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WERE WE AT THE STATE OF WAR WITH THE SOVIETS?!

The Red Army invasion was to take place under the pretence of helping Belarusians and Ukrainians once the Germans had done their work. Urged by Berlin, Stalin decided to accelerate the implementation of his plans rather than wait for the final collapse of the Polish state. This did not prevent him from arguing that “the Polish state and its government have in fact ceased to exist”. This confirms that Soviet policy towards Poland was beyond diplomacy, law and morality in international relations.

Probably on September 13, Stalin ultimately decided to invade Poland, when his intelligence service¹ notified him about the decision of the Allies taken in Abbeville. The next day Voroshilov and his chief of staff Shaposnikov signed a directive to concentrate the Soviet troops on their base positions by the evening of September 16. That day in Moscow Stalin concluded a truce in the war with the Japanese².

The Polish authorities harboured no illusions as to Soviet intentions towards Poland yet believed that the Soviet state, following its own geopolitical interest, would remain neutral and uninvolved in conflict³ and would not dare to invade Poland, bound by alliances with

¹ Edouard Pfeiffer, secretary to the French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, was “Stalin’s man”. Geoffrey Roberts claims in his work that the conspiracy of August 23 between Moscow and Berlin did not partition Poland and it was only around 7 September 1939 that the USSR government decided to intervene in Poland. Not only the factual assessment, but also the political correctness of the semantic structure (intervention rather than aggression) was surprising. This decision was supposed to be independent of the previous arrangements. However, why those agreements of August 23 did take place, then? The secretary of the German embassy in Moscow, Hans von Herwarth, immediately reported them to the American Embassy in Moscow (also the French and the British learned the content of Moscow’s secret protocol but did not consider it advisable to notify the most interested Polish party). Very unconventionally, the Allies’ short-sightedness, and especially France’s inaction, was conveyed by the later French Marshal Alphonse Juin: “Why didn’t we immediately strike on our front when the German troops rushed into Poland? What an unforgivable error! Honour above all else demanded that of us. [...] We allowed Poland, bound by our alliance pact, to be crushed. [...] What a disgrace! [...] From the point of view of strategy, we made a serious and grave error. There was no risk. All German armoured divisions, except one, were tied up in Poland. The Germans had almost no forces against us. This was the moment for dispatching troops on the offensive and breaking their Siegfried Line, which was only a bluff”.

² In July and August 1938, fights between the Japanese and the Soviets erupted over Khasan Lake after the Red Army seized Zaozernaya Hill. The Soviets, despite their advantage, suffered defeat. Although Moscow trumpeted their success for propaganda reasons, the Soviet commander, Marshal Vasily K. Blucher, fell into disgrace and paid with his life for the defeat. In May and September 1939, on the Chalchyn-Gol River, the Soviet forces under the command of G. Zhukov won a victory over the Japanese. As a result, the Japanese gave up their attacks on the USSR.

³ Fearing that Poles would capitulate too early, Stalin waited until the warfare was in full swing and the outcome of the Polish-German war would be a foregone conclusion. Via the Soviet ambassador to Poland Nikolai Sharonov, he deluded the Polish government into believing not only in Moscow’s neutrality, but also in its readiness to supply

France, the United Kingdom and... Romania. The Russia and Germany variant was not taken into account as this strategic alternative had no rational and effective policy. This was a catastrophic version of Polish policy and the country was unable to withstand that in military terms⁴. Unlike Minister Józef Beck, Marshal E. Śmigły-Rydz did not rule out a rapprochement of the Germans and the Soviets. He considered it on different occasions, e.g. during a conference held on 7 March 1939 as always possible and having its antecedents in history⁵. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was concerned that the German-Soviet pact would unravel the Polish-French-British coalition or would even make the Western allies leave the alliance⁶. The dominant belief, however, was that Moscow would incite war but would postpone its own engagement to obtain the greatest gain at the best of times. Another belief was that Red Russia was more dangerous as an ally than as an enemy, because it affected internal relations⁷.

On September 17, between 1.00 a.m. and 2.00 a.m., Soviet Border Guard units and regular forces of the Red Army crossed the Polish border. This happened before the ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Waław Grzybowski, who considered himself a realist and took into account the unfavourable scenario of Russia terminating the non-aggression pact under any excuse, received at 3.00 a.m. (1.00 a.m. Central European Time) a note justifying the Soviet aggression against Poland⁸.

The Soviets thus violated five previously signed international treaties. Ambassador Grzybowski yelled to Vladimir Potemkin, Molotov's deputy, that if the Soviet campaign proceeded, it would mean the fourth partition and destruction of Poland. Stalin expressed his unveiled hatred of Poland in a conversation with Georgiy Dmitrov: "The destruction of this country in the current situation means the existence of one less fascist state. What's wrong with extending the socialist system to new territories and new people as a result of Poland's defeat?"⁹.

warfare equipment. Ambassador Sharonov disappeared as a diplomatic contact for the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 11 September 1939. The risk of Soviet aggression was reported by the Polish military attaché in Moscow, Col. Stefan Brzeszczyński and by Border Protection Corps (KOP) depots. Finally, there were also reports on nearly 300 Soviet diversion and sabotage groups active on the Polish side of the border around transportation hubs, bridges, railway stations, and viaducts.

⁴ See M. Kornat, "Dyplomacja II Rzeczypospolitej wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Mołotow", *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 32/2000, no. 2, pp. 27-28.

⁵ He made a statement to this effect also during a conference at the Royal Castle on August 23. He saw it only logical, from the Soviet perspective, that Moscow will encourage the Germans to assault Poland. See M. Kornat, "Dyplomacja II Rzeczypospolitej...", p. 28; P. Wiczorkiewicz, *Historia polityczna Polski 1935-1945*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 58, 68 and 70.

⁶ See M. Kornat, "Dyplomacja II Rzeczypospolitej...", pp. 28-29.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ The Soviets struck with armed forces of two fronts: the Belarusian Front, with its Commander (Komandarm of the Second Rank) Mikhail Kovalyov, and the Ukrainian Front, with its Commander (Komandarm of the First Rank) Semyon Timoshenko, had over 460,000 soldiers, about 5,500 armoured combat vehicles and about 1,800 planes. Together with the forces of the second line, it was a million soldiers as well as border troops and the NKVD. Border Protection Corps and the Polish Army forces could not effectively counter this force. On September 17, 1939, in the eastern provinces we had about 300,000 troops and 20 KOP battalions scattered along the 1400-kilometre-long border with the Soviets and 4 battalions guarding the border with Lithuania. Only 100,000 Polish troops were able to effectively engage in combat.

⁹ See M. Kornat, "Dyplomacja II Rzeczypospolitej...", p. 27.

The Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, in the town of Kutu on September 17, received the first information about the Soviet aggression at 6 a.m. His first reaction was a decision to start the fight. As the reports were coming in, Marshal Śmigły realized that given the magnitude of Soviet aggression, Polish resistance was meaningless¹⁰. Polish Ambassador to Germany until the war broke out, Józef Lipski, invariably sober-minded, concluded matter-of-factly: “it is not a war, it is a catastrophe”.

On September 17, in Kolomyia, having received a report about the Soviet attack from the Border Protection Corps (KOP) depot in Czortków, General Waclaw Stachiewicz made a note: “Neither the commander-in-chief, nor any of us, HQ officers, had the slightest doubt as to the character of the Soviets entry into Poland. It was clear to us that they had deviously stabbed us the back [...]”¹¹.

In the afternoon that very day, Minister Józef Beck sent a wire by telephone to the Polish Consulate in Czerniowce, where he made an assessment of the Soviet invasion: “We filed a protest in Moscow. This action is a classic example of aggression”. In other instructions for diplomatic representatives he implied that in the future the Polish side would ask the Allies for an assessment of the Soviet aggression from the point of view of international law.

In the afternoon of September 17, again, Minister Beck spoke with Ambassador Gheorge Grigorcea and exonerated Romania¹² from the obligation to declare war on the Soviet Union after its aggression against Poland. In other words, Poland did not expect Romania to apply the *casus foederis*, even though Romania was bound by the alliance convention of 1921 (renewed a few times afterwards).

On the same day, in consultation with the President and the Commander-in-Chief, Minister Beck sent a memorandum to foreign missions and lodged a formal protest against the Soviet aggression. Polish ambassadors handed notes to the governments of France and England that day. While they did not clearly state that as a result of the USSR attack, Poland was at war with Moscow, from the point of view of international law Poland and the USSR were at war¹³.

At 4:30 p.m. on September 17 in Kutu, Edward Śmigły-Rydz, the Polish President, Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs were drafting the presidential address to the nation¹⁴. At about 10 p.m. Marshal Śmigły-Rydz issued a directive: “The Soviets have entered [...]. Do not fight the Soviets [...]”¹⁵. The Commander-in-Chief may have concluded that in this almost hopeless situation his main task was to save as many combatworthy units as possible.

¹⁰ PW vol. 10, *Sowiecka okupacja*, p. 8; W.J. Wysocki, *Cień Zawiszy. Ostatnie lata Marszałka Edwarda Śmigłego-Rydza*, 2nd ed., Komorów 1991, p. 23.

¹¹ W. Stachiewicz, *Pisma*, vol. 2, p. 196-197 – after: M. Jabłonowski, P. Stawecki, *Następca Komendanta Edward Śmigły Rydz*, Pułtusk-Warszawa 2013, p. 306.

¹² As of 6 September 1939 formally neutral with respect to the Polish-German conflict.

¹³ W.T. Drymmer, *W służbie Polsce*, Kraków 2014, p. 285.

¹⁴ “Citizens! When our army with unprecedented bravery has been struggling with the enemy’s aggression from the first day of the war to the present day, withstanding the enormous superiority of the entire German armed forces, **our eastern neighbour has invaded our lands**, violating existing agreements and time-honoured moral principles. This is not the first time in our history that we have been faced with a deluge flooding our country from the west and the east.”

¹⁵ M. Jabłonowski, P. Stawecki, *Następca Komendanta ...*, pp. 306-307.

Hence the pragmatic directive not to fight the eastern aggressor, issued in the evening, i.e. after the loss of the borderline and the first clashes with the Soviet troops¹⁶.

Given the communication problems in previous days between the Chief Commander's staff and individual units, especially large ones, Marshal Śmigły-Rydz's directive failed to reach many military formations or reached them clearly too late. Thus, the various allegations that the directive was the cause of the disarmament of Polish troops in the eastern part of the Republic of Poland is untrue, unjustified and irrational. Military commanders might have hesitated at night, in the morning and throughout September 17, but not after 10 p.m. that day, when the directive was dispatched¹⁷.

Marshal Śmigły-Rydz's directive had far more significance in the south than in the north-east Poland. Thanks to better communication, the contents of the directive reached more commanders and the order to withdraw to Hungary and Romania was easier to fulfil. The abandonment of resistance near the Romanian border was not generally well received by the officer corps. After all, there were units consistently engaging the eastern aggressor, such as KOP regiments/battalions of Rovne and Chortkiv, which resisted both the Soviets and Ukrainian forces on an equal footing. It was also hoped that "the shots fired by the retreating KOP units would be an armed demonstration and a token of protest resounding worldwide against the insidious aggression of the USSR"¹⁸.

On the first day, the political reactions to the news of the Soviet aggression were limited to a protest signed by Prime Minister Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski and a clear instruction of the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Beck, condemning the Soviet invasion as an "act of unprovoked aggression". The most significant document, however, was the address to the Polish nation of President of the Republic of Poland Ignacy Mościcki dispatched that day from Kutu. In the morning of September 18, the text of the President's address was rebroadcast from the Consulate in Czerniowce, i.e. from the territory of Romania), which the authorities in Bucharest saw as a violation of the neutrality of their country.

The highest authorities of the Republic of Poland, in spite of a number of statements, protests and the President's address, in the chaos of events on 17 September did not explicitly

¹⁶ Marshal E. Śmigły-Rydz's directive in its ideological form survived almost the entire war, although its author himself ceased to be the Commander-in-Chief in the autumn of 1939. It will be officially supported by the constitutional organs of the Polish state, including its armed forces in the country (Home Army, AK).

¹⁷ Only in few cases did local commanders (and high officials) forbid any engaging the Soviets. These infamous cases include: General Mieczysław Smorawiński, commander of the Second Corps District in Lublin, Colonel Jan Skorobohaty-Jakubowski, Brigadier General Leon Bilewicz, Mayor of Tarnopol Stanisław Widacki, who called for welcoming the Soviet army (although it did not protect him and others from being murdered in the Katyn forest). Gen. Władysław Langner, the commander of Lviv, did not share the full contents of the directive with anyone; he concealed from his officers the part about resisting Soviet attacks and attempts to disarm Polish units. He also dropped the plan of the Lviv forces to break through to the Hungarian border (plan of the staff of the 35th Infantry Division), although the chances for success of such an action were not slim at all.

¹⁸ Fighting with the Soviets were Border Protection Corps battalions Sarny, Głęboka, Krasne, Iwieniec, Kleck, and Baranowicze as well as the Polesie Brigade and sailors of the Pinsk Fleet. Casualties were another argument of real warfare: fights with the Soviets in September 1939 claimed the lives of 3,000-3,500 Polish troops and civilians (according to other data: 6,000-7,000 fallen and murdered), about 20,000 wounded and missing in action. Ukrainian bandits murdered about 1,400 Poles. About 240,000-250,000 soldiers of the Polish Army, Border Protection Corps and State Police officers were taken prisoner by the Soviet Union. The casualties on the Soviet side were 2,500-3,000 killed and 6,000-7,000 wounded. The Soviets lost 150 combat vehicles and up to 20 planes. They called those taken prisoner directly *voenno plennye*, or POWs. Only the propaganda of the Polish People's Republic commonly used the term "interned" with respect to those Polish troops. See also: *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej*, vol. 1: *Kampania Wrześniowa*, Part 4, Londyn 1986, pp. 525-526.

and directly declare a state of war between Poland and the Soviet Union, although the Soviet aggressor violated all bilateral agreements with Poland (primarily the 1932 non-aggression pact) and binding international agreements¹⁹.

Since formally the USSR did not declare war on Poland and the Polish side did not strive for an unambiguous legal clarification of the political situation, the Polish press release on September 19, 1939 confirmed the helplessness of the Polish authorities: "In view of the declaration of Soviet neutrality, the Polish army is not engaged in warfare against the Soviet army, while the Polish government protested against the border violation"²⁰.

Was there really no formal act of declaring war on the Soviet Union?! Do the official documents not testify to actual war? Are not invasion, assault, violence, and aggression synonymous with a state of war?! This, however, had far-reaching legal and propaganda consequences, and when the talks with Moscow took place later on, the Polish side, consenting to the interpretation of the opposite side, was in an untenable situation, which the Soviets expertly exploited.

After the ratification of the secret protocol of 23 September 1939, another anti-Polish collusion between Hitler and Stalin in the form of the "Friendship and Border Treaty" (its ratification took place on 25 September), on behalf of the government of the Republic of Poland, the Polish ambassadors presented the following note to the governments of the allied countries on 30 September: "Faced with the grave violations of the sacred right of the Polish State, perpetrated by the September 28 agreement between Germany and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics [rather: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], taking over territories of the Republic of Poland **to benefit both aggressor states, on behalf of the Polish Government I hereby file a most formal and solemn protest against this collusion of Berlin and Moscow in violation of all international commitments and the entire human morality. Poland shall never recognise this act of violence and, in the face of the rightfulness of its cause, shall not cease the struggle until the day its territories have been freed from the occupiers and its legal rights have been completely restored** [boldface WJW]. Through the heroic resistance of its army, through the patriotic sacrifice of the whole population, manifested in the heroic defence of its capital Warsaw, and of Lviv, Vilnius, Gdynia, Modlin, and so many other cities, the Polish nation clearly showed to the world its unbreakable will to live a free and independent life. Relying on the unanimous sympathies of countries that respect freedom and good faith in relations between peoples, and trusting in the constant support that guarantees its alliance agreements, Poland shall continue to fight using all means at its disposal, believing in its future and ultimate victory".

The equivalence of both aggressors-occupiers and the determination to fight against them is confirmed by earlier documents of the Polish authorities concerning the state of relations

¹⁹ The treaty was bilaterally extended by: – a non-aggression pact of July 1932; – prolongation protocol of May 1934 (prolonging the pact until 1945). Internationally multilateral outcomes of the treaty included: – the Briand-Kellogg Pact of August 1928; – so-called Moscow Protocol of February 1929 (on the regional entry into force of the Briand-Kellogg Pact); – the London declaration on the definition of an aggressor of July 1933; – shared membership in the League of Nations. See M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, "Negocjacje polsko-sowieckie o pakt o nieagresji w roku 1927 i w latach 1931-1932", *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 2012, no. 3, pp. 21-51; S. Zabiello, *O rząd i granice. Walka dyplomatyczna o sprawę polską w II wojnie światowej*, 4th ed., Warszawa 1986, passim; J. Łojek [Leopold Jerzewski], *Agresja 17 września 1939. Studium aspektów politycznych*, 3rd ed. Warszawa 1990, pp. 19-20.

²⁰ See M. Turlejska, *Prawy i fikcje. Wrzesień 1939 – grudzień 1941*, 2nd ed., Warszawa 1968, p. 121; W.J. Wysocki, *Cień Zawiszy...*, p. 23.

with Germany and the Soviets. At the same time, it was the Polish authorities that made it difficult to clearly define their relations with the Soviet Union. It concerns to the greatest extent the government of General Władysław Sikorski (who was also the Commander-in-Chief), whose cabinet, after longer discussions, accepted that the two countries are **in fact in a state of war**. However, public announcement of this conclusion turned out to be formally impossible, as it could cause unprecedented international complications, i.e. lack of acceptance of this state of affairs by the allies, which Minister Zaleski saw as exposing the government *to ridicule*. In fact, this meant that the Polish government renounced the state's sovereignty as of the autumn of 1939.

Soviet policy towards Poland violated the principles of diplomacy, international law and morality in international life. Unfortunately, after September 17, 1939, western countries adjusted to these Soviet principles.

Soviet aggression was not unexpected for Paris and London, which together with Washington decided to react so as to avoid pushing Moscow towards further rapprochement with the Third Reich. This meant that allied Poland was sacrificed over to improve relations with the Soviets. At the same time, European politicians, especially British ones, spared no favourable gesture towards Moscow, which were tokens of unfaithfulness from the Polish point of view and violated previous commitments. David Lloyd George, who stirs the worst memories among Poles, went as far as to extol "the liberating march of the Red Army" and denounced "imperialist Poland".

It should be remembered that France was bound by the 1935 mutual assistance agreement with the USSR and had included Moscow in its political calculations related to collective security policy. The French wanted at all costs to keep all conflicts away from the borders of France and the role of Poland was to be a transitional factor and a substitute ally after the loss of the Russian one. From today's perspective the military agreement binding Paris and Warsaw can be considered as worthless because of the French refusal to sign a political agreement. It allowed them to exert pressure on the Polish partner, if only to accept the Soviet "assistance" in case of a German attack, as well as to eliminate people loyal only to the Polish *raison d'état*, yet not too servile towards the French. The French, in turn, were ready to host only a Polish government which they hoped to be loyal and pliable²¹.

The German aggression against Poland was denounced by French politicians and media, who reacted differently to the Soviet aggression, though it was agreed that diplomatic relations with Moscow should not be severed. As Daladier wrote: "We must not close any of the routes, even circular ones, left by Moscow as open, and must not relinquish any of the existing contacts, so long as the USSR takes its place in the opposite camp of its own accord"²². The Polish side demanded a categorical protest of France against the USSR after 17 September, but Paris did not intend to do so²³.

In 1939, allied France not only failed to fulfil its obligations towards Poland but hoped to play a role in international relations in Central Europe similar to that after the first World

²¹ M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, *W cieniu wielkiej polityki – Rosa Bailly a stosunki francusko-polskie w latach 1916-1945*, (MS in the author's possession), chart 6-9.

²² See H. Batowski, *Zachód wobec granic Polski 1920-1940. Niektóre fakty mniej znane*, Łódź 1995, p. 163 (including Daladier's wire to the French Embassy in Moscow of 16 September 1939).

²³ It was argued that there was no relevant provision in the Polish-French military convention and that in case of Soviet aggression against Poland, France will automatically be in a state of war with Moscow.

War²⁴. The Polish-French alliance lost its significance in September 1939, and ceased to operate and was never reactivated after the defeat of France. The Polish government had a similar position as the Free French and the French National Liberation Committee led by Gen. Charles de Gaulle on German matters yet differed significantly as to the assessment of and contacts with the Soviets²⁵. New France applied a moderate attitude to the lawlessness taking place at Yalta and did not take any position on Poland's eastern border.

In a memorandum of Poland's ambassador to the United Kingdom Edward Raczyński, concerning the talks held in London on 12 October 1939 by Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski with Lord Halifax and Chamberlain, we read e.g.: "For the time being, any activity against Soviet Russia is to be avoided since Russia has not yet joined the German camp [sic!] and there is a chance **Russia will remain neutral**" [boldface WJW]. Zaleski was told [by the British leaders] that Poles must stand in line with the Allies and must not move forward, aligning their policy with the objective of the Allies, i.e. the defeat of Germany [...] Zaleski was told by British statesmen in no ambiguous terms that under no circumstances can Poland count on the United Kingdom's declaration of war with Soviet Russia so that Poland might regain the areas taken over by the Soviet troops on strategic grounds to safeguard this section of the border on the German side. These areas **may be** [boldface WJW] returned to Poland in the course of negotiations with Soviet Russia during next year's peace conference. Zaleski had weak arguments to counter this position [...]"²⁶.

During his visit to London on November 14-20, 1939, Prime Minister Sikorski held a number of talks. In a memorandum of Ambassador Raczyński on these talks we can read as follows: "Sikorski was mainly interested in finding out from Lord Halifax whether his statement in the House of Lords on 26 October to the effect that the Russian invasion of Poland was only a forward shift of the border to the Curzon Line represents the official position of the British Government. The Polish Government has already expressed its reservations against Halifax's allegation in a letter addressed to him by Zaleski. However, the explanations that Sikorski received in London satisfied him completely. [...] The British side made patently clear to the Poles that no one in London was going to exacerbate British-Soviet relations because of Poland"²⁷.

The approach of London and ... Paris to Moscow might have changed after the Soviet aggression in Finland²⁸; this time the Allies' reaction was far more resolute. Gen. Sikorski wanted to make use of it and agreed to the idea of using Polish troops (Independent Highland

²⁴ M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, *W cieniu...*, chart 10.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, chart 12.

²⁶ *Polska w polityce międzynarodowej (1939-1945). Zbiór dokumentów 1939*, Warszawa 1989, p. 593-594.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 617-618. Gen. Sikorski received via Col. Jan Kowalewski, an intelligence officer and a legendary breaker of the Bolshevik codes in 1920, "Soviet theses" concerning Moscow's approach to the Polish question. Namely, in return for the recognition of its taking over the eastern territories of the Polish Republic, Moscow would adopt a *désintéressement* towards ethnographic Poland. Was it the Soviet agenda for Poland?! What was Sikorski's reply!?

It seems that the reply was against the Polish *raison d'état*. Sikorski was aware of the problems connected with the issue of restitution of the Polish state's eastern territories. He instructed the PAT correspondent in London, Stefan Litauer, who was suspected of having contacts with the NKVD, to prepare a study on the possibility of a compromise with Moscow.

²⁸ The question remains why the League of Nations did not recognise the Soviet aggression against Poland as a crime yet did so by excluding the USSR after its aggression against Finland in November 1939.

Brigade of Col./Gen. Zygmunt Szyszko-Bohusz) as part of the British and French expedition forces. Sikorski saw it as a chance to draw the Allies into an “actual war” with Russia, a “most desirable” development from the Polish perspective. In official statements condemning the Soviet assault of Finland, Gen. Sikorski observed that coming to the aid of the Germans and stabbing us in the back at an agreed moment, Russia is **at a state of war with us** as much as the Germans are²⁹.

The declarations about Polish-Soviet relations made at the time by the Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief were very clear and unambiguous. Later, however, they were no longer that unambiguous³⁰.

This is borne out by a letter by Juliusz Łukasiewicz, whom Sikorski revoked as Polish ambassador to France, to Polish President Władysław Raczkiewicz of July 1940. We read there: “Acting without the consent of the President of the Republic of Poland and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. A. Zaleski, Prime Minister Sikorski went by plane to London on June 19 [1940] and filed on his own account a memorandum to the British government, where he proposed the creation on the Soviet side of a 30,000-strong Polish army out of the Polish population from Poland’s territories occupied by the Red Army.

Formally and practically, Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Gen. Sikorski agreed in this way to **negotiate with the enemy with which Poland was in a state of war and which, occupying nearly half of its territory** [boldface WJW], persecutes our compatriots as atrociously as the Germans. [...] **No Pole, let alone the Commander-in-Chief and the Prime Minister of the Government in Exile, should make any representation and provide any documents to any government testifying to the willingness to negotiate with any of the enemies** [...]”³¹[boldface WJW].

This was the reaction and evaluation of the situation by Poles concerned about Poland’s independence, maintaining the Polish *raison d’état*. In Poland, however, also in the circles of historians, lawyers, politicians, etc., there were growing doubts resulting from their inability to think independently. Under communist Poland, the oft-repeated version of Soviet historiography got firmly established in the enslaved minds. It perpetuated the propaganda of an absence of a state of war and “brotherly” Polish-Soviet relations. Facts contradict the above assertion and the captive mind seems a comfortable if servile Polish attitude towards the East and the West. Perhaps this has already become a Polish complex!?

Were We at the State of War with the Soviets?

Summary

At the time of the agreement with the German Third Reich on Soviet aggression on Poland on September 17, 1939, the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Moscow was given a diplomatic note declaring that in the face of the “break-up of the Polish state”, the USSR

²⁹ Andrzej Sowa, *Kronika 1939 r.*, Warszawa 2000, unnumbered page [17 IX].

³⁰ During the talks between Mayski and Sikorski, the Soviet diplomats observed that since there was no formal state of war, there is no question of occupation of the eastern territories of the Republic of Poland and their future should be decided upon by a plebiscite of the local population after the war. This was blatant cynicism on the part of the Soviets as this already took place after the ethnic cleansing (deportations), and given the terror introduced by the NKVD and other Soviet units, a plebiscite was impossible and the proposed demand was blatantly lawless.

³¹ See *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 84, Paris 1988, pp. 157-158.

“is defending the Belarusian and Ukrainian population” in eastern Poland. This deceptive version was naively accepted by Poland’s Western Allies, who pretended that Moscow was not hostile against Poland. They explained that they did not want to enhance, but rather to overthrow the German-Soviet alliance. The highest authorities of the Republic of Poland were charged with inconsistency and did not declare a state of war between Poland and the USSR as of September 17, 1939. This was a game of slander and the author documented the will of the parties to bring such charges. In the period of the Polish People’s Republic, the myth of so-called justified Soviet intervention in 1939 was perpetuated. Today, too, this issue remains not entirely clear for many politicians, historians and journalists. This text analyses the formation of this myth, showing its political ground for various propaganda and proclamations of Western states, and ambiguous attitudes of Polish politicians, especially focused on the very naïve and politically dependent General Sikorski, the Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister, with greater responsibility than the ruling party of the Second Polish Republic for the false opinions about Polish-Soviet relations in September 1939.

Keywords: September 1939, Soviet aggression on Poland, diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic, Second World War, President Ignacy Mościcki, Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, Minister Józef Beck

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