

ESTONIAN AND LATVIAN NAVAL COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD OF 1920–1940

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After signing of the peace treaties with Soviet Russia in 1920, both Estonia and Latvia had to start developing their peacetime defense structures. Owing to both countries' geographical positions with long coastlines, augmenting of naval forces was crucial for their maritime security. Forming a highly technical branch of the armed forces proved to be an arduous process for both nations. In recourse of the retrenchment of their defense budgets, neither country could acquire, maintain nor even complement a strong surface fleet. This inevitably created some unique naval concepts. This article examines the principles, based on which the Estonian (*Eesti Merejõud*) – and Latvian (*Latvijas Kara flote*) navies were developed, whether they concentrated on defensive or offensive naval warfare and why did a close collaboration begin between them. The naval cooperation lasted well into the early 1930s and it is interesting to observe, why this was abruptly discontinued. Although the naval alliance seemed logical on a political level, an inescapable question arises – namely, what, if any, were the actual benefits for the fleets and naval commanders themselves.

This article only provides the general framework on the subject at hand along with an overview of the collaboration itself. For a better understanding of this exclusive naval collaboration, it is justifiably vital to conduct extensive research in both Estonian – and Latvian archives.

Key words: Estonian Navy, Latvian Navy, warships, naval defense, naval history.

INTRODUCTION

The outcome of World War I saw the shifting of balance between great powers in the Baltic Sea Region. Since the former dominant naval powers such as German and Russian navies were in ruins after 1918, a significant power vacuum occurred in this region. In the period of 1918–1920, both Estonia and Latvia had to protect their independence against the military

invasion of the Red Army along with numerous German and White Russian forces. The overall war experience varied between the two Baltic countries mainly because of naval aspects. Estonia had to organize her naval defenses as early as 21 November 1918 and managed to conduct extensive naval operations in home – and enemy waters throughout the 1919 campaigns (Oll 2018, 35, 348). The first Latvian naval units were officially formed as late as 10 August 1919, consisting of small civilian vessels converted for military purposes (Priedītis 2004, 13). These rudimentary small river craft flotillas mostly conducted transport operations for the armed forces and occasionally bombarded enemy positions at river banks. It is citable that during the Estonian Navy's River Daugava operation against the *Landeswehr* forces the very first naval cooperation between Estonians and Latvians actually occurred. Namely, on 2 July 1919 the Latvian ship *Sekunda* supported the Estonian landings under Bolderāja with her artillery fire (Gajduk, Lapšin 2009, 135). Although the landings proved to be of temporary success, this endeavour also demonstrated good relations between both parties, since the Latvian ship came to aid the Estonians voluntarily.¹

After the Independence Wars, the higher military command of both countries acknowledged the need to develop a sustainable maritime defense policy. Owing to their geographical positioning, it was crucial to guarantee safe passage for merchant shipping lines, as well as to protect the coastal waters and harbours. Estonian and Latvian military commanders realized that for obvious reasons the small states could not acquire a large surface fleet, hence the maritime defense had to be mustered on a much tighter budget. Furthermore, the dire financial situation of both Baltic countries had to be taken into account, because forming and maintaining even a small navy was considered an expensive endeavour. Understandably, the naval aspect in this regard proved to be a difficult task, since there were no textbooks or perceptions on the subject of creating a small navy at that time. Even the contemporary literature on the subject of naval strategic thought focused solely on offensive and global naval powers. This was especially emphasized by the most notable naval thinker of the 20th century, American Rear Admiral Alfred Mahan, who viewed navies of a defensive nature as unsatisfactory (Mahan 1915, 277). On the other hand, while specialising on specific areas of naval warfare, a small navy

¹ Estonian Navy staff liaison officer's report concerning the Daugava operation, 16.07.1919. RA (The National Archives of Estonia), ERA.527.1.26, 33.

with a calculated concept of operations along with a balanced fleet of warships can still achieve high levels of performance (Till 2014, 29). This is what the Estonian and Latvian navies tried to execute with their limited resources. Justifiably, their main efforts were concentrated on coastal waters and adjacent sea areas of strategic importance. The key ingredients for these naval concepts were smaller warship types that in cooperation with coastal forces had to repulse the enemy attacks from the sea. To understand how the two Baltic countries began to cooperate on a military-strategical level, it is necessary to examine them side by side in the midst of the 1920s political situation.

ESTABLISHING MARITIME SECURITY IN THE EARLY 1920S

The overall Estonian-Latvian defense collaboration on a political and military level has been well established and written about both in Estonian and Latvian books, whereas the naval side has received little attention. The politicians played a key role in the ratifications of their countries' respective defense strategies, but generally played no significant part in naval concepts or the modernization of the fleets.

The first order of business in establishing a maritime defense was to clear all the minefields that were laid in Estonian and Latvian territorial waters during the period of 1914–1919. The first signs of peacetime collaboration between the Estonians and Latvians in the maritime sphere can be attributed to the work of the International Mine Clearance Committee, that was responsible for clearing the World War I era minefields in the Baltic Sea. Since the Estonian Navy was tasked with trawling the minefields in their home waters along with the surrounding areas of Ainaži (Sammalsoo 2002, 28–29), the Latvian officer in charge of maritime affairs, Captain Archibald Keyserling approached the Estonian Naval staff on 21 August 1920 to work out the overall assessments in this regard.² The reason for the Estonian aid was simple, the Latvian Minesweeper Division had only

² A. Keyserling's proposal plans regarding minesweeping operations in the Latvian waters, 21.08.1920. RA, ERA.527.1.1467, 345.

8 civilian boats³ converted into minesweepers with limited capabilities. Just a few weeks later, on 4 September 1920, Keyserling followed up with another proposal – Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland should all permit their warships to sail freely in each other's territorial waters and gain access to the ports.⁴ This was, of course, in conjunction with the minesweeping operations, but in retrospective it can be seen as an indication towards a deeper naval collaboration in the near future. Keyserling's proposals were warmly welcomed by the Estonian Navy's Chief of Staff, Captain Hermann Salza. Shortly afterwards, the two officers started a productive exchange of letters, sharing their ideas as to how and specifically with what forces the minefields should be disposed of.⁵ It appears that from September 1920 onwards Keyserling and Salza formed a professional relationship and remained in close contact for the rest of the decade. These two officers played a key role in the future Estonian-Latvian naval collaboration. It is also interesting to point out that both men were of Baltic German nobility and had served as senior officers in the Imperial Russian Navy.

The International Mine Clearance Committee conducted its work on 1 May 1923. The Estonian Navy trawled out 432 mines in their home waters and destroyed approximately 600 more in the process. It is estimated that German flotillas trawled more than 1000 mines out of the Latvian waters (Gajduk 2020, 148). The Estonian minesweepers also operated in the Gulf of Riga on many occasions in 1921–1923 and managed to destroy dozens of sea mines. Despite operating in their neighbouring countries' territorial waters, no actual cooperation between Estonian and Latvian minesweepers occurred. Nonetheless, these activities demonstrated the mutual consent and willingness to start cooperating on a political level more closely. Perhaps more importantly, close ties were made on a personal level between the naval commanders.

³ The Minesweeping flotilla consisted of the following tugboats converted into minesweepers: *Baltija*, *Wolemus*, *Kodimo*, *Lielupe*, *Oskars*, *Sekunda*, *Hamburg* and *Nadežda* along with motorboats *Frankonia* and *Gutenberg*.

⁴ Keyserling's proposal for Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Polish warships to be allowed to sail freely in each other's territorial waters, 6.09.1920. RA, ERA.957.11.383, 10.

⁵ Keyserling's proposals regarding mine clearance operations, 6.09.1920. RA, ERA.527.1.1467, 346–347. / Salza's proposals regarding mine clearance operations, 24.09.1920. RA, ERA.527.1.50, 250–251.

THE NAVAL CAPABILITIES

While analysing the naval situation of Estonia and Latvia in the early 1920s, there were both significant differences and striking similarities. The backbone of the Estonian Navy consisted of two modern ex-Russian destroyers of the Novik-type, which were captured by the Royal Navy's Baltic squadron in 1918 and handed over to the Estonians (Bennett 2003, 42–46). The *Lennuk* and *Wambola* were the most powerful warships in service of the Baltic states navies well into the early 1930's. These destroyers were equipped with 102 mm guns, sea mines (80 each) and three centreline torpedo batteries with triple tubes. Each of these ships could launch a dense salvo of 9 torpedoes (457 mm) against an enemy warship, making them one of the world's most powerful destroyer classes at that time (Friedman 2011, 348).

The rest of the fleet's main forces consisted of an armoured gunboat *Lembit*, two smaller gunboats, a patrol ship, along with the Minesweeper flotilla (18 vessels), Lake Peipus flotilla (5 converted gunboats) and the auxiliary fleet. Submitted under the navy were also the coastal artillery batteries located on the islands of Naissaar and Aegna (120–305 mm guns) along with batteries stationed at Suurupi Peninsula (234 mm guns).

On the contrary, Latvians had not succeeded to obtain any warships from the remnants of the Imperial Russian Navy. In the period of 1919–1921, the Latvian fleet units consisted of private merchant ships, steamers, tugs and cutters. Therefore, in 1920 the Latvian Government asked the Allies for former German warships, in Paris petitioned for elements of General Anton Denikin's Black Sea fleet and even tried to purchase warships from the US (Stoker 2012, 29–30). Unfortunately, these undertakings yielded no results. All the Latvian naval units were submitted under the Maritime Administration, which was formed under the Chief of Staff on 14 July 14 1920 (Priedītis 2004, 23), consisting of Minesweeper and Coast Guard divisions. The vast majority of these ships were rightfully demobilized shortly after the war, since they held little value in terms of naval matters.

One of the main similarities between the Baltic countries was that in 1920–1921 discussions were held on the subject of decommissioning the fleets both in Estonia and Latvia. Despite various opinions, the government bodies finally decided in 1921 that Estonia definitely needed to maintain a war fleet (Pajur 1999, 90). At the same time, Latvian naval situation deteriorated with disbanding of the Naval Administration on



Fig. 1. Estonian destroyers *Lennuk* and *Wambola* at Port Pernau in the late 1920s (A. Oll's private collection)

1. att. Igaunu eskadras mīnu kuģi "Lennuk" un "Wambola" Pērnavas ostā 20. gadu beigās (A. Olla privātkolekcija)

1 May 1921 (Priedītis 2004, 32). Subsequently, only a handful of ships was temporarily submitted under the War Ministry's Technical Department, and Keyserling remained the only special officer for Maritime Affairs.⁶ This basically meant that Latvia had no navy in the first years of the country's independence, and thus the minesweeping operations were also entrusted to the German, and to a smaller extent – to the Estonian Navy. Amongst these events, the Estonians saw the need to strengthen their relations with potential allies even further. The gunboat *Lembit* made the first official naval visit to Latvia in the summer of 1921, visiting Riga on 2–9 August, and Liepāja on 10–14 August (Oll 2012, 123–125). Onboard the *Lembit* were also the Estonian naval cadets, who took part in the 1919 Daugava operations against the *Landeswehr*. They reminisced in their memoirs:

⁶ The ships in question were the converted patrol boats *P*, *R* and *T* (the future auxiliary ship *Artilerists*), of which only the latter was equipped with a small 37 mm gun and 4 small motor boats. The only actual warship that Latvians possessed was the ex-German minesweeper *M* (the future flagship *Virsaitis*) that was being repaired and overhauled in Bolderāja.

“the *Lembit* 21-gun salute in honour of the independent Republic of Latvia was symbolic, since the very same artillery guns helped Latvians to fight off the German menace just two years ago”.⁷ Afterwards, the commander of the Naval Cadet School, Lieutenant Commander Johan Masik, was the first Estonian officer to write an evaluation report about Latvian naval forces.⁸ Although Masik thought highly of Captain Keyserling, he enunciated that Latvia had basically no naval capabilities. According to the report, Masik also underlined that the morale and discipline of the motorboat crews at Riga and the patrol boat *T* in Liepāja was unsatisfactory at best. It was clear to the Estonian naval command that the naval situation was not perfect by any means, since the Estonian Navy started to repair its fleet only in late 1921, and Latvia did not possess a meaningful war fleet of any sort. Therefore, the naval defense of the Baltic states at the beginning of the 1920s was inadequate.

In Latvia, there were even preliminary discussions on the matter of either forming a navy or concentrating solely on coastal artillery. As an alternative, the military leadership proposed that Estonia and Latvia could fortify the coasts of the Irbe Strait (forming a so-called “Small Gibraltar”) with artillery positions, thereby blocking the entrance to the Gulf of Riga. The Estonians renounced these plans in earnest.⁹ From the Estonian perspective, the main naval threat was considered to come from the East, hence, the coastal batteries were needed to protect the capital Tallinn in the Gulf of Finland. The Estonians could not do both. The Latvians, on the other hand, saw a potential threat from both Germany and the Soviet Union. Here, the threat assessments of both countries diverged. Concerning maritime aspects, both nations understandably concentrated on protecting their capital cities against attacks from the sea, but with limited resources no cooperation could be achieved in this regard. Eventually in 1923–1924 Latvia also abandoned these ideas on the grounds that investing in a squadron of warships was estimated to be 4–5 times cheaper (Bērziņš, Bambals 1991, 61).

⁷ Diary of naval cadet August Vares 1920/21, entry 2.08.1921. MM 4111 D.

⁸ Johan Masik’s report on Latvian and Polish naval forces during the gunboat *Lembit* voyage of 30 July – 23 August 1921. 29.08.1921. RA, ERA.649.1.18, 66.

⁹ Admiral Salza’s report to Estonian General Staff, 14.04.1928. RA, ERA.527.1.1488, 211.

OBTAINING WARSHIPS AND FORMING THE FLEETS

In the period of 1921–1924, both Estonia and Latvia wanted to acquire a new fleet of warships. The perplexing situation was the following: Estonia possessed a navy that was sizeable for a small country, but it primarily wanted to replace its entire fleet, and the navyless Latvia had to develop their own fleet programme. In contrast, Estonia inherited its warships quite randomly from the Russian Empire, while Latvians were presented with the unique opportunity to form a completely new navy as they saw fit. Although the origins of the Baltic states' navies differed significantly, the nucleus for their maritime defense thinking remained similar. On a political level, the Republic of Latvia was also in a much more favourable position to achieve these goals. Stipulating the fact that Latvia possessed no navy, in October 1920 the League of Nations initially allowed the country to maintain a fleet no larger than 4 destroyers, 4 submarines, 1500 sea mines and a number of seaplanes (Stoker 2012, 56).

To proceed with the assessment, it should be considered, what types of navies were the Baltic states planning to build. In this regard, it is interesting to view Estonian and Latvian warship programmes side by side, since they proved to be similar, yet were elaborated independently. As early as November–December 1920, the Estonian Navy proposed the following fleet concept: 2 destroyers (replacing the Russian ships with smaller British destroyers), 2–4 submarines with minelaying capabilities, 3–4 minelayers and 4–12 coastal motor torpedo boats in addition to the already existing auxiliary fleet and Lake Peipus flotilla.¹⁰ In 1923, the Latvian War Ministry proposed to acquire 4 destroyers, 4 submarines, 1 patrol ship, 2 minelayers, 12 seaplanes and 1500 sea mines (Priedītis 2004, 35). In view of these programmes, both countries clearly concentrated on defensive activities. The fleet concepts were realistically compatible with Estonian and Latvian general defense strategies. Naval personnel of Estonia and Latvia therefore had to mentally prepare themselves for a war against a numerically superior opponent and fight against overwhelming odds at sea. Therefore, it was crucial for small states to develop well-balanced fleets in conjunction with

¹⁰ Report of the Commander-in-Chief of Estonian Naval Forces to the Defence Minister about the condition of the navy, 11.11.1920. RA, ERA.527.1.1465, 170–171. / Report of the Commander-in-Chief of Estonian Naval Forces to the Defence Minister about the future warfleet programme, 3.12.1920. RA, ERA.527.1.1460, 24–25.

careful specialization on defensive naval warfare. Since their operational activities were primarily limited to littoral areas of strategic importance, the fleets had to be sufficiently strong to impose limited manoeuvrability upon invading enemy forces. Both countries focused on mine and underwater warfare. The idea of this concept heavily relied on laying extensive minefields on strategic sealines and protecting them with submarines. It was also abundantly clear that small navies could not win wars by themselves. With such coastal forces, initiative was only possible on a tactical or, at the very best, operational level (Børresen 2004, 253). In high site, the naval forces had to inflict enough damage to slow down the invading enemy or force it to abandon its primary objectives. In other words, the small navies had to stall for time for a more powerful ally to arrive. At least on paper the combined naval forces of Estonia and Latvia, under a central command in case of war, would have been a force to be reckoned with. But did they manage to acquire these fleets?

Theoretically, the time was right for both countries to start purchasing new warships. During the early 1920s there was a myriad of surplus warships available to choose from, specifically from the captured fleets of the Central Powers (mostly German and Austro-Hungarian warships).¹¹ These ships were superfluous for the Allied Powers, and could be easily sold to the Baltic states for a reasonable price. Estonian and Latvian foreign office representatives reached out to many European countries receiving surprisingly severe opposition from Great Britain, US and France. After many years of lobbying, it became evident that the Royal Navy initially was adamantly against these requests. The British were only willing to sell older or obsolete warships and naval weaponry of questionable quality (Kirsis 2019, 36).

In the background, the naval talks were ongoing between Salza and Keyserling. In March 1924, Salza visited his colleague in Riga, where a discussion was held concerning the creation of the Latvian Navy, as well as mutual assistance.¹² The main topic in question was how Estonia and Latvia should organize a joint coastal defense system. Quite possibly, in the wake

¹¹ For further reading: Dodson, Aidan; Cant, Serena. *Spoils of War: The Fate of Enemy Fleets after the Two World Wars*. Yorkshire: Seaforth Publishing 2020.

¹² Eesti-Läti ühine rannakaitse. Eesti merewäe staabiülem kapten Salza seletus Läti ajakirjandusele. Päevaleht, 1.04.1924, p. 3. / Hermann Salza välispass 1924. RA, ERA.957.16.896, 20–21.

of creating the Latvian Navy these negotiations laid the foundation for the actual naval collaboration itself. Soon after, warships started to visit each other's ports on regular basis. In this regard, the Latvian warship *Virsaitis* officially visited Tallinn for the first time in 1–6 October 1924, where Keyserling discussed the naval questions with Estonian higher military command.¹³ These types of naval visits served the purpose of strengthening relations between potential allies even further. Shortly afterwards, on 25 October 1924, the Latvian Parliament *Saeima* announced the revised war fleet programme— Latvia would initially purchase two submarines and two minesweepers from French shipyards (Priedītis 2004, 36). This idea was the middle ground or the so-called “small programme”, which was drawn up to justify the expenditure to the opposing political, as well as military parties in Latvia.

The period of 1924–1929 can be characterised as the preparatory work phase, which would eventually lead up to joint exercises of the fleets. In 1925, Latvians bought a sample of the Russian sea mine M08 from Estonia and on the basis of this specimen, 500 mines were produced by Liepāja harbour workshop (Gajduk, Dmitriev 2016, 41). It is plausible to conclude that both navies wanted to use the same types of sea mines, so there would be no shortage of ammunition. In the following years, both navies started to exchange officers to serve onboard their respective warships. These appointments served the purpose of acquainting the officers with their colleagues. Also, in 1927 a special torpedo course was conducted for the Latvian naval officers in Tallinn.¹⁴ Perhaps more importantly, the secret operational communication codes were developed, which were intended for use amongst the fleets, as well as naval surveillance posts. The initial draft was put together by Latvians, after which it was delivered to Estonian naval headquarters for review. Estonians made several additions, after which an officer was sent to Riga in 1927 to complete the signals book with Latvian colleagues.¹⁵ Notably, the code language was in Russian, while the secret messages were transmitted in Latin letter combinations.¹⁶

¹³ Lāti sōjalaew Tallinnas. *Pāevaleht*, 3.10.1924, p. 3.

¹⁴ Estonian Navy's annual report for the 1926–1927 season, 1927. RA, ERA.527.1.1522, 10.

¹⁵ Report from the Commander-in-Chief of Estonian Naval Forces to Defense Minister, 5.02.1927. RA, ERA.527.1.1558, 98.

¹⁶ Secret signal codes of Estonian and Latvian navies, 30.05.1930. RA, ERA.527.1.1518, 27–44.



Fig. 2. Latvian squadron in Tallinn 1927 (A. Oll's private collection)

2. att. Latvijas eskadra Tallinā 1927. gadā (A. Olla privātkolekcija)

To continue, in what condition were the Estonian and Latvian navies in 1927 and how much did they manage to fulfil their fleet programmes? After Latvia received her warships from French shipyards in 1926–1927, they had partially realized their shipbuilding programme, whilst the Estonian Navy received no brand-new ships over the entire decade. As of 1927, the nascent Latvian fleet consisted of patrol ship *Virsaitis*, submarines *Ronis* and *Spīdola*, minesweepers *Imanta* and *Viesturs* (30 mines each), submarine tender *Varonis*, auxiliary ship *Artilerists* along with motor boats.

The Estonian main fleet consisted of destroyers *Lennuk* and *Wambola*, torpedo boat *Sulev*, gunboat *Mardus*, patrol ship *Laine*, minelayers *Ristna* and *Suuroop*, minesweepers *Kalev* and *Olev* along with auxiliaries. Obviously, the original fleet propositions were not realized and the fleets were underpowered, thus lacking the capabilities to take initiative on an operational level. There was just a sufficient number of warships to fulfil the primary needs of maritime protection.

By early 1930s, Estonia and Latvia could muster a combined fleet of 2 destroyers, 2 submarines, 2 patrol ships, a torpedo boat, 2 minelayers and 4 minesweepers. Understandably, these fleets could have theoretically been able to cooperate on limited terms. Minefields could have only been laid near their capitals, where the fleets' home bases were located. Further



Fig. 3. Latvian submarines with the submarine tender Varonis in Riga 1928 (A. Oll's private collection)

3. att. Latvijas zemūdenes un zemūdeņu palīģkuģis "Varonis" Rīgā 1928. gadā (A. Olla privātkolekcija)

operations on open seas or even coastal areas were risky due to the lack of torpedo boats. The coastal artillery was providing the main protection for the warships operating in coastal waters but could not support them in adjacent sea areas. More destroyers, torpedo boats and submarines were definitely needed, if these navies were to stand a chance against a more powerful fleet. In 1927–1929, the Latvian Navy wanted to order additional two submarines and a minelayer of 4000 tons from the British shipyards but shortly backed down due to financial reasons (Stoker 2012, 125–126). Commander-in-chief of Estonian naval forces also revived the fleet programme, and in 1930 vehemently stressed the need to purchase at least three submarines and four coastal motor torpedo boats.¹⁷ Both admirals, Keyserling and Salza, recognized the shortcomings of their respective fleets. Therefore, it was decided in 1929 to take naval collaboration to the next level, namely, the fleets had to start conducting joint naval exercises.

¹⁷ Admiral Salza's report to the Chief of the General Staff, 28.11.1930. RA, ERA.527.1.1557, 9–10.

THE RELATIONS OF ESTONIAN AND
LATVIAN NAVIES, 1930–1940

A preliminary understanding on how these two fleets would have worked together is acquired, while examining their joint naval exercises of the early 1930s. The fleets definitely complemented each other. Estonians operated with destroyers which were the main threat for submarines. Therefore, Latvian submariners needed practical experience in operating against this type of warships. The Estonians, on the other hand, were keenly interested in the capabilities of the Latvian submarines, and the joint exercises provided the destroyer crews opportunities to practice manoeuvres against submerged threats. The first exercises took place in Estonian waters near Kuivastu roadstead along with adjacent sea areas from 25 June to 4 July 1930.¹⁸

In addition to the aforementioned submarine-destroyer training, emphasis was also placed on communications, joint minelaying and trawling exercises, as well as operating against seaplanes. The following year, more extensive but similar exercises were conducted in the same area between 4–13 August.¹⁹ The effect of these exercises was to obtain knowledge of each other's warships' capabilities. For instance, Estonian officers had an opportunity to complete diving exercises onboard Latvian submarines²⁰ and Latvian officers were stationed onboard the destroyers and torpedo boat. To strengthen the bond between the two navies even further, Keyserling allowed two Estonian officers to serve aboard the submarines for several months,²¹ and in return three Latvian officers served on destroyers (Prieditis 2004, 110). Interestingly, the working language used between naval personnel of the two countries was Russian. In conclusion, the main purpose for these exercises was to familiarise the personnel

¹⁸ Estonian Navy's annual report for the 1930–1931 season, 1931. RA, ERA.527.1.1563, 75.

¹⁹ Estonian Navy's annual report for the 1931–1932 season, 1931. RA, ERA.527.1.1570, 66.

²⁰ The schedule for Estonian and Latvian naval manoeuvres, 23.07.1931. RA, ERA.638.1.132, 21.

²¹ Lieutenant Alfred Pontak served onboard *Ronis* in 17 May–3 September 1930. He also accompanied the Latvian squadron in their visit to Stockholm in 12–28 August 1930. RA, ERA.527.1.210, 94–103. Lieutenant Villem Kirotar served in the Latvian fleet in 15 June–16 October 1931. RA, ERA.527.1.548, 12.



Fig. 4. Admirals H. Salza (left) and A. Keyserling (right) during the naval maneuvers at Kuivastu 1930 (Estonian Maritime Museum, MMF 4916)

4. att. Admirāļi H. Salza (no kreisās) un A. Keizerlings flotes manevru laikā Kuivastu 1930. gadā (Igaunijas Jūras muzejs, MMF 4916)

with warship types and weaponry that either side possessed in attack and defence scenarios.²²

Although the joint naval manoeuvres were beneficial for both sides, they were abruptly discontinued. To a smaller or greater effect, this came down to individuals, as well as economical capabilities. Firstly, the Baltic states' governments never fulfilled the fleet programmes recommended by their navies. Therefore, the fleets remained small, underpowered and allocated in different locations. The most prominent leaders that vehemently supported the naval cooperation were admirals Keyserling and Salza, who retired in 1931 and 1932 respectively, and afterwards the cooperation between the fleets also dispersed. Although good relations were retained throughout the 1930s, collaboration only continued in the field of exchanging military information and naval visits. There were also additional factors in play. After selling the destroyers to Peru in 1933, Estonian fleet became significantly

²² Secret report of the Commander of the Warship Division to the Chief of Staff, 19.11.1934. RA, ERA.527.1.1590, 152.

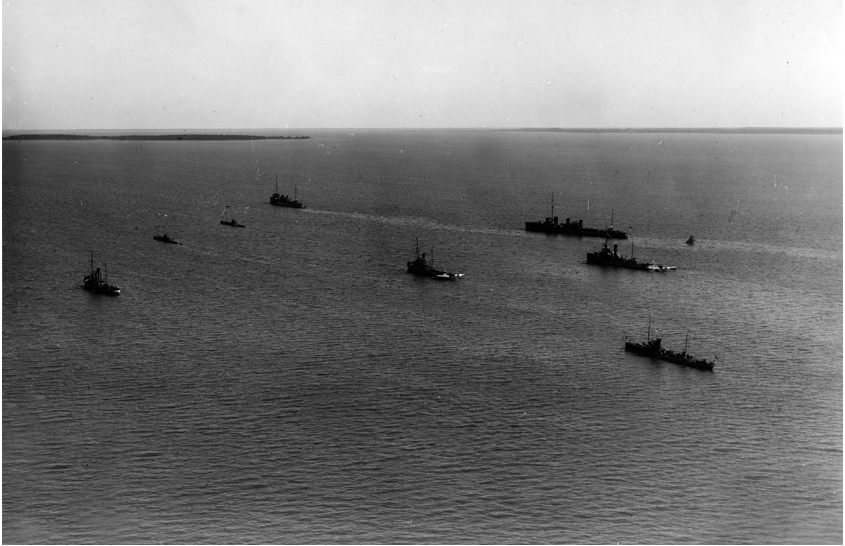


Fig. 5. Estonian and Latvian warships during the naval maneuvers in 1930
(Estonian Maritime Museum, MMF 1919/95)

5. att. Igaunijas un Latvijas karakuģi flotes manevru laikā 1930. gadā
(Igaunijas Jūras muzejs, MMF 1919/95)

weaker and confined to littoral waters. The capabilities were improved only at the end of the decade with several events— in 1937 the commissioning of brand-new submarines *Kalev* and *Lembit*, in 1939 the Estonians built the patrol ship *Pikker*, and in 1940 construction began in Tallinn of two open sea minelayers. Latvia did not acquire any warships during the 1930s because of financial difficulties. Also, by the end of the decade the technical condition of the Latvian submarines had severely deteriorated (Gajduk, Dmitriev 2016, 66–67). Only as late as 1940 the Commander-in-Chief of Estonian naval forces Johannes Santpank visited his colleague, Admiral Teodors Spāde, in Riga, and it was agreed to conduct joint naval exercises for the submarines in July 1940.²³ These efforts were already too late, since Estonia and Latvia were soon to be occupied by the Soviet Union.

²³ The joint exercise schedule between Estonian and Latvian submarines, 11.04.1940. RA, ERA.638.1.165, 13–16.

CONCLUSIONS

Speaking in maritime terms, the Baltic states of the 1920s and 1930s can be designated as coastal powers with coastal navies. These types of navies do not operate with large surface fleets and usually concentrate on defensive warfare with smaller warships in littoral waters. The naval collaboration itself can be summed up in three phases: 1. 1920–1923 an initial cooperation began due to the mine-clearing activities, 2. 1924–1931 saw the attempts to create mutual coastal defense and joint exercises of the fleets, the highlight of the collaboration, and 3. 1931–1940 were modest years of reticence. The key ingredients in these developments were the personal contacts between admirals A. Keyserling and H. Salza, who were the glue that held the navies together since 1920. According to their understanding, it was advisable for small countries with limited resources to band together and learn best practices from each other. This proved to be fruitful, since both navies concentrated in developing separate capabilities. For example, Estonians were accustomed to surface fleet tactics and manoeuvres, in which they had acquired a significant war experience, while Latvians shared their knowledge on the peculiarities of submarine warfare. The collaboration peaked in 1930–1931, when joint naval exercises were held in the Gulf of Riga, albeit shortly afterwards it became dormant. A question remains – why did this unique and promising collaboration end so abruptly? The main problem, besides the unfinished naval programmes and financial difficulties, was that both fleets were destined to protect their respective capitals. Estonians concentrated on operations in the Gulf of Finland, while Latvians – in the Gulf of Riga. Unfortunately, the fleets were too small, hence, their allocation did not allow for effective joint activities. The only way both navies would have actually banded together was against one potential scenario, the German invasion into Latvia. But this was considered highly unlikely by Estonians due to their close ties with German military intelligence. Nonetheless, this naval collaboration showed that the overall understanding of small countries' naval leaders in that time was innovative.

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IGAUNIJAS UN LATVIJAS JŪRAS SPĒKU SADARBĪBA STARPKARU LAIKĀ NO 1920. GADA LĪDZ 1940. GADAM

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Pēc miera līgumu parakstīšanas ar Padomju Krieviju 1920. gadā gan Igaunijai, gan Latvijai bija jāsāk attīstīt miera laika drošības un aizsardzības struktūras. Ņemot vērā abu valstu ģeogrāfisko stāvokli – garās krasta līnijas, jūras spēku papildināšana bija ārkārtīgi svarīga piekrastes drošībai. Augsti tehniski attīstīta bruņoto spēku atzara izveidošana abās valstīs bija sarežģīts process. Abu valstu aizsardzības budžeta samazināšanas apstākļos neviena no abām valstīm nevarēja iegādāties, uzturēt vai pat papildināt spēcīgu floti karadarbībai uz ūdens. Tādējādi radās daži unikāli risinājumi. Šajā rakstā aplūkoti principi, pēc kuriem tika veidotas Igaunijas (*Eesti Merejõud*) un Latvijas (Latvijas Kara flote) flotes, vērtēts, vai tās koncentrējas uz jūras karadarbību aizsardzībā vai uzbrukumā, un analizēts, kāpēc starp tām sākās cieša sadarbība. Jūras spēku sadarbība turpinājās vēl 20. gs. 30. gadu sākumā, un ir interesanti novērot, kāpēc tā pēkšņi tika pārtraukta. Lai arī jūras spēku alianse politiskā līmenī šķita loģiska, tomēr rodas neizbēgams jautājums – kādi bija faktiskie ieguvumi pašām flotēm un jūras spēku komandieriem. Šis raksts sniedz tikai vispārīgu strukturālu apskatu par šo tēmu, kā arī ieskatu šajā starpvalstu sadarbībā. Lai labāk izprastu šo īpašo jūras spēku sadarbību, nepieciešami plaši pētījumi gan Igaunijas, gan Latvijas arhīvos.

Atslēgas vārdi: Igaunijas flote, Latvijas flote, karakuģi, jūras aizsardzība, jūrniecības vēsture.

Kopsavilkums

Runājot jūrniecības terminoloģijā, 20. gadsimta 20. un 30. gados Baltijas valstīm var piemērot piekrastes spēku apzīmējumu, un šo valstu drošību aizsargāja to piekrastes flotes. Tās nav lielas virszemes flotes un parasti koncentrējas uz aizsardzības karadarbību, izmantojot mazākus karakuģus piekrastes ūdeņos.

Jūras spēku sadarbību var apkopot trīs posmos: 1) 1920.–1923. gadā uzsākta sākotnējā sadarbība atmiņēšanas jomā; 2) 1924.–1931. gadā notika mēģinājumi izveidot savstarpēju krasta aizsardzību un flotu kopīgas mācības – tas bija sadarbības spilgtākais punkts un 3) 1931.–1940. gadā sadarbībā valdīja peticība un atturība.

Šis norises galvenokārt noteica personiskie kontakti starp admirāļiem A. Keizerlingu un H. Salzu, – tieši viņi vienoja abu valstu flotes jau kopš 1920. gada. Viņi nelokāmi uzskatīja, ka mazām valstīm ar ierobežotiem resursiem ieteicams apvienoties un mācīties vienai no otras. Šāds princips nesa auglus, jo katra flote koncentrējās uz citu spēju attīstīšanu. Piemēram, igauņi bija pieraduši pie virszemes flotes taktikas un manevriem, kuros viņi bija guvuši ievērojamu kara pieredzi, savukārt latvieši dalījās zināšanās par zemūdens kara īpatnībām. Sadarbības augstākais punkts tika sasniegts 1930.–1931. gadā, kad Rīgas jūras līcī notika kopīgas jūras kara flotes mācības, taču neilgi pēc tam šī sadarbība ieslīga letargijā. Līdz šim nav atbildēts jautājums – kāpēc šī unikālā un daudzsoļošā sadarbība tik pēkšņi beidzās? Galvenā problēma līdztekus nepabeigtajām flotes programmām un finansiālajām grūtībām bija tā, ka abām flotēm izvirzītais pamatuzdevums bija aizsargāt katrai savu galvaspilsētu. Igauņi koncentrējās operācijām Somu līcī, savukārt latvieši – Rīgas jūras līcī. Diemžēl flotes bija pārāk mazas, tāpēc to sadalījums neļāva efektīvi īstenot kopīgas darbības. Vienīgā situācija, kurā abas flotes būtu apvienojušās, bija Vācijas iebrukums Latvijā, bet igauņi to uzskatīja par mazticamu, jo viņiem bija cieši sakari ar Vācijas militāro izlūkdienestu. Tomēr šī jūras spēku sadarbība parādīja, ka mazo valstu jūras spēku virspavēlnieku vispārējā izpratne par sadarbību tajā laikā bija novatoriska.

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