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The Policy of Equilibrium and Polish Bilateralism, 1934-1939

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In 1803, Prince Adam Czartoryski penned a policy outline for the Russian empire destined for Tsar Alexander I. In his treatise *Sur le système politique que devrait suivre la Russie*, he wrote:

> Policies must have principles from which the most appropriate system can be construed for each state, in accordance with its position and form of existence. The principles remain unchanged, yet their application changes indefinitely, depending on local conditions and the course of events. In order to be effective, the system should not be of a provisional nature, but provide permanent guidelines for the future. The true ability of a statesman lies in the skillful application of principles depending on different conditions. A cabinet that would have an unchangeable system regarding principles, as well as the statesmen's able to modify the application of those very principles depending on the circumstances, would undeniably be perfect.[1]

Aleksander Skrzyński, one of the most prominent politicians of the interwar Second Republic, noted that "a proper foreign policy is to skillfully represent the true figure of the nation abroad, represent its spiritual value and moral strength."[2] Thus, what determines the nature of foreign policy of a particular state?

Leading Polish historian Marceli Handelsman claimed that two factors play a determining role in every state's foreign policy: "the overall international situation and the traditional political psychology of a

particular nation."[3] He further believed that "every grand policy must have its own ideology, an ideal which it serves, a theoretical justification from which it operates, a concept which it must implement in the long-run.[4] Foreign policy is about "mode and spirit" – wrote yet another eminent historian, Władysław Konopczyński.[5] Austen Chamberlain stated it differently, and more succinctly, writing that a proper foreign policy has "permanent bases."[6]

What was the "mode and spirit" of diplomacy conducted by Marshal Józef Piłsudski and Foreign Minister Józef Beck? Did the policy of equilibrium have its principles and permanent bases or was it merely a result of the moment, a condition-dependent balancing between Germany and Russia? In Polish eyes as well as in Western historiography, the policy of equilibrium is still perceived as one of maneuvering between Poland's large neighbors. The above questions are fundamental for the reflections that follow.

French Ambassador to Warsaw Jules Laroche wrote that Piłsudski and Beck neither knew nor understood the "psychology of the West."[7] Similarly, very few attempts were made in Western historiography to understand the dilemmas facing Polish diplomacy prior to the Second World War.[8] Prominent French historian Maurice Baumont believed that Józef Beck did not understand the need for "solidarity of the states born in 1918 from the victory of the Allies."[9] Influential British historian Hugh Seton-Watson claimed that Polish policies of the latter 1930s were a product of Beck's "Machiavellian genius" and the interests of a caste of "colonels and landowners."[10] In general, the Polish foreign minister has come to be one of the most ill-comprehended persons in foreign historiography. Most often he is charged with an anachronistic adherence to the nineteenth century bilateralism that precluded Poland from functioning within the cooperation framework of Central European states under a European collective security system. Characterizing Józef Beck as a politician, Marian Wojciechowski wrote that he "was a man of outstanding intellect, great dynamism and political nerve. Yet his line of reasoning was bound by the rigid categories of diplomatic technique: political alliances, insured and reinsured by other agreements. It was a reasoning detached from its historical fundament, lacking an understanding of the elements of the past that were grounded in the present."[11]

The charges made by Józef Beck critics can be narrowed down to five major ones: (1) disregard for the League of Nations and acting against the projects aimed at an "eastern Locarno"; (2) tactical cooperation with Germany in the years 1934-1938; (3) antagonizing relations with Czechoslovakia and the USSR; (4) weakening the alliance with France; and (5) an unjustified aspiration to Great Power status. Beck has been accused of virtually everything, of gullible trust in Hitler, of power-oriented illusions, of "pathological anti-Czech resentment"[12] and, last but not least, of ideological anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. The charges of disregarding the League of Nations and sabotaging its collective security program are among the gravest ever put forth in Western literature against the foreign policy of Józef Piłsudski and Minister Beck. The above accusations are without doubt an important element in the negative stereotype of interwar Poland that was widespread the West, a stereotype that would last for decades and which still has not been discarded. Most unfortunately, Western historiography still lacks a thorough understanding of the geopolitical conditions that came to shape Polish foreign policy.

The political philosophy of Marshal Piłsudski and Minister Beck was far more complex and developed than what came to be presented in historiography, although by no means could they be considered theoreticians and "conceptualists," to use a term proposed by Piotr Wandycz. Undeniably, both held the following convictions as fundamental. (1) The security of Polish statehood depends primarily on the state's military strength relative to that of its neighbors and adversaries, and not on the efficiency of the international system. That conviction was only strengthened by the experiences of the 1919-1920 war. Their views were characterized by a profound skepticism as to the prospect of creating an effective collective security system in Europe. (2) Piłsudski and Beck believed that Poland would be able to strengthen its international standing by conforming to the principle of strict neutrality and equilibrium between Germany and the Soviet Union. (3) Further, they were convinced that despite the most unfavorable external conditions, Polish sovereignty would be sustainable, and Poland would not become a mere "client-state" of the Great Powers. Thus, Józef Beck attempted to conduct policies in accordance with the following dictum: "We can cooperate with the West of Europe as partners, and never as an object."[13]

Reborn Poland never considered itself a real power, although the authoritarian government's propaganda often referred to "Poland's power," while Polish Ambassador to Paris Juliusz Łukasiewicz would in 1938 publish a brochure under the title *Poland is a Great Power.*[14] Such were the charges put against the Polish government by French politicians, whereas a German diplomat would write in 1936 that Beck constantly sought "recognition of Poland as a Great Power" (*Annerkennung Polens als Grossmacht*).[15] Yet Piłsudski and Beck *pro foro interno* never considered Poland to be a state that sought Great Power status, with Józef Beck conveying that very notion to Minister Louis Barthou in the following words: "Nous ne sommes pas une grande puissance, mais un pays qui se respecte." The Marshal in turn would strongly underline the principle of "self-limitation" (*Selbstbeschränkung*) in foreign policy conducted by Poland.[16] That was also the principle message of his unwritten "political will," the carrying out of which, as far as foreign policy was concerned, he entrusted to Beck. He also held that political plans should not be formulated so as to exceed the capabilities of the instrument at one's disposal.[17] Yet he was convinced that Poland could not be a "client" of the Great Powers. On 24 March 1938, in an instruction regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations with Lithuania addressed to the Polish envoy to Kaunas Franciszek Charwat, Beck explained that "the position of Poland as a power" cannot be "understood to mean a so-called Great Power, but rather a state having a sovereign policy and playing a decisive role in shaping the fate of its region."[18] Poland as a "power," in Beck's understanding was thus nothing more than a state that conducts independent policy and enjoys significant influence in shaping the situation in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the outset of the rebirth of Polish statehood in the 1920s foreign policy guidelines had been set. It came to be accepted at the time that foreign policy must be an expression of the entirety of state interests, and those preclude the option of relying on either German or Russian support, as it could only be obtained at a price of limited sovereignty at a minimum, and most probably with territorial cession as well, the western territories to Germany or the eastern borderlands to the USSR. Marshal Józef Piłsudski's statements serve as a valuable commentary to Poland's position at the time: "If we were forced to join either the Germans or the Bolsheviks," the Marshal claimed in 1919, "it would mean that our work has not been completed. The *Mission civilisatrice* of Poland would remain unaccomplished."[19]

Poland could not seek its place in Europe as a state dependent on Russia or Germany. That conviction was backed by *consensus omnium* of the Polish political elites, probably with the exception of the communists. It is worth noting that prior to 1926, at a time when Józef Piłsudski did not play an active role in shaping Polish foreign policy, its makers were inclined to seek a certain equilibrium between Russia and Germany. Having regained power in Poland in May 1926, Piłsudski came to recognize that Polish foreign policy faced two principle tasks: normalizing relations with its great neighbors, and sustaining the alliances with France signed on 19 February 1921, and Romania signed on 3 March 1921.[20] "The ability to directly manage relations with neighbors is of particular value to every state, as it provides real freedom to regulate all remaining international relations (…)."[21] For that very reason, Piłsudski came to treat all other goals as being of secondary importance. Foreign Minister August Zaleski, with the consent of the Marshal, introduced yet a third principle: cooperating with the League of Nations with the aim of creating a system of common security.[22] Having concluded nonaggression agreements with the Soviet Union and Germany in the years 1932-1934, Piłsudski did not change those fundamental principles, but did maintain a natural reservation towards the League of Nations, which due to its decomposition ceased to serve as a point of reference for Polish policies.

In its fundamental premises the policy of equilibrium was the work of Józef Piłsudski. As to its implementation, it was the work of Józef Beck, for whom the Marshal as political authority, was the final instance. With the master-apprentice relationship binding the two, it seems improper to speak of a "Beck policy," although following Piłsudski's death in May 1935, the minister himself would be responsible for formulating Polish foreign policy goals, feeling naturally bound by the general principles left by the deceased leader. Regardless of how Józef Beck's role in Polish history is assessed, he did introduce his own style and hierarchy of values to Polish diplomacy.[23]

The policy of equilibrium was logically founded in the reality of Poland's history and the political geography of Eastern Europe.

> The situation of the state is grounded in the unwavering facts of geography and history, whereby Poland must inevitably conduct its policies between Russia and Germany. Founding those very policies on the support of

> one of those states has invariably led to dependence and the threat of renewed subjugation. Only equilibrium between the two states and vigilant strength has guaranteed independence. Perhaps that path was a difficult one, yet Piłsudski never, not even in the glorious days of independence, imagined the situation in which Poland found itself, nor the task facing Polish policy, to be easy matters.[24]

Reborn Poland's foreign policy was to be one of defending the status quo in Europe. August Zaleski would claim that "Poland has no reason to wage war."[25] In the 1930s, neither Piłsudski nor Beck would in fact point to any new strategic aims. As the international situation changed, however, the tactical goals of foreign policy were modified; those set in the 1920s differed distinctively from those put forth in the years 1938-1939. A thesis claiming that a continuity in Polish foreign policy existed can successfully be defended. It seems pointless however to frame it with a question of how, under the realities of the 1930s, it would have been conducted by earlier ministers Konstanty Skirmunt or Aleksander Skrzyński, as such questions have no answer.

With the signing of the Locarno agreements in October 1925, Polish politicians concluded that it would be most harmful to divide Europe into two distinctly different regions as far as international security was concerned, a Western Europe with security guarantees and a grey zone in Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the 1930s, it was the creation of a Great Power directorate that seemed to pose the gravest threat to Poland's security. It foreshadowed its unquestionable marginalization, and in the future, most probably corrections of its western borders. One Polish diplomat put it this way, "against all the manifestations of oligarchic tendencies in international life, Poland always did and would continue to protest. In her view, it was the principle of democracy in international life that should remain as the true achievement of modern international order."[26] The Five Power Declaration of 11 December 1932 giving Germany the right of equal rearmament (*Gleichberechtigung*) came to upset the "mode of international life" founded on the League of Nations. The Four Powers Pact only increased and strengthened Polish anxieties. Polish arguments claiming that such practices were destructive for a system of international cooperation built earlier in goodwill, were

logical.[27] As a political project, the Four Powers Pact foreshadowed the degradation of medium-size and small states that later paid the price of the Great Power directorate, while at the same time questioning indirectly the territorial integrity of Poland and Czechoslovakia.[28] The fact that Poland was not a beneficiary of the Locarno agreements necessitated the search for an accord with Germany through a bilateral agreement.

Józef Piłsudski believed that Poland's geopolitical situation required bilateral accords. Given the realities of the time, the chances for reaching an agreement with both the Third Reich and Stalin's Russia were minute. The Marshal would invariably insist that the problem of Poland's security was reduced to the issue of normalizing relations with Germany and the Soviet Union, as this was a vital matter for the Polish state, far more important than participation in any multilateral agreements, or guarantees offered by international organizations. The Marshal was rather unenthusiastic toward any multilateral agreements, as he perceived the effectiveness of such accords to be highly problematic, and in his judgment, instead of giving any real security guarantees, they offered merely illusory and empty hopes. The concepts of "common peace" and "collective security" would come to be interpreted by him as empty phrases.

In reviewing the experiences of international politics following the Great War, Piłsudski and Beck came to pessimistic conclusions. They became reinforced in their belief that an international order based primarily on the League of Nations did not give Poland any effective security guarantees in case of war. Recounting those experiences in a long conversation with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on 2 April 1935, Beck stated that

> for Poland, as for any state on the continent, it is neighborly relations that are the most important. Poland has two principle neighbors: Germany and Soviet Russia. Thusnearly 80% of our political work is directed at shaping and sustaining the relations with those countries. Following the war, relations with both neighbors were in disarray for a long time. Thus we could refer to both borders at the time, each being more than 1000 km long, as bad. The everyday life of a Polish citizen living along these borders developed in a difficult and burdensome manner. The smallest of

> incidents threatened to turn into a major dispute. Under such conditions, the League of Nations proved itself to be almost entirely unhelpful.[29]

Polish political leaders were therefore obliged to draw a lesson from the failure of the League of Nations. That was precisely what Piłsudski and Beck did. Poland was unable to defend the Versailles system and guarantee the effectiveness of the League of Nations, since the Great Powers that once formed the Entente would retreat or outright capitulate in face of the aggressive actions by the Third Reich. The disfunction of the system grounded in the League of Nations made clear the need for seeking means that would strengthen it.[30] Under such conditions, one of the primary instruments to further the security of individual states came in the form of bilateral nonaggression agreements.[31]

The position of the Polish government regarding the Eastern Pact project and other proposals for a collective security system for Eastern Europe, came to be determined mainly by the nature of Polish-Soviet relations. Those relations were grounded in a treaty framework and the Polish government spared no effort to normalize them with the aim of sustaining the status quo and the nonaggression context. It remains unquestionable that the Polish government could not allow the Soviet Union to become the guarantor of Poland's security and its borders. This would entail the risk of irreversible dependence on its Eastern neighbor. The realization of that risk dictated the negative position taken by Polish diplomacy regarding the Eastern Pact. It is worth noting that Polish consent to the Eastern Pact would necessarily have to led to an agreement on Soviet-Polish military cooperation. Finally, it should be underlined that the Eastern Pact would not only change the nature of Franco-Polish relations but would also bear on the Polish-Romanian alliance, a fact well understood by Romanian politicians including Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu who was an ardent enthusiast of the Eastern Pact and strove to include his country in its framework.[32] The decisions that the Polish leadership made in the years 1932-1935, choosing a bilateral agreement with Germany and rejecting the Eastern Pact project, provided evident proof of the principal mechanism of Polish foreign policy.

Polish distrust of Moscow did not find in the Europe of the 1930s any understanding among its Western partners, yet in light of such

developments as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, it seems well justified. The reorientation of Soviet foreign policy in the direction of reaching agreements on nonaggression with its neighbors, including an agreement with Poland signed on 25 July 1932, was from the very outset the object of European speculation as to whether it would prove to be a long term policy and whether it implied acceptance of the Versailles system previously condemned by Lenin. Western capitals held diverging views on the matter.[33] In Warsaw there was no conviction that this development would be of a lasting nature, although the nonaggression treaty had been signed in goodwill and with the aim of establishing a long-term policy instrument and an element of the equilibrium policy. Piłsudski did not believe that the Soviet Union would in the long-term pursue the policy of strengthening the status quo in Central and Eastern Europe. He correctly assessed that the new, red Russia was an organism no less expansionist than tsarist Russia.[34]

The agreement with Germany reached in January 1934 came to be perceived by Piłsudski and Beck as Polish diplomacy's greatest achievement, as it seemed to counter both the anti-Polish cooperation of the Berlin-Moscow axis and the policy of appeasement. Yet, were they right in their assessment? As in many other disputes, this matter is not easily resolved. From today's perspective, the claim may seem unjustified, yet the nonaggression treaty signed with the Soviet Union on 25 July 1932 and the declaration on refraining from the use of force in relations with the German Reich signed on 26 January 1934,[35] were both seen at the time in Europe, as strenthening Poland's position and therefore a significant achievement of Polish foreign policy.[36] It was important that the Four Powers Pact as a mechanism for resolving international disputes did not come into being.[37] Also of importance to Poland was the collapse of Germany's Rapallo policy, although fears of its return present in Polish diplomacy were not unfounded.[38] A careful reading of the *Diary* of Jan Szembek, proves that Polish foreign policymakers were aware that an anti-Polish agreement between Berlin and Moscow would not only be possible, but in fact would be met with enthusiasm in the Kremlin.[39]

As a result of the non-aggression agreements reached with both neighbors, Piłsudski and Beck seemed justified in their satisfaction. They had reason to believe that with "years-long consistent efforts carried out by Poland," a real achievement came with "a political stabilization of both of our borders, to the East and to the West," which was "a positive

element not only for us, but for European peace." "As can be seen," Beck would say, "historical conflicts wear out. We were in Moscow, Russia was in Warsaw. We hope that today's stabilization will prove lasting."[40] Was this optimism a mere illusion? Perhaps so, yet it should be taken into consideration that since regaining independence, Poland's international position was never as favorable as during the years 1934-1937. Still it was only a provisional arrangement. In reality, the Polish-German declaration on refraining from the use of force brought Poland crucial, yet impermanent benefits, chiefly the strengthening of security and a visible improvement of the country's position in the international arena. Poland acquired the ability to conduct a more independent policy toward the Western Powers, and in Central and Eastern Europe. In parallel, Poland would no longer find itself clearly dependent on its French ally. Poland was no longer considered a "seasonal state," as referred to by Weimar Republic's anti-Polish propaganda. New options opened for strengthening Poland's position in Central and Eastern Europe, which was a Polish foreign policy interest both prior to the May 1926 coup and later, when power would rest with Piłsudski and those cooperating with him. Finally, although it was not unimportant that the efforts of the Western Powers to forge the Four Powers Pact ended in fiasco and that Franco-German reconciliation proved futile,[41] the Polish government succeeded in reaching an agreement that did not require any concessions that were inimical to the vital interests of the Polish state.

Through the agreement reached with Germany in January 1934, Polish diplomacy managed to freeze and delay German territorial claims. It was not, however, successful in preventing the weakening of the alliance with France. In spite of the fact that Poland had not wished to give up the French alliance as a result of improving its relations with the Third Reich, the disintegration of the pact with France became virtually unavoidable given the realities of the 1930s. The January 1934 accord with Germany had a definite impact on Warsaw's lack of interest in various projects aimed at instituting collective security measures, as well as discussions concerning an "Eastern Locarno." The Polish government valued the bilateral accord with Germany more highly than any possible multilateral agreements. And conducting an independent policy strengthened Poland's prestige, which was not irrelevant for Piłsudski and Beck. At the time, any collective security system in Europe was inconceivable without Poland's participation. In the opinion of Minister Beck, the Eastern Pact was definitely not "a prelude to a new balance in

Europe," as Eduard Beneš would claim.[42] On the contrary, it was a proposal for a system that foreshadowed Soviet hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe. The Polish veto regarding the Eastern Pact resulted in the Franco-Polish alliance becoming a dead letter.

Minister Beck's diplomacy did not convince Poland's eastern neighbor that a Polish-German agreement against the USSR was not possible. The Soviet leadership consistently claimed that Poland and Germany were bound by a secret accord. What is more, as documents from the post-Soviet archives prove, Soviet intelligence did in fact inform Joseph Stalin that a secret Polish-German accord had been signed and that it was directed against the Soviet Union (sic!).[43]

For Poland, its pact with Germany was to give guarantees for the security of the state and its borders. For Hitler, normalizing relations with Poland became merely a point of departure for much broader, aggressive plans.[44] Hitler wanted to involve Poland in a common struggle against Soviet Russia, whereas Poland wanted to pursue an independent policy. The Reich Chancellor saw Poland as an important element in the Third Reich's system of alliances, and he intended to only temporarily tolerate the Polish policy of equilibrium. The January declaration of 1934 was thus merely provisional, and had no chance to become a lasting element. Yet it is undeniable that peaceful relations between Poland and Germany constituted a fundamental guarantee of the status quo in Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore the Polish leadership valued it greatly. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was strongly convinced that the normalization in Polish-German relations safeguarded Poland from the gravest of dangers, a Soviet-German rapprochement.

It is difficult to deny that the normalization of Polish-German relations was absolutely in the interest of Poland. The bilateral agreement between Poland and Germany seemed, under the circumstances, the only feasible solution. In his conversation with Foreign Minister Anthony Eden held in Warsaw on 2 April 1935, Józef Beck stated:

> As for Germany, when the relations with us were bad, we enjoyed a safeguard in the form of Polish membership in the League of Nations. Once Germany left the League, we lost that very safeguard. It was then that we approached the German government with an appropriate request and were

> answered positively. Such were the circumstances that led to negotiations, which were soon concluded, and after ten years of strenuous efforts it became possible to arrange an almost simultaneous visit of the Polish foreign minister to Moscow and the ratification of the Polish-German declaration of 26 January 1934. Such are the results of our policies. And for that reason, when we are presented with some proposal, we assess it primarily with regard to whether it does nothing to weaken the positive result that we achieved, and what further benefits might it offer. We spoke here of the animosities between Germany and Russia. Let us theoretically imagine that Poland binds itself to Soviet Russia or to Germany. Immediately, in place of the present stabilization along both borders, we would have one that would be absolutely bad. Preventing such change for the worse constitutes a fundamental principle of our policy.[45]

Today we have a thorough understanding of how fragile the Polish-German accord was. Yet we should realize that faced with appeasement policy, Minister Beck had no alternative to his policy of sustaining good relations with Germany as long as it was reconcilable with the unwavering principle of maintaining Poland's independence. Beck's diplomacy endeavored to maintain a freedom of choice for as long as possible under extremely unfavorable international realities.[46] In the opinion of British Ambassador to Warsaw Howard Kennard, Minister Beck wished "to free himself from the control of the Great Powers as far as he could and the mere mention of any Four Power Pact or Conference infuriated him."[47] The alternative could not be a sustained "French system" in Europe, as that system had already disintegrated by the second half of 1930s.. There is no rational proof that another political alternative could in fact have produced better results. This explains Beck's statements and feelings.

In historiography, there is a view that posits that Marshal Piłsudski understood that the achieved normalization of relations with both great neighboring Powers was only temporary, but that Beck believed "that their provisional character would naturally turn into a permanent agreement."[48] This is true, although it is of a matter of secondary importance since the policy of maintaining good relations with Germany for as long as it was

reconcilable with the inalienable principle of preserving Poland's independence, was the only conceivable policy.

Many Western historians and especially the French, offer today a strong critique of the Polish post-1934 policies towards France, blaming Piłsudski and Beck for the weakening of the alliance. Colonel Pierre Le Goyet stated that Poland under Piłsudski and Beck pursued "total independence," thus manifesting "susceptibilité epidermique."[49] This is how French historiography explained the dissolution of the alliance. But the pursuit of more independence from France by Polish statesmen was correct and logical since, as Henry Kissinger rightly points out, "a Power which is absolutely committed has no negotiating position."[50] The American statesman observed what Polish politicians dared not say so openly and clearly. The weakening of the Franco-Polish alliance had been gradually occurring since the Locarno Pact. French policy towards Poland at the time was accurately and explicitly described by Georges-Henri Soutou who admitted that it sought the path of extrication from its Polish alliance.[51] Although Aristide Briand would underline the fact that he was a signatory to the pact of 1921, he vaguely explained that "le pacte de Locarno est encore moins précis que cette alliance toujours en vigeur."[52] Polish Ambassador to Berlin Józef Lipski would later note, "Briand, a leading person, was very nasty toward us."[53] Poland was for France "une alliée de remplacement," a substitute for Russia. In Briand's time, all French ideas were based on the notion of a lasting rapprochement with Germany. Louis Barthou believed in a lasting engagement of Soviet Russia in defending the status quo in Europe, which for the Poles was a questionable premise from the very outset but one that would be supported by Barthou's successor Pierre Laval, if without much enthusiasm or confidence. In the appeasement period, French policy was subject to the British concept of avoiding war at any cost. At every stage of French policy formulation, Poland defended its interests as they were threatened although, what is most important, the interests of Poland and the interests of France as they were understood at the time by the leaders of both states were not parallel. Thus, any mistakes made by Piłsudski and Beck were of secondary importance.

The two political leaders perceived the Locarno agreements as one of the fundamental reasons for the growing inequality between partners in the French-Polish alliance. It can only be underlined here that for the Polish leadership Locarno was a negative experience, especially for

Piłsudski and his people, but not only.[54] A great majority of Polish politicians would subscribe to the words expressed by the Francophile Stanisław Stroński that "Locarno is by no means a reliable act of securing peace."[55] Perhaps even more importantly, in face of the implementation of the Locarno agreements the Polish government found itself powerless to defend the significance of the alliance with France. As we well know, the Polish government following the May 1926 coup had no political alternative but to accept the post-Locarno rapprochement between France and Germany as political reality. The potential rejection of the Locarno agreements, with the renewed provisions of the Rapallo accords through the Berlin Treaty of 24 April 1926, would definitely lead to Poland's isolation. Thus, it had to make every effort to adapt to the Locarno system by preventing the possibility of becoming a burden for France and avoiding a further widening of differences, even though they could not have been eliminated.[56] A definite dissolution of the alliance would, after all, be a true catastrophe, a "gift" to Poland's adversaries. Poland could have pursued an agreement with Germany, yet it was inconceivable with the Weimar Republic.[57] Such an agreement could have been of value only as long as it did not involve territorial concessions or limited sovereignty. Neither should it have thwarted the alliance with France. Without doubt, that was Piłsudski's train of thought. Yet was he completely successful in achieving his goal?

Opinions on that matter remain divided. An agreement with Germany, in which Piłsudski believed, was not intended to produce a break with France but rather revitalize a weak alliance. Most probably, Piłsudski and Beck took into consideration the fact that once France, be it sooner or later, came to realize the German threat, Poland would become a desired ally. The essence of Franco-Polish differences rested on the fact that for Poland the alliance with France was primarily a safeguard in case of war, whereas for the French it was an instrument of peacetime policy.[58] No other political configuration could have compensated Poland for its alliance with France and there are no grounds to think that Piłsudski and Beck lacked an understanding of that. As Beck stated in April 1932, the alliance with France was "a forceful construction of European stability."[59] Born in an atmosphere of confidence, the Franco-Polish alliance was "an obligation of politicians to a war-weary generation." It was "a natural safeguard against all tendencies to disrupt the harmonious cooperation of nations and a foundation on which further initiatives can be based."[60] Witnessing the decline of France's international position, Piłsudski and

Beck believed in its rebirth, and Beck would often repeat that "the genius of the French race becomes most visible at decisive moments of history."[61] Piłsudski's and Beck's efforts to strengthen the alliance with France should not be disregarded. However, major differences towards key European security problems made strengthening the Franco-Polish alliance impossible to achieve. Seen from today's perspective, the only way to eliminate those differences would require Polish subordination to the French point of view on those issues. And that was precisely what neither Piłsudski, nor Beck could afford to do.

The two political leaders desired to sustain the alliance with France which, first and foremost, was a bilateral agreement with specific mutual obligations that became operative in case of war. Such was "the Polish concept for the alliance," a term proposed by Michał Zacharias.[62] Yet for the French political leadership, the alliance with Poland remained primarily an instrument of diplomatic maneuvering.[63] Thus, in the years 1934-1936, the Franco-Polish alliance became a dead letter. The revival of the alliance through a treaty signed at Rambouillet on 7 September 1936, was advantageous to Poland yet it did not lead to both parties signing an accord on European security or on a basis for cooperation in case of war. Beck explained to French Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos in a conversation held in 6 December 1937 in Kraków, Poland that "the French insist on attaching a League-related component to the Franco-Polish alliance, which challenges our confidence to a certain degree, because in our view, the alliance has everything needed to make it a lasting construct, whereas the League of Nations is undergoing a crisis of undeterminable effects."[64] The Polish minister would recall that "Poland was never in a situation where more than fifty percent of its interests could be pursued through the League, because at one time, Russia was not a member of the League, and once it did accede, Germany left the League."[65] In the same conversation, Beck warned his French counterpart that everything, "which would be attached to the alliance would diminish its value in our eyes."[66]

Most likely, Polish diplomacy did play a role in the complete failure of French eastern policy. That failure in turn brought a reorientation of French policy towards appeasement, and American scholar Lisanne Radice was right to describe the fiasco of French eastern policy in the 1930s as a "prelude to appeasement."[67] That left Poland in a highly unfavorable position. What is more, in the view of British and French politicians, the collective security framework – whatever was

understood by the term – served to keep the Soviet Union cooperating with the West and thus prevented a rapprochement between Moscow and Berlin.[68] Yet, given the reality of the times, with France's weakness and the numerous inconsistencies in its foreign policy, was an alternative policy conceivable? A historian must resist any temptations to speculate on "what would have been if," yet in this case it seems justified to say that no other policy pursued by Poland could have given France more effective support in defending the territorial status quo in Europe.

The difference in views between Warsaw and Paris would become most clear during the events of 1938. On August 11 of that year in a conversation with Minister Georges Bonnet, Polish Ambassador to France Juliusz Łukasiewicz pointed out that the Polish government saw the character of the alliance differently. The ambassador made a reference:

> *primo* – to the difference of opinions regarding the text of the alliance treaty, which would reveal itself on various occasions. We always refer to the text from the year 1921 and hold it to be our sole justification, whereas our French counterparts were never unambiguous in their position on the matter. *Secundo* – to the fact that we always defended the position of "déclenchement automatique et immediate" of alliance obligations, whereas our French counterparts would refrain from any unquestionable precision on the issue, and instead attempted to maintain an option for delay, or to introduce additional elements to the functioning of the alliance. *Tertio* – to the fact that we never and in any way refrained from acting France's ally, while on the part of Quai d'Orsay, the very last year we were faced with a position regarding a matter, against which we were forced to react in a most serious form.[69]

The bilateral treaties with Great Britain and France were to safeguard Poland's position in case of war. Józef Beck was aware of the decline in France's importance, while the military value of the Franco-Polish alliance was judged to be rather limited, and that judgment proved realistic. Yet history offered a lesson that pointed to Great Britain as having a decisive say in defending the balance of power, although the country would not deploy effective land forces in the first phase of the war on the continent. What France lacked throughout the twenty-year peace

period to defend the status quo was the support of London. With British guarantees given to Poland that later would develop into a bilateral alliance, Poland's international position underwent a majorl change, and in Beck's interpretation that was a change for the better. For that reason, Józef Beck could claim that "the road to Paris leads through London," and what is more, in the summer of 1939 he became convinced that Polish diplomacy had managed to successfully travel that difficult road. In Beck's opinion, the bilateral alliance with Great Britain was a great achievement of his policy.

The history of European diplomacy of the 1930s oscillated between grand attempts to create a system of collective security with a leading role being played by the USSR, and a policy of concessions to aggressors. Poland under Piłsudski and Beck did not accept either option and so found fundamental difficulty in accommodating its position. It rejected both the idea of a Great Power directorate and collective security with Soviet participation. Ssuch a position was not grounded in on ideological premises but rather in pragmatic conclusions resulting from the observation of European post-World War I political experiences.

The idea of regional security pacts was to solidify the European status quo. Since the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Germany's neighbors to the East, did not partake in or benefit from the Locarno system, the idea of a "Locarno for Eastern Europe" or Eastern Pact was born.[70] From a historical perspective, the proposal of regional security pacts was an interesting concept, one worthy of attention, yet for Poland it seemed to be a questionable initiative. In the French interpretation, a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union would offer Poland security guarantees for its eastern border in case of war with Germany. Yet Warsaw well understood that the Soviet government would pursue a policy best satisfying its own interests, and that treaties would be of no importance.[71]

Piłsudski and Beck proposed their own *Realpolitik* program to counter the illusions of collective security and a policy of fruitless "pactomania." Both believed that

> diplomacy must be founded on the defensive power of the state, which at times should be used as the ultimate argument, the *ultima ratio,* of state policy; and any military

> success could become a lasting element in the history of a nation, provided that it be appropriately and sufficiently exploited by foreign policy. Foreign policy is by no means an independent element, separated from the general functions of the state, but to the contrary, is inseparably bound with the activity of the state.[72]

For Beck, the policy of collective security was the pursuit of a fiction. It was a product of political propaganda that repeated commonplace phrases and bringing forth problems that existed neither in legal nor political reality. Piłsudski and Beck opposed that fiction with reality, with the principle of clarity in treaty obligations, even if their scope was limited.

Undeniably, the Leagues of Nations' ineffectiveness was due to the impermanence of the Versailles system, and the deepening crisis of the League of Nations was a crucial reason for the failure of the efforts to strengthen that system. The coupling of the two tendencies was a phenomenon that many European politicians did not appreciate at the time. Under such conditions, bilateral nonaggression treaties became a principle instrument in fostering the security of individual states. A particular stereotype far removed from the truth was the assertion that Piłsudski and Beck pursued a program that aimed at contesting the League of Nations, seeing in it no benefits for Poland. Yet at the end of the 1930s, the League constituted *une quantité négligeable.*[73] Beck would draw an important lesson from that. He faced *faits accomplis*, although perhaps he too openly displaying his dismissive attitude towards the Geneva-based institution. In the eyes of Western politicians, even those who were favorably inclined towards Poland, Beck's attitude appeared inexplicable.[74]

Piłsudski and Beck preferred to pursue concrete and precise bilateral agreements, rather than collective security, which was deemed vague and which watered down real obligations. Their convictions were enhanced by distance and through criticism of the League of Nations which in their eyes was a failure. Polish diplomats during Beck's term in office often cited the ironical quip of the Bulgarian statesman Alexander Stamboliyski: "If you want peace – make peace with your neighbor, if you want war – make peace with your neighbor's neighbor." What remains open is the question of whether Józef Beck was a convinced advocate of

bilateral treaties regardless of the particular conditions of the 1930s, or was his stance perhaps forced on him by the specific circumstances of the time. The latter interpretation seems to be more legitimate**.**

"We did not and do not have any doctrinal objections to multilateral treaties," the Polish minister said to German Ambassador to Warsaw Hans Adolf von Moltke, "but our experience has shown that in bilateral relations we achieved certain results, by contrast none of the projects of multilateral pacts put forward at this time proved successful. Thus, and in the future, we shall approach new projects without doctrinal prejudice, but aware of our previous experiences."[75] It seems proper to make a reference here to yet another source. On 19 February 1938, clarifying the views held by Beck, Polish Chargé d'affairs in Paris Feliks Frankowski explained to Minister Yvon Delbos that "the minister always, and also in his public speeches, made clear that he did not consider bilateralism as a doctrinal issue, and that he would have nothing against more general agreements, or a combination of bilateral agreements with more general ones, if the latter were truly possible. That, in fact, the issue (if such really exists) of bilateral treaties became pressing only when it was clear that more general treaties are unachievable (…)."[76] It is pragmatism and not a doctrinal stance that dominates in those statements.

There is no doubt that Beck believeed in the effectiveness of defensive alliances and the value of bilateral nonaggression agreements. He persistently insisted that

> defensive alliances, which in the case of war are to supplement the military forces of a particular state, constituted political bases for organizing security. In the recent times, alongside the regular defensive alliances, we observe the creation of a new type of so-called nonaggression pacts, which are to serve the same purpose. Their significance is rather of a moral nature and in fact they acquire their importance only when they become a point of departure for a particular policy of consent and pacification of relations between the signatory countries. Such was the result of the Locarno Pact in Franco-German relations, or of the Polish-German nonaggression pact in our relations with our western neighbor. They have actually smaller significance than defensive alliances (…). [The

> second sphere of foreign policy] securing the recognition of one's interests, "is immeasurably more active and complicated. It concerns primarily preventing the creation of such agreements, which would decide on the solution to the problems that are of interest to a particular state, without that state's participation. This is the sphere of pure diplomacy which consists above all in the prevention of decisions taken without the participation of the interested state, founded on the ability to convince other countries of the need to consult and reach an agreement on a given issue with the state one represents, and finally, founded on the pursuit of agreements with certain states on guarantees of mutual support in advancing the commonly agreed postulates at broader international fora.[77]

Faced with an offensive waged by aggressive neighbors, and a policy of concessions by the Western Powers, the time and struggle to sustain independent statehood became ever more crucial. In the international situation of the 1930s, which was undergoing violent change, upholding Poland's independence in Europe required not only dynamism but also flexibility. Beck believed that an effective defense of Polish state interests required more determination, and he would reiterate that view on various occasions. In the frequently cited instruction for the members of the Polish delegation to the Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in September 1937, Beck conveyed his political credo:

> At first, the demands should be repeated for a longer time, so as to make people believe in their legitimacy and begin to implement them. Since presently the troubled world is fearful of dynamic states and willingly consents to their demands, so as to prevent any confrontation – let us underline those elements, which prove and give an impression that we are dynamic.[78]

Beck's diplomacy referred to invoked dynamism, understood as "making others aware that we are able to face any turmoil and that one could not foretell the consequences of our possible moves," as stated by Polish Ambassador to London Edward Raczyński.[79]

Józef Beck was convinced that the passivity of states considered to be "of secondary importance" in a "balkanized Europe," would only facilitate the policy of appeasement. But active opposition to the policy of concessions to aggressors would appear as an alternative and a deterring factor. Such dynamic policies led to accusations of kinship with the policies pursued by authoritarian and totalitarian states. Yet the situation seemed to necessitate the rejection of political passivity, regardless of the risks it entailed. Piłsudski and Beck concurred that Poland could not afford to remain passive in face of the coming challenges ahead. It could not pursue a policy of accommodation to the actions of the Great Powers.

It is utterly false to claim, however, as is often done, that Beck was imitating the policies of the aggressive powers. To be sure, such an impression was created in 1938 when a Polish ultimatum was presented to the government of Lithuania on 17 March 1938, but it conveyed merely a demand to establish normal diplomatic relations. The ultimatum of the Polish government to its Czechoslovak counterpart, dated 30 September 1938, which put forth demands of territorial concessions regarding the Teschen region, was primarily a protest against the decisions reached at the Munich Conference.[80] Condemning the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Lewis B. Namier wrote: "There was a streak of the gangster in Colonel Beck, and a passion for power-display and booty." Yet he was quick to note: "But even he would have preferred to practice these against, rather than in the company of, the Germans."[81] The partiality of those judgments is obvious. Of most fundamental importance was the fact that the Polish demands on Czechoslovakia in September 1938 did not thwart the policy of equilibrium, although abroad it created an impression that Warsaw and Berlin were perhaps bound by a secret pact.

Was Polish foreign policy of the years 1934-1939 truly a policy of equilibrium?

Stanisław Żerko wrote that the use of this term leads to misunderstanding, since Polish-German relations clearly enjoyed a more favorable atmosphere than relations between Poland and the Soviet Union. In his opinion, there was not much balancing between Germany and the USSR.[82] There is no doubt whatsoever that the climate of Polish-German relations was better than in relations between Warsaw and Moscow. While the Polish-German relations were at the time conducted in a good atmosphere, there was a spirit of a "cold war" in Soviet-Polish relations.

Polish diplomacy never succeeded in convincing Soviet politicians that Poland was in fact pursuing a policy of strict neutrality between Germany and Russia. Nevertheless, the term between Germany and the USSR was not mere rhetoric. It should be understood as a synonym for a policy of neutrality in the face of pressures from both the USSR and the Third Reich. Polish foreign policy would aim to maintain the balance of power in Europe, and there is no proof that it failed to depart from these premises so defined. The equilibrium was perhaps artificial, not only because Poland did not possess power comparable to Germany or the USSR but also because both nonaggression agreements seemed from the very outset to be merely temporary, a fact which Józef Piłsudski fully realized.

The Polish government never undertook any obligations on behalf of Germany against the USSR, or vice versa. The accusations of a secret pact between Poland and Germany that allegedly supplemented the declaration on refraining from the use of force were false. The extent of rapprochement with Germany, which Beck advocated and whose value he always defended, had its own impassible limit: Poland's independence and territorial integrity. For that very reason and without much hesitation, Beck rejected the demands made by Hitler and Ribbentrop that were presented for the first time to Polish Ambassador Józef Lipski in Berlin on 24 October 1938 regarding for the return of the Free City of Danzig to the Third Reich, and the building of an extraterritorial highway across the "Polish Corridor." Perhaps by accepting those demands, Poland could have averted the events of 1939, that is the aggression from both East and West and the ensuing partition. But in doing so Poland would have become a vassal of the Third Reich. The demands of the German leader were unacceptable not due to matters of prestige. Their rejection was not a result of the pressures exerted by the Polish public opinion, but sprang from the unwavering conviction held by Minister Beck and the Polish leadership that the demands were irreconcilable with Poland's most vital interests. To reiterate, accepting those demands, Poland could have averted the events that came to bear so gravely in 1939, but it would have become a vassal state of the Third Reich.

"Two things are impossible from Poland's point of view, and that is making her policy dependent either on Berlin or on Moscow," this was the message conveyed by Józef Beck to British prime minister Neville Chamberlain on 4 April 1939.[83] The Polish minister further claimed that,

> As far as Poland is concerned, two facts are of crucial importance due to its geographic situation. That is for Polish policy to be founded either on Germany or on Russia. If Poland was to make its policy dependent on one of those powers, it would immediately cease to be a factor for peace, and would become a factor likely to provoke a conflict.[84]

Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski made a particularly apt comment in a letter to American Ambassador to Poland Anthony Drexel-Biddle dated 15 October 1939, He observed that:

> We were a state crammed between two Powers. We stood between two insatiable imperialisms (…). We therefore maintained – perhaps even exaggerating – our neutrality and our autonomy both from German national socialism, as well as from Russian communism. We held the conviction that our accession to one of the blocs would only foster a bloody war, which we wished to avoid.[85]

In the view of Piłsudski and Beck, Poland's foreign policy was to be non-ideological.[86] Whereas Eduard Beneš claimed that policy is about "science and art" (*Wissenschaft und Kunst*),[87] Piłsudski and Beck placed particular stress on pragmatism in foreign policy and advocated disentangling it from ideology. The 1930s were a time of a major offensive by the totalitarian powers. This resulted in the division of Europe into antagonistic blocs, the signatories to the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Western Powers. The Italian aggression in Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War further enhanced those antagonisms. The West, as a specific political community, underwent definite disintegration which was viewed negatively by Polish politicians.[88] An ideological war seemed to be a prelude to a European war. Beck and those cooperating with him, realized well that an ideological war would begin with a Soviet-German conflict, and in that event Poland would simply be unable to maintain and defend its neutrality.[89] Hence the postulate to de-ideologize Polish foreign policy and, as far as it would be possible, to de-ideologize international politics. Piłsudski and Beck did not use the term "doctrine." Beck would refer to the "system," but not to doctrine. Piłsudski deeply despised the term "doctrine," and Beck followed his lead in that respect.[90] The

"system," in turn, implied a permanent orientation, an unchangeable direction based on supreme values and not on a momentary need. Doctrine seems somewhat artificial and ossified.

As French Ambassador to Warsaw Léon Noël would accurately note in July 1938, "such terms as 'axis,' 'block,' 'front,' and 'hegemony' did not exist in the political lexicon" of Poland at the time.[91] Building "blocs" seemed to be an expression of doctrinaire policy dominated by ideological phrases. Piłsudski and Beck rejected that political philosophy. Beck sought to normalize bilateral relations with the states of Central and Eastern Europe. Giving fundamental importance to bilateral international treaties, a non-ideological approach to foreign policy, and an adherence to "cabinet diplomacy" were the main ideas professed by Józef Beck. The bilateralism for which Beck had such a strong preference was not so much a rejection of all multilateral treaties, but primarily an expression of reluctance towards "pactomania" so characteristic of the 1930s diplomacy.[92] Both Piłsudski and Beck believed that talks should be held with whatever government ruled in Germany, as long as it functioned politically, regardless of the internal policies it pursued. For Piłsudski and Beck, Hitler, being Austrian, did not represent the anti-Polish Prussian tradition.[93] For the Polish Marshal, the issue of primary importance was the fact that his regime seemed to be a lasting one and, in any case, that there were no signs of a political alternative to that regime coming to the fore in Germany.[94]

The remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936 was met with French passivity and all the consequences it entailed, and gave Germany the advantage. It led to the birth of appeasement as a means of saving peace. Józef Beck attempted to adapt Polish diplomacy to the conditions that were introduced by the appeasement policy, with all its consequences for Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. Jules Laroche described the approach as the "diplomacy of maneuvering,"[95] and interpreted post-1933 Polish foreign policy as "*farà da sé* policy."[96]

The appeasement policy pursued by the Western Powers placed Poland in an extremely difficult position. The establishment of the Great Power quartet as a mechanism competent to institute border changes, led to Poland's marginalization in the international arena and made it an object in relations between the Powers. For that reason, Beck's attitude towards the Western Powers in the latter half of the 1930s was

characterized by a limited confidence. This was well understood by British Ambassador to Warsaw Howard Kennard, who in one of his reports to Lord Halifax wrote that "Beck founded his policy on the conviction that both the British government and the French government will not be ready, when the need arises, to offer Poland any effective assistance against further expansive maneuvers of Germany in Central Europe."[97]

With the Munich Conference in the Fall of 1938, all previously existing reasons for pursuing the policy of equilibrium vanished. It brought to an end the previous, extremely fragile stability in Central and Eastern Europe on which Beck based his assessments and actions. Germany ceased to tolerate an independent Polish policy, and so was fulfilled the prophecy of Marshal Piłsudski who, in 1934, declared that the current state of proper relations with Germany and Russia would last no more than four years.[98]

The alliance with Great Britain signed in 1939 marked the height of Beck's bilateralism doctrine. The Polish minister would strongly defend the alliance, believing that only such a treaty could fulfill its aim. He rejected any possibility of a multilateral agreement with Soviet participation, as he did not believe that Poland's eastern neighbor use military force would come to its rescue. The Polish-British pact signed on 26 August 1939 justified the assumption that in starting a war, the Third Reich would meet opposition from a tripartite coalition and face a war on two fronts. This would, of course, require the opening of a western front during the very first days of the war. It is clear that the leadership in Warsaw was completely unaware of the secret Franco-British military agreements of April 1939 that provided that if Poland were to lose its independence, it would be reconstituted at the victorious conclusion of the European war, whereas the very outcome of the Polish campaign was to be of secondary importance. Politicians in Warsaw were convinced that the unambiguous British stance, as it was perceived at the time, guaranteed the military involvement of France. The bilateral alliance treaties with France and Great Britain proved ineffective in providing any significant military support for Poland in 1939. Yet the fate of Poland became strongly bound to the question of peace in Europe, as it never had been and never would be in the future. Piotr Wandycz stated most aptly and succinctly that "no Polish policy could guarantee that the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact would not take effect, just as no Polish policy could

guarantee the immediate and effective support from the West."[99] Nonetheless, binding the fate of Poland to that of the Western Powers seemed then and still seems today to have been the only available option. The Western allies' refusal to fulfill their military obligations in September 1939 does not disprove this. Ignacy Matuszewski phrased it perhaps most aptly when he wrote that "the principle difficulty facing Polish foreign policy is the fact, that Poland cannot renounce its solidarity with the countries of the West, while they can easily renounce Poland."[100] This is not a moral charge, but a political reality of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Two bilateral nonaggression agreements and three bilateral alliance treaties were the political outcome of Polish foreign policy in the period 1921-1939. The nonaggression agreements were violated by Poland's neighbors, and the alliance treaties failed to pass their test. It is easy to draw the conclusion that interwar Poland's entire foreign policy was an utter failure. However there is no doubt that the 1930s witnessed the dusk of diplomacy. It was a period when force became the primary instrument of the international policy of totalitarian powers. All of the most important international obligations collapsed, including the Locarno system, which seemed to have been the only effective multilateral pact on the continent even if limited to Western Europe.

In his excellent work on Poland and the changing balance of power in Europe between 1932-36, Michał Zacharias points to five fundamental traits of the policy of equilibrium: constancy, consistency, continuity, independence, and activism.[101] The first of those principles was to be achieved with through continuity in foreign policy and its autonomy from "the fluctuations resulting from domestic political issues and momentary attitudes," since foreign policy could not be a function of internal relations. Independence meant opposition to the position of being a client dependent on the Great Powers. Activism was an antithesis to the passivity, disruptions and tensions that ruined post-war Europe. According to Piłsudski, foreign policy was to be founded on the permanent, vital and real interests of the state as a whole, which the Marshal always opposed to the interests of particular groups or parties.[102] Undeniably, that was Piłsudski's most important idea, his political credo in the post-1926 reality, and guiding principle of his unwritten political will.

The question of whether there was a political alternative to the concepts implemented by Józef Beck has been raised on various occasions, and Polish foreign policy was hotly debated both within the country and in émigré circles. Was multilateralism an alternative? This question has not been convincingly answered. Polish communist historiography found an easy prey in its critique of Piłsudski and Beck. It claimed that the sole option for preserving Poland's existence lay in an alliance with the Soviet Union, yet today such arguments are no longer seriously advanced. Whereas there was no alternative to the fundamental premises behind the policy of equilibrium, its practical implementation requires critical analysis and deserves a careful study that examines whether that policy could have been conducted more skillfully, or in a more sophisticated manner. The reasons behind that policy could certainly have been more effectively presented abroad so as to convince one's allies and demolish the arguments of one's enemies.

Was cabinet diplomacy and bilateralism anachronistic? I do not believe so, considering that collective security was no more than an illusion in the 1930s. In the conditions of an ongoing destruction of the peaceful order in Europe, one from which Poland greatly benefitted, bilateral treaties seemed the only rational means of enhancing Poland's security. Undeniably, there is a certain minimalism to be found in Polish bilateralism. The conviction held by Piłsudski and Beck that Poland should not busy itself with "healing the world" but rather seek its own survival, was rational and realistic.

The policy of equilibrium was not an act of "maneuvering" between Germany and Russia, and in any case there is no doubt that the term is misleading and does not convey what was essential in Beck's diplomacy. Undeniably it had its immutable bases and Beck would refer to them in conversations with his foreign partners. In the conversations with French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval, held in Geneva on 16 and 19 January 1935, he would offer a *résumé* of sorts of Polish foreign policy:

> … from our geographical position and from the historical experiences, we conclude that for us the decisive issues concern Poland's neighborly relations with Germany and Russia. These issues absorb the greater part of our political effort and our limited means of action. History teaches us that the greatest catastrophe that befell our nation resulted

> from the actions of both those states and secondly, that in the desperate situation in which we found ourselves there was no state in the world willing to come to our rescue. Thus our primary interests depend on our ability to resolve that fundamental issue. A further conclusion comes with the conviction that the policy pursued by Warsaw can never be dependent on either Moscow or Berlin. (…) those are the limits of our political options. As far as facts or concepts reaching beyond those principles are concerned, we will always be obliged to say *non possumus*. In reborn Poland, as at the end of the eighteenth century, it became clear we had to obtain real results, this time fortunately positive with regard to those two partners, ourselves.[103]

Pursuing a policy of equilibrium, Poland aspired to the role of a barrier between the Soviet Union and the German Reich, which its weak economic and military potential hardly permitted. Looking from a historical perspective, Stanisław Sierpowski succinctly stated that the function of interwar Poland in European politics amounted to serving as a "bulwark for containing Bolshevik expansion on the one hand, as well as absorbing and withholding, for as long as possible, the constantly feared German revenge."[104] In light of those guidelines, the policy of equilibrium served European peace well, contrary to the charges which the Polish government had to face after the conclusion of its agreement with Germany in January 1934. That policy served the balance of power in Europe as a whole, since should Polish territory have become a battleground for Germany and Russia, such a conflict could hardly have remained a local matter. It is clear that for as long as the Polish government strongly rejected participation in an alliance or a coalition directed against one of the neighboring powers, a particular stabilization was maintained in Central and Eastern Europe. With the aim of strengthening the policy of equilibrium, in the years 1937-1938, Józef Beck entertained the option of establishing an *Intermarium* system, a bloc of states encompassing the region between the Baltic and the Adriatic Sea. Such a bloc, referred to as the "Third Europe," stood no chance of being realized although the concept itself was undeniably interesting.[105] That bloc, in Beck's view, would not be a multilateral accord but rather an informal agreement between states in the region which wished to maintain neutral between Germany and the Soviet Union. In fact, it would have

been a group whose primary function would be to resist growing pressure from Germany.[106] The states constituting this "Third Europe" would be bound not through a formalized treaty, but rather through a common attitude toward the fundamental issues of peace and security in Europe. For that reason, the Third Europe project did not require an abandonment of bilateralism in Polish foreign policy.

The eternal dilemma of a medium-size state is how to be more effective in defending its interests in an unfavorable international constellation and in the face of an inefficient international legal order. Should it pursue a policy of accommodation to Great Power politics, or act against them? In answering that fundamental question, interwar Polish diplomacy advanced two ideas for action, one advocated by Skirmunt and Skrzyński, and one proposed by Piłsudski and Beck.

Konstanty Skirmunt believed that Polish foreign policy's guiding principle should be the goal of convincing Europe of the peaceful nature of Polish foreign policy.[107] He further held that the new Poland should strive to convince Europe that the integral preservation of the status quo was a defining safeguard of Poland's independence. "A new enterprise must pay particular attention to gaining confidence through its loyal behavior. Because the very fact that it is new raises some doubts," wrote Stanisław Grabski.[108] In other words, a new enterprise has less leeway. It is impossible "to believe in the realist gospel of brute force and violence at a time when it proved bankrupt in the hands of its most skilled and ardent followers," said Aleksander Skrzyński in 1924.[109] As minister he was well aware that "the world is divided in its mind between a clear consciousness of the interdependence of nations and a fear of internationalism, between the logic of economic principles and political prejudices."[110] But he assumed that a stabilization of political relations in Europe would progress and that a preservation of the European status quo would necessarily lead to a lessening of antagonisms and a weakening of revisionist tendencies. Piłsudski and Beck reasoned otherwise, but they shaped Polish policies at a time when resolving international disputes *manu militari* actually became a norm. They thus draw the conclusion that Poland could and should regulate relations with its neighbors without abandoning the threat of the use of force, if necessary. The Polish *ultimata* of 17 March 1938 to the Lithuanian Government and of 30 September 1938 to the Government of Czechoslovakia, had their justification in that philosophy.

Which concept of foreign policy is better? Which serves better the interests of a nation in Poland's position? One cannot definitively resolve this dilemma, and any state that is not powerful and is faced with external threats experiences this dilemma forcibly. The particular times and specific circumstances call for tactics that are most effective, and thus more justified. In peacetime idealistic "internationalism" prevails, when peace is threatened, it is rather defending state interests at any price that comes to the fore. Theoretical speculations become useless in the latter case. The priority is given to independence as the supreme value.

The guiding concepts held by Marshal Piłsudski and Minister Beck were: *primo*, respect for existing treaties; *secundo*, preference for bilateral accords instead of vague treaties; *tertio*, the principle of *nihil de nobis sine nobis*, and the conviction that "peace at any price" is not the supreme virtue. Those principles could be referred to as the "constants in foreign policy" of Poland, a term accurately coined by Prime Minister Janusz Jędrzejewicz.[111]

Very often in historiography, the policy of equilibrium comes to be perceived as a derivative of Polish idealism, a legacy of Polish political romanticism. Treating "realism vs. idealism" as opposites in politics is artificial and at times simplistic. Adam Bromke attempted to approach Polish history using such categories,[112] and his conceptual framework rightly met with objections. Yet without doubt there are two concepts present in thinking about foreign policy, whether that of Poland or Europe. Ever since the phenomenon of international politics became an experience shared by human societies, it was understood in two distinct ways. One is of universalistic nature, founded on the desire to create a system that in its framework would encompass the entire international order. The other is founded on *Machtpolitik*. On the one hand, international politics is understood as realizing universal values, while on the other, as a dialectic of struggle, a term coined by Raymond Aron in his *Paix et guerre entre les Nations*.[113] Politics as a phenomenon subordinated to the logic of power, is the realist stance as presented by Hans J. Morgenthau, the American analyst of international relations and leading representative of the "realist school," in his study *Politics among Nations*.[114] Although, the "idealist" and "realist" elements are to be found in history, they rarely come in pure form. The foreign policy of modern nations is a combination of idealism and realism, and both are values that change over time. What used to be an idealist dream a hundred years ago, may today become a

reality. Piotr Wandycz rightly observed that the perception of Piłsudski "as a romantic, who lacked the understanding of his times, is a great oversimplification."[115] In their political philosophy both Piłsudski and Beck came to combine the hard logic of *Realpolitik* and the romantic tradition of honor, rooted in the history of the post-partition Poland.

Józef Beck often spoke of political realism, observing that the proper understanding of "realité des choses" was a prerequisite for a skillful and effective foreign policy, with the basic instrument of every politician being "the calendar and the clock."[116] On numerous occasions he insisted that military force was the *ultima ratio* of every effective policy. This perspective may seem incomprehensible, as Poland's potential relative to the military power of the Third Reich and the USSR, was after all negligible. Nevertheless, there was an evident logic in Beck's statements, as he claimed that "foreign policy cannot be effectively pursued if it lacks the backing of that final argument, which is military power, while the use of military power will never be purposeful enough unless it is supported by appropriate and deliberate policy."[117] As pointed out by Piotr Wandycz, "the cynicism that would be evident at times in Beck's observations, although perhaps understandable in light of the disappointment felt in Poland, indicated lack of a broader perspective and ideals."[118] Such was the widespread view of Beck in interwar Europe, and the charges of "political Machiavellianism" made against the Polish minister were among the mildest ones. He was perceived as an adherent of the "nationalistic law of the jungle," who considers it natural that "the strong oppress the weak, and the weak must sooner or later fall pray to the mighty if they cannot defend themselves by force or contrivance, strengthen themselves at the expense of the still weaker, and ascend to position of a power that would be able to threaten others."[119] The official historiography of People's Poland presents Beck as a model example of the lack of realism in politics. The Polish Marxist historian Włodzimierz T. Kowalski wrote that for Beck *raison d'état* "became an abstract value for whose defense and safeguard he was unable to find means in the real world."[120] Such extreme judgements perform a disservice to genuine historical knowledge.

For Polish society on the eve of World War II, and for Józef Beck himself, it seemed "absolutely inconceivable that in the twientieth century, after the Great War which saw the triumph of the national principle, any state, even one stronger than Germany, could incorporate territory

inhabited by another, foreign nation against its will" and peacefully – as Polish Ambassador to Paris Juliusz Łukasiewicz remarked in May 1938.[121] In 1939, when the threat to Poland's existence became a reality, it seemed inconceivable for the Polish leadership not to defend militarily the independence of the state. The Polish decision to defend its independence regardless of its alliances sprang from a political philosophy deeply rooted in Polish history. Both Piłsudski and Beck would often refer to *imponderabilia,* or imponderables. Both unquestionably accepted the assumption that international politics comprised an interplay of interests that could be explained rationally. Yet it is was the *imponderabilia* that counted most and the ultimate instance in politics was honor, that supreme value "in the life of people, nations and states," as phrased by the Polish foreign minister in his speech to Parliament on 5 May 1939.[122] Those words conveyed not merely Beck's own political credo*;* he spoke for the entire nation. The very same message was later repeated by August Zaleski, the foreign minister in the émigré government of General Sikorski. Strongly critical in his assessment of Beck's diplomacy, he would write to the Polish ambassadors on 4 April 1940 as follows:

> It can be claimed that Poland could have pursued a different path. It could have conceded to the demands regarding Danzig and the highway crossing the Corridor, thus averting the war for some time, or perhaps accept a shameful peace offer after a few days of hostilities. But all those who were in Poland in the days when the decision was made, know well that this sort of proposal would have been met with unanimous rejection by the Nation, as it would disgrace its very Honor. And such is the nature of that Nation that it always placed Honor above all material considerations.[123]

NOTES

[1] Ks. Adam Czartoryski, *Pamiętniki i memoriały*, ed. Jerzy Skowronek, Warszawa 1991, 504. The original French version reads: „La politique doit savoir ses principes, desquels le Système le plus convenable à chaque État

d'aprês sa position et le genre de son existence, doit pouvoir etre deduit. Les princpes restent les mêmes, mais leur application varie à l'infini selon les corconstances locales et suivant le cours des evenements. Un Système pour etre bon ne doit pas etre un arrengement du moment, mais une règle fixe pour l'avenir. L'habilité d'un homme d'État consiste a savoir faire, suivant les differents cas, une juste application des principes. Un Cabinet qui auroit un Système invariable quant à ses principes, et des hommes d'États capables d'en modifier l'application d'aprês les circonstances seroit, sans contredit, parfait" (A. Czartoryski, *Sur le Système politique que devrait suivre la Russie presente et lu la meme année à l'Empereur Alexandre*, ed. Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, „California Slavic Studies", vol. V, 1970, p. 37).

[2] Quoted in Marceli Handelsman, "La politique extérieure de la Pologne 1920-1930," *Révue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, no. 4, 1932, 429.

[3] Marceli Handelsman, „Nasza polityka wobec Anglii," *Przegląd Polityczny*, vol. I, no. 2 (1924), 33.

[4] Marceli Handelsman, *Adam Czartoryski*, ed. S. Kieniewicz, Warszawa 1948-1950, vol. 2, 152.

[5] Władysław Konopczyński, *Polska polityka zagraniczna XVI-XVIII wiek*, Kraków 1921, 1.

[6] Austen Chamberlain, "The permanent bases of British foreign policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1931, 535.

[7] Report of ambassador Laroche dated 16 April 1935 (quoted in Maria Pasztor, *Polska w oczach francuskich kół rządowych w latach 1924-1939*, Warszawa 1999, 53.

[8] Henry L. Roberts, *The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck* in: *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, Princeton 1953, 579-614.

[9] Maurice Baumont, *La faillite de la Paix 1918-1945*, Paris 1945, 742.

[10] Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941*, Cambridge 1945, 388.

[11] Marian Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1939*, Poznań 1965, 535.

[12] Phrase used by Henryk Batowski, *Rok 1938 - dwie agresje hitlerowskie*, Poznań 1985, 437.

[13] Statement made by the ambassador in Rome (to Quirinal), Alfred Wysocki in a letter to Józef Beck, dated 22 March 1937, *Documenti per la storia delle relazioni italo-polacche (1918-1940) / Dokumenty dotyczące historii stosunków polsko-włoskich (1918-1940 r.)*, ed. M. di Simone, N. Eramo, A. Fiori, J. Stoch, **Rome** 1998, vol. 2, 1269.

[14] Juliusz Łukasiewicz, *Polska jest mocarstwem*, Warszawa 1938.

[15] Counselor of the German Embassy in Warsaw Johann Wühlisch to Auswärtiges Amt, 13 November 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Berlin) [later referred to as: PAAA], Botschaft Warschau 88.
[16] Kazimierz Świtalski, *Diariusz 1919-1935*, ed. A. Garlicki, R. Świętek, Warszawa 1992, 661.
[17] Józef Beck quoted Piłsudski in his speech of 2 November 1937, see: *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady 1931-1938*, Warszawa 1938, 324.
[18] Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (London) [later referred to as: IPMS], MSZ, A. 11. E/1495.
[19] Józef Piłsudski, *Pisma zbiorowe*, Warszawa 1937, vol. 5, 111.
[20] The alliance with Romania was twice prolonged, in 1926 and 1931.
[21] [Józef Beck], *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 1926-1939. Na podstawie tekstów min. Józefa Becka* oprac. Anna M. Cienciała, Paryż 1990, 51.
[22] See: Piotr Wandycz, *Z Piłsudskim i Sikorskim. August Zaleski, minister spraw zagranicznych w latach 1926-1932 i 1939-1941*, Warszawa 1999.
[23] Compare: Piotr Łossowski, *Dyplomacja II Rzeczypospolitej. Z dziejów polskiej służby zagranicznej*, Warszawa 1992, 266.
[24] Michał Sokolnicki, „Józef Piłsudski a zagadnienie Rosji," *Niepodległość* (Nowy Jork - Londyn), vol. II, 1950, 70.
[25] August Zaleski, *Przemowy i deklaracje*, Warszawa 1929, vol. 1, 6-16.
[26] Archiwum Akt Nowych (Warszawa) [later referred to as: AAN], MSZ, 97.
[27] Józef Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady*, 43 (compare interview in *Gazeta Polska* 12 December 1932 concerning the declaration of five powers announced in Geneva on 11 December 1932).
[28] Kazimiera Mazurowa, *Europejska polityka Francji 1938-1939*, Warszawa 1974, 120.
[29] Memo of the conversation from 2 April 1935, AAN (Warszawa), MSZ, 110.
[30] For more on the issue, see: Wiesław Balcerak, „Czynniki integrujące i osłabiające „Ład Wersalski" w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej 1919-1939," in: *Ład wersalski w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Wrocław etc. 1971, 35-64.
[31] Such treaties would be used as an instrument of foreign policy by the USSR in relations with its western neighbors in the years 1931-1932.
[32] For Polish aspects of the matter, see: Antoni Zieliński, „Rumuńskie materiały do dziejów stosunków polsko-rumuńskich w latach trzydziestych XX w.," *Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej*, vol. XX, 1984, 218.
[33] The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that this evolution had a tactical character. See Memorandum of Auswärtiges Amt („Sowjetrusslands Politik der Nichtsangriffspäkte"), 23 December 1932, *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, ser. B, Bd. XXI, doc. 236, 496-500.
[34] Statement made by Piłsudski during a meeting of the Committee on State Defense in December 1926, see: Piotr Stawecki (ed.), „Protokół pierwszego

posiedzenia Komitetu Obrony Państwa z dnia 23 listopada 1926 r.," *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, no 3, 1988, 83.

[35] The Germans did not consent to a nonaggression treaty, proposing instead a document termed "declaration" (German: *Erklärung*), arguing that it would be a more concise and unrestrained, and thus less formalistic. Naturally, many historians, especially in the West, incorrectly refers to the agreement as a "pact," supplementing it at times with the phrase „Nazi-Polish Pact". Similar references are to be found in the works published under communist Poland, ex. Karol Lapter: *Pakt Piłsudski-Hitler. Polsko-niemiecka deklaracja o niestosowaniu przemocy z 26 stycznia 1934 roku* ,Warszawa 1962.

[36] Ambassador Laroche perceived this agreement as underlining Poland's independence, report dated 3 September 1932, Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (Paris) [later referred to as : AMAE], serie: Europe 1918-1940, Pologne 374. On British perspective, see: Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Polska-Wielka Brytania. W dobie zabiegów o zbiorowe bezpieczeństwo w Europie 1923-1937*, Warszawa 1989, 375-382.

[37] The collapse of the Four Powers Pact in 1933 followed primarily form the lack of interest on the part of Germany. Its failure did not imply that its revival – in any form whatsoever – was precluded. The year 1938 brought a rebirth of the idea, although a short-lived one.

[38] Soviet diplomacy made various efforts aimed at rapprochement with Germany. See: Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence. The History of Sowiet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967*, New York - Washington 1968, 238.

[39] One example would be the statement of ambassador Juliusz Łukasiewicz made on 17 June 1935 r., *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka*, ed. Tytus Komarnicki, Londyn 1964, vol. 1, 317.

[40] Ibidem.

[41] Jacques Bariéty, Michael Bloch, "Une tentative de reconciliation franco-allemande et son échec 1923-1933," *Révue d'Historie Moderne et Contemporaine*, vol. 15, 1968, 433-465.

[42] Edouard Beneš, *Une nouvelle phase de la lutte pour l'equilibre européen*, Prague 1934, 35.

[43] Incomplete documents of Soviet intelligence suggest that the Foreign Department of OGPU received reports of alleged secret talks between Poland and Germany. Thus the intelligence headquarters received disinformation! Rossijskij Gosudarstwiennyj Archiw Socyalno-Politiczeskich Issledowanij in Moscow (RGASPI), Fond Stalina, f. 558, op. 11, d. 187 (report based on information from "a reliable Polish source," document dated 29 June 1934). The most apparent answer to the matter seems to be the claim that the authors of the reports aimed to adapt to the expectations of their superiors. The latter sought proof of the pre-defined thesis.

[44] On Hitler's views on Poland, see: Jerzy W. Borejsza, *„Śmieszne sto milionów Słowian…". Wokół Światopoglądu Adolfa Hitlera*, Warszawa 2006.
[45] AAN, MSZ, no. 110.
[46] Such was the (correct) interpretation of the tactics pursued by Minister Beck, as understood by German diplomats: „Man kann sich gut vorstellen, dass Herr Beck aus dieser unbequemen Situation heraus Wert darauf gelert hat, sich wieder die notwendige Ellbogenfreiheit zu verschaffen" — wrote Schliep to Ernst von Weizsacker, no date [1938], PAAA, Botschaft Warschau 50. It is interesting that a similar perception of the Polish policy was held by the British Foreign Office, and in particular by British Ambassador to Warsaw Howard Kennard, see: Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Polska — Wielka Brytania w dobie zabiegów o zbiorowe bezpieczeństwo w Europie 1923-1937*, Warszawa 1989, 498.
[47] Ambassador Kennard to Orme Sargent, 8 October 1938, PRO FO 371 21808, C. 11992/2168/55.
[48] Stanisław Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1939*, Poznań 1998, 18.
[49] Col. Pierre Le Goyet, *France - Pologne 1919-1939. De l'amitie romantique à la méfiance reciproque*, Paris [1991], 126.
[50] Quoted in: Piotr Wandycz, "Polish foreign policy: some observations," in: *The Theory of Two Enemies*, (ed.) Alexander Korczyński, Tadeusz Świętochowski, New York 1975, 63.
[51] Compare: Georges-Henri Soutou, "L'Alliance franco-polonaise 1925—1933 ou comment s'en déberaser?," *Révue d'histoire diplomatique*, no. 2/3/4, 1981, 295-348.
[52] Quoted in: Georges Bonnet, *Vingt ans de la vie politique 1918-1938. De Clemenceau à Daladier*, Paris 1969, p. 93.
[53] Marek Kornat (ed.), „Ambasador Józef Lipski o stosunkach polsko-niemieckich (1933-1939)," *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, vol. 2, no. 1/5, 2002, 206.
[54] Memo of the conversation between Beck and minister Yvon Delbos held on 8 September 1937 in Paris (AAN, MSZ, no. 108A).
[55] Stanisław Stroński, *Pierwsze lat dziesięć (1918-1928)*, Lwów 1928, 599.
[56] Piotr Wandycz, "La Pologne face à la politique locarnienne de Briand," *Révue d'histoire diplomatique*, no. 2/3/4, 1981, 237-263.
[57] The German government insisted on the need for Polish-German border revisions. For an important article on this matter is: Christoph M. Kimmich, "The Weimar Republic and the German-Polish Borders," in *The Theory of Two Enemies*, (ed.) Alexander Korczyński, Tadeusz Świętochowski, New York 1975, 45. An annex to the article quotes an instruction written by Gustav Stresemann to German ambassadors dated 30 June 1925, making reference to the need of reclaiming the Polish Corridor (the part of Pomerania region around Danzig) and Upper Silesia, in return Germany would definitely concede the city and region of

Posen in favor of Poland. That was to be the essence of the Polish-German compromise.

[58] In his new book, Talbot C. Imlay wrote: „Only after Munich did the French squarely confront the issue of an Eastern Front", Talbot C. Imlay, *Facing the Second Word War. Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France 1938-1940*, Oxford 2003, 355-356.

[59] Józef Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady*, 17.

[60] Ibidem, 34.

[61] Ibidem, p. 19 (interview for the Agence Havas from 14 July 1931).

[62] Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska wobec zmian w układzie sił politycznych w Europie w latach 1932-1936*, Wrocław etc. 1981, 39.

[63] Point made by Piotr Wandycz, *Polish Diplomacy 1914-1945: Aims and Achievements*, London 1988, 24. It is also apparent from his monograph: *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances 1926-1936. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland*, Princeton 1988.

[64] Memo of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs from that conversation, AAN, MSZ, 108A.

[65] Ibidem.

[66] Ibidem.

[67] Lisanne Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement: East Central European Diplomacy in the Early 1930s* Boulder, CO 1981. Compare also: Anthony Komjathy, *The Crises of France's East Central European Diplomacy 1933-1938*, Boulder, CO 1976.

[68] Memo by the head of the Northern Department in the British Foreign Office, Louis Collier, dated 19 February 1936, Public Record Office (London), Foreign Office (later referred to as: PRO FO) 371 20346, C. 911/187/38.

[69] IPMS, MSZ, A.11.49/CZ/2.

[70] Henryk Batowski, *Między dwiema wojnami 1919—1939. Zarys historii dyplomatycznej*, Kraków 1988, 223.

[71] Such was the common interpretation of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet policies in the 1920s. Minister August Zaleski would write to the Polish representative in Moscow, Stanisław Patek on 31 January 1927, that in case of an armed conflict between Poland and Germany, the fact of having a nonaggression pact with the Soviets would "play a minimal role." IPMS, London Embassy, A.12.P.II/1. There were no significant differences of opinion on the matter between Zaleski and Beck.

[72] AAN, MSZ, 97.

[73] Wacław Jędrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939. Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Ambassador of Poland*, New York-London 1970, 115-117.

[74] Anthony Eden – with some irritation – noted in 17 January 1938: „It is recalled that Poland in view of her difficult geographical position is probably more in

need of an organization such as the League of Nations than most nations in Europe" (PRO FO 371 21800, C. 193/193/55).
[75] Memo of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 24 April 1936, AAN, MSZ, 108A.
[76] IPMS (London), MSZ A.11. 49/F/4.
[77] AAN, MSZ, 97.
[78] Quoted in: Marek K. Kamiński, Michał J. Zacharias, *Polityka zagraniczna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1918-1939*, Warszawa 1998, 203.
[79] Marek Kornat (ed.), „Ambasador Edward Raczński i jego ocena «polityki równowagi»," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, Paryż, no 135, 2001, 86-113.
[80] For a new thorough study of the matter, see: Anna M. Cienciala, "The Munich Crisis of 1938: Plans and Strategy in Warsaw in the Context of the Western Appeasement of Germany," in: *The Munich Crisis, 1938. Prelude to World War II*, (ed.) Igor Lukes and Erik Goldstein, London - Portland OR, 1999, 48-81.
[81] Lewis B. Namier, *Europe in Decay. A Study in Desintegration 1936-1940*, London 1950, 162.
[82] Stanisław Żerko, „Polska polityka zagraniczna w styczniu - sierpniu 1939 r.," *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, vol. V, no. 5/27, 2005, 22 (endnote 5).
[83] Observations made in a conversation with Lord Halifax on 4 April 1939, *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne. 1939, Styczeń – wrzesień*, ed. Stanisław Żerko, Warszawa 2005, 171.
[84] Ibidem.
[85] Letter written by Kwiatkowski to Ambassador Drexel-Biddle, dated 15 October 1939, Baile-Herculane (Romania), *Tygodnik Powszechny* („Apokryf"), no. 15, September 1999, 14.
[86] The term "doctrine" was not at all popular with Piłsudski and his followers, see: Waldemar Paruch, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego 1926-1939*, Lublin 2004.
[87] Edouard Beneš, *Die Politik als Wissenschaft und Kunst*, vol. 1, Prague 1937.
[88] Roman Dębicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939. From the Rebirth of the Polish Republic to Word War II*, foreword by Oscar Halecki, London 1962, 101.
[89] *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka*, vol. 4, (ed.) J. Zarański, Londyn 1972, 366.
[90] Point made by Piotr Wandycz, „Wielkości, gdzie twoje imię?" Refleksje o Józefie Piłsudskim," *Niepodległość*" (Warszawa), vol. LVI, 2006, 140.
[91] Ambassador Noël to Minister Bonnet, coded telegram from 13 July 1938 in reference to the results of Beck's visit to Latvia, AMAE (Paris), Pologne, vol. 364.
[92] „Pactomania," term proposed by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "Spirit of Locarno: Illusions of Pactomania," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 50, 1972, 752-764.
[93] An observation often made in historiography, most recently by Tomasz Serwatka, *Józef Piłsudski a Niemcy*, Wrocław 1997.

[94] Mentioned by Ambassador Józef Lipski, see: M. Kornat (ed.), *Ambasador Józef Lipski o stosunkach polsko-niemieckich (1933-1939)*, 207.
[95] AMAE (Paris), Pologne 374 (report by Laroche dated 31 October 1934).
[96] Memo dated 19 September 1933, AMAE (Paris), Pologne, vol. 297.
[97] Ambassador Kennard to Lord Halifax, 14 January 1939, PRO FO 371, 23142.
[98] Kazimierz Świtalski, *Diariusz 1919-1935*, 660.
[99] Piotr Wandycz, *Z dziejów dyplomacji*, 49. On the views of the Polish political leadership regarding Poland's international position on the eve of the Second World War, see: Marek Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Mołotow. Problem zbliżenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2002.
[100] Ignacy Matuszewski, *Pamięci Józefa Becka*, in: *Wybór pism*, New York 1952, 195.
[101] Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska wobec zmian w układzie sił politycznych*, 33.
[102] Józef Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady*, 37 (Statement for the „Iskra" Agency following his nomination to the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs on 3 November 1932).
[103] AAN, MSZ, no. 108A.
[104] Stanisław Sierpowski, „Polska w Europie, Europa w świecie," in: *Polska na tle procesów rozwojowych Europy w XX wieku*, (ed.) S. Sierpowski, Poznań 2002, 12.
[105] For a thorough study on the matter, see: Hans Roos, *Polen und Europa. Studien zur polnischen Außenpolitik 1931—1939*, Tübingen 1957, 273-285. Compare also: Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland, and the Western Powers 1938—1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe*, London-Toronto 1968, 55. (The value of the bloc would be founded on solid accords between Poland, Hungary and Romania. On Polish-Hungarian relations at the time, see: Maciej Koźmiński, *Polska i Węgry przed drugą wojną światową (październik 1938 — wrzesień 1939)*, Wrocław 1970.
[106] Interpretation of the intentions held by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed by the British ambassador in Warsaw Howard Kennard (particularly important is his letter to Orme Sargent dated 9 October 1938, PRO FO 371 21808, C. 12277/2168/55).
[107] For a thorough study of the political concepts of Minister Skirmunt, see: Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Konstanty Skirmunt. Polityk i dyplomata*, Warszawa 1998, 93-151.
[108] Stanisław Grabski, *Uwagi o bieżącej historycznej chwili Polski*, Warszawa 1923, 155-156.
[109] „Przemówienie Dr. Aleksandra Skrzyńskiego, ministra spraw zagranicznych," in: *Liga Narodów. Siedem odczytów wygłoszonych na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim w roku akademickim 1924/25*, Warszawa 1925, 8. (for a thorough

study on the political concepts of Minister Skrzyński, see: Piotr Wandycz, *Aleksander Skrzyński. Minister spraw zagranicznych II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2006).

[110] Alexander Skrzyński, *American and Polish Democracy*, Washington 1925, 11.

[111] Janusz Jędrzejewicz, *W służbie idei. Fragmenty pamiętnika i pism*, (ed.) W. Jędrzejewicz, Londyn 1972, 177.

[112] Adam Bromke, *Poland's Politics. Idealism versus Realism* (Cambridge Mass. 1967). For a powerful critique of Bromke, see: Piotr Wandycz, "Realizm, idealizm i historia," in: Piotr Wandycz, *Polska a zagranica*, Paryż 1986.

[113] Raymond Aron, *Paix et Guerre entre les Nations*, Paris 1962.

[114] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York 1948.

[115] Piotr Wandycz, *„Wielkości, gdzie twoje imię?,"* 139.

[116] Józef Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady*, 325.

[117] AAN, MSZ, 97.

[118] Piotr Wandycz, *Z dziejów dyplomacji*, Londyn 1988, 15.

[119] Stefania Stanisławska, *Wielka i mała polityka Józefa Becka (marzec – maj 1938)*, Warszawa 1962, 204.

[120] Włodzimierz T. Kowalski, *Ostatni rok Europy (1939)*, Warszawa 1989, 13.

[121] Wacław Jędrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939*, 91-99.

[122] Józef Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady*, 432.

[123] IPMS, Vatican Embassy, A. 44. 122/21.