

STANISŁAW ŻERKO  
Poznań

## POLAND, GERMANY AND THE GENESIS OF WORLD WAR II

### HITLER'S PROGRAMME AND HIS ATTEMPT TO IMPLEMENT IT

The war, which was meant to give Germany control over Europe and later on also world domination, constituted in Hitler's programme the only realistic means to build the imperialist position of Germany. In fact the programme was drafted in a general outline by the leader of NSDAP as early as at the beginning of his astonishing political career. Using the concept of "Lebensraum" he maintained that the German nation should take under military control other territories on the European continent, and more specifically those on the debris of the Soviet Union<sup>1</sup>. He saw his supporter in Italy but it was Great Britain which he intended to be his most important ally. Announcing his will to break away from the so far practiced style of expansion he declared, "Let us stop the everlasting Germanic march to the south and west of Europe and let us direct our eyes towards eastern territories. (...) If we today talk about new lands in Europe we can think first of all about Russia and its subordinate states along the eastern borderlands"<sup>2</sup>. Alliances with Great Britain and Italy would make it possible for Germany to first beat France and then they would create conditions to go east against the Soviet Union. The aim of the new war was supposed to be the creation of the "racially pure"<sup>3</sup> German empire in the east of the continent. According to Hitler "Germany will either become a world power or it will cease to exist"<sup>4</sup>. He left no doubt that the future of the Reich will be decided with arms<sup>5</sup>. He claimed that "every nation has the right to take land which it needs and which it has the capacity to utilize"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München 1937, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 742.

<sup>3</sup> The racist nature of the future power was for Hitler beyond doubt; see ibidem, p. 311 and 444. Hitler, for example wrote, "The state, which at the era of racial contamination, will devote itself to nurturing its best racial features, must one day become the master of the world"; ibidem, p. 782.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 742.

<sup>5</sup> *Hitler: Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. Februar 1924 bis Januar 1933*, München 1992 Bd. III, Teil 2, doc. 6 (speech from 15 Mar 1929).

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, Bd. III, Teil 3, doc. 61 (speech from 19 Juni 1930).

After Hitler came to power he radically changed the tone of his public speeches and he was creating an image of a peacemaker and at the most an adherent of equal rights for Germany. He limited his postulates to enumerating the wrongdoing which Germany suffered following the Treaty of Versailles. However, during secret meetings he spoke of something different. He declared not only freeing Germany from the resolutions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles but as his aim he saw “conquering new living space in the east and subjecting it to ruthless Germanization”<sup>7</sup>. During one of the first cabinet meetings he announced that armaments in Germany will be given absolute priority<sup>8</sup>.

Three and a half years later by the end of summer in 1936 in his memorandum concerning the four-year plan Hitler reminded that it had become indispensable “to enlarge the living space, that is the raw material base and the staple food reserves for our nation. It is the task of the political rule to solve this issue in future”. He emphasized that communism has become the main threat for Europe, and above all he gave orders: “I. The German army must in four years be ready for action. II. The German economy must in four years be ready to take the burden of war”. The Reich must have the best army in the world since, as Hitler claimed, the world is at the brink of a decisive battle with the Jewish-Bolshevik threat<sup>9</sup>. Early in September 1936 during a cabinet meeting Göring<sup>10</sup> said that “settling matters with Russia” was inevitable. In a face to face private conversation the *Führer*, according to a note in Goebbels’ diary said, “Armaments are still in full swing. We have invested huge sums of money. We shall be completely ready in 1938. The decisive battle with Bolshevism will come. We shall be prepared. (...) We will gain control over Europe. However, we must not miss any chances. Armaments are a must”<sup>11</sup>. He was telling his ministers that when it comes to the armament programme financial matters cannot be an issue<sup>12</sup>.

In the years to follow winning an ally in Great Britain was one of the main objectives of the Nazi dictator. Joachim von Ribbentrop became a kind of *Führer’s* personal plenipotentiary who was meant to negotiate an alliance with Great Britain. Indeed, he managed to negotiate the German-British naval agreement signed on 18 June 1935, which marked the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Waterloo where the

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<sup>7</sup> A speech delivered to the high officers of *Reichswehr* and *Reichsmarine* on 3 Feb 1933; a quote from a short note summarizing Hitler’s theses, made by general Kurt Liebmann; Th. Vogelsang, *Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933*, VfZg 1954, p. 434.

<sup>8</sup> *Akten der Reichskanzlei. Regierung Hitler 1933-1938*, Teil 1, Bd. 1, Boppard a. Rh. 1983, doc. 17 (cabinet meeting 8 Feb 1933).

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum in: W. Treue, *Hitlers Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan 1936*, “Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte” 1955, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg, 14. November 1945 – 1. Oktober 1946*, Nürnberg, Bd. XXXVI, p. 489. (the Reich cabinet meeting 4 Sept 1936).

<sup>11</sup> E. Fröhlich (Hrsg.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Bd. III/2, p. 251-252 (note from 15 Nov 1936).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 272-273 (note from 2 Dec 1936).

Prussian army helped the victory of the British side. The agreement was signed only three months after shedding the military sanctions by the Reich and it constituted another blow against the Treaty of Versailles. The day when the agreement was signed Hitler called the happiest day of his life<sup>13</sup>, since he wanted to see in this document an introduction to a much further reaching alliance between both countries. In his conversation with David Lloyd George, the former prime minister of Great Britain who visited Germany in September 1936, the *Führer* said that in Ribbentrop he is sending to London his “best man” so that he, already as an ambassador, can make the “last attempt” to convince the British about the necessity of a closer relationship with the Reich<sup>14</sup>. When in October he was bidding farewell to his confidant setting off for London he told him, “Ribbentrop, what I want from you is to make England join the Anti-Comintern Pact, it is my biggest wish”<sup>15</sup>.

However, Ribbentrop’s mission ended up in failure. The Nazi ambassador “astounded the world with his ignorance of the mentality of the English”<sup>16</sup> but the truth was that even the most clever diplomat would not be able to fulfill the task Hitler had imposed on the Reich’s ambassador to London. The German offer presented to the British contained, among others, a promise of respecting by the Reich the *status quo* in Western Europe, a division of the areas of interest between London and Berlin (a free hand for Germany on the continent with guarantees for its western part and the recognition of the preponderance of Great Britain outside of Europe), a commitment by the Reich to provide military support at any time in the case of a threat to the British Empire. Above all however, Hitler demanded from London to be given a free hand in Central Europe, Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe.

However, Great Britain did not wish to enter into such a liaison with Nazi Germany. The British side was willing to make considerable concessions when it came to lifting some of the sanctions imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty, but there could be no mention of a complete *désintéressement* of London in the face of German expansion on the continent. According to the British any corrections to the 1919 resolutions should happen by peaceful means and Germany would have to be willing to cooperate with the remaining powers.

This was entirely against Hitler’s expectations who was growing impatient because of the British attitude. He complained that the British authorities are complete-

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<sup>13</sup> J. von Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau*, hrsg. von A. von Ribbentrop, Leoni a. Starnberger See 1961, p. 64. The same title of the book (by the way very superficial) R. Ingram, *Hitlers glücklichster Tag. London, am 18. Juni 1935*, Stuttgart 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Th. Jones, *Diary with Letters 1931-1950*, London 1954, p. 251.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted after: Th. Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten 1935-1940*, Tübingen 1962, p. 32 (The Anti-Comintern Pact was signed a month later but the negotiations had lasted for quite some time). According to Ribbentrop’s wife Hitler said, “Ribbentrop I want you to bring me an alliance with England!”, J. von Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau*, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> L. Geyr von Schweppenburg, *Erinnerungen eines Militärattachés. London 1933-1937*, Stuttgart 1949, p. 113.

ly “devoid of instinct”<sup>17</sup>. In his speech delivered in the *Reichstag* on his fourth anniversary of coming to power he expressed his regret that the danger of “the Bolshevik plague”<sup>18</sup> has not been recognized on the British Isles. The Nazi dictator started to realize, a conclusion by all means correct, that the British as a matter of fact want to limit and control the Reich’s expansion and that they will want to prevent the creation of a German Empire. In a conversation with Carl J. Burckhardt in September 1937 he complained saying that, “All my life I had loved England and English people. I had never ceased to offer them the friendship of Germany, the friendship of the great nation (...). They pushed me away; they have always pushed me away, that was the truth. It is pure madness (...) which can result in a terrible catastrophe but nevertheless I have to come to terms with it”<sup>19</sup>. What is more, the mention of a relationship of the Reich with Italy and Japan started to sound like a threat. At the same time Göring was warning the British ambassador, Neville Henderson that if “the British Empire persistently refused to cooperate with Germany, Germany could endeavour to destroy the Empire instead of sustaining its position in the world”<sup>20</sup>. Ernst von Weizsäcker, who was soon to become the secretary of state in *Auswärtiges Amt*, said to Burckhardt that the anti-British turn (“the effect of being unhappy in love”) occurred in Hitler completely unexpectedly, and then it was not at all possible to talk with him about England”<sup>21</sup>.

At a secret conference on 5 November 1937, Hitler already referred to Great Britain and France as “two hateful enemies (*Hassgegner*)” for whom “the German giant in the heart of Europe is a thorn in their flesh. These powers “are against the further empowerment of Germany both in Europe and on the overseas territories and in this disapproval all the parties in those countries are unanimous”. The chance for Germany lies however, in the weakening of both western powers, and in particular of Great Britain. The solution to the *Lebensraum* problem was possible only by war and therefore according to the dictator it had to take place not later than between 1943-1945 but should favourable circumstances arise, Germany could strike earlier<sup>22</sup>. When two weeks later in Berchtesgaden lord Halifax offered to Hitler to reactivate the Four-Power Pact, partially abandoned in 1933, as well as “to repair mistakes of the Versailles Treaty” and “to settle” the question of Gdańsk, Austria, Czechoslovakia and the issues of the colonies, the *Führer* gave him a cold shoulder. The condition that “the changes take place in the process of peaceful evolution” meant that the government of Her Royal Highness does not in any way intend to

<sup>17</sup> E. Fröhlich (Hrsg.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Bd. III/2, p. 249 (note from 13 Nov 1936).

<sup>18</sup> *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945*, M. Domarus (Hrsg.), Würzburg 1962 Bd. I, p. 664.

<sup>19</sup> An excerpt from a report of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Gdańsk from 20 Sept 1937, quoted after: C. J. Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission 1937-1939*, München 1960, p. 65-66.

<sup>20</sup> N. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> C. J. Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission*, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> ADAP, Serie D, Bd. I, doc. 19.

give Germans a free hand on the continent<sup>23</sup>. As related by Albert Speer, Hitler in his address delivered to the party's *Kreisleiters* by the end of November 1937 announced that "England is our number one enemy!"<sup>24</sup>. Goebbels summarized the then *Führer's* reasoning in his diary in the following way: "England wants to give the colonies, that is not by itself but only within the general regulations. This means a return to the League of Nations. That is not on. It (England) wants to grant us concessions in Central Europe. However, the *Führer* refused. Central Europe should not bother England at all. Also the problem of Gdańsk has to be solved. What is London's business in that?"<sup>25</sup> At the time Ribbentrop was also convinced that an agreement with Great Britain was no longer possible. He was trying to persuade the Italian foreign minister that "a conflict with the western powers is unavoidable" and therefore a German-Italian-Japanese military alliance becomes a necessity<sup>26</sup>. In his report for the *Führer* dated 2 January 1938 Ribbentrop made an assumption that "a change to the *status quo* in the east" can be made only through war and he was arguing that the hope for reaching an agreement with London "is gradually fading away". What is more, he expressed his belief that a German-British conflict is inevitable. "In future each day (...) in which our political considerations are not based on our conviction that England is our most dangerous opponent would be for the benefit of our enemies". The counter-measures included building "a network of allies against England, what in practice meant deepening friendly relations with Italy and Japan, and then attracting all countries whose interests are directly or indirectly convergent with ours"<sup>27</sup>. Poland was supposed to be one of these countries since relations with Germany, following an unexpected breakthrough which occurred in 1933/34, started to take an amazing turn.

#### POLAND BETWEEN GERMANY AND THE USSR

For many years between the two world wars one of the most serious trouble spots was the state of Polish-German relations and the conflict resulting from Berlin's drive to review the joint borderline. Warsaw made every effort to assure beyond doubt that any attempt to enforce the revisionist postulates of the Germans concerning the eastern border of the Reich will be met with a firm objection from the Polish side, including the use of military measures. When in the spring of 1933 the prospects of establishing a directorate in Europe emerged which included four powers united

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, doc. 31, appendix.

<sup>24</sup> A. Speer, *Wspomnienia* [Memories], Warsaw 1990, p. 210.

<sup>25</sup> E. Fröhlich (Hrsg.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I: *Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941*, Bd. IV, München 2000, p. 425 (note from 27 Nov 1937).

<sup>26</sup> G. Ciano, *Tagebücher 1937/38*, translated from Italian, Hamburg (1949), p. 32 (note from 24 Oct 1937).

<sup>27</sup> ADAP, Serie D, Bd. I, doc. 93 (underlined in the original).

by their ambition to enforce revisionist solutions at the expense of smaller countries, the Polish minister Józef Beck made it very clear by stating that, "If any country, on its own or in the company of others, should be tempted to take even a square meter of our territory the cannons will speak. They know about it in Berlin and they have acknowledged it. But I am afraid they still do not know it clearly enough in London, Rome and not even in Paris..."<sup>28</sup>.

As long as Germany remained weakened as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles a threat to Poland's security from its western side was relatively low. However, there was a real possibility that the Reich might receive permission from the power countries to be exempt from those clauses of the Treaty which demanded from Berlin to have an army consisting of only 100,000 men without a military air force, armour, heavy artillery, submarines and chemical weapons. Already at the Paris peace conference the British delegation criticized their French partners for having imposed on Germany too severe terms. Anyway, not long after the Treaty of Versailles had been signed, the French politicians themselves started to arrive at a conclusion that the attempts to execute the resolutions of the Treaty enforced upon Germany in an uncompromising way was equivalent to going down a blind alley. The French occupation of the Ruhr Valley in January 1923, as a matter of fact ended with embarrassment which exposed the political helplessness of strong, in the military sense, France. The conclusions which were drawn from that failure in Paris led the conference table in Locarno<sup>29</sup>.

The national security of the Republic of Poland relied on its own military force and on allied relations with France. However, the military dominance over the German army reduced to the number of 100,000 men could disappear if Berlin managed to cancel the resolution of the Versailles Treaty in this matter. The actual strength of the alliance with France was becoming more and more doubtful because Paris, since the Locarno Conference (1925) in an increasingly clear way wanted a more relaxed approach to its commitments made towards Warsaw<sup>30</sup>. In any way, France from the very beginning treated the Polish ally like a vassal, and it was using the alliance with Poland as a handy means of exerting pressure on Germany. Thus, there was a fear that the western powers in their attempt to reach agreement with Germany could decide that a correction of the Polish-German border is at least partially necessary in the name of peace in Europe.

The chronic crisis which had been present in the Polish-German relations was under the threat of escalation after Hitler came to power in 1933. It seemed obvi-

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<sup>28</sup> J. Laroche, *Poland of 1926-1935. Memoirs of the French Ambassador*, Warsaw 1966, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> A. Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe 1914-1940*, London 1995, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> Anyway even before the Locarno Conference and after the left-wing coalition had won the parliamentary elections in France, it was taken into account by Warsaw that Paris could denounce the Polish-French alliance from 1921; P. Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919-1925*, Westport, Connecticut 1974, p. 312.

ous that the Nazi leader would at least continue the anti-Polish policy of the former chancellors. Therefore, the international public opinion was even more surprised when following a conversation between the German chancellor and the Polish envoy, Alfred Wysocki (on 2 May 1933) there was an unexpected relaxation of the tension in the relations between both countries, and on 26 January 1934 both countries signed a German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact. A normalization of the relations with the Reich was a great success of Marshal Piłsudski and minister Józef Beck. The latter one was right when he said that the “breakthrough which had occurred recently in Polish-German relations was one of the most radical changes in European politics since the time of the war”<sup>31</sup>. The détente in the relations with the Reich expanded the room for manoeuvring for the government in Warsaw. The issue of reviewing the borders with Germany disappeared from the daily agenda, and Warsaw could make an attempt to settle the relations with Paris on partnership terms. As a Polish diplomat wrote, “Poland will no longer retreat from the course of independent politics but it is always ready for talks with France. Nobody desires a Franco-Polish alliance more than we do under the condition that it is a true alliance and based on equality”<sup>32</sup>.

The alliance with France was for Piłsudski and Beck the cornerstone and the main political safeguard against potential aggression from the Reich. Making this alliance stronger and, if the possibility arose, complementing it with a similar alliance with Great Britain would have been the ideal solution for the Polish leaders. Besides, in Warsaw they believed that the new German leaders would be more interested in expansion south-east and that they would be willing to abandon the typical for Prussia anti-Polish policy. It was also considered that the Nazis would need a lot of time to introduce changes in the Reich itself and to strengthen the regime<sup>33</sup>. The problems in the western-southern direction were supposed to distract the attention of Berlin, “from the eastern issues, at least partially”<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, it was firmly believed that, as Beck said in June 1935 at the conference with the Minister of the Interior, “settling our neighbourly relations with Germans had only become possible thanks to the Hitler revolution”<sup>35</sup>.

The Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact signed in January 1934 was preceded by the Non-Aggression Pact signed with the Soviet Union in 1932. In a confidential document in the Foreign Ministry from 1935 it said, “by having regulated on our own relations with our two largest neighbours in the terms laid out in bilateral treaties, Poland at the same time has cancelled in a radical way the possibility of being treated as a bargaining item in the political game led by France. Automatically and by the same token, the times of Poland being treated as an object in French politics

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<sup>31</sup> The New Records Archives. Warsaw, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 11464, J. Beck’s speech at a conference with the Minister of the Interior 5 Jun 1935, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> T. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka [Diary and portfolios of Jan Szembek]* (hence: DPJS), vol. I, London 1964, doc. 38, p. 91-92.

<sup>33</sup> J. Beck, *Last report*, Warsaw 1987, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> DPJS, I, doc. 31 (instructions issued by the Foreign Ministry for diplomatic posts, 31 Oct 1933).

<sup>35</sup> AAN Warsaw, Foreign Ministry 11464, J. Beck’s speech delivered at the meeting with the Minister of the Interior 5 June 1935, p. 6.

are over, and according to the Polish understanding this opens a new prospect of providing proper content for the Franco-Polish alliance by reinstating the so far compromised balance of rights and responsibilities within its scope"<sup>36</sup>.

In an official communiqué from 1937, it was stated that, "there is a need to maintain a policy of equilibrium between the two neighbouring countries"<sup>37</sup>. The term "policy of equilibrium" was sometimes also used in internal talks. In every day practice, however, there was no equilibrium in the political relations between Poland and both neighbouring large powers. The equilibrium was only a feature of the Polish strategy towards Berlin and Moscow, according to which Poland should not enter in an alliance with one of the powers against the other, and in terms of the agreements it should not exceed the scope of the Non-Aggression Pacts signed in 1932 and 1934. It was considered unacceptable to join either the block of countries which was being formed by Germany or the multilateral allied union with the USSR. There were worries, not without a reason, that in the former case Poland would run the risk of being vassalized by Germany and in the latter one the Red Army's advance on Polish territory in the role of an ally could trigger unaccountable consequences.

This was how far the so called policy of equilibrium reached. The completely incorrect view was that "the policy of equilibrium" was a result of the conviction that Warsaw first of all had to "strive for good relations with its most powerful neighbours, that is Germany and the Soviet Union because of its geo-political location. The basic guideline was abstaining from cooperation with one of the countries against the other. It was also assumed that any situations which could lead to that end were to be avoided"<sup>38</sup>. A careful analysis of the Polish-German and Polish-Soviet relations in the years 1934-1938 gives premises to deny each of the three statements. Poland made endeavours towards good relations not with the USSR but with Germany, attempting at the same time to isolate the USSR from "European matters". In addition, Warsaw did not hesitate to cooperate politically and diplomatically with Berlin in order to prevent initiatives which could strengthen the position of the Soviet Union (starting with issue of the Eastern Pact in 1934 until the Sudeten crisis in 1938). What is more, situations which opened opportunities for such cooperation were not at all avoided. Diplomatic cooperation with Germany was giving substantial political benefits as long as there was substantial caution on the Polish side. While not accepting the Nazi ideology and demonstrating doubts concerning Hitler's solutions, Polish leaders saw in the Third Reich a country with which it will be possible to strengthen its neighbourly relations. While a National Socialist Germany could not be isolated, it seemed possible to reduce and oust the Soviet Union's influence on the course of events.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted after P. Łossowski, *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918-1939* [Poland in Europe and in the World 1918-1939], Warsaw 1990, p. 218.

<sup>37</sup> DPJS, III, appendix. 70, p. 396.

<sup>38</sup> M. J. Zacharias, *Józef Beck i „polityka równowagi”* [Józef Beck and the 'equilibrium policy'], „Dzieje Najnowsze” 1988, No. 2, p. 8.

The Polish-German close relations initiated in 1933/34 (later on called the “Line of 26 January” from the date when the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact was signed) were becoming closer and reached a peak during the Sudeten crisis. Simultaneously however, relations between Warsaw and Moscow were systematically deteriorating. In the mid 1930s Polish-Soviet relations were “in deep crisis which lasted, almost without any change until the end of the Second Polish Republic”<sup>39</sup>.

#### POLAND BETWEEN GERMANY AND FRANCE

Shortly after the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact had been signed, Józef Piłsudski said to his staff members that good relations with Germany are only a temporary state which will be difficult to uphold longer than four years<sup>40</sup>. On another occasion he was reported to have said, “Having the two pacts [with Germany and the USSR – S. Ż.] we are sitting on two stools. This cannot last long. We need to know which one we will fall off first and when”<sup>41</sup>. Soon though in the Foreign Ministry leadership, especially after the Marshal’s death, the belief that the “pro-Polish” course in German politics was settling in became apparent. First of all, there were illusions concerning Hitler’s intentions. The Foreign Minister Józef Beck admitted it later himself writing in a letter to a friend, “On the basis of the nevertheless concrete evidence in 1934 I had reasons to regard him [Hitler] as a rare in Germany example of common sense in foreign policy”. The Nazi dictator had as if to say a sense of moderation, “which according to my estimation he tried to represent in a Bismarck fashion for the first time in Germany”. Beck also added that even in 1938 it was possible to talk with the *Führer* “sensibly about European politics”, and that it was only during the conversation in Berchtesgaden on 5 January 1939 that he had noticed “a dangerous change in this man”. Beck went on to reveal that “The Commander had once foreseen trouble which would come from “our unhealthy romances with the Germans”, but he was convinced that we would not be able to reach a sensible agreement with countries in Western Europe if we had not created, even only for some time, our own Polish-German politics”<sup>42</sup>.

In the new conception of Polish foreign policy which was starting to crystallize in Warsaw since 1933/34 the actual relations with Germany and France were in a

<sup>39</sup> S. Gregorowicz, *Polsko-radzieckie stosunki polityczne w latach 1932-1935* [Polish-Soviet relations in years 1932-1935], Warsaw 1982, p. 248.

<sup>40</sup> At the meeting in March 1934, “The Commander reckons that good relations between Poland and Germany can last for about four more years but because of the changes which are currently happening in the mentality of the German nation, the Commander cannot guarantee good relations in years to come” K. Świtalski, *Diariusz 1919-1935* [Diary 1919-1935], Warsaw 1992, p. 660-661.

<sup>41</sup> Related by gen. Kazimierz Fabrycy, quoted after: W. Jędrzejewicz, *Kronika życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867-1935* [Chronicle of Józef Piłsudski’s life], vol. II: 1921-1935, London 1986, p. 487.

<sup>42</sup> PDD 1939, doc. 275 (private letter from Beck to B. Wieniawa-Długoszowski from 10 May 1939).

way mutually dependent. Better relations with Berlin were to be our reply to the conciliatory tendencies western powers demonstrated in their policy towards Germany. On the other hand, maintaining an alliance with Paris was considered as a reassurance of the “Line of 26 January”. Combining these two factors required huge dexterity. With time, however, it turned out that for the Polish minister more importance was attached to better relations with the Reich. The endeavours to maintain good neighbourly relations with Germany seemed a well justified policy but in practice it led to a crisis between Warsaw and Paris, and both sides were to blame.

By the end of 1935 the deputy foreign minister, Jan Szembek when talking to his superior quoted Piłsudski’s words from the previous year in which the Marshal had strongly emphasized that “although our alliance with France is as a matter of fact losing its importance, we cannot under any circumstances allow for it to be denounced”. The minister clearly ignored this admonition and replied that Piłsudski had always recommended that “the Polish-French talks should be limited to conversations between the foreign ministers of both countries during their meetings in Geneva”<sup>43</sup>. General Kazimierz Sosnkowski did not voice any reservations concerning the idea of good neighbourly relations with Germany when he talked about these issues. In January 1936 he said that more than once he had wondered what aim Piłsudski had in mind in 1933 but “although I could never get a clear answer I had always presumed that all the effort was made to get France”. Sosnkowski did not deny that “France had acted in a very disloyal way towards us on more than one occasion”, but nevertheless he was “convinced that an improvement in Polish-French relations is in line with our interest because it is the primary condition of maintaining our present position in Berlin”<sup>44</sup>. In fact Sosnkowski was emphatic for some time then that “if we are supposed to conduct German politics, the alliance with France is our counterbalance and a safeguard for our political interest (...)”<sup>45</sup>. The advocates of the “Line of 26 January”, like for example Józef Lipski were aware of this and they agreed that “maintaining our alliance with France is an undeniable necessity most of all because of our policy of accord with Germany”<sup>46</sup>.

The closer Polish-German relations had become the more blurred were becoming the relations between Warsaw and Paris. To a certain extent this state was independent of Poland since the French side made a lot of effort to stop the Polish Republic from trying to reach a consensus with our western neighbour. Notwithstanding, the Polish side not only responded with an allergic reaction to any attempts to force Warsaw to alter the new directions in our foreign policy, but it also with content retaliated as if in response to the injustice it had suffered in the past. Minister Beck was particularly famous for it. In effect the French allies could often hear words uttered

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<sup>43</sup> Piłsudski’s opinion from 26 Dec 1934, quoted by J. Szembek in his conversation with J. Beck 13 Dec 1935, DPJS, I, p. 438-439.

<sup>44</sup> DPJS, II, p. 52 (24 Jan 1936).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, I, p. 225 (1 Feb 1935).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 307 (27 May 1935).

by the Polish in a style which had little in common with the still officially declared friendship. For example, in January 1936 minister Beck treated Alexis Léger, the secretary general in the French Foreign Office with arrogance unfit for a diplomat. The Polish minister must have felt satisfied afterwards but with such conduct he did not gain friends for his own country. When in March 1939 the idea of the British-French guarantees for Poland was being conceived, the same Léger was trying to convince the British ambassador in Paris that Beck cannot be trusted as he is “entirely cynical and false” and therefore he will take the first opportunity to betray his allies<sup>47</sup>.

The distrust on the part of the French was not cleared even by Marshal Piłsudski's reassurance that “there is nothing more than what actually has been written down”<sup>48</sup> in the Polish-German Non-Aggression declaration from 26 January 1934, more so that it was more or less at the time when serious discrepancies between the two countries occurred concerning the project of the Eastern Pact. Warsaw fought against the idea of “Eastern Locarno” with the best intentions for Poland, but the Polish standpoint towards the plans of Barthou and Litwinow to a large extent overlapped the views represented by the Reich. It was already then that the prospect of Polish-German diplomatic cooperation was being mentioned in some European capitals. The increasingly frequent visits of Hitler's dignitaries to Poland were becoming an external sign not of what they actually were, that is an outcome of relaxation in the Polish-German relations, but they were taken as proof of the emerging Polish-German rapport. The French ambassador spoke about it on the first anniversary of signing the Polish-German declaration<sup>49</sup> in an explicit way misinterpreting Polish intentions in the following words, “What is seen as wrong by the French is that you come in too close contact with the Germans, and that you seek their advice in everything”. The same ambassador, Jules Laroche when talking to Szembek two days later during the first visit paid by Göring to Poland made a comment that “Your talks with Germany are perceived in France as a sign that you are starting to attach less value to the alliance with France. If the French government under the pressure of public opinion was forced to denounce this alliance, it would be very bad for France, and I do not know if it was good for Poland”<sup>50</sup>. When Beck was informed about the comment made by Laroche he ignored the threat claiming that it really would be suicidal for France<sup>51</sup>. Besides, the Polish side did not cease trying to convince the French that their attempts to include Moscow into European politics, and especially the French-Soviet alliance (May 1935) can have disastrous consequences<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. IV, London 1951, doc. 405.

<sup>48</sup> J. Laroche, *Polska lat 1926-1935* [Poland in the years 1926-1935], p. 147.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222 (28 Jan 1935).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 223.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 372 (15 Oct 1935).

In view of the conciliatory tendencies prevalent in western countries towards Germany the “Line of 26 January” could prove to be at least for some time a cure for appeasement. Sensing that the verbally harsh reaction voiced in western capitals in response to the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936 will not result in taking action the leadership of the Polish foreign policy made every effort to maintain the “Line of 26 January”. Already after the first visit paid by Göring to Poland in February 1935, Minister Beck said to his deputy that, “the relaxation of tension in relations between Poland and Germany constitutes the greatest and the most precious achievement of our foreign policy”. The minister added, “We would be in a right state today if we did not have the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact (...). Most likely in London talks we would have been sold for 2 pounds 13 shillings”<sup>53</sup>. Such observations, undoubtedly right, were for Beck reassuring that his foreign policy while strengthening Polish national security it did not contain any elements of risk.

Although the possibility of a conflict with Germany was not excluded in the Foreign Office at Wierzbowa street, it was not considered probable. As the minister said in June 1935, “The Polish-German agreement” is respected by the Nazi government “with effort that is worthy of being recognized”. The National Socialist leadership “has additionally taken the burden of breaking the anti-Polish attitude in German mentality” and acting within its capacities it is trying to fulfill the task, and “some incidents which do occur from time to time are dampened down in Berlin”<sup>54</sup>. In early July 1935 the head of the Polish diplomacy returned from his trip to Berlin in a very good mood, “very happy with having established personal contact with the leaders of German politics”. He confided in his deputy that “personally the impression he had after talking to Hitler was most positive”. Hitler seemed to him absolutely honest in his political ideas and very sincere in his reasoning”<sup>55</sup>. According to Beck and the majority of his staff members all the plotting against Poland (especially around Gdańsk) was not instigated by Hitler but by Berlin’s conservative circles in *Auswärtiges Amt*<sup>56</sup>. In this conception Hitler was supposed to be the guarantee of the good neighbourly policy of Berlin towards the Polish Republic. What is more, according to Beck’s words, which were uttered soon after Piłsudski had died, “Germany had to take more notice of Poland” since “the Polish state has been continuously gaining strength whereas south of the Carpathian Mountains there was permanent chaos”<sup>57</sup>. Some of his co-workers shared his views, like for example Juliusz Łukasiewicz who was convinced (shortly before the German troops entered the demilitarized Rhineland) that the value of Poland on an interna-

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, p. 233 (13 Feb 1935).

<sup>54</sup> AAN Warsaw, Foreign Ministry 11464, J. Beck’s speech at the meeting with the Minister of the Interior 5 Jun 1935, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> DPJS, I, p. 332 (9 Jul 1935).

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 323 (26 Jun 1935), p. 345 (7 Aug 1935).

<sup>57</sup> AAN Warsaw, Foreign Ministry 11464, speech by J. Beck at a meeting with the Minister of the Interior 5 Jun 1935, p. 5-6.

tional scale stems from the fact that both France and Germany are trying to keep Poland closer for fear of it joining the opposite camp. This makes Poland a kind of a pointer that can tip the balance (...)”<sup>58</sup>. Indeed this was an incredibly apt depiction of the nature of the Polish policy of balancing between Paris and Berlin that remained valid until the break of 1938/39.

In Poland, however, the drive towards closer relations with Germany was increasingly criticized. Beck came under attack not only from the opposition but also from influential circles in the government, including military circles. The public attitude was strictly anti-German. In April 1937 Szembek complained to the Foreign Minister that the anti-German mood was thriving even in governmental circles, namely “Individual ministers made excuses not to organize a reception for Göring. Also, the difficulties experienced by him [Beck – S. Ż.] were symptomatic when he was going to appoint the chairman of the Polish-German Society in Warsaw”<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, the Foreign Ministry had serious reservations when it came to the policy of local authorities towards the German minority. A permanent source of discontent for the Foreign Ministry was the tough policy towards the German minority waged by Michał Grażyński, the head of the Silesian Province<sup>60</sup>.

Contrary to some opinions Piłsudski’s successor, Edward Rydz-Śmigły was not an opponent of the “Line of 26 January”. Yet, he would express his opinion that Berlin “cannot be absolutely trusted, that the Germans after all have had a hostile attitude towards us (sic!) and because of that we need a counterbalance in the form of our alliances with Romania, and first of all with France”<sup>61</sup>. When in mid 1936 he talked to Szembek while “stating the necessity to continue the policy of accord with Germany, the general stressed that at the same time it was essential to keep on guard. German armaments are undoubtedly also directed against us. At the moment the Reich needs 2-3 more years to reach its full operational readiness”<sup>62</sup>. General Rydz-Śmigły was unwilling to be convinced by the statement of the deputy Foreign Minister that the Nazi Reich will direct its expansion south and voiced his opinion that Gdańsk “will be the eye of the conflict which will start a Polish-German war (...)”<sup>63</sup>. In general however, he did not disagree with the Foreign Ministry’s line of policy”.

The Polish side was eager to record all the anti-Soviet comments made by its German partners. Also, all more or less explicit offers of a more permanent bond between Poland and Germany and a closer cooperation directed against the Soviet Union, which would follow should Poland join the Anti-Comintern Pact, were noted

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<sup>58</sup> DPJS, II, p. 96 (27 Feb 1936).

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, III, p. 74 (12 Apr 1937). Finally senator Wojciech Gołuchowski, a person of secondary importance in governmental circles, was appointed the chairman of the Society.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 271 (18 Apr 1935).

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 364 (8 Oct 1935).

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 238 (note from 30 Jun 1936).

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, p. 239 (30 Jun 1936). “It should be stated that the general always takes into account the possibility of a future conflict with Germany”, *ibidem*, p. 272 (16 Sept 1936).

down. Although these offers were not accepted they were a source of satisfaction allowing to assume that the anti-Soviet attitude exhibited by the Nazi leadership, and personally by Hitler would render any agreement between Berlin and Moscow improbable. For the above reasons as well as due to the attitudes of the western powers, as it was said by Szembek in his conversation with the Prime Minister, Marian Zyndram Kościałkowski in March 1936, “the agreement reached with Germany in 1933/34 is for us of primary importance and cannot be under any circumstances compromised”. Minister Beck’s deputy stressed the fact that it was the Soviet Union and not Germany that was more threatening for Poland<sup>64</sup>.

Statements made by Hitler and other German dignitaries in which they declared their willingness to establish the best possible relations with the Polish Republic became deeply imprinted in the conscious minds of Polish diplomats. It was also believed that the importance of good relations with Poland was so significant for Berlin, that it would be possible to evade from accepting German offers of much closer collaboration. At the same time however, attempts were made to obtain from the Reich confirmation of the *status quo* on the Polish-German border and a guarantee of the Polish rights concerning Gdańsk, and perhaps even having these rights strengthened (should any changes be made in the international legal regulations referring to the status of the Free City). As said by Beck in early 1936, the Polish side started to surmise that the most beneficial move for Poland would be to solve all pending disputable issues with Germany by means of “one grand *Ausgleich*”<sup>65</sup>. Nevertheless, the Germans did not want to take up the matter until the autumn of 1938 when Joachim von Ribbentrop addressed ambassador Lipski with this kind of proposal. For the time being though Germany limited itself to some remarks that in future it may be possible to find a compromise, for example concerning “the Corridor” which would guarantee Poland’s access to the sea. On the whole, Germans took care to speak about it in a friendly tone but some remarks were starting to sound ominous. To illustrate, on 18 November 1936 ambassador Moltke following instructions from Berlin plainly warned Beck, who had come up with a proposal to examine the possibilities of extending Polish rights in the Free City, not to raise ‘the unpleasant matter’ of Gdańsk and threatened that this would meet with “a sharp reaction and ensue severe disturbances in Polish-German relations”<sup>66</sup>. What is more, Moltke reiterated this statement to Rydz-Śmigły on 25 November. For the first time since 1933 the German side resorted to threats in talks with Poland.

When in the summer of 1937 Beck made an attempt to obtain from Germany any statement confirming the *status quo* in Gdańsk, at the beginning of September

<sup>64</sup> DPJS, II, p. 127-129 (15Mar 1936).

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 65 (1 Feb 1936).

<sup>66</sup> ADAP, D, V, doc. 11, footnote 4 (fragment; the entire document is in DPJS, II, appendix 91, Moltke’s report from 18 Nov 1936), quoted after M. Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933-1938* [Polish-German relations 1933-1938], 2nd edition, Poznań 1980, p. 301. Polish note from the aforementioned conversation (in DPJS) does not contain the quoted fragment.

he received via Moltke reassurance that the “*Führer* and the Chancellor of the Reich considered the Gdańsk statute to be a reality (*eine Realität*) and did not intend to infringe upon it” but there is no way “a public statement containing this content could be issued”<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, in October minister Neurath ruthlessly told ambassador Lipski that sooner or later the Gdańsk issue “will have to be solved in a fundamental way” that is in the sense of “restoring the natural relation” between Gdańsk and the Reich with taking into account the economic interests of Poland. Lipski, astonished by the turn the matters had taken asked Neurath whether he intended to take up the issue in the near future but he did not receive any concrete reply<sup>68</sup>. It appeared that concerning the Gdańsk issue the Polish side had to accept the interim solution offered by Germany. In a conversation with ambassador Lipski on 5 November 1937 Hitler announced that, “1) There will be no changes in the legal and political situation of Gdańsk (...), 2) The rights of the Polish residents in Gdańsk will be respected, 3) Poland’s rights in Gdańsk will not be violated”<sup>69</sup>. This statement however, was not to be made public and in the official communiqué it was limited to a mention that “the meeting was concluded (...) with a statement that Polish-German relations cannot be disturbed by the Gdańsk problem”<sup>70</sup>.

In the face of appeasement tendencies towards Germany gaining strength in the West, the Polish Foreign Ministry did not doubt that it was essential to hold on to the “Line of 26 January”. In the Polish governmental circles it was concluded that the “the policy of relaxation in our relations with Germany is the best defence against any attempts to pay for the so called pacification of Europe at the expense of Poland. What could have constituted a threat for us before 1934 is now a huge threat to Czechoslovakia”<sup>71</sup>. In a speech delivered in the Bruhla Palace *pro foro interno* it said, “Even at the moment when the Versailles Treaty has been shattered, even at the moment when the international economic tide is so strongly favouring Germany, (...) the Reich Chancellor is reiterating his declaration towards us as far as the need to maintain the *status quo* and Poland’s rights in Gdańsk are concerned”. A conclusion was drawn that Berlin’s attitude was a result of “a very sensible evaluation of the situation by the Germans”, who “must take into account the strong resistance on the Polish side concerning Gdańsk, that the gains obtained from its annexation could not cover the cost (...)”<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted after B. Dopierała, *Gdańska polityka Józefa Becka* [The Gdańsk policy of Józef Beck], Poznań 1967, p. 239.

<sup>68</sup> ADAP, D, V, doc. 13.

<sup>69</sup> DPJS, III, appendix. 65; *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 73.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted after B. Dopierała, *Gdańska polityka...*, p. 243.

<sup>71</sup> DPJS, III, p. 214 (14 Dec 1937).

<sup>72</sup> AAN Warsaw, Foreign Ministry 117, “Przegląd Informacyjny Polska a Zagranica” [Information Review Poland and Abroad] nr 17 from 18 Dec 1937, quoted after S. Sierpowski, *Źródła do historii powszechnej okresu międzywojennego* [Sources for the general history of the inter-war period], vol. III, Poznań 1992, doc. 364.

The balancing of Poland between France, Great Britain and Germany reached a peak in 1938 during the Sudeten crisis. Poland did not have much room to manoeuvre and the pressure put by Paris and London on the Polish Republic to make its attitude towards Germany more firm was impossible to reconcile with the Polish interest under the conditions of *appeasement*. The demand issued by Paris in May to carry out a warning *démarche* in Berlin was unthinkable for Beck. As the minister said to his deputy, “we would immediately find ourselves in a conflict with the Germans and we would cross out any possibilities of conducting a policy of equilibrium”<sup>73</sup>. However, Polish diplomacy having decided that the disunion of the Czechoslovakian state is in the interest of Poland, started to play a risky game which made it easier for Berlin to encircle Czechoslovakia. Starting with the first talks concerning Czechoslovakia which Hermann Göring had with Beck in Warsaw on 23 February, the contacts between both sides were becoming increasingly tighter. It was on this occasion that an attempt was made to obtain from Germany a decisive declaration concerning Gdańsk, the shared border and an extension of the Pact from 26 January 1934. The attempt ended in a failure, the German partners played for time and at the same time they were asking more explicitly about Poland joining the Anti-Comintern Pact. After the Sudeten crisis Poland earned the opinion of being *de facto* an accomplice of the Reich, as well as imitating its methods. The relations with France laid in ruins, and there was nearly a military confrontation on the border with the Soviet Union, followed by a diplomatic note from Moscow to Warsaw in which a threat of denouncing the 1932 Non-Aggression Pact was clearly stated<sup>74</sup>.

What is more, on the day when the Polish handed in their ultimatum in Prague demanding the evacuation of Czechoslovakians from Zaolzie, Minister Beck directed a question to Germany whether in case of a military conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia the Reich would resume an amicable approach towards Poland. The minister also asked whether in the case of Poland being attacked by the Soviet Union, Germany would show a friendly attitude”<sup>75</sup>. The reply was delivered to Beck by Ribbentrop himself at noon on 1 October. Germany reassured officially that in the case of a war between Poland and Czechoslovakia Warsaw can count on an amicable attitude from Berlin. In the case of a Polish-Soviet war the Reich will take “a more-than-friendly approach, suggesting [Ribbentrop] clearly that the German government would offer help”<sup>76</sup>. On the same day the ambassador also talked to Göring who

<sup>73</sup> DPJS, IV, p. 158. In his memoirs Beck noted maliciously but correctly that “The various actions taken by the French diplomats aimed at bringing a relief to the Czechs by spoiling Polish-German relations”; [J. Beck], *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 1926-1939*, edited by A. M. Cieniało, Paris 1990, p. 213.

<sup>74</sup> The Polish moves are analyzed by the present author in: S. Żerko, *Polen, die Sudetenkrise und die Folgen von München*, w: *Das Münchener Abkommen 1938 in europäischer Perspektive*, hrsg. im Institut für Zeitgeschichte (in press).

<sup>75</sup> ADAP, D, V, doc. 54.

<sup>76</sup> PDD 1938, doc. 364.

was even more open as he reassured that, “It is completely inconceivable that the Reich would not help Poland in its fight against the Soviets”<sup>77</sup>. This incident emphatically shows that the notion “policy of equilibrium” in fact constituted an empty declaration.

Abroad in democratic countries the fact that Poland filed an ultimatum towards Prague and threatened Czechoslovakia, which had been abandoned by everybody, with a war mostly made a bad impression. The worries expressed by the deputy Prime Minister, Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, who was against the ultimatum, materialized when he predicted that the decision from 30 September will cast a long shadow on the image of Poland<sup>78</sup>. There were voices that Poland behaved like a hyena which attacks a victim already beaten in Munich. The title of the Swedish daily, “Dagens Nyheter” (4 Oct 1938), *Germany’s Followers* belonged to the more restrained ones. The commentators not very knowledgeable in what had motivated Poland’s actions became convinced that minister Beck is disloyal and deceitful acting as a matter of fact in league with the Nazi Reich. Many authorities in the West started to reach a conclusion that Poland does not deserve help, should it become the next target of German aggression<sup>79</sup>. The Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, who himself not long before had been showing off in Munich, compensated his distastefulness with contemptuous remarks about Poland’s conduct<sup>80</sup>. Even in the same month when Polish soldiers entered Zaolzie the French ambassador to Warsaw, Leon Noël presented to his superiors a memorandum calling for a reduction of the commitments towards Poland because of the fact that “it almost all the time in its everyday political life” is acting in the interest of France’s opponents “no matter who they are”<sup>81</sup>. Similarly in London, especially in the Foreign Office, the Poles were given a cold shoulder and treated with distrust<sup>82</sup>.

As it was related by the Polish consuls in the Reich, the opinions that now it will be “Poland’s turn” were not rare among the Germans. It was heard in conversations that Hitler will want the Poznań Province, Gdańsk Pomerania and Higher Silesia, and that Germans living in Poland “should be set free”<sup>83</sup>. Similar views became common within the German minorities in Poland, which put the Polish authorities in a state of justified uneasiness.

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<sup>77</sup> PDD 1938, doc. 364, also doc. 363 and Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Monachium 1938* [Munich 1938], doc. 463.

<sup>78</sup> E. Kwiatkowski, *W takim żyliśmy świecie* [The World we lived in], Kraków 1990, p. 103. See also [J. Beck] *Polska polityka zagraniczna...*, p. 223 and DPJS, IV, p. 283-284 (30 Sept 1938). On another occasion Beck wrote about Kwiatkowski that the deputy prime minister “was always afraid of taking any more serious decisions”, [J. Beck], *Polska polityka zagraniczna...*, p. 208.

<sup>79</sup> Wider about the reactions to the Polish ultimatum: S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1939* [Polish-German relations 1938-1939], Poznań 1998, p. 98.

<sup>80</sup> This was reported in Washington by ambassador William Bullitt; FRUS, 1938, 1, p. 667.

<sup>81</sup> L. Noël, *Agresja niemiecka na Polskę* [German invasion of Poland], Warsaw 1966, p. 206, quoted from p. 210.

<sup>82</sup> E. Raczyński, *W sojusznicy Londynie* [In the allied London], London 1997, p. 22-23.

<sup>83</sup> New Files Archives, Warsaw, Embassy in Berlin 841, general consul in Leipzig F. Chiczewski to J. Lipski, 17 Nov 1938, p. 74.

Some German diplomats of the old Conservative-Nationalist school were reaching the same conclusions. The German diplomats who were unaware of Hitler's plans, started to deliberate whether Berlin should take advantage of the favourable circumstances and resort to some of the old revisionist issues. It was noted that if the Reich "took up the problem of the (Corridor) Poland could not count on any of its friends"<sup>84</sup>. Ernst von Weizsäcker in his memoirs expressed his conviction that nobody would rush with help for a discredited and isolated Poland, "the jackal of Munich"<sup>85</sup>. In the autumn of 1938 he decided that Germany should at last demand from the Polish government in Warsaw "being connected to Eastern Prussia" (the term "*Landbrücke nach Ostpreußen*" is unclear) as well as permission for Gdańsk to be annexed to the Reich. Poland was to be reduced to the role of a buffer state between Germany and Russia. It was also the advice Weizsäcker gave to Ribbentrop in December 1938<sup>86</sup>. As Weizsäcker told Admiral Canaris, Great Britain and France would remain neutral in the case of a Polish-German conflict<sup>87</sup>. In a similar vein, the German ambassador to London, Herbert von Dirksen argued that since the Sudeten crisis Warsaw has made itself unpopular on the Thames and that the British do take into consideration that the Reich will demand from Poland at least Gdańsk and the "Polish Corridor"<sup>88</sup>. Nonetheless, Hitler had different plans concerning Poland.

#### GERMAN ATTEMPTS TO ATTRACT POLAND AS ITS ALLY

For Hitler the motives to depart from the so far anti-Polish policy of Berlin were initially of a tactical nature. As he admitted in the autumn of 1938 in a closed meeting for German journalists, "Circumstances made me talk about peace for many years"<sup>89</sup>. First, the *Führer* wanted to lead his regime through "the risky phase" that is while Germany was still weak, then he wanted to gain time, strengthen his rule, arm the Reich, weaken the French network of alliances by planting a wedge between France and Poland, sabotage all the attempts to create an anti-German coalition, mislead and disorientate potential opponents. In his speeches and diplomatic notes he invariably would assure about his alleged exclusively peaceful intentions. The Polish-German declaration was to be proof that he was ready to seek agreement even when conflict would seem invincible<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> R. Spitz, *So haben wir das Reich verspielt. Bekenntnisse eines Illegalen*, München-Wien 1986, p. 324.

<sup>85</sup> Earlier versions of Weizsäcker's memoirs, according to: R. A. Blasius, *Für Großdeutschland – gegen den großen Krieg. Staatssekretär Ernst Frhr. von Weizsäcker in den Krisen um die Tschechoslowakei und Polen 1938/39*, Köln – Wien 1981, p. 75-76.

<sup>86</sup> L. E. Hill (Hrsg.), *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933-1950*, Frankfurt a.M.-Berlin-Wien 1974, p. 150. Not much in: E. von Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen*, München-Leipzig-Freiburg i. Br. 1950, p. 212.

<sup>87</sup> H. Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938-1940*, Stuttgart 1970, p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> ADAP, D, IV, doc. 287.

<sup>89</sup> H. von Kotze, H. Krausnick (Hrsg.), *Es spricht der Führer*, Gütersloh 1966, p. 269.

<sup>90</sup> See S. Żerko, *Niemiecka polityka zagraniczna 1933-1939*, Poznań 2005, chapter II, p. 59.

Soon however, the Nazi dictator decided that a tactical alliance with the eastern neighbour could be transformed into a more permanent bond. He somehow came to the conclusion that perhaps it would be possible to find for Poland a place in the future "German Europe". Poland dividing Germany from the USSR had at its disposal a sizeable military potential. Also the genuine recognition that Hitler and some other Nazi dignitaries had towards Piłsudski, the conqueror of the Red Army in 1920, played a significant part in Hitler's calculations. Additionally, the fact that the political system introduced by Piłsudski departed from the principles of parliamentary democracy, which Hitler despised, was of considerable importance. Since 1933 in almost every conversation with Polish diplomats, the chancellor referred to the Soviet threat and talked about Poland's significant role in the east<sup>91</sup>.

Soon intensive efforts were made to win over Poland as an ally. Hermann Göring, who was entrusted by Hitler to take care of relations with Poland, played a chief role in these endeavours<sup>92</sup>. Starting in February 1935, his regular hunting expeditions to the Białowieża Forest provided him with ample opportunities to present the German offer without mincing his words. Already during his first visit to Poland he "went far in his offer and suggested a division of interest zones concerning Russian matters"<sup>93</sup>. When however, the Nazi dignitary took up this issue while speaking to Piłsudski, the Marshal dismissed the topic and explained that the Polish Republic intends to conduct a policy of caution with the USSR<sup>94</sup>. Notwithstanding, Göring continued his efforts in the following years. In February 1936 a Polish high-ranking official in the Foreign Ministry summed up the reasoning of the German guests during another of Göring's visits to Poland in the following way, "Poland should go against the Soviets in an alliance with the Germans"<sup>95</sup>. On another occasion the Nazi dignitary said to his Polish interlocutor that in the face of aggressive plans of the Kremlin "Poland and Germany will have to join forces whether they will or will not want to (...). In any way there is a great future before Poland and Germany since the centrifugal tendencies in Russia are gaining strength"<sup>96</sup>. In February 1937 in an extensive speech he was trying to convince Rydz-Śmigły about the need to align Polish and German politics<sup>97</sup>, and in November he made a casual comment that "The Baltic is not

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<sup>91</sup> More details in: S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie...*, p. 33.

<sup>92</sup> A wider account of these activities of the Nazi dignitary in: S. Martens, *Hermann Göring: "Erster Paladin des Führers" und „Zweiter mann im Reich“*, Paderborn 1985; A. Kube, *Pour le mérite und Hakenkreuz. Hermann Göring im Dritten Reich*, München 1987.

<sup>93</sup> The Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum, London, A.11 E/144, A committee appointed in relation with the results of the war campaign of 1939, doc. 6, testimony by J. Lipski from 6 Mar 1941, p. 241; also DPJS, I, p. 225 and 230.

<sup>94</sup> More in: S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie...*, p. 43.

<sup>95</sup> DPJS, II, p. 93 (23 Feb 1936).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 261 (12 Aug 1936).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, III, doc. 7 (note by Szembek, corrected by Lipski, from the conversation between Göring-Śmigły 16 Feb 1937).

enough for Poland” as it should have “a window onto the Black Sea”<sup>98</sup>. It was then that the international press wrote intensely about rumours that the Polish Republic might possibly join the Anti-Comintern Pact. On 9 November 1937 minister Beck felt obliged to instruct the Polish embassies and diplomatic missions that Poland had not received any propositions to join the pact, and in any way Warsaw would not join the Anti-Comintern Pact because of its “specific location as a neighbour country of the USSR, and its principal stance against blocks”<sup>99</sup>. The same statement was repeated three days later in a communiqué released by the Polish Political Information agency with an additional mention of the need to maintain “the policy of equilibrium between the two neighbour countries”<sup>100</sup>. Nevertheless, the effects of the above *de-menti* were of limited appeal and the rumours of Poland’s possible accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact did not cease.

Also other Nazi dignitaries were involved in trying to draw Poland closer, like for example Joseph Goebbels was convinced, as he wrote in his private diary, that “the axis Berlin-London-Rome-Warsaw would be something not to throw away”<sup>101</sup>, or the future general governor, Hans Frank. The latter in early 1936 was trying to convince his hosts in Warsaw that “Poland and Germany going hand in hand constitute a power which will be difficult to resist in Europe; a block consisting of a compound mass of 100 million people”<sup>102</sup>. Attempts to attract the Polish side were also joined, among others by Joachim von Ribbentrop, relatively early well before he became the head of Hitler’s diplomacy. He said to deputy-minister Szembek, who was staying in Berlin on the occasion of the Olympic Games, that both nations “must come together” and the present then relaxation in Polish-German relations is only the beginning because Poland and Germany will together achieve “far greater things”. In view of these tasks all quarrels from the past should take second place<sup>103</sup>. Ribbentrop made similar comments a short while later when talking to ambassador Raczyński in London.

Yet, the German public and a decisive majority of the conservative elites did not willingly accept the new policy towards Poland. Also, many leaders of the German minority in Poland did not hide their disappointment as they complained that Berlin left the compatriots stranded behind the eastern border. The new political course was accepted with clenched teeth in the German Foreign Office dominated by the advocates of the traditional anti-Polish attitude, and it was not infrequently sabotaged in various ways. Still the analysis of the *Auswärtiges Amt* revealed a more sober estimate of the Polish Republic’s foreign policy. Hence, in the material prepared for

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem, p. 163-164 (4 Nov 1937).

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, appendix 69.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem, appendix 70.

<sup>101</sup> E. Frohlich (Hrsg), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Bd. III, p. 4 (note from 4 Jan 1937).

<sup>102</sup> DTJS, II, p. 82 (12 Feb 1936).

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, notes from 8, 12 and 14 Aug 1936 (Ribbentrop talked to Szembek three times on that occasion).

minister Neurath dated 11 January 1938, it was aptly noted that the Polish-French alliance remains the cornerstone of Polish foreign policy<sup>104</sup>. Anyway, also ambassador von Moltke, an advocate of good neighbourly relations between Warsaw and Berlin warned against drawing overoptimistic conclusions from an analysis of Polish political moves.

It is quite characteristic that the German dignitaries while repeating their attempts to recruit Poland would now and then imply the need to revise the *status quo* along the Polish-German border. Hitler also talked about it, for example to Lipski on 22 May 1935. He then reassured that although Germany does need “living space”, *Lebensraum* is not to be found in Poland. One could only infer that the chancellor meant USSR territory. Immediately Hitler added that he had a certain idea which could be implemented in about 15 years time, namely a special German railway line and a motorway across the Gdańsk Pomerania<sup>105</sup>. This was not a novel idea and it had appeared in previous years. Also, in the following period the German side would return to this project (for example, Göring in the autumn of 1936 in a conversation with Lipski, in February 1937 in a conversation with Rydz-Śmigły, and first of all Hitler once more in his conversation with Lipski on 20 September 1938)<sup>106</sup>.

The Polish side treated the advances made by Germany either with gentle refusal or at the most in an evasive way. Warsaw tried to maintain the best possible relations with Germany but without making a bond with the Reich. The Polish leadership almost by instinct felt that an alliance with Berlin would mean degrading the Polish Republic to the rank of a vassal of the Third Reich. Still the top priority was to obtain proper guarantees from France while at the same time creating appropriate circumstances for a closer relationship with Great Britain. Yet, abandoning the “Line of 26 January” would seem irresponsible in view of the dominant appeasement tendencies towards Germany in the policy conducted in Paris and especially in London

In the meantime however, the German dictator finally decided that Great Britain would not give him a free hand in the east. He was no longer satisfied by the policy of appeasement on the part of the western powers. As early as during the Sudeten crisis he was ready to risk a war with the western powers if they had decided to come with help should the Reich have attacked Czechoslovakia. Hitler believed that a military confrontation in the west was unavoidable. It would be difficult to think about implementing his major objective, which was building a German empire on the debris of the USSR, without having eliminated France and having isolated Great Britain. Indeed, before the *Wehrmacht* could set out east the Germans should secure the rear. Thus, the Anti-Comintern Pact was being perceived not only as a bloc with a blow aimed at the Soviet Union but as an alliance of countries ready to wage a war against Great Britain and France.

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<sup>104</sup> ADAP, D, V, doc. 25.

<sup>105</sup> *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 44.

<sup>106</sup> S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie...*, p. 45.

For that matter while earlier on Hitler saw in Poland an ally during his attack on the USSR then, that is in the autumn of 1938 he “wanted” Poland to play a different part. The Polish divisions would first secure the Reich during its attack on the western powers, and the attack on the Soviet Union was supposed to come after France had been beaten. In any way, first it was essential to urge the Polish leaders to unequivocally declare themselves on the German side.

On 16 March 1938 during a conversation with Lipski, Göring “came up with a direct offer of Polish-German military cooperation against Russia”. The ambassador made a note in his records that the offer was much more detailed than the proposals put forward earlier on<sup>107</sup>. On the last day of March Joachim von Ribbentrop, the then new foreign minister of the Reich, was encouraging Lipski to establish “wider cooperation” between Poland and Germany in the Anti-Comintern spirit. At the time Ribbentrop asked Lipski to treat his proposal as informal<sup>108</sup>. On 10 August Göring repeated his arguments to Lipski aimed at closer cooperation between Poland and Germany in the anti-Soviet spirit<sup>109</sup>. On the night of 27 and 28 of September Ribbentrop repeated to Lipski his offer of a permanent alliance with Poland within the Anti-Comintern Pact but this time he insisted that Lipski should inform minister Beck about the German suggestion<sup>110</sup>.

After the Polish campaign concerning Zaolzie Hitler and his paladins did not skimp on complements for Warsaw. On 1 October Göring in his telephone conversation with ambassador Lipski assessed the Polish move as “an incredibly bold operation carried out in an excellent style”. On the same day Ribbentrop said to Lipski that “the chancellor during his breakfast spoke to his entourage with great esteem about Polish politics”. Beck was informed by a Polish diplomat from Berlin that “our move was regarded there as an expression of great power and independent thinking, which constitutes the most certain guarantee of our good relations with the Reich’s government” (sic!)<sup>111</sup>. The Polish-German discrepancies concerning the new demarcation line were quickly overcome because the Reich handed over to Poland the right to a key railway junction in Bohumin.

The Polish ambassador was invited for 24 October to Berchtesgaden where Ribbentrop was staying. The German minister was well prepared for the meeting and he conducted it very skillfully. He spoke in superlatives about the Polish stance during the Sudeten crisis. Among others he referred to Hitler’s words: “The Poles are a brave folk. Piłsudski would be proud of them”. Lipski almost immediately presented the real reason for his visit which was obtaining German support for the cause of adjoining the Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. Ribbentrop went on pretending

<sup>107</sup> *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 353-354.

<sup>108</sup> PDD 1938, doc. 74; ADAP, D, V, doc. 34; DPJS, IV, p. 119 (4 Apr 1938).

<sup>109</sup> PDD1938, doc. 176.

<sup>110</sup> The report of the Polish ambassador concerning this topic of the conversation is said to have been lost; the historian has access only to a note Lipski made later: *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 427.

<sup>111</sup> PDD 1938, doc. 364.

that the plans of creating a common Polish-Hungarian border were something new to him and was evasive towards the matter, exaggerated potential obstacles and being straightforward he took up the issue which was meant to dominate the entire conversation. He stressed that “now the time has come to cleanse the relations between Germany and Poland from all existing problems” and this would be “the crowning achievement of the creation that Marshall Piłsudski and the *Führer* had started”. Thus, he proposed a “general regulation” of Polish-German relations. First of all, the problem of Gdańsk needed to be “solved” by incorporating it into the Reich. An extraterritorial Autobahn belonging to Germany and a railway connection to East Prussia was supposed to be built across the Gdańsk Pomerania. The joint border would receive a guarantee of being permanent and the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact from 1934 would be extended for a further 10 to 25 years. However, it was the two last points on Ribbentrop’s list that were the most important.

Not only was Warsaw to join the Anti-Comintern Pact but it also had to accept an additional consultation clause appended to the treaty from 1934 which would oblige Poland to negotiate its foreign policy with Berlin. Ribbentrop noted that he did not expect an immediate answer and asked Beck to carefully consider his proposal. More or less twenty minutes later the German minister called in Lipski again and added that “if the global regulation in the relations between Germany and Poland is achieved” then also in the case of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia “a beneficial agreement could be achieved”<sup>112</sup>. The German proposals unambiguously aimed at making Poland the Reich’s satellite, although the demands concerning Gdańsk and the Autobahn were not in themselves exorbitant.

When deeply alarmed Lipski reported in person the subject matter of the conversation to Beck, he did not attach much importance to the German proposals. At a meeting called by the minister on 4 November with a small group of staff he did not mention a word about them. He assessed the Polish position in optimistic terms and when talking about relations with Germany he was joking that “lions are not so fierce when you live closer with them”. He maintained that Poland’s position is beneficial (“politically we are at a good point”). He still remained impressed by the “success” achieved at the expense of Czechoslovakia and kept on saying that “it was possible to get more from the Czechs without much resistance. The weakness of that country was beyond our expectations”<sup>113</sup>. It would be difficult to find a better example of being disorientated, careless and overestimating the role of one’s own country.

Beck gave orders to reply to Berlin in a polite manner nevertheless refusing their offer. The Polish minister believed that he would be able to continue his policy of balancing between Germany and the western powers, and that the Reich will come to terms with the Polish refusal also this time. He seemed to have paid less attention to

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<sup>112</sup> Quotations based on the Polish document: PDD 1938, doc. German version: ADAP, D, V, doc. 81.

<sup>113</sup> DPJS, IV, p. 357, 358.

the emerging prospect of confrontation with Germany than to the issue of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Incorporating this tiny country into Hungary would not only get rid of the “Ukrainian Piedmont” but it was first of all to be a stage in implementing a completely unrealistic conception of a “Third Europe”, that is a grouping of medium and smaller countries in Central and South-East Europe independent of Germany. Anyway, Beck considered the proposal from 24 October to be a scheme plotted by Ribbentrop. However, on 5 January 1939 during a meeting with the *Führer* in Berchtesgaden Beck was to realize himself that things were different than he had thought, and that it was Hitler himself who was behind the proposal. The chancellor made an effort to maintain a friendly tone in the conversation, but on the following day Ribbentrop was much more aggressive. Beck who had previously deluded himself that in the face of the Polish refusal Germany would not insist on the October proposals was then put straight.

As soon as the minister had returned to Warsaw, a consultation meeting was convened in a narrow group of top statesmen including president Mościcki and marshal Rydz-Śmigły. The leaders of the Polish state unanimously agreed that accepting the German offer (it needs to be reminded that it was still not a demand but a proposal) will inevitably take the Polish Republic “onto an inclined plane resulting in a loss of independence and assuming a role of Germany’s vassal”<sup>114</sup>. The Polish side did allow a margin of concessions concerning the issue of Gdańsk and access via “the Corridor” and expressed the willingness to seek a compromise but on the other hand an attempt was going to be made to strengthen relations with France and Great Britain. On 25 January 1939 (on the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the Non-Aggression Pact) minister Ribbentrop was received in Warsaw with the utmost courtesy. The guest and the hosts were outdoing one another in their assurance of the will to maintain friendly relations. However, when Ribbentrop returned to the German proposal he practically did not achieve anything. Beck even warned Ribbentrop against being overoptimistic when relating the course of the Warsaw talks to Hitler<sup>115</sup>. Nevertheless, both sides cared about evading crisis. Other dignitaries of Hitler were coming to Warsaw (among others Hans Frank in December 1938 and Heinrich Himmler in the February of the following year). All the signs were there that the “Line of 26 January” was still being observed. The Polish refusal, after all not the first one, did not seem to be synonymous with breaking relations between Warsaw and Berlin.

It can be assumed that Hitler still counted on making Poland join the coalition headed by Germany. Following a note made by one of his aide-de-camps on 18 February 1939, the chancellor did no longer exclude resorting “if necessary to other than diplomatic means”<sup>116</sup>. A few days later Hitler revealed in confidence that he intended to send a strong group of *Kriegsmarine* to Gdańsk making in this way a demonstra-

<sup>114</sup> [J. Beck], *Polska polityka zagraniczna...*, p. 240.

<sup>115</sup> S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1939*, chapters II and III.

<sup>116</sup> H. von Kotze (Hrsg.), *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938-1943. Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel*, Stuttgart 1974, p. 45.

tion of power (which however did not take place)<sup>117</sup>. Ribbentrop made the last attempt to convince the Polish in the second half of March 1939 after the final breakup of the Czechoslovakian state and the establishment of the Protectorate of Czech and Moravia. The reply passed on from Beck by ambassador Lipski on 26 March 1939 did not leave any room for delusion. "The Poles will remain our enemies" were the *Führer's* words noted down by Goebbels<sup>118</sup>. When a few days later on 31 March 1939 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons the British guarantees for Poland, Hitler had no doubts that Poland will remain a country connected with the western powers in the political and military sense. In early April orders were given to start preparations to attack Poland.

#### THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE POLISH DECISION

The decision made by the highest political authorities of the Polish Republic to turn down the *Führer's* magnanimous offer was made at the beginning of January 1939, that is before Great Britain expressed readiness to issue a guarantee of independence for Poland. The participants of the meeting in the Royal Castle were aware of the seriousness of the situation but they undoubtedly counted on overcoming the emerging crisis with diplomatic means.

When several weeks later the *Wehrmacht* army entered Prague the advocates of the appeasement were discredited and international opinion was alarmed as to the real objectives of Nazi Germany, the position of Poland appeared to have been strengthened. It needs to be remembered that the final refusal which was handed over by ambassador Lipski to Ribbentrop on 26 March 1939 took place in a radically changed situation. Although in effect of the German occupation of Czech and Moravia Poland became entrapped also from the south, its political position was clearly strengthened. Additionally, the British-French guarantees obtained by Poland five days later were evaluated as a great asset on the Polish side. Finally, the circumstances were there to stop the expansion of the Nazi Reich. It seemed that the Polish leadership in its contest with Berlin was at last holding a good hand of cards.

We know that it was not an easy decision to make at least for Beck; the minister of foreign affairs was very much aware of the risk he was burdened with<sup>119</sup>. Undoubtedly when taking the decision the Polish military potential was vastly overestimated and the military power of Germany was underestimated. It might be that the decision was made with awareness that any closer cooperation with the Reich, than what was until then determined by the "Line of 26 January", would not be accepted by the thoroughly anti-German Polish public, and the generals were mostly very distrust-

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<sup>117</sup> ADAP, D, VI, doc. 361, footnote 1.

<sup>118</sup> E. Fröhlich (Hrsg.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels...*, Bd. III, p. 584 (note from 28 Mar 1939).

<sup>119</sup> PDD 1939, doc. 275.

ful towards the Germans. Resigning from the alliance with France could even have brought about an internal political crisis and collapse of the existing government. The prospect that the Polish army would shield the Reich from the east in order to create good conditions for the *Wehrmacht* forces to beat France would not be acceptable for both the vast majority of the Polish elites as well as generally for public opinion. Minister Beck was even irritated by the enthusiasm with which the Poles welcomed severing relations with Germany. Nevertheless, when analyzing the situation of Poland in the spring of 1939 it was difficult to assume that the assets in the form of alliances with France and great Britain were of an illusory nature.

The months following the breaking of the relations between Warsaw and Berlin resulted in a war of nerves that Hitler waged on Poland and the western powers. However, the fear of the risky game played by their *Führer* was also shared by Hitler's political collaborators and army generals. Also, the German public was full of anxiety. On the one hand, it welcomed with satisfaction the collapse of close relations with the disliked neighbour and it was ready to willingly accept a short local war against Poland but it was on the other hand, paralyzed by the thought that a local campaign could transform into a widespread conflict. In Warsaw they believed that the war of nerves can be won by demonstrating a firm attitude. On Minister Beck's initiative and in line with the declaration that the Polish government will not be intimidated many attempts were made to re-establish relations with Germany. Signals were sent through the Japanese, Italians and Hungarians, Romanian and Bulgarian diplomats were used and even as it seems the chief-in-command of the Estonian army was involved. There were also attempts to establish relations directly with Germany<sup>120</sup>. These however, remain almost unknown episodes in the history of the Second Polish Republic which nevertheless allow to question the stereotypical opinions about the alleged uncompromising Polish attitude.

Making an assumption that the final decisions made in Berlin will be rational proved to be false. The premise that the British guarantee for Poland would constitute a challenge for Hitler, who was making decisions in the manner of a *va banque* player, was unjustified. Another mistake was assuming that the western allies would eventually reject the defeatist strategy and in their best interests would take action directly after Germany had begun their war operations. It also proved to be false to assume that Hitler's anti-Soviet attitude rules out an alliance between Germany and the USSR. Notwithstanding it does not seem that, contrary to what is presently written, the German-Soviet Pact was the factor which finally made it possible for Hitler to attack Poland and unleash World War II.

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<sup>120</sup> See S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1939*, passim.