

*Dariusz Jeziorny*

Institute of History, University of Łódź

## BRITISH DIPLOMACY AND THE EASTERN PACT ON MUTUAL ASSISTANCE (1934)

### Abstract

The Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance (called at the beginning 'Eastern Locarno') was a Franco-Soviet initiative which drew much attention of politicians and public opinion in Europe in 1934. It was a proposal to be implemented into the collective security system. The article addresses the following questions: What was the main aim of British diplomacy in European affairs in 1934? Was London interested in the idea of an Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance? Did the British diplomats see any profit for their country's security in a Franco-Soviet proposal? Were they active in European diplomatic relations in the case of the Eastern Pact and if so to what extent? How did they understand collective security in East Central Europe? And how did they assess attitudes and motivations of the proposed signatories of this new coalition of states?

**Key words:** British diplomacy, Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance, European international relations, collective security, British foreign policy

There were several versions of an Eastern Pact. The earliest attempt, formulated in December 1933, assumed that France, Belgium, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia would help each other militarily should any of these states be attacked by a country external to the group. In the second version, proposed in April 1934 by Louis Barthou, the French Minister for foreign affairs, several alterations were introduced. Paris proposed changing the composition of the Pact members. France and Belgium were to be excluded and Nazi Germany to be co-opted. France would be only a guarantor of the pact while the USSR would become the third guarantor of the Locarno Treaty signed in 1925. A clause of mutual assistance was also included to ensure that a member of the Eastern Pact was to be immediately helped if another member attacked

it. In both the 1933 and 1934 conceptions of the pact the main purpose was designed against German expansion because Berlin, under Adolf Hitler's regime, was regarded aggressive.<sup>1</sup> The third version of the Eastern Pact appeared in February 1935 but it had a quite different scope and schema and is not considered further within this text.<sup>2</sup>

All these versions of the Eastern Pact appeared in a situation of growing conflict between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.

<sup>1</sup> There is a huge literature on this subject but not necessarily in English – see Andrzej M. Brzeziński, *Zagadnienie bezpieczeństwa zbiorowego w Europie w polityce zagranicznej Francji (1919–1939)* (Łódź, 1992), 104–8; Wojciech Rojek, 'Geneza koncepcji paktu wschodniego 1933–1934', in Stanisław Sierpowski (ed.), *Niemcy w polityce międzynarodowej*, ii: *Lata wielkiego kryzysu gospodarczego* (Poznań, 1992), 208–21; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939* (London and Basingstoke, 1984), 32–8; Jiří Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca, 1984), 38–44; Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska wobec zmian w układzie sił politycznych w Europie w latach 1932–1936* (Wrocław, 1981), 107–11, 131–42; Stanisław Gregorowicz, 'Koncepcja paktu wschodniego na tle stosunków polsko-sowieckich 1934–1935', in Andrzej Ajnenkiel et al. (ed.), *Międzymorze. Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek. Studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warszawa, 1995), 321–5; Hugh D. Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West: A Political Biography of Maksim Litvinov*, Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN, 1985, 222–30, 240–57, available at: <<http://proquest.umi.com>> [Accessed: April 3, 2009]; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, 'Louis Barthou et la rapprochement franco-soviétique en 1934', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, iii, 4 (1962), 525–34; Svend Allard, *Stalin und Hitler. Die sowjetrussische Außenpolitik 1930–1941* (Bern and München, 1974), 33–5; Lisanne Radice, 'The Eastern Pact 1933–1935: A Lost Attempt at European Cooperation', *Slavonic and East European Review*, lv, 1 (1977), 45–9; Piotr Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rheinland* (Princeton, 1988), 343–4, 356–8; Walenty Daszkiewicz, 'Z dziejów stosunków polsko-radzieckich w latach 1932–1934 (III)', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, xxi, 8–9 (1968), 91–110; Andrzej Skrzypek, *Strategia pokoju. Radziecka polityka zbiorowego bezpieczeństwa w Europie 1932–1939* (Warszawa, 1979), 91–101, 132–43.

<sup>2</sup> French diplomacy offered to sign the mutual non-aggression pact between the countries planned earlier. But this was to be amended by facultative immediate mutual assistance obligations by member-states willing to undertake them. Thus the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia would be able to count on each other's assistance in the case of aggression by any other member of the Eastern Non-Aggression Pact. The underlying purpose of the pact was still anti-German. And such an idea materialized in form of two mutual assistance pacts between the USSR and France and Czechoslovakia signed on 2 and 16 May 1935, respectively. But there was no non-aggression understanding.

France aimed to use the Pact to involve the USSR and other states as anti-German factors. It is also worthy of note that the 1933 initiative was launched at a very important moment of the Geneva Disarmament Conference which attracted a lot of attention from politicians and public opinion worldwide. After German withdrawal from the Conference on 14 October 1933, the majority of British diplomats and politicians were sure that the Conference had no chance for any successful solution. Political elites in other countries were of the same opinion.<sup>3</sup> This shed doubt whether the General Commission's 82 meeting planned for 29 May 1934 should take place at all. Its failure would compromise the whole idea of disarmament. The Commission did meet and confirmed the opinion of Disarmament Conference's inability to do anything. The British still wanted to use that forum to work out a German-French disarmament/rearmament agreement.<sup>4</sup>

The British were not informed about the first version of the Eastern Pact. There is no trace in British documents that London was even aware of Franco-Soviet plans formulated in late 1933.<sup>5</sup> Our focus in this article is to present the attitude of British diplomacy towards the second concept of the Eastern Pact. What was the main

---

<sup>3</sup> Andrzej M. Brzeziński, *Dyplomacja francuska wobec Konferencji Rozbrojeniowej w Genewie (2 II 1932 – 31 V 1937)* (Łódź, 1987), 343–5. Compare with analyses of Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in: Warsaw, Archiwum Akt Nowych [hereinafter: AAN], Ambasada RP Londyn [hereinafter: Amb Londyn] 1173, 3a–4a, 215–7, 323–4, 'Biuletyn Informacyjny Polska a Zagranica' of 22 Jan., 26 March, 14 and 28 May 1934; *ibidem*, Ambasada RP Berlin [hereinafter: Amb Berlin] 248, 41–6, 56–60, 89–93, Konstanty Skirmunt (Polish Envoy to London) to Józef Beck (Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs), London, 12 and 28 March, 23 May 1934.

<sup>4</sup> *Dokumenty wnesnei politiki SSSR* [hereinafter: DVP], xvii (Moskwa, 1977), 352–60, Litvinov's speech, 29 May 1934. The appeal of Litvinov was repeated on 1 June – see *ibidem*, 362–5. On 3 June Soviet Commissar presented his project in writing, sketching details of the Permanent Conference of Peace (*ibidem*, 366–8).

<sup>5</sup> Berlin had better information. First report of Fritz von Twardowski (Counsellor of German Embassy in Moscow) mentioning Soviet interest in French proposal of mutual assistance pact was sent to Auswärtiges Amt on 21 December 1933. In his correspondence to headquarter, Twardowski stated that the Soviet-French agreement was very probable. Litvinov's nervousness after Twardowski's question about secret negotiations confirmed the news received by German diplomacy – see *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945, from the archives of the German Foreign Ministry*, Series C: (1933–1937), *The Third Reich: First Phase* [hereinafter: DGFP, C], ii (London and Washington, 1959), 274–6, 278–80, Twardowski's dispatches of 26 Dec. and telegram of 27 Dec. 1933.

aim of the British Cabinet in European affairs in 1934? Was London interested in the idea of an Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance? Did the British diplomats see any profit for their country's security in a Franco-Soviet proposal? Were they active in European diplomatic relations in the case of the Eastern Pact and if so to what extent? How did they understand security in East Central Europe? And how did they assess attitudes and motivations of the proposed signatories of this new coalition of states? The above questions seem to be quite important because many historians repeat the Soviet explanation that Great Britain was entirely against (or at best uninterested in) the Franco-Soviet proposal.<sup>6</sup>

The second version of the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance was proposed by Alexis Léger, the Secretary General in the French Foreign Ministry, to the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* in France, Marcel Rozenberg, on 28 April 1934. After further Franco-Soviet negotiations in May and June, the whole scheme was almost ready. Both countries were sure that Poland was a necessary member, but differed about the membership of the Baltic States (Moscow pressed for their participation).<sup>7</sup> Moscow was unwilling to present the concept of the Pact to other countries, but Paris was in a hurry and decided to inform other partners.

The British Cabinet was officially communicated about the 'Eastern Locarno' (French diplomacy used such a wording knowing the positive British sentiments towards the Locarno Treaty) in Geneva. Louis Barthou had his lunch with Lord Privy Seal Anthony Eden, during the session of the League of Nations Council on 15 May 1934.<sup>8</sup> His information was very general. Barthou said France was negotiating a European agreement with the Soviet Union which was connected with the Soviet entry into the League of Nations. He promised to share more information after completion of further direct negotiations

---

<sup>6</sup> See for example Vilnis Sipols, *Vneshnaia politika Sovetskogo Soiuzna, 1933–1935* (Moskva, 1980), 14–8, 171–96, 221–98; Vadim K. Sobakin, *Kollektivnaia bezopasnost v Evrope* (Moskva, 1956); Viktor I. Popow (ed.), *Sowjetische Außenpolitik und europäische Sicherheit* (Berlin, 1973), 31–9.

<sup>7</sup> Gregorowicz, 'Koncepcja paktu', 324–5; Rojek, 'Geneza koncepcji', 217–22.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Manne ('The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xvi, 4 [1981], 727) and Marek Baumgart (*Londyn–Berlin 1918–1939. Niemcy w brytyjskiej polityce zagranicznej* [Szczecin, 1993], 181) are mistaken stating that London was informed about the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance in June 1934.

with Maxim Litvinov.<sup>9</sup> Four days later Barthou told Eden about a mutual assistance pact for East Central European countries: the USSR, 'Soviet neighbours', Lithuania, Germany and Czechoslovakia. This information could not be considered as very precise since Eden did not know precisely what 'Soviet neighbours' meant. But he only asked whether Great Britain was expected to be a member of this 'Eastern Locarno' and passed Barthou's negative answer to London, where the matter was discussed during the Cabinet meeting of 30 May. The British Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald was not happy with the French proposal assessing it as 'coquetting with Russia' and as a 'dangerous game of trying to isolate Germany with an Eastern Locarno'.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after 30 May, the British Foreign Office received more detailed information from other sources<sup>11</sup> concerning the pact and Moscow's readiness to become a member of the League of Nations.<sup>12</sup> The initial reactions of the FO towards the French proposal were moderate and rather unenthusiastic. John Vyvyan (Third Secretary in Northern Department) called it a 'Soviet trick' to accuse Germany of being aggressive because of Berlin's rejection of participation in a 'peaceful initiative' aimed at the stabilisation of the European situation. He was doubting Moscow's sincerity. Robert Craigie (head

---

<sup>9</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939* (London, 1946–), Series 2: 1930–1938 [hereinafter: DBFP, 2], vi, 702–4, Pattenon (British Consul) to Simon, Geneva, 15 May 1934; Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators* (London, 1970), 79.

<sup>10</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 707, Pattenon to Simon, Geneva, 19 May 1934; Eden, *The Eden Memoirs*, 80; London, The National Archives [hereinafter: TNA], Cabinet Papers [hereinafter: CAB] 23/79, 22nd meeting of the Cabinet, 30 May 1934; TNA, PRO 30/69/1753/1/34, 492, MacDonald's Diary, 9 June 1934.

<sup>11</sup> I.e., Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tevfik Rüştü Aras (who informed John Simon about the proposed signatories of the 'Eastern Locarno') and Vladimir Poliakov, a foreign correspondent of *The Times*, regarded as a person connected with foreign intelligence services (mainly Italian).

<sup>12</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 732–3, Simon to Foreign Office, Geneva, 1 June 1934; TNA, CAB 23/79, Simon's report during 23th Cabinet's meeting, 6 June 1934; TNA, Foreign Office [hereinafter: FO] 371/18527, W5693/1/98, memorandum Allen Leeper (Head of Western Department), 23 May 1934. See also British attitude towards the Soviet access to the League of Nations in Dariusz Jeziorny, 'Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec przystąpienia ZSRS do Ligi Narodów w 1934 r.', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Historica* 89 (2012): *Od Chin po Gibraltar. Brytyjska polityka zagraniczna w I połowie XX wieku. Studia i szkice*, ed. by Andrzej M. Brzeziński, 85–119.

of American Department) proposed British isolation from European problems excepting support for the Low Countries' independence. He and Edward Carr (First Secretary in Southern Department) named the new European initiative a 'Franco-Soviet alliance' and regarded it dangerous because it made a German-Japan counter-alliance more probable. Finally Orme Sargent (Assistant Under-Secretary) was not sure about what to do in a new European situation but rejected the concept of British isolationism because it would cause the need of higher armaments. Other Under-Secretaries, George Mounsey and Lord Stanhope supported his point of view. But the concept of the 'Eastern Locarno' also found some supporters. Allen Leeper and Ralph Wigram (heads of Western and Central Departments) advocated the idea of Britain deterring Adolf Hitler using national forces (this approach supported the demand for greater re-arming of Great Britain) and allied states.<sup>13</sup>

The stating of this view coincided exactly with the critical moment in the domestic debate among British governmental departments about their Defence Requirements Sub-Committee report, which suggested the rapid raising of funds for British re-armament.<sup>14</sup> Discussion of this matter took place before the FO officers knew any real detail behind the overall schema of the 'Eastern Locarno'.

All these seemingly isolated pieces of information from different areas led to the question as to who instigated the 'Eastern Locarno'

---

<sup>13</sup> TNA, FO 371/18298, N2973/2/38, minutes Vyvyan and Collier, 22 May; *ibidem*, N3007/2/38, minutes Vyvyan, 22 May; TNA, FO 371/18526, W5331/1/98, minutes Stirling and Leeper, 2 and 4 June; TNA, FO 371/18527, W5693/1/98, minutes Leeper, Collier, Craigie, Wigram, Carr, Sargent, Mounsey, and Stanhope, 23 May – 7 June 1934.

<sup>14</sup> See details in Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge MA, 2006), 89–93, 97–9; Keith Neilson, 'The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement', *The English Historical Review*, cxvii, 477 (2003), 651–2, 665–72; Brian J. C. McKercher, 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power: The Field Force and British Grand Strategy 1934–1938', *The English Historical Review*, cxxiii, 500 (2008), 100–13; Wesley Wark, 'Intelligence Predictions and Strategic Surprise: Reflections on the British Experience in the 1930s', in Kenneth G. Robertson (ed.), *British and American Approaches to Intelligence* (Basingstoke and London, 1987), 91–5; Ann Trotter, *Britain and East Asia, 1933–1937* (Cambridge MA, 1975), 39–46; Reinhard Meyers, *Britische Sicherheitspolitik 1934–1938. Studien zum außen- und sicherheitspolitischen Entscheidungsprozess* (Düsseldorf, 1976), 83–8.

initiative. Paris informed London that it was the Soviet Union that proposed the concept (and was not true) whilst Moscow had credited the idea as being French. It was also not clear whether the proposed pact had already been worked out in most of its detail or it was 'yet beyond the embryo stage'. London did not even know who was regarded as possible members of the whole construction. Some sources named actual participants whereas other sources claimed that the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia) and even the Balkan countries were expected to participate.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of their lack of detailed knowledge on the emerging 'Eastern Locarno', British diplomats started their exchange of views about the European situation. The idea of an 'Eastern Locarno' polarised opinions into two groups. It won sympathy from Ralph Wigram, Allen Leeper and Laurence Collier supported by John Vyvyan and Terence Shone (First Secretary in Northern Department). Leeper and Shone were sure that the Franco-Soviet proposal was directed against a possible German aggression. Sir Orme Sargent agreed with this statement but it motivated him to advise non-intervention at such an early stage. Sargent did not wish to be confronted with any German suggestion along the lines of: 'we can participate if you [British] participate'. Everybody knew that London had no interest in taking up any new international obligations. Moreover Sargent maintained that there was no French request to support their scheme and the full understanding of it remained very obscure for him. Later on he added

---

<sup>15</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 746–7, 752–3, 753–6, 764–8, 759–61, 773–4, 799–800, Simon to Phipps, London, 12 June; Clerk to Simon, Paris, 14 and 20 June; Phipps' telegrams to Simon, Berlin, 15 and 19 June; minute Sargent, 16 June, and Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 22 June; Erskine (British Envoy to Poland) to Simon, Warsaw, 6 July; TNA, FO 371/17747, C4090/247/18, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 15 June; *ibidem*, C4439/247/18, Clerk to Vansittart, Paris, 28 June; TNA, FO 371/18298, N3457/2/98, Erskine to Sargent, Warsaw, 5 June; *British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II: From the First to the Second World War* [hereinafter: B DFA, II], Series F: *Europe, 1919–1939*, ed. by Christopher Seton-Watson (Bethesda MD, 1990–6), li–lvii; *Poland*, ed. by Keith Sword, lv, 349, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 20 June; B DFA, II, Series A: *The Soviet Union, 1917–1939*, ed. by Donald C. Watt (Frederick MD, 1984–6), xii; *Jan. 1934 – June 1935*, 112–13, Sperling to Simon, Helsingfors, 13 June; TNA, FO 371/17747, C3862/247/18, Preston (British *chargé d'affaires*) to Simon, Kovno, 19 June; TNA, FO 371/18231, N3839/131/59, Torr (British *chargé d'affaires*) to Simon, Riga, 26 June 1934.

that making the USSR the third guarantor of the Locarno Treaty was also controversial. Having formulated the above arguments, Sargent advised to instruct Ambassador George Clerk to await the outcome of the approaching visit of Barthou in London. Sir Robert Vansittart (Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office) and Sir John Simon supported this plan which was fully accepted by James R. MacDonald.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> The arguments of the supporters of 'Eastern Locarno' were as follows: i) London has always supported regional pacts since the Locarno Treaty and tried to convince Germany to sign such agreements with her Eastern neighbours; ii) Wigram preferred a multilateral pact in Locarno Treaty style to a bilateral alliance of the USSR and France (Paris counted on Soviet assistance in the case of having its borders endangered by Germans) – that is why the *Quai d'Orsay* was forcing the Soviet entry into the League of Nations; iii) 'Eastern Locarno' would strengthen French influence in East Central Europe (Paris as a guarantor of the new understanding would be able to react in any moment independently of decisions of the League of Nations' Council); iv) Wigram proposed to support the idea of 'Eastern Locarno' and to combine it with the suggestion that Berlin would be allowed to rearm if it behaved peacefully and agreed to participate in a new agreement. Orme Sargent opposed to the British involvement into the 'Eastern Locarno' scheme to avoid additional commitments. Although in the given case an argument like 'we are not an Eastern European country' could be useful, the British Cabinet could be soon proposed to participate in a 'Mediterranean Locarno' (such an idea was being prepared by Paris at that moment and Turkey strongly supported it) and in that case it would be impossible to convince anybody that Great Britain was not a Mediterranean state. According to him Berlin could easily raise further objections towards the Franco-Soviet concept and it might also involve new obligations for London. See the whole discussion in TNA, FO 371/17746, C3680/247/18, minutes Wigram, Leeper, and Sargent, 15–18 June; TNA, FO 371/17747, C3743/247/18, minutes Wigram and Leeper, 18 June; *ibidem*, C3743/247/18, minutes Sargent and Vansittart, 18–19 June; *ibidem*, C3895/247/17, minute Sargent, 19 June; *ibidem*, C3936/247/18, minutes Wigram, Sargent, and Vansittart, 22 June; *ibidem*, C4011/247/18, minutes Wigram, Sargent, Vansittart, and Simon, 25–27 June; TNA, FO 371/18298, N3493/2/38, minute Vyvyan, 15 June; *ibidem*, N3554/2/38, minutes Vyvyan and Shone, 21 June; *ibidem*, N3682/2/38, minutes Vyvyan and Collier, 25–26 June; TNA, PRO 30/69/1753/1/34, 495–6, MacDonald's Diary, 24 June 1934. The initial conversation about Louis Barthou's trip to London took place in Geneva on 7 June 1934. Anthony Eden, who represented his country in the League's Council, passed French suggestion of a meeting in London. Foreign Office and the Cabinet agreed, although they did not know what to expect from Barthou. There were several hesitations as to Barthou's plans. It could be against British plans when the French Foreign Minister wanted to strengthen the impression of building a strong anti-German block – see TNA, FO 371/18527, W5499/1/93,



It was apparent from the exchange of arguments that the higher ranking diplomats were more reserved towards this very unclear Franco-Soviet initiative. London's supporters of the idea treated it purely instrumentally. They tended to view it as a means of facilitating a Franco-German armaments understanding – the Gaston Doumergue Cabinet was expected to agree to German rearmament in exchange for an additional guarantee of security. The British Government had been dreaming of such a solution since the middle of the 1920s. It was also clear that only great powers like France and Germany were of real interest to London. The Soviet Union was also mentioned in FO discussions but not the rest of the likely 'Eastern Locarno' members. Also Italy attracted some attention in London and consequently, French diplomats suggested British support for the new scheme in Rome, but the first rumours about the Italian attitude were not promising. Adolf Hitler visited Benito Mussolini on 14–15 June 1934 and the 'Eastern Locarno' was mentioned then but according to the British Ambassador in Rome, Sir Eric Drummond, Mussolini's response to a somewhat delicate German disapproval was non-committal.<sup>17</sup>

On 27 June 1934 the FO were compelled to address their formal position on matters prior to Barthou's expected London visit when Sir Robert Vansittart received from the French Ambassador, Charles Corbin, a written outline along with a request for his reflections upon it. The French proposal consisted of three independent instruments: A Treaty of Regional Assistance was the first one. The USSR, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were proposed as signatories. These countries were to undertake an obligation to deliver immediate assistance to any contracting party attacked by any other contracting party, in conformity with articles 10 and 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, consultation

---

Eden to FO, Geneva, 7 June, and minutes Vansittart and Leeper, 7–9 June; TNA, CAB 23/79, 23th Cabinet's meeting of 6 June, 1–2; *ibidem*, 26th Cabinet's meeting of 27 June 1934, 1.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C3742/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 17 June; *ibidem*, C3866/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 19 June 1934.

<sup>18</sup> In article 10 main rules of collective security were announced – the Council of the League of Nations was to determine means of reaction towards aggression or threat of aggression. Article 16 enlisted possible sanctions (also military ones) if any member-state had started illegal war (articles 12, 13, 15 described how to understand legal and illegal wars).

of member-states in order to restore peace was proposed in the case of either an actual, or a threat of, attack. Non-member countries could also take part in this consultation – this clearly opened possibilities for French diplomatic interference. It was further provided that any possible aggressor should not be supported by another signatory of the pact. The second instrument proposed by the *Quai d'Orsay* was a Franco-Soviet understanding. According to this document, Moscow should become the third guarantor of the Locarno Treaty alongside Great Britain and Italy. France would accept the role of a guarantor for the Regional Assistance Instrument of the new pact. That meant Paris took up all obligations of the contracting nations, including military ones. A General Act was the third document in which the preceding instruments were recognised as a contribution towards maintaining peace and as being consistent with the obligations of signatories of the League of Nations. The understanding would be put in force by its ratification by all the member-states and the Soviet entry to the League of Nations. Paris asked the British Government to support the whole schema through their diplomatic channels in Berlin, Rome and Warsaw. Corbin explained that the *Quai d'Orsay* preferred the proposed version of the pact to the Soviet concept of constructing bilateral alliances. He also claimed the scheme would bring Moscow back to a policy in conformity with the general interests of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

The French presentation of this written scheme revived discussion between Wigram and Sargent. The Chief of Central Department shared Corbin's hopes connected with the 'Eastern Locarno' and repeated his arguments. Sargent however remained unshaken in his reservations. He raised counter-arguments mainly of a legal character. Additionally, the Assistant-Under-Secretary found the proposed pact to be a clear discrimination against Germany. For example, if the USSR was to be regarded as the third guarantor of the Locarno Treaty, it should also act in the case of a French attack on Berlin, whereas the second instrument proposed by the French declared that Soviet intervention would only occur in the case of a German aggression against France. Sargent was not prepared to recommend such an idea in Berlin. Furthermore it became clear within the texts that France would deliver assistance to the Soviet Union when attacked

---

<sup>19</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4098/247/18.

by Germany, but no reaction was foreseen in the event of a Soviet invasion to the West. These clauses, according to Sargent, showed that the 'Eastern Locarno' was indeed a disguised alliance between Moscow and Paris. Such an interpretation was also given by Prince Otto von Bismarck, Counsellor of the German Embassy in London.<sup>20</sup> Herbert William Malkin, the Foreign Office Legal Advisor studied the document delivered by Corbin and also Sargent's reflections upon it. He noticed that the French proposal for a 'Collective Treaty of Mutual Assistance' was based on the 'Treaty D' model approved in 1928 by the League of Nations<sup>21</sup> and by the Security Committee in Geneva. Malkin defused the majority of Sargent's legal reservations, but regarded it impossible to introduce entirely automatic sanctions because it would be difficult to reconcile them with the Covenant of the League of Nations. Malkin also maintained that the 'Eastern Locarno' could be amended by the definition of 'aggression' as described by Nicolaos Politis (Greek Envoy to Paris) during disarmament negotiations,<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The main arguments by Wigram were of French origin. He hoped for Soviet participation in a policy in conformity with the interests of Europe and shared French fears for Moscow's demands to establish a bilateral pact in the case a multilateral one was unsuccessful. According to Wigram, it would be difficult for Barthou to reject such a proposal because Moscow could easily come back to the 'Rapallo policy' which meant close cooperation with Germany. Finally he saw no contradiction between the 'Eastern Locarno' and the Covenant of the League of Nations. Sargent opposed to this statement. First of all, there was no distinction, in his opinion, between "alleged violation" and "flagrant violation" in the new scheme and such a distinction was present in the Locarno Treaty and assumed the necessity of intervention of the Council of the League of Nations. Secondly, Sargent noticed no room for the signatories' decision whether the "flagrant violation" was really "unprovoked" [in the original]. This meant automatic military sanctions, which did not exist in the Locarno Treaty. Thirdly, there was no definition of the aggressor. The whole discussion *ibidem*, minutes Wigram and Sargent, 28–9 June 1934.

<sup>21</sup> Henryk Korczyk (*Działanie i recepcja Locarna 1927–1936* [Warszawa, 1999], 38–49) discusses all these models. He indicates that 'Model D' confined clauses on conformity between a pact and the Covenant of the League of Nations. There should be also present non-aggression obligations, exceptions justifying wars, regulations on peaceful solving of conflicts (courts, arbitration, and conciliation) and mutual assistance for the attacked country, but it was the Council of the League of Nations to state whether such circumstances took place. Questions of sanctions, guarantees for the territorial status quo and war renunciations were not foreseen in 'Model D'.

<sup>22</sup> The Security Committee working in Geneva under Nicolaos Politis (Greek Envoy to Paris) adopted the definition of aggressor on 24 May 1933. This document

but London should not be expected to support this idea in Berlin. Malkin agreed with Sargent's conclusion concerning the asymmetry of guarantees against Germany and added this might be contemplated as an opportunity to enlarge the second part of the French proposal, if Berlin desired it. This was the most objectionable point of the whole scheme, because 'Treaty D' model assumed no arrangements against any power or group of powers. The accusation of forming an anti-German bilateral alliance between Paris and Moscow hidden behind the multilateral formula could be proved based solely on the second instrument of the French proposal. According to Malkin such a situation excluded any possibility of bringing British pressure to bear on the Germans if they were unwilling to take part in it. Sir John Simon added two more reservations when he noticed that Belgium would also be deprived of Soviet assistance in the case of any aggression. He saw no reason to state that the British support of the scheme should be decisive for the Germans. He was also afraid of Barthou's intention to use any British consent to demonstrate London's anti-German co-operation with Paris.<sup>23</sup>

The whole discussion resulted in Orme Sargent's memorandum which listed the questions needing French clarification:

- i) Was the French proposal of a 'Collective Treaty of Mutual Assistance' based on 'Treaty D' model approved by the League of Nations in 1928?
- ii) Who is to decide whether an 'attack' or 'invasion', or 'resort to war' has taken place – the Council of the League of Nations or signatories themselves?
- iii) Was any further definition of 'attack' contemplated?
- iv) Was it intended to introduce any distinction between 'alleged violation' and 'flagrant violation' and if yes, were there any special provisions dealing with the case of 'flagrant violation' foreseen?
- v) Was the Soviet guarantee in connection with the Locarno Treaty proposed only to cover the situation of a German attack against France or did it also cover a German aggression against Belgium, and, vice versa, also a French or a Franco-Belgian aggression

---

was based on Maxim Litvinov's proposal. It was used in the Convention signed on 3 July 1933 by the USSR and its Western neighbours – see *ibidem*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4098/247/18, minutes Malkin and Simon, respectively 28 June and 3 July 1934.

against Germany? For Sir Robert Vansittart, this point was the only justified argument Berlin could have against the 'Eastern Locarno'. He said the scheme should not be regarded as a hidden Franco-Soviet defensive alliance and, in the case of reciprocity of guarantees being assured, he suggested the British position should be to support Barthou's achievements.

- vi) Was the formal assent of the other parties of the Locarno Treaty necessary to co-opt Moscow as a guarantor?
- vii) Were the French obligations only to apply when the USSR was attacked by Germany or were they also applicable in the case of any aggression of one signatory against the other?

Sargent delivered this document to Roger Cambon, Counsellor of the French Embassy in London. And a day later Corbin declared that Barthou would be ready to discuss all these questions in the British capital. He hoped the British Government would be ready not only to ask questions but also to present their formal attitude towards the French proposals. If it was positive, Paris expected active support of the Foreign Office in Berlin, Warsaw and Rome. The French however were not informed that London planned to support the 'Eastern Locarno' conditionally. The condition was that since the new instruments provided France with an additional security guarantee, which she has sought after for many years, she should consequently agree to authorise German rearmament.<sup>24</sup> The British hoped that the acceptance of this provision would save the whole Disarmament Conference.

French attempts to win British support for the 'Eastern Locarno' were strengthened by Moscow six days before Barthou's arrival in London. The Soviet *polpred*,<sup>25</sup> Ivan Maisky met Robert Vansittart and took up the problem of the 'Eastern Locarno'. He attacked Germany as a real threat for international stability and peace. He also tried

<sup>24</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C4849/247/18, memorandum FO, 4 July; DBFP, 2, vi, 785–7, Sargent to Cambon, London, 4 July; TNA, FO 371/17747, C4434/247/18, minute Vansittart, 5 July; *ibidem*, C4533/247/18, memorandum FO, 5 July 1934 with Vansittart's remarks; *ibidem*, C4467/247/18, Cambon to Sargent, London, 7 July; *Documents diplomatiques français 1932–1939*, Series 1: 1932–1935, ed. by Pierre Renouvin (Paris, 1985) [hereinafter: DDF, 1], vi: 13 mars – 26 juillet 1934, 214–15, exchange of correspondence between Barthou and Cambon, 5–6 July 1934.

<sup>25</sup> *Polpred* meant *Polnomochnyi predstavitel*. In that period the Soviet authorities did not use terms like 'Ambassador' or 'Minister' in their diplomacy because they regarded them too *bourgeois*.

to convince Vansittart about the very dangerous situation for his country of having potential enemies in the West (Germany) and in the East (Japan). He cautiously tried to sense what London's attitude towards the newest French initiative was. Having told Vansittart of his surprise by the British press attitude towards the 'Eastern Locarno', he wondered who inspired its low level of acceptance or at best its lukewarm attitude. Maisky declared he would expect some assistance from the British Cabinet in this matter. Vansittart was rather cold and explained to his interlocutor that the British newspapers were independent and there was no question of any governmental inspiration at all. The Permanent Under-Secretary was however happy because of very friendly atmosphere of his conversation with Maisky.<sup>26</sup>

Louis Barthou arrived as the head of the French delegation to London on 9 July. Two and a half of three sessions were focused on the 'Eastern Locarno' Pact. The French delegates emphasized loyalty towards their British partners and asked their assistance. The British Cabinet was expected to convince first of all Mussolini's government and secondly Germany and Poland. Barthou wanted to make these two countries participants of a new grouping. Failure to achieve this would lead to a Franco-Soviet bilateral understanding. Barthou and Léger preferred a multilateral pact and tried to move Moscow towards this line which in Paris' view was connected with the USSR's entry to the League of Nations. The British negotiators proposed three amendments to the French proposal. First of all they wanted to insert reciprocity of obligations between France, the USSR and Germany. Each of the three powers was to be assisted if attacked by another one. This solution was necessary to erase the impression of a hidden alliance between Moscow and Paris and hence the understanding could be presented as an enlargement of the Locarno system. Secondly, Simon supported the idea of the USSR's participation in the League of Nations. Thirdly, he pressed Barthou for his consent to the idea of authorisation of German armaments. The head of the Foreign Office did not foresee that such a move would strongly discourage Warsaw and other smaller countries from East Central Europe, which could feel endangered by a growing German power. The last condition was

---

<sup>26</sup> TNA, FO 371/18305, N4029/16/38, minute Vansittart, 3 July. Lord Chilton in Moscow received a report from this conversation – see BDFA, II, A, xii, 140–2. Maisky's report also achievable in DVP, xvii, 436–7.

that there would be no new British obligations which were likely to be unacceptable to public opinion in that country. The French agreed for almost all these points without special reservations. Finally, because of the British pressure they also accepted the idea that the success of the concept of 'Eastern Locarno' could be a starting point for disarmament negotiations being based on the idea of German '*Gleichberechtigung*'.<sup>27</sup> Barthou was aware that he was forced to come to a solution that would be very unpopular in his country and he also expected strong opposition from Moscow. Surprisingly however this point was never raised by the Soviet diplomats. Moreover Karl Radek, one of the leading Soviet journalists was encouraging Berlin to accept the proposed grouping of nations and regain equal treatment in armaments. Litvinov only instructed Rozenberg to press Barthou to give the French guarantee to all nations involved in the 'Eastern Locarno' scheme.<sup>28</sup> This was exactly what Paris tended to avoid from the very outset of negotiations with Russians because of French public opinion's pacifistic attitudes and exaggerated estimations of current German armaments by French Intelligence.<sup>29</sup>

At first the British Cabinet was not interested in quick decisions regarding the 'Eastern Locarno', but finally they agreed to lobby for the new concept in Rome, Berlin and Warsaw as the French had urged. Barthou suggested to start in Warsaw, where he expected strong resistance, but Simon preferred to begin in the Italian capital.

---

<sup>27</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 803–16, stenograms of the meetings; the French version DDE, 1, vii: 27 juillet – 31 octobre 1934, 954–63.

<sup>28</sup> DVP, xvii, 466, 809–10, correspondence between Litvinov and Rozenberg, 11–12 July 1934. The French Ambassador did even inform Maxim Litvinov about the French consent to German *Gleichberechtigung* – see DVP, xvii, 466–71, Maisky's report and telegram of 12 July and minutes of Litvinov's conversation with Alphanod of 13 July 1934. Politbureau of VKP(b) took an affirmative decision as to London settlement on 14 July 1934 – see Grant M. Adibekov *et al.* (ed.), *Politburo TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) i Evropa. Reshenia 'osoboi papki'* (Moskva, 2001), 313. Radek's article was reported by Lord Chilston on 17 July 1934 (TNA, FO 371/17748, C4978/247/18).

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Porch, 'French Intelligence and the Fall of France, 1930–1940', *Intelligence and National Security*, vi, 1 (1989), 39–42; Donald K. Douglas, *Domestic Political Structures, Public Opinion and the Limits of Great Power Balancing: The Western Response to German Expansionism, 1933–1941*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999, 114–15, available at <<http://proquest.umi.com>> [Accessed: April 1, 2009].

The whole idea was named 'Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance'.<sup>30</sup> All these settlements were accepted by the Cabinet a day after the French delegation's departure. The British Prime Minister having his holidays at that moment received a letter from Simon, who was congratulated by governmental colleagues for his successful negotiations.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting that the French proposal must have been regarded as a greatly important matter if the British Cabinet was discussing it at this level of detail. London was very devoted to the Locarno Treaty so its potential enlargement had immense importance. This was especially so when seen against the League of Nations' failure in Manchuria and Chaco and after German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference. Britain was also keen on new guarantees of security for France – it would be the Red Army to fight for Paris in the case of any future danger. All these indicators, along with the hope that the measure would help to save the Disarmament Conference, encouraged the British Cabinet to support the Franco-Soviet initiative<sup>32</sup> and to commence intense diplomatic activity. The first step was sending information to diplomatic posts in Rome, Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Riga, Moscow, Prague and Brussels. These telegrams described conversations with the French delegation and also the British conditions for the new scheme's support. But there were some differences in their content. Sir Eric Drummond received an instruction not only to inform Italian partners about London settlements but also to ask Mussolini for his cooperation in persuading Berlin and Warsaw to support the Eastern Pact. Simon, knowing that Rome was very keen indeed to avoid any solution that would strengthen France's position in Europe, mentioned that there was a real possibility of a Franco-Soviet alliance emerging should the Eastern Pact initiative collapse.<sup>33</sup> Ambassador Sir Eric Phipps in Berlin was

---

<sup>30</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 816–21, notes of the meeting, 10 July 1934 in the morning (French version in DDF, 1, vii, 963–5).

<sup>31</sup> TNA, CAB 23/79, 28th Cabinet's meeting of 11 July; TNA, PRO 30/69/680, Simon to MacDonald, 11 July 1934.

<sup>32</sup> See analyses in TNA, CAB 4/23, C.P. 205 (34), 8, report by Ministerial Committee, 31 July 1934.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4524/247/18, Simon to Rome, Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Riga, Moscow, Prague, and Brussels, 11–12 July 1934. Simon saw Dino Grandi (Italian Ambassador in London) on 11 July and said no word about the content of negotiations with Barthou. But a day later he instructed Sargent to speak to Leonardo



instructed to announce the British support for the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance and to make it clear that it was thanks to Simon's pressure on Barthou that German reservations had been catered for. The British Ambassador had to add his hopes for positive German input in the approaching negotiations.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Envoy Sir William Erskine's task in Warsaw was to describe the London settlement and explain that it was thanks to British endeavours that assumed reciprocity of obligations had been included.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, he was to express the hope for no obstructions from Poland in finalising the concept of the Eastern Pact. Simon was oblivious to the fact that such a diplomatic position carried no weight in the case of Poland which was actually excluded from the group of states which were undertaking reciprocal obligations. He expected to break Warsaw's resistance without entering into a complicated discussion concerning the East Central European smaller states. All these diplomatic steps were loyally reported to the French.<sup>36</sup>

John Simon's speech in the House of Commons was the second important step in support of the concept of an Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance. On 13 July 1934 the Foreign Secretary presented the whole idea and emphasized all his successes achieved during the London negotiations. He enumerated: Reciprocity of obligations between Germany, France and the USSR; no new British continental commitments; possible entry of the Soviet Union to the League of Nations; stabilisation of the overall international situation if the reopened Disarmament Conference finished successfully. Simon's understanding was that Barthou agreed to re-open the discussion on German rearmament in return for Britain's active support for the Eastern Pact. Simon warned he expected long negotiations but he tended to support the whole concept. After the Foreign Secretary's intervention there was a long debate and the majority of MPs supported the governmental recommendation. Winston Churchill and Austen Chamberlain were amongst them.<sup>37</sup>

---

Vivetti (Counsellor of Italian Embassy) about the telegram sent to Drummond (see *ibidem*, C4559/247/18, Simon to Drummond, London, 12 July 1934).

<sup>34</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, s. 833–4, Simon to Phipps, London, 11 July 1934.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4524/247/18, Simon to Erskine, 11 July 1934.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, two Simon's telegrams to Clerk, 11 July 1934.

<sup>37</sup> <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1934/jul/13/foreign-office>> [Accessed: July 3, 2013], debate of 13 July 1934. Both Chamberlain and

The British Parliament's declaration along with the intensification of British-French contacts<sup>38</sup> and the Night of the Long Knives of 30 June 1934<sup>39</sup> put the German question into the centre of attention for the British press. The Third Reich's image was extremely negative at that time and this intensified the public opinion's support for the Eastern Pact scheme as presented by Simon. Nobody had any doubts that it was directed against Berlin and nobody took the German side, even newspapers belonging to Viscount Rothermere.<sup>40</sup> The League of Nations Union and many other organisations declared their encouragement for the new concept.<sup>41</sup> The only disappointment came after Barthou's speech in Bayonne of 15 July. The French Minister said he merely agreed to consider re-opening discussion on German rearmament if the Eastern Pact was actually adopted. Such a declaration was in direct opposition to what Simon said in the House

---

Churchill were known of their reluctance toward Nazi Germany – see David Dutton, 'Sir Austen Chamberlain and British Foreign Policy 1931–1937', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, xvi, 2 (2005), 283–7, 290–1; David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 2000), 46–7. Churchill's stand could be regarded as a spectacular change because his negative approach to communism and the Soviet Union was well known. But in 1934 his fear for growth of German military domination became predominant – see *idem*, 'Churchill and the Two "Evil Empires"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ix (2001), 335–7.

<sup>38</sup> Berlin was really distressed about Secretary of State for War, Viscount Hailsham's visit to Paris, which anteceded Barthou's trip to London – see DGFP, C, iii (London and Washington, 1959), 144–5, Hoesch to Neurath, London, 7 July 1934.

<sup>39</sup> On 30 June 1934, following Hitler's order, the SS liquidated the leading circles of SA with Ernst Röhm. Some other dignitaries like General Kurt Schleicher were also killed.

<sup>40</sup> See press surveys reported by foreign diplomatic missions to their headquarters: AAN, Amb Londyn 1174, 64–8, 'Biuletyn Informacyjny Polska a Zagranica', 21, 4 Aug. 1934; AAN, Amb Berlin 248, 124–6, 128–9, 132–3, 135–6, 147–9, Skirmunt and Orłowski (Counsellor of Polish Embassy in London) to Beck, London, 20 July, 1 and 15 Aug., 12 Oct.; TNA, Government Code & Cypher School [hereinafter: HW] 12/181, 057492, Romanian Legation to Press Department of Ministry for Foreign Affairs, London, 14 July 1934. Lord Rothermere was still pro-German during the spring 1934 but changed his views for some months after his quarrel with Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists – see TNA, HW 12/175, 55457, and *ibidem*, 12/177, 56164, Romanian Legation to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, London, 19 Jan. and 21 March 1934.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C5057/247/18, Lord Cecil (President of LNU) to Simon, London, 19 July, and Simon's response of 24 July 1934.

of Commons and this raised disagreement and nervousness among the British diplomats.<sup>42</sup>

Now it was necessary to wait for the results of British diplomatic interventions from overseas. Sir Eric Drummond's conversation with the Italian dictator on 12 July was very promising. After presenting the compromise achieved in London and listening to Mussolini's statement about Hitler's reservations Drummond asked for cooperation in supporting the idea in Berlin and Warsaw. He was surprised with Mussolini's reaction which was totally positive without any special efforts on Drummond's part.<sup>43</sup> Diplomats in the Foreign Office shared Drummond's surprise and could only speculate as to Mussolini's reasons. Finally Sir Robert Vansittart proposed officially to congratulate Drummond on his achievements.<sup>44</sup>

Response from Germany was less promising. Both diplomats and journalists exhibited a deep seated reserve towards the Franco-Soviet initiative (newspapers were directly negative and there was no doubt this was inspired by official circles). Sir Eric Phipps sent to the Foreign Office several dozens of telegrams and dispatches to present the Nazi leaders' attitude. After gathering all information Charles Baxter (First Secretary in Central Department) suggested the production of suitable counter-arguments to be ready for discussions with the Third

---

<sup>42</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5313/247/18, memorandum Eden, 18 July, and minutes Wigram, Stephenson (new head of Western Department after A. Leeper's death), Sargent, Vansittart, Stanhope, and Eden, 19 July – 1 Aug. 1934. The Italian reception of Barthou's words was very negative too – see TNA, FO 371/17748, C4983/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 20 July, and minute Dew (Third Secretary in Central Department), 25 July; *ibidem*, C4984/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 21 July, and minute Wigram, 28 July 1934.

<sup>43</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 837–8, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 13 July 1934; TNA, FO 371/17747, C4600/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 13 July; *ibidem*, C4846/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 14 July 1934. Earlier Drummond's conversation with Fulvio Suvich, Under-Secretary of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, was not so promising. Former German-Italian contacts did not indicate Rome could ever support the idea of Eastern Pact too – see DGFP, C, ii, 834–5, memorandum Bülow, 23 May 1934.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4558/247/18, minute Vansittart, 13 July; *ibidem*, C4846/247/18, minute Sargent, 20 July 1934. This action seems to be a misunderstanding because the Soviet diplomacy knew about the Italian positive attitude towards the Eastern Pact at the end of June (see DVP, xcii, 431–4, Litvinov to Soviet *polpreds*, Moscow, 29 June 1934). So Drummond should be rather sent a reprimand for no news about this.

Reich. Orme Sargent produced a long minute in which he put all the arguments Berlin could raise against the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance. He also suggested possible solutions:

- i) Too many participants – Sargent proposed to eliminate the Baltic States and Finland; he expected Soviet resistance towards this issue but Moscow would be alone in opposing the little states' exclusion.
- ii) No limited time span for the life of the Pact – the British diplomat gave an idea that the Pact should last as long as the German-Polish Non-aggression Declaration which meant 10 years.
- iii) No indication of renewed recognition of Germany's Eastern frontier – but Hitler has already committed himself in his agreement with Poland.
- iv) No will to sign multilateral understandings – Sargent submitted arguments against such an approach:
  - a) multilateral pacts are more popular among the public opinion and inspire more confidence (British Cabinet wanted to avoid any repetition of pre-war alliances);
  - b) this puts into practice the principle of international co-operation and solidarity, whereas a bilateral agreement would be always directed against a third party;
  - c) the Pact could rebuild a bridge between Berlin and Moscow;
  - d) Germany could restore her international reputation and strengthen her claim for equal treatment in armaments.
- v) No mention about frontiers in the Eastern Pact – this could be easily improved so Berlin's argument was regarded as a totally false one.
- vi) Weakening of the Locarno Treaty – Sargent understood this as a hidden aspiration that the British should guarantee the Eastern Pact to make it effective, which was entirely unacceptable for London.
- vii) Criticism that the British Government wanted to involve the Bolsheviks into co-operation, but it was Germany that started agreements with Soviet Russia in 1922.
- viii) Fears for the prospect of Franco-Soviet alliance which were officially denied by Hitler but the Foreign Office did not believe it.
- ix) There would be no connection between the Eastern Pact and German *Gleichberechtigung* according to Paris – Sargent argued

there was a direct connection and Hitler could be able to exploit it tactically during negotiations.

- x) Fears for foreign troops crossing the German territory in the case of an action against any aggressor – the British diplomat maintained it would be no problem to insert a stipulation enabling the avoidance of any undesired assistance.

The FO did not treat German arguments as sincere. They rather saw them as ‘stupid’ (Sargent) or ‘either bad or indifferent’ (Vansittart). Wigram believed Berlin would be open to negotiate that is why he regarded the outbursts in German newspapers as preparing their position prior to direct discussions. Vansittart summed up all German arguments as ‘playing for time’.<sup>45</sup>

As far as Polish reservations were concerned the FO Central Department also prepared a special memorandum:

- i) Poland under Józef Piłsudski’s leadership wanted to avoid uncertain liabilities and limit any unnecessary commitments – according to Charles Baxter and Armine Dew (Third Secretary in Central Department) Warsaw and London had similar foreign policy.
- ii) The Poles did not intend to guarantee security for the Baltic States and Czechoslovakia, because none of these countries could contribute in delivering additional assistance to Poland in the case of danger. The FO officers saw that Polish relationships were ‘not too good’ with Prague and ‘Lithuanian attitude towards the Vilna question is the source of obvious difficulties’.
- iii) The Polish Government was afraid of admitting German or Russian troops on Poland’s territory in order to defend other countries. This argument sent to London by Lieutenant-Colonel Connal Rowan, British military attaché in Warsaw, was no doubt the most important one although Józef Beck has never used it in his official representations.
- iv) Warsaw wished to have her hands free in the event of a Soviet defeat by Japan – that point raised by the Foreign Office is a good

---

<sup>45</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C4907/247/18, minute Sargent, 21 July; *ibidem*, C4867/247/18, minute Vansittart, 21 July; *ibidem*, C4744/247/18, minutes Baxter, Wigram, Sargent, and Vansittart, 19–21 July; *ibidem*, C4870/247/18, minutes Dew, Wigram, and Vansittart, 20–23 July; *ibidem*, C4664/247/18, minute Sargent, 13 July; TNA, FO 371/17747, C4597/247/18, minutes Wigram, Sargent, and Vansittart, 16 July 1934.

indication of how effective Soviet propaganda was in accusing Poland of aggressive intentions. However it was also stated in the FO memorandum that Poland would be bound by the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1932 signed with the USSR.

- v) Poland objected to the exclusion of her Romanian ally from the group of member-states. This short remark was not commented upon by the British diplomats, but it seemed to be an important Polish tactical argument to multiply reservations.
- vi) Warsaw felt insecure because the success of the Eastern Pact could be used for the purpose of re-opening the Disarmament Conference which might claim further disarmament of Poland and allow German re-armament at the same time.
- vii) The Polish Embassy privately shared her fears that Germany could claim some prize for agreeing to participate in the Pact, like a revision of the Eastern frontier.
- viii) Polish political elites could be also afraid of the future of the Franco-Polish alliance.

British diplomats were further aware of other reasons for Polish reservations. Erskine added that the Polish Government was full of distrust towards the USSR because of anti-Polish propaganda describing Warsaw's aggressive tendencies towards the Baltic States and the Soviet Ukraine or Piłsudski's secret meetings with Hitler. 'French flirtation' with the USSR was also a point of Beck's irritation. Erskine added that the insistence on Piłsudski to change his mind and accept the Eastern Pact, exerted by the French Ambassador in Poland, Jules Laroche, had no sense because of the Polish leader's independent mind.<sup>46</sup>

British diplomats were divided as to how to re-act to the Polish policy. All were sure that the Polish position was simply one of playing for time. But Ralph Wigram and Laurence Collier followed French arguments about the necessity to press Warsaw to accept the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance. They intended to use British influence

---

<sup>46</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5258/247/18, Central Department memorandum, 30 July; *ibidem*, C5229/247/18, Erskine to Sargent, Warsaw, 21 July; TNA, FO 371/17748, C5055/247/17, Erskine to Simon with Rowan's memorandum, Warsaw, 21 July; *ibidem*, C4914/247/18, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 22 July; *ibidem*, C5030/247/18, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 24 July; *ibidem*, C5055/247/17, minutes Dew, Baxter, Wigram, and Sargent, 26–31 July 1934. It could be said that the British Foreign Office had a good orientation in reasons of Polish reluctance towards the Eastern Pact – see Zacharias, *Polska wobec zmian*, 158–64.

against Beck's resistance because once he agreed then Germany would be forced to participate or remain isolated in Europe. Wigram was unhappy at William Erskine's inability to deliver the expected Polish approval.<sup>47</sup> However Robert Vansittart regarded the German attitude more important for the positive conclusion of the Eastern Pact. Orme Sargent submitted this point of view and this was a pivotal moment of decision not to exert pressure on Piłsudski in spite of French insistence. Anthony Eden completely understood and had sympathy with the Polish arguments particularly after Barthou's Bayonne speech. Finally Wigram accepted his colleagues' point of view, assuming the British would really support Paris because the policy of being an intermediary between two conflicting countries has been ineffective for many years.<sup>48</sup> It seems the Foreign Office failed to understand why Paris aimed at having Poland in the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance even without Germany. Given such a structure it would be possible then to conclude a treaty and threaten Berlin from the East where Warsaw would be unable to stop the Soviet troops crossing her territory in their march to the West.

London was focused mainly on Berlin's and Warsaw's arguments since neither were entirely in favour of the Eastern Pact. However, there was a larger group than just these two who held similar misgivings. Finland openly declared her negative point of view. The Finnish Envoy in London, Georg Gripenberg came back from his leave and announced his Government's position to Laurence Collier. Collier

---

<sup>47</sup> TNA, FO 371/17747, C4589/247/18, minutes Dew and Wigram, 16 July; FO telegram to Erskine, London, 16 July 1934 (the Envoy was rushed to work more effectively).

<sup>48</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C4612/247/18, minutes Wigram, Collier, Sargent, Vansittart, and Simon, 17–20 July, and Eden, 1 Aug.; *ibidem*, C4982/247/18, Drummond to Simon, Rome, 19 July; TNA, FO 371/17749, C5394/247/18, minute Wigram after his meeting with R. J. de Margerie (Secretary of French Embassy in London), 19 July; minutes Sargent and Vansittart, 19 July; *ibidem*, C5313/247/18, minutes Wigram, Vansittart, and Eden, 19–20 July, and Eden, 1 Aug.; TNA, FO 371/17750, C5615/247/18, minutes Baxter and Vansittart, 18 Aug.; *ibidem*, C5824/247/18, Campbell to Vansittart, Paris, 25 Aug., and Vansittart's answer, 27 Aug. 1934. Compare Wigram's pro-French attitude characterised by Peter Neville (*idem*, 'A Prophet Scorned? Ralph Wigram, the Foreign Office and the German Threat, 1933–1936', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xl, 1 [2005], 42–3). Berlin was aware of Eden's criticism towards the Eastern Pact – see DGFP, C, iii, 249–50, Hoesch to AA, London, 26 July 1934.

and Sargent saw no strong argument, particularly because of geography, to force Finnish authorities to change their mind. They tended to leave it to Moscow to persuade Helsingfors into acceptance.<sup>49</sup>

The Estonian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julius Seljamaa declared publicly that his country was informed about the Franco-Soviet initiative and was following developments. His intention was to re-assure public opinion in his country.<sup>50</sup> Declarations from the Latvian and Estonian governments were very careful. They did not refuse to participate in the Eastern Pact, but claimed its clauses should not be directed against any particular country, for instance Germany. They also refused to accept any guarantee of their independence or territorial integrity because of fears of any Red Army military 'assistance' which would mean the end of their independence.<sup>51</sup>

At the turn of July and August contradictory news were emerging about Riga and Tallinn's reactions. After Józef Beck's visit in both capitals British diplomats wrote about the same 'cunctatory' or even sceptical positions as represented by Poland,<sup>52</sup> but after Seljamaa's trip to Moscow Lord Chilston wrote about Estonian and Latvian affirmation of the Eastern Pact. This news was very well received by Wigram and generally by the Foreign Office.<sup>53</sup> But such statements must be assessed as a fruit of Soviet pressure.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C4996/247/18, Simon to Sperling, London, 23 July, and minutes Wigram, Sargent, Vansittart, and Simon, 20–23 July; TNA, FO 371/17749, C5143/247/18, Th. Henderson (Second Secretary of Legation) to Simon, Helsingfors, 26 July, and minute Dew, 28 July; *ibidem*, C5432/247/18, Henderson to Simon, Helsingfors, 28 July, and minutes Dew and Perowne (First Secretary in Central Department), 10 Aug.; *ibidem*, C5226/247/18, Henderson to Simon, Helsingfors, 31 July; TNA, FO 371/17750, C5683/247/18, Sperling to Simon, Helsingfors, 15 Aug. 1934. It seems the Finnish Government used the British indifference in their propaganda against the idea of Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance. Press in Finland was very critical towards the USSR's foreign policy which was noticed by British Legation in Helsinki.

<sup>50</sup> *ibidem*, C5105/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 23 July, and minute Dew, 27 July 1934.

<sup>51</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 838–9, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 13 Aug. 1934.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5145/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 29 July; *ibidem*, C5146/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 29 July; *ibidem*, C5176/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 30 July; DBFP, 2, vi, 885–6, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 31 July 1934.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5175/247/18, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 30 July; *ibidem*, C5314/247/18, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 3 Aug., and minute Wigram,



Lithuania and Czechoslovakia were the least considered countries in the British diplomatic analyses. Both states were regarded as supporters of the Franco-Soviet scheme and this conclusion was true. The Lithuanian attitude was clear during Stasys Lozoraitis', the newly nominated Minister for foreign affairs, visit to Moscow at the beginning of August. At the same time Bronius Balutis, the Lithuanian Envoy to London, delivered to John Simon a short diplomatic note confirming his government's acceptance of the Eastern Pact.<sup>55</sup>

In August London suddenly realised that Paris and Moscow had become passive and Rome's attitude was similar. Great Britain appeared to be the only active promoter of the scheme. No doubt it was not a position the FO wanted to be in. London preferred to receive opinions of states involved and sometimes suggest its views. British representatives in Paris and Moscow were sent instructions on 1 August to speak with Barthou and Litvinov and express London's hopes that both governments lose no time in their endeavours to ensure their initiative's success. Sir John Simon talked separately to Maisky and Corbin in the same spirit on 26 July and 1 August, respectively.<sup>56</sup> London desired their activity because the Eastern Pact

---

4 Aug.; TNA, FO 371/18332, C4626/4626/38, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 30 July 1934; TNA, FO 371/17750, C5682/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 15 Aug., and minutes Dew and Baxter, 22 and 24 Aug. 1934. Paris was of the same opinion (DDF, 1, vii, 149–50), but Berlin treated enunciations coming from Tallinn and Riga in quite an opposite way (DGFP, C, iii, 270–1, 279–80). Radice accepted the French point of view – see *eadem*, 'The Eastern Pact', 51–2.

<sup>54</sup> It is visible in Seljamaa's statement delivered to German Legation – see *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Aus dem Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts*, Series C, iii, 1: 14. Juni bis 31. Oktober 1934 (Göttingen, 1973), 271–2, O. Reinebeck (German Envoy to Estonia) to AA, Tallin, 1 Aug. 1934.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5303/247/18, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 3 Aug.; *ibidem*, C5287/247/17, Balutis' note, London, 3 Aug., and minutes Dew and Wigram, 3 Aug.; *ibidem*, C5538/247/18, Clerk to Simon, Paris, 13 Aug., with minutes Dew and Baxter, 14 Aug.; TNA, FO 371/18332, N4830/4830/38, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 6 Aug.; DBFP, 2, xii, 12–13, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 10 Aug.; TNA, FO 371/18231, N4976/131/59, Th. Preston (British *chargé d'affaires* in Kovno) to Knatchbull-Hugessen, Kovno, 16 Aug., and Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 21 Aug. 1934.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5269/247/18, minutes Sargent and Vansittart, 23 July, and telegrams to Phipps, Erskine, Clerk, and Chilston, 1 Aug.; *ibidem*, C5306/247/18, Simon to Clerk, London, 1 Aug.; DVP, xvii, 503, Maisky to Litvinov, London, 26 July 1934.

on Mutual Assistance had already captured the attention of British public opinion whereas there was no sign of progress to report.<sup>57</sup> Neither the Germans nor the Polish said a final 'no', while there was nothing like a 'yes' either.<sup>58</sup>

The *Quai d'Orsay* response to the British Embassy in Paris was that cooperation with the USSR was their main aim. The Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance had to be concluded while Moscow was in conflict with Berlin. The easiest way to get fruit from Franco-Soviet cooperation was to isolate Germany but the Poles' resistance did not permit to achieve it.<sup>59</sup> Clerk failed to comprehend the reality that the French statement contained no expression of desire for a successful completion of an Eastern Pact. After the Reichswehr's victory over SA, Sir Robert Vansittart wanted to avoid the possibility of renewed Soviet-German co-operation which seemed to him very probable since military circles in Berlin were traditionally pro-Russian and acted in this direction together with Prussian landown-

---

<sup>57</sup> It was visible in Parliamentary questions asked by George Mander, the Liberal MP. His questions were answered in a very general way because of no formal response from Germany and Poland – see <<http://hansard.millbank.systems.com/commons/1934/jul/25/eastern-mutual-security-pact>>; <<http://hansard.millbank.systems.com/commons/1934/jul/26/eastern-mutual-assistance-pact>>, <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1934/jul/31/proposed-eastern-pact-of-mutual>> [Accessed: Dec. 17, 2010].

<sup>58</sup> TNA, FO 371/17748, C5029/247/18, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 24 July; TNA, FO 371/17749, C5123/247/18, Newton to Simon, Berlin, 25 July; *ibidem*, C5173/247/18, Newton to Simon, Berlin, 26 July; *ibidem*, C5322/247/18, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 31 July; *ibidem*, C5523/247/18, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 31 July; BDFa, II, F, lv, 350–1, Erskine to Simon, Warsaw, 31 July 1934.

<sup>59</sup> DBFP, 2, vi, 875–7, 892–3, 894–5, Campbell to Vansittart, Paris, 26 July, and two telegrams by Clerk, Paris, 2 Aug.; *ibidem*, 2, 12, 2, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 6 Aug. 1934. Historiography still believes that there existed divisions among the members of the political elite in the Soviet Union, yet it was impossible to have views openly different from Stalin's ones. Soviet politicians were divided into pro-German (Molotov) and pro-French (Litvinov) but in fact these are only speculations – see Haslam, *The Soviet Union*, 1–2; Jonathan Haslam, 'Soviet-German Relations and the Origins of the Second World War: The Jury Is Still Out', *The Journal of Modern History*, lxix, 4 (1997), 787–9; Derek Watson, *Molotov. A Biography* (Basingstoke and New York, 2005), 148–9; R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917–1991* (Ithaca and London, 1992), 75–6, 78–9. British diplomacy was not free from this mistake – see BDFa, II, A, xii, 166–7, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 10 Aug. 1934.

ers, industrialists and bankers.<sup>60</sup> This attitude became decisive in August in determining the British support for the Eastern Pact. The FO tried to understand the reason for French passivity and also the total inactivity of Soviet diplomacy during the whole of July. Soviet diplomats were even refusing to pass the concept of the Eastern Pact to the governments of the Baltic States. The only moment of being active was Moscow's strong pressure exerted on Estonia and Latvia at the beginning of August.<sup>61</sup> After 9 August, Litvinov disappeared from Moscow and no further information about Soviet policy was available for Chilston.

It is apparent that the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance was a leading topic during unofficial meetings in Geneva in September 1934. Louis Barthou was determined to convince Józef Beck to accept his proposal but instead of his consent he listened to well-known Polish objections and a declaration that Poland would not participate in any grouping without Germany. The Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs was aware of Berlin's negative attitude from two meetings held by the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski, with Konstantin von Neurath and also from his direct conversation with him whilst on his way to Geneva on 6 September.<sup>62</sup> Barthou was not successful in his efforts during his further negotiations with the Poles.<sup>63</sup> The British were not informed about their content. On 9 September Eden also heard Polish objections from Beck, which was negatively received by the Foreign Office. Sargent and Vansittart agreed that Polish foreign policy was unrealistic.<sup>64</sup>

On the day following the meeting between Eden and Beck a critical moment occurred with the receipt of a long memorandum from Berlin dated 8 September, also copied to Paris, Rome, London and Moscow.

---

<sup>60</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5511/247/18, minute Vansittart, 25 July; *ibidem*, C5219/247/18, minute Vansittart, 28 July; DBFP, 2, vi, 881–2, Vansittart to Campbell, London, 30 July 1934; cf. Manne, 'The Foreign Office', 728–30.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, FO 371/17749, C5427/247/18, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, Riga, 4 Aug., with minutes Dew and Baxter, 11 Aug. 1934.

<sup>62</sup> Tytus Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka* [hereinafter: DTJS], i (Londyn, 1964), 170–1, memorandum Raczyński, 7 Sept. 1934; Marian Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933–1938* (Poznań<sup>2</sup>, 1980), 142–4.

<sup>63</sup> DTJS, i, 174–8, Polish-French meetings on 11 and 13 Sept. 1934.

<sup>64</sup> Maria Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Polska–Wielka Brytania w dobie zabiegów o zbiorowe bezpieczeństwo w Europie 1923–1937* (Warszawa, 1989), 402–3; TNA, FO 371/17750, C6032/247/18, minutes Dew, Baxter, and Sargent, 10–11 Sept. 1934.

This document clearly indicated the German preference for bilateral pacts because they were afraid of being drawn into unwanted international conflict. For a multilateral pact to be accepted by Berlin it would be required to fulfil some additional criteria: the equal treatment of Germany in armaments, no pressure for Berlin's return to the League of Nations before the equal treatment was awarded, no immediate sanction against an aggressor should be included, no permission for the transit of foreign troops across German territory allowed, the USSR should not be included as a guarantor for the Locarno Treaty and France should not guarantee the Eastern Pact. Finally, Berlin declared its willingness to replace the mutual assistance principle with one of mutual consultation.<sup>65</sup>

The Foreign Office reacted quickly to the German memorandum. Sir George Clerk received an instruction to sound out the Doumergue's Cabinet reaction,<sup>66</sup> although even without this information London now regarded the whole concept as dead. For sure there was no chance to bind a new pact with disarmament. Charles Baxter thought the German attitude would be unshaken, although he noticed potentially negotiable propagandist elements in the presented memorandum text. He also perceived Berlin's intent to restart Eastern expansion. The Eastern Pact without clauses on mutual assistance would not exceed the League of Nations Covenant's stipulations which would make it useless for France. German fears for foreign troops on German territory were regarded as overestimated. But it seems the USSR's intentions towards its Western neighbours were implicitly expansionist because the provisions for mutual assistance would depend on Moscow's decision to start 'assistance' outside the Soviet territory. Baxter assessed the majority of Berlin's argument as baseless. Orme Sargent agreed with the colleague's memorandum and suggested again no further British involvement in the entire initiative. John Simon fully supported Sargent's reflection and assessed the Eastern Pact as a 'baseless fabric of a vision'. Its only value was, according to him, making the USSR a member of the League of Nations but this had already been achieved in Geneva on 18 September 1934. Even Robert Vansittart, although critical towards what he considered as

---

<sup>65</sup> Jarosław Jurkiewicz, *Pakt wschodni. Z historii stosunków międzynarodowych w latach 1934–1935* (Warszawa, 1963), 165–71.

<sup>66</sup> DBFP, 2, xii, 83, FO to Clerk and Phipps, 11 Sept. 1934.

an 'inadequate' answer from Berlin, was forced to accept the idea of sending no response to the German memorandum.<sup>67</sup>

At first the French were confused by the Berlin memorandum.<sup>68</sup> Sargent expected Berlin would press Poland to take up a similar attitude to 'share responsibility in the killing' of the Eastern Pact. In fact the British diplomats did not regard the Polish answer as being necessary or even important. Maybe this explains the very restrained Foreign Office's reactions when finally Warsaw presented her reservations toward the idea of the pact. There was nothing new in the document delivered to the European powers on 27 September. For British diplomats the only Polish argument of real importance was the necessity of German participation in the whole grouping. The British *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow, Noel Charles reported to London the content of his conversation with Henryk Sokolnicki, his colleague from the Polish Embassy. The Polish diplomat was first of all afraid of the Soviet troops' entry into his country's territory. Such a possibility could easily make Poland a battlefield of foreign armies. But diplomats in London disregarded these arguments.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> TNA, FO 371/17750, C6076/247/18, minutes Baxter, Ph. Leigh-Smith (First Secretary in Western Department), Sargent, Vansittart, and Simon, 12–20 Sept.; TNA, FO 371/18530, W8401/1/98, minutes Ch. Stirling (Second Secretary in Western Department) and Leigh-Smith, 18 Sept. 1934.

<sup>68</sup> Barthou still tended to press the Poles to receive their positive response and start negotiations on the Eastern Pact without German participation but he was stopped by Léger. Paris also tried to answer to Berlin in a way suggesting that Hitler's regime misunderstood its intentions. But London discouraged the French to continue negotiations without their consent for German *Gleichberechtigung*. See TNA, FO 371/17750, C6117/247/18, Clerk to Simon, Paris, 12 Sept., and minutes Dew and Baxter, 13 Sept.; *ibidem*, C6118/247/18, Clerk to Simon, Paris, 12 Sept., with minutes Dew, Baxter, and Sargent, 13–14 Sept.; DBFP, 2, xii, 94–7, Léger's letter of 14 Sept. 1934 with the attached memorandum project.

<sup>69</sup> Jurkiewicz, *Pakt wschodni*, 171–3; TNA, FO 371/17751, C6547/247/18, minutes Dew and Wigram, 2–3 Oct.; *ibidem*, C6492/247/18, minute Dew, 28 Oct.; *ibidem*, C6521/247/18, minute Dew and Sargent, 29 Sept.; TNA, FO 371/18325, N5582/580/38, Charles to Simon, Moscow, 25 Sept., and minute Vyvyan, 2 Oct.; TNA, PRO 30/69/680, Simon to MacDonald, 3 Oct. 1934. Juliusz Łukasiewicz also touched the problem of the Red Army's transit across Poland in his conversation with Charles Alphand, French Ambassador in Moscow (DDF, 1, vii, 580). The interesting thing is that the British newspapers mentioned Polish arguments which did not even appear in a memorandum, for instance *The Times* wrote about Polish fears for weakening of the Franco-Polish alliance and omission

London also noticed almost no reaction to the German position coming from the Soviet Union. There was only one article in *Pravda* very moderate in its expression. Its author accused Germany of conducting a secret alliance with Japan complemented by a Polish-German agreement of similar character.<sup>70</sup> But traditionally the British were focused mainly on the Western part of Europe. There was no single suggestion from anybody in London actively to press Hitler to accept the Eastern Pact. Berlin's negative memorandum was assessed by the British as being final and this view was directly in line with the primary aspiration of the British Cabinet which was to solve all European problems peacefully and non-confrontationally. British public opinion was totally unwilling to participate in any new war so every British government had to take this into account when proposing their foreign policy. Politicians of the left particularly exploited such tendencies of British citizens.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless the MacDonald

---

of Romania in the Eastern Pact's scheme (TNA, FO 371/17751, C6521/247/18, press cuttings).

<sup>70</sup> B DFA, II, A, xii, 200–3, Chilston to Simon, Moscow, 11 Sept. 1934. Polish Embassy in Moscow was much more scrupulous in referring to Soviet press' mentions on the alleged anti-Soviet plot of Germany, Japan and Poland – see AAN, Amb Londyn, 1174, 129–32, 134–8, 'Biuletyn Informacyjny Polska a Zagranica', no. 23 and 24, 1 and 15 Sept. 1934. The Soviet Polibureau of VKP(b) took a decision on waiting with reaction to German memorandum on 23 Sept. – see Adibekov *et al.* (ed.), *Politburo TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) i Evropa*, 318.

<sup>71</sup> Pacifist propaganda of the left-wing Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain was very strong. But there were also many other organisations active on this field, for instance Women's Co-operative Guild, Women's Committee against War and Fascism, the British Anti-War Movement (a part of Amsterdam-Pleyen Movement), the Anti-Imperialist League and Shop Assistants' Union. All of them were under the Comintern influence. Moscow's instructions demanded to create as numerous movements as possible which was against the British tradition of pacifist associations. But the pressure exerted on the governments was impressive – see Deborah E. van Seters, *Women's Foreign Policy Advocacy in 1930s Britain*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1999, 49–51, available at <<http://proquest.umi.com>> [Accessed: April 20, 2009]; Gottfried Niedhart, *Grossbritannien und die Sowjetunion 1934–1939. Studien zur britischen Politik der Friedenssicherung zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (München, 1972), 42–3, 72–5; Michael Pugh, 'Pacifism and Politics in Britain, 1931–1935', *The Historical Journal*, xxiii, 3 (1980), 643–6; Dariusz Jeziorny, 'Stosunki pomiędzy Moskwą a Komunistyczną Partią Wielkiej Brytanii (1934–1936) w świetle dokumentów brytyjskiego wywiadu radiowego', in Henryk Kocój, Radosław Małek, and Marek Szczerbiński (eds.), *Z dziejów Rosji i Polski w XX wieku. Księga dedykowana profesorowi Richardowi*

Cabinet, however pacifist, was unable to disagree a few months earlier with the national re-armament project prepared by their Defence Requirements Sub-Committee. In July 1934 the decision to build Field Force units ready for transport to and fighting in Europe was finally taken up.<sup>72</sup> This shows the politicians in London were still more pessimistic as regards possibilities to achieve a disarmament agreement with Germany. But they did not feel ready for military confrontation with the Nazi regime in 1934.

France's foreign policy under the leadership of Louis Barthou had supported the Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance as a way of containing Germany from the East. Such a solution had not initially found favour in London but after Barthou's visit in July 1934 the British Cabinet started actively to support his project. The Foreign Office understood Paris' motives to restrain German expansionism from the West and East although at that time a possibility of German expansion did not raise British fears that the balance of power was endangered. Still, Nazi Germany was regarded a crucial problem for the European stabilisation and peace. London harnessed the Eastern Pact instrumentally, as a tool to revive the Disarmament Conference, but acted very sincerely during summer 1934 to support it. The Pact could give an additional security guarantee for France without further commitments on the part of London. Berlin was unwilling to take up new obligations because of Hitler's expansionist plans which were strongly suspected by the Foreign Office. The German dictator simply preferred to keep his hands free from any obligations. Warsaw refused to sign the mutual assistance pact too. Polish diplomacy was afraid of the possibility of opening doors under international law for the Red Army to invade Polish territory in the case of German attack on Czechoslovakia or Lithuania. London rightly picked up Polish reservations but gave them no positive support. Finland, Estonia and Latvia shared Polish fears for the Franco-Soviet concept but only Helsingfors was courageous enough to refuse it openly. Estonia and Latvia because of their ambiguous declarations were mistakenly

---

*Pipesowi* (Gorzów Wlkp., 2006), 102–4; Eugene J. Meehan, *The British Left Wing and Foreign Policy. A Study of the Influence of Ideology* (New Brunswick and New Jersey, 1960), 41; TNA, HW 17/16, 74–5, Kun to CPGB, Moscow, 17 March; TNA, HW 17/17, 2, instruction for CPGB, Moscow, 23 Oct. 1934.

<sup>72</sup> Mc Kercher, 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power', 117.

supposed in London to back up the idea of Eastern Pact in its original version. Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, feeling endangered by German aggression, were among the main supporters of the concept. British diplomats had no difficulty to determine their attitude although both countries were insignificant for them. Moscow, however, was only satisfied with a mutual assistance treaty in any form which could easily be used to provoke a war in Europe and allow Soviet troops to move into neighbouring territories. The Eastern Pact clauses allowed this to be done lawfully in the case of German attack on Lithuania or Czechoslovakia. Soviet aims remained obscure to London. Soviet propaganda stated Moscow's fears of attack from the West and simultaneously from the East (Japan) and this was seen as the main motivation for Moscow's 'defensive' steps. This gives credence to the Foreign Office's low level of understanding of what was the Soviet Union's true policy. The fact that London was much less interested in the politics of states to the east of Germany and their security might in some way excuse the diplomats. Wrong assumptions, however, as to the aims of Stalin's regime meant that British efforts to establish a security system, based on disarmament and balance of power, failed. But according to the British government the German reluctance to the idea of Eastern Pact on Mutual Assistance was decisive for the failure of the whole initiative in 1934. Further development of international situation was strengthening His Majesty Government's discouragement. The Italian aggression on Abyssinia, German re-armament of the Rhineland, Spanish civil war and the rapprochement between Germany, Italy and Japan made London reluctant to be involved in East Central Europe.

*proofreading John Hobson*

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adibekov Grant M. et al. (ed.), *Politburo TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) i Evropa. Reshenia 'osoboi papki'* (Moskva, 2001).
- Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Aus dem Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts*, Series C, iii, 1: 14. Juni bis 31. Oktober 1934 (Göttingen, 1973).
- British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Part II: *From the First to the Second World War*, Series A: *The Soviet Union, 1917–1939*, ed. by Donald C. Watt (Frederick MD, 1984–6), xii: Jan. 1934 – June 1935.



- British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Series F: Europe, 1919–1939*, ed. by Christopher Seton-Watson (Bethesda MD, 1990–6), li–lvii: *Poland*, ed. by Keith Sword, lv.
- Brzeziński Andrzej M., *Zagadnienie bezpieczeństwa zbiorowego w Europie w polityce zagranicznej Francji (1919–1939)* (Łódź, 1992).
- Carlton David, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 2000).
- Documents diplomatiques français 1932–1939, Series 1: 1932–1935*, ed. by Pierre Renouvin (Paris, 1985).
- Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939* (London, 1946–), Series 2: 1930–1938.
- Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945, from the archives of the German Foreign Ministry, Series C: (1933–1937), The Third Reich: First Phase*, ii–iii (London and Washington, 1959).
- Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, xvii (Moskwa, 1977).
- Duroselle Jean-Baptiste, 'Louis Barthou et le rapprochement franco-soviétique en 1934', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, iii, 4 (1962), 525–45.
- Dutton David, 'Sir Austen Chamberlain and British Foreign Policy 1931–1937', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, xvi, 2 (2005), 281–95.
- Gregorowicz Stanisław, 'Koncepcja paktu wschodniego na tle stosunków polsko-sowieckich 1934–1935', in Andrzej Ajnenkiel *et al.* (ed.), *Międzymorze. Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek. Studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warszawa, 1995), 321–31.
- Haslam Jonathan, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939* (London and Basingstoke, 1984).
- Hochman Jiří, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca, 1984).
- Jeziorny Dariusz, 'Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec przystąpienia ZSRS do Ligi Narodów w 1934 r.', *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica* 89 (2012): *Od Chin po Gibraltar. Brytyjska polityka zagraniczna w I połowie XX wieku. Studia i szkice*, ed. by Andrzej M. Brzeziński, 85–119.
- Jeziorny Dariusz, 'Stosunki pomiędzy Moskwą a Komunistyczną Partią Wielkiej Brytanii (1934–1936) w świetle dokumentów brytyjskiego wywiadu radiowego', in Henryk Kocój, Radosław Małek, and Marek Szczerbiński (eds.), *Z dziejów Rosji i Polski w XX wieku. Księga dedykowana profesorowi Richardowi Pipesowi* (Gorzów Wlkp., 2006), 89–109.
- Jurkiewicz Jarosław, *Pakt wschodni. Z historii stosunków międzynarodowych w latach 1934–1935* (Warszawa, 1963).
- Komarnicki Tytus (ed.), *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*, i (Londyn, 1964).
- McKercher Brian J. C., 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power: The Field Force and British Grand Strategy 1934–1938', *The English Historical Review*, cxxiii, 500 (2008), 98–131.
- Neilson Keith, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge MA, 2006).
- Radice Lisanne, 'The Eastern Pact 1933–1935: A Lost Attempt at European Co-operation', *Slavonic and East European Review*, lv, 1 (1977), 45–64.

Rojek Wojciech, 'Geneza koncepcji paktu wschodniego 1933–1934', in Stanisław Sierpowski (ed.), *Niemcy w polityce międzynarodowej, ii: Lata wielkiego kryzysu gospodarczego* (Poznań, 1992), 205–26.

Zacharias Michał J., *Polska wobec zmian w układzie sił politycznych w Europie w latach 1932–1936* (Wrocław, 1981).

**Dariusz Jeziorny** – 20th century history; professor at the Institute of History, University of Łódź; e-mail: [dariuszjeziorny@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:dariuszjeziorny@uni.lodz.pl)