

# The Political System of Karlis Ulmanis' Authoritarian Regime (15.05.1934 – 17.06.1940)

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**Abstract:** *The paper examines the political system of Karlis Ulmanis' authoritarian regime. Although Ulmanis himself underlined that his regime on its merits was revolutionary, in fact in most aspects it was a simple authoritarian, even autocratic regime, in which all the power was in the hands of one person – Ulmanis. He was the head of government, the government in turn having usurped the rights of the parliament; he was also the President and the supreme commander of the armed forces.*

Ulmanis' regime did not want to be only a simple, conservative authoritarian dictatorship but claimed to be “a national revolution”, a dictatorship with features of fascistic mass mobilisation and manipulation. During the time the regime existed, Ulmanis and the members of his government, not to mention ideologists and propagandists of the regime, compared it with fascistic or even totalitarian regimes. Ulmanis has several times publicly expressed his high evaluation of Italy's fascism and of B. Mussolini personally and called on people in Latvia to learn from Italy. In a speech given in the meeting of Mazpulki (a youth organisation) on 26 April 1935 he laid a special emphasis on the authoritarianism of Italy and on the psychological plane of fascism: fascism as an excited emotional state and enthusiasm that is necessary for the mobilisation of masses.<sup>1</sup> He wanted to see something like that in Latvia, too. The regime's propaganda compared Ulmanis not only to Mussolini, but even to Hitler.<sup>2</sup> On 3 April, 1938 addressing the Chamber of Labour, Minister of Foreign Affairs V. Munters gave something like a typological definition of authoritarian regimes, Ulmanis' regime included: it belonged to “... one-party or party-less regimes, called also totalitarian or authoritarian...”<sup>3</sup> In 1939 when the fifth anniversary of the regime was celebrated, both fascism and totalitarianism were inseparable from the regime's self-definition: at times the regime was deemed as deserving the name of a fascist state;<sup>4</sup> at times its claim was even more megalomaniac: the well-known statistician J. Bokalders, who served also as the regime's ideologist, described it as “... a politically united and totalitarian state...”<sup>5</sup> Totalitarian!

The regime of 15 May was a compilation, which tried to borrow several features from dictatorships of various kinds, but it did not make it a fascist, and even less so – a totalitarian, dictatorship, the kind of which in fact did not fully exist even in the policy of

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<sup>1</sup> *Pirmais gads*, [The First Year] 1934, May 15, 1935, 247, 248; Ulmanis' glorification of Italy, in a striking, even unusual manner, is evident in his New Year greetings to the people of Latvia from 5 January 1938: all congratulations are built on references, but not to his own speeches or examples from Latvia, but to Italy (*Rīts*, [Morning] January 5, 1938); see also Ulmanis' message of February of the same year *Duty – the Supreme Law – Sējējs*, [The Sower] 2 (1938): 114.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. A. Alnis, “No parlamentārisma uz autoritāru vadonības valsti,” [From Parliamentarianism to an Authoritarian State] *Sējējs*, 8 (1939): 806.

<sup>3</sup> *Ceturtais Gads*, [The Fourth Year], 367.

<sup>4</sup> A. Alnis, “No parlamentārisma”, 806.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bokalders, “Saimnieciskā ideoloģija,” [Economic Ideology] *Ekonomists* [Economist], 10 (1939): 700.