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The Curious Case of Aistija: Sidelights on Latvian–Lithuanian Rapprochement During the 20th Century

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Abstract

The nascent Aistijan movement centred around the idea of establishing a Latvian–Lithuanian state following the Second World War. This article surveys the background of the idea, with particular attention to the public diplomacy of Lithuanian American émigrés, demonstrating its prevalence during the First World War. The activities of interwar Latvian and Lithuanian rapprochement societies are outlined, noting the prominence of the Aestii – the earliest recorded inhabitants of the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea – in both academic and popular history, in addition to the emergence of the Aistijan movement following the Second World War. Examining the initial successes and rapid decline of the movement, the article also charts developments and material circumstances of language learning practices in connection with the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state.

Keywords

Aistija, émigré propaganda, Lithuanian-Latvian state, public diplomacy, rapprochement societies

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Introduction

In spring 1992, a call was published in the Latvian exile press for people to 'save evidence of the history of exile' by donating periodicals 'nearing the end of their useful lives' as, over time, 'folds break, the low-value paper crumbles or darkens, the ink bleeds or fades, and the printed word becomes illegible' (OGR, 1992, p. 1). More specifically, the initiative sought to commit to microfilm Latvian newspapers that had been printed in displaced persons (DP) camps following the Second World War, predominantly from Germany, but also Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. This project was initiated by Professor Valters Nollendorfs (b. 1931) and implemented at Münster University Library, with Ojārs G. Rozītis (b. 1951) managing the collection, examination, and organisation of the materials (Kince, 2000, p. 8). Eight years later, in spring 2000, a copy of the microfilm was received by the Misiņa Library in Riga, an overview of its contents noting an 'interesting newspaper, *Aistija*, dedicated to cooperation between Latvians and Lithuanians' (Kince, 2000, p. 8). The name of the periodical was a direct reference to the idea of Aistija, the notion of establishing a common Latvian–Lithuanian state, around which a nascent transnational movement developed in the wake of the Second World War, albeit briefly.

The idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state is generally considered to have been short-lived, culminating in a brief period of wider interest during the final years of the First World War, centred around the activities of Jonas Šliūpas (1861–1944), a prominent figure in the Lithuanian national awakening (Anderson, 1965, p. 42; Balkelis, 2009, p. 31; Genzelis, 2007, pp. 75–76; Gimžauskas, 2006, p. 193; Jurkynas, 2004, p. 6; Kaslas, 1976, p. 119; Rauch, 1974,

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pp. 31, 107; Žalys, 1999, pp. 99–100). Although a marginal aspect of Latvian and Lithuanian history, the notion of a common state nevertheless had demonstrable appeal to a broader cross section of society; yet research of the phenomenon remains largely focussed upon the activities of Šliūpas. While a handful of studies have examined (or intersected with) the phenomenon in more detail (see, e.g., Butkus, 1993; Mačiulis, 2011; Pivoras, 2020, 2021) they have not extended beyond the interwar period. This is partly due to its framing as the 'first tentative steps to develop the idea of a union among the Baltic countries' (Kaslas, 1976, p. 119), which culminated in the *Treaty of Good Understanding and Co-operation* (1934), the first legislated co-operation in foreign policy between the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, known as the Baltic Entente. This interpretation can be traced to the late 1930s, when Bronis J. Kaslas (previously Bronius Kazlauskas, 1910–1996) noted that the 'first embryo of the Baltic Entente can be found in the dedicated works, from 1917, by one of the apostles of the Lithuanian Renaissance, Doctor Šliūpas, [who sought] to show the usefulness of a Letto-Lithuanian union' (Kazlauskas, 1939, p. 80). While the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state did indeed intersect with broader region-building dynamics at the end of the First World War, it was not initially envisaged in such a context.

Proponents of Aistija emerged during the interwar period, and a nascent movement later centring around Jūlijs Bračs (1909–1984), a Latvian school teacher and historian, following the Second World War. As a distinctly political concept, a Latvian–Lithuanian state can be traced to the mid-1880s, when it was first articulated in the Lithuanian American press by Šliūpas. Bračs recognised Šliūpas as 'the first to develop the project of Lithuanian-Latvian federation' (Bračs (1954), p. 13). Moreover, Bračs believed that the 'unification of Latvians and Lithuanians cannot be linked to Pan-Baltia or any similar union' and that they should 'unite on a national and organic basis' (Bračs, 1934, p. 205). The connection between the endeavours of Šliūpas and Bračs have been obscured by state- and nation-centric history writing, further compounded by the perceived marginality of support for a Latvian–Lithuanian state. Nevertheless, the perennial character of notions of a common state invites further investigation. Besides charting the trajectory of the idea from Šliūpas' conception of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic to Bračs idea 'of a common Aistijan state with one parliament and one army' (Akmentiņš, 1992, p. 6; Akmentiņš, 1993, p. 2; Bračs, [1954], p. 12), this article also provides an overview of changes in attitudes to language learning practices connected to the phenomenon during the 20th century. Language was a fundamental component of the notion to establish a common state, which Bračs considered to be the 'most important bridge for the rapprochement of Latvians and Lithuanians' (Bračs, [1954] Bračs, [1954], p. 12). However, just as visions of a common state underwent changes and reinterpretations, so did understandings of the differences between the two languages, along with the material circumstances of proponents of a Latvian–Lithuanian state.

Historical background

The notion of a Latvian–Lithuanian state is inextricably linked to the historical personality of Šliūpas. Born in Rakandžiai, a Lithuanian village near the city of Šiauliai, in the spring of 1861, he later attended gymnasium in Mitava (present day Jelgava, Latvia). Spending part of his formative years and his adolescence living and studying among Latvians is considered to be the period in which the seed of his idea of a common state was planted (Jakštas, 1979, pp. 26–27; Mačiulis, 2011, p. 94; Švec, 2016, pp. 269–271). He emigrated to the United States of America in the summer of 1884, after being blacklisted from universities in the Russian Empire for participating in a student protest, subsequently drawing the negative attention of Russian and Prussian authorities for his patriotic activities (Perrin, 2013, p. 181; Vingėla, 1926, pp. 4–10). Arriving in New York in June 1884, Šliūpas possessed no trade, and had no knowledge of the English language (Perrin, 2013, p. 187). Nevertheless, he quickly established himself in the Lithuanian American community, striking up a partnership with newspaper publisher Mykolas Tvarauskas (1844–1921). The two men undertook to publish a weekly newspaper called *Unija* (Union), initially conceived as a bilingual Polish and Lithuanian initiative (Krapauskas, 2000, pp. 136–137; Perrin, 2013, pp. 181–187). According to Šliūpas, his main priority after emigrating to the US was promoting 'Lithuanianness with the ideal of a free Lithuania-Latvia' (Šliūpas, 1927, p. 100), and it was in *Unija* that he first published his conception of 'a Lithuanian-Latvian republic like France, Switzerland and similar states' (K. [Šliūpas], 1885, p. 2). This was not only the beginning of a Latvian–Lithuanian state as a distinct political notion but also among the earliest articulations of Lithuanian independence (Perrin, 2013, p. 188).

Šliūpas promoted Latvian–Lithuanian unity throughout his life, though his advocacy of a common state, specifically his ideal of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic, was pragmatic. He utilised periods of political upheaval during which there was the potential for Lithuanians to gain independence from (or at least autonomy within) the Russian Empire. Consequently, until 1905, Šliūpas focused on other priorities which he had set himself upon his arrival in the US. These were essentially separating Lithuanians 'from Polish influence, which was then expressed especially through the Polish Church', and raising the level of Lithuanian national consciousness and education through 'science [...], shaking off, among other things, the destructive influence of religious dogmas' (Šliūpas, 1927, p. 100). These priorities,

which he pursued primarily by promoting socialism among Lithuanians (Perrin, 2013, pp. 211, 252), contributed to his collaboration with Tvarauskas being short-lived. Throughout this period, Šliūpas was convinced of an imminent clash in Europe between Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism, which would become a war of empires, though he also viewed such a potential development as an opportunity to gain political emancipation for Lithuanians (Mačiulis, 2011, p. 87) and, by extension, Latvians. As such, during the 1905 Russian Revolution, he published an appeal to his compatriots that 'Lithuania and Latvia unite as brother and brother, and let the differences that have separated them for so many centuries disappear' ([Šliūpas], 1905, p. 51). Šliūpas was not the only prominent figure of the Lithuanian national awakening considering the potential of a Latvian–Lithuanian state during this period.

As a consequence of the Russian Revolution, the Great Seimas of Vilnius – an assembly of approximately 2,000 representatives from within and beyond the boundaries of ethnographic Lithuania – was convened in December 1905, at which Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927) organised discussion on the question of Lithuanian–Latvian unity (Grigaravičius, 2017, p. 106; Miknys, 2019, p. 290). Mykolas Sleževičius (1882–1939) attended the Great Seimas, representing the Lithuanians of Odessa and delivering the resolutions of their own congress which included the statement that it was 'absolutely necessary to unite with the Latvians as soon as possible' (Genzelis, 2007, p. 75; quotation: Motieka, 2005, p. 281). Inspired by the Great Seimas, together with the priest Jonas Žilius-Jonila (1870–1932), Šliūpas organised a Lithuanian American political conference in Philadelphia, which took place in February 1906 (Perrin, 2013, pp. 199–200). The resolutions adopted by the conference in Philadelphia included demanding the unification of Lithuania and Latvia within an autonomous unit (Perrin, 2013, p. 200; Szlupas, 1915, pp. 93–94; Šlekys, 2011, p. 62).

While Šliūpas' specific ideal of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic does not appear to have had a significant number of ardent supporters, there was a perceptible inclination (or at least willingness) among Lithuanians towards unity with Latvians. Territory that would come to constitute part of the Republic of Latvia was often considered to form part of historical and ethnographic Lithuania. For example, Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis (1880–1951), the self-styled Count of Garliava (Senn, 1977, p. 16), considered the Dauguva to be a Lithuanian river – the second greatest after the Nemunas – and to him the geographic limits of Lithuania extended as far north as the Vidzeme Highlands (Lat.: *Vidzemes augstiene*) in present-day northeastern Latvia (Mačiulis, 2011, p. 87). Ideas of Latvians forming part of the Lithuanian nation were common among Lithuanians throughout the first decades of the 20th century. In 1911, Gabrys, who historian Alfred Erich Senn (1932–2016) described as the most prominent Lithuanian political figure in Western Europe before 1916, founded the Lithuanian Information Bureau in Paris to circulate propaganda about the political goals of Lithuanians (Gabrys-Paršaitis, 2007, p. 9; Kiaupa, 2002, p. 308; Misiūnas, 2008, pp. 12–13; Senn, 1967, p. 411; Senn, 1977, p. 16). In the first memorandum of this initiative, Gabrys states that the '*Lettons* (*Latviai*), of whom there are about two millions, who lived [sic] in Courland and Livonia in Russia, belong to the Lithuanians, considered from an ethnological standpoint' (Gabrys, 1911, p. 5). Although articulations of a Latvian–Lithuanian state were less frequent, the notion of Latvians constituting part of the Lithuanian nation were commonplace among Lithuanians on both sides of the Atlantic.

For Šliūpas, the First World War – the collision of Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism that he had been anticipating since the 1880s – presented a significant opportunity to advance his proposal of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic. With the outbreak of the First World War, Šliūpas wrote *Lithuania in Retrospect and Prospect* (1915), his first foray into English-language public diplomacy on behalf of an independent Lithuania, which he considered synonymous with a Lithuanian–Latvian republic. The publisher's note in the book stated that it was 'the first complete, though brief, account of the history of Lithuania in the English language', written by someone 'who has himself been in large measure responsible for the reawakening of the [Lithuanian] nation' (Szlupas, 1915, p. 4). Though ostensibly promoting the idea of an independent Lithuanian state, Šliūpas 'advocated the establishment of a Letto-Lithuanian Republic', broadcasting that 'the Lithuanians hope to attain freedom for the Letto-Lithuanian race' (Szlupas, 1915, pp. 94–96). Such sentiments became a prominent feature of Lithuanian émigrés' public diplomacy. Already in 1915, while reviewing the various political ideas proclaimed in connection with visions of Lithuanian independence, publicist Albinas Rimka (1886–1944) remarked that the notion of a 'federated independent state for the Baltic peoples, i.e., especially for Latvians and Lithuanians' was advocated by 'individual persons from various currents, not more left-wing than the right-wing of the democratic movement' (Rimka, 1915, p. 54).

Calls for a Latvian-Lithuanian state were found across political and religious divides. For example, Antanas Milukas (1871–1943), a priest and editor of the Lithuanian American Catholic magazine *Žvaigždė* (The Star) between 1903 and 1942, spoke regularly at rallies from the beginning of the First World War, entreating his audiences to adopt resolutions expressing the desire that 'the united lands of Lithuania together with Latvia form one federal Lithuanian-Latvian state' and that citizens 'should have universal equal voting rights on the example of the United States' (Julės, 1931, pp. 51–52). As recounted by Milukas' long-term collaborator Julija Pranaitytė (1881–1944)—under the

name Pranaičių Julės; one of several pseudonyms – he later translated a series of articles from Lithuanian to English that were written by the priest Antanas Jusaitis (1871–1942) and published in *Žvaigždė* in 1917. The translated articles were bound in a volume called *The History of the Lithuanian Nation and Its Present National Aspirations* (1918) and copies – which conveyed that the 'ideal of the future of the Lithuanians is a complete, united Lithuania, a free Lithuania; if possible, in confederation with the equally independent and undivided Lettland' (Jusaitis, 1918, p. 107) – were gifted to US President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) and the US delegates at the Paris Peace Conference (Julės, 1931, pp. 53–54; Misiūnas, 2008, pp. 14–15). Milukas' vision of a Latvian–Lithuanian state shared many similarities with that of Šliūpas, though with one significant difference, namely Catholicism as the state religion. Milukas believed that the common state's constitution should be 'based on the Catholic faith' to guarantee 'the fullest freedom of religion and speech' (Julės, 1931, p. 52). However, Šliūpas, a freethinking atheist, hoped that the Lutheranism which predominated among Latvians would be a moderating element that would render a state religion a moot question within a Lithuanian–Latvian republic. From the beginning of his advocacy, Šliūpas envisioned a democratic Lithuanian-Latvian republic in which the State would be the guarantor of citizens' rights and social justice (K. [Šliūpas], 1885, pp. 1–2).

Meanwhile in Europe, with the outbreak of the war, Gabrys relocated the Lithuanian Information Bureau from Paris to Lausanne in summer 1915, from where he continued to promote an independent Lithuania in close federal ties with an autonomous Latvia. Also during summer 1915, the first issue of the Lithuanian Information Bureau's *Pro Lithuania* was published. Gabrys sought to gain visibility and legitimise his activities by enlisting Western academics to contribute to publications (Gabrys-Paršaitis, 2007, p. 46). The first article, by French historian Charles Seignobos (1854–1942), was about 'The Lettish-Lithuanian Nation'—referred to 'by a hyphenated name because it is cut in twain' – stating that the 'awakening of the Lettish-Lithuanian nation has become a fact' and 'knowing that the future will bring the realization of her national aspirations, she progresses confidently towards liberty' (Seignobos, 1915, pp. 6, 10). The theme of Latvian–Lithuanian unity is prominent throughout the various publications of the Lithuanian Information Bureau. Gabrys also sought to engage Latvian émigrés, seeking to cooperate and conduct joint propaganda (Mačiulis, 2011, p. 87). Shortly after his arrival in Switzerland, he convened a joint Latvian–Lithuanian conference in Bern in August 1915, at which 'representatives of Latvian and Lithuanian foreign colonies' decided to 'demand the right to broad national autonomy for the Latvian and Lithuanian peoples' (Gimžauskas, 2006, p. 61). This resolution was based on the understanding that 'Lithuanians and Latvians form two branches of one nation', defining 'the Lithuanian-Latvian nation, according to its national consciousness, and spiritual and material culture', which they believed to occupy 'one of the first places among the Russian nations' (Gimžauskas, 2006, p. 61). Despite the resolutions adopted at this joint conference, Gabrys later reflected on the difficulties of acquiescing the national aspirations of Lithuanians with the social concerns of Latvians, foreseeing limited success in the initiative from the outset (Eidintas, 1992, p. 52; Gabrys, 1920, p. 68). Manifestations of Latvian–Lithuanian unity approaching the notion of statehood did not only appear among émigrés. In 1916, a group of Lithuanian intellectuals gathered in Kaunas, drafting a proposal for the restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, formed around an autonomous Latvian–Lithuanian unit (Mačiulis, 2011, p. 88; Pivoras, 2020, p. 451). The group stated that 'Lithuanians and Latvians form a national group completely separate from the Slavic and Germanic peoples' and that they should 'unite to form a separate self-governing constitutional state' (Grigaravičius, 1991, p. 354).

During the final years of the First World War, a vision of a federative Latvian–Lithuanian state within a larger network of smaller states resonated among some Lithuanian nationalist politicians, and the idea of a union between Latvians and Lithuanians was periodically utilised by Lithuanian statesmen as a counter proposal to notions of a revived union with Poland (Butkus, 1987, p. 132; Butkus, 1993, p. 14; Butkus, 2009, pp. 215–216; Pivoras, 2020, pp. 452–456). In 1918, Šliūpas expanded his vision of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic, framing it as the nucleus from which a broader confederation of states surrounding the Baltic Sea might grow, for which he sought Scandinavian support at anticipated post-war peace talks (Pivoras, 2020, p. 452). Such a vision was presented in a collection of articles and public lectures that Šliūpas published in Stockholm under the title *Lietuvių-latvių respublika ir Šiaurės tautų sąjunga* (1918). While Šliūpas' idea of a common federative republic did not resonate with Latvian and Lithuanian political elites, public diplomacy efforts in the West were still unfolding. Šliūpas' *Retrospect and Prospect* had been the first of numerous publications and related propaganda in internationally accessible languages that overtly called for the establishment of a common Latvian–Lithuanian state. Such works came to the attention of Allied peacemakers, both while preparations were being made for post-war peace talks and during the Paris Peace Conference. Influential publications came from the public diplomacy campaigns of the Lithuania National Council in America (hereafter LNC), established in March 1918 as a bipartisan Catholic (conservative) and Nationalist (liberal) initiative to pursue recognition for an independent Lithuania, effectively operating as an unofficial legation to the US until a Lithuanian Mission was formally established in

1922 (Misiūnas, 2008, pp. 12–13). The most noteworthy publication was *Lithuania's Case for Independence* (1918), which was distributed to politicians and diplomats around the world. The *Case* contained a section titled 'The Confederation of Lithuania and Latvia' which outlined that if Lithuania were 'to combine with Latvia, its racial twin, as many Lithuanians and Letts now advocate', that everything 'from the standpoint of economics and politics, would tend to promote the growth and development of such a state; the natural resources and the geographical position should also render this union a favorable one' (Norus & Žilius, 1918, pp. 45–46). Even LNC propaganda that did not explicitly embrace the notion of a Latvian–Lithuanian state would frequently note that the Lithuanian nation was composed of 'Lithuanians proper, Samogitians, [and] Letts' (Bielskis, 1918, p. 6). Despite the existence of the LNC, to a degree, public diplomacy efforts in the US remained uncoordinated, with individuals pursuing their own initiatives.

In the public diplomacy of Lithuanian émigrés that presented a favourable impression of the prospect of a Latvian–Lithuanian state, figures projecting the territory and population of a common state are often considerably inflated. Although this is partly due to the incorporation of territories that would become part of Belarusian and Polish states, they are nevertheless illustrative of the extent to which Latvians were considered to compose part of the Lithuanian nation. Šliūpas stated that a Latvian–Lithuanian republic would consist 'of at least 7,000,000 people' (Szlupas, 1915, p. 96) while the LNC's *Case* stated that the population of a common state would consist of 6,817,000 Lithuanians and 2,600,000 Latvians, totalling 8,417,000 people (Norus & Žilius, 1918, pp. 44, 46). An LNC publication intended to support information provided in the *Case* indicated that the population would be 'about 9,000,000, of which 7,000,000 are Lithuanians (3,500,000 Lithuanian proper; 1,500,000 Lithuanians using Slavic dialect; and 2,000,000 Letts), and 308,444 Poles' (Bielskis, 1918, p. 6). Meanwhile, in the articles translated by Milukas and bound as a book, it was conveyed that 'if Lithuania should form a federation with Lettland then there would be a large and respectable state' with 6,260,000 inhabitants consisting of 4,138,000 Lithuanians and 2,123,000 Latvians (Jusaitis, 1918, p. 105). The following year, Lithuanian émigré writer Oscar Vladislav de Lubicz-Milosz (1877–1939) estimated the total population of a Latvian Lithuanians state as 'nearly 10 million' (Lubicz-Milosz, 1919, p. 12). Figures for territory are similarly incongruous. For example, the *Case* states a combined Latvian–Lithuanian territory of 191,523 square kilometres while supporting material indicates 80,000 square miles, or approximately 207,199 square kilometres (Bielskis, 1918, p. 6; Norus & Žilius, 1918, p. 46). Indeed, at the joint Latvian–Lithuanian conference in Bern during 1915 organised by Gabrys, participants outlined their conception of a Latvian–Lithuanian state as '250,000 sq. km in the territory located by the Baltic Sea, in the basins of the Nemunas and western Dauguva rivers, between Russia and Germany', with a collective population of 'about seven million' (Gimžauskas, 2006, p. 61). For comparison, present-day Latvia has a territory of 64,589 square kilometres and a population of approximately 1,900,000, while Lithuania covers 65,300 square kilometres with a population of approximately 2,860,000. As these figures from the second decade of the 20th century suggest, there was not one specific conception of a Latvian–Lithuanian state (or Lithuania), but many. With that in mind, it is not surprising that the idea of a common state persisted beyond the First World War.

Besides the direct public diplomacy of individuals (such as Šliūpas and Milukas), and organisations (such as the LNC), propaganda that featured the notion of a Latvian–Lithuanian state continued to influence international perspectives, even after it had been rejected by the major political parties of both Latvians and Lithuanians. This occurred primarily because propaganda written in English and French was more accessible to foreign audiences and utilised extensively in public relations and news reports (Baxenfield, 2022, pp. 46–48; Baxenfield & Rändi, 2022, pp. 195–196). Information relating to the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state frequently found its way into newspaper articles, perpetuating the notion that, 'Lithuania and Lettland, once united and independent of alien control, would form a magnificent agricultural State' (Misiūnas, 2008, pp. 101, 103), often incorporating Latvians through earlier inflated projections of Lithuania's territory and population (Baxenfield, 2022, pp. 46–50). Moreover, the notion of a state in common with Latvians was well represented in Lithuanian propaganda that had been gathered by the study groups of peace commissions and foreign offices, contributing to the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian being sufficiently visible to attract the attention of peacemakers at the end of the war ('Memorandum on the Baltic Provinces', 1918, pp. 144–145; Baxenfield, 2022, pp. 46–48; Baxenfield & Rändi, 2022, pp. 192–194). Meanwhile, even though the idea of a union between Latvians and Lithuanians was not the project of choice among Baltic politicians, a proposal for Lithuanian–Latvian confederation was prepared in advance of the Paris Peace Conference, though it was never presented (Butkus, 2009, p. 219; Butkus et al., 2008, pp. 116–117), demonstrating that the idea of a common state was still considered a potential option, if only pragmatically, during postwar peace talks.

While the notion of a common state was primarily a Lithuanian émigré phenomenon, it was not without Latvian supporters, particularly among émigrés in Western Europe, among the most prominent being the poets and playwrights Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) and Aspazija (Elza Rozenberga-Pliekšāne, 1865–1943), who each conceived of

the idea before they were married in 1897 (Genzelis, 2007, pp. 75–76; Kaslas, pp. 120–121; Kazlauskas, 1939, pp. 81–82; Lehti, 1997, p. 455; Rauch, 1974, pp. 31, 107). Šliūpas effectively retired from international politics and diplomacy at the end of 1919, and there was a significant decline in his promotion of a Lithuanian–Latvian republic (Baxenfield, 2022, pp. 50–51). However, any doubts as to the sincerity which individuals other than Šliūpas had towards the notion of a Latvian–Lithuanian state at the end of the First World War can be alleviated to an extent by a statement that appears immediately before the Paris Peace Conference. The statement was made by the editorial board of the *Revue Baltique* journal—a joint endeavour founded Lubicz-Milosz and edited by Latvian writer and journalist Arturs Tupiņš (1889–1951)—reads in part:

> Six months have passed since we first inscribed on our banner the project of the Letto-Lithuanian federation, and proclaimed as the sole guarantee of the future peace of the East the strengthening of the Letto-Lithuanian bond and the rapprochement of the two Lithuanian and Finnish-Estonian groups. Today we find ourselves faced with a fait accompli. The Baltic nations understood that only this federation could give them the necessary prestige and, restoring the balance of Eastern Europe, guarantee the future peace of the world. [...] We gave this idea our intellect, our love. We will give it, if necessary, our blood. (Le Comité de Rédaction, 1919, p. 1)

Even after the Paris Peace Conference, the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state continued to appear in the writings of intellectuals among Lithuanian émigrés. For example, Lubicz-Milosz advocated the 'constitution of a Letto-Lithuania allied with Estonia' (Lubicz-Milosz, 1919, p. 12), while the philosopher Stasys Šalkauskis (1886–1941) envisaged 'political rapprochement with Latvia, if possible in the form of federalism' that 'would unite the entire Letto-Lithuanian race with the aim of achieving a local balance between the Germanic world and the Slavic world' (Šalkauskis, 1919, pp. 231–232).

Rapprochement and the Aistijan movement

Federative proposals from the First World War that concerned the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea, including the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state, were among the potential blueprints for creating a regional alliance from the fledgling republics. In many respects, the idea of a Baltic League was more central to the eventual forging of the Baltic Entente in 1934 than notions of a Latvian–Lithuanian state (see, e.g. Lehti, 1997). While Šliūpas' idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state had been integrated into conceptions of a broader regional alliance during the final years of the First World War, a Lithuanian–Latvian republic remained its focus. Ideas of Latvian and Lithuanian unity – and to a lesser extent the notion of a common state – still resonated with some people following independence. In 1921, the Latvian–Lithuanian Unity Society (*Latviešu lietuviešu vienotības biedrība*, hereafter LLV Riga) was founded in Riga, and an analogous Lithuanian–Latvian Unity Society (*Lietuvių-latvių vienybės draugija*, hereafter LLV Kaunas) was established the following year in Kaunas, the interwar provisional capital of Lithuania following the Polish occupation of Vilnius and the surrounding region. These societies pursued joint activities, ranging from language courses to publishing. They also observed one another's national holidays, organised excursions, and held annual congresses that alternated between Latvia and Lithuania, the first being convened in Riga in 1923. Some members were positively inclined towards Šliūpas' conception of a Lithuanian-Latvian republic (Baxenfield, 2022, pp. 51–54; Mačiulis, 2011, p. 94). While postwar notions of a common state had little influence on national policies (Ščerbinskis, 2016, p. 62), LLV Riga and LLV Kaunas effectively acted as incubators for the idea throughout the interwar period.

Bračs, who graduated from the University of Latvia in 1935 with a master's in history, was a member of LLV Riga. Jānis Sudrabiņš (1877–1962), a colleague in later years, recalled that Bračs 'paid special attention to tracing and clarifying the common threads of Latvian and Lithuanian history' (Sudrabiņš, 1984, p. 6, same text in Sudrabiņš, 1984a, p. 2,162). The year before Bračs graduated he published a book, *No aistu vēstures* (1934), which presented a common Latvian–Lithuanian history (Bračs, 1934). The book is composed of two parts. The first part was written by Frīdrihs Veinbergs (1844–1924), a prominent figure in the Latvian national awakening, originally appearing as a series of articles in the newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnes* (Baltic News) in 1885. Bračs edited and annotated Veinburgs' work, supplementing it with his own that made up the second part of the book. In a review of the volume, Augusts Baumanis (1883–1966) considered it to be less the work of a historian and more that of 'a policymaker who dreams of a federation within the old ethnographic boundaries of Aistija' (Baumanis, 1935, p. 495). While incorporating Belarusian lands that had been part of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as in earlier notions of a common state, a union between Latvians and Lithuanians was at the core of the idea. Bračs would effectively become the custodian of Šliupas' ideal of a Latvian–Lithuanian state, considering Latvians and Lithuanians a single nation whose common development had been disrupted during the Northern Crusades of the 13th century. He sought to reunite this nation through the establishment of a common state, a country named Aistija.

The name of this imagined country was derived from *Aestii*, the name given to the inhabitants of the eastern shore of a sea described by the Roman historian and politician Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120) as 'sluggish and almost stagnant' (Tacitus, 1972, p. 139), the Baltic Sea. These Aestii, whose home was located where 'the last radiance of the setting sun lingers on [...] till dawn, with a brilliance that dims the stars' (Tacitus, 1972, p. 139), have been claimed as ancestors of the Latvian and Lithuanian nations, in addition to the Estonians. As historian Gustaaf Schamelhout (1869–1944) observed, during the interwar period, the Aestii were 'generally believed to be, despite their name, [...] not the ancestors of the Estonians, but those of the Lithuanians and Latvians' though 'some scholars claim that the Estonians are their descendants' (Schamelhout, 1925, p. 243). In the present day, Tacitus' Aestii are often considered to denote the Old Prussians, a Balt tribe that were conquered during the Northern Crusades and did not survive until modern times. Aestii is also sometimes used as a term to denote all inhabitants of the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea, partly because the precise locality of these ancient people cannot be determined (Banytė-Rowell & Bitner-Wróblewska, 2005, p. 116; Gimbutas, 1963, pp. 21–22: Lang, 2007, pp. 245–246). The latter practice was observed already in the interwar period. For example, linguist Alfred Senn (1899–1978) thought it likely that 'the Aestii of Tacitus were not a homogeneous group' and that the 'name must have designated a conglomerate of different people with different languages' (Senn, 1931, p. 148). Or, as the Estonian politician Kaarel Robert Pusta (1883–1964) later observed,

> Tacitus avers that the knowledge which the Romans acquired of these peoples was obtained by their journeys in search of amber. Unable to distinguish between the Baltic races, he calls all the Balts *Aestii* or *Aestyorum Gentes*, who dwelt on the right i.e. the eastern shores of the Mare Suevicum (the Baltic Sea). It was only later that the name came to apply to Estonia (*Eesti*) alone. (Pusta, 1944, p. 372)

Indeed, the present-day Estonian word used both for the country and its native inhabitants – *Eesti* – is derived from the Bronze Age people described by Tacitus (Senn, 1931, p. 148; Zubras, 1968, p. 17).

While the notion of establishing a common state continued to be a marginal aspect of Latvian and Lithuanian political relations during the interwar period, ideas of common ancestry were ubiquitous. In academia, Lithuanian scholars, notably Kazimieras Būga (1879–1924) who is widely considered to be the founder of Lithuanian linguistics, found the term Aestii – first used by historian and linguist Johann Kaspar Zeuss (1806–1856) in 1837 – to be more accurate than 'Baltic', which philologist Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann (1811–1881) had proposed to designate the Latvian and Lithuanian languages in 1845 (Jovaiša, 2012, pp. 58, 77; Zubras, 1968, p. 56). Būga's suggestion gained some traction, but ultimately did not supplant the established term that Nesselmann had introduced. Nevertheless, the Aestii featured prominently in Baltic history writing, as they had done since the beginning of the national awakenings, both academically and in popular imaginations. A prominent example is *Lietuvos Istorija* (1936), the quintessential Lithuanian historical work of the interwar period, edited by Adolfas Šapoka (1906–1961). More specifically, Šapoka wrote:

> The first mention of the inhabitants of our region dates back to the end of the first century in the Roman writer Tacitus' *Germania*. He calls them the Aisčių (*aestii, aestiorum genies*). Since the archaeological evidence in the Baltic shows no change in culture, it must be assumed that the same Aestiians would have been living here since the New Stone Age. For each nation usually has its own distinct culture, and if there is a change of nations somewhere, there is clearly a change of culture. Archaeology does not find a change of culture in our region, nor do the sources of historical times show a change of peoples, so that the Aestiian people mentioned in the writings must be considered to be of Lithuanian origin. (Šapoka, 1936, p. 18)

In the interwar period, the usage of Aestii could even extend further than the Latvians and Lithuanians, with members of the general public embracing this idea of a common past and utilising it as a basis for transnational collaboration, such as at the first congress of Baltic states' pharmacists, held in Riga in June 1925 (Punka, 1925, pp. 168–169). The congress brought together professionals from the 'peoples who have been inhabiting grey Aistija since ancient times, whose shores are caressed by the eternally free waves of the Baltic Sea' (Lejiņš, 1925, p. 294). The aim of this congress was to establish a forum for sharing pharmaceutical knowledge 'which would begin in the cold rocks of Finland and end in the green forests and golden ruins of Lithuania' (Lejiņš, 1925, p. 294).

Although notions of a common Latvian–Lithuanian ancestry were widespread, there were pronounced differences between the two languages. Independence elevated Latvian and Lithuanian to state languages, and the advent of national borders introduced a hard boundary between them. Lithuanian publicists who had advocated for various conceptions of a bilingual Latvian–Lithuanian state during the First World War had given little thought to the differences between the two languages. Jusaitis provided an apt description of a prevailing perception among them, remarking that the languages were 'so closely akin to one another that they differ no more than various German dialects of the south and north' and that uniting in a common state 'would purify and strengthen the Lithuanian-Lettish spirit, and also

the language of both' (Jusaitis, 1918, pp. 88–90). During the interwar period, LLV Riga and LLV Kaunas adopted a more structured approach to language learning. LLV Riga organised Lithuanian language courses 'led by experienced linguists' in 1921 ('Lietuvju valodas kursi', 1921). It was advertised that, due to 'the close kinship of the Lithuanian language with the Latvian language' that 'a Latvian can learn the Lithuanian language much more easily than any other foreign language' and that it would take only one year while 'it would take three years to learn a foreign language' ('Lietuvju valodas kursi', 1921). These language courses were rather intensive, beginning in mid-September and following the course of the academic year, taking place twice a week in the evening, each meeting lasting for two hours. One meeting was 'dedicated to theory and the other time to practice (conversations, writing, dictation, etc.)' ('Lietuvju valodas kursi', 1921). Advertisements stressed that practical language lessons were taught by a Lithuanian lecturer with a university education, who guaranteed correct teaching and pronunciation of the Lithuanian language. Courses were primarily attended by Latvians, but would also attract a few Lithuanians ('Lietuvji valuotas mācības kursa klausītāji 1925/1926', 1925). In addition to these basic language courses, LLV Riga advertised that 'if there is a sufficient number of participants who study Lithuanian etymology or who have studied Lithuanian language for one year at a Latvian university' then groups 'for continuing Lithuanian language learning (syntax, Lithuanian literature, opinion articles, etc.)' could be organised ('Lietuvju valodas kursi', 1921). Bračs enrolled in a basic year-long course in 1925 ('Lietuvji valuotas mācības kursa klausītāji 1925/1926', 1925). It is not clear if he participated in advanced courses, but he continued attending language classes from September 1926, for a time. In 1929, he requested to be released from the 'tuition fees of Lithuanian language courses for 1926/27', not having 'paid that amount due to difficult material circumstances' (Bračs, 1929).

These language courses, which were also organised by LLV Kaunas, and other activities of the interwar rapprochement societies were ended by the Second World War and subsequent Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. Along with many other citizens, members of these rapprochement societies that survived the conflict were displaced. During the deportations from the Baltic states in the early 1940s, thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians found themselves interned in Soviet correctional work camps, or gulags. In the fourth largest Siberian gulag, a 'unique illegal Baltic community, Aistija, which operated in the Vorkuta 40th mine camp' was established (Vaičiūnas, 2016, p. 15). The group comprised of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians who believed that once the Baltic states 'regain their freedom, they will have to unite into one state on the basis of a federation' (Vaičiūnas, 2016, p. 15) in order to preserve their independence. Led by Oļģerts Miza (1921–1992) – who had been drafted into the Waffen-SS in 1943, becoming a non-commissioned officer – members of this Aistijan community in Siberia met in secret to plan for their future federative state, learning one another's languages in preparation (Vaičiūnas, 2016, p. 15). The clandestine nature of activities means that little evidence beyond the testimonies of those involved that have survived to the present. However, Vorkuta was not the only place where Aistijan activity appeared after the Second World War. The largest centre of Aistijan activity was in Germany, specifically within the DP camps.

Bračs left Latvia in 1941, two months before the Soviet army returned to the Baltic states after being driven out by German forces. Along with others seeking refuge, he travelled to Germany with the evacuating army. He was housed in a DP camp near Hannover from where he attempted to re-establish the activities of the interwar rapprochement societies. Rather than re-forming LLV Riga and LLV Kaunas as separate entities, Bračs consolidated them into a single bilingual society, interchangeably known as Latvian–Lithuanian Unity and Lithuanian–Latvian Unity (hereafter LLV). Bračs claimed that LLV was established in 1945, though this and many other claims he made are difficult to corroborate. It seems likely that Bračs began his undertaking independently, resembling what was taking place in Vorkuta, before later taking steps to formalise activities. The formal renewal of coordinated activities occurred by 1949, when the first congress took place – at which Bračs was elected chairman – and a news bulletin named *Aistija* began to be published ('Latviešu lietuviešu kongress', 1949, pp. 1–4; 'Aistija', 1953, p. 60). Nevertheless, exile and émigré communities on both sides of the Atlantic were aware of the LLV and Bračs' activities prior to this year ('Lietuviai vokietijoje', 1947, p. 9), by which time the ideal of a Latvian–Lithuanian state had transitioned from a (predominantly) Lithuanian émigré idea to a nascent (predominantly) Latvian exile movement. While it remained a marginal aspect of exile political activity, Bračs envisaged a worldwide movement, spreading out from Germany, with LLV branches being established to coordinate activities. To Bračs, Aistija was an ethnic term that related to Latvians and Lithuanians, while Baltic was a geopolitical term that could be used to denote Aistijans and Estonians ([Bračs], 1951, p. 4).

Bračs sought to ensure that the Aistijan movement would 'not only unite the masses' but 'also carry out purely technical preparations' ([Bračs], 1951, 4). Congresses, events, and educational activities, many of which centred on language learning, were organised. The communal living situation of DP camps appear to have been effective nurseries for the Aistijan movement, at least initially. While the Aistijan movement was primarily concerned with unity between Latvians and Lithuanians, collaboration with Estonians was encouraged and sought. However, doubts were

'expressed as to whether the federation of all three Baltic nations will be possible, since the Estonians are orientated towards their brother nation – the Finns. Therefore, it is time to consider another version – only the federation of Lithuania and Latvia' ('Galvas pilsēta kaut kur starp Joniškiem un Lielvircavu', 1953, p. 2). The prevailing idea among LLV members was that Latvia and Lithuania would unite to form Aistija, which would then be allied to Estonia, thus, the Baltic states would have been composed of two states named after Tacitus' Aestii: *Eesti* and *Aistija*. In general, among Baltic exiles, federative notions were considered to be a practical alternative to the restoration of nation-states (Beķere, 2016, pp. 144–147), and the idea of Aistija was a minor aspect of that less desirable prospect.

The first congress of the revived LLV took place in June 1949, in Wolterdingen, Lower Saxony (A., 1948, 3). Topics on the agenda included Aistijan unity and Baltic federation concepts. In a bid to unite Latvians and Lithuanians, under Bračs' leadership, the LLV recognised the utility of common symbols, which had been lacking in earlier conceptions of a Latvian–Lithuanian state. Before the first congress, the organisers asked participants to bring Latvian and Lithuanian flags with them, and indicated that it was desirable for people to attend in national costumes (A., 1948, 3). A coat of arms was devised from those of the Latvian and Lithuanian republics: the three Latvian stars, beneath which stood the Pillars of Gediminas, a heraldic symbol from the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In Vorkuta, Miza also devised a coat of arms, though it is unknown if it bore a resemblance to that which was used in Germany. There is a significant possibility that it did, particularly as Bračs had been utilising the Pillars of Gediminas as early as 1934, when it featured on the cover of *No aistu vēstures*. At the first congress a tricolour flag was also adopted, consisting of equal horizontal stripes of white, carmine red, and yellow. Bračs explained the flag's design as being composed of two colours from each of the national flags of the interwar period: white and red for Latvians; and, red and yellow for Lithuanians (Bračs, [1954]Bračs, [1954], p. 12). However, one of Bračs students from the interwar period, Valentīns Silamiķelis (1924–2005), later claimed that this flag emerged during the Second World War as a symbol of Baltic unity that included Estonia (Silamiķelis, 2002, p. 9). The latter suggests that it was not a coincidence that the colours corresponded with those that meet on the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian flags when arranged geographically from north to south (Baxenfield, 2022, p. 57). Besides the unveiling of common symbols at the congress, as reported in the exile press, dedicated sections had been planned to address the needs and representation of Baltic exiles in DP camps. Education and youth were pertinent topics, with four out of six sections dedicated to them. These included adult education in folk sciences, but the emphasis was on activities directed towards the exile communities' youth. One section was specifically tasked with 'bringing the idea of unity to life at school' and addressing the matter of 'equalising the school system, and the issue of common national schools in further exile' (A., 1948, 3). The first congress appears to have been a success, reporting approximately 300 participants and that, after the congress, training courses took place in a YMCA centre which was attended by approximately 50 people ('Latviešu lietuviešu kongress', 1949, p. 4).

Critics of the movement found it to be 'an outdated idea' and 'an incomplete replacement of the idea for a Baltic Union' ('Kādai jābūt Baltijas ūnijai', 1953, p. 1), remarking the Baltic states were quite similar and therefore the similarities of language should not be the basis of forming a union or a new border ('Kādai jābūt Baltijas ūnijai', 1953, p. 1). Meanwhile, LLV members were critical of the actions of Baltic politicians of the interwar period, and the passivity of the general population to matters of collective security ('Baltijas savienotās valstis', 1949, p. 1); particularly in relation to foreign policies that were 'not coordinated and often worked against each other' ([Bračs], 1951, p. 4). It was thought that little 'had been done to educate the masses of the people – through the translation of literature, the teaching of language and history' ([Bračs], 1951, p. 4) and that these matters had been left to the initiatives of individuals and organisations, such as LLV Riga and LLV Kaunas. Occasionally, articles lamented that although 'circles of Latvian–Lithuanian unity [had] wanted to form the Latvian–Lithuanian unity state of Aistija, [...] nothing came of it. What remains is the bitter lesson of history that it is not freedom and prosperity that unites countries, but the danger and fear of death' ('Baltijas savienotās valstis', 1949, p. 1). In an effort to overcome these shortcomings in exile, LLV activities centred around the society's news bulletin, *Aistija*, of which there were Latvian and Lithuanian language editions published. Language learning was a prominent topic from the first issue. Notes on the publication of Latvian and Lithuanian books in DP camps were printed, providing information about where they could be obtained, recommending them not only as engaging reading material but also as a means of learning one another's languages. The reading of translated books was an activity encouraged by the LLV in an attempt to facilitate mutual exchange of languages. However, the principal method of encouraging language exchange was to be utilised in LLV meetings, congresses, and conferences. As Bračs described:

> The rapprochement of the wider masses is possible only by spreading even a partial understanding of the language of the brothers' people. LLV uses new methods to spread language knowledge. As in conferences and large events, no foreign languages are used in gatherings, meetings and deliberations

> [...]. Everyone speaks their own language, making translations if necessary. A translation or retelling of the content is placed before the original presentation, so a person who does not know the language can listen to the second language and begin to understand it. (Bračs, [1954], p. 12)

This differed from the interwar practices of LLV Riga and LLV Kaunas, which provided translations after presentations, with the underlying idea being that participants would be able to familiarise themselves with the content in advance, then listen to the original language, over time developing fluency in the both languages. The LLV was also concerned with future emigration, planning for Bračs and other senior LLV members to visit branches and give lectures about the long-term goals of Aistija in emigration ('LLV darbība', 1949, p. 5).

To further facilitate language learning, Bračs planned to publish a study of the Latvian and Lithuanian languages, and a history of Aistija (K. V., 1949, p. 24), though he does not appear to have completed these endeavours. There was also a plan to translate *History of the Lithuanian Nation* (1948) by Constantine R. Jurgėla (1904–1998), a second generation American Lithuanian, into Latvian ('Lithuanian Latvian Union', 1950, p. 27). Bračs considered Jurgėla's book to be 'the most beautiful confirmation of the idea of Aistija in Lithuanian historical literature' ([Bračs], 1951, 4). More specifically, he appears to have been referring to the introduction and first chapter (Jurgėla, 1948, pp. 15–42, 45–48) which describes the ancient history of the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea. Referring to the inhabitants mentioned by Tacitus as Aistians, Jurgėla gradually phases out the use of the term to tell a distinctly Lithuanian history in subsequent chapters. However, Jurgėla does note that 'it is doubtful that the inhabitants of this fairly large area, with the possible exception of some tribe, had ever called themselves Aistian' (Jurgėla, 1948, p. 16). Among Jurgėla's citations is Šapoka's *Lietuvos Istorija*. Jurgėla drew extensively from this work concerning the settlements, occupations, and religion inhabitants of the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea and of the early his book bears a strong resemblance to the second chapter of the interwar work. Šapoka wrote of the 'Aisčių tribes from which the Lithuanian nation was formed' as living northeast of the Old Prussians, while 'even further away lived the tribes from which present-day Latvians were formed' Šapoka's 1936, p. 20). The latter underscores that the notion of the Aestii mentioned by Tacitus being the earliest inhabitants of the region was widespread, though interpretations as to precisely who these people were considered to be the ancestors of were often different, sometimes substantially.

Through the emigration and resettlement of DP camp residents, LLV branches were established in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the US. Bračs was particularly optimistic about the American LLV branches, attaching particular importance to the Lithuanians émigrés because he thought that the notion of Latvian–Lithuanian unity was better understood by this community. By 1960, it was claimed that more than 20 LLV chapters had been established across Europe, reaching a total membership of approximately 1,000 (J. S., 1960, p. 6). However, this figure is probably an exaggeration, more likely reflecting the total number of individuals attending activities and events organised by LLV. Despite reported initial success of LLV, any momentum that it may have had quickly dissipated. Beyond being a marginal aspect of Baltic exile political activity, a significant factor for its rapid decline was emigration. LLV assisted some individuals with relocating – particularly to cities in the US with large Latvian and Lithuanian émigré populations – in the hope that they would establish new local chapters, however, these efforts essentially remained unrealised. The relocation and emigration of LLV members began to create significant administrative and operational difficulties as early as 1949 ('LLV darbība', 1949, p. 4). The nascent Aistijan movement and their language practices waned as the exiles began to relocate, invariably adapting to life in their host countries – such as Germany, Britain, and the US – and learning the languages spoken there. The swift demise of the Aistijan movement is reflected in the publication of *Aistija*. Monthly issues were published between September and November in 1949, but it then ceased being published until 1953 when issues appeared in April and July. In 1960 an unsuccessful campaign to obtain financial support to bring *Aistija* back was made through the exile press (J. S., 1960, p. 6; J. S. 1960a, 4; J. S., 1960b, 7). Nevertheless, one final issue was published in April 1966, commemorating Emīls Skujenieks (1903–1965), editor of the five issues of *Aistija* published between 1949 and his death (Ekmanis, 1997, p. 11).

Conclusion

While the idea to establish a Latvian–Lithuanian state did not develop into a mass movement, it experienced periodic popularity among various émigré and exile groups, connected by a period of incubation within interwar rapprochement societies. The extent of the support for the idea is difficult to ascertain as it can be difficult to distinguish between a general sense of unity – grounded in an imagined prehistory – and the aspiration to establish a common state. Despite a widespread inclination towards Latvian–Lithuanian unity, the idea of a Latvian–Lithuanian state does not appear to have been a dominant notion among politically engaged individuals. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion of common statehood was sufficiently prominent within Lithuanian American public diplomacy to come to the attention of peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference among a myriad of imagined futures. During the interwar period, while a common state was not the main concern of rapprochement societies, the idea resonated

with some members, emerging in the Aistijan movement in Germany, and the parallel clandestine activities in Siberia. While the level of support was likely exaggerated, a coordinated group was undoubtedly making a concerted effort to promote the concept of a common country named Aistija. However, any potential the nascent movement had to grow appears to have been swiftly curtailed by the emigration and resettlement of people from DP camps.

Though the reasons as to why ideas of a Latvian–Lithuanian state were never realised are beyond the scope of this article, some observations and comparisons between Šliūpas' Lithuanian–Latvian republic and Bračs' Aistija can be made. To dismiss them being unrealised to a matter of them not having widespread support is an oversimplification; many things in the political realm exist which are unpopular. At the end of the First World War, the idea of a common state resonated among numerous individuals across political and religious divides, with the notion considered an acceptable (though less desirable) alternative to the nation-state, as it was again following the Second World War and Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. In both these periods of heightened activity, one of the principal reasons why the notion failed to gain traction was the absence of a proponent that would appeal to people across political and religious divides. Šliūpas, for example, though a prominent figure, was a controversial personality because of his atheism, which alienated him from many members of the Catholic majority.

Concerning language learning in the context of a Latvian–Lithuanian state, perceptions and activities underwent several changes. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the prevailing notion was that through everyday interaction, mutual intelligibility would increase, and the common language of their ancestors might be to some extent reconstructed. During the interwar period, rapprochement societies quickly developed intensive language courses that addressed both theory and grammar, promising accelerated learning due to similarities between the two languages. Following the Second World War, a more basic practical method was devised by the LLV, which to an extent combined both earlier approaches, providing translations in advance to facilitate the development of comprehension. Efforts were taken to encourage such activities and cohesion in general with the introduction of common symbolism – such as a flag and coat of arms – that had not featured in earlier notions of a common state and were intended to create the sense of a shared nationality.

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