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THE BRITISH ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ATTEMPT AT A RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT IN WARSAW AND THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES (1946–1947)

Recently an article by Włodzimierz Borodziej appeared,¹ particularly interesting one because of the facts to which it refers; the subject of which are the Polish-French diplomatic talks conducted immediately after the second world war. The author made use of the incomplete documents put at his disposal in the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However he did not investigate the French diplomatic sources in the archives of the *Quai d'Orsay*. Before this gap is filled I have decided to complete, at least partly, the picture traced by Borodziej. My article has been written on the basis of British documents kept in the London archives, the Public Record Office. The British diplomats who watched the situation developing in the Franco-Polish relations arrived at conclusions which I do not think should be dismissed. Of course they could not be correct in every detail but on the whole they were characterized by a good deal of common sense. Anyway the British did not attribute to the initiatives emanating from Warsaw the designs they did not actually have, that is to make Poland's relations with the Soviet Ally more distant in favour of closer political connections with the West.

Five days before the public statement that the Polish-French diplomatic talks were being held, which was done by the Polish deputy foreign minister, Zygmunt Modzelewski at a session of the KRN (Home National Council) on 28 April 1946, the British ambassador in Paris, Alfred Duff-Cooper informed the Foreign Office, quoting a reliable

¹ W. Borodziej, *Rozmowy polsko-francuskie 1945–1947: zapomniany epizod z historii dyplomacji (Polish-Franco Talks 1945–1947: a Forgotten Episode from the History of Diplomacy)*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny”, 1986, no. 1, pp. 75–109.

journalist, that the Polish side had recently put forward to the French government a proposal of concluding a treaty of friendship. He added that the Polish government declared itself ready to support the French postulate to put the Ruhr area, separated from the rest of Germany by a customs barrier, under international control.² It constituted part of the British occupation zone of Germany and London was not prepared to let other States administer that very important industrial area. Duff-Cooper also quoted the opinion of an unnamed Polish journalist that the Polish government rarely acted without consulting Moscow.³ At the same time the British politicians did know the Soviet project of depriving Great Britain of her right to rule the Ruhr and of using that area's resources for paying reparations.⁴

The British ambassador in Poland, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, after his talks with Modzelewski and having read the Polish press of early April, came too to the conclusion that the Warsaw authorities were supporting the French stand on the future of the Ruhr. He thought "it likely that the Polish Government would be glad to conclude a treaty of mutual friendship with the French Government particularly if this was approved by the Soviet Government".⁵ However Cavendish-Bentinck was informed on May 3 by the French ambassador in Warsaw, Roger Garreau, that no Franco-Polish negotiations were going on. True, "the Polish Government had in the past suggested the conclusion of a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance and were still anxious to conclude such a treaty but the French Government had so far been reluctant to accede to this request". Garreau expressed then an almost open threat that if at the session of the Foreign Ministers' Council (the deliberations were held in Paris from 25 April to 15 May and from 15 June to 12 July) the French postulate concerning Rhinland was not accepted (and it implied not only the detachment of the Ruhr from Germany, but also of the territories on the Rhine's left bank with the French occupation stretching down to Cologne which was in the British zone) (the French

² Public Record Office (farther PRO), FO-371, vol. 56638, N 5344/2712/55, Duff-Cooper's telegram to FO, no. 230, 23 April 1946; cf. J. Krasuski, *Polityka czterech mocarstw wobec Niemiec (Policy of the Four Powers Towards Germany)*, Poznań 1967, pp. 33-34.

³ PRO, FO-371, vol. 56638, N 5344/2712/55, Duff-Cooper's telegram...

⁴ J. Krasuski, *Historia RFN (History of GFR)*, Warszawa 1981, p. 25.

⁵ PRO, FO-371, vol. 56638, N 5639/2712/55 Cavendish-Bentinck's telegram to FO, no. 739, 29 April 1946.

government would be prepared to conclude a treaty of friendship with Poland.⁶

It appeared that in Paris the relationship with the Warsaw authorities was treated simply as a means. The French wanted apparently to make the British and Americans anxious and thereby more inclined to meet the French postulates on Germany. And Modzelewski, on his part, was acting entirely in accordance with the intentions of Joseph Stalin and Viacheslav Molotov the foreign minister, who obviously wished to position France in such a way that in her contest over Germany with the United States and Great Britain she might be restricted in conducting a policy contrary to Soviet interests. At the same time Modzelewski was trying to strengthen the position of the communist — led Provisional Government of National Unity *vis-a-vis* the Anglo-Saxon powers which, by virtue of the Yalta and Potsdam decisions, were jointly with the Soviet Union guarantors of “free and unfettered elections” in Poland. A political treaty with France would have strengthened the hand of the Provisional Government of National Unity in its arguments that the Americans and British had no right to interfere in Poland’s internal affairs.

The Foreign Office took note of that particular aspect of the suggested Franco-Polish treaty of friendship. In a note on May 7 Denis Allen, of the northern department, stated that “it would ... be a pity if the French Government were to give the present Provisional Government of Poland the prestige success of a treaty of friendship”. He did admit however that the French government’s attitude towards Polish authorities was “rather too delicate” to try and make the French give it up. The British specialists in Polish problems realized that it was impossible to induce the French to act on the British pattern, that is to make the ratification of the projected treaty depend on the Polish side holding elections (that was what the British had done in June 1946 in regard to the already signed British-Polish financial agreement) (since no French representatives had been signatories to the Yalta and Potsdam decisions.⁷

But by the late May it was already known at the Foreign Office that there was no political treaty on the cards but simply a Polish-Franco

⁶ *Ibid.*, N 5900/2712/55, Cavendish-Bentinck’s telegram to FO, no. 767, 3VV 1946; cf J. K r a s u s k i, *Polityka...*, p. 34

⁷ PRO, FO-371, vol. 56638, N 5900/2712/55, Allen’s note, 7 May 1946, note (sign. illegible), 28 June 1946.

declaration stressing the two parties' interests in preventing a revival of Germany which might threaten peace and declaring a mutual exchange of information on any questions relating to Germany. While informing Cavendish-Bentinck on it, on 23 May, the Polish deputy foreign minister indicated that the Polish-French treaty of February 1921 was still valid but "would require to be renewed in an amended form when the future of Germany was settled or could at least be more clearly foreseen than at present".⁸

Five weeks later, on July 2, the representative of the French embassy in London, Roché, called on Denis Allen at the northern department of the Foreign Office to inform him that on 10 July Modzelewski would arrive in Paris in order to sign the Franco-Polish declaration of friendship and a cultural convention. Allen could learn that in the declaration the two sides would commit themselves, among other things, to co-operate on the delimitation of Germany's boundaries "in such a way as to facilitate Germany's disarmament and to prevent a recurrence of German aggression". Roché was trying hard to convince Allen that the document was of a general character and contained less substance than the Polish side had initially wished it to have, so the British should regard the declaration as "relatively harmless". The French diplomat justified the step of his government by its wish to draw Poland more closely to the western world. He met however with a sceptical response from his British colleague who feared that "the present Polish Provisional Government would do all it could to make capital out of this Agreement for internal political purposes". Allen drew his attention to the possibility that the Polish Provisional Government could make use of the Franco-Polish undertaking on an exchange of information concerning Germany and ask for the participation of the Polish side in discussions on all German matters conducted by the representatives of the four powers. Roché denied that this could be the case and indicated that the French government would pass on to the Polish authorities only that kind of information it considered proper to give on the basis of mutuality.⁹

So the French side began to act so as to dispel the British suspicions and doubts. To some extent it succeeded in achieving it, an evidence of

⁸ *Ibid.*, N 6855/2712/55, Cavendish-Bentinck's telegram to FO, no. 173, 23 May 1946.

⁹ *Ibid.*, N 8870/2712/55, Allen's note, 2 July 1946.

which was the exchange of opinions between the Foreign Office officials in early July. The adopted British position was expressed in a cable of 8 July sent by the head office to its Warsaw post. It was noted in the telegramme that the Franco-Polish declaration might have no major practical consequences. It was even assumed that it could have for the French a desirable psychological effect and they would be able "to regain their self-confidence and feeling of security". But many objections did remain. It was likely that instead "of drawing the Poles westwards", as the French had suggested, it would have the effect of "drawing France eastwards and making her less dependent on Great Britain and America for her security". According to the cable's authors, the Franco-Polish declaration would make it more difficult for Great Britain and France to reach an agreement on the future of the Ruhr and Rhineland, "though the extent to which the Poles will be able to make their voice heard in discussions on German affairs will probably depend in practice on how far the French and Soviet Governments can reconcile their views on Ruhr and Rhineland question". The British were coming to the conclusion that they should not undertake any action aimed at making the signing of the declaration difficult for the French because the former would put themselves "in a false position" and become vulnerable to the "propaganda from Eastern Europe that we are really in favour of building up German strength".¹⁰

Differences in the approach by the French and British authorities to the political struggle waged in Poland manifested themselves clearly on 4 July at the talks the ambassadors of those two States held in Warsaw. Garreau told Cavendish-Bentinck bluntly that "the French Government did not care what form of Government might be in power in this country (in Poland) but they wished Poland to become as strong as possible and her population to increase as a guard against future German aggression".¹¹ As it appeared from that statement the French ambassador did not grasp the actual situation Poland found herself in after the second world war. Nor did he understand the reasons why the Polish side was asking for a change in the declaration when three weeks later on 20 July he spoke with the British chargé d'affaires, John Russel. The British diplomat was informed that the signing of the declaration

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, FO's telegram to the embassy in Warsaw, no. 1235, 8 July 1946; note (sign. illegible) 3 July 1946; Dean's note, 5 July 1946.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, N 8871/2712/55, Cavendish-Bentinck's telegram to FO, no. 214, 4 July 1946.

and its publication had been postponed indefinitely because of an amendment introduced by the Polish foreign ministry into the agreed text which was of essential significance for the document's content. Garreau saw in it "a deliberate intervention from Moscow to force the Poles to withdraw the hand they had stretched out towards the West".¹²

It does not seem likely that Stalin had felt it necessary in this case to intervene in order to harden the Warsaw authorities' position towards their French partners. Instead one must assume that they themselves came to the conclusion that it was necessary to stress in the declaration a difference between the status of the German eastern boundary along the rivers Oder and Nysa Łużycka, accepted at the Potsdam conference (with the formal proviso that its final delimitation would take place at the peace conference) and the German western boundary which for the time being was not altered despite the French demands to move it to the Rhine. The Polish Workers' Party leaders were at that time still concerned over a speech delivered by Molotov on 10 July which, as it later would appear, started a competition with the American secretary of state, James Byrnes to win German society. So the Polish side could not, in the changing situation, accept unclear statements in the joint declaration with the French authorities.¹³ As for Garreau, whom Russel described as "a highly eccentric and excitable character", having stated that he had failed in achieving a Franco-Polish agreement he intended to go soon to Paris for consultations.¹⁴

In the afore-mentioned Molotov's pronouncement at the Foreign Ministers' Council the Russian politician, though he spoke in favour of the Ruhr being put under the control of the four powers, declared himself against the detachment of that industrial area from Germany and so, generally speaking, against the breaking up of the German State. This caused the French foreign minister, Georges Bidault, now isolated, to embark on a policy of rapprochement with the Anglo-Saxon powers. Both Byrnes and the British foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, agreed on a partial concession for their French colleague by declaring, on 11 July, their support for his plan to link the Saar to France by a customs and

¹² *Ibid.*, N 9681/2712/55, Russel's telegram to FO, 25 July 1946.

¹³ E. Reale, *Raporty, Polska 1945–1946 (Reports, Poland 1945–1946)*, Paris 1968, pp. 220–224; cf W. Borodziej, *op. cit.* pp. 91–93.

¹⁴ PRO, FO–371, vol. 56638, N 9681/2712/55, Russel's telegram...

monetary union.¹⁵ This created a favourable climate for closer consultations between the French and British representatives on the French policy towards Poland.

On 20 August a meeting took place between the general secretary of the French Foreign Ministry, Jean Chauvel, and the representative of the British embassy in Paris, Ashley Clarke who had the rank of minister. Chauvel spoke in a way suggesting that the French authorities would like to justify their conduct. He claimed that the French government was under constant pressure from the Polish and Czechoslovak governments, which wished to sign treaties of friendship with France. He indicated that in Quai d'Orsay those proposals were received with reserve because "the fact of concluding pacts of this kind with various Russian satellites at a time when they (the French Government) had no political treaty with us (Great Britain) would be inopportune". Chauvel despite suggestions of initiating steps towards a Franco-British alliance did not give up the possibility of realizing in future agreements with Poland and Czechoslovakia "in anodyne form without guarantee of frontiers" in order "not to discourage them from looking towards the West". As an example of the French intransigence on essential matters he indicated that the French did not agree to give a guarantee for the Oder-Nysa Łużycka boundary and had rejected the Polish amendment introduced at the last moment into the text of the projected Franco-Polish declaration. In fact Chauvel was trying to win British acceptance for the French attempts at a rapprochement with Poland and Czechoslovakia and was persuading his guest that France would see to it that the agreements were formulated in general terms and were not obligatory. Clarke promised him that the British side would present its position on the problems under discussion.¹⁶

This particular conversation did not dispel the anxiety of British politicians. Duff-Cooper, ambassador in Paris, warned that France could "become a Russian satellite herself" and be involved in alliances connected with the Soviet Union. The view was shared by the foreign secretary Bevin. The Foreign Office came to the conclusion the French should be informed that the British would like the negotiations with

¹⁵ J. Krasuski, *Polityka...*, pp. 34-37.

¹⁶ PRO, FO-371, vol. 56638, N 11759/2712/55, Duff-Cooper's letter to Harvey, 22 August 1946; N 11450/2712/55, telegram from the British delegation to the Paris peace conference to the British embassy in Warsaw, no. 3, 7 September 1946.

Poland and Czechoslovakia to be postponed until the conclusion of a British-French treaty of alliance. And the talks on the latter could be started only after the French had given up their conditions concerning a British consent to the French demands on the Ruhr and the future of Germany. It was felt in London, too, that choosing the lesser of two evils it would be better to accept a Franco-Czechoslovak treaty "since they (Czechs) are at least ostensibly making an effort to keep on the borderline between East and West with links in both directions".¹⁷

Before the British were able to work out their final position on the matters discussed with Chauvel, on 4 September a meeting had been held between him and the deputy undersecretary, Oliver Harvey. Harvey spoke favourably of the idea of the British-French alliance expressing the hope it would be eventually concluded. He stated however that Great Britain was opposed to "vague pacts of mutual friendship of this kind with the Eastern European states as we (Great Britain) do not consider that they really strengthen the links between those countries and Western Europe". Besides the two diplomats agreed (and it was even Chauvel who was the first to make that remark) that "propaganda use could be made of such pacts equally well by the pro-Russian elements in those countries". Chauvel, taking into consideration a stronger position of the Polish communists than of the Czech ones in the ruling authorities opted for the conclusion of a pact with Czechoslovakia rather than Poland. He also confessed he had never been in favour of the alliance treaty with the Soviet Union signed on 10 December 1944. He thanked his interlocutor for communicating to him the British views on the questions under discussion.¹⁸ The respective positions of the two diplomats seemed almost identical.

Three weeks later, on 28 September, ambassador Duff-Cooper met with Chauvel. Acting on the Foreign Office instructions he repeated Harvey's recent statement indicating apparently that till the signature of the British-French treaty of alliance "it is not desirable that France, which is of special importance to us (Great Britain), should drift into alliances with Eastern European powers and risk being sucked into the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, N 11759/2712/55, Duff-Cooper's letter, Harvey's notes, 3 Sept. 1946, 4 Sept. 1946.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, N 11450/2712/55, telegram from the British delegation N 11759/2712/55, Harvey's note, 4 Sept. 1946

Soviet orbit". Chauvel replied by informing him that already when he had been requesting the British side to take position on the France's pacts with Poland and Czechoslovakia, that is in late August, the French government had decided to give up any further talks on that subject. And only in the case of Britain's positive attitude towards the projected pacts was he ready to reconsider those problems. Chauvel admitted that France made its conduct towards the two East-European States dependent on the British acceptance. But she did not intend to "burn her boats" in her relations with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The French side preferred, therefore, to say neither "yes" nor "no" and maintained that the "suitable moment" for these discussions had not come yet.¹⁹

The Polish foreign minister realized, in the second half of September that the French side would not sign with the Polish authorities any document till the Elections in this country.²⁰ And in the opinion of ambassador Cavendish-Bentinck, after a speech by the secretary of state Byrnes in Stuttgart on 6 September in which he stated that the size of the territories assigned to Poland at the expense of Germany had still to be finally determined, there was in Warsaw an increased demand for the French recognition of the Oder-Nysa Łużycka boundary. Cavendish-Bentinck thought that a pact of friendship concluded at that time even without that recognition in its text would still be regarded by the Polish public opinion as the French government's actual support for the existing Polish western frontier. Ambassador Garreau, who next day after Byrnes' speech gave a rather spontaneous interview to the Polish Press Agency stating that:

"the whole of the French nation regards the Polish frontier drawn up at Potsdam as completely justified", left Warsaw for three weeks in order to persuade the Polish delegation at the Paris peace conference that the Polish side should give up its demand to get in writing the French guarantee for the Oder-Nysa Łużycka frontier. On his return from Paris the French ambassador complained to his British colleague that he had been unsuccessful in his efforts to remove the Polish amendment to the project of the common declaration and thought that

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, N 11830/2712/55, Harvey's note, 20 Sept. 1946; FO' telegram to the British embassy in Paris, no. 1811, 25 Sept. 1946; N 12519/2712/55, Duff-Cooper's telegram to FO, no. 432, 28 Sept. 1946.

²⁰ W. Borodziej, *op. cit.* pp. 95-96.

only in that case he would be able to make the French government sign that pact of friendship.²¹ Thus towards the end of October the British could already be sure that in the near future no form of Franco-Polish agreement would stand any chance of realization.

Only after the elections held in Poland in January 1947, Modzelewski, who by then had become minister of foreign affairs, came to Paris to sign, on February 10, the Polish-French cultural convention. In the communiqué issued at the end of the visit the two sides deemed it necessary to revise the political treaty of February 1921. The Quai d'Orsay spokesman stated however that until a new treaty was signed the old one would remain valid.²² Soon, on 4 March a Franco-British treaty of alliance and mutual assistance was signed at Dunkirk.

The treaty between Great Britain and France was to remain in force for fifty years and it provided for an assistance against a German aggression after consultations between the two sides even if it were necessary to consult other powers "having responsibility for action in relation to Germany". Paragraph 2 of article 5 contained essential reservations in regard of future Franco-Polish, or rather the then put in the first place Franco-Czechoslovak, talks on a political treaty. France and Great Britain had pledged themselves that neither of them "will conclude any alliance or take part in an coalition directed against the other High Contracting Party; nor will they enter into any obligation inconsistent with the provisions of the present Treaty". There was an important statement in the treaty's preamble which defined the future policy of the two States and which said that they considered "most desirable the conclusion of a treaty between all the Powers having responsibility for action in relation to Germany with the object of preventing Germany from becoming again a menace to peace". The treaty would come into force only after an exchange of ratification documents which took place half a year later in London on 8 September 1947.²³

²¹ PRO, FO-371, vol. 56638, N 116640/2712/55, Cavendish-Bentinck's telegram to the British delegation to the Paris peace conference, no. 8, 11 Sept. 1946; N 14230/2712/55, Cavendish-Bentinck's letter to Hankey, 28 Oct. 1946.

²² W.T. Kowalski, *Polityka zagraniczna RP 1944-1947 (Poland's Foreign Policy 1944-1947)*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 337-338.

²³ M.K. Kamiński, *Wielka Brytania wobec czechosłowackich prób stworzenia "pomostu między Wschodem a Zachodem" (G. Britain's Attitude Towards the Czechoslovak Attempts to Become "a Bridge Between East and West")*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej", vol. XXI, 1985, pp. 162-164.

The treaty of Dunkirk restricted the elbow-room of the French side in its talks with the representatives of Polish authorities. However, Chauvel, the general secretary at Quai d'Orsay, indicated that the project of a political treaty had already been exchanged between the French and Polish diplomats in March. Initially the Polish side had been prepared to accept the French conditions but then it put forward a proposal of extending the allies' obligations against Germany over the states allied to her. It was the reason for the negotiations to be suspended till the end of August 1947. The French government replied it could not accept the extended obligations since they went beyond the conditions established in the treaty with Great Britain.²⁴ But W. Borodziej affirms that in March only the Polish project arrived at the French foreign ministry (in discussing its content he does not say whether the proposal of a pact against the States allied to Germany was included in it) while the French counter-project was delivered to the Poles in early July (the Polish author remarks surprisingly that "in article three a statement on Germany's possible allies was left out"). He admits however that in the documents put at his disposal in the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs the course of the Polish-French negotiations "is not clear: once more there are no Polish sources on those talks of May 1947".²⁵

Without the knowledge of French diplomatic sources one can hardly systematically reproduce those negotiations. Anyway, till the end of August the British government was interested in the questions of Franco-Polish relations only as far as they concerned the development of Franco-Czechoslovak contacts.²⁶ So one can assume that nothing particularly important was at that time happening between Paris and Warsaw. I should like to add incidentally that I do not think correct. W. Borodziej's statement, who while comparing the differences in the formulation of particular treaty articles says that "the extension of the pact's force over (Germany's) future allies seems less essential."²⁷ Indeed this was a key question because it threatened to involve France in activities against the Anglo-Saxon States should they ever be considered in Moscow as Germany's allies.

²⁴ PRO, FO-817, vol. 48, Ashley Clarke's letter to Bevin, no. 799, 17 Sept. 1947.

²⁵ W. Borodziej, *op. cit.* pp. 97-99, pp. 102-103.

²⁶ cf M.K. Kamiński, *op. cit.* p. 169.

²⁷ W. Borodziej, *op. cit.* p. 103.

One and a half month after the rejection by Polish authorities of the offer to participate in the Paris conference on the so called Marshall plan of Europe's post-war reconstruction on 28 August the Polish project of the political treaty did arrive at Quai d'Orsay.²⁸ Chauvel informed Duff-Cooper about it immediately. The general secretary of the French foreign ministry was surprised at the Polish initiative of a pact which "referred not only to Germany but contained a vague reference to certain other nations". He also informed the British ambassador that as the minister of foreign affairs Bidault had left for a two-week holiday the French side had not decided yet on a reply but "he did not think that (Quai d'Orsay) would agree to the inclusion of the sentence in question".²⁹

At the Foreign Office a plan was adopted already in early July, which the undersecretary of state Christopher Warner called "the official doctrine". It implied that Great Britain drew "a clear distinction" between anti-German pacts with her immediate neighbours whom she could effectively help in the case of an enemy attack and make use of their territories for attacking the aggressor, and the pacts with States situated at the heart of Europe, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia. The British thought that both the French and they themselves, if they signed political pacts with the afore-mentioned States would be unable to fulfil their treaty obligations not only because of the geographical distance. The efficiency of those pacts would have been diminished by other alliances binding Poland and Czechoslovakia, the signatories to which the two western States had not been. Thus Great Britain should try to realize a project put forward by the American secretary of state Byrnes in May 1946 suggesting the conclusion of a four-power pact for the control of German disarmament which would safeguard the European continent against a new war.³⁰

The information Duff-Cooper got on the Polish authorities' new initiative made the British draw further conclusions. It was indicated at the Foreign Office that an extension of treaty obligations against Germany's possible allies had been demanded not only by Poland's representatives from the French side but also by the Soviet side from the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁹ PRO, FO-371, vol. 66 211, N 10163/800/55, Duff-Cooper's telegram to FO, no. 845, 30 August 1947.

³⁰ M.K. Kamiński, *op. cit.* pp. 167-168.

British and by the Czechs from the French. Hanock of the northern department came to the conclusion that: "it seems to confirm our belief that the Soviets aim at using such a clause for some ulterior end — no doubt in order to divide French and British opinion against the Americans in certain conceivable future eventualities in which the Russians were able to argue that the Americans were in some way supporting the Germans".³¹

On 10 September Duff-Cooper was instructed to have a talk with Chauvel and explain the British position on the Polish proposal according to "the official doctrine" while drawing attention to the danger of creating divisions in the western world. The ambassador was also supposed to prompt the French they might indicate to Poland's representatives that the best safeguard against a German aggression would be for Poland to join the treaty of the four powers as proposed by Byrnes.³² But the American proposal stood almost no chance of being realized in view of Molotov's statement that it did not contain sufficient guarantees for Germany's real disarmament.³³

On 16 September, an official of ministerial rank at the British embassy in Paris, Ashley Clarke, came to the meeting. Chauvel told the Englishman the Polish side had after all moved a little on the road to making closer the respective positions of the two States. It had namely renounced from putting in the treaty project of the late August, in article 2, a note on Germany's allies, restricting itself to a statement in article 3. Consequently France would be obliged to act against Germany's allies only in case of war. But she would be under no obligation to undertake common action aimed at preventing a menace from a State other than Germany. Chauvel indicated however that he did not at the moment expect much progress in the Franco-Polish talks though "they (the French Government) were now awaiting further developments". Anyway the Polish side had been notified that the French did not accept article 3 in its proposed wording.³⁴

At the Foreign Office the content of the talk was received with dissatisfaction. It was noted that Chauvel had not even mentioned the possibility of suspending negotiations with the Polish government.

³¹ PRO, FO-371, vol. 66211, N 10163/800/55, Hanock's note, 3 Sept. 1947.

³² *Ibid.*, FO's telegram to Duff-Cooper, no. 1786, 10 September 1947.

³³ M.K. Kamiński, *op. cit.* p. 167.

³⁴ PRO, FO-817, vol. 48, Ashley Clarke's letter to Bevin, 17 Sept. 1947.

There was little comfort in the fact that also in her negotiations with the Belgians France had promised to keep consulting the British ally (The British stand was that a political rapprochement with Belgium could take place only after economic decisions had been taken as a result of discussions on the Marshall plan). They did not accept Chauvel's arguments that the Byrnes' quadripartite treaty had little chance of becoming reality. As an example of the ineffectiveness of western alliances with Poland they quoted the pacts concluded with her by France and Great Britain before the war. In his letter of 22 October Bevin was telling Duff-Cooper that "in 1939 both France and this country (Great Britain), in spite of our clear obligation towards Poland, were unable — although we went to war with Germany in pursuance of that obligation — to do anything at all to assist Poland when that country was invaded by Hitler".

The Foreign Office did not agree with Chauvel's opinion that, unlike in Czechoslovakia, in Poland the communists wanted to conclude a pact with France against Stalin's wishes. In the afore-mentioned letter Bevin held on to the opinion that "both in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Communists, under inspiration from Moscow, were insisting upon the extension of mutual assistance obligations to cover States associated with Germany". Thus in London it was said that the meeting between Ashley Clark and Chauvel was by no means a success.³⁵

The British were not wrong because three days after that talk, on 19 September, the French submitted to the Polish foreign ministry their project of a treaty. It turned out that they accepted the Polish proposal of article 3 relating also to Germany's allies.³⁶ But only one month later did Duff-Cooper learn about that concession from *Le Figaro* newspaper of 18 October. On that day, too, he asked for explanation Jacques Camil Paris, director of the European department at Quais d'Orsey. The representative of the French foreign ministry confirmed that information in *Le Figaro's* article did correspond with the facts. He stressed however that the negotiations were at a deadlock because the Polish side objected to a fragment in the preamble indicating France's respon-

³⁵ *Ibid.*, FO-371, vol. 66211, N 10992/800/55, Hankey's note, 26 Sept. 1947; note (sign. illegible), 29 Sept. 1947; Hankey's note, 1 Oct. 1947; Warner's note, 6 Oct. 1947; note (sign. illegible), 9 Oct. 1947; Hancock's note, 13 Oct. 1947; Warner's note, 20 Oct. 1947; FO-8117, vol. 48, Bevin's letter to Duff-Cooper, no. 1326, 22 October 1947.

³⁶ W. Borodziej, *op. cit.* p. 106.

sibility as one of the four powers occupying Germany. Whereas the article expressed the idea that the signing of the pact with Poland depended on the signing of the quadripartite treaty on Germany and the negotiations with Czechoslovakia would be completed only after the talks with the Polish side had brought positive results. Camil Paris indicated on his part that the foreign minister "Bidault was now absolutely opposed to concluding political agreements with these two (Poland and Czechoslovakia) countries".³⁷

London did not inquire into the sudden firmness of the French minister. Perhaps Bidault ceased hesitating under the impact of new experiences he had won while co-operating with Bevin at the Paris conference in July on the Marshall plan. It cannot be excluded that a declaration proclaimed at Szklarska Poręba in late September, signed by representatives of the communist parties of the Soviet Union, six Central European countries and of France and Italy, in which a division of the world into two opposite blocks was announced, made Bidault more cautious in his dealings with Polish diplomats. From 4 May there were no longer communists in the French government, a fact which enabled the Christian-Democrat minister to conduct a policy that did not depend on their opinion on co-operation with the Central European countries.

It seems however that Bevin still did not believe in a radical change of his French colleague's attitude. Too long had lasted France's "flirtation" with Poland and Czechoslovakia. He was particularly alarmed at Paris's opinion that "if unexpectedly the Poles were suddenly to give way on the reference to France's obligation as one of the four powers responsible for Germany the French Government would admittedly find themselves in a somewhat embarrassing position". Nor was he convinced by the next words of the French diplomat that "they (French Government) would have to extricate themselves as best they could". Bevin felt that there was "a distinct risk of agreement" between France and Poland since only at one point the positions were not co-ordinated. "You were quite right — he cabled to Duff-Cooper on 23 November — in saying to M. Paris that my apprehensions would continue so long as these negotiations had not been finally buried". In his view the essence of Soviet policy on French pacts with Poland and Czecho-

³⁷ PRO, FO-1371, vol. 66211, N 13246/800/55, Duff-Cooper's telegram to FO, no. 1023, 18 Nov. 1947.

slovakia was “to put all possible obstacles in the way of the Byrnes project... just because it would dispose of the German menace and so deprive the Soviet Government of the pretext for building up a system of interlocking bilateral pacts in Eastern Europe in which they (Soviet Government) clearly hope to involve France, thus detaching her to a certain extent from the West”. On the other hand, France herself, without British and American assistance, would be unable to support her eventual East European allies.³⁸

Paris suggested that Bevin himself should discuss these problems with Bidault who was coming to London for a session of the Foreign Ministers’ Council.³⁹ Bevin, on his part, instructed Duff-Cooper to ask Paris for the projects of the Franco-Polish treaty to be delivered to the British side. Almost four months earlier, on 7 August the French ambassador in London, René Massigli had handed the undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Orme Sargent, copies of the projected pact with Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰ On 25 November, Paris promised Duff-Cooper to gratify Bevin’s request. The French diplomat assured once more his interlocutor that Bidault was absolutely opposed to the signing of pacts with Poland and Czechoslovakia. When the Czechoslovak vice-premier, Peter Zenkl, of the national-socialist party, visited Paris the French foreign ministry gave a negative answer to his suggestion of discussing a Franco-Czechoslovak political pact. In a telegram to Bevin of 23 November Duff-Cooper was expressing the hope that “if a break with Russia occurs at the Council of Foreign Ministers the French will be prepared to take up a more definite stand in the sense which we desire”.⁴¹ Besides, Bevin had no longer any doubts that the meeting of the four powers’ foreign ministers would end with a failure.⁴²

The by then clear situation was somewhat blurred by the telegrams from British representatives in Prague and Warsaw (the first of 5 November, the second of 21 November). Both of them informed that the Soviet government was impeding the negotiations of Czechoslovak and Polish sides with the French. The British ambassador in Poland, Donald Gainer maintained that “in Soviet eyes France is not ripe

³⁸ *Ibid.*, N 13246/88/55, Bevin’s telegram to Duff-Cooper, no. 2474, 23 Nov. 1947.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Duff-Cooper’s telegram; Hancock’s note, 20 Nov. 1947.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Bevin’s telegram to Duff-Cooper.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, N 13492/800/55, Duff-Cooper’s telegram to Bevin, no. 1045, 25 Nov. 1947.

⁴² *Ibid.*, N 13246/800/55, Bevin’s telegram to Duff-Cooper.

enough to be tied to the Soviet satellite system". But in his view it did not mean, as Chauvel thought, that the Polish communists were at odds with the Soviet leadership. The ambassador had no doubts that the Polish authorities "are required to submit each clause for the approval of the Soviet Government". So he was inclined to think "that Poland is more eager than is Soviet Russia to see this political pact concluded at an early date".⁴³

Under the impact of those telegrams, the Foreign Office revised somewhat views on the possibility for an agreement between France and Poland. Bevin came to the conclusion that the Polish-French pact would constitute for the Russians a risk of western influences spreading in Poland which would remove the advantages of France being involved "in the Eastern European Treaty network". He was anticipating that the Soviet side would apply the policy of holding back the treaty's finalization while waiting for the Marshall plan to break down, for the French communists to win an influential position in the government, and for the French side to accept the conditions put forward by the Polish side. In spite of all these considerations Bevin stressed: "I still consider that the conclusion of the pacts (between France, Poland and Czechoslovakia) would involve France dangerously in the European Treaties network". In his instruction of 31 December he asked the ambassadors in Warsaw and Prague to follow closely the developments and inform him in detail.⁴⁴

Even in the late 1947 and early 1948, Bevin could not free himself from suspecting his French partner, despite the fact that the London session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, which had lasted from 25 November to 15 December, ended its deliberations with a failure which almost automatically pushed France back to the western camp since the diplomatic game of the Soviet Union over Germany was coming to an end. The distrust could be deepened by the fact that the French, though they had promised to do it, did not deliver to the British in December the project of a political pact with Poland.⁴⁵ At the beginning of that month some rumours had already reached the Foreign Office that the planned

⁴³ *Ibid.*, N 13548/800/55, Gainer's telegram to Bevin, no. 352, 21 Nov. 1947.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, N 14922/800/55, FO's letter to Gainer, no. 614, 31 December 1947; N 13548/800/55, Hancock's note, 9 December 1947, Hankey's note, 9 December 1947, Warner's note, 14 December 1947.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Hancock's note, 23 December 1947.

Czechoslovak-Hungarian treaty would not only include no mention about Germany herself or about Germany and her allies but that it would also provide for mutual assistance in the case of “any aggression”. At the same time in the British press appeared reports that the already concluded political pacts in Central Eastern Europe would be revised by the extension of the term “aggressor” over any State. Although the Foreign Office waited for a confirmation of this news from more authoritative sources it was getting convinced that France was conducting a game which was the more dangerous the longer it lasted. Because one could put even more easily under the term “any aggressor” the United States or Great Britain than one could do it in the case of a “Germany’s ally”⁴⁶

A meeting between Bevin and Bidault took place on 17 December. The French minister stated at it that the Czechoslovak and Polish ambassadors had been informed that “the present was not the right moment for such (political) treaties” with their States.⁴⁷ Earlier, in November ambassador Garreau had been recalled from Poland as “his strongly pro-Soviet bias had embarrassed his own Government”.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the British ambassador was told in early December by the French chargé d'affaires, de Beausse that the latter could not imagine any other French government to be able to sign a political treaty with Poland than the one led by the general secretary of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez.⁴⁹ At the Polish Socialist Party’s Congress in Wrocław, vice-premier Władysław Gomułka for the first time expressed an accusation against a member of the French government, the socialist minister of the interior, Jules Moch, which provoked a French note of protest.⁵⁰

During the December conversation with Bevin, Bidault did not misinform his colleague. The veracity of his statement was additionally confirmed by the fact that the French minister was accepting without reservation the Anglo-Saxon thesis that the Polish western frontier along the Oder and Nysa Łużycka line had not been established yet and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, N 14922/800/55G. Hancock’s note entitled “The Franco-Polish and Franco-Czech Pacts of Mutual Assistance”, 3 Decem r 1947.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, note entitled “Anglo-Czech Conversation” of December 17th 1947.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, N 13548/800/55, Gainer’s telegram to Bevin.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, n 14125/800/55, Gainer’s telegram to FO, no. 1809, 18 December 1947.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, N 14557/800/55, Gainer’s telegram to FO, no. 1809, 18 December 1947.

so the Polish-Franco political pact of 1921 could not guarantee it. “The French guarantee — he stated — if it could be said to exist, applied to the soul rather than to the body of Poland”.⁵¹ So for the British diplomacy a period of some tension, caused by the uncertainty in which direction France would go, was coming to an end. The development of the general international situation, influenced by the break-down of any forms of co-operation between Moscow and Washington, also affected deeply France’s political position. Her co-operation with Great Britain and the United States could now no longer be replaced by the Soviet Union.

(Translated by Ludwik Wiewiórkowski)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, N 14922/800/55 G, note entitled Anglo-French conversation.