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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Kornat, Marek (ed.) with the cooperation of Piotr Długołęcki, Maria Konopka-Wichrowska, Marta Przyłuska. *Polish Foreign Policy and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1938 as Reflected in Polish Diplomatic Documents. A Discussion of Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1938* (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2007); pp. 984, including preface, list of documents, subject and name indexes. ISBN 978-83-89607-18-8.

The volume of Polish diplomatic documents for 1938, edited by Polish historian Marek Kornat, an expert on Polish diplomacy of the interwar period,[1] illustrates Polish foreign policy during that year, dominated by the Czechoslovak crisis. The third volume published in this series,[2] contains 460 documents, most of them published earlier in a collection of Polish documents on Munich (1985),[3] and also scattered in various other publications. As in the previous volumes, the editor provides a brief note on Polish foreign policy during the given year; a brief discussion of chief Polish works on Polish foreign policy in 1938 and previous Polish

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[1] Marek Kornat's most recent book is on the Polish policy of balancing between East and West (Germany and the USSR): *Polityka Równowagi 1934-1939. Polska Między Wschodem a Zachodem* [*The Policy of Balance, 1934-1939. Poland Between East and West*] (Kraków, 2007).

[2] The two previous volumes cover the year 1939 for January-August and September-December 1939, see *Polskie Dokumenty Dypomatyczne. 1939. Styczeń-Sierpień* [*Polish Diplomatic Documents. Juanuary-August 1939*] edited by Stanisław Żerko with the cooperation of Piotr Długołęcki, Warsaw, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (PISM), (Warsaw, 2005); Anna M. Cienciala review, *Kwartalnik Historyczny,* v. CXV, (Warsaw, 2008), no. 2, pp. 137-146; Richard Raack, *Polish Review*, v, LII:4, 2007, pp. 515-529 and Cienciała letter to Editor, *Polish Review*, v. LIII: 2, 2008, pp. 271-273. *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1939. Wrzesień–Grudzień* [*Polish Diplomatic Documents September-December 1939*] edited by Wojciech Rojek with the cooperation of Piotr Długołęcki, Maria Konopka-Wichrowska and Marta Przyłuska, (PISM,Warsaw, 2007). The abbreviation for the volume under review is *PDD 1938.*

[3] Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, eds., *Monachium 1938. Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne* [*Munich 1938. Polish Diplomatic Documents*] (Warsaw, 1985).

documentary publications; information on document selection and editing criteria; on archival information, including the losses suffered by the Polish Foreign Ministry archives in World War II; a list of publications frequently referred to and abbreviations for them, also listed on the bookmark attached to the volume. As in the previous volumes, Kornat provides footnotes and information on the archival source or previous publication at the end of each document. The subject index allows the reader to follow Polish policy with regard to each country covered. The name index gives the rank or function — if known — held by each person at the time.

Any mention of interwar Polish foreign policy is usually accompanied by condemnation of Poland's cooperation with Hitler in the Czechoslovak crisis that ended with the Munich Conference of September 29 1938, that is, the assent of the British and French prime ministers, Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, as well as Hitler's ally, Benito Mussolini, to the German annexation of the Czech Sudetenland. This mountainous and highly industrialized region of Bohemia had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until its collapse in October-November 1918; it was awarded by the victorious western powers to Czechoslovakia, against the wishes of its German-speaking majority, because it was seen as economically vital for the country; the Czechs also viewed its mountain ranges as vital for defense. Another important factor was that Germany had raised no claims to the region, but Hitler aimed to annex it on the pretext of uniting all Germans with the Fatherland; in fact, however, he saw Czechoslovakia as a threat to Germany because of its alliances with France (1924) and the USSR (1935), the latter complementing the Franco-Soviet alliance signed that year. He secretly financed and directed the local, Nazi-style Sudeten German Party established in 1935 and led by a local Nazi, Konrad Henlein. After mounting German pressure and threats, accompanied by Anglo-French diplomatic pressure for a peaceful solution, Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš accepted the Munich agreement at noon September 30, 1938.[4] This was followed twelve hours later by a Polish ultimatum to Prague demanding the cession of two counties of the former Habsburg Duchy of Cieszyn (Czech, Těšín, German, Teschen) west of the Olza river, known to Poles as "Zaolzie." These were the western part of Cieszyn county, including the western part of the town of Cieszyn, and the county of Frysztat (Czech, Fryštat). They had been claimed by Poland in 1918, but were awarded to Czechoslovakia by the western powers in July 1920 as the Red Army was approaching Warsaw, an award bitterly resented by the Poles. The Czechoslovak government accepted the ultimatum and Polish

[4] For the best account of Hitler's policy in the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938, see the pre-eminent American historian of Nazi foreign policy, Gerhard L.Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II 1937-1939* (Chicago, London, 1980, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1990), or same, *Hitler's Policy: The Road to World War II, 1933-1939* (New York, 2005).

troops entered the region on October 2, 1938. (The Cieszyn problem will be discussed later in this paper.)

The Polish policy of the time, identified with Józef Beck (1894-1944, foreign minister 1932-1939) is still generally condemned, or at least distorted. Winston Churchill wrote: "Now, in 1938, over a question as minor as Teschen... we see them hurrying, while the might of Germany glowered up against them, to grasp their share of the pillage and ruin of Czechoslovakia."[5] Historians writing in the USSR, as well as in communist-ruled Poland and other communist countries, condemned Beck for playing a major part in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia — thus helping to justify the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23 1939 and its consequences for Poland.[6] In a recent British reference work Beck is charged with "helping the Germans to expand eastwards through Czechoslovakia and in due course defeat the Soviet Union." Beck, according to the author, planned for Poland to remain neutral if Germany turned against the western powers, but assumed they would win.[7] Given the fact that a massed German attack on the USSR was bound to go not through Czechoslovakia but through Poland — whose leaders refused even to discuss such a possibility with Berlin because it would mean German domination of Poland — and that Poland, as an ally of France, could not stand aside in a European war, Webb's description of Beck's policy shows the author relied on negative stereotypes, still current in western historical literature on the crisis of 1938, despite the availability of scholarly studies.[8]

The key evidence often cited by Polish historians for Polish-German cooperation against Czechoslovakia is the Polish record of Józef Beck's conversations with Marshal Hermann Göring during the latter's visit in Warsaw on February 23, 1938, in particular the second conversation when they spoke alone: (Beck had a good knowledge of German; as always on such occasions, he dictated the note to Józef Lipski, ambassador in Berlin.)

[5] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Vol. I., The Gathering Storm* (Boston and London, 1948, reprint 1983), p. 323.

[6] Cienciala, "Marxism and History: Recent Polish and Soviet Interpretations of Polish Foreign Policy in the Era of Appeasement. An Evaluation," *East European Quarterly*, v. VI, no. 1, 1972, pp. 97-11.

[7] Adrian Webb, *The Routledge Companion to Central and Eastern Europe since 1919*, (London, 2008), p.11.

[8] Webb apparently did not consult this reviewer's book, also published by Routledge (then Routledge and Kegan Paul), *Poland and the Western Powers in 1938-1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe*, (London, Toronto, 1968). Three chapters of the book, based mainly on Polish archival documents, also on published documents available at the time, deal with Polish policy in the Czechoslovak crisis. See also same, "The Munich Crisis of 1938: Plans and Strategy in Warsaw in the Context of the Western Appeasement of Germany," in Igor Lukes and Erik Goldstein, eds., *The Munich Crisis, 1938. Prelude to World War II*, (London, Portland, OR, 1999), pp. 48-81.

Having outlined recent German policy on Austria in the first conversation — at which both Lipski and the German Ambassador to Poland, Hans Adolf von Moltke, were present — in the second conversation Göring passed on to Czechoslovakia and said Polish interests would be taken into account. Beck stated that, unlike Austria, where Poland had only economic interests, it was seriously interested in the Czech problem, that is, in a certain region of the country and in the method of solving the problem. To this Göring replied that Polish interests in "Märisch-Ostrau" (Moravská Ostrava, of which Zaolzie was the eastern part) would not be infringed. After this exchange, the two speakers briefly discussed means of improving Polish-German relations: Beck suggested extending the 1934 agreement[9] and an adequate solution to the Danzig problem.[10] In fact, one of the goals of Polish foreign policy during the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938 was to obtain German

[9] For the Polish text of the Polish-German Declaration of Non-Aggression, which recognized the existing agreements of each country and did not include any secret protocols, see: Tadeusz Jędruszczak and Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa eds., *Dokumenty z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1918-1939* [*Documents from the History of Polish International Politics*] v. II, (Warsaw, 1996), doc. 8; English translation, *The Polish White Book. Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933-1939,* (London, New York, 1940), doc. 10; A French version of this documentary collection also appeared in Paris, 1940. Piłsudski and Beck balanced the Polish-German Declaration of Non-Aggression, valid for ten years, by a ten-year extension of the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty of 1932. For a discussion of the interpretations of the Polish-German agreement see Cienciala, "The Significance of the Declaration of Non-Aggression of January 24, 1934 in Polish-German and International Relations," *East European Quarterly,* vol. I, no. 1, 1967, pp. 1-30.

[10] Göring-Beck conversation, Warsaw, Feb. 23, 1938, *PDD 1938,* doc. 37; English translation in: Wacław Jędrzejewicz, ed., *Diplomat in Berlin. Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland* (New York and London, 1968), doc. 80. The Freie Stadt Danzig (Free City of Danzig, Polish: Wolne Miasto Gdańsk), the majority of whose population was German-speaking, was established with Polish economic and cultural rights by the Versailles Treaty (articles 100-108), as a compromise between German ethnic and Polish economic claims. Despite the German signature of the Versailles Treaty on June 28 1919, this settlement, like that of Pomorze (Polish Pomerania) — called the "Polish Corridor" by the Germans because it separated East Prussia from Germany — as well as the rest of the Polish-German frontier, were never officially recognized by any German government. The Polish-German agreement of 1934 provisionally removed Danzig and the Polish Corridor from the British and German agenda of changes to be made in the Versailles Treaty in favor of Germany, see Cienciala, "German Propaganda for the Revision of the Polish-German Frontier in Danzig and the Corridor; Its Effects on British Opinion and the British Foreign Policy-Making Elite in the Years 1919-1933," *Antemurale*, vol. 20, (Rome, 1976), pp. 77-129.

confirmation of Polish rights in Danzig, or a Polish-German agreement on Danzig, and public German recognition of the Polish-German frontier. The extension of the 1934 agreement, sought by Beck in 1938, was a means to this end.

Returning to Beck's statements to Göring on Polish interests in Czechoslovakia, one may ask if they really prove that he emphasized Polish readiness to participate in the aggression then being planned by Hitler against that country?[11] In fact, Beck only stated Polish interests on the assumption that Hitler would succeed in annexing the Sudetenland. Furthermore, the issue must be viewed within a broader framework, that is, Polish foreign policy at this time should be examined in three different contexts: (1) what the Polish Foreign Minister knew of the key to resolving the Czechoslovak crisis: British policy toward East Central Europe, and thus French policy which was dependent on Britain, and the conclusions he drew from the above. (2) The basic principles and aims of Polish foreign policy; and (3) Polish-Czechoslovak relations before 1938.

Regarding the first point, we should note that the German government had informed Beck of the suggestions made to Hitler by Lord Halifax in mid- November 1937. (Halifax, a former Viceroy of India, was then Lord President of the Council; he became Foreign Secretary in February 1938.) The government of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, whose goal of preserving peace by appeasing Hitler was fully shared by Halifax, sought a general settlement with Germany and the latter's return to the League of Nations. Halifax visited Hitler at his "eagle's nest" in Berchtesgaden on November 19, 1937; he told the Führer that Britain would not oppose changes in Eastern Europe such as Danzig, Austria, and the Sudetenland, provided they were made peacefully. The Germans duly informed the Polish government of the Halifax suggestions, as well as of Hitler's statements on desiring peaceful solutions for Austria and the Sudeten Germans — adding that the Führer had made no comment on Danzig.[12] Its mention, however, was enough to worry the Poles who knew the British government had always favored its return to Germany.

[11] Stefania Stanislawska, ed., *Sprawa polska w czasie drugiej wojny światowej* [*The Polish Question in World War II*], (Warsaw, 1965), Introductory Chapter, 1934-1939, doc. 5, p. 6, note 2.

[12] See Halifax report in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 2nd series, v.19, (London, 1982), doc. 336, also, The Earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax. The Life of Lord Halifax*, (London, 1965), pp. 368-372, including a photograph of Halifax with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, misdated as 1938. For German information to the Poles on the Halifax proposals and Hitler's statements, see the report by Stefan Lubomirski, Counselor at the Polish Embassy, Berlin, on his conversation with the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernst von Weizsäcker, December 2, 1937, Landau and Tomaszewski, *Monachium 1938,* doc. 1.

Beck did not know — nor did other European statesmen of the time — what Hitler told his closest collaborators two weeks before he saw Halifax: that he would annex Austria and destroy Czechoslovakia at the first opportunity; he also foresaw war with France and Britain. Here it is worth noting that Hitler did not see Poland as an ally. On the contrary, he thought that if Germany suffered setbacks, a Polish attack against East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia must be taken into account.[13] After his conversation with Halifax, however, the Führer knew that if he managed to implement his goals regarding Austria and Czechoslovakia by "peaceful means" he would not risk war with France and Britain. The Polish foreign minister knew this too and conducted Polish policy accordingly.

Hitler moved quickly. He absorbed Austria in mid-March 1938 and then instructed the Sudeten German leader, Konrad Henlein, to gradually increase his demands from self-government to changes in Czechoslovak foreign policy.[14] The last demands were clearly unacceptable to Prague for they meant giving up its alliances with France and the USSR. The aim of Nazi strategy was to show that a compromise solution of the Sudeten German problem was impossible.[15]

Beck made one aspect of Polish foreign policy clear on January 12 1938, by stating before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Sejm (lower house of parliament) that any Czechoslovak decision favoring one of its minorities would be considered an unfriendly act if not applied to the Polish minority. He confirmed this stand on March 21in an interview with Ward Price of the popular English paper, *The Daily Mail.* Eight days later, the Polish deputy from Zaolzie to the Czechoslovak parliament, L. Wolf, demanded Polish autonomy for the region. Furthermore, the "Union of Poles in Czechoslovakia" began to cooperate with Henlein's Sudeten German Party.[16]

The Polish government's aims were, however, broader than that. Beck — the chief formulator of foreign policy — did not write memoranda, but his views were recorded in instructions to Polish diplomatic posts and especially — sometimes orally — to Poland's ambassadors in Berlin, London, and Paris. They were also reflected in letters to Polish diplomats written by his closest collaborators, especially the Polish Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Jan Szembek, who made notes of the Minister's

[13] Hossbach Memorandum, Nov. 5, 1937, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918* (henceforth: *DGFP*) ser. D, I, (London, Washington D.C., 1949) doc. 10. Hitler meant German Pomerania (Pommern) and German western Silesia (Schlesien).

[14] For Hitler's instructions to Henlein, see *DGPF*, D, II (London and Washington, 1950), doc. 133.

[15] For a detailed account of Hitler's policy, see Gerhard L. Weinberg's books listed in note 4 above.

[16] Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers, pp. 60-61.

conversations with Polish and foreign diplomats as well as his own. Beck's regional goals in case of the expected collapse of Czechoslovakia are outlined in Szembek's letter of April 12, 1938 to his close friend, Henryk Dębicki, the Polish minister in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Szembek wrote "The minister [Beck] thinks that the Czech matter will be resolved in the course of the year and wants to have the ground so prepared as to avoid any surprise and achieve the maximum advantage. *There is no crystallized plan and no concept on our side as yet. We just believe that German domination of all of Czechoslovakia, even in the form of its becoming dependent on the Reich, along with obtaining extensive autonomy for the German part, would be the worst solution for us.* It does not seem, however, that this is the (Sudeten German) party's plan, for it mainly wants the annexation of the Sudeten part. This would suit our desiderata, but it must take place simultaneously with the separation of Slovakia from the Czech lands, the return of Silesia (Zaolzie) and the achievement of a common (Polish) frontier with Hungary in Subcarpathian Ruthenia." Szembek also stated that (Polish) policy excluded any idea of union with Slovakia, but considered its union with Hungary. Another Polish aim was to bring about cooperation between Romania and Hungary, but Szembek noted the difficulty of bringing this to fruition. He enlarged on these ideas in the instructions he gave six days later to Roger Raczyński (younger brother of the Polish ambassador in London, Edward Raczyński), the first Polish minister with ambassadorial rank to Poland's ally, Romania. Szembek said he thought the western powers would not defend Czechoslovakia, so in the future European lineup Poland would have to consolidate its influence in the region between Russia and Germany. A very important element in this future system, he said, was the achievement of an understanding between Romania and Hungary and this would be one of the ambassador's main tasks in Bucharest.[17]

It is clear from the above that Polish policy aimed at preventing German domination of all of Czechoslovakia, which might follow the annexation of the Sudetenland. Germany already borderd on Poland in the west and in the north (East Prussia), therefore such domination would mean a German outflanking of Poland in the south. The plan outlined by Szembek was developed by Beck and pursued by Polish diplomacy throughout the Czechoslovak crisis. At the same time, however, Beck had to keep in mind

[17] Szembek to Henryk Dębicki, April 12, 1938, *PDD 1938*, doc. 86; translation by Cienciala and italics added by same. For Szembek's note of April 18, 1938 on his instructions to Ambassador Roger Raczyński, see Józef Zarański, ed., *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka* [*The Diary and Portfolio of Jan Szembek*] *(1935-1945). TOM IV, 1938-1939* (The Diary and Files of Jan Szembek, vo.IV, 1938-1939) (London, 1972), p.133; the volume contains Szembek's notes and Polish diplomatic documents for 1938-1939. Romania had a large Hungarian population in Transylvania, previously part of Hungary. This was a constant irritant in relations between the two countries.

the possibility that if Hitler attacked Czechoslovakia, and the latter resisted, its ally France — also the ally of Poland — was committed to give Prague military aid against Germany. If this occurred, there would be war between France and Germany, and the Franco-Polish alliance would come into play.

Piłsudski and Beck aimed to secure British support for Poland in a European war. That is why Beck kept on reminding the British – whose policy decisions had to be accepted by the French — about his statement to Prime Minister Chamberlain — during his visit to London for the coronation of George VI in 1937 — namely, that Poland was the only country which could give help on land to countries that were very close to Great Britain in Europe (France, Belgium and Holland). He reminded British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden of this statement on January 26 1938 at the League of Nations Meeting in Geneva. This was his reply to Eden's statement at the outset of the conversation that England wished to preserve the League of Nations for its contacts with Europe — because London did not have, and could not have any other form of political cooperation outside of France, Belgium and Holland. Beck also tried to secure closer relations with London by suggesting Britain could help supply Poland with heavy anti-aircraft artillery. He asked, since France could not supply it, whether Poland could count on British cooperation in this matter. Eden said this was reasonable and his government would study the question. Finally, it should be noted that Beck told Eden he had obtained the necessary assurances on Danzig during his visit in Berlin, without infringing the existing treaties or the League of Nations procedure.[18] Hitler had, indeed, two weeks earlier repeated to Beck his declaration of November 5, 1937, that neither Polish rights in Danzig nor the statute of the Free City would be infringed in any way.[19] The Führer's unspoken aim was, of course, to reassure Beck that he would keep the Danzig Nazis under control — provided Poland did not oppose German claims to the Sudetenland.

The second context in which Polish diplomacy should be viewed in 1938 is that of its basic principles. Formulated by Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935, military leader, head of state 1918-21, seized power May 1926) and espoused by Beck, they can be summarized in four points: (1) Balance

[18] Note on the conversation between the Foreign Ministers of Poland and Great Britain on the international situation, Geneva, Jan. 26, 1938, *PDD 1938*, doc. 14. There was much talk at this time of reforming the League of Nations because, in the Free City of Danzig, the ruling Nazis were violating the constitution, guaranteed by the League, which was also to protect the FCD. In fact, implementation of the guarantee and the city's protection depended on Britain and France, both which wanted to be freed from these obligations, preferably by a Polish-German agreement.

[19] Hitler-Beck conversation in the presence of German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath and Ambassador Józef Lipski, Berlin January 14, 1938. *PDD 1938*, doc. 10; see also *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc.77.

between Germany and the USSR, but alliance with neither since in either case Poland was bound to lose its independence; (2) for the same reason, the Poles could not accept any German or Soviet guarantees, or help, in case of war (3) Poland must protect its rights in the Free City of Danzig and the inviolability of the Polish-German frontier (both of which all British governments considered as subject to change in Germany's favor); (4) the alliance with France must be maintained and Poland could not be on Germany's side in a European war. The first two points followed naturally from past Polish experience with the two partitioning powers and the fact that their successors, post-World War One Germany and the USSR, both had territorial demands on Poland the fulfillment of which would mean the loss of Polish independence. The path to achieving the third point led to the improvement of Polish-German relations in the declaration of 1934, which shelved German claims and was balanced by the extension of the Polish-Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression of 1932. Beck tried to secure an agreement with Germany on Danzig and German recognition of the Polish-German frontier in mid-September 1938 (discussed toward the end of this review). The fourth point accorded with the view not only of Polish policy makers, but also of the army and the vast majority of Polish opinion.

Józef Beck wrote in his memoirs — of which the second, most important part on the coming of the war, was dictated in the first months of his internment in Romania in fall 1939 —that he had presented his views on the Czechoslovak question at two of the customary conferences held at the royal castle, Warsaw. He gives no dates for these conferences — held by Poland's decision makers to discuss major problems — but one may assume they took place in the summer of 1938. He presented his hypotheses as follows: "(1) the Czechs will not fight; (2) the western states are neither morally nor materially prepared to intervene to their advantage." As for Soviet Russia, he perceived its actions as having a demonstrative character, although the over-flight of Romania by Soviet planes proceeding to Czechoslovakia was an added irritant. He added that Moscow had already begun to hint at the need for (troop) transit through south-eastern Poland (former East Galicia) if it was to help the Czechs. He noted, however, that there was no sign of military preparation for such action while the purge of high ranking officers left the Red Army in a very bad state. Following these statements, Beck wrote: "In presenting my opinions [to the conference members] I always categorically added that, first, we cannot and should not be the first to begin any kind of action against the Czechs, and two, that if my hypotheses proved to be wrong, it would be necessary to change Polish policy within twenty-four hours because, in case of a real European war with the Germans, we cannot be, even indirectly, on the German side."[20]

[20] For the original Polish text, see *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 1926-1932* [*Polish International Politics in the Years 1926-1932*]* Na Podstawie Tekstów min. Józefa Becka Opracowała Anna M. Cienciała (Polish Foreign

Beck's readiness to change policy at a moment's notice in case of a European war is confirmed in the unpublished memoirs of the head of Beck's Cabinet office, Michał Łubieński. He writes that when news of the Munich decision on the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany arrived in Warsaw (morning of September 30), he discussed with Beck whether Poland should mobilize in defense of Czechoslovakia. Beck also discussed this possibility with the Polish chief of the General Staff (General Wacław Stachiewicz). But, Łubieński wrote, this was possible only if the Czechs decided to fight and all information pointed to the conclusion that they would break down completely.[21] When Czech acceptance of the Munich verdict was known, however (President Beneš accepted it at noon, September 30), the Polish government decided to issue an ultimatum to Prague demanding the cession of Zaolzie.

There were several reasons for this drastic step, which has tarnished Poland's reputation, and particularly that of Foreign Minister Józef Beck, ever since. To begin with, Polish ambassadors in London and Paris had stated repeatedly that whatever rights the Czechoslovak government granted to one of its minorities must also be granted to the Polish minority.

Policy in the Years 1926-1932* (typo, should be 1939) Edited by Anna M. Cienciala, based on the texts of Minister Józef Beck) (Paris, 1990), pp. 217-219, translation and italics by Cienciala; another Polish edition was published as: Józef Beck, *Ostatni raport* [*Final Report*] (Warsaw, 1987), without the permission of the owner of the texts, the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America, New York. For the French translation, see Colonel Joseph Beck, *Dernier Rapport. Politique Polonaise 1926-1939,* Jadwiga Beck, Michel (Michał)comte Łubieński, Ladislas (Władysław) Pobóg-Malinowski, colonel Thadée (Tadeusz) Schaetzel, eds., (Neuchatel, Paris, 1951), pp. 162-163; English translation, Józef Beck, *Final Report,* (New York, 1957), pp. 157-158. This book contains rare photographs of Beck supplied by his widow, Jadwiga, who was very angry at the publisher, Robert Speller & Sons, for eliminating the footnotes and reducing to skeletal size the appendices as contained in the French version. Indeed, the rump appendices, titled "Editor's Notes," do not even give the editor's name, if there was one. Correspondence regarding the English edition is in the archives of the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America, New York. Soviet hints on the need for Red Army transit through south-eastern Poland were not made to the Polish government; the Soviet planes mentioned by Beck were purchased by the Czechoslovak government.

[21] See Michał Łubieński, "Refleksje i reminiscensje" ["Reflections and Reminiscences"] typescript in the Jan Weinstein collection, Józef Piłsudski Institute of America, New York, p. 67, copy in possession of A.M. Cienciala. On the Polish military force on the border with Zaolzie and a General Staff discussion of using its possible use to support Czechoslovakia, see Marian Zgórniak, *Sytuacja Europy w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1938 r.* [*The European Military Situation During the Political Crisis of 1938*] (Warsaw, 1979), p. 294, n. 343.

Therefore, the British and French governments were informed of this demand — accepted by the Czechoslovak government in May — but wanted to resolve the Sudetenland issue first. In late May, when Czechoslovak mobilization to counter an alleged German troop concentration on the frontier infuriated Hitler and worsened the crisis, French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet requested that Poland join London and Paris in their appeals to Hitler not to use force. Beck rejected this idea on the grounds that it was an obligation going beyond the Franco-Polish alliance; in reality, he did not want to jeopardize Polish-German relations by joining the Franco-British warnings to Berlin. He suggested a discussion of the new developments, but Bonnet did not take it up. The British, for their part, criticized the tone of the Polish press toward Czechoslovakia and later warned Poland against the use of force.[22] Indeed, the Polish press waged a relentless campaign for the cession of Zaolzie to Poland.

As mentioned earlier, a concurrent Polish aim was to establish a common Polish-Hungarian frontier in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was claimed by Hungary. Aside from resenting the Czechoslovak government's permission to many Ukrainian exiles from former East Galicia to reside and agitate thence against Poland, Beck wanted the frontier with Hungary to prevent German domination of all of Czechoslovakia and serve as the base for a new East European bloc. At the Munich Conference, however, both Chamberlain and Daladier opposed the settlement of Polish and Hungarian demands, which were to be considered again in three months' time. Hitler obtained French and British agreement for the Czech evacuation of the Sudetenland between October 1 and 10, while he accepted an international commission to delineate plebiscite areas. France and Britain committed themselves to guarantee the rest of Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression, provided Germany and Italy participated. Thus, the Munich conference decisions ignored long-standing Polish and Hungarian demands and did not guarantee the existence of Czechoslovakia.

Was the Polish ultimatum an angry response to the dismissal of Poland's demands in a question involving its national interests? This was certainly the case, but only partly so. Paweł Starzeński, Beck's Private Secretary at the time, wrote in his memoirs that Beck's principle was *Nic o nas bez nas* ["Nothing about us without us."] It was known, Starzeński

[22] For Beck's instructions of May 24, 1938 to Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, and his reports on his conversations with Bonnet at this time, see *PDD 1938*, docs. 118,123, 127, 128; for the English translation, see: Wacław Jędrzejewicz, ed., *Diplomat in Paris 1935-1939. Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz Ambassador of Poland* (New York, London, 1970), pp. 81-108. For the expanded Polish–edition, see W. Jędrzejewicz and Henryk Bułhak, eds., *Juliusz Łukasiewicz. Dyplomata w Paryżu 1936-1939,* (London, 1989), published in Warsaw a few years later. For British criticism and warnings to Poland, see *PDD 1938,* docs. 134, 165, 203, 280, 283.

continued, that Polish and Hungarian claims would be considered by the great powers in three months' time, unless they were settled meanwhile in direct talks. "Worse still," he writes, "Lipski telephoned from Berlin relating a part of his conversation with Ribbentrop in Munich, which indicated that Hitler, at the moment of greater victory than he had expected, would take on the role of protector of Poland and Hungary. These two news items, especially the last one, tipped the scales."[23] There is no written record of this telephone call by Lipski, but most likely it was recorded in Lipski's telephonogram, received at 2.30 p.m., September 30, stating that Ribbentrop had telephoned that morning to Berchtesgaden, saying that Poland could be satisfied with the way in which her interests had been safeguarded. According to Lipski, Ribbentrop also said: "Germany, in accordance with its understanding with us, had not given a guarantee [of the decision reached]."[24] Starzeński's view is confirmed by Beck's later instruction to the Polish ambassador in London, Edward Raczyński. He was to tell Halifax that Poland had been ready to settle its demands on Czechoslovakia, and its relations with that country, together with the great powers. Since that proved unfeasible, "we were satisfied with the possibility of a completely independent solution to that question *without any debts of gratitude to anyone, and thus also to Germany.*"[25]

As mentioned earlier, after the Munich decision and its acceptance by President Beneš, the Polish government decided on September 30 to send Prague an ultimatum. In the new situation, it judged as inadequate the Czech government's offer of negotiations, even though it accepted Polish territorial

[23] Paweł Starzeński, *Trzy Lata z Beckiem* [*Three Years with Beck*], Foreword and Notes by Bogdan Grzeloński (Warsaw, 1991), p. 94; translation, Cienciala.

[24] *PDD 1938*, doc. 347; it is not clear whether Lipski was in Berlin or Berchtesgaden at this time. For Lipski's longer report of the same day, sent from Berlin, see *ibid.*, doc. 350; English version, *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 114. A telephonogram was a message dictated over the phone and written down at the receiving end.

[25] Raczyński's note on Beck's instructions to explain the main objectives of Polish foreign policy to Halifax, Warsaw, November 29, 1938, *PDD 1938*, doc. 435, underlining in document. The ambassador carried out the instructions on Dec 15, 1938, see *ibid.*, doc. 448. Beck was then working to improve Anglo-Polish relations and succeeded in securing British agreement that no changes be made in Danzig without consulting Poland, see Cienciala, "Minister Józef Beck i Ambasador Edward Raczyński a zbliżenie polsko-brytyjskie w okresie październik 1938 — styczeń 1939," ["Minister Józef Beck, Ambassador Edward Raczyński, and the Polish-British Rapprochement in the Period October 1938 — January 1939] in Hanryk Bujak et al., eds., *Z dziejów polityki i dyplomacji polskiej* [*From the History of Polish Policy and Diplomacy*], pp. 348-363 (Warsaw, 1994). The book was dedicated to the memory of Ambassador Edward Raczyński, who was in 1976-89 president of the émigré Polish Government in Exile, London. He died in 1993, at the age of 102.

claims. It is worth noting Beck's view of the situation at the time, as recorded at a high level conference on the afternoon of September 30. According to notes taken by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, then deputy premier and minister of finances, Beck compared the Munich decision to the plan for a Four Power Pact of a few years earlier (1933), which could be a dangerous precedent for decisions on Poland's vital interests. Therefore, Poland must make a quick and quite drastic stand against such methods, and only this could save it from another Munich. Furthermore, if Poland hesitated, Germany could seize this very valuable and highly industrialized patch of land (Zaolzie). In view of the above, he proposed an ultimatum to Prague. Kwiatkowski opposed this solution, arguing for diplomatic procedures in order to prevent Poland's identification with Germany.[26] The majority of the conference members, however, supported Beck's proposal and the ultimatum was delivered in Prague by the Polish minister, Kazimierz Papée, at midnight the same day. It demanded the cession of two districts west of the Olza river within 24 hours and the rest of Zaolzie within ten days. British and French interventions, including a Prime Minister Chamberlain's offer of mediation made on October 1, were rejected. The Czechoslovak government accepted the ultimatum but asked for a one hour delay to evacuate the first part of the territory, which was granted.[27]

Could Poland have followed a different policy toward Czechoslovakia throughout the crisis, and at its end? Could the two states have become allies against Germany, which was always the goal of French policy? To answer these questions we must look at the prior relations between the two countries. Unfortunately, they were bad throughout most of the post-World War One period. For the Poles, the main bone of contention was Zaolzie. In late 1918, Poland claimed the then preponderantly Polish-speaking counties in the western part of the old Duchy of Cieszyn; the Czechs, however, viewed the coal of the Karvina mines, also located there, as vital to the country's economy; they also demanded the historic frontiers of the old Bohemian Crown, which included the whole western Cieszyn area, earlier under Polish and later Austrian sovereignty. Regional Polish

[26] On Polish demands and Czechoslovak replies in late September 1938, see *PDD 1938*, docs. 253 ff. For the record of Beck's views expressed at the conference of September 30 by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, see his article: "Józef Beck," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 76 (Paris, 1986), pp. 27-28. This article on Beck's foreign policy was first published in an underground journal, *Arka*, no. 12, 1986. The Four Power Pact, signed by Britain, France, Germany and Italy on July 15, 1933, envisaged the peaceful revision of some disputed European frontiers by agreement between these powers. Accepted by Prague but vigorously opposed by Warsaw, the pact was not implemented.

[27] Text of ultimatum in French, *PDD 1938, doc. 353;* Czechoslovak answer, doc. 359; British and French interventions and Polish answers, doc. 360; see also Cienciala studies listed in note 8 above.

and Czech councils agreed in early November 1918 on a provisional division on ethnic lines, leaving Zaolzie on the Polish side, but this was not recognized by the Czechoslovak government. An official Polish proposal, made in December 1918, to negotiate the issue was not rejected but avoided by Prague. The Polish government proclaimed elections to the Warsaw parliament, whereupon Czech troops marched into Zaolzie in January 1919, just as the Poles were engaged in fighting the Ukrainians and the Red Army in the east. Fighting ensued between Czechs and Poles with atrocities on both sides. French troops came in and the Czechs were forced to withdraw, after which several international commissions tried and failed to settle the dispute. Finally, in July 1920, as the Red Army was advancing on Warsaw, the western powers awarded the disputed area to Czechoslovakia without a plebiscite, as demanded by the Polish government. The Poles saw this decision as a dastardly act; they also greatly resented the Czechoslovak refusal to allow the passage of trains with military supplies for Poland in 1920 during the Polish-Soviet War. It is true that the Polish and Czechoslovak governments signed a wide ranging treaty in 1921, including mutual frontier recognition, but it was never ratified and Prague was unwilling to make any concessions, even symbolic ones, in the contested area.[28]

There were, of course, other irritants in Polish-Czechoslovak relations besides Zaolzie. The Polish government complained of anti-Polish activities by Ukrainian political exiles in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and, increasingly in the 1930s, of shelter given to Polish communists. Warsaw also resented Prague's alliance with the USSR, concluded in May 1935, in line with the Franco-Soviet alliance signed that month. As far as mutual perceptions in the pre-Hitler area were concerned, Polish decision makers saw Czechoslovakia as an artificial construct of several nationalities, and believed that neither Prague nor Vienna could count on western support if threatened.[29] Czechoslovak statesmen and politicians, for their part, viewed

[28] For the best account of the Cieszyn problem in the period 1918-1926, see Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919-1925. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno* (Minneapolis, MN 1962), ch. 3 "The Problem of Teschen," pp. 75-103. For a recent, illustrated Polish language article on the Polish-Czechoslovak armed conflict over western Cieszyn, the French occupation and the international commissions, citing both Polish and Czech archival sources, with maps, see Grzegorz Gąsior, " Zaolzie 1918-20. Stawianie granicy" ["Zaolzie 1918-20. Establishing the Frontier"], *Karta, Kwartalnik Historyczny*, no.55, Warsaw, 2008, pp. 2-63.

[29] On Piłsudski and Beck views of Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1932, see French Ambassador Jules Laroche report of December 18, 1932; he commented, however, that their views would change if France drew the sword, see *Documents diplomatiques français* [*French Diplomatic Documents*], lst ser. Vol. 5 (Paris, 1970), doc. 156.

the USSR as a potential ally against Germany; they also believed that Poland had taken too much Soviet territory in 1920, and did not want any ties with Poland because of the Danzig-Corridor issue. A Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry official noted in mid-June 1938 that in the past his government had not wanted to tie itself to Poland because it seemed much more threatened by Germany than Czechoslovakia, particularly in view of the danger of a conflict over the Corridor.[30]

As mentioned earlier, majority Polish public opinion always supported the "return" of Zaolzie to Poland, and in summer 1938 even the opposition parties demanded it.[31] On September 23-24, the Polish government tried to launch a popular Polish uprising, or at least a convincing popular Polish demonstration in Zaolzie; it proved a dismal failure because of information leaks and strong Czech military presence in the area. The Polish action is partly explained by the Sudeten German Party's new claim to the region.[32] This was connected with what the Poles learned on 28 September: that the German map handed to Chamberlain during his conversation with Hitler at Godesberg (September 22-23) had encroached on the area of Polish claims. Beck instructed Ambassador Lipski to make a firm statement of the Polish demands, including readiness to use force if necessary. (The Germans conceded the Polish requests after the Munich Conference).[33]

Finally, Beck tried to obtain Hitler's recognition of the Polish-German frontier, of Polish economic rights in the Free City of Danzig and an extension of the 1934 declaration. Ambassador Lipski received instructions on these and other issues during his brief stay in Warsaw in mid-September 1938. As he noted in his memoirs, the Polish requests were expected to result in three documents: (1) a Polish-German declaration similar to the Italian-German one; (2) an extension of the non-aggression declaration of

[30] For the mid-June 1938 note on the Czechoslovak attitude toward Poland by Arnost Heidrich, chief of the political department in the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, see Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, pp. 14-15 and notes 32, 33; also same, " Poland and Strategy in Warsaw," Lukes and Goldstein, *Munich 1938*, pp. 54-55.

[31] The word "return" was used to indicate both the historic Polish claim to the Duchy of Cieszyn, ruled by Poland before it passed to the Crown of Bohemia, and the provisional, local Polish-Czech agreement of November 1918. For the report by Czechoslovak journalist Vàclav Fiala on his talks with opposition leaders in Poland, see Cienciala, *ibid.*, pp. 66-69, and same, "Plans and Strategy in Warsaw," Lukes and Goldstein, *Munich 1938*, p.58 and note 25.

[32] On the failed Polish uprising in Zaolzie, see Cienciala, "Plans and Strategy in Warsaw," Lukes and Goldtein, *Munich 1938*, pp. 60-61.

[33] Beck instruction to Lipski, September 28, and the confrontation of Polish and German maps, Berlin the same day, see *PDD 1938*, docs. 326, 327; English translation, *Diplomat in Berlin*, docs. 111, 112. For the final German agreement to Polish claims, October 8, see *PDD 1938, doc. 378*.

January 26, 1934; (3) a precise, written definition of the Hitler's declaration of November 5, 1937 on safeguarding Polish economic interests in Danzig by assuring the free development of Polish trade in the Free City. Lipski saw Göring on September 16, the day after the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting at Berchtesgaden where the British Prime Minister expressed his personal agreement with Hitler's demands and undertook to present them to his government. Lipski, after categorically stating Polish desiderata in Zaolzie, as listing Polish and Hungarian demands for plebiscites in certain parts of Slovakia, presented the requests on the Polish-German frontier, Danzig and the extension of the 1934 agreement. He reported that Göring was positively disposed on the frontier proposal, but said the Danzig question should be discussed after the Czechoslovak settlement. He also returned to his (previous suggestions) of an exchange of minorities.[34]

Hitler invited Lipski to see him in Berchtesgaden on September 20, whereupon Beck sent the ambassador "strictly confidential" directives on what he was to say to the Führer. This document illustrates Beck's regional aims at this time and the arguments designed to secure Hitler's agreement to them as well as on Danzig and the Polish-German frontier. In fact, Beck tried to Hitler's agreement to Polish requests by presenting his policy as giving vital support to Berlin in the crisis. Thus, Lipski was to claim that the Polish government had "paralyzed the possibility of Soviet intervention" (to help Czechoslovakia) and that Moscow understood current (Polish) military maneuvers in Volhynia as a warning. (This vast exaggeration of Polish influence on Soviet policy was designed to play on Hitler's passionate anti-communist and anti-Soviet views). The ambassador was also to say that Poland considered Soviet intervention in European affairs as unacceptable. Furthermore, the Polish government had rejected four proposals to join international interventions in Czechoslovakia (reference to French and British proposals that Poland join their appeals to Hitler not to use force). Polish "direct claims" to the Cieszyn-Silesian region were stated as not going far beyond the Cieszyn and Frysztat (Czech, Fryštat) districts, plus rail access to the Bohumin (Oderberg) railway station. Lipski was also to mention Poland's favorable view of a common frontier with Hungary and state that Hungarian claims to Subcarpathian Ruthenia were valid, while Slovakia should have broad autonomy (in Hungary.) The ambassador was also to tell Hitler that Poland was putting its local demands "categorically," although Polish troop concentration on the Czechoslovak frontier (in

[34] Lipski's note on Beck's instructions, Warsaw, and three expected documents, *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 401; Lipski-Göring conversation, September 16, 1938, *PDD 1938* doc. 218; English version, *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 96, pp. 402-405. Hitler had assured Italy in a speech on May 7, 1938, during his visit to Rome, that the inviolability of the German-Italian frontier was an integral part of the German-Italian friendship, cit. *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 403, n. 3, after *DGFP* D, I (London, Washington, 1949) docs. 759, 761, 767.

Zaolzie) was not directed against Germany. Last but not least, Beck instructed Lipski to state that a stabilization of Polish-German relations was essential. Here, the Foreign Minister was to state that Danzig played a key role in these relations. Now, with the "bankruptcy of the League of Nations a simple agreement stabilizing the situation in the Free City seems indispensable." Next, Lipski was to repeat his earlier request for a German declaration on the Polish-German frontier similar to the German-Italian one. Beck added that he was ready to meet with Hitler or Göring, despite any technical or political difficulties.[35]

Lipski put these proposals to Hitler on September 20 in Obersalzburg — a small town near Berchtesgaden — in the presence of German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. The meeting began at 4 p.m., that is, after Chamberlain had sent Hitler's demands — presented to the British Prime Minister at Berchtesgaden, September 15 — to Prague with advice to accept them. Hitler told Lipski he expected his claims (to annex the Sudetenland) to be honored, but he would insist on a plebiscite. He now wanted to discuss what was to be done with "the balance of the problem," that is Polish and Hungarian claims, so he had invited the Hungarian Premier and Lipski. After hearing the ambassador, Hitler assured Lipski that in a conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia, Germany would side with Poland (!) He then gave his views on a number of other topics, and mentioned Polish-German relations. He did not go into the Danzig question, but regarding the Polish Corridor he suggested a "superhighway connected with railways," which would be about 30 meters wide.[36] A similar suggestion had been made tentatively in the past by Göring, but had not been taken up by the Polish government. The fact that it was now brought up by Hitler eliminated Beck's hopes for a German-Polish agreement acceptable to Poland. In fact, Lipski later wrote that as he was boarding the train for Berlin on September 14, he heard that Chamberlain was coming to Berchtesgaden the next day. The ambassador's retrospective

[35] Beck's directives to Lipski for the conversation with Hitler, sent on September 19, 1938, *PDD 1938*, doc. 239; English text, *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 98, pp. 406-407. These directives were delivered to Lipski by Doman Andrzej Rogoyski, then a member of the Political-Economic Department in the Polish Foreign Ministry, later in the Foreign Minister's Cabinet and Beck's secretary and companion until his death in Romania in June 1944. He told this reviewer that he was the courier who carried Beck's instructions to Lipski on this and other occasions in September 1938; see Cienciala, "Wspomnienie o Domanie Rogoyskim (1903-1987) i dwa przyczynki historyczne" ["Remembering Doman Rogoyski with Two Historical Contributions"], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 84 (Paris, 1988), pp. 167-171.

[36] Lipski report on conversation with Hitler, September 20, 1938, *PDD 1938*, doc. 248; English version, *Diplomat in Berlin*, doc. 99.

comment was: "The West had capitulated. It was too late to present our demands to Germany."[37]

In conclusion, Polish foreign policy certainly contributed to the German annexation of the Sudetenland, and thus to the first stage in the process which led to the disappearance of the Czechoslovak state. The Polish contribution, however, was not decisive. The decisive factor during the crisis and in its end result was the determination of France and Britain to avoid war over Czechoslovakia. It is true that these powers implemented partial mobilization after Hitler, at his meeting with Chamberlain at Godesberg on September 22-23, demanded immediate annexation of the Sudetenland and a plebiscite afterwards, which was judged unacceptable. All they wanted, however, was for Hitler to achieve his aims peacefully. Therefore, they accepted Hitler's proposal — initiated by Mussolini — for a conference to resolve the problem.

Warsaw's policy was based on Beck's assumption, which proved to be correct, that the western powers would not fight Hitler over the Sudetenland, therefore Czechoslovakia was bound to collapse sooner or later. He also believed that a complete German domination of the country was contrary to Polish interests. Thus, the Polish government aimed not only to gain Zaolzie, but also to establish a common Polish-Hungarian frontier in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. This was to be the foundation for a new Central European system built on the close cooperation of Poland, Hungary, Romania, and if possible, Yugoslavia. Indeed, in June 1938 Beck told the American Ambassador in Warsaw, Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, that the combined armies of Poland, Romania and possibly Yugoslavia, might effectively prevent German aggression to the east, but only if British and French forces simultaneously engaged German forces in the West. If this took place, Beck said "Poland would march not for Czechoslovakia, but against Germany." It is also worth noting Beck's statement that Poland would never agree to a German march through Polish territory to (Soviet) Ukraine because this would mean the end of Polish independence.[38] If Beck hoped that his statements to Biddle would evoke interest in London and Paris, he was disappointed. After Munich, Beck tried to implement the new regional system, called "the Third Europe," by bringing Romania and

[37] *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 401.

[38] Anthony J. Drexel Biddle report of June 19, 1938, in Philip V. Cannistraro, Edward D. Wynot Jr. et al eds., *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War. The Diplomatic Papers of A.J. Drexel Biddle, Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland 1937-1939* (Columbus, OH, 1976), doc. 4, cit. Cienciala, "Plans and Strategy in Warsaw," Lukes and Goldstein, *Munich 1938*, p. 59. See also the unofficial statement by a member of Marshal Śmigły-Rydz entourage, noted by a British official on August 31, that if the Western Powers came to Czechoslovakia's aid, Poland would fight alongside them, but if not, she would take her share of Czechoslovakia, see ibid., p. 78, note 27.

Hungary together. This proved impossible, however, due to these two countries' unbridgeable dispute over Transylvania; also, Mussolini, who had shown interest in the project, failed to support it, while France and Britain abstained.[39] Beck also failed to achieve official German recognition of Polish rights in Danzig, or a Polish-German agreement on the Free City, as well as Hitler's recognition of the Polish-German frontier. Finally, the Polish ultimatum to Prague of September 30 and the annexation of part of western Cieszyn (plus some small areas later), made an extremely bad impression in Western Europe, which is still reflected in histories of the period. Indeed, it sometimes overshadows the fact that the western powers played the decisive role in the outcome of the Czechoslovak crisis.

Theoretically, three alternative policies were available to Warsaw. The first was Polish alignment with Czechoslovakia against Germany; the second was to join the western powers in warning Hitler against using force and then accept western mediation of the Polish-Czechoslovak dispute; the third was alignment with the USSR. Politics is, however, the art of the possible and none of these policies was possible for Poland at the time. The first alternative was out of the question due to bad relations between the two neighbors, for which they bore equal blame. The second was unfeasible because the Polish government believed that, as an independent state, it could not accept decisions by other countries involving national interests. As the documents show, Warsaw was even ready for armed conflict with Germany if Hitler tried to expand his territorial and plebiscite demands into Moravska-Ostrava, which included the Zaolzie as well as the railway junction and town of Bohumin (Oderberg). The third alternative was out of the question because the Polish government, the army and public opinion adamantly opposed any cooperation with the USSR. They remembered not only Russian rule over Congress Poland — which ended in 1915 — but, more importantly, they had a vivid memory of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, when the Red Army reached the outskirts of Warsaw before being thrown back and defeated by Piłsudski. In any case, while Moscow declared its support of Czechoslovakia, there is nothing to indicate that Stalin was willing to tangle with Hitler either in 1938 or 1939.

The volume of Polish diplomatic documents under review gives the fullest picture to date of Polish foreign policy and relations with other countries in 1938, including the Polish "ultimatum" to Lithuania in March 1939, which demanded the establishment of normal relations between the two countries.[40] Documents on Polish-Soviet relations are sparse before

[39] On the "Third Europe," see Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, ch.. v and same, "Plans and Strategy in Warsaw," Lukes and Golstein, *Munich 1938*, p. 68.

[40] On the Polish ultimatum on Lithuania of March 17, 1938, see *PDD 1938*, doc. 56, also preceding documents. Beck acted after Hitler's annexation of Austria and there was fear that Germany might move to dominate the Baltic States.

October 1938, but it is worth noting the benign Soviet reaction to Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania and the Soviet threat of September 22 to abrogate the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty if the Polish government did not deny that its forces were preparing to enter Czechoslovak territory. Beck replied that orders regarding national defense were the business of the Polish government, which was not obliged to explain them to anyone; that this government knew the texts of agreements which it had made; and that it was surprised by the Soviet démarche since it had not issued any military orders for the Polish-Soviet frontier.[41] It should be noted that while some mobilization took place in the western regions of the USSR in September 1939, no Polish or Russian document has been found so far on a Soviet demand for Red Army transit through Poland to Czechoslovakia, or a Red Army plan of operations to help Czechoslovakia.

The reader would have benefited from a longer introduction on Polish foreign policy in 1938, but this was not feasible either in this or the two volumes published earlier on 1939, due to the Editorial Committee's decisions regarding the whole series. It is also a pity that the committee mandated a bare minimum of footnotes; this sometimes results in lack of information connecting various aspects of a given problem, or the omission of references to published British, French, German, Italian, Russian, and other documents. Finally, a diplomatic historian will regret the committee's decision to start the series with 1939 and then go backwards, as was the case with western documentary publications. This decision, together with the brevity of the notes, does not allow the reader to perceive the continuity, or lack thereof, in previous Polish foreign policy on any given issue.

None of the above criticisms are directed at the editor of the 1938 Polish documents, Marek Kornat, an expert on Polish interwar foreign policy and diplomacy. He deserves the highest praise for his editing work in the volume under review.

Lithuania had cut off all relations with Poland after the inclusion of the predominantly Polish-speaking city and region of Wilno (Vilnius, Vilna) in Poland in 1922. It was named as the capital of Lithuania in the country's constitution.

[41] On the Soviet reaction to Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania, see *DPP 1938*, doc. 57; for the Soviet and Polish statements of September 22, see *ibid.*, docs. 268, 273. For the Russian texts of the Soviet note and Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potemkin's note on his conversation that day with Polish counselor Tadeusz Jankowski, see Euzebiusz Basiński, I.A. Khrenov et al., eds., *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich* [*Documents and Materials for the History of Polish-Soviet Relations*], Vol. VI. 1933-1938 (Warsaw, 1967), docs. 257-259.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Donald E. Pienkos's review of my book (*The Polish Review*, vol. LIV (2009) 1:104,

A History of the Polish Americans (the reprint edition of my 1987 book, A*nd My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans*, recently reissued by Transaction Publishers under this more searchable title) focuses on the topics not treated in the book (read: subjects of interest to the reviewer). But the review devotes no ink to the book's many strengths, generously enumerated by other reviewers who, unlike Pienkos, found a glass more than half full.

In fact, Pienkos finds no need for the book to have been reissued at all, as the original edition is "readily available to scholars." But in this observation, Pienkos misses the point. Polonia's scholars and organizational leaders have spent far too much time talking among and to themselves, and not reaching out nor, at least, not reaching out very successfully, to the huge potential audience of persons of Polish descent who are not connected to "organized Polonia." Since 1987, new generations of readers in Polonia have come of reading age. The last time I checked, the only copy of the first edition of my book available on a popular online used-book site was listed for the staggering sum of 101 dollars! There meanwhile are so few other general works on the Polish experience in America available to general readers — Poles and non-Poles alike — that this alone justifies reissue of a well reviewed, readable work such as mine by a trade press at an affordable price.

Like perhaps all such works, the book indeed may be "an intellectual artifact of its time," as is Dr. Pienkos himself, as perhaps are we all. But clearly the reviewer does not seem to have learned very much from it, although I am gratified that he (grudgingly) found my "social class approach" (as he calls it) "defensible, often insightful, and interesting." While quote-mining (out of context, I might add), Dr. Pienkos might have pursued other, more useful veins I pursued then, as now: the book "touched hitherto largely silent ethnic longings among Polish-American readers ... for recognition and a voice" (xiv) and introduced a sympathetic perspective on Polish-Americans still largely absent from standard accounts of white ethnic