

Mieczysław Nurek

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES BEFORE AND AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE MUNICH AGREEMENT

The signing of the Munich agreement and its consequences have been discussed in relevant literature mostly in relation to Southern and Central-Eastern Europe. The list of publications on the subject of connections between Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries is rather modest.¹ The question however merits our attention.

The role played by Scandinavia in the politics of Great Britain has been very specific but, leaving aside the scant amount of mutual trade, it was usually assessed in terms of transit: the facilities, difficulties or danger to transport routes linking England and the Atlantic with Central and Eastern Europe, primarily with Germany and the Soviet Union, and later with Poland. Hitler's accession to power, his domestic and foreign policies openly generating conflicts aroused apprehension also in London. Germa-

¹ Among the recent publications mention is due to: T. Munch-Petersen, *The Strategy of Phoney War. Britain, Sweden and the Iron Question, 1939 - 1940*. Stockholm 1981; S. Seymour, *Anglo-Danish Relations and Germany 1933 - 1945*, Odense University Press 1982. A penetrating analysis dealing with another region of the Baltic Sea and another time is that of: M. L. Hinkkanen-Lievonen, *British Trade and Enterprise in the Baltic States 1919 - 1925*, Helsinki 1984.

ny's leaving the disarmament conference and the League of Nations in October 1933 became an alarm signal. It was fashionable at the time to adopt the theory that the application of economic sanctions in respect of some country, that is the economic blockade, would make impossible or at least weaken its aggressive intentions for the future.

In accordance with this theory the Sub-Committee on Economic Pressure of the Committee of Imperial Defence submitted at the end of October 1933 a report entitled Economic Pressure on Germany. It argued that in a situation of conflict, but not causing a formal declaration of war, Article 16 of the Treaty of the League of Nations could not be effectively applied because only a few countries concerned with preventing German armaments would be ready to take part in an anti-German action.² The report mentioned the countries which were supposed to collaborate in applying "economic pressure to Germany". The first group included those states which, in the authors' opinion, were especially interested in preventing any further armaments in Germany; they were: Great Britain, France, Belgium, Poland, and the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia). The next group was made up of the Dominions, the United States and Italy. The third included the U.S.S.R., Argentina and the rest of the South and Central American nations. But it was not certain that all the countries in that group would collaborate in economic pressure on Germany. The fourth and last group listed the countries neighbouring on Germany which were not parties to the Versailles Treaty: Holland, Norway, the Baltic states, Austria and Switzerland. In the opinion of the authors of the report some of the countries listed in that group might share the view of the powers on the subject of the boycott. But emphasis was put on the terms of their cooperation with Britain against Germany through economic pressure that is on guaranteeing their security in case of German aggression or some other retaliatory action.

² Public Record Office (later: PRO), CAB 47/5, A.T.B. 101, Committee of Imperial Defence (later: CID), Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War. Sub-Committee on Economic Pressure. Report: Economic Pressure on Germany, 30 Oct. 1933.

But in conclusion the report said that none of the countries mentioned in the last group, thus also the Scandinavian states, would cooperate.³

The findings adopted by the Sub-Committee in 1933 remained valid as long as the foreign policy of Nazi Germany did not introduce any new elements to the pattern of international forces. The collaboration of the Third Reich, Italy and Japan in the latter half of the thirties essentially altered the existing pattern of forces in the international arena. Consequently, Britain had to resolve the dilemma how to oppose the growing strength of the axis countries.⁴ This problem was discussed at the Cabinet meeting on December 8, 1937. The discussion was based on the report elaborated by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, which compared the British military strength with that of some states as at the beginning of 1938.⁵ In that document the conclusions were expressed quite unambiguously. The state of the British armed forces was "still far from sufficient to meet our defensive commitments, which now extend from Western Europe through the Mediterranean to the Far East". Neville Chamberlain also agreed with the conclusion that Great Britain was not capable of simultaneously opposing Germany, Italy and Japan; consequently, the main burden of securing the vital British interests was to be borne by the Foreign Office. In order to counterbalance this relative military weakness, the British diplomatic service was to

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ PRO, CAB 23/90, 46/37/10, 8 Dec. 1937. CID conclusions based on the memorandum produced by the Secretary for Coordination of Defence; I. Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, London 1971, p. 81, *passim*. The naval agreement concluded between Britain and the Third Reich, by negating the chances offered by the Stresa Front recently created by Great Britain, France and Italy, primarily struck a blow to the idea of disarmament and the Versailles Treaty. But for the British side it contained, as Whitehall argued at the beginning, an element of collaboration between Berlin and London.

⁵ PRO, CAB 24/273, C.P. 296, 8 Dec. 1938. Memorandum of the Secretary for Coordination of Defence on the basis of Most Secret Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January, 1938 (CID, No. 1366-B, 12 Nov. 1937).

reduce the number of potential opponents, and to gain as many allies as possible. France was considered the most important ally. Although Chamberlain assessed the possibility of smaller countries as better than before, yet he thought that they would not much strengthen the defensive or offensive strength of Great Britain. In his opinion, help on the part of smaller nations was useful in peace but much less so in the event of war. The document is all the more interesting as it dwelt also on the possible development of events in the nearest future in Central Europe and the probable reaction of the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. They were not thought to play an important role because their public opinion was divided in its sympathies towards the powers. It was pointed out that Germany exerted much influence in those countries. In conclusion, the memorandum expressed doubts in the possible opposition of the nations of Northern Europe in the event of German intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The memorandum as well as the conclusions reached in the discussion are important for at least three reasons : (i) the assignment to the Foreign Office of a crucial role in the protection of British vital interests ; (ii) the minor role to be played by the Baltic and Scandinavian states in British politics of the time ; (iii) the statement about the existence of considerable German influence in those states. Thus, the answer to the question whether the opinions contained in items two and three had changed and if so why, should be of interest.

The growing tension between Berlin and Prague after the Anschluss increased the probability of a direct attack by Germany upon Czechoslovakia. A memorandum prepared in April 1938 by the Northern Department of the Foreign Office defined in more detail the trends in the foreign policy of the Baltic and Scandinavian countries.⁶ Lithuania's policy was considered more sympathetic to France and Czechoslovakia than to Germany. But Latvia, Estonia and Finland were thought to be anti-Russian to the point that they would "gravitate rather towards the German camp". It was emphasized that the policies of Scandinavian coun-

⁶ PRO, FO 371/22276, N2072/533/63. Memorandum : Possible Opposition to Germany in Case of an Attack upon Czechoslovakia, 26 Apr. 1938.

tries were increasingly swerving away from the idea of collective security and thus from the League of Nations in favour of "strict neutrality". The cause of such an attitude was ascribed solely to their "relatively defenceless state", and thus to their small defence potential. In the case of Sweden the question was more complex. Presumably, that country's "neutrality" would not mean stopping the shipments of iron ore to Germany. Consequently, the possibility of applying a blockade to Germany upon a relevant decision of the League of Nations by the Scandinavian and Baltic countries was deemed highly improbable. So, the Third Reich could count on the deliveries of important commodities from Scandinavia "so long as she is not too openly aggressive in her attacks upon Scandinavian shipping". Moreover, the information obtained in London by the Intelligence Service seemed to indicate that neither Germany nor the Soviet Union intended to use the region of Northern Scandinavia in the event of war for military purposes. On the other hand, the flights of unidentified aircraft over northern Finland, Sweden and Norway were viewed with some apprehension.⁷

The problem of the possible blockade of Germany came to the fore in the British conceptions in March 1938, when Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of Defence, changed his decision of December of the previous year and recommended that plans for war against Germany, but not Japan as hitherto, should be intensively studied.⁸ The report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War emphasized the increased difficulties in carrying out the future economic blockade of Germany as compared with the years 1914 - 1918. During the First World War the execution of that plan, the report said, was easier for paralysing the trade of the central powers required controlling only the trade of five neutral countries. In the future conflict the degree of difficulty would be much higher for control would have to cover, according to the report, as many as nineteen countries. If the blockade of Germany was to deny it all imported goods, the

⁷ PRO, FO 371/22294, N1510/220/59.

⁸ PRO, CAB 47/6, A.T.B.181. Plan for Economic Warfare against Germany. Memorandum, 22 July 1938.

blockade would have to include every neutral country from which Germany imported the commodities it needed. The region of the Baltic Sea was part of the area from which Germany could receive certain imports. The authors of the report expressed serious doubts as to the efficacy of the blockade in that part of Europe, since the Baltic countries, Poland, and probably, although to a lesser degree, also Finland and Sweden were because of their geographical position more exposed to pressure on the part of Germany than the Allies.⁹

This opinion, though correct, requires some comment. The Scandinavian countries, although they were genuinely more exposed to pressure on the part of Germany than the Allies, took, up to the mid-thirties, an active part in the sanctions applied within the framework of the League of Nations and thus collaborated with the Western democracies. But, as the efficacy of the League of Nations in resolving serious international conflicts dwindled, so they modified their foreign policies and, what follows, the character of their neutrality.

The beginning of the change in the nature of the neutrality of the Nordic countries can be traced to the ineffective action by the League of Nations in the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. As a result, those countries became aware of the fact that theory and practice were two distinct matters. Mussolini's success and the humiliation of state members of the League of Nations as well as the violation by the Third Reich of the Locarno agreements, convinced the Scandinavian nations that that institution was not capable of guaranteeing the security they sought.¹⁰ The joint declaration by them and Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, announced in Copenhagen on July 23, 1938, was the direct outcome of that assessment, hastened by the Anschluss. One of the important findings in that declaration contained the decision about the hitherto system of sanctions being no longer obligatory. All those countries remained members of the Geneva community but reserved their right to independent decisions.

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ N. Ørvik, *The Decline of Neutrality 1914 - 1941*, London 1971, p. 177.

The new pattern that emerged in the relationship between the Scandinavian countries and the League of Nations had its impact on their links with Great Britain which in mid-August made known its position towards the oft-announced since the Anschluss declarations of neutrality. In the notes sent to those countries the British Government emphasized that the announcement of the principles of neutrality alone by any state was not equivalent to their international adoption, because they might be at variance with binding principles of international law concerning the privileges and duties of neutral states. The most vital item in London's attitude was the reservation that "they cannot prejudice the position of any State which is not party to them".¹¹ New elements in the neutrality of the Scandinavian states did not help British diplomacy. Consequently, the British Government reserved to itself the possibility of altering its position after making a full analysis of the text of the declarations. A certain anxiety in the British Isles was caused by the principle of strict neutrality of the Scandinavian countries, difficult to maintain in a future armed conflict since they admitted of a situation in which the ban on flights by foreign aircraft over strategic regions would not be binding. In the case of Denmark this would mean agreement to flights over the straits of Belts and Sound.¹²

Yet, the declaration of strict neutrality by that group of states did not guarantee that shipments of iron ore to Germany would stop in the event of an armed conflict, which created a vital problem for the British. London was aware that any attempt by Sweden to limit the deliveries of iron ore would be considered in Berlin "an unfriendly act" and give it an excuse for blockading the Swedish Baltic ports until its demands were satisfied.¹³ Moreover, the Northern Department estimated that it was possible that the idea of neutrality would spread and a belt of neutral countries emerge from the Arctic to the Black Sea. Such a possi-

¹¹ PRO, FO 371/22276, N4252/533/63. Note to the Finnish ministry for foreign affairs, London 23 Aug. 1938.

¹² *Ibidem*, N3411/533/63. Notes, 6 July 1938.

¹³ *Ibidem*, N4631/533/63. Sir E. Monson's letter to L. Collier, Stockholm 5 Sept. 1938.

bility was considered harmful to British interests since it would considerably weaken the effectiveness of the best weapon, viz. the blockade.¹⁴

Both the War Office and the Northern Department excluded the possibility of collaboration with the Soviet Union. The possible benefits from such collaboration would, in their opinion, be probably much less than the losses incurred. For the supporters of this view thought that the Soviet Union as an ally would antagonize, at least in Europe, Britain's potential friends.¹⁵ Thus the price for moral support, the only one obtainable from the Soviet Union in London's estimation, would be too high. At the same time London did not fear any Soviet-German rapprochement "so long as Herr Hitler remains in power".¹⁶

On the eve of the Munich Agreement, the state of the relations between Britain and Scandinavia could be described as paradoxical to a certain extent. Contrary to the intentions of both parties, they drew further away from one another while the policies of the Third Reich were becoming increasingly expansionist.

The Munich Agreement, signed on 29 September, 1938, was an attempt at controlling Hitler's policies. Next day, Prime Minister Chamberlain additionally signed a declaration of friendship with the Reich chancellor. Among other things, the Munich Agreement bound Hitler to settle any future conflicts by negotiations rather than military action. In accordance with Chamberlain's intentions, it was to secure peace in Europe for at least one generation and strengthen the prestige of Great Britain on the international stage.

The assessment of the Munich Agreement by various countries was marked by a curious feature: the farther away from the region of the recent conflict the stronger the approval of the agreement. The Scandinavian countries belonged to a group which did

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ PRO, FO 371/22275, N4774/247/63. Lieutenant-Colonel N.C.B. Brownjohn (War Office) to Mr Hadow (Northern Department), 27 Sept. 1938.

¹⁶ PRO, FO 22276, N4601/533/63. Soviet Russia and Germany. Document drawn up by R. H. Hadow, 17 Sept. 1938.

not recognize the agreement as a success of the Western democracies. The initial satisfaction and optimism were followed by deeper reflection. Pessimism rapidly replaced optimism. In Denmark, bordering on Germany, the pessimistic mood, stemming from the conviction that the ideals of the League of Nations were an illusion, was widespread. People on the Jutland Peninsula were certain "that the great Western democracies could not be relied upon to protect a weak state bordering on Germany from aggression".¹⁷ The way in which the fate of Austria and Czechoslovakia was settled increased Denmark's fears about North Schleswig. Similar moods prevailed in Sweden but there the feeling of sorrow predominated rather than anger because of British submissiveness to dictatorial powers. Although the increase in British armaments was noticed, yet the proper use of rapid armament was considered dependent on the introduction of compulsory national service.¹⁸ In Norway and Finland feelings and assessments resembled those in Sweden and Denmark. The British minister in Helsinki wrote that "Germany's achievements during 1938 produced in Finland an impression, beyond the reach of propaganda, of German strength, organising power and ruthlessness: "An impression of alarm and even disgust was created as well [...] the deepest possible conviction that the policy of His Majesty's Government was sane, humane and pacific".¹⁹ But the latter opinion, expressed by the British diplomat, did not counterbalance the feeling in Finland caused by the successes of the current German policy.

An equally strong feeling of disillusion and disappointment prevailed in the Baltic countries. The British minister in Tallinn, William H. Galienne, described the mood in Estonia as follows: "Here was a natural regret that another nail has apparently been driven into the coffin of collective security, and that the hopes of small nations for disinterested protection from the great powers were misplaced".²⁰

¹⁷ PRO, FO 371/23637 N816/816/15. Annual Report 1938, Denmark.

¹⁸ PRO, FO 371/23709, N2184/2184/42. Annual Report 1938, Sweden.

¹⁹ PRO, FO 371/23648, N1395/434/56. Annual Report 1938, Finland.

²⁰ PRO, FO 371/23605. Annual Report 1938, Estonia.

Independently of these opinions characterising the position of Scandinavian and Baltic countries in respect of the Munich Agreement, doubts were soon increasing in Britain itself as to whether the treaty of four did really settle the dilemma of how to work out a permanent settlement of relations with the Third Reich. But Chamberlain still enjoyed a strong support at home. His staunchest supporters in the Foreign Office were Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office ; Gladwyn Jebb, private secretary to the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office ; Franck Ashton-Gwatkin, economic adviser at the Foreign Office ; and William Strang, head of the Central Department. There was also in the Foreign Office a group which did not support the way in which Chamberlain wanted to reach an agreement with Hitler. Its members saw a chance to achieve a genuine rapprochement on condition that talks with Hitler were conducted from the position of strength. The group consisted of Sir Robert Vansittart, chief diplomatic adviser to the Foreign Secretary ; Sir Lancelot Oliphant, deputy under-secretary supervising the Eastern, Northern and Egyptian Departments ; Sir Orme Sargent, assistant under-secretary supervising the Central and Southern Departments ; Oliver Harvey, head of the Information Department ; and Laurence Collier, head of the Northern Department. More numerous and "more influential were those who did support Chamberlain's efforts".²¹

The analysis of documents shows that in summer and autumn of 1938 both the Foreign Office and the Cabinet with its Sub-Committees were primarily engaged in assessing the situation in Central and South-Eastern Europe where German expansion was best observed.²² The opponents to Chamberlain's policy before and

²¹ S. Newman, *March 1939 : The British Guarantee to Poland*, Oxford 1976, p. 62.

²² At the time when London attempted to work out an effective political counteraction to the growing German influence in Europe, the Third Reich was already carrying out its plans of expansion. In early October 1938, Dr Walter Funk, minister for the Reich's economy, visited countries of South-Eastern Europe. As a result, Germany granted Turkey and Bulgaria long-term credits, thus putting into practice its aspirations towards expanding its sphere of influence. Great Britain acted more slowly.

after the conclusion of the Munich Agreement were still of the opinion that it was impossible to achieve an accord by granting Germany colonies and, in return, to obtain its agreement to disarmament, liberalisation of trade and the maintenance of territorial status quo. The first memorandum prepared in the Northern Department after the signing of the Agreement, concerned not the Northern but the Southern Europe. In it, dated 29 October, 1938, L. Collier did not conceal his disapproval of the British policy towards the axis powers.²³ He considered any hopes of drawing Italy away as unjustified. "I submit," he wrote, "that the test whether or not this view is correct will come when Signor Mussolini pronounces himself on the colonial question. If he supports German colonial claims it will be clear proof that the policy of making concessions to him in the hope of detaching him from Herr Hitler has definitely failed and though I do not usually bet, I am willing to stake a large sum on the chances of his holding to the axis in this matter as in others". L. Collier was equally firm in his opposition to German colonial claims. He considered action in this direction one of the most important goals of British policy. This goal, he thought, could best be achieved by a public declaration by Great Britain of its firm opposition to further concessions granted to a power which having access to the natural riches of half of Europe was equal in its strength to the power of Germany in 1914.

L. Collier's opinions were not fully recognized by the Cabinet nor by the Foreign Office. To appreciate this divergence of views suffice it to quote W. Strang who, while supporting the government policies, said "if the path' of appeasement is to be, it is in this field that some contribution must be sought".²⁴ The head of the Northern Department was of a diametrically different opinion about the methods of British diplomacy. He considered that if anything was deemed justified and correct before the Munich Agreement, every such step would be considered both at home and

²³ PRO, FO 371/21659, C14471/42/18. L. Collier's memorandum: International Situation after Munich, 29 Oct. 1938.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, W. Strang's memorandum: International Situation after Munich, October 1938.

abroad "as a sign of our complete decadence".²⁵ Unable to have his views approved by his superiors, he did not hesitate to clearly define the situation "in matters of foreign policy we live under a dictatorship—just like Germany and Italy". A. Cadogan neither disapproved nor approved this document. Presumably he did not have enough valid arguments to disprove L. Collier's opinion. To recognise its justness was still outside the scope of his intentions.

The non-efficacy of the Munich accord and the expansion of German influence into Northern Europe increased the uneasiness of the Northern Department as well as strengthening the conviction that a swift counteraction on the part of the British Government was necessary. At the same time, the Department was at one with the War Office, as was the case before the Munich Agreement, in its opinion that an alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany "...is likely to do us a great deal more harm than good, at least in Europe".²⁶ Without inclining towards a strengthening of contacts with the Soviet Union, the British politicians feared certain steps by that power on which they would have no influence, like e.g. the occupation of the Aaland and Oesel Islands. It was thought that such an action would push Finland and Estonia closer to Germany which in turn would influence Sweden and the imports of iron ore by the Third Reich.

In analysing the agreement in the few days which followed its signature, the Northern Department became convinced that "the Baltic is thus likely to play a very important part in the near future".²⁷

As time went by, the number of instances showing increasing German activity in the region of Northern Europe grew in the autumn of 1938. A typical example of the methods employed by Denmark's southern neighbour was provided by the affair of Nicolay Blaedel, a Danish journalist and opponent of the Nazi system. A few weeks after Munich he was forced to take a three-month leave as a result of the intervention by the German minis-

²⁵ *Vide* No. 23.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, letter from Lieutenant-Colonel N.C.B. Brownjohn (War Office) to R. H. Hadow (Northern Department), 27 Sept. 1938.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, notes by R. H. Hadow, October 1938.

ter to Copenhagen who considered insulting an article written by him. Peter R. Munch, the Danish foreign minister, justified Blaedel's leave on the grounds of Danish *raison d'état*. Blaedel, in a conversation with Collier on 9 November, 1938, strongly underlined the need for His Majesty's Government to undertake a rapid action countering the violent expansion of German influence in Denmark in consequence of the Munich Agreement.²⁸ The Danish journalist spoke of two ways in which Germany strengthened its influence in his country. The first consisted in propaganda which emphasized the lack of interest on the part of Western powers, especially of Britain, in the plight of Denmark. The other was the direct activity of the German minister who demanded that he be granted the right to control the press and other areas of public activity in Denmark. According to N. Blaedel, the tone in which these demands were made was unthinkable two months earlier. He did not conceal that the mood in Denmark was one, as he put it, of general panic. After Munich, in many Danish circles the question was asked: "...whether the present British Government were not deliberately conniving at Herr Hitler's European ambitions in order to protect their own interests elsewhere...".²⁹

A similar appreciation of the situation was presented to Collier by the Scandinavian correspondent of the *Financial Times*, George Soloveytchik.³⁰ The German press had recalled the Munich accord in order to confirm its opinion about Britain having recognized Europe and especially the Eastern and Northern Zone, as a region of the Third Reich's economic influence. He openly expressed his fear that in the face of a lack of firm counter propaganda Germany would be able to convince the public opinion in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries about Great Britain's

²⁸ PRO, FO 371/22262, N55663/15. Note by L. Collier: Danish Relations with the United Kingdom and Germany, 9 Nov. 1938.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, W. Czaplinski, *Dzieje Danii nowożytnej 1500 - 1975 [History of Modern Denmark, 1500 - 1975]*, Warszawa 1982, p. 289.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, German activities in Scandinavia and Baltic Countries—L. Collier's note, 2 Nov. 1938.

economic, cultural and political capitulation in Europe in consequence of the Munich Agreement.³¹

The situation as viewed by the Northern Department in autumn 1938 was far from optimistic. For it was aware of the unavoidable consequences of the increased German political activity in the region of Northern Europe. The Blaedel affair, the resignation of pro-British Rudolf Holsti from the office of Finnish foreign minister were of unambiguous significance. Although some historians do not link R. Holsti's resignation with German pressure, yet that is how the fact was interpreted in London.³² Collier thought that time worked against his country. In order to fight quickly and efficiently Hitler's political and economic expansion, he suggested that a prominent representative of the British Government, the prime minister if possible, declare officially that Britain did not intend to resign from its position in Northern Europe.³³ The need of such a declaration was probably prompted by a kind of insurance reason. The recent declaration by the prime minister in the House of Commons about the community of interests of Germany and Britain in Central and South-Eastern Europe has been interpreted as the weakening of the British position in that area. Presumably, Collier hoped that should Chamberlain not make up his mind to issue a public statement about his government's will to maintain the present connections with the Scandinavian countries he would at least give up a declaration similar to that about the Central and South-Eastern Europe.

For a long time the Northern Department had expected an increase in the interest in Northern Europe, and this at last came about at the turn of 1938. The reason was that London feared a direct threat to the British Isles and was concerned with the question of blockade. On 19 January, Halifax drew up a memorandum on Possible German Intention, in which he took into account the opinions of Sir A. Cadogan, G. Jebb, Sir R. Vansittart

³¹ *Ibidem*, P. Salmon, *Scandinavia in British Strategy, September 1930 - April 1940*, Cambridge 1979 (typescript of a doctoral thesis), p. 18, *passim*. The author thanks for lending him the typescript.

³² PRO, FO 371/22265, N5489/64/56. L. Collier's notes, 14 Nov. 1938.

³³ *Ibidem*.

and W. Strang. He came to the conclusion that possibly "Hitler is contemplating a coup early this year, the danger period beginning towards the end of February".³⁴ His sources spoke of the possibility of a German attack directed first against the West, and only later against the East, i.e. contrary to what had been assumed so far. The attack might come directly from the air or through the occupation of the Netherlands.

The growing threat to Britain intensified the search for the best means of protection against an attack. As in previous years the decisive means was supposed to be a blockade. One of the most important tasks would be the blocking of iron deliveries from Sweden to Germany.³⁵ From June 1938, according to Patrick Salmon, when the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC) produced a successive report (*Routing of Swedish Iron Imports*), to February 1939 "there is no evidence of any extensive discussion of the problem" and "no indication that special measures were taken at the time of the crisis".³⁶ It is probably no accident that precisely in February 1939, the IIC again turned its attention to the problem of blockading the shipments of Swedish ore to the enemy. Presumably the majority of persons who at the time were responsible for British policy were aware that the Munich Agreement did not diminish the threat of an armed conflict in Europe. But not all admitted it openly. On 8 February, the Cabinet decided that Secretary for Overseas Trade, Robert Hudson, should visit North-European countries and thus confirm Britain's interest in Scandinavia.

The increased British activity in Northern Europe did not mean a full agreement of opinions in the Foreign Office. F. Ashton-Gwatkin, in comparing at the beginning of 1939 the present results of the rival German trade with those of the British trade

³⁴ PRO, CAB 27/627, F.P./36/74. Memorandum of the Foreign Secretary: Possible German Intention, 19 Jan. 1939 (with five enclosures).

³⁵ This question has been dealt with in detail in: T. Munch-Petersen, *op. cit.*; P. Salmon, *British Plans for Economic Warfare against Germany, 1937 - 1939: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore*, "Journal of Contemporary History", vol. 16, 1981, pp. 53—71.

³⁶ P. Salmon, *British Plans...*, p. 63.

in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, as well as in Poland and the U.S.S.R., did not think that there was any ground in saying that "the United Kingdom trade is on the brink of catastrophe in the major Scandinavian markets, viz. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland".⁸⁷ The British economic circles were not so much alarmed by the consequences so far of German competition in Scandinavia as by its results in the future. For that reason the Federation of British Industries expected a great deal from the planned talks with German economic circles. It was hoped that as a result of those negotiations Germany would give up its high subsidies to its own export, and thus the economic competition between Germany and Britain in Scandinavia would be played out on equal terms.⁸⁸ Collier, like Ashton-Gwatkin, did not consider the situation "catastrophic" but he viewed the question of German expansion in a broader context. He had no doubt that from the moment of concluding the Munich Agreement there was an increasing number of facts confirming that the Third Reich intended to make the most of its position in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in other regions. He was afraid that Germany would apply a policy of simultaneous economic and political pressure also in Northern Europe: "As is well known, indeed, they are already pursuing it in Southeastern Europe; but it is not yet so generally realised in this country that they may be encouraged by success or driven by need of export markets to pursue the same policy towards the Scandinavian and Baltic countries".⁸⁹

The fact that the British Cabinet decided in early February to send Mr R. Hudson to Northern Europe pointed to a growing British activity in that area of Europe. But opinions still diverged in London, no longer about the goal but about the methods. For instance, the Board of Trade objected to the Foreign Office proposal that Mr Hudson should try, during his planned trip, to introduce the clearing system as a form of pressure in trade with the Scandinavian countries. In this way those countries might be

⁸⁷ PRO, FO 371/23653, N260/64/63. Ashton-Gwatkin's memorandum: German Aims in Northern Europe, 12 Jan. 1939.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, draft memorandum by L. Collier (undated).

inclined to buy more in Britain. On his part, Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade, was of the opinion that His Majesty's Government should not imitate German methods.⁴⁰ The documents from Mr Hudson's journey bear no trace of his suggesting the introduction of such a system.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Germany on 15 March, which meant the violation of the Munich Agreement, altered the international situation completely. In assessing the influence of the agreement on the policy of Great Britain towards the Nordic countries, it would be correct to assume that the change was not caused by the agreement but by its violation. Between autumn 1938 and March 1939, Scandinavian affairs still played a minor role, although more time was devoted to them, especially from early 1939.

The problems of South-Eastern and later Eastern Europe predominated on the agenda of the Cabinet and its committees.

The violation of the Munich Agreement considerably increased the probability of the outbreak of an armed conflict. The growing destabilisation of the political order in Europe strengthened the role of Scandinavian countries in the calculations of the United Kingdom, a role principally concerned with the running of the blockade. From the strictly military point of view Britain was mostly concerned with Norway. German aircraft taking off from Norwegian airfields would have a greater operational range against the British Isles. On the other hand, the use by the British of naval bases in Norway would enhance the effect of the blockade.⁴¹ The question was all the more vital with reference to the Scandinavian countries the more London, especially after the failure of the Munich Agreement, felt unsure about the position those countries would take up in the event of a German-British conflict. It was assumed that they would adopt the status of strict neutrality but the possibility was not excluded that they might be "coerced into benevolent neutrality towards Germany".⁴² A direct

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, O. Stanley to the Secretary of State at FO, 7 March 1939.

⁴¹ T. Munch-Petersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 - 27.

⁴² PRO, CAB 16/209, S.A.C. 6th Mtg, 17 Apr. 1939. Notes by the Strategic Appreciation Sub-Committee concerning FO opinion.

action by the British navy in the Baltic Sea was not envisaged for operational reasons. It was expected that the possible successes would be out of proportion to the degree of uncertainty resulting from military operations in that region.⁴³ Britain was compelled, despite its hitherto intentions, to stiffen its position in respect of Germany and the visits of O. Stanley and R. Hudson were cancelled.⁴⁴

The fiasco of the Munich policy considerably weakened the prestige of Western democracies and diminished the trust of the smaller states, including Scandinavia, in British policy. This was clearly underlined by Rickard J. Sandler, Swedish minister for foreign affairs, during Mr Hudson's visit to Stockholm. Hudson presented Mr Sandler's views as follows: "It was sheer hypocrisy on the part of Great Britain to pretend that her guarantee (to Poland) was given for democratic reasons. (Great Britain) had done it solely because we felt that the independence of Poland was of vital interest to Great Britain...".⁴⁵

In appreciating British policy towards the Scandinavian countries one should answer the vital question whether those countries had done everything possible to oppose the growing power of the Third Reich. Every answer will be certainly debatable. But one should not overlook a significant feature of their collaboration with one another. It did not cover military cooperation and thus the problem of joint defence. Wilhelm M. Carlgren wrote that while Denmark felt the greatest danger, Norway did not fear much; Sweden did not quite know who threatened it, while Finland was afraid of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ These differences in the assessment of the situation determined the lack of genuine mili-

⁴³ PRO, CAB 53/49, C.O.S. 915. CID, the Chiefs of Staff European Appreciation 1939 - 1940 (Paper No. C.O.S. 843), 25 May 1939.

⁴⁴ S. Seymour, *op. cit.*, p. 46; D. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War. Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe 1930 - 1939*, Princeton, New Jersey 1980, p. 290.

⁴⁵ PRO, FO 419/33, N1842/1818/42. Hudson Memorandum: Two Conversations with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1 Apr. 1939.

⁴⁶ W. M. Carlgren, *Swedish Policy during the Second World War*, London, 1977, p. 10; S. Seymour, *op. cit.*, pp. 59 - 60.

tary cooperation between the Scandinavian countries, thus limiting to some extent the prospects of British policy in that part of Europe. An exception was the Swedish-Finnish collaboration in the fortification of the Aaland Islands. This plan was supported by London.⁴⁷

David E. Kaiser correctly judged the British policy towards Eastern Europe in the time between the signing of the Munich Agreement and its violation as full of contradictions.⁴⁸ This characteristic was obvious also in London's policy towards Scandinavia. It would be difficult to define this policy as dynamic. The way in which propaganda was carried out in Denmark is proof of its indecision. The appointment of press attachés in 1938 in Oslo and Stockholm, based in the Swedish capital, went smoothly enough, but not so in Denmark. In spite of additional subsidies for propaganda purposes obtained from the Treasury, no press attaché was appointed, not because of opposition in London, which might have been expected, but because the British minister in Copenhagen, Sir Patrick Ramsay, objected to it. It was only in October 1939, when Sir Patrick left Copenhagen, that British propaganda livened up.⁴⁹

The failure of the powers to create a peace front in Europe in the summer of 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War put to the test both the British conceptions admitting a certain role to be played by the Scandinavian countries, and the principles of neutrality which were so strongly professed by the Northern countries.

(Translated by Krystyna Kęplich)

⁴⁷ T. Munch-Petersen, *Great Britain and the Revision of the Aaland Convention, 1938-1939*. Scandia, 1976, pp. 67-86; T. Cieślak, *Północno-europejskie koncepcje współpracy międzynarodowej z lat 1918-1939* [*North-European Conceptions of International Cooperation in 1918-1939*], "Historia i Współczesność", vol. 1, Katowice 1977, pp. 161-168; D. G. Kirby, *Finland in the Twentieth Century*, London 1979, p. 118.

⁴⁸ D. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁴⁹ Sir P. Ramsay to Halifax, 15 Dec. 1939. PRO, FO 371/22262, N6276/253/15; S. Seymour, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.