



DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/EO.2016.005>

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Independence in the Vicinity of the Empire. Polish-Soviet Negotiations on Non-Aggression Pact and Moscow Protocol in 1925–1932

Słowa kluczowe: polska polityka zagraniczna; dyplomacja polska; dyplomacja sowiecka; sowiecka polityka zagraniczna; stosunki polsko-sowieckie.

Key words: Polish foreign policy; Polish diplomacy; Soviet diplomacy; Foreign policy of the Soviet Union; polish-soviet relations.

In Polish foreign policy, the relations with Russia were ones of the most difficult ones. Russia, being one of the participants of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century, and also in the 19th century broadening its influence and territories in Europe, posed a threat to all Polish attempts at independence. The collapse of the Romanov Dynasty, a civil war in Russia and taking over the power by Bolsheviki in 1917, as well as an international situation favourable to Poles after the First World War, made it easier for Poland to regain its independence in 1918. The Soviet Russia, however, did not give up its aspirations to reactivate the pre-war borders. The words of Vyacheslav Molotov, who in 1939 said that Poland was “monstrous bastard of the Treaty of Versailles,” are well known. Soviet politicians and diplomats regarded the Polish State as a temporary creation, the territory of which should be incorporated or divided with the participation of their political and military partner, that is Germany. The

Soviet-German relations, in which cooperation interlaced with rivalry, and criticism of the Versailles system led also to the revision of the borders of the independent Polish State, had a huge impact on international relations and directions of Polish foreign policy.

Foreign policy of the Soviet Union, activities of the Soviet diplomacy in the interwar period has a large literature on the subject, based to a large degree on Russian archival documents.¹ Let us mention here only some of the most important contributions. George Frost Kennan writing on foreign policy of the Soviet Union, described its diplomacy as “demonstrational diplomacy,” that is a diplomacy that had little to do with real intentions to make peace and normalize international relations.² The signing of a non-aggression pact by Moscow in 1932 with Poland and France Oleg Ken perceived in a broader context of the world policy of the Soviet Union. An option of cooperation with Western states was, according to him, an attempt to exert pressure on Germany in order to force them to cooperate more closely with the Soviets, and at the same time was a warning sign for Germany against

¹ I mention only some of the texts: G. F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, Boston 1961; P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations 1917–1921*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1969; A. Nowak, *Imperiological studies: a Polish perspective*, Krakow 2011; *Rossiiskaia imperiia v sravnitelnoi perspektive*, ed. A. Miller, Moskva 2004; A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire and Nationalities in Post-Soviet Historiographies*, in: *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia*, ed. T. Hayashi, Sapporo 2003; J. Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938*, Cornell University Press 1984; O. N. Ken, *Collective Security or Isolation? Soviet Foreign Policy and Poland 1930–1935*, St. Petersburg, 1996; idem, *Moskva i pakt o nenapadenii s Pol'shej (1930–1932 gg.)*, St. Peterburg 2003; O. V. Babenko, *Polsko-Sovetskiye Otnosheniya v 1924–1928 gg: ot protivochtoianiya k sotrudnitsestvu*, Moskva 2007; *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991. A Retrospective*, ed. G. Gorodecki, London 1994; I. S. Ivanov, *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva Inostranykh diel, vol. 2: 1917–2000*, Moskva 2002; S. Dullin, *Des hommes d'influences. Les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe 1930–1939*, Paris 2001; in a Russian translation: *Stalin i yevo diplomaty. Sovietskii Soyuz i Evropa 1930–1939*, Moskva 2009; W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy: stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918–1939*, Warsaw 1994; idem, *Amorficzność paradygmatu polityki zagranicznej Związku Sowieckiego. Między globalizmem ideologicznym teorii a imperialistyczną praktyką*, in: *W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu transformacji*, ed. J. Staniszkis, Warsaw 1994; idem, *Na widencie. II Rzeczypospolita wobec Sowietów 1918–1943*, Warsaw 2005; S. Gregorowicz, M. J. Zacharias, *Polska – Związek Sowiecki. Stosunki polityczne 1925–1939*, Warsaw 1995; M. Wołos, *Francja – ZSRR. Stosunki polityczne w latach 1924–1932*, Toruń 2004, idem, *O Piłsudskim, Dmowskim i zamachu majowym. Dyplomacja sowiecka wobec Polski w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1925–1926*, Krakow 2013; F. Dessberg, *Le triangle impossible. Les relations franco-soviétiques et le facteur polonais dans les questions de sécurité en Europe (1924–1935)*, Bruxelles 2009; S. Gorłow, *Alians Moskva–Bierlin, 1920–1933. Voyenno-politicheskiye otnosheniya SSSR–Germaniya*, Moskva 2001.

² G. F. Kennan, op. cit., p. 34.

their plans of domination over Europe. The Soviet-Polish negotiations for the non-aggression pact made it easier, according to Ken, for Moscow to deal with Paris and enter in 1934 the League of Nations.³ Also Sabine Dullin sees the policy of Kremlin in the context of rivalries and drive for the Soviet-German cooperation, although she puts more emphasis on the pro-Western course of Moscow resulting from the fear of Berlin.⁴ Many detailed information about the Soviet foreign policy, giving us at the same time an insight into the decision-making mechanism of the Soviet state, are provided in recent studies by Mariusz Wołos and Frédéric Dessberg.⁵ Their research does not leave room for any illusions about the aggressive policy of the USSR towards Poland.

The present article presents a less exhibited in the Western literature on the subject eastern pillar of the Polish foreign policy and Polish diplomacy in relations with the Soviet Union during the period of negotiations on the non-aggression pact and Litvinov protocol known also under the name of Moscow protocol. It was certainly a specific period in the Polish-Soviet relations which, apart from the Peace of Riga of 1921 that ended the war and setting the Polish-Soviet border, was dominated by negotiations and compromises, but also tensions. It demonstrates above all how difficult it was for the Polish diplomacy to negotiate with the Soviets who mostly wanted to weaken Poland and lead to its isolation in the international arena, but who at the same time were realizing their own political aims in Europe, and not only.

The knowledge of Polish decision-makers and diplomats of the inter-war period about the purposes of Soviet and German foreign policy was pretty broad and deep. It was the threat of these states that determined the course of Polish foreign policy and Polish alliances after the regaining of independence, that is alliances with France and Romania. The internal position of Poland, however, worsened after the decision of Locarno Conference of October, 1925, and differences of opinion about the security in Europe between the East and the West of Europe, as well as after the Soviet-German non-aggression pact and neutrality pact of 24 April, 1926. The treaty, which was a continuation of Rapallo policy, was a dangerous signal for Europe basing its security on the League of Nations. Additional factors worrying Polish diplomacy were its analyses of the Soviet foreign

³ O. N. Ken, *Collective security or isolation?*, p. 284–285.

⁴ S. Dullin, *op. cit.*, pp. 110–118.

⁵ M. Wołos, *Francja – ZSRR*; *idem, O Piłsudskim, Dmowskim i zamachu majowym*; F. Dessberg, *op. cit.*

policy which allowed for an assumption that by bilateral alliances the Soviet Union sought to create a new international system, competitive with the League of Nations.⁶ Aleksander Skrzyński, who until 5 May, 1926, was the prime minister and foreign minister, advocated a joint European action based on the procedures of the League to countercheck imperial aspirations of Soviet Russia. He thought that only organised Europe would be able to stand up to Moscow. After the coup of 12–14 May, 1926, by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, there were some important changes in Polish foreign policy. The existing alliances were supplemented by a new political line, known in the literature on the subject as the policy of balance between the Soviet Union and Germany.⁷ After May 1926 Józef Piłsudski became minister of military affairs, and from 2 October, 1926, to 27 June, 1928, he also served as prime minister (keeping the command of the army at the same time); and although the post of foreign minister in 1926–1932 was given to August Zaleski, it was the Marshal himself who as the expert on Russian matters had the greatest impact on the eastern policy of Poland. Even though Piłsudski appreciated the role of the League of Nations, he did not believe, just like Skrzyński himself, in the efficiency of its procedures that would guarantee the safety of Poland. In the autumn of 1926 the Marshal appointed his personal friend Stanisław Patek Polish envoy to Moscow and entrusted him with the task to negotiate a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. In his reports Patek presented some extremely interesting information and observation on the subject of the Soviet state. He wrote with bitterness that “the Russians are unable to unlearn looking at us like at limitrophes who have broken away from Great Russia”⁸ and indicated that “there was no one who has been all the better for the approach with the USSR without reservations and due caution. It is possible to realise the country’s aims only when they are afraid of or dependent on the country at the given moment or are in need of something.”⁹

⁶ Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych), Acts of Erazm Piltz, sign. 34, fol. 5–15, April 1926, Memorandum of the Polish Government”; M. Kornat, *Stanisław Patek i początki jego misji w Moskwie w r. 1927 (w świetle nowych dokumentów)*, „Zeszyty Historyczne”, 2007, nr 160, pp. 146–155.

⁷ The most comprehensive information on the subject, see: idem, *Polityka równowagi 1934–1939. Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem*, Kraków 2007.

⁸ S. Patek, *Raporty i korespondencja z Moskwy (1927–1932)*, ed. M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, 2nd ed., Warsaw, 2013, document no. 116, p. 279, Moscow, 4 February, 1928, Patek’s report to Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski; M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, *Stanisław Patek w dyplomacji i polityce (1914–1939)*, Warsaw, 2013, p. 294.

⁹ S. Patek, op. cit., document no. 117, Moscow, 6 February, 1928, p. 282, Patek’s report to Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski.

The Non-Aggression Pact

The idea of non-aggression pact, without its detailed provisions, was presented to the Polish side already in November 1924 by the Soviet plenipotentiary representative, that is *polpred*, to Warsaw Pyotr Voykov.¹⁰ In January 1925 Poland proposed that the negotiations be joined by Romania and the Baltic States without Lithuania (Poland and Lithuania did not have diplomatic relations).¹¹ The USSR opposed the proposal and submitted its own: a general triple alliance between the Soviet Union, France and Poland. This proposal was submitted to Aleksander Skrzyński by the head of the Soviet diplomacy, Georgy Chicherin, during his visit to Warsaw on 27–29 September, 1925.¹² At that time, this activity of the Soviet diplomacy and the idea of alliance (either a triple one: Soviet-French-Polish, or bilateral Polish-Soviet) was influenced by the Soviet-French relations, but mainly by a planned conference at Locarno and an attempt made by the USSR to exert pressure on Germany in order to balance mutual Soviet-German relations (the Soviets managed to conclude a Soviet-German treaty on 24 April, 1926) in the face of German approach with France.¹³ Let us add here that the head of the Soviet diplomacy left Warsaw directly for Berlin.

Poland entered the negotiations with the Soviet Union on the non-aggression pact in 1926. Initially, the talks were led by the Polish envoy to Moscow, Stanisław Kętrzyński. Poland conditioned the conclusion of negotiations on a joint pact of the USSR, Poland and the Baltic States (a round table formula) with an additional Bessarabian clause,¹⁴ but allowed for the possibility of concluding “individual alliances by Soviet Russia with Po-

¹⁰ *Dokumenti vneshney politiki SSSR* (hereafter: DVP SSSR), vol. 7, Moscow 1963, pp. 771–772, note 35; W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, p. 182; S. Gregorowicz, M. J. Zacharias, op. cit., p. 19.

¹¹ DVP SSSR, vol. 8, document no. 47, pp. 104–106, Warsaw, 30 January, 1925, Voykov’s telegram to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

¹² For more information, see: P. Wandycz, *Aleksander Skrzyński, minister spraw zagranicznych II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 2006, pp. 191–195; DVP SSSR, vol. 8, document no. 323, pp. 552–555, 2 October, 1925, Chicherin’s letter to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs; ibidem, document no. 272, pp. 487–489; O. N. Ken, *Moskva i pakt o nena-padenii*, p. 7; O. V. Babenko, op. cit., pp. 116–121.

¹³ M. Wołos, *Francja – ZSRR*, p. 219; F. Dessberg, op. cit., pp. 118–122.

¹⁴ The clause stemmed from the Polish-Romanian alliance that guaranteed the territorial integrity (like the Article 10 of the League of Nations). The USSR did not have diplomatic relations with Romania and did not recognise Bessarabia as belonging to Romania.

land and the Baltic States” regarded as a whole.¹⁵ Moscow, seeking to conclude bilateral alliances with Poland and the Baltic States, consistently rejected the Polish condition.

Let us stray for a moment from the subject of Polish-Soviet relations to recall a talk of Chicherin’s deputy Maxim Litvinov with French Ambassador to Moscow Jean Herbette on 25 January, 1927. The Soviet diplomat asked the Frenchman whether Poland would be able to assure France of its non-aggressive polity towards Moscow if the analogous assurance had been given by the USSR? Litvinov even said that if Herbette had been able to convince his government to such mediation, Litvinov himself would “in consultation with his authorities enter the official way” in this matter. He also added that it was up to France to decide on the scope of guarantees and obligations of the parties. At this moment Herbette suggested to include Romania within this construct. Litvinov, however, opposed this idea on the grounds of small probability of Romanian attack against the USSR; according to him, “Romania would not risk it,” but Piłsudski posed a real threat. Litvinov also uttered the words which – as we are justified to believe – reflected the real stance and intention of the Soviet government in relation to the planned conclusion of the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact. The deputy of the people’s commissar for foreign affairs argued that Moscow wanted to sign with Poland “a simple non-aggression pact” and France could help achieve this aim.¹⁶ This probably meant that France would play the role of intermediary between the Soviet Union and Poland, and that a similar pact would be signed with France (it was already negotiated by Moscow) and both the pacts would form a kind of trilateral alliance. It seems that in the early months of 1927 Litvinov, facing the expected obstinacy of Poland regarding the non-aggression pact that would include the Baltic States and possibly Romania, considered the idea of using France by the Soviets to put pressure on Poland in order to force the latter to enter a simple bilateral pact that would be included to the general formula of tripartite alliance of the Soviet Union, France and Poland. This was to limit maximally Poland’s margin of manoeuvre in the international relations and to made Poland dependent on Moscow and Paris.

¹⁵ *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich* (hereafter: DiM), vol. 4, prep. A. Deruga, W. Gostyńska, J. Jurkiewicz, P. Olszański, A. Zatorski, Warsaw 1965, document no. 341, s. 516, Warsaw, 29 April, 1926, Aleksander Skrzyński’s instruction to Envoy Stanisław Kętrzyński.

¹⁶ The Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации) in Moscow (hereafter: AVP RF), f. 04, o. 32, p. 225, d. 52825, fols. 8–9, 25 January, 1927, Litvinov’s notes from the meeting with Herbette.

The subject of trilateral French-Soviet-Polish relations, but also of French-German-Soviet ones, together with the ideas of collective security very important for France at that time was after the Locarno treaties one of the most difficult problems of post-Versailles Europe. But, as much as tripartite treaties belonged to the sphere of possibility which Paris was open to consider, the support for a bilateral pact between the USSR and Poland tied – according to the system of collective security – with the French-Soviet agreement belonged to the sphere of the most important affairs of French foreign policy. At that time, in their talks with the Soviets the French did not put the matter as categorically as in 1931. Poland, in turn, from the very beginning conditioned the signing of the pact with the Soviet Union on the conclusion of analogous pacts between the USSR and the Baltic States (without Lithuania) and possibly with Romania. With the lapse of time, also France began to make dependant the pact with the Soviet Union on such alliances with the western neighbours and Romania. The difference, however, was that Poland wanted to conclude the pacts together with the Baltic States and Romania and it would be a kind of regional alliance, while France wanted to include these bilateral pacts, also the Polish-French one, to the system of collective security.¹⁷ Moscow, however, opposed these French plans to combine the pacts with Poland and the Baltic States and criticised the idea not only because of its references to the League of Nations, but also because of the role Poland wanted to play within the arrangement. If the USSR was interested in non-aggression pacts it was only in separate bilateral alliances with each of those states individually which would secure Moscow the role of initiator.

At the beginning of 1927 the Polish side treated the Soviet proposals with reserve and expected quick negotiations on the non-aggression pact. After Kętrzyński was recalled, a new envoy in the person of Stanisław Patek was sent to Moscow in January 1927. It was not until April that the negotiations with the Soviets began. In June the talks were suspended after the assassination in Warsaw of Soviet *polpred* Pyotr Voykov. They were resumed for a short time in September of that year then suspended until the summer of 1931. Moscow did not accept the Polish suggestions to sign jointly together with the Baltic States and possibly Romania a multilateral pact at a round table. It is worthy of notice here that already after two initial meetings there was a clash on 19 April, 1927, between Patek and the member of

¹⁷ For more information, see: M. Wołos, *Negocjacje polsko-sowieckie*, in: F. Dessberg, M. Wołos, *Francusko-sowieckie i polsko-sowieckie negocjacje w sprawie zawarcia paktów o nieagresji w latach 1925–1927*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” 2007, nr 161, pp. 57–73.

the Council of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, caused by the speech delivered on 18 April at the Fourth All-Russian Conference of Soviets by Prime Minister Aleksey Rykov who said that Poland had not joined the negotiations on non-aggression pact and accused Poland of patronising policy towards the Baltic States and Rumania.¹⁸ On the following day, that is 19 April, agitated Patek came to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and told Boris Stomoniakov that after the speech he was "unable to recover". He brought with him some propaganda "materials" handed distributed during the conference among foreign diplomats, containing offensive information about allegedly aggressive intentions of Piłsudski towards the USSR.¹⁹ This was one of many Soviet activities in order to force Poland to resign from the Polish conditions pertaining to the non-aggression pact and especially the idea of "round table."

When in 1931 the negotiations were resumed, the Polish side still tried to maintain its position on the cooperation with the Baltic States and Romania as regards either the simultaneous signing of the pact or its initialling. Polish diplomacy doubled its efforts to encourage the Baltic States, Finland and Romania to sign pacts with the USSR.²⁰ Also France played the part of intermediary with the Soviets in Romanian matters. But Romania itself was sceptical about the idea of pact with the Soviet Union. In the way of the pact was, of course, the lack of diplomatic relations with Moscow, but also fears of Bucharest that the pact would weaken the alliance with Poland. Finally, the Soviet-Romanian talks were initiated, but soon afterwards were aborted and nothing concrete came out of them. The Soviet side, however, prevented the Polish suggestion of cooperation with the Baltic States from be-

¹⁸ AVP RF, f. 04, o. 33, p. 220, d. 52719, fols. 23–28, 19 April, 1927, Stomoniakov's report on the meeting with Patek.

¹⁹ Ibidem, fols. 23–24, 19 April, 1927, Stomoniakov's notes from the meeting with Patek.

²⁰ There is a broad literature on this subject, see for instance: H. Bułhak, *Polska a Rumunia 1918–1939* in: *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi 1918–1939*, ed. J. Żarnowski, Wrocław 1977; M. Leczyk, *Polsko-rumuński sojusz wojskowy (1926–1932)*, „Dzieje Najnowsze” 1994, nr 3; A. Skrzypek, *Zagadnienia rumuńskie w stosunkach polsko-radzieckich w latach 1932–1938*, „Z Dziejówstosunków Polsko-Radzieckich. Studia i materiały (hereafter: ZDSPR), 11–12 (1973); A. Essen, *Polska a Mała Ententa 1920–1934*, Warsaw–Kraków 1992; T. Sandu, *La Roumanie dans les dispositifs français de sécurité en Europe centre-orientale, 1919–1933*, in: *Bâtir une nouvelle sécurité. La coopération militaire entre la France et les Etats d'Europe centrale et orientale de 1919 à 1929*, Château de Vincennes 2001; idem, *Le système de sécurité français en Europe central-orientale. L'exemple roumain 1919–1933*, Paris 1999; H. Walczak, *Sojusz z Rumunią w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918–1931*, Szczecin, 2008.

ing realised and initiated separate negotiations with each of them that were concluded with the signing of pacts. In this situation, on 25 January, 1932, Poland initiated the agreement with the Soviets and on 25 July, 1932, put its signature under it. In November 1939 the pact was supplemented by another important point on a formal conciliatory procedure. The Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact was made for three years, and in 1935 it was prolonged for another ten years. Let us remind that to pursue its policy of balance, on 26 January, 1934, Poland signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. In 1939 both these pacts were broken off by Moscow and Berlin. In September 1939 the bleakest scenario in the Polish foreign policy came true.

In the meantime, however, Poland, despite being contended to sign the Polish-Soviet pact, was aware of its fragility in the relations with such a dangerous neighbour like Soviet Russia. The main negotiator during the talks with the Soviets, Stanisław Patek, wrote that the non-aggression pact gave Poland nothing new but it probably could be useful for the Soviets since they wanted to sign it, but “in principle it is better for Poland to have the pact than not to have it.”²¹ Marshal Piłsudski, according to the reminiscences of Zalewski’s successor on the post of foreign minister, Józef Beck, regarded the non-aggression pact as “a weighty form of political declaration [...] rather than a juridical instrument, he cared only for some basic rules of conduct and not for details of the texts.”²² The accord confirmed the non-aggression rule in relations between the two states and the validity of the Treaty of Riga. And that was its true value.

The Moscow Protocol

A multilateral agreement on eliminating war as an instrument of national policy, called the Kellogg-Briand Pact or the Pact of Paris, was signed in Paris on 27 August, 1928, by Germany, the United States, Belgium, France, Great Britain and the British dominions, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. It entered into force on 25 July, 1929. Already in 25 August, 1928, France invited officially the USSR to enter the pact and on 6 September Moscow joined the signatories. The signing of the pact, regardless of its real or intentional significance, was an important element of the contemporary international relations. And this fact was used by the

²¹ S. Patek, op. cit., document no. 1, Moscow [January 1927], p. 68.

²² *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 1926–1932. Na podstawie tekstów min. Józefa Becka*, prep. A. M. Cienciała, Paris 1990, p. 57.

USSR. Let us remind here that the talks on the non-aggression pact between Poland and the Soviet Union were suspended in the autumn of 1927. On 20 December, 1928, the Soviet Political Bureau decided to propose to Poland and Lithuania a protocol on “earlier ratification of the Kellogg Pact and on recognition of its entering into force between these states and the USSR regardless of its ratification by other signatories.”²³ It was Litvinov who talked about it with the Polish envoy to Moscow Stanisław Patek on 29 December 1928 in the presence of Boris Stomoniakov.²⁴ The Soviet diplomat emphasised that the idea of earlier ratification did not include all the Baltic States because they had not joined the Kellogg-Briand Pact yet. But as soon as they would do it, Soviet Russia “reserves the right to turn”²⁵ to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland in the future. The information were included in the note that Litvinov handed to Patek, together with the suggestions that it was Poland who was responsible for the lack of tangible positive results from the negotiated non-aggression pact.²⁶ On the same day Litvinov informed the Lithuanian envoy to Moscow Jurgis Baltrušaitis about the initiated protocol and suggested that the pact should be turned into multilateral settlement for Moscow proposed to make it an open pact that could be joined by other states of the region. But the proposal did not stipulate the form of signing of the pact. Litvinov dispatched similar notes to the diplomatic envoys to Moscow of France, Estonia, and Finland. To Ambassador Herbet, he handed out a copy for Patek and asked him to pass on this information to the government of the United States.²⁷

The Soviet initiative was not favourable to Poland. The Turkish envoy to Moscow, Vasif Bey repeated to Litvinov a fairly characteristic comment

²³ O. N. Ken, A. I. Rupasov, *Politbiuro CK VKP(b) i otnošenija SSSR s zapadnymi soseďnimii gosudarstvami (koniec 1920–1930ch gg.). Problemy. Dokumenty. Opyt kommentaria*, part 1: 1928–1934, Sankt-Peterburg 2000, pp. 123–128.

²⁴ DVP SSSR, vol. 11, document no. 392, p. 639, 29 December, 1928, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Patek, document no. 393, pp. 640–645, note and a protocol’s project; W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, pp. 221–223; S. Łopatiuk, “Protokół moskiewski,” ZDSPR, vol. 4, document no. 3, p. 181, Patek’s telegram of 30 December, 1928.

²⁵ The Central Military Archives at Rembertów, I.303.4.2929, Moscow, 29 December, 1928, fol. 399, Litvinov’s note to Patek in Polish translation.

²⁶ DVP SSSR, vol. 11, document no. 392, p. 639, 29 December, 1928, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Patek, document no. 393, pp. 640–645, note and a project of the protocol.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, document no. 394, p. 664; document no. 395, p. 646; document no. 396, pp. 647–649, document no. 397, p. 649. For more, see: W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, pp. 223–224; Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères français (hereafter: AMAEF), URSS, vol. 311, Moscow, 29 December, 1928, Herbet’s telegram no. 1408 to Briand.

of the Polish envoy Stanisław Patek who was supposed to say shortly after 29 December, 1928, that “if we say yes, we will be forced to cede the initiative to the Soviets and recognise their contribution in this matter. If we say no, we will expose ourselves in the eye of the world.”²⁸ Patek soon realized that this proposal made the USSR an arbiter for the region of Central Eastern Europe and saw it as an action that could be counter-productive to similar aspirations of Poland. Thus, he was rather critical of the suggestion of Moscow, although he did not oppose the idea of the pact itself. In his opinion it was a cunning diplomatic move of propaganda character to strengthen the Soviet position towards the neighbouring states. He thought that such an action could have a negative influence on the relations between Poland and the Baltic States. He wrote: “The theme had been cleverly thought out. Our consent to their proposals will bring them gain, and our refusal will give them grounds to a new attack of their self-advertisement and propaganda on the subject of their pacification and our belligerence.”²⁹ Also Ambassador Herbette saw the idea of Litvinov as a cunning manoeuvre to move Poland away from the Baltic States and to take over the initiative in this region by the USSR.³⁰

At the beginning of January 1929 Litvinov met with the German ambassador to Moscow, Herbert von Dirksen. The German diplomat was sceptical about the idea of protocol, although it did not surprise Litvinov who was probably accustomed to critical comments of the German every time the Soviets made a step towards Poland. Litvinov informed Dirksen that Germany could join the protocol and listed possible benefits: 1) a general form of the protocol that did not oblige Germany to guarantee the western border of Poland; and 2) the possibility to weaken the pressure exerted on Germany towards the “eastern Locarno.”³¹ It is possible that Litvinov’s words were to probe or, which was even more probable, were to refer to Dirksen’s question, without much hope for their realisation. What was important here, however, was the reference of the Soviet diplomat to the western border of Poland. It corroborates the fact known in the literature on the subject that

²⁸ AVP RF, f. 05, o. 9, p. 43, d. 3, fol. 15, 14 January, 1929, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Turkish envoy Vasif Bey.

²⁹ S. Łopatniuk, op. cit., document no. 3, p. 182, Patek’s telegram of 30 December, 1928.

³⁰ AMAEF, URSS, vol. 311, fols. 6–13, Telegram no. 1408–1420, Moscow, 29 December, 1928, Herbette to Briand; *ibidem*, fols. 106–107, Telegram no. 27–28, Moscow, 10 January, 1929, Herbette to Briand; *ibidem*, fols. 14–18; for more information, see: M. Wołos, *Francja – ZSRR*, pp. 421–431.

³¹ AVP RF, fols. 8–9, 7 January, 1929, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Dirksen.

both Germany and the Soviet Union regarded the question of the Polish borders as open issue. Litvinov's statement indicates that the Soviets wanted to transform the protocol into a general alliance without any concrete stipulations, hence the reference to "the eastern Locarno." But the protocol was of political importance for international relations and of course of propaganda significance. Litvinov emphasised this in his talk with Dirksen on 21 January, 1929, saying that the Soviet side would seek to fulfil its former stance and would oppose the Polish attempts to make the protocol an element of "eastern Locarno."³² It should be stressed here that it was with German diplomats that Litvinov talked about real aims of the Soviet foreign policy. Anticipating the developments, that it the consent of Poland to join in the protocol and the Polish idea to sign it at the round table with Romania and the Baltic States, it is worth to refer here to next talks between Litvinov and the Germans. The Soviet diplomat told Dirksen on 1 February, 1929: "We have given Poland no chance to slip out of the protocol and for this reason we have made concessions."³³ An interesting talk took place between German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann and Litvinov on 10 May, 1929, that is several months after the signing of the protocol. Litvinov said that the Soviet side attached great importance to the protocol. The Kellogg-Briand Pact had not entered into force yet, and the protocol signed in Moscow had been already valid for four months. Litvinov listed the following reasons for signing of that protocol: 1) an aspiration of Moscow to change the image of "the aggressive USSR" seeking to invade Poland that pervaded in the West (he added that Poland had even succeeded in convincing Briand) and to protect the Soviet Union against "the aggression" of Poland; 2) a desire of Moscow to "tie up the hands of Poland in its relations with Lithuania."³⁴ The latter comment of Litvinov seems especially important. Initially, Moscow did not achieve its aim because Lithuania had not joined the protocol, the Lithuanians did it later. The fact, however, that both Lithuania and Poland joined the Soviet initiative was extremely important for Moscow. We should agree with Oleg N. Ken and Alexandr I. Rupasov that the Soviet diplomacy used the Kellogg-Briand Pact to demonstrate its role in the tense Polish-Lithuanian relations.³⁵

³² Ibidem, fol. 25, 21 January, 1929, Litvinov's note from the meeting with Dirksen.

³³ Ibidem, f. 09, o. 4, p. 34, d. 3, fol. 30, 1 February, 1929, Litvinov's note from the meeting with Dirksen.

³⁴ Ibidem, fol. 51, 10 May, 1929, Litvinov's note from the meeting with Stresemann; ibidem, f. 05, o. 9, p. 43, d. 3, fols. 95–97.

³⁵ О. Н. Кен, А. И. Рупасов, *Москва и Страны Балтии: Опыт Взаимоотношений, 1917–1939 гг.*, p. 9, on: www.lviv.ru/documents/ken/, [access: 12. 11. 2011].

On 10 January, 1929, Polish Foreign Minister August Zaleski gave Litvinov a positive replay to his note of 29 December, 1928, with the condition that the Soviet government should issue similar notes to Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Romania.³⁶ Let us remind that the USSR had sent to the Baltic States only telegrams and not notes with the information about the content of talks with Poland and Lithuania. Thus, Zaleski wrote that because of “the necessity to deal jointly with the problem of security in Eastern Europe by all interested states,” the Polish government was going to address those states in order to examine their stance on the matter.³⁷ Indeed, the Polish side made proposals to agree and submit a common standpoint towards the Soviet initiative. In the light of Patek’s talks in the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs it is evident how the Polish diplomacy tried to use the Soviet proposals for its own ends and to extricate itself from the Soviet trap. Proposing the formula of signing the pact together with the Baltic States and Romania, the Poles returned to one of the more thorny issues concerning the non-aggression pact.

At this time, the Lithuanian government (on 23 January) responded to the Soviet proposal by withdrawing from the participation because of – as it was stated – the fact of signing the pact “on equal terms with Poland” and Polish aspirations to dominate in the Baltic region.³⁸ Also Finland was not interested in signing the protocol. They explained that the Finnish parliament had to approve the Kellogg-Briand Pact first, and then possibly the protocol proposed by the USSR. This left, apart from the Soviet Union and Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania. And although initially Moscow opposed the formula to signing the pact together with the Baltic States and Romania (and let us again remind that there were no diplomatic relations established between the both states), it finally consented to the proposal.³⁹ There was, however, some friction, as Patek wrote to the then undersecretary of state Alfred Wysocki on 29 January, 1929: “As regards the matter of joint and simultaneous signing of the protocol by Poland, Romania and the Baltic States, the Soviet press took such a negative position, and during my few last visits to the Narkomindel Litvinov was overcome with such strong bitterness that [...] I feared that the Soviets might in their annoyance, ruthlessness and adventurism announce to the world that the negotiations

³⁶ DiM, vol. 5, document no. 201, pp. 370–372, Warsaw, 10 January, 1929, Zaleski’s note to Litvinov. For more information, see: W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, pp. 222–223.

³⁷ DiM, vol. 5, document no. 201, p. 371.

³⁸ W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, p. 224; idem, *Na widecie*, p. 337.

³⁹ O. N. Ken, A. I. Rupasov, op. cit., pp. 130–132.

are aborted and that our stance is anti-peace and anti-Soviet.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the days preceding the signing of the protocol were extremely nervous. Litvinov wanted to quickly sign the protocol with Poland only, he even set the date on 7 February, 1929, and then he wanted other states to join in. Patek on the other hand, wanting to include the Baltic States and Romania, tried to delay the very act of signing, and suggested 10 February.⁴¹ The Soviet diplomat made efforts to sign the protocol in the smallest possible group. For this reason, after the Romanian diplomat Carol Davila arrived to Moscow, Litvinov wanted the protocol to be signed by Romania and Poland only. According to him, neither Estonia nor Latvia responded officially to the proposal of joining the protocol, thus their diplomatic representatives had no authority to do it. Patek was against the idea.⁴² After Estonian envoy Julius Seliamaa had been informed by his government that he could sign the protocol,⁴³ Litvinov tried to finalise the matter at least without Latvia.

Finally, thanks to extreme determination of the Polish side, but also the ambitions of Litvinov who was preparing himself to replace Chicherin as the head of the Soviet diplomacy, the protocol, called the Litvinov Protocol or Moscow Protocol, was signed on 9 February, 1929, by the USSR, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania. The signatures were put by: Estonian envoy to Moscow Julius Seliamaa, Latvian envoy to Moscow Karls Ozols, Romanian envoy to Warsaw Carol Davila, Stanisław Patek and Maxim Litvinov. The protocol was a regional agreement on renunciation of war among its signatories and remained “open for all states to join in” (article 5).⁴⁴ Soon, the protocol was joined by Turkey and Persia, and then also by Lithuania, but was not joined by Finland.

Historians have taken a positive view of the Moscow Protocol signed by Poland. It was undoubtedly a success of the Polish diplomacy, since it took the form of multilateral alliance, signed at the round table, so much criticised by the Soviet side during the negotiations with Poland on the non-aggression pact.⁴⁵ Its importance, however, should not be overestimated. The

⁴⁰ S. Patek, op. cit., document no. 150, p. 346, Moscow, 29 January, 1929, Patek’s letter to Wysocki.

⁴¹ AVP RF, f. 05, o. 9, p. 43, d. 3, fol. 36, 31 January, 1929, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Patek; also: f. 09, o. 4, p. 34, d. 3, fol. 28.

⁴² S. Patek, op. cit., document no. 151, p. 348, Moscow, 15 February, 1929, Patek’s report to Zaleski.

⁴³ AVP RF, f. 05, o. 9, p. 43, d. 3, fol. 53, 9 February, 1929, Litvinov’s note from the meeting with Seliamaa.

⁴⁴ DiM, vol. 5, document no. 215, pp. 397–399, Moscow, 9 February, 1929.

⁴⁵ M. Leczyk, op. cit., p. 247; W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy*, p. 225; idem, *Na widecie*, pp. 338–339; A. Skrzypek, op. cit., p. 130; O. H. Кен, А. И. Рупасов, *Москва и Страны*

Moscow Protocol was operative only for six months, that is until July 1929, when the Kellogg-Briand Pact entered into force.

Streszczenie

Niezależność w sąsiedztwie imperium. Polsko-sowieckie negocjacje na temat paktu o nieagresji i protokołu moskiewskiego z lat 1925–1932

Artykuł dotyczy polsko-sowieckich stosunków w latach 20. i 30. XX w. w kontekście ówczesnych stosunków międzynarodowych z uwzględnieniem także problematyki państw bałtyckich i Rumunii. Stanowi także próbę ustosunkowania się do dotychczasowej literatury, stanu badań i nowych źródeł. W artykule przedstawiono wschodni filar polskiej polityki zagranicznej i działalność polskiej dyplomacji w stosunkach z Związkiem Sowieckim w okresie negocjacji w związku z paktem o nieagresji oraz protokołem Litwinowa znanego także jako protokół moskiewski. ZSRS już pod koniec lat 20. XX w. rozpoczął aktywną działalność mającą na celu wejście do polityki światowej. To dążenie Moskwy zostało dość przychylnie odebrane przez państwa zachodnie. Sądzone, iż możliwe są normalne kontakty z ZSRS, a demonstrowana przez sowiecką dyplomację aprobata polityki zbiorowego bezpieczeństwa wpłynie tylko korzystnie na pokój w Europie. Dodatkowo miano nadzieję, że ten zwrot w polityce sowieckiej osłabi jej kontakty z Berlinem. To państwa graniczące z ZSRS, w tym Polska, były wyczulone na sowieckie niebezpieczeństwo. Pojawia się oczywiście pytanie, czy była szansa na utrzymanie niepodległości w sąsiedztwie zaborczego imperium dążącego do reaktywowania granic z przeszłości. Polska dyplomacja w okresie rządów i wpływu Józefa Piłsudskiego na politykę zagraniczną z niezwykłą determinacją starała się bronić zasady niezależności polskiej polityki i wiązała to z zagadnieniami bezpieczeństwa Polski. Mając na uwadze sowieckie zagrożenie, wykorzystywano formy układów dwu- i wielostronnych, aby zapewnić pokój w stosunkach polsko-sowieckich. Jednym z ważniejszych elementów wschodniej polityki Polski było dążenie do utrzymania wspólnego frontu działań z państwami bałtyckimi i Rumunią wobec ZSRS. Niestety działania te przynosiły tylko częściowe sukcesy, jak chociażby podpisanie protokołu moskiewskiego czy paktu o nieagresji. Polskiej dyplomacji nie udało się zniwelować sowieckich i niemieckich wpływów oraz działań w państwach bałtyckich. Układy z Moskwą były jednak dla Polski konieczne, chociaż nie dowierzano sowieckiej dyplomacji, widząc w nich podstępnych i przebiegłych graczy.

Баитми; Ken and Rupasov indicate the cleverness of the Polish diplomacy in diplomatic manoeuvres with Moscow. At the same time they write that this “failure” of Moscow resulted in the change of course towards Poland and sharpened the mutual relations.

Summary

Independence in the Vicinity of the Empire. Polish-Soviet Negotiations on Non-Aggression Pact and Moscow Protocol in 1925–1932

It was already at the end of the 1920s that the USSR began activities in order to enter the world politics. Those actions of Moscow were fairly favourably regarded by Western states. It was thought that the normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union was possible and that the approval of the system of collective security demonstrated by the Soviet diplomacy would have a constructive impact on peace in Europe. Only the states adjacent to the USSR, including Poland, were sensitive to the Soviet threat. It was with great determination that Polish diplomacy during the time of Józef Piłsudski and his influence on the foreign policy tried to defend the independence of Polish foreign politics which was related to the problems of Polish security. With regard to the Soviet threat, formulae of bi- and multilateral alliances were used to maintain peaceful neighbouring relations with the Soviet Union. One of the most important elements of Polish eastern policy was the attempt to form a common front of action with the Baltic States and Romania towards the USSR. Unfortunately, these actions were successful only in part, as for instance the conclusion of the Moscow Protocol.

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