The Prime Minister, W. Churchill, to Foreign Secretary, A. Eden, 16 January 1944.

Prime Minister’s Personal Minute No. M(S) 31/3.

1. You will remember all the discussions we had at the beginning of 1942 about the future of the Baltic States and the very strong line I took against our committing ourselves to their absorption by Russia at that time. We solved these difficulties for the time being by the 20 Years Treaty, and I see by my minute to you of October 6, 1943[[1]](#footnote-1), that I summed up the situation as it was before the Moscow and Teheran Conferences.

2. I ask myself, how do all these matters stand now? Undoubtedly my own feelings have changed in the two years that have passed since the topic was first raised during your first visit to Moscow. The tremendous victories of the Russian armies, the deep-seated changes which have taken place in the character of the Russian State and Government, the new confidence which has grown in our hearts towards Stalin – these have all had their effect. Most of all is the fact that the Russians may very soon be in physical possession of these territories, and it is absolutely certain that we should never attempt to turn them out. Moreover, at Teheran when Stalin talked about keeping East Prussia up to Konigsberg[[2]](#footnote-2), we did not say anything about the Baltic States, which clearly would be comprised in the Russian Dominions in any such solution.

3. We are now about to attempt the settlement of the eastern frontiers of Poland, and we cannot be unconscious of the fact that the Baltic States, and the questions of Bukovina and Bessarabia, have very largely settled themselves through the victories of the Russian armies. At the same time any pronouncement on the topic might have disastrous effects in the United States in the election year[[3]](#footnote-3), and there is no doubt that we should ourselves be subject to embarrassing attack in the House of Commons if we decided the fate of these countries.

4. In all these circumstances I should be very glad if you would let me have a note on the whole position of the Russian western frontier as you see it today. As far as I can make out the Russian claim in no way exceeds the former Tsarist boundaries, in fact in some parts it falls notably short of them. I should like to discuss the matter with you and Cadogan one evening, and thereafter I think the matter should be brought before the War Cabinet and Constant Attenders, not so much with a view to action but to seeing where we all stand at the present time. It would be far better to shelve it all until we reach the discussions which we shall have to have after the defeat of Hitler. I do not know however whether this will be possible or whether the negotiations about Poland will not directly or indirectly involve these other matters.

5. I am afraid these are rather unhelpful jottings which only the extraordinary difficulty of the subject can excuse.

W[inston] C[hurchill]

16th January, 1944

[TNA, PREM 3/399/6]

Keywords: Baltic states

1. In it, Churchill, with references to Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941 and subsequent discussions, specified reasons as to why in the treaty with the Soviet Union the British side had to abandon the question of setting fixed borders on the Soviet Union’s western front: the factor of a possible split of opinion in the House of Commons and the need to take into account the US position. He recommended to postpone the resolving of this the problem until the peace conference, adding at the same time, that "we should do everything in our power to persuade the Poles to agree with the Russians about their eastern frontier, in return for gains in East Prussia and Silesia” (published in: Churchill WS the Second World War Vol V. Boston, 1951. p. 588-589). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the Soviet minutes see: Tegeranskaya konferentsiya. p. 167. Iden nadeyalsya, chto Stalina udastsya sklonit’ k otkazu ot zayavki na Kenigsberg. "The more I think over Stalin's Konigsberg demand the more I think that if Poles are willing to talk on the basis of the Curzon Line we should press him very strongly to drop it” - minister Churchill wrote soon after the Tehran conference (Eden to Churchill, 24/12/1943 // TNA, FO 954/19). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The US presidential elections were to be held in November 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)