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POSITION OF POLAND IN INTER-WAR CENTRAL EUROPE IN CONCEPTIONS OF POLITICIANS

In the early spring of 1921, a peace treaty was signed in Riga between Poland and the Soviet republics. In summer, 1922, Polish authorities took over the administration in the eastern part of Upper Silesia, which had been just conceded to the Polish Republic. These two events symbolize the position of Poland in relation to its neighbours, both east and west. To the east, Poland acquired a frontier that made it possible for the part of the territory, which had been ruled by Polish kings before the partitions to be incorporated into the state; this, however, divided Byelorussian and Ukrainian territories, imposed Polish rules upon communities speaking different languages, having their own distinct culture and aspirations, and established conditions for perpetually glowing fires of irredentism, which was a threat for agreements of Riga. The fact that some eastern regions were inhabited by a considerable number of Polish people (Vilna region and East Galicia) often added to the complicated political conditions there. Therefore, even though the USSR many a time emphasized that it was determined to stand by the peace treaty of 1921, and then in 1932 signed a non-aggression pact with Poland, there was not a politician in Poland responsible for the directions of Polish policy during the inter-war period who would not have been anxious about the future of the Polish eastern frontier. The fact that about 2 million of Byelorussians and 5 million of Ukrainians found themselves within the Polish frontiers, most of them, looking for means of liberation from Polish rules, weighed heavily on the Polish-Soviet relations. Some critical opinions on treating Byelorussian and Ukrainian populations by Polish administration, that appeared in the Soviet press and in announcements

of some politicians, especially when conflicts in the eastern borderlands were intensified, raised protests in Warsaw and increased the existing distrust to the policy of the USSR.

To the west, Poland's frontier settled by the decisions of the Treaty of Versailles also separated people speaking the same language; it separated the Polish nation. To the west of this frontier, a Polish national minority, amounting to at least one million people, had been left in Germany and subjected to germanization. Moreover, at the same time, defeated Germany did not intend to accept the settlements of the Peace Treaty. In the twenties, Germany attempted to realize the programme of frontier revision through economic pressure and diplomatic interventions, declaring, at the same time, that a renouncement of war should be the only method of solving controversies. At the beginning of March 1925, one of Polish diplomats, in his letter to the Foreign Minister, Aleksander Skrzyński, defined the question of the western frontier as a matter of life and death, commenting: "I am aware of these unparalleled difficulties with which it is bristling. How many open antagonists and *faux-frères* it has" even in the League of Nations.¹ At that time, preparatory negotiations leading to the Treaty of Locarno began. After Hitler had come to power, military preparations were initiated.

The problems that troubled Polish politicians were not the same at the eastern as at the western frontier of the Polish Republic. In the west, there was a fear of the German imperialism, of resuming the policy of annexation and germanization. To the east, the unity of the Polish territory was threatened by national movements for liberation on the part of nations whose states had been developed within the USSR political system. Polish politicians were also anxious about the prospects of the "export of revolution" although many of the Soviet politicians had rejected and condemned such ideas. However, the above-mentioned differences disappeared in the practice of diplomatic activities. The essential problem for the authors of Polish foreign policy programmes was how to establish the international position of the Polish Republic so as to protect it from consequences of the German revisionism,

¹ Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archives of New Records, further referred to as AAN], files of E. Piltz 209, p. 11.

Byelorussian and Ukrainian irredentism, and the increased international significance of the Soviet republics. Poland, situated between Germany and the USSR, felt distrust and fear with respect to both her neighbours and was looking for an alliance system that would give her support of other countries against them.

With some simplification, one may say that there existed three main lines of this political activity. The first one was the policy towards the powers of Entente that had won the First World War and then determined, to a great extent, the shape of the Polish Republic by the Versaille decisions. Especially relations with France played an important role, since in the twenties this country followed decidedly an anti-German policy and was unfriendly towards the USSR. A weak point of the policy of cooperation with the Entente powers was the presence of serious political differences between them, Great Britain's policy being even in collision with Polish interests. In addition, the international position of France was weaker and weaker.

The second line of the Polish policy included attempts to settle the relations of Poland with both her powerful neighbours. The Treaty of Riga signed as a result of bilateral talks was a basis for the mutual relations between Poland and the Soviet republics (later on, the Soviet Union), whereas the western neighbour denied the equity of the Versaille decisions regarding the frontiers, and many a time referred to the Article 19th of the Covenant of the League of Nations which presumed a possibility of changes to be introduced in international agreements. Formally, a programme leading to a revision of the Polish frontiers was presented only by Germany. However, there was some anxiety in Warsaw that the two neighbours, to the east and west, could reach closer understanding.

Polish diplomats were undertaking, with varying success, activities along both lines, but these efforts were generally considered insufficient to secure the state interests. Thus, since the very beginning of the restored independence period of the Polish Republic, various programmes had been developed, aiming at political unification of Central and South-Eastern Europe states, which—like Poland—were settled “between Germany and the

USSR.”² The latter question, which constituted the third line of Polish policy, is the subject of the present paper.

At the beginning of the regained independence, Polish foreign policy, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, was dominated by conceptions of Józef Piłsudski who was the Head of State and exerted an important influence on Polish diplomatic activities. From the circles close to Piłsudski, the so-called “Belvedere camp,” proposals were put forward to create a constellation of states that would keep Russia in check regardless of her political system. Whereas Piłsudski’s decisions underlaid the Polish-Russian and Polish-Lithuanian conflicts, the consequences of the war with the Soviet republics and those of the Vilna military expedition led by General L. Żeligowski, signified in fact a collapse of the far-reaching plans of the Belvedere camp, in favour of the victory of the National Democrats’ “incorporation” programme.³ It was their ideas that, finally, mostly affected the Polish foreign policy before Piłsudski’s coup d’état of May. It should also be noted that up to May 1926, the driving force behind diplomacy were ministers connected with the National Democracy Party.⁴ It turned out, however, that their practical activity had much in common with that of politicians connected with Piłsudski.

Original conceptions of Polish policy in Central and South-Eastern Europe between 1919 and 1920 were evidently under the influence of the “Federation” idea represented by the Belvedere camp.⁵ At that time, a programme was formulated to make

² See W. Balcerak, *Koncepcje integracyjne w polskiej polityce zagranicznej (1918 - 1939)* [*Integration Concepts in Polish Foreign Policy (1918 - 1939)*], “Dzieje Najnowsze,” 1970, No. 1; J. Tomaszewski, *Europa środkowa i południowo-wschodnia: cechy charakterystyczne i granice regionu* [*Central and South-Eastern Europe: Specific Features and Borderlines of the Region*], “Ekonomia,” 1976, No. 36.

³ See e.g. W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski* [*Modern Political History of Poland*], vol. II: 1914 - 1939, London 1967, pp. 536 - 537, 546 - 555, 575 - 577.

⁴ Among those one should mention Eustachy Sapieha (23 June 1920 - 24 May 1921), Konstanty Skirmunt (11 June 1921 - 6 June 1922), Marian Seyda (28 May - 27 October 1923), Roman Dmowski (27 October - 14 December 1923), Maurycy Zamojski (19 February - 27 June 1924).

⁵ Cf. J. Lewandowski, *Federalizm. Litwa i Białoruś w polityce obozu belwederskiego (XI 1918 - IV 1920)* [*Federalism. Lithuania and Byelorussia in the Policy of the Belvedere Camp (November 1918 - April 1920)*], Warszawa 1962; S. Mikulicz, *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej* [*Promethean Idea in the Policy of the Second Polish Republic*], Warszawa 1971.

Poland the centre of a bloc of states that would extend from the Black Sea to the Baltic; this programme was competitive with Czechoslovakia's plans. On the 6th of May 1920, when Stanislaw Patek was Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maurycy Zamoyski who was Ambassador of the Polish Republic in Paris, was given an instruction that included the following passage: "If it is too early now to accentuate in Paris that the general policy in Central Europe, had never been in total agreement with the lines of Polish policy, as it had been based on the idea of a purely Slavonic bloc (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland) with a marked Czech predominance, which idea was a temporary conception leading to Pan-Slavism based on the restoration of Great Russia, it would, however, be necessary just now to prepare the ground in Paris to accept the need, for the benefit of France, to revise French policy in Central Europe... The basic idea of French policy consisting in restoration of some economic solidarity, in the form of a Danubian union, of the states formerly subjected to the late Austro-Hungarian monarchy may be undertaken but without excluding Hungary from the union and without ascribing Slavonic predominance to it."⁶

As it appears from the letter of Erazm Piltz to Sapieha, of August 1920, some politicians in Warsaw regarded the idea of a Polish-Hungarian-Rumanian alliance as an opposing suggestion to the French concept of a bloc of states based of Czechoslovakia.⁷ Plans similar to the Polish ones were also discussed in Budapest where the proposed three-state alliance was suggested to be extended in future over Austria, Bavaria, and Yugoslavia but without Czechoslovakia.⁸

All those ideas appeared to be unrealistic, as Hungary took up an uncompromising position about the question of frontiers, which fact was upsetting particularly for Rumania. In Bucharest there were opinions, on the one hand, that the only effective guarantee against the danger of Hungarian revisionism is an alliance with

⁶ AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu [The Embassy of the Polish Republic in Paris], 99, p. 5 - 6.

⁷ *Archiwum polityczne Ignacego Paderewskiego* [Ignacy Paderewski's Private Political Archives], vol. II, Warszawa 1974, pp. 453 - 454.

⁸ Report of the Polish Legation in Budapest, of November 11, 1920. AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu, 223, p. 8 - 9.

Czechoslovakia and cooperation with Yugoslavia, which soon was materialized in the form of Little Entente. However, on the other hand, Rumanian politicians did not intend to reject the cooperation with Poland, which was important in view of their attitude towards the Soviet republics. Therefore, Minister Take Jonescu proposed that a bloc should be formed which would include—apart from the states of the Little Entente—Poland and Greece;⁹ the latter country, like Yugoslavia and Rumania, was interested in cooperation aimed against Bulgaria.

Therefore, as early as at the beginning of Poland's restored independence, south of the Carpatian mountains, a contradiction appeared, between political interests of Poland and Czechoslovakia, which states were tending, each in the name of its own benefit, to form their own alliance systems.

At the same time in Warsaw vivid attention was paid to the planned cooperation of the Baltic states.¹⁰ Such a plan was presented by Estonia as early as the Peace Conference. In October 1919, Aleksander Skrzyński, at that time Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made efforts to bring Great Britain round to the idea of north-east federation, the base of which would be the united Polish-Lithuanian state.¹¹ In January 1920, Leon Wasilewski, a person of significance in the Belvedere camp, attended as the Polish official delegate the conference of the Baltic states in Helsinki; the resolution of the conference stated among others: "*Die an der Konferenz Teilnehmende Staaten verpflichten sich unverzüglich an die Ausarbeitung eines Planes zu schreiten Zwecks gemeinsamen Verteidigung gegen die ihnen*

⁹ J. K ü h l, *Föderationspläne im Donauraum und in Ostmitteleuropa*, München 1958, p. 39.

¹⁰ A. Skrzypek, *Związek Bałtycki, Litwa, Łotwa, Estonia i Finlandia w polityce Polski i ZSRR w latach 1919 - 1925* [*The Baltic Union, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland in View of Poland's and USSR's Policy Between 1919 and 1925*], Warszawa 1972, pp. 82 - 83, 92; M. Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Polska—Wielka Brytania w latach 1918 - 1923. Kształtowanie się stosunków politycznych* [*Poland—Great Britain Between 1918 and 1923. Trends in Political Relations*], Warszawa 1975, pp. 172 - 173, 330 - 331. Balcerak in the afore-mentioned paper emphasizes, particularly, the significance ascribed to the Baltic plans and relations with Byelorussia and Ukraine in Pilsudski's group concepts, while omitting their incidental interest in the relationship with Rumania and Hungary. Cf. W. Balcerak, *op. cit.* pp. 33 - 35.

¹¹ J. K ü h l, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

seitens Soviet-Russland drohenden Gefahren [...]"¹² The plans resulting from Piłsudski's idea of federation were impeded not only by Polish-Lithuanian feuds but also were in conflict with Great Britain's interests. The British were afraid that any form of close cooperation of the Baltic states with Polish participation would lead a way to the French domination in this region ; thus, some effective steps were undertaken to paralyze the efforts of Polish diplomats. Therefore, the plans to compose an alliance system according to the proposals formulated in Piłsudski's circles failed finally. But some elements of this programme were maintained in future and they would appear in Polish policy during the whole inter-war period though they were differently marked at various times. Among these elements one may mention the Polish cooperation with Rumania and Hungary as Polish diplomats tried to mitigate conflicts between these two countries, the unextinguished interest in the alliance of the Baltic states, and finally, the competition with Czechoslovakia to gain the leading position in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The attempts to organize a closer cooperation of the Baltic states under Polish leadership were continued, though in a modified form, by Sapieha. In April 1921 he advised to make France interested in these plans emphasizing that they are of essential significance in opposing the Germans and the Soviet republics. In his instruction for a Polish envoy to Paris he said : "our alliance with Rumania, recommended by France, has its 'pendant' in the North through an alliance with the Baltic states."¹³

The passage quoted above is worth attention, also because it directly revealed a connection between the Polish plans for a Baltic alliance and the programme of cooperation with the southern states. Under changed circumstances the former tendencies expressed by the Belvedere camp during the early period of the Polish independence returned thus in a modified form.

However, in the autumn of 1921 it became unavoidable to admit a failure of the Baltic plans, although in the next years Poland would still try to accomplish a cooperation between the

¹² AAN, files of L. Wasilewski 44, p. 50.

¹³ AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu, 4, p. 8.

countries in this part of Europe and to establish there a political-military bloc opposing the German influence.¹⁴

The failure of evident Polish efforts to eliminate Czechoslovakia from the Central-European alliances induced Poland to change the principles of her policy. The conceptions of the National Democratic Party had perhaps their share in this modification: these conceptions seem to be appropriately understood by Wiesław Balcerak who wrote in his paper that the leaders of this group: "did not exactly determine the connections of Poland, under their rules, with the Central-European states. However, one may deduce from the foreign policy led in 1923 by Marian Seyda and Roman Dmowski that they intended to assemble in Central Europe a group including Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania by extending and reconstructing the Little Entente so that it could be a mainstay of resistance against the danger of possible German attacks. Assuming that Poland would play a leading role in this group they hoped to exploit this to strengthen the position of Poland in Central Europe as well as in her partnership with Russia."¹⁵ We are not deeply interested in the possible intentions of the National Democratic Party in question of Poland's relations with Russia after the expected restoration of capitalism there, the more so as they remained only in the sphere of wishful thinking, while a significant aspect of this to us is a change of the Polish tactics towards Czechoslovakia—which was to be one of the members of the Polish alliance system but with a subordinate position. Also this conception turned out to be impossible to realize, like the previous attempts to leave the southern neighbour outside the Central-European political system. During autumn 1921 some attempts at rapprochement between Poland and Czechoslovakia were made. The two countries signed agreements that settled a few problems in their mutual relations.¹⁶ An internal bulletin of the Polish Mi-

¹⁴ For broader description see Z. Sládek, J. Tomaszewski, *Próby integracji gospodarczej Europy środkowej i południowo-wschodniej w latach dwudziestych XX w.* [Attempts at Economic Integration of Central and South-Eastern Europe in the Twenties], "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych," vol. XL, 1979.

¹⁵ W. Balcerak, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Cf., in particular, *Češi a Poláci w minulosti*, p. 2, Praha 1967, p. 488 ff.

nistry of Foreign Affairs informed its readers about a statement of Edvard Beneš, Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made in Parliament, that an era of new policy was coming "which policy would take into account the mutual interests and would be a serious guarantee against the German expansion. From our side [i.e. the Polish one—J. T.] we attach much importance to the Polish-Czechoslovak agreement because it strengthens the international position of Poland, makes even easier our relations with France, and in exchange for our obligation to some solidarity with the Czechs in the field of Central European policy makes a new step towards stabilization of our eastern frontiers."¹⁷

It is worth noting that the intentions which underlaid the rapprochement with Czechoslovakia were the fortification of a political system that would give guarantees against both Germany and the USSR. Poland, however, ostentatiously dissociated herself from the Czechoslovak conception of alliances in Europe. It rejected suggestions that it should join the Little Entente.¹⁸ This resulted from unwillingness to engage itself in a policy unfriendly to Hungary but also from the fear that Prague would gain a dominant position. Polish diplomats emphasized that the Little Entente had a local character while the Polish Republic was interested in settlements on a more extended scale. Moreover, the Polish plans concerning the Baltic states were still alive. Within this expanded alliance system the position of Poland was expected to be increased at the expense of Czechoslovakia.¹⁹

Polish politicians tried to persuade first of all Rumania to adopt these political solutions, being right in assessment that Rumania, out of the states allied in the Little Entente, would be most keen to approve the alliance on an extended scale. After all, the cooperation with Czechoslovakia did not solve all the Rumanian

¹⁷ AAN, Ambasada RP w Londynie [The Embassy of the Polish Republic in London], 1167, "Polska a zagranica" (internal bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). October 20, 1921, p. 20.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, "Polska a zagranica," November 3, 1921, p. 45.

¹⁹ Cf. J. Lewandowski, *Pierwsze próby integracji Europy środkowej po I wojnie światowej na tle rywalizacji polsko-czechosłowackiej* [First Attempts at Integration of Central Europe after the First World War against the Background of the Polish-Czechoslovak Rivalry], "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej," vol. II, 1967, p. 147 ff.

problems. From this point of view attention should be drawn to a report from the meeting between two Ministers, Seyda and Ion Duca, held on 26th June 1923. We read there, among other things, the following: "it was accepted... that in Central and Eastern Europe a collective force should be established, against which the nations and countries that live today sustained by revenge plans will not have the courage to start a new war and will accept the facts accomplished. Having in mind this assumption, Minister Duca asked whether Poland would join the Little Entente and invited Minister Seyda to Bucharest to take part in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Little Entente. In reply Minister Seyda stated that the reason of the Little Entente's existence is the safeguarding of the states allied in the Entente on the basis of the treaties of St. Germain, Neuilly, and Trianon, whereas in order to achieve the aim stated before it is necessary to establish a more extended agreement which would guarantee Poland, Rumania, and their future allies in Central Europe their territories possessed according to all relevant treaties, including thus both the Treaty of Versaille and the Treaty of Riga. Minister Duca approved this conception. Then Minister Seyda declared that he would decidedly tend towards this end, being conscious, however, that it would rather take much time to complete it." The essential impediment in this way is Czechoslovakia's policy, particularly in relation to the Soviet Union. "Unless the Czechoslovak policy adapt itself to the Russian policy of Poland and Rumania it would not be possible to combine a Central-European bloc."²⁰

This was the right estimation, however it did not include all the existing impediments. The politicians in Prague, irrespective of their attitude towards the Soviet political system, did not want to engage themselves explicitly in supporting the frontiers that were questionable from the ethnographic point of view, gave scope to conflicts, and would be unacceptable to the possible bourgeois Russia. Moreover, in Beneš's opinion Czechoslovak relations with the Germans were free of any controversial questions whilst the rapprochement with Poland and supporting her

²⁰ AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu, 148, p. 36.

policy against Germany would injure his good contacts with Berlin and would draw Czechoslovakia into the sphere of a conflict, difficult to be solved and dangerous, while not giving any essential benefit in return.

It is worth noticing that Poland did not give up the idea of an alliance system that would join the Baltic with the Black Sea. Minister Seyda's successor, Dmowski (the ideological leader of the so-called national camp), explicitly subjected the Baltic policy to the programme of the alliance with the Balkan states including Bulgaria, recommending, at the same time, caution in relations with Czechoslovakia.²¹ One can see, thus, that the National Democrats only modified in fact the lines of Polish foreign policy in Central and South-Eastern Europe, tried to use different tactics but continued the same basic ideas.

The Polish plans could not be, however, estimated as very realistic. First of all, they were counteracted by Czechoslovakia, which was not going to lose its leading position in the Little Entente in favour of Poland. The politicians in Prague were duly afraid that the Polish-Rumanian rapprochement could be a threat to the closeness of the Little Entente. Also Great Britain was adverse to the Polish ideas as it considered them advantageous for France.²² Some British politicians openly warned representatives of the Baltic states that the alliance with Poland was a risk, because the frontiers, Polish-German and Polish-Soviet, are impossible to be maintained; besides, England would not intervene in case of a Soviet-Rumanian conflict over Bessarabia.²³ Finally, the Polish plans were opposed by conflicts existing between the countries that, according to these plans, were to enter into the alliance. Because of all those circumstances, only a little part of the plans presented by Seyda and Dmowski was accomplished. Poland managed to strengthen her cooperation with Rumania and maintain close relations with Estonia and Latvia, but did not

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 41 - 42.

²² M. Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Polityka Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Europy środkowo-wschodniej w latach 1918 - 1921* [Great Britain's Policy in Central-Eastern Europe between 1918 and 1921], "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej," 1970, p. 6, p. 122.

²³ Cf. a letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of September 5, 1924, AAN, Ambasada RP w Londynie, 42, pp. 30 - 31.

approach even a bit the materialization of her idea to create a union of states between the Baltic and the Black Sea.

The intentions of politicians representing the National Democratic camp were underlaid by their belief that Poland should have a strong position in Europe.²⁴ A country situated between Germany and the USSR that was not given a sufficient support from Western Europe must combine an extended alliance system where it would keep a due, leading role.

This fundamental idea of the foreign policy of the Polish Republic was still valid after the coup d'état of May, when the political line was laid out by Piłsudski and, later on, by Józef Beck. Piłsudski, among his fundamental dogmas on the Polish foreign policy, formulated also the following tenet which would turn out fatal in its practical realization in later years: "Poland should be great or fall."²⁵ This principle was later developed into Poland's aspiration to gain the status of a Great Power declared by Beck and his associates.

It is only natural that after the coup d'état of May the principal ideas of the Polish relations with the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe, set forth in the earlier period, were continued. The tactics, however, had been in many respects modified which was also a result of new circumstances in international situation. Generally, these ideas were approved by most opposition circles. The Polish Socialist Party supported the

²⁴ Dmowski wrote: "It had to be clear for everybody who even a little bit understood the political geography of Europe, that in this area, where Western Europe is ended and which is a way out to the vast plains of the East, moreover, as in recent years, situated between two powerful states, there is no room for a small, weak, little country" (R. Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, Warszawa 1925, p. 17). This element of Dmowski's views was pointed out by M. Jaworski in his MA dissertation (not published) entitled *Struktura i ewolucja koncepcji politycznych R. Dmowskiego w latach 1893 - 1915* [*Structure and Evolution of R. Dmowski's Political Conceptions in the Years 1893 - 1915*], Warszawa 1978, Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

²⁵ Cf. P. Starzeński, *Trzy lata z Beckiem* [*Three Years with Beck*], London 1972, p. 37. It is worth emphasis that the author of the memoirs illustrating the ideas underlying the Polish foreign policy during the closing period of the Second Polish Republic, shows a most critical attitude to the above dogma; in his opinion Poland "never had at her disposal sufficient power to determine, in a decisive and permanent manner, the development of events, and to rescue Europe." *Ibidem*, p. 36.

Baltic bloc idea under Polish leadership, being at the same time sceptical about the possibility of achieving the agreement with Czechoslovakia, though socialist leaders emphasized the great significance of such an agreement to the benefit of Poland.²⁶ The programme of an alliance system that would be established between the Baltic and the Black Sea was also raised by Władysław Sikorski who connected this programme with an idea of close cooperation between Poland and France. He stated on this occasion that to be successful in this plan the Polish Republic should maintain Byelorussian and Ukrainian lands within its territory, and wrote in 1930: "From the political point of view, our eastern borderlands ensure us a direct connection with the Baltic states and Rumania. They are thus fundamental for a big power status of our state. As long as Polish troops positioned within the triangle of the Volhynia fortresses stand, at the same time, on guard of Rumanian Bessarabia, as long as our direct frontier with Latvia enables us to conduct active policy towards the Baltic states, Poland will be a crucial factor for political equilibrium in the East."²⁷ It is worth noting that this distinguished politician who was shortly to become one of the leading personages of the right-central wing of the political opposition against the "sanacja" system, formulated a programme for Poland of a Great Power status, analogous to the one declared by Piłsudski's associates.

The fact that the principal lines of the Polish prior-to-May policy in respect of the Baltic states were further continued was confirmed in an instruction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 13th October 1928: "An agreement between the Baltic states and Poland, including both political and economical cooperation, was the starting point of our policy on the Baltic" (particularly with respect to the USSR). "The Polish Baltic programme, in the long term, consists in attempting to combine, after suppression of our conflicts with Lithuania, a political-economical bloc that would include Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and would be led by

²⁶ Cf. L. Ziąja, *PPS a polska polityka zagraniczna 1926 - 1939* [The Polish Socialist Party and its Influence on Polish Foreign Policy, 1926 - 1939], Warszawa 1974, pp. 28 - 29, 98.

²⁷ W. Sikorski, *Polska i Francja w przeszłości i dobie współczesnej* [Poland and France in the Past and Nowadays], Lwów 1931, p. 114.

Poland and Finland.”²⁸ The economic cooperation of the Baltic states with Poland, emphasized in the above-mentioned instruction, was in fact rather weak during the whole inter-war period. The political effects of the programme achieved in the thirties turned out to be not more successful than before. Admittedly, Beck managed, by using threat, to induce Lithuania to establish diplomatic relations with Poland in 1938, but by no means this could signify the suppression of the conflicts and establishing a friendly cooperation, without which the real alliance was out of question. The main cause of the conflicts the matter of Vilna, remained still vital.

There were, however, gradual changes in Polish relations with the countries south to the Polish frontiers, but these seem to be changes in tactics that previously appeared to be unsuccessful, rather than changes of the principles of Polish policy. As we know, already Dmowski advised caution against Czechoslovakia, still earlier Seyda became aware of numerous difficulties in imposing the Polish political lines upon Prague in spite of the settlement with Rumania to this effect.

After Piłsudski's *coup d'Etat*, the relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia seemed to remain unchanged. There were some symptoms, however, suggesting that the rivalry between the two countries was intensified mainly because each country had its own view on its future relations with Germany. At the beginning of 1927 August Zaleski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggested, during his talk with one of the western diplomats, that the “Anschluss” should be approved in exchange for the Germans' renouncing their claims for Polish territories. A few weeks later President Thomas G. Masaryk emphasized, during his talk with Gustav Stresemann, a significance of Danzig to Germany, drawing his interlocutor's attention away from the matter of Austria. The alternative—Austria or Danzig—was even more clearly put forward by Beneš in March 1928.²⁹

The role of Danzig in the Polish policy was analyzed many

²⁸ AAN, Ambasada PR w Londynie, 42, p. 44, 46.

²⁹ F. G. Campbell, *Confrontation in Central Europe. Weimar Germany and Czechoslovakia*, Chicago-London 1975, p. 183, 189.

times and it is obvious that the Czechoslovak politicians' suggestions were strikingly in collision with Poland's interests. On the other hand, viewing it from Prague, the question of Austria was of particular importance. The "Anschluss" would bring about encirclement of the Czech territories and give a totally new significance to the question of German minority in the Czechoslovak Republic. It was Piłsudski who was perfectly aware of possible consequences of the "Anschluss" to Czechoslovakia, and it is obvious that Zaleski could not act without Piłsudski's initiative or at least approval.

I could not find any trace in documents indicating that at the Wierzbowa street, where Beck resided, it was known what Masaryk and Beneš had said during the above-mentioned talks, as well as that Zaleski's initiative was known in Černin Palace, a seat of Beneš. It also seems that these plans did not meet at first with a response from Berlin. It is possible that the Polish side treated this as a feeler to find out the German views of the conditions on which a direct threat would be turned away from the Polish western frontier. It is also possible that the intention was to exert an indirect pressure on Czechoslovakia to induce her to accept the Polish political conception under a threat of the possible German danger.

Meanwhile, much more significance was ascribed to the plans of the Agrarian Bloc. This idea appeared in the summer of 1930 and originated at the conference of Yugoslav, Rumanian, and Hungarian experts who gathered to coordinate the positions of the agrarian states against industrial ones. This initiative was joined by Poland which was planning to involve also Bulgaria and the Baltic states in this agreement. Common offices were soon established to coordinate works in the field of agrarian policy, and conferences were periodically convoked. Also Czechoslovakia joined the Agrarian Bloc.³⁰

A preliminary meeting of the three states raised anxiety in Prague that her allies of Little Entente would elaborate a com-

³⁰ M. Romportlová, Z. Sládek, *Obchodně politické vztahy a výměna zboží mezi ČSR a Madarskem v letech 1927 - 1935* [Commercial Relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, 1927 - 1935], "Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity", Řada historická C 21 - 22, Brno 1975, pp. 80 - 81.

mon way to cooperate with Hungary without Czechoslovakia's knowledge. The establishing of the Agrarian Bloc was met with fear that it would be a tool for Poland to press Yugoslavia and Rumania to weaken their alliance with Czechoslovakia. This anxiety turned out to be right as Poland had had in fact side intentions to weaken the international position of Czechoslovakia, but the basic reason for the conferences and meetings was looking for ways to overcome the agrarian crisis and to gain some concessions from the European industrial states. The quite ambitious objectives of the Agrarian Bloc were not materialized. Also Poland did not manage to impair the position of her southern neighbour. Meanwhile new problems appeared.

In the early thirties some symptoms appeared in the policy of Germany that induced Czechoslovak politicians to modify their attitude towards Poland. The most alarming move was an unsuccessful attempt to form an Austro-German customs union. This revealed a change in German policy, which till then was mainly interested in Polish affairs. It can be seen, too, from some internal diplomatic documents. On the 15th of April, 1931, Secretary of State Wilhelm von Bülow wrote to a German envoy to Prague that Czechoslovakia was expected to be drawn into the orbit of German influences while Poland was to be only the next stage of expansion.³¹ These circumstances induced Czechoslovak politicians to look for cooperation with Poland, though at first without any formal agreement so as to avoid an open conflict with Germany.³² Still the common opinion was that the most serious threat was directed at Poland.

The Czechoslovak proposals were received in Warsaw with rather restrained acceptance which was, among other things, caused by personal prejudices of Piłsudski and Beck (the latter was Zaleski's successor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) against

³¹ P. Krüger, *Das europäische Staatensystem und die deutsche Politik gegenüber Tschechoslowakei in den 30er Jahren*, in: *Gleichgewicht - Revision - Restauration. Die Aussenpolitik der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Europasystem der Pariser Vorortverträge*, München-Vien 1976, pp. 243 - 244.

³² Cf. J. Kozeński, *Czechosłowacja w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1932 - 1938* [Czechoslovakia in Polish Foreign Policy between 1932 and 1938], Poznań 1964, pp. 46 - 48 ; E. Beneš, *Paměti. Od Mnichova k nové válce a k novému vítězství*, Praha 1947, p. 11.

the Czechs.³³ Mutual relations between the two states were, however, determined by different political concepts. Czechoslovakia was building its security on the basis of strictly observed peace treaties and the alliance with France, and was interested in the defence of the *status quo* in Europe. Poland after Piłsudski's coup d'état became more and more disillusioned with the French policy, particularly because of France's attitude at Locarno in the autumn of 1925; Beck kept himself aloof from the League of Nations, opposed attempts at multilateral agreements, and promoted the idea that only bilateral settlements were reasonable. Behind this idea there was a belief that any cooperation with the USSR should be avoided because of the possibility for Poland's eastern neighbour to enter in partnership with the Great Powers in the question of European problems.³⁴ Thus Poland decided to sign a non-aggression pact with the USSR but she was determined not to take any further step.

In 1933 there appeared an opportunity to make progress in the question of Poland's western frontier. Poland exploited the situation after Hitler's coming to power and signed a non-aggression declaration in January 1934. The close Franco-Polish cooperation was thereby broken and the Polish Republic—convinced of its status of a Great Power—started her "policy of equilibrium" with both her neighbours, which was to mean keeping an "equal distance" to Berlin and Moscow.

This policy was to be conducted along with combining a vast alliance system in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Such assumptions were presented in a talk given to the higher-rank employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in February or

³³ In 1936 Beck said to his associates: "Our policy and the official Czechoslovak policy are diametrically opposed. The Czechs permanently thwart my plans. There was a moment, yet in Marshal's days, when it seemed possible to us to come to terms with them; I was about to set out for Prague but Beneš shifted his ground. He is not courageous enough to unite with us. He is a little, impudent man. The Czechs played unfair with us at the end of the war, and it was not only once. Marshal promised the delegation of Poles from Zaolzie... that they would return to Poland, and this promise must be fulfilled." P. Starzeński, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

³⁴ I think, thus, despite Balcerak's opinion (*op. cit.*, pp. 49-50), that the ideas underlying the Polish policy, later on leading to a more hostile course towards Czechoslovakia, were formed as early as the period before 1933.

March 1934, probably by one of Vice-Ministers of this Ministry ; he began with a statement that here existed in Europe a zone of states situated between Germany and the USSR that was extended from the Baltic to the Black and Mediterranean seas. "Undoubtedly Poland is the most conscious of this situation. From this a belief resulted, so wide-spread in Poland, that the only way for us is to exist as a big political power, such a power that would be able to ensure for itself conditions for free development and create around an atmosphere of peace and order... We have to become therefore, whether we like it or not, a guide-post of a kind for those countries and indicate to them the significance of establishing conditions which would neutralize the influence of the Great Powers and give our allied states freedom in their development, hampered till now by foreign and often hostile factors... It should be noted that those states are rather medium size. They can, by all means, develop but it is doubtful if to the power status. Thus they are not able to surpass Poland and her tasks either in their aspirations or in capabilities... By contributing to their development and consolidation we shall simultaneously establish an open door for our economic expansion." The author of this discourse showed much criticism towards the anti-Hungarian conception of the Little Entente as well as towards the Czechoslovak policy. "Our point of view differs from that of the Little Entente yet in some other matter. The Entente, under the influence of its initiator, Czechoslovakia, makes itself subordinated to the policy of the Great Powers putting thereby a halt to the Polish conception of an independent organization of states that belong only to this part of Europe."⁵⁵

Because of its internal and instructive character, the document quoted above seems to be important for the better understanding of the principles and objectives of the Polish foreign policy. The signing of the Polish-German declaration, stating that force would

⁵⁵ AAN, MSZ [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs] 5205, p. 222 - 223, 254. The typescript is not signed and has no date. However, some allusions to the current international events allow us to determine the year and approximately the month, whereas the contents and the way of expressing thoughts suggest that the author was a close Beck's associate. The discourse presented assumptions and fundamental ideas of Polish foreign policy.

not be used between the two countries, had changed many essential elements in the routine work of the diplomatic officials and it was important to make them acquainted, generally, with the problems the Republic had to face. The above-mentioned opinions show that at that time a concept of the Great Power status of Poland in Central and South-Eastern Europe was finally crystallized, with the assumption that the rest of the states involved would be subordinated to the Polish political leadership and subjected to Polish economic expansion. Czechoslovakia seemed to be the most serious impediment.

It was just at that time that Poland seemed to take a step away from her, till then only critical, attitude towards Czechoslovakia and from her competing for the leading position among other states, towards a preparation of a much further-going action. As early as spring 1933, an opinion spread among Polish diplomats that Hitler's Germany would tend "first of all to annex Austria, Czech and Moravian borderland inhabited by Germans, Alsace, at least a part of Lorraine, and perhaps some area of German-speaking Switzerland," and not earlier than that the Reich could become dangerous to Poland.³⁶ Taking this view, Beck thought that his position was, at that time, extremely strong and suitable to impose his ideas and leadership on Beneš. However, diplomatic contacts during 1933 showed that Czechoslovak politicians were not going to give up their concept and accept the Polish leadership, so that the agreement was impossible to achieve. In these circumstances the signature of the Polish-German declaration meant that Poland had decided to accept the German expansion to the South.³⁷

This interpretation of changes in Polish-Czechoslovak relations, that occurred between 1933 and 1934, is in agreement with our previous considerations of the competition between the two

³⁶ S. Schimitzek, *Drugi i bezdroża minionej epoki. Wspomnienia z lat pracy w MSZ (1920 - 1939)* [Roads and Roadless Tracts of the Past Epoch. Memoirs of the Years of Activity in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1920 - 1939)], Warszawa 1976, p. 273.

³⁷ Balcerak is, then, right when writing that after February 1934 "first of all Czechoslovakia and Austria were doomed to be the Reich's victims;" as a consequence of this Poland became again interested in cooperation with Hungary and in establishing a common Polish-Hungarian frontier (W. Balcerak, *op. cit.*, p. 50).

states. From Beck's point of view, to settle the Polish-German relations as well as to switch the Reich's attention to Czechoslovakia were equally desirable. Both would strengthen Poland's position, contribute to impairment of the rival's security, and could be used to build up an alliance system, that time evidently at the expense of the southern neighbour.³⁸

I do not think that this political line should be treated as a deviation from the hitherto existing course towards Czechoslovakia. Previously, Polish diplomats tried to impose their own concepts and leadership upon Czechoslovakia using indirect methods, exploiting in particular, the cooperation with Rumania and Yugoslavia. The intention was to impair the Little Entente from the inside, to modify its character and adapt to the purposes of the Polish policy. In the years 1933 - 1934, when the methods used so far seemed to be unsatisfactory, a conversion to an open political confrontation was made, the tactical turn in the Reich's policy being most helpful. There is no evidence, however, to suppose that Germany and Poland coordinated directly their policies against Czechoslovakia. Various Polish documents indicate rather that Polish diplomats carefully observed German moves and tried to match the Polish policy so that Poland could draw her best advantage. It was characteristic that in February 1934 Poland started a political and propaganda campaign against Czechoslovakia over the question of Polish population in a part of Czech Silesia (so-called Zaolzie). As a pretext, the 15th anniversary of the partition of Cieszyn (Těšín, Teschen) Silesia was used. In the autumn of 1934, Piłsudski received Hermann Goering who informed him, among other things, that establishing a *modus vivendi* with Czechoslovakia was impossible. Piłsudski's answer was that the Poles were not fond of Czechs, neither they had much respect for them.³⁹ This exchange of opinions was not, of course, the same as an agreement over the common policy, however the similarity in attitudes signified an indirect coordination.

³⁸ The problem of Polish-Czechoslovak relations in the years 1933 - 1934 will have to be subject of a separate, more detailed analysis, which lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

³⁹ J. Beck, *Dernier rapport. Politique polonaise 1926 - 1939*, Neuchatel 1951, p. 34.

The same result was gained from the talks between Beck and Hitler, in February 1938, when Hitler "spoke extensively about Austria and Czechoslovakia, revealing rather explicitly his plans in dealing with these two states. Similar ideas were expressed at Beck's earlier meeting with Neurath and Goering."⁴⁰ The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs declared his indifference to the question of Austria but emphasized that Poland had its own interests in Czechoslovakia. Soon, in February, Beck during his talk with the Hungarian regent, Miklos Horthy, raised the question of a common Polish-Hungarian frontier, which together with the previous talks acquired a character of preparations to partition the Czechoslovak territory.⁴¹

Being aware, on the basis of numerous memoirs, of Beck's loyalty to Piłsudski and his blind faithfulness to Piłsudski's political testament, one cannot, of course, exclude that the unfriendly line of Polish policy in respect of Czechoslovakia, in the late 1930s, was simply a continuation of the "beloved Commander's" promise, taken on the verge of Poland's independence, that Zaolzie would be incorporated into Poland. But one cannot help doubting this explanation. Whatever would be our opinion on Beck's concepts and policy, it is beyond question that he followed, as a rule, rational reasons based on an analysis of the actual situation, the real capabilities of the Polish state, and anticipation of the development of future events. It is hard to believe that a politician responsible for guiding the Polish foreign policy could, without any objection, accept the encirclement of Poland from the south by its potential enemy only because he wanted to annex to Poland a small region inhabited by not much more than 100 thousand of Poles (or even—according to the

⁴⁰ P. Starzeński, *op. cit.*, p. 98. For more details see S. Stanisławska, *Wielka i mała polityka Józefa Becka (marzec - maj 1938)* [*Big and Little Policy of Józef Beck (March - May, 1938)*], Warszawa 1962, pp. 28 - 30. H. and T. Jędruszcak state in this connection that "Germany managed to ensure Poland's support for itself, while the Polish Government was led away by German promises and blandishments, only to become soon the next victim of aggression." H. i T. Jędruszcak, *Ostatnie lata Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1935 - 1939)* [*Last Years of the Second Polish Republic (1935 - 1939)*], Warszawa 1970, p. 260.

⁴¹ P. Starzeński, *op. cit.*, p. 105. For a detailed study of Polish policy and the international situation see, in particular, H. Bątownski, *Europa zmierza ku przepaści* [*Europe Driving to Its Fau*], Poznań 1977.

maximum estimates made in "sanacja" circles—about 250 thousand). This would mean an act of folly while Beck was not mad. We should rather think of some other interpretation.

The basic problem of Beck's policy was to create a system of protection from the Polish neighbours to the east and west. The non-aggression pact with the USSR and the Polish-German declaration were considered important but not sufficient to ensure security. An indispensable supplement to them had to be a system of alliances. For a long time the alliance treaty with France, signed in the early twenties, had seemed to be of doubtful value for Warsaw, France being more and more influenced by British policy. At the same time, Great Britain declared indifference to Central European affairs, at least as could be judged from the statement by Lord Halifax during his talks with Hitler in the autumn of 1937.

An increased pressure from Germany, although directed to the south, had to induce Poland to hasten in combining her own, independent of France, alliance system, but the Little Entente together with Czechoslovakia stood in the way. A deep conviction of the governing politicians was that Czechoslovakia, sooner or later, would have to be disintegrated, and the intensification of political activity on the part of the Sudetendeutsche Partei and the Slovak autonomists was taken as an evidence of the incoming end of the Czechoslovak Republic. Beck, for certain, was not interested in its rescue, the more so that he did not believe in success of the possible attempts; but he was interested in observing the Reich's policy which tended to cut off the Czech territory, and was ready to take advantage for Poland of the incoming events. Then, prospects seemed to emerge for elimination of the rival and fulfilment of Piłsudski's political testament with respect to Zaolzie. Over the ruins of Czechoslovakia Beck would be pleased to see an independent Slovak state, subjected to Hungarian and Polish influences, while he was ready to transfer Subcarpathian Ruthenia to Hungary.⁴² This idea underlaid the intensified

⁴² Beck "handed over" to Hungary, among others, a Ruthenian politician paid by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rev. S. Fencik, together with his party. It is related by J. Zieziula in his unpublished MA dissertation *Activities of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia Political Parties Between 1918 and 1938*, Warszawa 1976, Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

activity of Polish politicians who tried to induce friendly Slovak leaders to proclaim their independent state.⁴³

Thus Poland played a rough game in following her tendency to exploit the cutting-off of Czechoslovakia by the Germans to carry into effect her plans of a desirable alliance system. This system was to be turned against both the USSR and Germany and expected to stop their expansion.⁴⁴

Contradictions between Hungary and its neighbours constituted one of the impediments that had to be overcome on the way to the materialization of the above idea. Finally, a decision was made in Warsaw to sacrifice good relations with the Slovaks by closing the ranks with Hungary. The same could not be, however, done with Rumania which played an important role in the Polish plans. Polish diplomats were also afraid of the developments in the Balkan region, where the Entente impeded Bulgaria's agreement with its neighbours. "Against the French concept of Little Entente we tried to oppose the line of Warsaw—Bucharest—Sofia and that of Warsaw—Budapest—Belgrade, based on the detente between Rumania and Bulgaria and between Hungary and Serbia" the Polish envoy to Vienna, Jan Gawroński, wrote in this memoirs.⁴⁵

The modified Polish policy towards Germany and France raised more and more objections from the political opposition in Poland, this opposition being also against the Polish policy towards the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The Socialist Party reproached the Government for the attempts at creating

⁴³ For more details about the indecision of the Polish policy in the matter of Slovakia and its evolution in the years 1937-1938 see E. Piotrowska-Orlof, *Kwestia słowacka w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1938-1939* [*The Slovak Question in the Polish Foreign Policy during the Years 1938-1939*], Rzeszów 1977, p. 17 ff.

⁴⁴ Such a conclusion is brought to mind on the basis of Piłsudski's talk with the Hungarian Prime Minister, Gyula Gombos, in October 1934. Cf. M. Koźmiński, *Polska i Węgry przed drugą wojną światową (październik 1938-wrzesień 1939)* [*Poland and Hungary before the Second World War (October 1938-September 1939)*], in: *Z dziejów dyplomacji i irredenty*, Wrocław 1970, p. 35. See also pp. 47-48, 50-53.

⁴⁵ J. Gawroński, *Moja misja w Wiedniu 1932-1938* [*My Mission in Vienna, 1932-1938*], Warszawa 1965, p. 27. See also H. Batowski, *La Pologne et les états balcaniques entre 1933 et 1939*, "Studia Balcanica," vol. VII, 1973, pp. 196-200.

a powerful bloc which would result in cooling, most inadvisedly for Poland, the relations with West European states. After the declaration of February, 1934, had been signed, socialists postulated cooperation with the Little Entente as an opposition, at the same time, to the rapprochement to the Nazi Reich.⁴⁶ This criticism was growing as the German expansiveness was intensified. Both the Polish Socialist Party and the Peasant Party pointed out, in particular, to the need of closer relations with Czechoslovakia to resist the ever increasing danger that threatened both states, although these parties perceived the controversial questions existing between Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁷ These ideas, though not always consistently composed, would mean a departure from the former opinions on the role that Poland was to play in Central Europe. The opposition parties were, however, right in their opinion that in the changed international circumstances the Polish—Czechoslovak rivalry for leadership had to recede into the background.

On the other hand, the official foreign policy of Poland, guided by Beck, was persistent in promoting the concepts that had been outlined during Piłsudski's period. The only solution to the Polish problems was seen in preserving Poland's independence of the Great Powers (which in practice was pointed against France) and keeping distance from the USSR; but German suggestions for cooperation in the east, in order to gain some territories there, were also rejected.

Efforts to draw nearer the Baltic states and to overcome the troubles "south to the Carpathian mountains" were intensified as the German expansion was more and more successful. In summer 1938, according to Starzenski's memoirs, Beck planned "that a protective zone should be established from the Baltic up to the Black sea. The question of our common frontier with Hungary was becoming a more and more pressing component of this

⁴⁶ L. Ziąja, *op. cit.*, pp. 158, 236 - 239.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 266 - 268, 285, 325 - 327, 335 - 336, 354 - 370; *Zarys historii polskiego ruchu ludowego [An Outline of History of the Popular Movements in Poland]*, vol. II: 1918 - 1939, Warszawa 1970, pp. 505, 518, 519.

plan.”⁴⁸ This, it seems, could explain the hesitation and inconsistency in Poland's dealing with the Slovaks.

The partition of Czechoslovakia in autumn 1938 confirmed the fall of the most serious antagonist of the Polish concept of a vast alliance in Central and South-Eastern Europe, thus the strongest impediment to Beck's plans seemed to be eliminated. It then turned out, however, that this great programme of “building a defence wall extended from the Baltic up to the Black Sea” was based upon unrealistic assumptions. In spite of the Polish aspirations for the Great Power status, the Polish Republic was not strong enough, either politically or economically, to organize the alliance system assumed. Poland did not manage to overcome all of the contradictions between the states involved. The Third Reich did it, to some extent, in the years 1939 - 1941, imposing by force its own solutions and revisions of frontiers, but it was only possible with its military force and under a threat of using this force against much weaker partners that were left at the Reich's mercy. Poland did not have means at her disposal to force her concepts, while settling the conflicts by compromise turned out to be impossible.

Poland did not possess the economic potential, either, sufficient to meet her proud announcements about her own economic expansion and to make her a welcome partner for weaker rural states which needed credits and markets for agrarian surplus. Such possibilities existed, however, in Germany as in the thirties the Germans gradually increased their trade with Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary. As a consequence, on the verge of World War II, a political system combining a number of states in the European region in question was indeed established but a decisive centre occurred to be the Third Reich. The Polish policy, hostile towards Czechoslovakia and opposing a collective system of security, contributed to this development of events.

⁴⁸ P. Starzeński, *op. cit.*, p. 133. I cannot, then, agree with Balcerak's and Batowski's opinions that the Polish plans to link the southern and northern directions of Central-European policy did not seem to be definite enough. From the above-mentioned documents one can conclude that such an idea appeared quite clearly, as early as the twenties. Cf. H. Batowski, *Europa...*, pp. 85 - 86; W. Balcerak, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

In my opinion the main evolutionary lines, presented in this paper, of Polish foreign policy concepts for Central and South-Eastern Europe, as well as their realization in practice, reveal a far-reaching continuity in political activities of the succeeding Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in spite of differences between the two main camps of the Polish Right Wing, the National Democrats and the "sanacja." This continuity was forced by Poland's situation in the period discussed. Both groups were hostile to the great Polish neighbours, being afraid, at the same time, of their expansion. However, this fear was based on different motives, it induced politicians of both groups to dream of a security system in which Poland would play the central and leading role. We must remember that both camps agreed as to the need for Poland to achieve the Great Power status. In view of this attitude, Poland's competition with Czechoslovakia could not be avoided. Only the forms of this competition changed with time, as the external conditions evolved. The crucial point was which of the concepts of organizing this part of Europe, Polish or Czechoslovak, would be victorious and whose interests would be better secured. The attempts to reach understanding with the Baltic states as well as with the countries south of Poland, including Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, were also a mere consequence of this situation. It was clear, that only an extended alliance system could guarantee protection against both Poland's great neighbours.

The idea of an extended alliance system between the Baltic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas was to secure power and stability of the Polish Republic, which would thereby become a leader of a strong regional assembly of states. But Poland's capabilities had been over-estimated and the power and cleverness of her antagonists underrated, which resulted in a disastrous defeat. It does not seem, however, that existed a solution to the problem of security of the Polish state, based on the assumptions that Polish policy had adopted.

(Translated by Jolanta Krauze)