muutis Austraalia oma poliitikat taas ning pöördus tagasi *de facto* tunnustamise juurde kui Whitlami ametijärglane Malcom Fraser 1975. aastal võimule tuli.

Uued arhiiviallikad, mis pärinevad peamiselt Austraalia välisministeeriumist, ning intervjuud võtmeisikutega annavad ülevaate senises ajalookirjutuses lahtiseks jäänud teemast, miks Balti riikide annekteerimist tunnustati. Sellele küsimusele vastamiseks uuritakse allikmaterjale aastast 1972 kuni 1974. aasta keskpaigani ehk Whitlami valitsuse algusest kuni ajani, mil *de facto* tunnustus muudeti *de jure* tunnustuseks.

[133] NAA, A1838, 69/1/3/8 PART 5: Handwritten note 'For Mr. Greet', 25.10.1974.

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Artikkel näitab, kuidas see otsus toimus kahe sammuna. Esimene otsus sündis 1972. aasta teisel poolel, mil Whitlam eiras välisministeeriumi soovitust ja muutis Austraalia *de facto* tunnustuspoliitika sõnastust. See sillutas tee tunnustamisele *de jure* 1974. aasta keskel, kuigi siis toimus see välisministeeriumi soovitusel. Artikkel asetab tunnustamisotsuse selgelt Austraalia tollase välispoliitika paradigmadesse, mis näitab, et põhiline motiveeriv faktor oli reaalpoliitiline vaatenurk, toetus *détente*'ile ja ebamäärased ideed Austraalia ja Nõukogude Liidu suhete parandamiseks.

Artikkel seab kahtluse alla varasemate uurijate oletused, et poliitika sündis kahtlastel asjaoludel ning eelkõige selle idee, et tunnustamisotsus tulenes Nõukogude Liidu valitsuse survest. Kõrvale võib jätta ka oletuse, et tunnustus oli seotud toona käimasolevate Euroopa julgeoleku- ja koostöökonverentsi läbirääkimistega, mis peagi tipnesid Helsingi lõppaktiga. Nende kahe idee vastu räägib austraallaste kohmakus tunnustuse väljakuulutamisel ja huvipuudus Helsingi protsessi vastu, eelnevate konsultatsioonide puudumine Nõukogude Liidu valitusega ning viimase vähene reaktsioon. Näis, et Nõukogude Liidu valitsus oli sama üllatunud kui kõik teised ega teadnud, kuidas reageerida.

Hoolimata *de jure* tunnustuse sünniloo täpsustamisest ja eelnevalt mainitud aspektidest, oli ka teisi taustategurid. Esiteks oli Austraalia tolleaegses poliitilise ja diplomaatilise eliidi hulgas levinud reaalpoliitiline arvamus, et väikesed rahvusriigid, nagu Balti vabariigid, ei olnud määratud ellu jääma ja neil on "parem" suuremas riikide kogumis nagu Nõukogude Liit. Mõned Austraalia valitsuse liikmed kahtlesid Balti riikide suveräänsustaotluses. Teine ebameeldiv tegur oli Whitlami etniline eelarvamus Austraalia baltlaste suhtes. Whitlam nimetas mitmel korral Baltikumist pärit inimesi natsideks ja nende kodumaad fašistlikuks. Whitlam ei soovinud vastu võtta Lõuna-Vietnamist saabuvaid pagulasi, sest ta eeldas, et sarnaselt baltlastele, esindavad nad kommunismivastast ja konservatiivset maailmavaadet, mis on ohtlik leiboristide positsioonile. Tema veendumust tugevdas ka asjaolu, et Austraalia sõjajärgses immigratsioonisüsteemis oli taustauuringute süsteem puudulik, mistõttu jõudis Austraaliasse väidetavalt sõjakurjategijaid, kes varjasid end Balti riikidest pärit ümberasujate hulgas.

Baltikumi annekteerimise tunnustamise saaga Austraalias on huvitav juhtumiuuring Balti küsimuse ajaloos külma sõja ajal. Nõukogude Liidu suhtes üldise hea tahte žestina mõeldud samm ei saavutanud pingelanguse tingimustes erilist edu. Nõukogude Liidu valitsus ei palunud poliitika muutmist ega esitanud ka tõelist protesti, kui Fraser varasema olukorra taastas. Võimalik, et Nõukogude Liit ei pidanud laiemas plaanis realistlikuks väljavaadet, et lääneriigid muudavad oma seisukohta Balti küsimuses

ega uskunud, et Austraalia samm põhjustab *de jure* tunnustamise doomino-efekti Läänes. Tähelepanuväärne on ka Baltikumi annekteerimise tunnustamise saaga mõju meie arusaamale selle ajastu Austraalia välispoliitikast.

Märksõnad: Austraalia; Baltikum; tunnustamine; Nõukogude Liit; külm sõda

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