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# Sanacja's Foreign Policy and the Second Polish Republic, 1926-1935

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SANACJA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC,  
1926-1935

by

Martin J. Kozon

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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in History

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May 2015

## ABSTRACT

### SANACJA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC, 1926-1935

by

Martin J. Kozon

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Professor Neal Pease

Following its reemergence on the map of Europe in 1919, the Second Polish Republic found itself wedged between a revisionist German state and a world revolution-seeking communist Russia. Although it procured alliances with France and Romania, territorial issues spoiled relations with neighboring states and revisions to the post-World War I order began to raise serious concerns over the Republic's security in East Central Europe. Seven years later and after the May coup by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the Sanacja regime emerged as the Republic's caretaker and instituted an exotic foreign policy that saw Poland become self-dependent and adopt the sub-policy of equilibrium or "*równowaga*." This thesis focuses on the formation of Sanacja's foreign policy during a nine-year period from 1926 to 1935, through the examination of relations between Poland and its allies, perceived enemies, neighbors, and the overall changing political atmosphere in Europe.

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It is never a rare phenomenon to thank and credit one's parents for his or her success, but how thankful I am to my mother and father, Halina and Waldemar Kozon, is immeasurable. Despite being perhaps too young to grasp what I was seeing, I look back and thank my mother for always taking me to see historical points of interests all over Poland when I was but a mere child. When coupled with my father's storytelling and answering my numerous historical inquiries, it is without a doubt that my parents were the ones who truly cultivated my curiosity for Poland's past.

## INTRODUCTION

From 1926 to 1935 the Second Polish Republic was ruled by the *Sanacja* regime under the tutelage of Marshal Józef Piłsudski.<sup>1</sup> Its political ideology was derived from the term's meaning, aiming to morally purify a Polish state whose political arena had spiraled out of control in recent years. Although domestic instability was the primary motive for Piłsudski's seizure of power in May 1926, once in control the Marshal had devoted most of his time in shaping Polish foreign policy.

Poland's place in Europe's interwar period was nothing new when compared to its past, as the reborn Republic found itself yet again wedged in between two large and aggressive neighbors in Germany and Russia. Only this time, the Polish nation did not find itself imprisoned by the great 19<sup>th</sup> century empires of Europe under a Kaiser or a Tsar. Germany was left with overwhelming feelings of bitterness due to the unfavorable terms that the Treaty of Versailles forced upon it. Russia saw two revolutions replace its autocracy with a communist party whose goal was to spread the proletariat revolution abroad. But regardless of their new postwar forms, both states shared a common interest in that they could not reconcile the very thought of an independent Polish state.

The longevity of the Republic's independence and cultural life relied on preventing the past from repeating. Namely, that Germany and Russia's collaboration could only serve to bring about the end of the Polish state. Thus it was imperative for Polish foreign policy to prevent such a possibility by continuously working to protect

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<sup>1</sup> Some historians classify the regime as encompassing the additional four years between the Marshal's death in 1935, and the capitulation of the Republic at the onset of World War II in 1939. However I classify the period from 1935-1939 not under the *Sanacja* regime, but under the Colonels regime, one that was without the Marshal's direction but composed of many former military colleagues of his who lacked his foresight in policy-making.



Poland's interests and find guarantees for its security. Though the Paris Peace Conference had established a postwar system to promote and maintain peace, gradual changes over the following years began to undermine that structure and threaten to swing the pendulum away from Poland's favorable position.

Sanacja's foreign policy did not seek to undo what the regime's predecessors had done. The main issues that made this nine-year period of Polish foreign policy stand out were the dangerous circumstances that the Republic had found itself in by the time Piłsudski seized power. Domestic instability, continuous cabinet changes, and subsequently, the lack of consistent policies caused the failure in the Republic's search and adaptation of a uniform foreign policy. Whereas the Locarno Agreements created a dangerous precedent for territorial revisionism to strike at the Republic's borders, the Treaty of Rapallo revived the late 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of German-Russian collaboration that could only end disastrously for Poland. Perhaps a greater problem lay in the fact that Poland's allies, France and Romania, had drifted away from full cooperation within a defensive system created to guarantee each other's security. The Sanacja regime inherited the reins of a state that had been geopolitically isolated and whose security was left exposed.

My choice in time frame is based on the following observation: the large majority of scholarship has tended to focus on Polish foreign policy during the whole interwar period, from 1919-1939. While there does exist a smaller collection of scholarship that groups Sanacja with its successors, the Colonels regime, I find merit in separating the two and devoting greater attention to the former.<sup>2</sup> The focus of my thesis is to examine how

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<sup>2</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the differences between the Sanacja regime and the Colonels regime, even if only centered on foreign policy. Although the latter inherited the Marshal's

the Sanacja regime under its chief architect, Marshal Piłsudski, attempted to bring Poland out of its geopolitical isolation and secure its position in East Central Europe, using methods that differed from the regime's predecessors. The basic phenomenon that its foreign policy presents us with is that it made Poland increasingly self-reliant in its search for security over the nine-year period, rather than place its independence in the hands of institutions such as the League of Nations, which tended to disregard its interests over the years. In order to display this, particular attention is paid to Poland's neighbors (Germany, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Soviet Union) and allies (France and Romania), and what changes it made to conducting diplomatic relations with these states. Though I spend more time examining Poland's position vis-à-vis them, background information on their position in Interwar Europe has been provided as well. I then place these interactions within the European political scene in order to test their reactions to the changes taking place, such as the introduction of international concepts like the Kellogg-Briand Pact, or regional schemes such as the Eastern Pact.

For purposes of clarity, the thesis is composed of five chapters that divide up the nine-year period into blocks of years. Chapter one introduces us to the rebirth of and the first seven years of the Second Polish Republic. It provides a background on the state's social, economic, political, and foreign policy makeup, culminating in Piłsudski's coup and subsequent consolidation of Sanacja's rule over Poland. Chapter two introduces us to the origins of Sanacja's foreign policy, where its blueprint is presented and initial interactions with Poland's neighbors and allies take place. Following drastic changes in the European political scene within the first three years, Chapter Three presents the

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policies, it failed to maintain them or make the necessary adjustments to avoid Nazi and Soviet aggression in the fall of 1939.

radical shift in foreign policy to accommodate them. Poland continues to grow independent of the influence of its allies and the League of Nations, and exhibits aggressive tactics in order to counter foreign actions that are deemed detrimental to its interests. Poland's position vis-à-vis the rise of Nazi Germany and Europe's answer in appeasing and or neutralizing it are examined in Chapter Four. And finally, the last five months of Sanacja's foreign policy under the tutelage of Marshal Piłsudski, as well as a brief overview of the Republic's last four years of independence, are laid out in Chapter Five.

When originally planning this thesis, my goal was to identify something new or original about the topic. But there was little feasibility in attempting such a venture. Under the guidance of my adviser and thesis committee, I reworked the goal of this project into something that could perhaps be more contributing to the existing scholarship. From the view of Sanacja Poland, my thesis attempts to reconstruct the events occurring in Interwar Europe from 1926-1935, recounting the decay in the postwar-Versailles system and Sanacja's subsequent response to it. My intention is not to absolve the Republic of its shortcomings or to glorify any of its achievements, but to argue that its security was the safest in the hands of this particular regime. Poland and Europe may have fallen victim to Nazi and Soviet aggression in 1939, but this thesis will show that there were attempts made by the former to avoid the road less traveled, the road to another world war and deprivation of independence.

## I. THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

### From Independence to *Sanacja*

Absent for over 123 years, Poland returned to the map of Europe following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian empires at the end of World War I. The Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination became a guideline for the Polish representation at the Paris Peace Conference, to help the young Polish state ease back into its form as an independent state in Europe. Although diplomats from the victorious Allied side crafted the peace to “never again” bring about such a devastating war and reconstruct a Europe with independent states primarily in East Central Europe, the bayonets of the Polish army also played a large part in forging the borders of the Second Polish Republic.

The Republic’s borders stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Danubian basin, situated yet again between two large neighbors in Germany and Russia, and bordering also newly established states such as Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. While the Polish army conquered or seized pieces of territory on its eastern frontier, the Paris Peace Conference had awarded it with territories at the expense of Germany to form its western frontier. Through various special commissions and plebiscites, contested territories such as Upper Silesia and Eastern Galicia for the most part were handed to Poland. After much dispute between Poland and Germany, the port city of Danzig (Gdańsk) became a free city in which Poland received exclusive rights such as vital access to the Baltic. Ethnically the state was composed of about 70 percent Poles but also an enormous 30

percent mixture of various minorities such as Germans, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews among the larger groups.<sup>3</sup>

World War I's effects were extremely devastating to the Polish countryside and in turn, set the postwar economy back when compared to Western Europe. An incredible 90 percent of land hosted the battles of the Eastern Front, 25 percent of which was continuously fought on.<sup>4</sup> Like most of the region, Poland had never completely industrialized during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The war did not fare well on what little industries the country did possess, as the retreating German and Russian armies had looted or razed the majority of them. Plants were stripped of machinery and raw materials, all of which was taken back to their respective countries.<sup>5</sup> Historically known to be agriculturally dominant, Polish farms and livestock also suffered from the war. Fields were depleted from continuous warfare, the retreating armies had taken livestock, and class differences showed that the aristocracy was still unwilling to cede land to the large peasant population of Poland.<sup>6</sup>

Politically, the new Republic was designed on the parliamentary democracy model, consisting of the *Sejm* as the lawmaker of the land. In its first four years it did not have a president but instead was led by the Polish Legionnaires' wartime leader Jozef Piłsudski. Returning from his internment at Magdeburg in November 1918, he was named and confirmed by the Sejm as *de facto* head of state. But Piłsudski did not wish to

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<sup>3</sup> Although outdated, Stephen Horak's *Poland and Her National Minorities, 1919-39* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961) still serves as a good, general survey describing the roles and history of minorities in Interwar Poland.

<sup>4</sup> About 30-40 percent of farms and or homes in some regions were completely destroyed as a result of Polish territory hosting the Eastern Front of World War I. Czesław Brzoza and Andrzej Leon Sowa, *Historia Polski 1918-1945* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 170.

<sup>5</sup> This method of "total war" was used primarily by Germany to prevent the reemergence of a Polish state who could threaten to rival it industrially. Brzoza i Sowa, 171.

<sup>6</sup> The peasantry had been the dominant class in Polish society, constituting 53.5 percent of the population.

become dictator of Poland but rather help secure its political stability and its place in Europe. He worked with the Sejm to create a constitution and establish the presidency. Unfortunately the contrasting ideologies of Piłsudski and the Rightist National Democrats, who dominated the legislature, led the latter to tailor a constitution in 1921 that severely emasculated the presidency and greatly strengthened the legislative branch.<sup>7</sup> Until 1926, Poland was ruled by what many referred to as “Sejmocracy”.

But inept domestic politics severely plagued the Republic and caused much internal instability. Bitter rivalries and continuous cabinet changes (fourteen up until May 1926) had stagnated the attempted progression in social, economic, and most notably political sectors of the country. Piłsudski had refused to run for the presidency in 1922, citing that the constitution and the Sejm itself were largely built to oppose him or at the least severely restrict his role in Polish politics. Rather, he chose to focus solely on the military that he took great pride in and revered as his own appendage. Piłsudski would retire in early 1923 as a result of the assassination of his close friend and first president of Poland Gabriel Narutowicz. He had largely blamed the Right for the president’s death and refused to serve or even have himself associated with them.<sup>8</sup> A new election brought in another long-time associate of Piłsudski’s during their days as socialists in the Russian empire, Stanisław Wojciechowski. Unfortunately Wojciechowski’s tenure was marred by the Sejm’s emasculation of the executive branch, with the President himself unwilling or claiming to be too powerless to challenge the legislative.

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<sup>7</sup> The president was not able to be commander-in-chief during wartime, and any legislation he signed would require a signature from the prime minister. He could not dissolve the Sejm, while the latter could only dismiss the prime minister and his cabinet. The Sejm had secured and enjoyed complete protection under the law it had molded itself. Antoni Czubinski, *Przewrót Majowy 1926 roku* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1989), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *Piłsudski’s Coup D’état* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 9.

Poland's financial woes were not only due to its postwar situation, but also due to the continuous change in government. Hardcore hyperinflation hit Poland in 1923 practically as hard as the worldwide depression later on in 1929. It was only under the cabinet and leadership of Władysław Grabski that Poland found some temporary stability, with the creation of a the Polish *złoty* which replaced the value-plummeting Polish mark in April 1924. Despite the longest tenure of all of Poland's interwar cabinets, Grabski's fell after due to a clash of interests and the return of hyperinflation, in addition to a tariff war waged by Germany in 1925. The cabinet of his successor, Count Aleksander Skrzyński, did not fare any better. Although he also held the portfolio of foreign minister and showed more interest in that than domestic affairs, Skrzyński desperately tried to maintain his government. But it was doomed when the rivalry between the Left and Right reached such extreme levels to the point where the former's ministers resigned in protest over the Right's continuous political abuses. The succeeding cabinet of Wincenty Witos on May 6, 1926 was thus made up of mostly members of the Center and Right parties. It would however last only about a week as it triggered one of the most monumental moments in Polish history.

Marshal Józef Piłsudski's successful coup d'état that began on May 12, 1926 and ended a few days later, had violently shaken the domestic scene in Poland. His return from retirement had been in the making since late 1925.<sup>9</sup> A mixture of verbal assaults aimed at him, political abuses by the Sejm, and most notably the latter's tampering with the military had set off this radical change in the Republic. Since his retirement, the Right

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<sup>9</sup> Piłsudski had given countless interviews where he explained how Poland's problems could be corrected. But since late 1925, various pro-Piłsudski officers were being placed in key military positions. For an overview of the organization of conspirational activity to bring the Marshal back to power, see Rothschild, 76-80.

had continuously attacked him in the press, citing him as a has-been or as one political opponent labeled him, “a political corpse”.<sup>10</sup> The deterioration of Poland’s social and economic climates due to political antics worried the Marshal who felt that any morality left in Poland was dying off. But attempts to subjugate the military under full political control truly brought about the Marshal’s wrath, as since 1924 he had countlessly warned Poland’s multiple governments about the dangers of civilian influence in military matters. With the military command project never resolved since Piłsudski’s days as war minister in 1923 and the Right solidifying control over Poland, the Marshal had been antagonized enough and chose to execute his coup.

With the Marshal in full control it was time for many changes to be put into motion. Thus until his death in 1935, the *Sanacja* regime increasingly solidified its rule over the Republic. The regime’s focus was derived from the term’s meaning, where Piłsudski’s entourage wished to bring about the state’s moral purification by eliminating the abuse and corruption from the past. Disliking the idea of dictatorship, Piłsudski called upon elections where the well renowned physicist Ignacy Mościcki was elected President of the Republic.<sup>11</sup> A trusted associate of the Marshal’s, Kazimierz Bartel, was given the reins to the government as Prime Minister and compiled a cabinet made up of mainly pro-Piłsudskiists. By 1928, Piłsudski had helped create a political bloc in the Sejm called the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR). Its concept was to not only unite parties who were interested in promoting the interests and welfare of the Republic, but to rip power away from the Center and Right parties that Piłsudski had

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<sup>10</sup> Rothschild, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Józef Piłsudski, *Pisma Zbiorowe: Tom IX* (Warszawa: Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1937) 22. The Marshal’s only request was that he retain the portfolio of War Minister, that his original military command project would be passed, and that he become Inspector General of Armies.



blamed for Poland's problems of the past seven years. Sanacja's tightening grip on the legislature was not only for domestic policies to cater towards its political agenda, but to also bring about a balance in power. The 1921 constitution was slightly revised in order to strengthen the presidency and avoid showdowns with the opposition. Sanacja had for the most part, enjoyed widespread and popular support among the Polish nation. The economy was balanced, with foreign loans (most notably the Stabilization Loan from American and European bankers) being invested in various state projects and unemployment being at its lowest in the entire interwar period.<sup>12</sup> And despite the hardships of the worldwide depression, it prevented hyperinflation from occurring for a third time and maintained the state's budget.

As time progressed the Sanacja regime displayed more authoritarian tendencies. The 1928 "Czechowicz affair" shed light on the mismanaging of state funds by the overspending of 563 million złoty the previous fiscal year. When the Świtalski government attempted to create a conference to settle the affair, the Center and Left parties (the *Centrolew* coalition) chose to prosecute the finance minister Gabriel Czechowicz instead.<sup>13</sup> Originally supportive of Piłsudski's return to power and the Sanacja regime, the *Centrolew* had begun to distance itself from both, most notably when their candidate Ignacy Daszyński defeated Sanacja's for the position of Marshal of the Sejm. Sanacja began to replace many of the *Centrolew* candidates with its own, to prevent the coalition from becoming a challenger to its control over domestic policy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> By 1928, only 80,000 individuals were unemployed, yet wages remained realistic, consumption increased, and the standard of living increased. Sowa, 201.

<sup>13</sup> It also attempted to oust the Świtalski government who had backed their finance minister. Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 290-291.

<sup>14</sup> It was seen as a challenger to the Sejm-dominated BBWR.

When the Sejm was to reconvene for a budgetary session on October 31, 1929 after a long recess, the first clash of interests between the Centrolew and the Sanacja regime occurred when Daszyński refused to open a Sejm surrounded by armed officers.<sup>15</sup>

But it was the “Brześć affair” that put an end to the Centrolew’s growing defiance. The latter had hosted a congress in Kraków on June 29, 1930, where they drew up a manifesto demanding an end to a Piłsudski-influenced government, and the formation of a constitutional one that would work together with parliament to solve the country’s economic problems.<sup>16</sup> In front of a large crowd, the congress declared an end to the Piłsudski dictatorship where even the president had been “subject to the dictator’s will.”<sup>17</sup> Another rally held on September 14 finally broke the Sanacja’s tolerance and resulted in the arrest of nineteen deputies and senators. They were detained in the fortress of Brześć and subjected to harsh conditions and unheard of abuses. Subsequent trials observed that “their ‘revolutionary’ activity was alleged to have consisted of inciting hatred towards the Government among the masses, calling on them to overthrow the regime by force, ‘organizing, schooling, and arming revolutionary cadres, and forming a central revolutionary organization under the name of the [Centrolew]’.”<sup>18</sup> The majority of the accused were convicted and given lengthy sentences, with some choosing to emigrate. The affair may have silenced the opposition but it drew large criticism from some sections of society. New elections were called in November 1930, with Sanacja overwhelmingly winning seats in the Sejm and Senate. Its consolidation of control over

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<sup>15</sup> Piłsudski and his officers’ presence had been widely regarded as an attempt to pressure the Sejm to retroactively appropriate funds to balance the 1927-28 budget that the Czechowicz affair had affected. The affair itself was resolved in late 1930 with the necessary adjustments made. For an account of the showdown between Piłsudski and Daszyński, see Piłsudski, IX, 194-196.

<sup>16</sup> Rothschild, 349. Polonsky, 309.

<sup>17</sup> Polonsky, 310.

<sup>18</sup> Polonsky, 341.

Poland's domestic issues had been completed, but at the price of leaving lasting emotional and psychological scars. In the last five years the regime would successfully continue to pass legislation in its favor, highlighted by a new constitution in April 1935.

At best the Sanacja regime was of a semi-authoritarian character where although Piłsudski largely influenced important decision-making, he still respected the Republic's constitution and executive branch. His fear of parliamentarian abuse certainly triggered his coup and brought about the birth of Sanacja, whose aim was to restore morality in a country continuously seeking domestic stability. As time went on, the regime increasingly monopolized its hold over not just the executive but also the legislative branch in an effort to promote the interests of the state. When met with opposition, it resorted to strong-arm tactics after attempts at negotiation proved futile due to political or even ideological differences. But when comparing Sanacja to the first seven years of the Republic's existence, its merits outweighed its abuses. Piłsudski had put an end to parliamentarianism, which had flirted with potential disaster and provided no clear plan for the Republic's future. Sanacja had corrected various legislation and state functions that had been previously used by political parties as weapons against opponents and tools for self-enrichment. The nine-year period from May 1926 to 1935 saw the reborn Second Polish Republic enjoy the most domestic stability in the whole twenty-year period.

### **Reborn Poland within a Reconstructed Europe**

While Piłsudski and the new Polish government in Warsaw formally enacted and enforced domestic and foreign policies, it was the Polish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference that continued to seek favorable political, territorial, and economic rewards for the new state. The Conference's Supreme Council reserved the right to make

decisions regarding territorial settlements in East Central Europe. “The Allies stressed their belief that they had to determine all postwar problems, whatever they were and wherever they arose.”<sup>19</sup> The Polish delegation’s task was to present Poland’s territorial demands based on arguments of historic, ethnic, and even economical significance. Before the state could create an official foreign policy, it needed to secure its place in Europe through diplomacy and combat.

After the conclusion of the First World War, territory in East Central Europe was up for grabs at the expense of the dissolved empires. But this frenzy became a potential prospect for another war breaking out. The first known conflict involving Polish territorial questions involved the struggle over Teschen with Czechoslovakia. Both sides had created local governments there in October 1918, and both laid claims to it at the Peace Conference. Polish arguments based along ethnic lines resonated slightly stronger than that of the Czech economic ones, as the city had an enormous ethnic Polish population.<sup>20</sup> Yet before the Allies could decide the region’s fate, the Czechs forced a *fait accompli* through partial military occupation of the region in late January 1919. Despite a provisional treaty signed by both sides to partition the region temporarily, the Czechs attacked the Polish half a month later. Their reasoning for aggression was the state’s desire to recover its historic frontier, which it successfully accomplished in the summer of 1920 at Spa. The Allies awarded the large majority of Teschen to Czechoslovakia at the expense of Poland, whose diplomatic maneuvering had been severely limited by its

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<sup>19</sup> Roman Dębicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962), 24.

<sup>20</sup> Czechoslovakian political thought felt that historical, economic, and strategic considerations would triumph over ethnographic ones when it came to territorial acquisition. Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, “Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1918-1922,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 35, (1956), 177-178.

reliance on Allied support in its struggle against the Soviet Union's advancing Red Army in the Polish-Soviet War.

After Germany had officially surrendered in the war, so began the withdrawal of its troops from Poland. Unfortunately the Eastern Front army proved to be a headache in its stubbornness to relinquish the Oberkommando-Ostfront (Ober-Ost) borderland. Yet towards the end of its evacuation a greater problem had emerged for Poland. A power vacuum had formed as it vied with a new Russia, the Soviet Union (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – USSR), over the territory and the race to create their own favorable borders. For Piłsudski's Poland, the aim was to create a federalist system of states with the Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia forming a bloc against the USSR. The idea was based on the romantic idea of resurrecting the Jagiellonian concept, a Polish state that chaired over other national minorities. Yet Piłsudski had no plans to recreate exactly the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before its partitions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Under the Federalist system, the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian national minorities would have their own autonomous states under Polish tutelage. The Polish-Soviet War proved to be more than a conflict over open terrain. It was a clash of opposing political and even religious ideologies, with parliamentarian democracy facing off against socialist communism and Christianity versus atheism.<sup>21</sup> Whereas Poland's independence was at stake, the Soviet Union aimed at maintaining the Russian empire but under the Marxist model of a working class state. On a grander scale, Poland was seen by

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<sup>21</sup> Although outdated, Norman Davies' *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20* (London: MacDonald, 1972) still serves as a highly detailed monograph on the event, filled with perspectives from both sides and lively commentary from the author. For Polish-Soviet relations, including the war itself, consult Piotr S. Wandycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

the Soviet Union as the obstacle to exporting the proletarian revolution to the rest of Europe, particularly a defeated German state.<sup>22</sup>

In the beginning stages of the war, the Polish army had pushed the Soviets out of the Ober-Ost up to Kiev. But the tide turned when the latter answered with a devastating counterattack, breaking Polish lines and advancing to within the gates of Warsaw in August 1920. The “Miracle on the Vistula” saw Polish forces repel the Red Army, break its divisions, and throw it into complete disarray on its retreat back to the Soviet Union. A peace treaty was signed months later in March 1921 at Riga, where multiple compensations were agreed upon such as an official border that favored Poland.<sup>23</sup> Along with domestic political opponents who favored the Piast model for a Polish state, the Jagiellonian concept was not realized with the conclusion of the war.<sup>24</sup> States not awarded with statehood by the Paris Peace Conference such as Belarus and Ukraine, were divided up by Poland and the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> But the Polish-Soviet War had many repercussions for both sides. For the Poles, it became a great sense of national pride for the reborn state and lifted Piłsudski’s cult image to such levels that would clearly emerge years later during his staged coup d’état. Yet the incorporation of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands gave Poland one of the largest population of national minorities of any

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<sup>22</sup> Davies, 29. Lenin had labeled the war as another effort by the West to destroy the Soviet Union. Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Harold H. Fisher, *Soviet Russia and the West 1920-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 61.

<sup>23</sup> Two years later, the League of Nations recognized the treaty and the official border. A copy of the treaty is reprinted in *Dokumenty z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1918-1939: Tom I 1918-1932*, ed. Tadeusz Jędruszczak and Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1989), 150-170.

<sup>24</sup> The National Democrats whose nationalist ambitions rejected the inclusion of national minorities, heavily favored the Piast model. Essentially, this model was based on the Polish state before its union with Lithuania in 1569.

<sup>25</sup> It should also be noted that a Polish-Ukrainian war was fought from November 1918 to July 1919. While Polish forces sought to rebuild the pre-1772 borders, their Ukrainian counterparts fought in the hope of forming an independent Ukrainian state.

state in Europe, which would have profound consequences down the road.<sup>26</sup> But for the Soviet Union the war brought about a reality check and spelled the end of the premature desire of spreading world revolution. It solidified Moscow's isolation from the rest of Europe, but also brought about a newer focus to win the civil war it had been embroiled in against counterrevolutionary forces since late 1917. The ultimate end result was that the Polish-Soviet War added another chapter in historic Polish-Russian relations, where coexistence between the two was grudgingly accepted and abnormal for the next couple of years.

Poland's eastern frontier had been solidified. Yet the year 1921 saw further developments in the final shaping of the Polish state and its borders. Although Lithuania did not engage directly in the Polish-Soviet War, it was caught in the crossfire as the city of Vilna continuously traded occupants throughout the two-year struggle. Historically, it had been the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's capital until the state's union with Poland in 1569. Until Poland's partitions, the city was seen as a key cultural center for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among cities like Lvov, Warsaw, and Kraków. When both states reemerged independently after the Great War, Lithuania was granted the city and the Poles launched their objections.<sup>27</sup> Born in the city, Piłsudski held a particular fondness towards it and saw it as a perfect addition to his federalist concept. Even Polish opposition circles favored Vilna's annexation.

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<sup>26</sup> Animosity between the Polish state and its minorities occurred because the latter were often victims of discrimination and abuse by government policies throughout the interwar period. As a result, conspiratorial groups such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) arose and employed terroristic methods to push for independence. Polish responses were marked by an increase in suspicion and discrimination, most notably highlighted by the 1930 pacification of Ukrainian lands in a bid to weed out anti-state activity.

<sup>27</sup> Lithuania had its own claims to cities that historically had been part of the Grand Duchy. It demanded the return of Grodno and Suwałki from Poland.

In the beginning stages of the Polish-Soviet War with the Red Army edging closer, the Lithuanians appealed to the Poles for aid but only on the condition that the latter agreed to recognize the former's independence with Vilna as its capital. But when the Poles captured the city, they chose to use it as bait, dangling it in front of the Lithuanians in exchange for recognition of Lithuanian independence.<sup>28</sup> To instill pro-Polish support in the predominantly ethnic Polish city, there was a failed coup attempt led by government officials from Warsaw in August 1919.<sup>29</sup> Vilna was no longer a territorial dispute, it now became a political even military one that worsened already raw relations between both states. Poland further refused to recognize the Lithuanian state until the Polish minority's rights were protected. During the last stages of the war, Polish forces clashed with Lithuanian troops in a struggle between both sides to mark their territories from the fleeing Red Army. But it was the Lithuanians who recaptured Vilna.

The war had ended and peace seemed certain in Eastern Europe. But Polish ambitions to enlarge their reborn state were not over, as Piłsudski had devised a scheme to bring Vilna under Polish control. In October 1921, General Lucjan Żeligowski and his troops "rebelled" against Polish orders and took the city and surrounding territories. Żeligowski then declared himself *de facto* head of state of what was now known as Central Lithuania.<sup>30</sup> Negotiations between both governments were futile, with neither side giving into to each other's demands. "It was only demonstrated that the crux of the problem lay in the Lithuanians' firm decision not to admit any constitutional link of

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<sup>28</sup> In a speech after the capture of Vilna, Piłsudski stated that the population would have the right to choose its own government, yet the ideas of federation or annexation were still open without mentioning them. Piłsudski and the Poles had no real intention of annexing all of Lithuania but needless to say they took this opportunity to use as a bargaining piece if not *fait accompli*. Alfred Erich Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania, and the Vilna Question* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> Senn, *The Great Powers*, 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> Piłsudski had ordered the general not to "destroy" the Lithuanian government, yet it seemed he had no problem with using force regardless to achieve Polish aims. Senn, *The Great Powers*, 50-51.



closer cooperation with Poland.”<sup>31</sup> Granting Vilna autonomy was also out of the question. The case was referred to the League of Nations who rather than create a plebiscite, chose to hold the elections to a Constituent Assembly that would vote on the fate of the city. In January 1922 the Assembly was formed and overwhelmingly voted for reincorporation with Poland. The Vilna dispute was formally settled in March 1923 at the same time when the Allied powers recognized Poland’s eastern frontier. The end result was the severe straining of relations between Poland and Lithuania, with the latter cutting off all diplomatic contact as a sign of protest and contempt for the debacle.

With its borders practically completed, Poland replaced bayonets with diplomacy to carry out her foreign affairs. The primary objective of Polish foreign policy was to “create a political system that would permit Poland to develop her national life in peace and security.”<sup>32</sup> Again, the state had found itself wedged in between two aggressive neighbors, Germany and Russia, with its existence dependent on deterring not just any threat from either side but to also prevent both sides from working together towards wiping Poland off the continent again. There were two ways to accomplish this: to take advantage of the Versailles Treaty’s enforcer, the League of Nations, and to seek alliances with other states that shared the same interest in security.

The greatest accomplishment of Polish foreign policy came in February 1921 with the creation of the Franco-Polish alliance, in order to “achieve complete security against its principal enemies.”<sup>33</sup> France had lost its key prewar ally in Russia to communism, and now it aimed at promoting its security interests by keeping Germany in check and as

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<sup>31</sup> Dębicki, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Dębicki, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate 1918 to 1939* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1998), 175.

weak as possible. The new Polish state seemed to have fit perfectly within the framework of post-WWI French foreign policy. Poland, who had successfully staved off a Soviet invasion, would serve as a *cordon sanitaire*, a barrier to keep German revisionism and Bolshevism from spreading.<sup>34</sup> Its interest in France was that it would have a chief ally to monitor Germany from the West and support Poland in case of future conflict with the Soviet Union. There also existed an enormous French support in promoting Poland's economic, territorial, and political interests at the Peace Conference, particularly in Upper Silesia and the eastern borderlands.<sup>35</sup>

Thus a formal agreement was concluded between both sides that brought the birth of the alliance. A political treaty was founded on cooperation, mutual aid, joint defense, economic collaboration, and consultation on foreign matters. Two days later, both sides signed an important secret military convention.<sup>36</sup> Its nature was defined by creating an actual security system through French supplies for Poland in the case of unprovoked German aggression, and if the Soviet Union attacked during a Polish-German conflict. Although there were no promises of French troops being deployed, both sides were satisfied despite overwhelming French dictation of the terms. Three years later the convention was renewed, bringing material benefits for Poland and reaffirming both

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<sup>34</sup> Anna M. Cienciała and Titus Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno: Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919-1925* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 14.

<sup>35</sup> Whereas Poland's success in the East would promote the *cordon sanitaire*, the awarding of Upper Silesia to Poland would help the reborn state economically at the expense of Germany. French and Polish leaders felt that if Upper Silesia was given to Germany, all of Central and Eastern Europe would be dependent of it. Cienciała and Komarnicki, 64, 83.

<sup>36</sup> A copy of the agreement as well as the secret military convention is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 129-133.

sides' commitments to maintaining the alliance in the wake of the West's rapprochement with Germany.<sup>37</sup>

A month later another success in Polish foreign policy came about with the signing of a similar agreement to that of the Franco-Polish alliance. Poland was able to conclude an alliance with Romania with the Convention on Defensive Alliance.<sup>38</sup> Like Poland, Romania was interested in creating a cordon sanitaire against the Soviet Union. It was not only threatened by communism from the east, but it also saw developments in Hungary under the short-lived Béla Kun regime. The other principal Romanian aim was the annexation of Bessarabia, to create more of a barrier from the Soviet Union who had already plans to take it.<sup>39</sup> Poland saw Romania as a state where war material could be transported through in the event of war with Germany without the kind of interruptions it had suffered during the Polish-Soviet War.<sup>40</sup> When coupled with Poland's aspirations in the east, Polish-Romanian cooperation would be founded on the use of a common frontier as a defensive barrier against the USSR. Undoubtedly, it not only possessed an anti-Soviet stance, but it was also seen as something that could have an overpowering effect on South Central Europe.<sup>41</sup> The treaty that was signed between the two had been in the making for practically two years and highlighted that in the event of an unprovoked attack on either state's eastern border, the other would come to its aid. A secret military

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<sup>37</sup> The treaty was mainly aimed at the 1924 Geneva Protocol that laid out the idea of collective security. Although originally hesitant, the French agreed to the slight modifications. Jan Ciałowicz, *Polsko-Francuski Sojusz Wojskowy 1921-1939* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 118.

<sup>38</sup> A copy of this treaty is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 146-149.

<sup>39</sup> Romania had assisted Polish forces to a degree by fighting their share of Western Ukrainian troops immediately after the Great War. Both showed no interest in an independent Ukrainian state and thus took advantage of territorial annexations.

<sup>40</sup> Czechoslovakia notoriously blocked the transit of war supplies to Poland.

<sup>41</sup> Henryk Bułhak, "Początki sojuszu polsko-rumuńskiego i przebieg rokowań o konwencję wojskowa w latach 1919-1921," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 3, (1973), 22. Along with the earlier creation of the Little Entente, a bloc of states was seen as a guarantee of peace and stability in the region. Like the former, the alliance was highly supported by France. Henryk Bułhak mentions that France saw Romania's partnership with Poland as a way to save it from German influence. Bułhak, 41-42, 50.

convention had also been concluded, coinciding with the political treaty and listing stipulations such as steps towards mobilization in the defense of the afflicted partner.<sup>42</sup> In a matter of two months, Poland had concluded two treaties and set up a system of alliances with one partner to the West and another in the East. Its security system against Germany and the USSR was in place and now its foreign policy's aim would be to maintain it at all costs.

Relations with Germany were to be troublesome right from the start, as Poland was the recipient of most postwar territorial acquisitions at the expense of her western neighbor. Although plebiscites had been held for the contested areas of Upper Silesia and East Prussia, the former's Polish inhabitants successfully wrestled away its industrial section through a *fait accompli* by way of three armed uprisings. Although East Prussia's plebiscite went Germany's way, other territories such as Poznan and Pomerania were awarded to Poland thanks to the Peace Conference. The city of Danzig proved to be a mightier problem for both states. Polish claims to the predominantly ethnic German city were of economic importance, while Germany refused to have itself and East Prussia separated by a "Corridor".<sup>43</sup> The fate of Danzig was decided by the League of Nations, becoming a free and independent city whose economy would be linked to Poland's.<sup>44</sup> Yet hostility between the city and Poland would be a prominent and regular occurrence and expressed in German propaganda throughout the interwar period, in an effort to prove the incompatibility of the two and that Germany would be a better suitor for the city.

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<sup>42</sup> Its secrecy was kept until both sides knew the provisions of the Treaty of Riga that way it would not contradict any binding agreements Poland had with the Soviet Union. A copy of this military convention is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 148-150.

<sup>43</sup> The Poles argued that Danzig was just as if not more fundamentally important to their state's existence, because of its economic value as an outlet to the Baltic Sea.

<sup>44</sup> A treaty had been signed between the city and Poland in 1920 that stipulated trade agreements as well as the authorization of stationing a Polish military and police garrison. A copy of the treaty is available in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 120-128.

Germany refused to acknowledge its border with Poland despite the League of Nations' recognition. The end result was not only German feelings of contempt, but also a sizable German minority left within the borders of the new Polish state. German foreign policy aimed at the return of lost territory, and "once these claims were satisfied no obstacle stood in the way, as far as Germany was concerned, to good German-Polish relations."<sup>45</sup>

Major obstacles to the normalization of German-Polish relations were often linked together. Germany's territorial revisionist campaign was channeled in many different ways, one of which was through its accusations that the German minority was being persecuted and abused. Poland had given the minority the chance to opt for Polish or German citizenship, with the option of returning to Germany.<sup>46</sup> The goal was to weaken German nationalism, which was seen as a threat to Poland's independence. And so Poland chose to forcefully evict the German minority when they chose German citizenship but remained in Poland.<sup>47</sup> The minority question was a hot topic before the League of Nations, with Warsaw often defending itself against Berlin's accusations. In spite of each other, the two states became embroiled in a tariff war in June 1925 that would last for many years. Germany halted Polish coal exports from Upper Silesia, while Poland halted the former's own exports. The German aim was to wreck Poland economically and force it to concede to demands such as ones of a territorial nature in

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<sup>45</sup> These were the words of German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann. Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, "Stresemann and Poland before Locarno," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 18, (1958), 42.

<sup>46</sup> Article 91 of the Versailles Treaty granted this right to "prevent their [the minorities'] detention against their will in what might possibly be a hostile government." This measure however was taken in an opposite matter where minorities were actually forcefully evicted. Harald von Riekhoff, *German-Polish Relations, 1918-1933* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1971), 57.

<sup>47</sup> Germany was accused and found to have been doing the same thing with its Polish minority. Yet this is open to debate since evicted Poles were charged and found guilty with committing crimes. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 58.

order to lift the financial siege.<sup>48</sup> The tariff war did not hurt Poland, instead it made it more dependent on domestic production of goods and opened it up to other foreign markets. Yet the major result was the continuation of strained relations between both states.

But the underlying reason for hostility in German-Polish relations was that the former could not stomach the thought of a strong and independent Polish state. Many political and military leaders viewed Poland's existence as temporary (*Saisonstaat*) and undeserving.<sup>49</sup> Reichswehr General Hans von Seeckt's continuously quoted position on Poland captures these popular resentments over Poland, "Poland is the crux of the Eastern Problem. The existence of Poland is unbearable and incompatible with the vital interests of Germany. She must vanish, and vanish she will through her own internal weakness and through Russia – with our assistance."<sup>50</sup> Poland's alliance with France, which had clearly showed anti-German aims, potentially may have deepened German hostility towards its eastern neighbor. As long as Poland's independence came at the expense of Germany's unfavorable postwar conditions, relations between the two states could never reach a peaceful level.

The Polish-Soviet War had left relations between Poland and the Soviet Union in an awkward state. Poland emerged victorious, while the Soviet Union's idea for world revolution had been shattered. It now had to change its approach to foreign policy by

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<sup>48</sup> Other concessions would involve the German minority issues. Gasiorowski, "Stresemann and Poland before Locarno," 41-42. For a detailed study of the tariff war, consult Charles Kruszewski, "The German-Polish Tariff War (1925-1934) and its Aftermath," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 3, (1943), pp. 294-315.

<sup>49</sup> Dębicki, 47. Historiography and even Polish political thought has suggested that most leaders who displayed hostility towards Poland were ones of Prussian background, anti-Polish since the days of Bismarck.

<sup>50</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 31. The role of the USSR within German foreign policy will be explained later in the chapter.

acknowledging a coexistence, if temporary, with the West. Revolution was not to be completely abandoned, only supported if it arose anywhere in the world. Relations with other countries were to be opened in order to gain economic aid and “breathing space” to help survive the civil war. But the grand strategy was to play a double game: build relations with other states and play upon their rivalries in order to divide them.<sup>51</sup> This way the Soviet Union could actually benefit off of its isolation and prevent any Western designs of coalitions to destroy it, a paranoia present throughout the interwar period.

Soviet foreign policy affected Poland quite negatively. By opening up relations with Lithuania and concluding a treaty, the Soviet Union had created a wedge between Poland and her northern neighbor. This was prevalent in Polish suspicion of Lithuanian collusion with the Soviets during the Polish-Soviet War. The consequences were not only terrible relations between both states, but the spoiling of designs for a defensive bloc of Baltic states in 1922 due to Lithuania’s refusal to engage in diplomatic talks with Poland.<sup>52</sup> Polish fears over any collaboration between Germany and Russia flared up when both countries concluded the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. It called for peace between both states and secretly initiated German rearmament on Soviet territory that benefited both states’ military. But it had also created a partnership between both European outcasts, which according to Soviet opinion, spoiled any chance of a “united capitalist front against Soviet Russia”.<sup>53</sup> This partnership was detrimental to Poland’s interests, weakening any chance at an improvement in German-Polish relations. The idea of collaboration between two states that showed contempt for Poland and could undo its

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<sup>51</sup> As Lenin once remarked, “...to remove the opportunity for the enemies to create an alliance among themselves for a struggle against us; to keep on interfering with their policies; to prevent them from winning.” Eudin and Fisher, 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Eudin and Fisher, 112-113.

<sup>53</sup> Watt, 181. Eudin and Fisher, 169.

postwar settlement, courted the minds of Berlin and Moscow.<sup>54</sup> Yet still keeping the idea of a German revolution in mind, the Soviet Union played a double game and proposed to Poland territorial acquisitions if one successfully took over Germany. The Poles outright rejected this but did engage in talks of a nonaggression pact which never materialized. Negotiations for a nonaggression pact took place a number of times, but the Soviets backed out each time as a result of Polish attempts to attach the Baltic states to it.<sup>55</sup> Overall, the Poles exhibited neutrality towards their relations with the Soviets, while the latter attempted to frustrate Polish initiatives in Europe.

The Teschen question became a bitter pill for the Poles to swallow and had profound consequences in affecting Polish-Czech relations throughout the Interwar period. It became the foundation for Polish animosity towards the Czechoslovakians, serving as an obstacle to cooperation between the two states. Yet it seems that the true underlying factor in poor relations between both states were their diverging interests in pursuing and maintaining their independence.<sup>56</sup> Differences in ideology bore the antipathy of both sides towards each other. Before the Great War and notably after its conclusion when both states had gained their independence, Polish and Czech designs on existence in East Central Europe were based on the state of their enemies. Whereas the Poles saw Russia as a never ending danger to independence, Czech feelings of pan-Slavism favored a region under the guidance of Russia, tsarist or communist. They also saw no ill will towards or from Germany. Czechoslovakian President Tomáš Masaryk

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<sup>54</sup> Leon Trotsky had defended Soviet-German collaboration by claiming it was not aimed against Poland but purely for economic benefits, remarking, "Poland can be either a bridge between Germany and us, or a barrier... We do not want war; we shall pay for peace, but not by isolating ourselves from the European market." Eudin and Fisher, 217-218.

<sup>55</sup> The Soviets refused to accept anything that might sweep the Baltic states into the arms of Polish hegemony in the region.

<sup>56</sup> Gasiorowski, "Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1918-1922," 172.



insisted that the small people of Eastern Europe “need a strong Russia lest they be at the mercy of the Germans and Austrians,” while the Poles favored a federation between both states to counter the German threat.<sup>57</sup> These differing views undoubtedly impacted the territorial aspirations of both states and prevented any cooperation between the two throughout the interwar period.

Czechoslovakia could not come to accept Poland’s quest to dominate the Eastern Borderlands. It not only saw this as hostility towards Russia, but also towards Ukrainian nationalism. The key factor linking both reasons was that the Czechoslovakians desired a common frontier with Russia that would realize their pan-Slavic dreams, and where reconciliation between Poland and Russia would promote Eastern Europe’s stability.<sup>58</sup> They saw Polish gluttony for territory as the source of problems in the region, one that would only benefit Germany in the end. Teschen was not the last territorial rift between both states, as Javorina was contested for nearly two years after the conclusion of the former’s fate. One prominent Pole suggested that it was “a question of sentiment, and, at the same time, a test of the good will of the Czechs”.<sup>59</sup> Along with accusations of minority mistreatment, it seems Polish-Czech relations were too focused and embroiled with petty issues such as territorial disputes. These took away any chance at not only good relations, but also cooperation in the event of conflict.

It is not to say that both sides never attempted to come to an understanding and improve relations with each other. A political-economic treaty was all but signed between both sides in 1921. Its failure was linked with Czechoslovakian fears of risking and

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<sup>57</sup> Gasiorowski, “Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1918-1922,” 175-176.

<sup>58</sup> Gasiorowski, “Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1918-1922,” 177.

<sup>59</sup> Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, “Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1922-1926,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 35, (1957), 478. In 1924, the League of Nations would award Javorina to Czechoslovakia, but other provinces would go to Poland.

endangering their state's interests by becoming entangled in diverging Polish interests, while the Poles disliked Czech dictation.<sup>60</sup> When France concluded alliances with both states, it attempted to open dialogue between them to create a united military front against Germany. Both Polish and Czechoslovakian military circles agreed, only for the latter's political circles to reject such coordination until "political difficulties were resolved".<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, relations were extremely complicated due to the power struggle between both sides portrayed through territorial and ideological disagreements that led Polish and Czech political thought away from cooperation.

In 1924 Polish foreign policy began to go on the defensive when its key ally France and Great Britain began to open dialogue with Germany for better relations. France had experienced a change in government when the socialist Cartel des Gauches took over, who like Great Britain, favored Germany's reintegration into leading European politics. France had long sought to regain partnership with Great Britain who had been its chief wartime ally, while the latter was always interested in the reemergence of German economic growth. But both sides agreed that the Versailles Treaty had been too punishing on Germany, and looked to bring about revisions to it such as the lowering of Germany's war reparation payments and its eventual entry to the League of Nations.<sup>62</sup> Overall a peaceful rapprochement with Germany would promote greater European cohesion and a stronger structure for the League of Nations.

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<sup>60</sup> Gasiorowski, "Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1918-1922," 190-192. Marek K. Kaminski and Michał J. Zacharias, *Polityka zagraniczna II Rzeczypospolitej 1918-1939* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1987), 75. A copy of this proposed agreement is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 180-182.

<sup>61</sup> Gasiorowski, "Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1922-1926," 491.

<sup>62</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919-1925* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 313.

A strong advocate of German revisionism, German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann felt this was the perfect time to promote German interests in undoing the effects of the postwar settlements. His philosophy was that if Germany “insist(ed) on getting back everything at once, she would end up in getting nothing. Only by writing off for the time being some of her losses – those impossible to recover in the existing circumstances – might she regain the others.”<sup>63</sup> The only way Germany was to recover was through a process of seeking gradual concessions, and a Franco-British rapprochement itself was the perfect opportunity. It was in September 1924 that Stresemann began to court the British and later the French, about the return of Danzig and the Allied-occupied Rhineland to Germany. His aim was not to renounce war as a method to revising the German-Polish border, possibly the largest aim of German revisionism, but to give the impression that a compromise could be reached in order for everyone to gain absolute peace.<sup>64</sup> In a letter to another German politician, Stresemann stated that his aim was to “secure the Rhineland, split the Allies, and open new possibilities in the east.”<sup>65</sup> Months later in February 1925, he submitted a proposal to the French about a security pact that guaranteed Germany’s western borders, renounced war, and used arbitration as a method to resolve conflict.

Falling in early 1925, the Cartel was replaced by a government whose foreign ministry was headed by a man who looked to continue this quest for French security through direct dialogue with Germany, Aristide Briand. Briand was heavily invested in the idea but was not quick to leave out France’s eastern allies in Czechoslovakia and Poland. His idea was that Germany would not risk a war with France knowing it had

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<sup>63</sup> Gasiorowski, “Stresemann and Poland before Locarno,” 26.

<sup>64</sup> Cieniała and Komarnicki, 229.

<sup>65</sup> Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies*, 327.

Great Britain's backing, thus France would no longer need a "provocative policy", and Germany would settle down and stabilize itself financially.<sup>66</sup> Together with the British Foreign Minister Austen Chamberlain, Briand felt that gradual appeasement to German demands would replace war as a method to maintaining peace and security in Europe.<sup>67</sup> French goodwill towards the German proposal was exhibited with the commencing of plans to evacuate the Ruhr, which had been occupied by French troops since 1923 as punishment for German failure to repay reparations.

The quest for Western security came to a conclusion at the Locarno conference in October 1925. France's allies Czechoslovakia and Poland were invited to attend, but their presence and actual participation were severely limited. The chief goal by Great Britain and France was to achieve a favorable settlement with Germany, even if nothing could be attained for the East. Locarno produced seven treaties that outlined security in Western Europe, including the "Rhineland Pact" which ensured that France, Belgium, and Germany would not attack each other. It was guaranteed by Great Britain and Italy who would aid the victim of an attack by any of the other two countries listed. Notably, the pact secured Germany's western frontier yet made no mention of its eastern one, which had been the deal breaker in order to get Germany to sign the agreements in the first place. France made one attempt not to completely abandon the interests of its eastern allies, and that was the creation of separate arbitration treaties between Germany and countries such as Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Locarno was a huge success for Briand and Chamberlain, with the former expressing the belief that the inclusion of Germany to European politics neutralized the

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<sup>66</sup> Cienciala and Komarnicki, 233.

<sup>67</sup> Chamberlain's view that the promotion of greater German participation in European politics would improve German-Polish relations and eventually lead to peaceful territorial revisions in the future.

threat of its collaboration with Russia. Germany had also highly benefited as it not only left its border with Poland open to revision, it was to gain entry to the League of Nations and the full evacuation of the Ruhr and the Rhineland was to commence. Yet it proved to be a huge blow to Polish foreign policy. Germany had successfully driven a wedge into the Franco-Polish alliance. According to the arbitration treaty between Germany and Poland, if a conflict arose between the two states it would have to be handled by a third party. But what truly weakened the alliance was that if Germany attacked Poland, France would not be able to immediately assist its ally until the League of Nations ruled whether Germany was an aggressor. Poland was now forced to take a defensive stance, and adapt the results of Locarno to the alliance and its military convention.<sup>68</sup> It was helpless at Locarno as not only had France failed to consult its ally, Polish acquiescence to the scheme was to avoid the state being labeled as a liability to European peace. It was apparent that France was no longer interested in using alliances to neutralize threats like Germany. Although the alliance was not completely abandoned, it put forth grave doubt among the Poles in the reliability of their French counterparts in case of conflict. Skrzyński had publically praised Locarno, but privately he once admitted that the Rhineland Pact was “a dagger thrust in the back of the alliance between our two countries.”<sup>69</sup>

Locarno had also brought great unease to the Soviet Union. It had succeeded in ripping Germany away from its sphere of influence, casting great uncertainty in the German-Russian partnership established at Rapallo. But it mainly conflicted with Soviet

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<sup>68</sup> Cienciala and Komarnicki, 273. France and Poland also signed a guarantee pact at Locarno, which was supposed to calm Polish anxieties and reaffirm France's commitment to maintain the alliance and the spirit of Locarno. A copy of this agreement is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 351-353.

<sup>69</sup> Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies*, 364.

foreign policy, as it derailed continuous efforts towards dividing the West. Yet Soviet concerns were calmed when Germany reached out and directed the signing of the Treaty of Berlin in April 1926. It reaffirmed cooperation between both sides, with Germany giving assurances that Locarno and its entry into the League would not be detrimental to the partnership nor Soviet interests.<sup>70</sup> Relations strengthened between Germany and the Soviet Union, while Polish anxieties grew larger.

### **Isolation and Uncertainty**

Polish foreign policy's main objective was to take the newly independent Polish state and help it maintain its freedom by promoting its cultural and political growth. But geopolitically, Poland found itself in a troublesome position. It reemerged on the map of Europe stuck between two large neighbors yet again, and surrounded by other states with which relations quickly soured. The roots of this interesting predicament stemmed from a clash in ideology and interests, as designs for the recreation of the once glorious Polish past did not fit within the framework of other states, with some trying to salvage what was left of their shattered empires while others trying to create their existence from scratch. The temptation of claiming territory and nostalgia for the past created a deadly concoction that would inevitably lead to conflict. Although Polish ideas of federalism failed and territorial struggles created detrimental divisions, the formation of alliances seemed to have created this belief that Poland could peacefully exist on its terms despite subpar relations with its neighbors.

Locarno had proven that postwar Polish success was only temporary. Changes within the French political system ushered in governments that were seeking cooperation

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<sup>70</sup> Stresemann also saw it as an opportunity to sabotage any Polish-Soviet collusion as an answer to Locarno. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 123-124.

with Germany rather than alienating it. Although they acknowledged the need to maintain France's preexisting alliances, they saw them as disposable if the state's security could be guaranteed by coming to a direct agreement with Germany. This belief had played into German desires for revisionism, which could only be put forth in motion if its western flank was neutralized. Locarno was notorious for creating peace between Germany and the West, but failing to secure the same for the East. Thus Poland was left to fend for itself, failing to create a common bloc with Czechoslovakia at Locarno or drawing any interest from Romania to fill the void.<sup>71</sup> Its alienation of Lithuania and its failure to adopt a more approaching manner towards the Soviet Union, rather than sternly maintaining a cordon sanitaire against it, only isolated the state further.

Was Polish foreign policy completely to blame for its country's downward spiral in the European political scene, or had the West invested too heavily into German overtures for security? When looking at Poland's domestic politics, the continuous cabinet changes and wide array of ministers certainly prevented a solid direction for foreign policy to follow. One must consider whether there would have been stability had Piłsudski remained active in politics, even with the failure of a federalist system materializing in Eastern Europe. If the finger is pointed at domestic politics, then France must certainly be placed in the same boat as Poland. A tug of war between the socialists and conservatives influenced changes in foreign policy that led to partnering with Germany as opposed to containing it. The main culprit was parliamentary democracy, where the loss of confidence in one cabinet brought about its replacement with another

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<sup>71</sup> The Romanians primarily saw the alliance as a deterrence to a Soviet and not German threat. Ultimately the Czechs did not see a German threat at the moment, and chose to pursue cordial relations with the latter, citing an interest in preventing an isolation of their country as a result of a German-Austrian *Anschluss*. Gasirowski, "Polish-Czechoslovak Relations, 1922-1926," 493. Cienciała and Komarnicki, 274.

that at times chose a radical change in domestic and foreign policy. Locarno highlighted the European failure to stick to the postwar structures and laws set forth by Versailles, abandoning them prematurely due to blind temptations of reconciliation, and putting in motion events that would have dangerous consequences for the continent down the road. By May 1926 the Second Polish Republic had found itself geopolitically isolated with its future uncertain. The one question that remained was whether it could get itself out of this predicament, and if so, whether it would be able to adapt to the rapidly changing European scene.



## II. FINDING POLAND'S PLACE IN EUROPE: 1926-1929

### The Outline of Sanacja's Foreign Policy

Marshal Piłsudski's return to power in May 1926 had been primarily motivated by Poland's domestic crisis. Yet its geopolitical isolation certainly motivated the return of a patriot who had fought for and defended its independence before his retirement from all public offices. But in three years, his accomplishments and the state's security were unraveled and left exposed by an inconsistent foreign policy that failed to adapt to the impulsive changes made to the postwar Versailles system. Although his primary objective was to reestablish domestic order by eliminating the inefficiency of "Sejmocracy," the Marshal also possessed a more coherent view of how Poland should conduct its relations with other European states in order to secure its place in Europe as a strong and independent entity. He estimated that no major changes would occur in the next five years that would require the state's participation.<sup>72</sup> While the Sanacja regime consolidated domestic control, it would only resort to surveying the European political scene before taking on any serious ventures. The main goal of Poland's foreign policy in promoting the growth of Polish national life in peace and security remained unchanged. What ultimately would set Sanacja apart from its predecessors was its approach to conducting relations with other states.

After a week had passed since his successful coup d'état, Piłsudski set the record straight on his goals for foreign policy in an interview with *Le Matin*. He expressed a desire for peace yet passive aggressively underlined that if Poland was infringed upon, it

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<sup>72</sup> Józef Beck, *Final Report* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, Publishers, Inc., 1957), 1.

would know how to defend its interests.<sup>73</sup> He had no desire to undo the errors of his predecessors nor dismantle the post-Locarno system that he viewed with contempt, but rather reaffirm Poland's commitment to salvaging what little was left of the Versailles Treaty's provisions. While Piłsudski focused on rebuilding domestic policy for the time being, he entrusted the day-to-day operations of the Foreign Ministry to a man who shared similar views on Poland's international position. An experienced diplomat, August Zaleski was familiar with the international scene and well liked around Europe. Before his official appointment as Foreign Minister, he had served the Polish delegation alongside Skrzyński at the League of Nation's General Assembly. Yet his ideas continuously clashed with his superior's, particularly on the topic of Locarno where he argued against signing a pact that brought about an agreement of "differentiation between the guarantees of security for the West and East."<sup>74</sup> Perhaps this is why he enjoyed the Marshal's good graces, as the latter was never short of being critical of Skrzyński's actions at Locarno, going as far as even labeling him the "bitch of Locarno".<sup>75</sup>

In the summer of 1926, Piłsudski had arrived at the Foreign Ministry where he established two principles that were to serve as the foundation of the Sanacja regime's foreign policy. The first one revolved around Poland's place in between two neighbors it historically had never truly gotten along with. It was to remain neutral with respect to both Germany and Russia, and avoid garnering suspicion that it was colluding with one over the other. The second point supplemented the first in that Poland should maintain its

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<sup>73</sup> Piłsudski, IX, 21.

<sup>74</sup> He accused his superior of giving into French and British pressure to sign the pact. "Memoirs," Box 14, Folder 1, August Zaleski Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, 145, 166. "HI" here after.

<sup>75</sup> This is based off of Prime Minister Bartel's accounts. Piłsudski did offer Skrzyński the Foreign Affairs portfolio but the latter refused. Regardless, the Marshal noted that it would have been temporary just so he could calm the anxious foreign opinion that the coup had attracted. Piotr S. Wandycz, *August Zaleski* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1980), 26.

alliances with France and Romania, which had chiefly been designed to guarantee its security if conflict arose with Germany or Russia.<sup>76</sup> Piłsudski asserted that these two principles were to be maintained and never deviated from, as Poland's existence depended on them. Zaleski raised the question about a possible third point, namely whether Poland should continue to remain close to the League of Nations. He had been a supporter of the institution and its 1924 Geneva Protocol, confident that both could help maintain the survival of the Polish state.<sup>77</sup> Yet Piłsudski was not shy in expressing his dislike for it, as he considered it a tool used by the Great Powers to force their own policies upon smaller and weaker states. Zaleski stressed the need to seek collective security through the Geneva Protocol, underlining that Poland could not even handle a sole attack from Germany or Russia, let alone from both. Piłsudski understood this, but he had predicted that neither side was capable of launching an offensive for another 10 to 15 years.<sup>78</sup> Yet he did not restrict Zaleski from keeping Poland away from the League, instead advising a cautious approach to it. "Follow it if you think it opportune, but do not believe in it, if you don't want to be made a fool of."<sup>79</sup>

Although he did not wish to introduce radical changes to Poland's foreign policy, Piłsudski certainly wanted to distance it from the League's supremacy. He had good reason for this according to the Geneva Protocol and the Locarno agreements' provisions. Under the former, there was a blind tendency by all of its supporters to adhere to the "Spirit of Geneva" doctrine, where all assembled delegates would settle their differences by reaching an acceptable compromise. The problem with this was that there was a

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<sup>76</sup> "Memoirs," Zaleski Papers, 180.

<sup>77</sup> The law introduced compulsory arbitration and reaffirmed the obligation of members to assist the victim of aggression in time of war.

<sup>78</sup> "Memoirs," Zaleski Papers, 182.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

“tendency to overlook justice for the sake of compromise,” as stronger states would often bully weaker ones into submitting to the League’s most favored option.<sup>80</sup> In the case of Locarno, it forced both Poland and her French ally to employ the League as a third party arbitrator if conflict arose. French aid was conditional and could also only be dispersed to Poland if the League agreed that the latter had been a victim of aggression. Therefore Piłsudski’s skepticism of the League and subsequent choice to distance Poland from it was not without reason, as he did not want to completely put Poland’s security or even its existence in the hands of an institution that could potentially sacrifice it.

When Zaleski took over he immediately established communications with all foreign representatives to clarify Poland’s direction after the May coup. His ultimate goal was to “create the impression that Poland would continue her foreign policy in the same pacific and conciliatory spirit as heretofore and that the return to power of Marshal Piłsudski did not mean the return to the methods with the Poles had to use sometimes during his tenure of the office of Chief of State.”<sup>81</sup> It was to reassure international opinion that Poland would not immediately resort to the bayonets of the Polish army if conflict arose. Yet this did not mean that a military figure like the Marshal would also completely refrain from using force if need be. Facing the Sejm’s Foreign Affairs Committee on July 21, 1926, Zaleski elaborated on the general orientation of his policy citing that above all else, peace was needed to restore the equilibrium in Poland’s relations with other states. He dismissed any rumors that designs for war were in the making, as they were not consistent with the state’s political and national aspirations. “A peaceful policy nowadays demands a wholehearted and a possibly most comprehensive collaboration, with other

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<sup>80</sup> Many delegates had even been pressured to approve the Protocol so as not to go against the “Spirit of Geneva”. Ibid, 147.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 176.

countries for the pursuit of aims common to all states.”<sup>82</sup> Zaleski was realistic in acknowledging that although collaboration with other states had harmed Poland in the past (i.e. Locarno), aside from armed conflict, it was the only option left that could actually still be used in its favor. Thus the only way to bring Poland out of its geopolitical isolation would be to continue collaborating with other states, but to ensure that it closely adhered to Polish interests. But he did state that there was room for change in this policy as changes in the international scene demanded “different tactics at different times.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Foreign Reactions to Piłsudski’s Coup and Sanacja’s Initial Approaches**

Piłsudski’s coup had attracted great attention, particularly from the Soviet Union. It was largely alarmed of what the Marshal’s intentions may be, fearing the resurrection of his federalist ideas or a war against Russia for Piłsudski to divert attention away from Poland’s internal crisis.<sup>84</sup> But no such plot existed. To calm Soviet fears, the Poles made a conciliatory gesture by inviting the Russian envoy Pyotr Voykov, to attend a personal dinner with the Marshal. There, Piłsudski stated that the Soviet regime was most favorable to Poland and that he personally possessed no territorial ambitions. He assured Voykov that a new war between the two states was out of the question as, “...personally I can only lose in the case of a war. Now I am a victor. In case of another war I would only risk to lose this position.”<sup>85</sup> To underline Polish goodwill, Stanisław Patek who enjoyed popularity in the Soviet Union as a defense attorney of many revolutionaries in the days of Tsarist Russia, was designated as envoy to Moscow.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>84</sup> In July, one Soviet note claimed that Poland desired to detach Soviet Belarus and Ukraine from the Soviet Union. “Wystąpienie wojenne Piłsudskiego i stanowisko partii,” 31 May 1926, Memorandum KC KPP, and, “Notatka Feliksa Dzierżyńskiego do Józefa Stalina,” 11 July 1926, reprinted in *Przewrót Majowy 1926 roku w oczach Kremla*, eds. Bogdan Musiał and Jan Szumski (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009), 153, 284.

<sup>85</sup> “Memoir,” Zaleski Papers, 177.

Yet Soviet foreign policy did not change much with regards to the new regime. It continued to maintain close contact with Germany, focused on preventing coordination among the Baltic states and Poland, and lastly, attempted some sort of détente with Piłsudski's Poland.<sup>86</sup> The last two objectives were notable with Soviet offers for neutrality acts with every individual Baltic state, including Poland in August 1926.<sup>87</sup> Nothing ever materialized, as all states (particularly the latter) made their signatures dependent on including all of the Soviet Union's western neighbors. Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Rykov once complained that the main obstacle in concluding a treaty with Poland was the latter's efforts to become the leader and negotiator for a chain of states stretching from Finland to Romania.<sup>88</sup>

Germany did not exactly hold the same convictions as the Soviet Union. It proceeded with caution but saw optimism in Piłsudski's takeover, as popular opinion theorized that the Marshal saw it "as the lesser of her [Poland's] neighbouring evils" when compared to the Soviet Union.<sup>89</sup> It was right to a degree, as his distrust for anything Russian did surpass any reservations he held for any other neighboring state. Polish security depended on a subdued Germany, yet Locarno ruined that initiative. Sanacja needed a new approach to counter the growing threat of Germany's resurgence, which is why Piłsudski felt it was better to create a rapprochement with that state. In June 1926 he

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<sup>86</sup> Jan Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland: From Versailles to Yalta* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 103.

<sup>87</sup> The proposed nonaggression pact would renounce all forms of aggression against either side, pursue neutrality if one side was involved in a conflict with an outside third party, and avoid accepting political or economic agreements detrimental to the other side. "Narkomindel Statement on the Soviet Proposal for a Non-Aggression Pact with Poland," 28 August 1926, *Izvestia*, reprinted in *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, Vol. II: 1925-1932*, ed. Jane DeGras (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 130.

<sup>88</sup> Kaminski and Zacharias, 113. Both sides agreed upon certain points in September 1927, but it would take a few more years before anything truly materialized. Eudin and Fisher, 346.

<sup>89</sup> Harald von Riekhoff, "Piłsudski's Conciliatory Overtures to Stresemann," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 9, (1967), 74.

sent Herman Diamand to conduct separate talks with Stresemann and the Foreign Ministry's Secretary Carl von Schubert, making it known that concessions could be made if Germany supported Poland's reelection to the League's Council.<sup>90</sup> The Germans made no promises, marking the mission as a stepping-stone rather than a failure.<sup>91</sup> Another attempt at dialogue was made at the League's September session where Poland successfully was reelected to the Council. It was there that Zaleski had met with von Schubert, who informed him that relations would never improve without a revision to the German-Polish border. Zaleski's rebuttal was simply, "never."<sup>92</sup> He always underlined that Polish policy was continuously seeking to establish a friendly coexistence between both states, but remained steadfast in letting German revisionism influence or dominate any sort of negotiations.

Aside from the topic of revisionism, Polish-German relations during this three-year period aimed at settling other issues that divided both states. First, Germany held an interest in coming to an agreement over the liquidation process initiated by the Versailles Treaty. Under Article 297, a country had the right to liquidate the property of German nationals. Poland had taken advantage of this privilege to continue its drive to weaken the minority's presence and influence in Germany's revisionist aims.<sup>93</sup> After much delay in negotiations, both sides came to an agreement in October 1929 where they mutually renounced all financial and property claims.

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<sup>90</sup> "An Unofficial Polish Mediator," 28 July, 1926, reprinted in *Gustav Stresemann: His Diaries, Letters, and Papers: Volume II*, ed. Eric Sutton (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1937), 500.

<sup>91</sup> von Riekhoff, "Piłsudski's," 77-78.

<sup>92</sup> "Memoirs," Zaleski Papers, 197.

<sup>93</sup> The liquidation process was a difficult one as it required a state to compensate Germany for evicting its nationals. Poland financially could not afford this and so the process was dragged out for years. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 137.

The second issue regarded minorities, as the number of Poles living in Germany practically equaled that of Germans living in Poland.<sup>94</sup> Since the early 1920s, both sides had lobbed complaints at each other over the treatment of minorities, with Germany utilizing the League of Nations as a forum particularly after its entry in September 1926. Due to the high concentration of Polish Germans in Poland's western frontier, the goal of Sanacja's predecessors had been to disperse the minority and force its assimilation. Despite a difference in policy, not much changed when Sanacja took over as it was more interested in consolidating political control in Warsaw.<sup>95</sup> Thus Germany's complaints continued and the minority became a main propaganda tool in its revisionist campaign. The minority issue was never truly solved and remained an obstacle in Polish-German relations due to its deep roots in the political differences of both states.

In effect since 1925, the tariff war was the third issue obstructing the normalization in relations between both states. The September 1926 encounter between Zaleski and von Schubert also contained a dialogue between the two on a mutual desire to end the economic conflict. For the next three years both sides would conduct negotiations of various sorts to put an end to the tariff war. Headway was made on commercial agreements for commodities such as timber and rye. The reason Germany was willing to deal with Poland commercially despite a radical difference in political aims, was because it was feeling the pinch from its embargo on Polish goods, drastically needing to increase its exports in order to maintain financial obligations to the postwar

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<sup>94</sup> Aside from Horak's book, one should also consult Richard Blanke's *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland 1918-1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), or most recently Winson Chu's *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) for an analysis on the relationship between the German minority and the Polish state, as well as the former's role in Germany's revisionist campaign.

<sup>95</sup> Sanacja also relied on the support of conservative-nationalist circles on certain topics, and thus chose not to touch the already preexisting policies on Poland's national minorities. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 211.



reparation payments. Thus the economic channel provided a better shot at normalization in relations than any other one.

The diverging interests of Poland and Czechoslovakia from 1919-1925 undoubtedly carried over into the Sanacja years. Czech perceptions of the May coup were that Piłsudski would take an anti-Russian stance and bring Poland closer to Germany via some kind of territorial agreement.<sup>96</sup> Although some Polish officials attempted to dispel Czech suspicions, the Marshal made it clear that he did not care much for Poland's southern neighbor. He still remembered the Czechs' actions during the Polish-Soviet War and personally held the opinion that their state's independence would not last very long.<sup>97</sup> Zaleski seemed to have been the only man the Czechs felt they could count on for normal relations with Poland, due to his experiences working with Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš in Geneva. But that partnership never truly materialized, as Beneš refused to support Zaleski's defense of Poland's minority issues.

In fact, the minority question was actually an obstacle in the improvement of Polish-Czech relations themselves. Poland had accused its neighbor of pushing its political views onto the Polish minority that heavily occupied the border regions. The Czechs often responded with complaints that the Czech minority in Poland was subjected to hostility from their own localities. But other minority problems that should not have directly affected relations between both states carried on from the pre-Sanacja years. Polish suspicions that Prague was still supporting Ukrainian irredentism came up,

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<sup>96</sup> Jerzy Kozeński, "Próby zbliżenia polsko-czechosłowackiego w latach 1926-1931," *Przegląd Zachodni* 20, (1964), 316.

<sup>97</sup> Although the Czechs were neutral during the conflict, they blocked Allied relief from traveling through their state to Poland. Marian Zgórnjak, "Sytuacja międzynarodowa czechosłowacji i niektóre aspekty stosunków czechosłowacko-polskich w latach 1919-1937," *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski, 1914-1939* 9, (1965), 14.

particularly in 1927 when Beneš refused to support Zaleski's attempt to dismiss Ukrainian complaints against Poland at Geneva.

Perhaps foreign policy in relation to Germany was what divided both neighbors. Whereas it was deemed a threat to Polish independence, the Czechs felt their position was safer and thus refused to politically align with Poland, probably to prevent Germany from concluding that an anti-German alliance existed between the two.<sup>98</sup> Hungarian revisionism was another Czech concern in which Poland had no interest. Polish foreign policy maintained very good relations with Hungary, and thus remained neutral on issues such as revisionism. The Poles had always assured their counterparts that their country held no serious political talks with Hungary, let alone any anti-Little Entente feelings.<sup>99</sup> The other dividing factor was that unlike Poland's neutrality on the issue, Czechoslovakia feared an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria because with Hungary, it would create a complete encirclement of Czechoslovakia. In the end, political divisions overshadowed any progress made between both states, such as the effective collaboration between their General Staffs.

In early 1926 the Polish-Romanian alliance was renewed for another five years without any significant changes.<sup>100</sup> But the May coup produced considerable interest in Romania, as Bucharest saw Piłsudski's return to power as beneficial to the alliance.<sup>101</sup> Yet the Marshal did not attach much importance to Romania. Although he never specifically mentioned why, he was critical of their General Staff and felt it was too

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<sup>98</sup> Kozeński, 312-313. In 1927, Beneš felt that Czechoslovakia was in a better position to remain neutral than to conclude an alliance with Poland against German aggression. Krzysztof Lewandowski, "Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie w latach 1918-1939," in *Przyjaźnie i Antagonizmy*, ed. Janusz Żarnowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1977), 239.

<sup>99</sup> Kozeński, 324.

<sup>100</sup> A copy of the renewal is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 357-359.

<sup>101</sup> Henryk Bułhak, "Polska a Rumunia 1918-1939," in *Przyjaźnie i Antagonizmy*, ed. Janusz Żarnowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1977), 324.

theoretical than practical in that it never showed any preparations if conflict arose. It seems that Romania only offered one significant contribution to the alliance by forming a joint barrier with Poland against the Soviet Union. This helped secure Poland's eastern border, but the "theoretical" train of thought may have created some doubt among the Poles as to the reliability of Romania's forces. The last reason for Piłsudski's apathy may have been that this alliance had no value in countering German aggression. Yet the Poles continued to maintain the alliance probably because it did not cause as much difficulties as the one with France.

The first three years were stagnant with the only development in the partnership being the frequency in which their General Staffs met.<sup>102</sup> There were instances where both sides increased their development and trade of war material between each other, something Piłsudski attached great importance to. He desired greater cooperation with the Romanians, so that they could lean against Poland to become a strong ally.<sup>103</sup> The Marshal's concern was that they were too preoccupied with Hungarian revisionism as opposed to any dangers from Russia or Germany. If there was one goal that Polish foreign policy attached to this alliance, it was to change this Romanian mindset by building Poland's prestige in Bucharest.<sup>104</sup> The greater the Polish influence, the greater the alliance's reliability may prove to be in the end.

The new regime drew mixed reactions in France, with most of the government's concern focused on what radical moves Marshal Piłsudski had in store for Poland. He was not seen as a Francophile like his predecessors, and fears were conjured up that he

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<sup>102</sup> Bulhak, "Polska a Rumunia," 324.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 325.

might rip Poland away from its Western ally in favor of German influence.<sup>105</sup> But on the contrary, Piłsudski chose to uphold the alliance citing that it was one of the two cornerstones of Polish foreign policy. Immediately upon his appointment, Zaleski identified the alliance as an “instrument of security and peace,” a friendship that brought both states together through “common interests.”<sup>106</sup> But the main hurdle Poland faced was how to bridge the gap that Locarno had created in the alliance’s effectiveness. Piłsudski’s primary trepidation came from the question whether France was still a reliable ally should Poland be attacked. Thus the initial focus for Polish foreign policy was to see what had and had not changed within the alliance before adopting any new methods.

One thing that became evident early on was that Poland and France had different interpretations of the alliance. A proponent of Locarno, Briand continued to direct French foreign policy during this time in a different manner. Although he followed popular opinion in France to maintain the alliance with Poland, there was a caveat in this where France no longer had an interest nor need for a defensive alliance system to guarantee its security. Security had been achieved through direct negotiations with the perceived threat, Germany, at Locarno. There was a preference to adapt a self-defensive stance and reduce the alliance with Poland to nothing more than an insurance policy that retained some economic and political value.

Despite French assurances that Locarno did grant their country security, the Sanacja regime refused to buy into that blind belief, rather choosing to adhere firmly to the alliance’s original agreements. The focus was to attain a guarantee from their ally that should Poland be the victim of German aggression, France would still aid it despite the

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<sup>105</sup> One potential reason may have been Piłsudski’s cooperation, despite temporary, with the Central Powers during the war.

<sup>106</sup> “Memoirs,” Zaleski Papers, 186.

legalities of Locarno. But if Poland began to engage Germany in negotiations to improve relations between both states, why did it put so much effort into strictly maintaining the Franco-Polish alliance? The reason may have been that it too served as an insurance policy for the Poles. If German revisionism truly failed to cease until the western frontier was rectified, French military backing was still vital.

France may have misinterpreted a German-Polish rapprochement for an actual understanding between the two sides, thus triggering a process of blunting the sharpness of the alliance. The diverging interests increasingly became apparent in that the French were more absorbed in subordinating their ally to the status of “junior partner” while the Poles desired that their counterparts “adapt their policies to the exigencies of Poland’s security.”<sup>107</sup> This became obvious by French attempts to demand changes to the alliance’s provisions, while the Poles countered those offers with more demands for detailed guarantees of aid in time of conflict. The toxicity between the two also became noticeable in Geneva, when the French rarely backed Polish initiatives or even scorned their ally with regards to Germany’s constant minority complaints. It got to the point that at times, France would ransom their support in return for Polish subservience to the former’s agenda. But the underlying problem and trend within the alliance dating back from Locarno was the failure of France to consult its Polish ally, reinforcing the latter’s belief that the alliance one day might prove to be useless if not completely abandoned.

### **1927: War Scares and Cracks in the Alliance System**

Relations with Lithuania had been nonexistent since 1923, when the Lithuanians cut off all diplomatic contact with the Poles and declared that the two were at a “state of war” with each other. It was a sign of protest against the Polish seizure of Vilna, as well

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<sup>107</sup> Karski, 83.

as a demonstration against the League's disinterest in taking any steps to rectify the situation. Lithuania increasingly became closer with Germany and the Soviet Union, with all three seeing this as an opportunity to neutralize or isolate Poland.<sup>108</sup> But the military coup d'état that occurred in Kaunas on the night of December 16-17, 1926, ushered in a more nationalistic regime. Once in control, the regime asserted power in the style of a semi-authoritarian state, with its parliament's powers weakened to a large extent. Under Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras, Lithuania's primary objective was to do everything possible to see that Vilna was returned, even if it meant war.<sup>109</sup> These radical developments intensified the state of war, setting off a war scare that swept across European diplomatic circles.

Taking a step back, the absence of relations between Poland and Lithuania for three years did not mean that no major controversies existed during that time. Lithuania went a step further when it ended all diplomatic relations with Poland by effectively closing the border between both sides. All links of communications were destroyed, with thousands of miles worth of railroad tracks dismantled and telegraph lines torn down.<sup>110</sup> There were countless border incidents with some that ended in one side or the other sustaining casualties. Perhaps the main source of conflict was the numerous times one side accused the other of mistreating its minority. In Poland, the Lithuanian minority tended not to clash with the authorities due to its extremely small population. But in Lithuania, the wealthy landowning Poles were regarded as alien to the population, while

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<sup>108</sup> Piotr Łossowski, "Stosunki polsko-litewskie w latach 1921-1939," in *Przyjaźnie i Antagonizmy*, ed. Janusz Żarnowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1977), 139.

<sup>109</sup> Alfred Erich Senn, "The Polish-Lithuanian War Scare, 1927," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 21, (1961), 271.

<sup>110</sup> "Litwa i Polska pomiędzy dwoma wojnami światowymi. 1914-1939," 1955, Box 4, Folder 4, Leon Mitkiewicz Papers, HI, 165.

they themselves could not grasp the concept of an independent Lithuanian state “unaffiliated with Poland”.<sup>111</sup> The population was not shy of harboring anti-Polish feelings, with demonstrations and even physical confrontations occurring. Differences in ethnicity, class, and historical interpretation tended to lead the relationship between the two sides to a point where “conflict rather than accommodation prevailed”.<sup>112</sup>

When Piłsudski came to power, he held a desire to resolve the conflict over Vilna. In the summer of 1926 there were Polish troop movements throughout the Vilna region with secret military conferences held near the Lithuanian border. This raised alarms in the Soviet Union who reported that Poland was going to attack Lithuania. Yet Zaleski dismissed these rumors and stressed the need to reopen normal diplomatic relations in order to liquidate the state of war. Polish troop movement may have been to pressure the Lithuanians to open up relations, or at least to quell their increasingly hostile attitude towards Poland. But tensions only increased as the Lithuanians concluded a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union on September 28, 1926. It reaffirmed the treaty signed between both sides in 1920, with both states’ territory and sovereignty respected. No aggression was to be undertaken against each other and the Soviet Union was to stand by Lithuania on the Vilna question. Soviet willingness to take part in this pact was because it complemented its foreign policy in creating divisions among other states. In this case, there existed a strong desire that collaboration with Lithuania would prevent its

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<sup>111</sup> The land barons were notably targeted by land reforms that aimed at consolidating Lithuanian peasant holdings and at the same, time diminishing the former’s chance at threatening the state’s independence. Vladas Krivickas, “The Polish Minority in Lithuania, 1918-1926,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 53, (1975), 80, 85.

<sup>112</sup> “...the maintenance of the state took precedence over the officially proclaimed principle of equal national rights.” Krivickas, 90, 91.

alignment with Poland, thus further weakening the latter's position in the Baltic region.<sup>113</sup> The pact brought concern to Poland, as now the Soviet Union became indirectly involved in the conflict. Polish protests were lodged against the Soviets primarily for violating the Riga treaty by taking up a position on Vilna.<sup>114</sup>

Pressure between the two grew larger after the coup in Lithuania. Voldemaras asserted that the return of Vilna was the price Poland would have to pay for the reconvening of relations. Until then it would remain Lithuania's principal enemy.<sup>115</sup> Piłsudski's initial response was that he would do nothing. He acknowledged that before the coup, no responsible government existed in Kaunas and that any dangerous situation could have provoked a war between the two.<sup>116</sup> Now Poland was dealing with a more nationalistic regime and thus Piłsudski favored not to aggravate the already delicate situation. But days later he did remark to the French ambassador that his patience was ending and that he would find a solution.<sup>117</sup> Secret talks were conducted between representatives from both sides during the summer of 1927, but proved futile.

While studying the conflict with Lithuania, other problems surfaced for Polish foreign policy early on in 1927. The French had begun to inquire whether changes could be made to the alliance. Their desire was not just to have it conform to the Locarno agreements, but to complete France's shift away from using alliances as their number one

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<sup>113</sup> Although Piłsudski had no intent to resurrect his federalist designs, the Soviets continued to seek out opportunities to continue Poland's isolation. Josef Korbel, *Poland Between East and West: Soviet and German Diplomacy toward Poland 1919-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 224, 227.

<sup>114</sup> The Riga treaty stated that the Soviet Union must "recognize any agreement" between Poland and Lithuania regarding the western frontier. Because the latter had refused to accept the outcome over Vilna, the Soviet Union argued that it had not violated the treaty. It also cited that it did not recognize any decisions made by a third party, in this case the League's Conference of Ambassadors. "Reply to Polish Representations Concerning the Soviet-Lithuanian Treaty," 19 November 1926, Kluchnikov & Sabanin, iii, I, p. 356, reprinted in DeGras, 142.

<sup>115</sup> Alfred Erich Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania, and the Vilna Question, 1920-1928* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 184.

<sup>116</sup> Piłsudski, IX, 64.

<sup>117</sup> Senn, *The Great Powers*, 185.



form of protection. The Poles had found this troublesome not only because it threatened to diminish what strength was left of the alliance, but just a few months earlier in December 1926, both sides had concluded a guarantee treaty that stated they were obliged to come to each other's aid even if the League Council could not come to a unanimous decision in the event of aggression.<sup>118</sup>

Various proposals for modifications had been made involving the alliance's political or military convention. Ambassador Jules Laroche had suggested eliminating the political convention and instead, subjecting the alliance to the League's covenant. In November, General Franchet d'Espèrey visited Warsaw to propose a revision to the military convention, one that had been designed by the French General Staff as early as March 1926. Among some minor alterations, its purpose was to eliminate Germany and Russia as "aggressors" from the agreement. But all approaches proved unsuccessful. Piłsudski absolutely refused to even consider discussing the changes, as he saw them as openings for France to retreat from its commitments. If the Poles allowed one change to the alliance, it would only further encourage France to continue pushing for more. The only modifications Piłsudski would consider were increases in French deliveries of war materials.

Another war scare stirred the already simmering worrisome feelings of many European states. Great Britain cut off diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in May, and a string of anti-Soviet incidents had popped up in Europe and Asia. To make matters worse, on June 7 Voykov was the recipient of an assassin's bullet while awaiting a train at Warsaw's train station. The perpetrator was Boris Koverda, the son of a Russian

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<sup>118</sup> This treaty may not have put to rest Poland's concern for security, but it did somewhat bandage up the alliance's power which had been partially restrained by Locarno. Karski, 86.

monarchist who opposed the Bolshevik regime. Soviet outrage filled the diplomatic channels between both states, as they were convinced that Poland had been collaborating with Great Britain against it.<sup>119</sup> As a result, a genuine fear of war breaking out with the West overwhelmed the Soviet Union, bringing about everything short of the Red Army's mobilization. While Poland apologized profusely, the Soviet Union accused it of harboring anti-Soviet terrorists and condoning such acts of violence.<sup>120</sup> Its official press, *Tass*, accused the Poles of deliberately preventing Voykov from acquiring the necessary medical attention and as a result, bleeding out to death.<sup>121</sup> Patek had his work cut out for him as he was able to calm Moscow to some extent. He informed the Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov, that both sides could come to an understanding despite this "unfortunate accident," which had no connections to Poland at all. He assured him that Polish politics were peaceful, having nothing in common with the "anti-Soviet intrigues on the wide, international scene."<sup>122</sup>

The Polish delegation attempted to attain a security guarantee for its state at the League's Assembly in September. It put forth a proposition to create a universal nonaggression pact, later modifying it to conclude a "renunciation of war as a means of settling international disputes and an obligation to settle such dispute by pacific

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<sup>119</sup> A Soviet note from June 11 cited that the assassination was "infinitely more significant than an isolated individual act." It ties it to the recent rupture of relations between the USSR and Great Britain, accusing the latter of helping "militant imperialism" to create complications between the former and other states. "Reply to the Polish Note," 11 June 1927, Kluchnikov & Sabanin, iii, I, p. 387, reprinted in DeGras, 229. It is worth noting that the Soviets had also suspected Great Britain of playing some role in producing Piłsudski's coup. Soviet convictions were that both Poland and Great Britain were ready to launch a war as soon as the USSR became threatening to the former. "Raport wywiadu wojskowego," 27 June 1926, reprinted in Musiał and Szumski, 243.

<sup>120</sup> "Protest Against the Assassination of the Soviet Envoy," 7 June 1927, Kluchnikov & Sabanin, iii, I, p. 385, reprinted in DeGras, 221.

<sup>121</sup> "Raport nr 635/T/27," 18 June 1927, AAN, Ambasada RP w Moskwa, 55, k. 144-145, reprinted in *Stanisław Patek: Raporty i korespondencja z Moskwy [1927-1932]*, ed. Małgorzata Gmurczyk-Wrońska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010), 152.

<sup>122</sup> "Raport nr 636/T/27," 18 June 1927, AAN, Ambasada w Moskwa, 55, k. 146-152, reprinted in Gmurczyk-Wrońska, 154-155.

means.”<sup>123</sup> Its goal was to fill the gap that the 1924 Geneva Protocol had created, where a state could still wage war if it was for legitimate purposes. Since German revisionism had greatly intensified since Locarno, the Polish move here was to block threats like it from taking advantage of the gap and targeting Poland. Unfortunately the proposal was denied as it was strongly opposed by Stresemann. He argued for general peaceful methods to counter what he saw as an “Eastern Locarno.”<sup>124</sup> If passed, it would indirectly force Germany to recognize its border with Poland and renounce ever using force. The very thought of Poland securing something of an Eastern Locarno sharply conflicted with Germany’s revisionist agenda.<sup>125</sup> But Stresemann successfully won the support of France and Great Britain, as Briand took no interest in the matter and Chamberlain commented that weaker states had no business putting forth proposals of such importance as the Poles had.<sup>126</sup> Although the pact failed, the League had adopted a resolution banning wars of aggression. Yet this still did not fill the gap in the protocol. On top of that, Poland was not considered a leading state, scorned for its initiative, and shunned by its French ally.

The Lithuanians were irked by Poland’s willingness to give asylum to political refugees and use them to build support for control over Vilna.<sup>127</sup> But the Poles had their own gripes, stemming from newspaper articles reporting that Polish schoolteachers were being interned at a prison in Lithuania. The Polish response was the closing of Lithuanian educational institutions in Vilna, with Piłsudski even attending anti-Lithuanian demonstrations on the seventh anniversary of Żeligowski’s seizure of the city.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> “Memoirs,” Zaleski Papers, 201.

<sup>124</sup> Jerzy Krasuski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1919-1932* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1975), 277.

<sup>125</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 235.

<sup>126</sup> “Memoirs,” Zaleski Papers, 201-202. The French delegation also refused to back the Poles because they were uncertain of the German response to it. Krasuski, 276, 277.

<sup>127</sup> Senn, *The Great Powers*, 194-196.

<sup>128</sup> Senn, *The Great Powers*, 194.

Voldemaras capitalized on these recent developments by writing a detailed complaint to the League of Nations on October 15. He asserted that the report on the internment of Polish schoolteachers was fabricated, and that Lithuania would not allow Polish reprisals against the Lithuanian minority and its institutions go unpunished. Defending his country, he concluded that “the Polish Government was putting into execution a general plan directed against the existence itself of independent Lithuania.”<sup>129</sup> Voldemaras went further by playing upon nationalist sentiments at home to consolidate his political agenda against Poland.

The ongoing and escalating conflict between Poland and Lithuania had larger implications for Europe. Many states such as Great Britain and France had continuously tried to moderate the situation in order to maintain peace and prevent an armed showdown from happening. France did not want this crisis to interrupt the recent Polish-German rapprochement, which already contained considerable “strain.”<sup>130</sup> Anxiety over a war breaking out was high, especially since Germany and the Soviet Union had taken an active role in it. According to Stresemann, his aim was to prevent the West from using the crisis as a pretext for an Eastern Locarno, which would bring Poland security.<sup>131</sup> The Soviet Union was committed to supporting Lithuania according to their pact. They underlined their position by sending a direct message to Warsaw, warning the Poles that

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<sup>129</sup> “Lithuania and Poland: Lithuanian Government’s Note to League,” *Economic and General Bulletin*, November 1927, Box 64, Folder 8, Poland Ambasad (Great Britain) Records, HI. An actual copy of Voldemaras’ complaint (the previous citation is an English translation of it) is available under “Requets du Gouvernement Lithuanien en vertu de l’article 11 iu pages,” 15 October 1927, Box 64, Folder 8, Poland Ambasad (Great Britain) Records.

<sup>130</sup> Korbel, 230.

<sup>131</sup> Stresemann was careful not to fully endorse the Lithuanians against the Poles, as to not give off the perception that Germany was no longer interested in the return of the pre-dominantly ethnic German port city of Memel. Ibid, 229, 232.

Moscow would not stand by idly in the event of war.<sup>132</sup> French Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jean Herbette sent telegrams to Poland expressing his concern that a Polish-Soviet war may break out due to the Lithuanian crisis.<sup>133</sup> Patek pointed out in a report to Zaleski that true Soviet desires were based on isolating Poland and preventing her from scoring friendly ties with its neighbors.<sup>134</sup> The League of Nations had found itself in a conundrum over the situation and decided to convene in early December to find a solution to the crisis.

The recent Lithuanian accusations lodged against Poland before the League brought the situation to a breaking point. In the month of November Piłsudski weighed his options. He held conferences with his military leaders and Lithuanian political refugees to assess the situation. After reports were made that Lithuania was mobilizing, the Marshal contemplated preparing the Polish military only to decide against it. He knew Poland would be victorious but ultimately decided to let the situation be judged accordingly at the League's session next month.<sup>135</sup>

The Marshal personally embarked on a rare journey to Geneva where he arrived on December 9. At the diplomatic luncheon he became personally acquainted with Stresemann and cut straight to the chase. "For the last nine years Polish-German relations have constantly been very bad. Moreover, the Germans have adopted an offensive policy. The balance of all these years shows that Poland has not lost very much through it and Germany not only has not gained anything but has done much harm to her interests in the

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<sup>132</sup> Senn, *The Great Powers*, 196. According to Ambassador Laroche, four days earlier Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin warned Polish envoy Patek, "that if Poland acted against Lithuania, the USSR would act against Poland." Korbel, 234.

<sup>133</sup> Kaminski and Zacharias, 121.

<sup>134</sup> "Raport nr 1256/T/27," 5 December 1927, AAN, MSZ, 6644, k. 219-224, reprinted in Gmurczyk-Wrońska, 230.

<sup>135</sup> Piłsudski, IX, 99.

international forum. Is it worth continuing?”<sup>136</sup> Stresemann’s response was of open arms and a “gesture of helplessness.” Yet Piłsudski did pepper the conversation with compliments for Germany and emphasized that his state desired friendly relations with it. The result of this encounter was a more direct attempt at rapprochement with Germany, this time coming straight from the strong man of Poland.

It was the next day where Piłsudski shifted gears to address the issue that had prompted him to come to Geneva. According to a witness, Voldemaras was giving a speech when the irritated Marshal, “struck the table with his open hand so hard that the water pitcher rattled, and screamed at the Lithuanian, ‘I have not made the long trip from Warsaw to Geneva, M. Voldemaras, just to hear your long speech.’”<sup>137</sup> Drawing the attention of every League representative, Piłsudski asked his counterpart whether he wanted war or peace.<sup>138</sup> Shocked at the ultimatum, Voldemaras replied “peace.” The Marshal had successfully exposed his counterpart’s month’s long bluff of an actual showdown with Poland, and declared that the matter was over. The League ultimately came to a resolution that a state of war no longer existed between both states and that they could now open up negotiations to reinstate diplomatic relations.<sup>139</sup> But both sides had great difficulty choosing a location and setting up an agenda for when they would convene. Eventually they held a conference in Königsberg in late March and early April

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<sup>136</sup> Beck, 2.

<sup>137</sup> It should be noted that Piłsudski never thought highly of Voldemaras to begin with, in one instance citing his mentality as having been borrowed from an insane asylum. Senn, *The Great Powers*, 197.

<sup>138</sup> Accounts vary as to the exact way Piłsudski posed the question, but all agree that “war or peace” was asked. *Ibid*, 197. Piłsudski, IX, 102.

<sup>139</sup> Alfred Erich Senn contends that in reality a Polish-Lithuanian War was highly unlikely due to many “unfavorable circumstances”. But in the end, both Piłsudski and Voldemaras’ maintained they had achieved a diplomatic victory. The latter informed his country that the League had accepted the Lithuanian viewpoint of the conflict, when in reality it did not. Senn, “The Polish-Lithuanian”, 283, 284. Voldemaras’ arrogance and tendency to manipulate situations in his favor would catch up to him in 1929, when he was ousted by a coup led by President Antanas Smetona, the same individual who had seized power with the Prime Minister in December 1926.

1928, where they discussed communications, economics, and security. But nothing materialized from it. Voldemaras had always been pessimistic about holding negotiations, feeling that it was better for Lithuania not to come to an understanding with Poland.<sup>140</sup> The Lithuanian delegation also felt relations would never become regulated, underlining the importance in the return of Vilna.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Transition from post-Locarno to Collective Security**

The Piłsudski-Stresemann encounter carried on into the early months of 1928. It was favorably looked upon by other states such as France, who felt that the differences between both sides could finally be resolved. To start up fresher negotiations with Germany, Piłsudski dispatched Prince Janusz Radziwiłł to Berlin in March 1928. He was to secretly meet with Stresemann and like the Diamand mission, touch upon what was obstructing Polish-German relations. When Radziwiłł made a reference to some sort of minor territorial adjustments, Stresemann's response was that the German people would not allow him to come out of such negotiations empty-handed.<sup>142</sup> What this meant was that Germany was seeking a *complete* revision of the territorial status quo between both sides before other issues could be addressed. Yet again, Polish overtures were considered a failure as they were at the mercy of the territorial question.

The successes of Locarno had intrigued Stresemann enough to push for more concessions for Germany. In September 1926 he met with Briand in the French village of Thoiry to discuss greater German participation in European politics. There, it was Briand's mistake in hinting to Stresemann that Germany could gain more favorable concessions. The latter knew that it was France who held "the solution of the principal

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<sup>140</sup> Łossowski, "Stosunki," 151.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>142</sup> von Riekhoff, "Piłsudski's," 83.

questions of German policy, not only in the west but also in the east.”<sup>143</sup> If he could eliminate all French fears of German aggression, it would compel France to become more pro-German. By the time 1928 came around, the Rhineland question had gained much ground in diplomatic circles. Stresemann’s aim was to convince the West that Germany’s good behavior deserved some kind of gesture of goodwill to signify the formation of détente between both sides, such as the early withdrawal of Allied troops from the Rhineland, who were to remain there until 1935. But the other goal attached to this one was also some sort of compromise to ease the burden of reparations. If achieved, Germany would be completely free to place all of its attention towards its revisionist campaign against Poland.

An early evacuation of the Rhineland would be a blow to Polish foreign policy. In reality, its occupation was the last piece of security guarantee Poland had against German aggression. As long as Allied troops were stationed there and the war reparations were not paid off, Germany could not afford in any way to mobilize against Poland and take back the territories it laid claim to. And so on top of trying to find more guarantees for security after Locarno, Polish foreign policy was now faced with another task that could make the overall quest even more difficult. Although Zaleski supported a French-German rapprochement and made it clear that Poland would not be an obstacle to it, there was worry in Warsaw that the former might be realized at the expense of France’s allies. But France did not see the Rhineland’s evacuation as a threat to Poland. Briand maintained that an early evacuation could only occur if Germany followed disarmament provisions,

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<sup>143</sup> Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, “Stresemann and Poland after Locarno,” *Journal of Central European Affairs* 18, (1958), 303.



and if so, Locarno did not prevent France from crossing back into the Rhineland if its allies were victims of German aggression.<sup>144</sup>

Piłsudski had expressed an interest in attaining something similar to that of an Eastern Locarno in order to offset the consequences of an early withdrawal.<sup>145</sup> This was witnessed via Polish initiatives at the League. Poland had considered invoking Article 429 of the Versailles Treaty, where the evacuation could be delayed in order to obtain the required guarantees to fulfill the treaty's provisions. Zaleski's tactic was to use the threat of legal force to push Germany into directly negotiating some sort of a nonaggression pact with the Poles, which would be guaranteed by France and Great Britain. Yet France refused to support this idea, as the Quai d'Orsay cited Poland as not being of the original Allied contingency at Versailles, and Briand refused to extend Locarno-like guarantees to Eastern Europe.<sup>146</sup> If anything, the latter was more hopeful that the Piłsudski-Stresemann encounter might produce some bilateral agreement or that some reparations may satisfy Poland.

What became evident here was the growing estrangement between France and Poland, due to increasingly divergent interests. The former progressively began to take a defensive stance in terms of security arrangement. This came not only at the behest of the state's political arena looking for reconciliation with Germany, but the state's financial woes also influenced this turn in foreign policy. When coupled together, the military budget shrunk and funds were transferred to a new project, the building of a defensive barrier known as the Maginot Line. Although construction would not start for another

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<sup>144</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 70, 77.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

couple of years, the French saw this as a precautionary measure after the imminent evacuation of the Rhineland.

But yet again the French attempted to make changes to their commitments in the alliance with Poland. A proposed revision submitted to Warsaw in January stated that France would “possibly” engage Germany if it attacked Poland during a Polish-Soviet conflict. Though it was outright rejected, Piłsudski did send a member of the Polish General Staff, General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, to inquire what the French would actually do in this scenario. His counterpart, General Eugene Debeney refused to divulge the new mobilization plans under the proposed revisions.<sup>147</sup> This clearly did not rebuild Polish confidence in the reliability of its French ally. However in the summer of 1928, French and Polish General Staffs came together to discuss technical adjustments to the military convention, where France would possibly assist Poland in the buildup of its army, navy, and general armament. But the true downside to this cooperation was that both General Staffs were often subjugated to the wills of their political superiors. French military leaders often clashed with politicians over budgets and foreign policy. On the Polish side, Piłsudski directed the General Staff, with the only downfall being that he increasingly weeded out French influence in the Polish military.

As time progressed, so did France’s attitude in treating Poland more like a junior partner. It felt there was little need to maintain the razor sharp edge of an alliance that was originally aimed at Germany, whom now was in the good graces of Paris.<sup>148</sup> French accusations that Warsaw leveled unfair treatment against French business firms in Poland arose, with the most notable case being the Żyrardów textile mill. Allegedly, the Polish

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>148</sup> There was also this notion that Polish foreign policy may hold back or harm French diplomatic initiatives.

government had imposed harsh penalties on the business owners for widely profiting at the expense of the country's economy and the mill's workers. But Warsaw defended its actions arguing that it was trying to bridge the gap between Poland's benefits from French investments and the profits that the firms were reaping based off of the alliance's economic agreement's preferred nation clause. But on a grander scale, France began to attack Poland for constantly having accusations brought against it in front of the League, considering them "petty and time-consuming."<sup>149</sup> There were many instances where France felt that Poland was always sabotaging all members' attempts at reconciliation with Germany. No matter what contested issue came between the two, Poland continuously found itself emasculated and accepting the French point of view to prevent a complete rupture in the alliance.

French efforts to gain security for France were seen with the concluding of the Kellogg-Briand Pact on August 27, 1928.<sup>150</sup> Designed and coordinated by Briand and the United States' Secretary of State Frank Kellogg, the pact was originally signed between both statesmen's countries as well as Germany. Other states such as Poland were forced to wait and latch on their signatures at a later date.<sup>151</sup> The pact went into effect about a year later and its principal goal was for the signatories to renounce the threat and use of war as a way to resolve disputes. Other provisions allowed signatories the right to self-defense and to nullify their obligations under the League's covenant should another member violate the pact. Its design was to fit within not just the League's framework, but

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<sup>149</sup> Dębicki, 60.

<sup>150</sup> A copy of the pact is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 406-409.

<sup>151</sup> France refused to allow Poland to be one of the original signatories because it did not consider the latter a Great Power. Although the Polish delegation was able to convince its American counterparts to allow Poland to become an original signatory, this prestige was blunted when France put forth a motion to allow the Little Entente the same opportunity. "Ni w Pięc Ni w Dziewiec," 1960, Box 14, Folder 2, Zaleski Papers, 3.

also within that of Locarno's. For France, the pact was seen as a chance to erase any chance of Germany using force against it or its allies. It was also perceived as a way to ensure the Rhineland's imminent transition from occupied to free. If Germany violated any of the provisions through an unprovoked act of aggression, than France would be justified to take action against it.<sup>152</sup> But this pact was not necessarily a victory for Poland, as Zaleski had signed it to prevent the deterioration of Poland's position as a supporting ally and transition to being labeled a burden. The Poles held reservations about this pact because they had not been consulted and the very fact that it had practically the same nature as the Polish proposal in September 1927.<sup>153</sup> It may have outlawed the use of war, but this did not guarantee Poland's security. Even if Germany violated the pact, there was no promise of French aid because League members could decline to uphold their obligations. Since France could not get Poland to accept revisions to the alliance, the pact may have given it a blind impression that aid was no longer necessary and thus void due to the ban on war.

The Soviet Union had always looked at the League with suspicion, seeing it as a Western instrument aimed against it. When news broke of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, Chicherin reacted with contempt. "The omission of the Soviet Government from those taking part in the negotiations brings us in the first place to the thought that the real aims of initiators of the pact obviously included and include the desire to make of it a means of isolating the USSR and of fighting against it."<sup>154</sup> There was also a feeling of unease in

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<sup>152</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 122.

<sup>153</sup> Even a French diplomat had remarked, "We have once again given the Poles an impression, deplorable in itself and humiliating to us, that France considers them henceforth a deadweight which it only awaited the opportunity...of dropping." Ibid, 122.

<sup>154</sup> Chicherin felt that because the pact adhered all things anti-Soviet such as the League's covenant, Locarno, and France's "treaties with a number of Powers," it became "an integral part of the preparation of

Moscow, in that the pact did not go far enough in renouncing all methods of aggression. The Soviets even accused the Germans of straying away from the spirit of Rapallo and Berlin, sacrificing its ties with them for better relations with the West. “At that time (Rapallo) Germany was tenaciously fighting for a place in the international arena and needed the support of Russia; by 1929 she was recognized as an equal by the big powers.”<sup>155</sup> A real crisis struck Moscow as not only had Germany been drawn closer to France and Great Britain, but the war scare of 1927 was still in the minds of many. A feeling of insecurity arose to high levels by late 1928 in the Soviet Union, motivated by foreign and domestic difficulties. Its own search for security now became paramount to its existence.

In early December, Litvinov expressed his desires to Patek for the “regulating of good mutual neighborly relations” between both their states.<sup>156</sup> For years, neither side could finalize an agreement over a nonaggression pact, but that changed on December 29, when the Soviets proposed the Litvinov Protocol.<sup>157</sup> It was to apply the provisions of the Kellogg-Briand Pact to the relations between both states, without waiting for the former’s ratification. The Soviets had also extended it to Lithuania, but not to the Baltic states. In January, the Poles expressed a desire to conclude this agreement but on the persistent condition that the Baltic states and Romania be included. Although they initially refused,

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war against the USSR.” “Press Statement by Chicherin,” 5 August 1928, *Izvestia*, reprinted in DeGras, 322, 323.

<sup>155</sup> Korbelt, 255.

<sup>156</sup> “Raport nr 1227/T/28,” 12 December 1928, AAN, Ambasada RP Moskwa, 26, k. 318-320, reprinted in Gmurczyk-Wrońska, 337.

<sup>157</sup> This protocol was designed just to renounce the use of war when conflict arose. Litvinov’s note to Patek clarifies that the Soviets have not withdrawn the 1926 offer for a nonaggression pact. He remains avid that the concluding of one in the future could further strengthen “good-neighbourly relations” between both states. “Note from Litvinov to the Polish Ambassador,” 29 December 1928, *Vneshnaya Politika*, p. 340, reprinted in DeGras, 358.

the Soviets gave in and on February 9, the protocol was signed in Moscow.<sup>158</sup> Although hostilities between both states reemerged within months after the signing, both sides saw the agreement as a diplomatic success even if only for the time being. Russia's fear of isolation had eased, and Poland had gained some assurance of security on its eastern front, particularly in the wake of Germany's growing strength in Western politics and France's unpredictable foreign policy.

The League had decided to settle the Rhineland issue and Germany's remaining war reparations in August 1929 at the Hague Conference. With its evacuation imminent, the Poles scrambled to gain some kind of assurance of security before the decision was made to pull out all Allied troops. According to Zaleski, Polish aims were to accept the evacuation and instead, focus on collecting reparations and a guarantee of security.<sup>159</sup> A report from May 30, 1929 cited that potential compensation for an early evacuation would involve attaining a "concrete political declaration from the Entente powers" for security, in addition to the strengthening of Poland's military.<sup>160</sup> Another report created two main points that the Poles should stress at the Hague: apprehend some kind of guarantee of security from France, and, create a favorable political result from the conference.<sup>161</sup> The first point was to be based on proposing the "model D" project. The second concluded that the evacuation should not be accepted behind Poland's back.

The Hague Conference was split into two sessions, the first one taking place from August 6 to 21, 1929, and the second one from January 3 to 20, 1930. At the first session,

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<sup>158</sup> Lithuania delayed its signature until April 1. Korbel, 252. A copy of the protocol is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 417-419.

<sup>159</sup> "Exposé ministra spraw zagranicznych RP," 15 January 1929, A. Zaleski, *Przemowy i deklaracje...*, t. I, s. 204-215, reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 414.

<sup>160</sup> Sztab Główny to Lechnicki, 31 May 1929, Box 2, Folder 12, Poland Ambasada (France) Records, HI.

<sup>161</sup> Kochany Pułkownika, 1 June 1929, Box 2, Folder 12, Poland Ambasada (France) Records.

the conference's participants accepted the reduction of Germany's war reparations, and initiated the process to withdraw all remaining Allied troops from the Rhineland.<sup>162</sup> The Polish delegation heavily courted their French counterparts during the conference. They proposed the model D project as a final attempt to at an Eastern Locarno. It was supposed to be a tripartite agreement between Poland, France, and Germany, with its structure similar to that of Locarno's. All three sides were to renounce war, use arbitration to settle their differences, and lend assistance to one another after a League ruling on whether an act of aggression had occurred. In fact, the project stated that one side could actually lend immediate assistance to the victim since an attack on one League member equaled that of an attack on all members. Yet it failed to define what constituted flagrant aggression and how to secure obligatory aid. The Poles ransomed their consent to the Rhineland's evacuation in return for French aid that would cover this specific classification. They saw model D important for the "consolidation of European peace."<sup>163</sup>

But the French refused to accept the whole project for a number of reasons. According to the Quai d'Orsay's political director René Massigli, he expressed doubt whether the Germans would accept such an offer.<sup>164</sup> They would not consent to something that strengthened the Franco-Polish alliance (which in their eyes was always aimed against Germany) and guaranteed Poland's borders. Despite this project making better guarantees of nonaggression than the Kellogg-Briand pact, the absence of a demilitarized Rhineland made the term "flagrant aggression" difficult to define. Massigli

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<sup>162</sup> All of this was finalized at the second session, including sanctions on Germany should it violate the Conference's decisions.

<sup>163</sup> "Instrukcja wiceministra spraw zagranicznych RP," 5 July, 1929, AAN, Delegacja RP przy Lidze Narodów, t. 139, s. 5-11, kopia, maszynopis, reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 422.

<sup>164</sup> Rozmowy polsko-francuskie, 27 August 1929, Collection 40, Box 5, Archiwum Romana Dębickiego, Józef Piłsudski Institute of America Archives. "PI" here after.

embodied French concerns over its definition and whether it interfered with Article 2 of the Rhineland pact.<sup>165</sup> Under that article the French could only respond if: the Germans entered the Rhineland before its evacuation, the League had made its decision on who the aggressor was, and if this was not a legal war under Article 15 of the League's covenant. The definition of flagrant aggression was worthless without the Rhineland. When the Poles asked the Quai d'Orsay's Secretary General Philippe Berthelot what would happen in case of German aggression, he responded, "You have your military convention, which in time will find its application."<sup>166</sup> Without the clause on flagrant aggression that guaranteed immediate aid, the Poles could not push for the signing of the model D proposal.<sup>167</sup>

The Poles were willing to come to a compromise by editing model D and strengthening the alliance's military convention through it. Rather than push for immediate French aid, the Polish General Staff suggested strengthening the convention's terms on material aid. This too however did not stick well with the French, who countered that they could not guarantee an increase in material aid for financial and legal reasons.<sup>168</sup> Whether this was the actual reason or that France was now pressured to accept the evacuation by other members present at the Hague, it still represented another failure for both sides to find an agreement that guaranteed Polish security. Zaleski made one last attempt after the Hague conference to add "flagrant aggression" to the alliance, only for the French to bring remind them of legalistic interpretations and reassure that France would be ready to mobilize in the event of conflict immediately after a League ruling. An

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>167</sup> "Instrukcja wiceministra...", reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 420.

<sup>168</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 145.



armament loan was discussed between Zaleski and Briand, after the former had asked the latter what could guarantee Poland's security now that the Rhineland's early evacuation was accepted. Briand responded that he was willing to commit a French loan of 2-3 million francs to help facilitate the Polish army. Although Zaleski accepted the offer, Piłsudski refused it on the grounds that Poland would be greatly indebted to France and that Polish war industries would be able to equip the army by the time conflict arose.<sup>169</sup>

The last Polish attempt at attaining some sort of guarantee for Poland's security had failed. "Poland was no closer to her East-Locarno goal and her security position had considerably deteriorated."<sup>170</sup> Their French counterparts were too invested in the legalities and refused to back their allies because they were not interested in reverting to a pre-Locarno-like position, where all initiatives were aimed against Germany. But in reality, it seems the French were more interested in preventing anything from spoiling their own rapprochement with Germany, something the Poles became increasingly apprehensive about.<sup>171</sup> What became apparent with the Rhineland's early evacuation was that the Franco-Polish alliance had lost practically all of its power, leaving the Poles to wonder whether their French counterparts would still be reliable when conflict arose.

With the year 1929 coming to a close, Polish foreign policy had lost more than it had gained. It was able to reassess Poland's relations with its neighbors and allies through bilateral talks in an effort to improve them. A slow thaw in Poland's geopolitical isolation had begun, with some diplomatic successes achieved. Unfortunately the failure to gain any direct guarantees of security for Poland is what stood out the most in Sanacja's first

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<sup>169</sup> The loan would come in monetary and war material form. Zaleski cites Piłsudski's prediction of five years of peace as sufficient time to build up the army. "Ni w Pięc Ni w Dziewiec," Zaleski Papers, 1, 2.

<sup>170</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 244.

<sup>171</sup> Dębicki, 60.

three years at the reigns of foreign policy. Unable to successfully prevent the premature evacuation of the Rhineland, Poland was now more exposed and vulnerable to the threatening dangers of German revisionism. Its foreign policy had to continue on, searching for security by itself as France proved unwilling to assist it. The question remained not just how, but what were the new challenges awaiting now that Germany had been released from its shackles.

### **III. UNCERTAINTY: 1930-1932**

#### **A New Direction in Foreign Policy**

The year 1930 ushered in a new era in Europe. Barely any remnants of the Versailles system remained truly intact. Stresemann was dead, but his work from the past six years had come full circle since Locarno. Germany had been successfully re-integrated into the new European concert of Great Powers, due to keystone events like the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the Rhineland's early evacuation. But the significance in its emancipation from the shackles of Versailles lay in the circumstance that its revisionist agenda faced just a few more obstacles. War may have been renounced with a caveat or two, but the German courtship of the West proved to be the definitive factor in Germany's drive to retake what it had been stripped of. With security purchased on its western front, it would amplify its revisionist aims against the East, hoping that Europe would once again concede to its demands.

Poland had not necessarily found itself geopolitically isolated yet again, but rather caught in the crossroads of European stability. The Sanacja regime had failed to attain any direct guarantees of security for its state, but it did reopen dialogue with states it had been estranged with due to longstanding differences. Some progress had been made to neutralize the Soviet Union and its fears of a Western-led Polish conspiracy against it, but negotiations with Germany continued to stall anytime the territorial question was brought up. The bigger problem may have been that the alliance system with France had deteriorated rather than strengthened in the face of Germany's regeneration. No changes were exactly made to the conventions, but it became inherently obvious that France was no longer interested in maintaining the military stipulations that it felt were outdated and

had to be replaced by conventional diplomacy. Facing the reality that its ally may be unreliable if conflict arises, and troubled by what an unrestrained Germany might now be capable of, Sanacja needed to rethink its approach to foreign policy as its soft diplomatic aims now proved to be outdated for the challenges on the horizon.

The appointment of Colonel Józef Beck as Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs in 1930 came at the behest of Marshal Piłsudski. The latter had held Beck in high regard and possibly trusted no other man in Poland more than him, in the next few years claiming that he had “found a particularly able and intelligent assistant in the person of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.”<sup>172</sup> He was Piłsudski’s right-hand man, an ex-Legionnaire who had fought alongside him during World War I. In the early 1920s he briefly served as a military attaché in Paris, later working in the War Ministry shortly after the May coup. But in the last three years, Piłsudski had planned for Beck to switch careers and enter the Foreign Ministry.<sup>173</sup> His quick ascendancy to second-in-command after Zaleski was a clear example that the Marshal was slowly turning Polish foreign policy to a different direction. Judging from both Piłsudski and Beck’s backgrounds, and their long relationship serving with each other, it is not far off to assume that the Ministry was going to adapt a more militaristic-strategic approach to relations with Poland’s neighbors.

### **Initial Responses to Revisionism**

Polish-German relations had somewhat stabilized in the past three years. But after the evacuation of the Rhineland, aggressive displays of revisionist feelings began to spoil that progress. Stresemann’s successor, Julius Curtius, was in favor of continuing his

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<sup>172</sup> Beck, 58.

<sup>173</sup> Henry L. Roberts, “The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck,” in *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, eds. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 580.

predecessor's goals and like most Germans, keeping up with a revisionist campaign against Poland. Yet the state's economic woes as a result of the worldwide depression had made the Foreign Minister favor a more realistic approach. He found it more practical to carry out a policy of normalization with Poland, as opposed to intensifying Germany's revisionist aims that could lead to a war in which the latter would be too weak to engage in.<sup>174</sup> It was in late 1929 that Germany had chosen to conclude a liquidation and trade treaty with Poland after years of slow negotiations. By March 1930, both states had signed a most-favored nation commercial treaty. But Curtius' realistic approach was met with domestic hostility, not only from most political parties but also from public opinion.

As a result of revisionist feelings prevailing over conciliatory aims, relations between both states began to deteriorate. The liquidation and trade agreements fell through as the German Reichstag refused to ratify them, and instead, chose to increase customs tariffs on Polish goods (which effectively eliminated any benefits from the most-favored nation agreement).<sup>175</sup> There were numerous occurrences of border incidents and media outlets promoting anti-German or anti-Polish propaganda. Warsaw's view of Germany were dampened when the latter's secret active role in supporting Ukrainian nationalism by way of training and supplying terrorist cells like the OUN, came to light in 1931.<sup>176</sup> Some prominent German politicians went so far not only to mention revisionism in their speeches, but also assert that the lost territories in the East would be

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<sup>174</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 328.

<sup>175</sup> Kruszewski, 309.

returned to Germany.<sup>177</sup> The topic of the Polish Corridor began to reemerge whenever the territorial question was brought up, as it remained the primary obstacle to linking Germany with East Prussia. Overall, the danger in all of these cases was that it further fueled the German public's support for the revisionist campaign against Poland.

Despite being afflicted by the economic repercussions of the depression, Poland was able to counter Germany's reigniting of the tariff war. With the help of foreign loans, it was able to hasten the construction of a commercial port in the Baltic city of Gdynia. The benefit here was not just purely economical but also political. It relieved the burden of the state relying on trade through the free city of Danzig, which had recently ramped up its own hostility against Poland due to the growing influences of nationalist parties like the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) party. "Disorganization and disequilibrium within and between both nations were rampant, nationalism was inflamed and 'economic trading considerations were subordinated to political objectives.'"<sup>178</sup>

Tensions were arguably at an all time high between both states, but war remained unfeasible for either side to carry out against the other.<sup>179</sup> Factors such as the open terrain shared by both states and a general atmosphere of mistrust, was what particularly gave way to this paranoia that precipitated in Berlin and Warsaw that war may break out. On the Polish side, Zaleski had always lodged complaints following any signs of hostility in German propaganda or actual incidents between both sides. However, he was always

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<sup>176</sup> Korbelt, 262. For a study on this matter, please consult Andrii Bolianovs'kyi's "Cooperation between the German Military of the Weimar Republic and the Ukrainian Military Organization, 1923-1928," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 23, (1999), 73-84.

<sup>177</sup> The most notable example is German Minister of Transport Gottfried Treviranus' speech from August 10, 1930. Despite receiving criticism for his clumsy remarks, he refused to recant them because he believed they firmly adhered to the "active policy of revisionism without, however, involving any military threat." von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 330.

<sup>178</sup> Kruszewski, 311.

<sup>179</sup> Solely speaking militarily, Polish forces were still superior to that of Germany's.

open to and pursued negotiations with his counterparts to liquidate any open conflicts. But it was Piłsudski who embodied a tougher approach to relations with Germany, even if it meant Poland taking up arms to protect its interests. In one instance, he underlined to American President Herbert Hoover via the Polish Embassy in Washington, that Poland will “never accept any discussion over the revision of its borders.” In the same communiqué, the Marshal emphasized that in case of an attack from Germany, Poland would launch all military might against it rather than lodge a complaint to someone. “This type of war would be the ruin of Germany.”<sup>180</sup> But under German Chancellor at the time, Heinrich Brüning, Germany did not intend to concentrate all of its strength against Poland. Instead, Brüning had also followed a policy similar to that of Curtius’, where he was more focused on stabilizing and repairing his state’s domestic problems than inflaming relations with Poland.<sup>181</sup>

German revisionism and domestic instability had surprisingly created anxiety in France as well. Not only had Germany’s appetite for concessions grown, but also the tensions growing on its eastern frontier had worried the West that a war may actually break out and drag into it all of Europe despite the recent success in avoiding it. Therefore the French began to reproach their Polish allies in 1930 in an effort to find a solution to curbing the escalating uncertainty brewing in the state the partnership was designed to keep at bay. The French General Staff reevaluated the military convention and conducted studies on the Polish Corridor. It had concluded that the latter was largely Polish and a key part to its ally’s economic sustainability, while the convention was not

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<sup>180</sup> P. Filipowicz do Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, 23 October 1931, Box 1, Folder 1, Zaleski Papers, 2.

<sup>181</sup> It seems Brüning was more worried about the rise of “extreme elements” that threatened to takeover the state’s democratic structure. But in foreign policy, the Chancellor seemed to be more interested in bringing Germany’s final war reparation payments to a close. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 335.

outdated and still valuable to the alliance. To show their Polish counterparts that their state was vital to France's interests, the French went ahead and transferred the final installment of a loan that had been originally finalized in 1925. On February 18, 1931 an agreement was concluded where Poland would receive the delivery of 113 million francs worth of war material for its military.

Yet there were rough spots to these attempts at rebuilding relations, as the Poles often demanded more from their ally. In particular, they requested more loans to fund other state projects such as an updated railroad system. But it was Piłsudski who held general reservations about these recent developments in Franco-Polish relations. His primary concern was that Poland was exhibiting too many signs of dependence on France.<sup>182</sup> The latter itself did not exhibit a concrete stance on the situation in Germany, and whether its foreign policy would continue to cater towards greater cooperation with it. While the political Left continued to support what the Briand years had produced, the Right was apprehensive towards the rise in German nationalism and refused to tolerate its growing revisionism. But the reality was that those in power blindly chose conciliation, finding that the spirit of Locarno still existed and would continue to safeguard both states from falling into conflict with each other. This thought served to neutralize any fears that France would be dragged into a German-Polish conflict.

The highlight of the Franco-Polish alliance's bankruptcy came at the Disarmament Conference in February 1932. It was there that the assembled European powers (even the Soviet Union, a non-League member) debated whether to completely disarm or create limitations to their stockpiles of weaponry, in an effort to extend the provisions of collective security from the late 1920s. Stresemann may have been dead,

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<sup>182</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 184.



but his successors continued to push for Germany's reemergence as a Great Power by attaining an "equality of rights" status for their state, so it could have equal power in European decision-making. With regards to the conference, the German delegation would either attempt to convince all participants to uniformly disarm, or bring about limitations equal to that of Germany's. All of this had raised alarms in both Polish and French military circles. But the political views of both allies had failed to align yet again in the face of a possible German threat. Whereas Warsaw was interested in raising its military strength, Paris only showed interest in a "retention of forces capable of defending the country."<sup>183</sup> Despite the latter's ambiguity towards the domestic changes occurring in Germany, Paris felt it was more important to continue promoting European solidarity through Germany's reintegration.

Prime Minister André Tardieu, who had personally submitted a proposal at the conference, led the French delegation. The Tardieu Plan called for every League member to contribute troops and heavy artillery in order to create a security force that would help maintain international security. While the Poles held no objections to it, the Germans had created an awkward and tense atmosphere by threatening to leave the conference if they were not given the desired equality of rights for their state.<sup>184</sup> Since the French plan was met with objections, Zaleski decided that Poland should put forth its own plan, the "Polish minimum scheme." "The caliber of artillery guns and the types of armoured vehicles be limited, and a convention adopted prohibiting air bombing of open cities and non-military objectives, and also all particularly barbarous methods of warfare such as

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<sup>183</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 239.

<sup>184</sup> Ultimately, the Germans chose to leave the conference. But their gesture of protest paid off as the rest of the conference's participants agreed to discuss Germany's equality of rights on the condition that its delegation returned.

poison gas, bacteriological warfare, etc.”<sup>185</sup> But the plan found no support and was outright rejected.

The conference yielded no great results for its participants except for Germany, who on December 11 was granted equality of rights with the support of Italy, Great Britain, and the United States. Germany’s victory bore many repercussions, namely that the state could actually return its weapon stockpiles to the levels of its neighbors. But the Sanacja regime saw this as another deep blow to the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, which had kept Germany disarmed. In Warsaw’s eyes, the results of the conference only increased the uncertainty it saw in its western neighbor. While Beck had told Laroche, “To allow [Germany] to have arms means a lost game,” on a separate occasion he had stated that the German victory, which had been decided by a small group of powers, spelled danger for the League of Nations’ existence.<sup>186</sup> But France’s idleness also disturbed the Poles who throughout 1932, increasingly became self-reliant and less collaborative with their ally. Piłsudski had grown tired of Paris’ tendency to change its policies, of saying one thing today and changing its mind tomorrow. The increase in episodes of French officials commenting on the unavailability of territorial revisions on the German-Polish frontier, only reinforced Sanacja’s suspicion of its allies dependability. By October 1932, Piłsudski clearly exhibited violent reservations about the alliance, commenting to French military attaché Colonel Charles d’Arbonneau, “France will abandon us, France will betray us! This is what I think, and this is what I should tell you.”<sup>187</sup> The Marshal’s beliefs may have been proven two months later when Germany attained the equality of rights status. A notable discourse was occurring in the alliance, as

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<sup>185</sup> Beck, 40-41.

<sup>186</sup> Karski, 90. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 247.

<sup>187</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 234.

France increasingly took up fortifying a defensive position while Poland continued to invest in the 1921 offensive mindset. It was perhaps the failure or stubbornness of both sides to find common ground, that directed the growing division.

### **A Turn to the East: The Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1932**

The Soviet Union's domestic difficulties had carried into the early 1930s, with its Five Year Plan's collectivization efforts meeting resistance in addition to falling short of their aims. The goal had been to industrialize the state that could produce a "powerful, modern military machine."<sup>188</sup> But this plan required foreign capital in order to lift off the ground, thus compelling Soviet foreign policy to take on a more active and friendlier approach to the West. But the state found itself plagued with worry when it also came to external events. In 1931 Japan had launched a successful invasion of Manchuria, and while its next target was China, its fortification in the Soviet Union's backyard raised alarms in Moscow. All of these events had prompted the Soviets to take up a position to further their pursuit of peace and secure the state's western frontier.<sup>189</sup> The Litvinov Protocol had extended the Kellogg-Briand Pact to Eastern Europe, but this did not stop the continuation of incidents between Poland and the Soviet Union. In fact, there had been this wave of suspicion that occupied Moscow in the late 1920s and early 1930s about Polish espionage taking place on Soviet territory, thus never allowing the war scare from 1927 to recede into the pages of history.<sup>190</sup> To make matters worse, the recent

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<sup>188</sup> J.A. Large, "The Origins of Soviet Collective Security Policy, 1930-32," *Soviet Studies* 30, (1978), 215-216.

<sup>189</sup> Bohdan B. Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations 1932-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 8-9.

<sup>190</sup> The Poles had waged a propaganda war to weaken the Soviet Union by targeting its southern enterprise, the Soviet Ukraine. Although there were no designs to launch a war to rip it away from the influence of Moscow, the Poles had created various espionage agencies that were attached to propaganda organs to incite resistance in Ukraine. While it is difficult to measure the success of such ventures, it clearly became a threat to the Soviet Union particularly when its collectivization campaigns of the early 30s began to face

developments in Germany had left relations between both states hanging by a thread. With its revisionist aims free to take affect, Berlin no longer saw the Russian card as valuable in isolating Poland. However it retained an active role in maintaining relations with Moscow to prevent the latter from ever concluding an agreement with Warsaw that recognized the Polish-Soviet border, or at least one that prevented the Soviet Union from aiding Germany if it was attacked by Poland.<sup>191</sup>

As early as October 1930, Soviet circles began to publically express a desire to improve relations with Poland. Both states began to gravitate towards each other particularly after the Franco-Soviet talks in May 1931. Like Poland, France had also been seeking a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union since 1926, and looked to keep Moscow and Berlin apart.<sup>192</sup> But since it could not force the Poles to make changes to the alliance, its aim may have been to ease France's responsibility in coming to Poland's aid in case of a conflict with the Soviet Union or a Soviet-Romanian conflict.<sup>193</sup> Although Paris did not include Warsaw in the negotiations with Moscow, it maintained contact with it at all times and successfully coaxed it into pursuing its own agreement with the Soviets. Days after the Franco-Soviet pact was initialed, Patek submitted a draft of the original 1926 Soviet offer, in which the Poles yet again desired the inclusion of the Baltic

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what became to be known as the 1932-33 Ukrainian famine. It is outside the scope of this thesis to fully explain this phenomenon that has only recently come to light in the interwar period's historiography. For a greater analysis from the Polish side, please consult Timothy Snyder's *Sketches From a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>191</sup> Korbel, 271. One should also consider whether the Germans were preventing the Soviets from getting closer to the West via Poland. According to J.A. Large, due to the uncertainty of relations with Germany, Soviet foreign policy decided that for security purposes it was now more logical to improve relations with the West who had typically been a threat to the USSR. Yet both states maintained mutual relations to reap benefits such as military collaboration. Large, 217, 219.

<sup>192</sup> French businesses were also seeking access to the Soviet markets. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 208.

<sup>193</sup> With regards to the latter, France was worried that Poland may engage the conflict in order to seize land at the expense of the Soviet Union. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 211.

states and Poland's southern ally Romania. Although the Soviets scoffed at the proposal, their domestic and foreign concerns forced them to reconsider and accept it.

The Marshal's feelings of distrust and dislike for the Soviet Union had not changed. Yet he was practical in the sense that with the uncertainty over the developments in Germany, an opportunity arose to focus on securing Poland's eastern frontier with its other threatening neighbor. Thus Piłsudski felt it was necessary to take advantage of this pretty favorable situation and come away with some kind of agreement with the Soviets. In general, Polish foreign policy saw it as an opportunity to end Soviet propaganda and speculations that Poland still had designs to invade Russia.<sup>194</sup> He entrusted Colonel Beck to oversee this project, with Patek and the Ministry's Eastern Department's Director Colonel Tadeusz Schaetzel, spearheading the negotiations with Moscow.<sup>195</sup> The reason Beck was given command was so that Polish foreign policy could begin to follow a new direction, namely a strategic one underlined by a "freedom of action," where Poland could stabilize its security without depending on France anymore.<sup>196</sup> When looking at the new Polish approach to conducting negotiations bilaterally and independently of French guidance, it had opened up a clearer picture.

Litvinov, who had now succeeded Chicherin, gave the Poles in October 1931 a counteroffer in which the nonaggression pact would be based on the Franco-Soviet one. But the Poles were not satisfied, arguing that the pact should be based on previous arrangements between both sides, such as the Litvinov Protocol and the Riga Treaty.<sup>197</sup> After much debate, both sides were able to come to an agreement on this point, basing the

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<sup>194</sup> Telegram from Mühlstein, 21 October 1931, Box 17, Folder 2, Poland Ambasad (France) Records, 2.

<sup>195</sup> Beck, 7.

<sup>196</sup> Karski, 106.

<sup>197</sup> The Quai d'Orsay itself, asserted that the Polish-Soviet agreement must not be of the same substance as France's. Telegram from Mühlstein, Poland Ambasad (France) Records, 1.

new pact on the original Soviet offer from 1926. Piłsudski expressed four points for the Poles to attach to this pact: It should adhere to previous political agreements, the interests of Russia's other neighbors, and to avoid any unclear definition of aggression. The underlining importance of the pact was in "demanding that the inviolability of territory and frontiers be adopted as the basis for any definition of the aggressor."<sup>198</sup> Once the important matters had been agreed upon, Beck had instructed the Foreign Ministry to cut off further talks. This was seen to ensure completion of the dragged-out project, and mainly to prevent the Soviets from attaching at the last moment any conditions that were of no interest to the Poles.

But the true obstacle to Polish-Soviet talks was that of the inclusion of the Baltic states and Romania. Like the French, the Poles were interested in promoting stability in the region. They saw it not only in their interests, but in all the other states' interests as well.<sup>199</sup> But when it came to their Romanian ally, its security was just as important in the common front against the Soviet Union as was maintaining the alliance itself. The alliance had been recently renewed in January 1931 for another five years.<sup>200</sup> If we recall Piłsudski's desires for the alliance in the previous chapter, involving Romania in a nonaggression pact may have been an opportunity to strengthen the alliance and mold Romanian foreign policy into a more Polish-accommodating one.

It was in early May 1931 that the Poles contacted Bucharest and inquired whether it was interested in bilateral talks with Russia.<sup>201</sup> Although talks wouldn't take place until

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<sup>198</sup> Beck, 10.

<sup>199</sup> "Raport nr 1253/T/31," 16 November 1931, AAN, Ambasada RP Moskwa, 26, k. 303-307, reprinted in Małgorzata Gmurczyk-Wrońska, ed., *Stanisław Patek: Raporty i korespondencja z Moskwy [1927-1932]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010), 453.

<sup>200</sup> A copy of the renewal is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 452-454.

<sup>201</sup> This was communicated via the Polish Ambassador to Romania, Jan Szembek. Among other things asked, the Poles inquired whether the Romanians would desire Polish assistance, and if they would be

January 1932, the French and Poles had successfully coerced the Romanians into approaching the Soviet Union, but at the sacrifice of the Baltic states' direct inclusion.<sup>202</sup> However Warsaw was able to salvage some leverage over Moscow by making their own signature dependent on that of Bucharest, something the latter stingily accepted.<sup>203</sup> Yet the Romanians did not show as much enthusiasm as their allies. Relations with the Soviet Union were practically nonexistent as the Romanians refused to discuss the mutually contested territory of Bessarabia. They were also suspicious of whether a nonaggression pact would cloak true Soviet intentions of driving a wedge in between the Polish-Romanian alliance.<sup>204</sup> If there was a chance in reaching a nonaggression pact, it was to do so without touching upon the topic of Bessarabia or becoming detrimental to the alliance with Poland. The true dilemma lay in two options: "preserve the unity of action with Poland and France at the expense of some compromise over Bessarabia," or "continue to defend intransigently the principle of status quo inviolability even if that attitude should lead to a loosening of alliances?"<sup>205</sup>

The French and the Poles were forced to take up the roles of arbitrators for the Romanian-Soviet negotiations. Whereas the Poles relayed information to Moscow, the

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interested in having their potential pact resemble a Polish-Soviet one. "Memo, Arion to Ghika and Ministry of War," 15 May 1931, reprinted in *Behind Closed Doors: Secret Papers on the Failure of Romanian-Soviet Negotiations, 1931-1932*, ed. Walter M. Bacon, Jr. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), 27. The Poles had actually informed Bucharest as early as December of a potential pact with the Soviet Union, but the latter did not take an official line of whether it would soon follow Warsaw's footsteps. Dov B. Lungu, "Nicolae Titulescu and the 1932 Crisis concerning the Soviet-Romanian Pact of Non-Aggression," *East European Quarterly* 18, (1984), 186.

<sup>202</sup> The Soviets and the Poles would initial their pact, with the former going further and concluding similar bilateral pacts with the Baltic states. Korbelt, 273.

<sup>203</sup> Budurowycz, 14. "Intradepartmental memo by Arion," ? January 1932, and "Intradepartmental memo by Arion," January 1932, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 89, 91.

<sup>204</sup> "Cabinet letter (copy), Ghika to Warsaw Legation," 26 November 1931, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 43.

<sup>205</sup> Unlike France and Poland at the time, Romania did not possess any quarrels with Germany, which it felt these negotiations and subsequent agreements were aimed against. But it seems the general fear of becoming isolated itself by not joining its allies, compelled Romania to seriously consider entering negotiations. Lungu, 186, 187, 188.

French maintained Bucharest's composure and willingness to cooperate with the Soviets. But trivial issues arose from the outset. Both sides debated on the location to carry out discussions, with Romania suggesting Warsaw and the Soviet Union choosing Ankara in Turkey.<sup>206</sup> A deep sense of ambiguity prevailed over the Romanian side, resulting in evasive replies to the feasibility of reaching some sort of an agreement with the Soviets. They never truly desired to negotiate with the Soviets and claimed that they were pressured by Poland and France to open up dialogue.<sup>207</sup> They felt that Warsaw's refusal to support Bucharest's own draft of a nonaggression pact on the grounds that it differed from its own, most likely aggravated not only the latter's little enthusiasm but possibly even relations between both states. Poland's aim may have been to maintain the *cordon sanitaire* against Russia through identical pacts, but Romania was more concerned in defining particular conditions for security reasons, especially since it was still involved in a territorial dispute. Since there had never been any legal recognition of the Romanian-Russian border, Bucharest feared that any legal discussion regarding this issue would open the door to discussions over the legality of their ownership of Bessarabia.<sup>208</sup>

A clash of personalities and interests also divided the Poles and the Romanians. The latter's Minister in London and former President of the League's General Assembly, Nicolae Titulescu, enjoyed widespread popularity in his home country and was highlighted by being in the good graces of King Carol II. Titulescu's opinions were held

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<sup>206</sup> "Telegram, Ghika to Ankara Legation," 11 December, 1931, and "Letter (copy), Bilciurescu to Ghika," 10 December 1931, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 46, 47. Eventually both sides agreed on the city of Riga to host their delegations, since Poland refused to hold them in Warsaw. Ankara was turned down as the Poles and the French disliked the idea of involving Turkey.

<sup>207</sup> The Romanians also acknowledged the fear of isolation if their state did not heed to Polish and French pressure. "Presentation, Ghika to Council of Ministers," 5 January 1932, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 60.

<sup>208</sup> Samsonovici to Foreign Ministry, 29 May 1931, Box 17, Folder 4, Nicolae Titulescu Papers, HI, 1. The Romanians often cited the Kellogg-Briand Pact's arbitrational provisions as the true source in opening up the Bessarabian question. They felt that a nonaggression pact would go further than the previous piece of legislation.



in high esteem due to his experience as a European diplomat and his honesty in expressing his deep dislike for the Soviet Union. He felt that dealing with Moscow would only be detrimental to Romania's interests. It seems that he was predisposed to favoring international treaties than bilateral ones, citing that there was no need to replace an "eternal pact (Kellogg-Briand)" with "an isolated five-year pact..."<sup>209</sup> Yet he did not cut off negotiations with the Soviets, most likely to prevent a rupture in relations with Poland and France. Instead he had stuck to firmly preventing the Bessarabian question from being raised in the nonaggression pact.<sup>210</sup> But he had a tendency to continuously push for the pact to contain detailed wording. This came at the irritation of Beck who had avoided this method to prevent the Soviets from ever gaining legal leverage against Poland.

Eventually Polish patience with Romania and France began to wear thin. While the former balked at coming to a general agreement with Russia, France dismissed its own pursuance of a nonaggression pact. The Franco-Soviet pact had been drawn up under Briand and negotiations continued under his successor Pierre Laval. However France's domestic instability claimed another cabinet, replacing Laval with Tardieu who chose to cease negotiations.<sup>211</sup> Tardieu had never been in favor of negotiating with the Soviets, and may have been influenced by political circles that opposed the pact. The Soviets

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<sup>209</sup> I.M. Oprea, "Nicolae Titulescu's diplomatic activity," in *Bibliotheca Historica Romaniae*, 20-23, trans. Andrei Bantas (Bucharest: Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1968), 61. He also pointed out that the Kellogg-Briand Pact banned all use of force and that a new pact would only introduce a newer interpretation. Theoretically, this could create loopholes for a legal use of force or aggression. Lungu, 193.

<sup>210</sup> Titulescu held reservations on whether Romania actually upheld all legal conditions in its claim to Bessarabia. The question of whether Romania had actually recognized Bessarabia's right to self-determination troubled the diplomat. Since its international status had been questionable, it seems he ardently prevented the Bessarabian question from being raised in order to avoid not only giving the Soviets an edge in contesting its status, but even the League becoming involved which might lead to Romania being stripped of its authority over the territory. Lungu, 191-192.

<sup>211</sup> As one Romanian telegram quoted Tardieu, "It would have been preferable if France had never begun discussions for a Franco-Soviet pact, but once begun and the question being irritating, a method will have to be found to escape the present impasse." "*Decoded telegram*, Cesianu to Ministry of Foreign Affairs," 27 March 1932, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 96-97.

somewhat displayed a mutual feeling, as they resented France's economic reconstruction in the Danube states and its support for Japan's Manchurian venture.<sup>212</sup> Yet the French retained activity in Poland and Romania's negotiations, largely guiding and influencing the latter. But it soon became apparent that Zaleski's diplomatic and calm approach to the Romanians had no effect on speeding up the Romanian-Soviet pact. It was now time for Polish foreign policy to apply pressure, clearly exhibited during Piłsudski's state visit to Bucharest in April.

While meeting with Romanian Prime Minister Dimitri Ghika on the 14th, the Marshal claimed that the Poles were conducting a policy within the alliance's framework in establishing collective negotiations and agreements with the Soviets.<sup>213</sup> It was here that he put the Romanians on the spot and without directly saying it, inquired when they would sign their pact? It was here the Marshal also espoused his contempt for persistent French impotence, citing their habit of changing foreign policy and abandoning their own plans for a pact.<sup>214</sup> When the Romanians cited that they would not make any changes to their own nonaggression pact, Piłsudski took this as his counterparts surveying whether the Poles would adopt their policy to fit Romania's interests. He burst out in anger asserting that he was not like the French, and implied that if he shared a policy with at least twenty individuals one day, he would not change it the next day like the French do.<sup>215</sup> The Marshal went on to insist the value of previous litigation like the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the Litvinov Protocol, and that simultaneous ratification of a nonaggression pact would benefit both sides. A bitter taste was left in both sides' mouth,

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<sup>212</sup> Large, 225.

<sup>213</sup> *Dare de seama a intredereii ce a avut loc intre Mareșalul Piłsudski, D-Nii Iorga, Ghika, și Contele Szembek*, 14 April 1932, Box 17, File 4, Titulescu Papers, 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

with the Romanians certainly not taking kindly to Piłsudski's less than conciliatory approach.<sup>216</sup>

By June the Poles could no longer wait for their allies to conclude an agreement with the Soviets. Szembek informed Bucharest that the Poles had decided to sign their own nonaggression pact sometime between June 15 and 25 in order to maintain solidarity with the Baltic states.<sup>217</sup> The Romanians retorted by asserting that they could not be pressured to conclude their negotiations with a deadline, as it would weaken Romania's position in talks with the Soviets. By mid-June Beck had communicated to Bucharest that Poland could no longer afford to put off its signature for fear of a Soviet withdrawal. Thus in early July the Poles pressed the Romanians with a simple ultimatum on whether they would simultaneously join Poland in concluding nonaggression pacts with the Soviets.<sup>218</sup> Romania's response was "no," but they held no more objections to Poland proceeding to sign its agreement without them.<sup>219</sup>

The Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact was signed on July 25, 1932 in Moscow.<sup>220</sup> It reaffirmed the Riga Treaty, adhered to any previous legislation signed by either side, and remained active for a period of three years. It also contained a clause for an automatic two-year renewal, as well as an "escape" option where if one side displayed an

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<sup>216</sup> "Telegram, Titulescu to Ministry of Foreign Affairs," 22 April, 1932, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 100.

<sup>217</sup> "Intradepartmental memo by Gafencu," 11 June 1932, reprinted in Bacon, Jr., 110. Beck had discussed something similar in a communiqué with a French diplomat on April 26. He stated that the Baltic states were left in a difficult position by waiting on Poland and Romania to conclude their pacts, citing that the alliance protected Romania's position more than the Baltics'. Whether Poland would sign without Romania, Beck did not give a clear answer but mentioned that his state was still waiting to hear back from its ally on where it stood with its negotiations. On a separate note, it should be acknowledged that throughout negotiations, Romania was never hesitant in avoiding a reply to Polish inquiries. Telegram from Beck, 26 April 1932, Box 11, Folder 13, Poland Ambasada (France) Records.

<sup>218</sup> Beck, 9. The Poles may not have gotten the answer they were looking for, but they still intended to push Romania in the direction of concluding negotiations with Moscow. Piłsudski had communicated to Bucharest that although the Poles would sign without their ally, they would hold off on ratifying the agreement. Lungu, 196.

<sup>219</sup> Beck, 9.

<sup>220</sup> A copy of the pact is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 487-490.

act of aggression against a third party then the other side could void the pact.<sup>221</sup> The Poles had successfully included the coveted legislation on “the integrity and inviolability of territory” into the pact’s first article. It was seen as a way to stabilize Poland’s eastern territorial status quo, and allow Warsaw to focus more on countering German revisionism in the west.<sup>222</sup>

Yet both sides did not attach great faith in the pact, only considering it a mere diplomatic achievement. It lessened the chance of a Polish-Soviet clash but only gave hope for peaceful coexistence between both states. Moscow was in need of establishing peace with the West, only if temporary, while it consolidated its position of industrializing its state. The Poles saw it as a “gesture of goodwill” and an opportunity to build good relations with Russia.<sup>223</sup> Although Piłsudski continued to remain suspicious and distrusting of the Soviets, the pact was still considered a milestone and great success in Polish foreign policy. Poland had engaged one of its threatening neighbors with little to practically no French influence.<sup>224</sup> The result was an agreement that took Polish interests into account, something that had always been absent in the West’s political agenda. If there is one thing that the Poles had learned, it was that bilateral agreements guaranteed more security than previous international collective ones.

A Romanian-Soviet pact never materialized to the great irritation of Warsaw. While Moscow at one point had agreed to finally sign the pact, Bucharest had refused.<sup>225</sup> It disagreed with the presence of the phrase “existing differences” which implied that the

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<sup>221</sup> Budurowycz, 17.

<sup>222</sup> Karski, 109.

<sup>223</sup> Budurowycz, 19.

<sup>224</sup> Although the French did welcome this diplomatic victory for Warsaw, they complained that the Poles had been too eager to conclude the pact and acted too independently. If anything, Paris felt that Warsaw’s moves had now put them in an awkward position with Moscow where they would be pressured to finally conclude their own pact with the Soviets. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 232.

<sup>225</sup> Lungu, 203.

Bessarabian question was still open to future debates. It had also made a vain attempt to involve France and Poland through a convention that would oversee extensions or renewals of the nonaggression pact.<sup>226</sup> The nail in the coffin was the appointment of Titulescu to the post of Foreign Minister in October 1932. He continued to clash with Romania's envoys in Warsaw and Moscow, with a tendency to continuously create new arguments on why his state was being given unfavorable conditions in the proposed pact.<sup>227</sup> Despite the efforts of Beck to mediate, Romanian stubbornness proved too overwhelming. But what incensed Warsaw was French meddling in Romania's negotiations. While Tardieu had declared to Litvinov that France would not sign until Russia dropped its quest for a "recognition of territorial dispute" with Romania, his successor Édouard Herriot had rescinded his predecessor's condition and instead tried to implement a plan that contained the wording of "existing disputes."<sup>228</sup> Romania outright rejected this and if anything, France only worsened Romania's reservations of actually concluding a pact with Russia. France's continuous change in foreign policy had not only been detrimental to its relations with Poland, but now threatened to do the same with the latter's relations with Romania. After months of negotiations, Bucharest officially ended talks with Moscow on November 23, after Titulescu's speech to the Romanian parliament on rejecting the pact won popular approval. Romanian-Soviet relations would remain

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<sup>226</sup> Telegram by Kobyłański to Zaleski, 29 September 1932, and, Telegram by Beck to Zaleski, 27 September 1932, Box 1, Folder 1, Zaleski Papers. The French outright rejected the idea. While no evidence exists that the Poles were willing to consider this, it would be hard to imagine that they would risk it as their own pact with Moscow had not been ratified yet.

<sup>227</sup> Beck notes in his memoirs of Titulescu's irritating habit. Beck, 9.

<sup>228</sup> Lungu, 194, 199. Karski, 107.

nonexistent until 1934, when both sides reestablished diplomatic negotiations and exchanged notes that guaranteed full respect of each other's sovereignty.<sup>229</sup>

### **Stick to Your Guns: The "Wicher" Incident**

Sanacja had been preoccupied with concluding a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union in the first half of 1932. Yet by the late spring and early summer, it nervously watched the deteriorating domestic scene in Germany. The Nazi party began to wield considerable strength in German politics, while Brüning had resigned the chancellorship in late May and was replaced by Franz von Papen. Together with the Nazis, the parties of the Right were attempting to paint Poland as a state with "aggressive designs against Danzig, East Prussia, and Upper Silesia," in order to legitimize Germany's claim to them.<sup>230</sup> Warsaw was less than thrilled by this change, as they viewed Brüning's policies towards Poland as more moderate than von Papen's. Brüning had been a block to the Nazis' Adolf Hitler's rise to the chancellorship.<sup>231</sup> Whereas in von Papen, they saw Germany's direction shifting more towards the agenda of the political Right, especially since his cabinet was made up of individuals who were staunchly anti-Polish.

But the rapid changes in Germany were also exhibited in the free city of Danzig. Up until 1930, Warsaw's relations with the city were more normal than with Germany. Under the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty, Poland was to allowed to use Danzig's harbor to accommodate its warships and for trading purposes. The former was reinforced

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<sup>229</sup> Oprea, 77-78. It is difficult to pinpoint why Titulescu held off for another two years before negotiating with the Soviets. One may speculate he took the time to consolidate his already bolstering influence in Bucharest. The Soviets on the other hand may have concluded this "guarantee" in the wake of Hitler and the Nazis taking over the reigns of Germany.

<sup>230</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 344.

<sup>231</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 365.

by a *port attaché* agreement signed by both sides in October 1921. Despite the number of complaints that the city lodged against Poland for years, a number of them were settled in the late 1920s by both sides. But with the rise of the Nazis and their strong presence in Danzig, the city began to exhibit vehement anti-Polish sentiments that led to a corrosion of relations with Warsaw. As a result of Danzig's choice to treat Polish enterprises unfavorably, Poland answered back by transferring a great amount of its marine business to the newly constructed port in Gdynia. According to one Polish government official, Danzig was to blame itself for Poland's preference in using Gdynia, "for it [Danzig] had both been sabotaging Poland's needs with regard to sea-borne trade and had been demanding economic privileges which had to be paid for by the Polish national economy."<sup>232</sup> Both Beck and Piłsudski in December 1931 had acknowledged that the Danzig situation needed proper attention. In the past, the Polish government had been inclined to settle problems through bilateral negotiations. But the main obstacle to this was that the Free City increasingly became subservient to Germany's revisionist agenda, which aimed at exploiting the tension abroad and showing that this Versailles settlement could not last.<sup>233</sup>

Since January 1932 the port agreement had expired and a provisional one was put into place while a new one was to be negotiated. Yet due to prevailing hostile attitudes towards Poland, Danzig not only refused to create a new agreement but also forced the Poles under the temporary one to seek special permission from the city before it sent its

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<sup>232</sup> Bohdan Dopierała, "Beck and the Gdańsk Question (1930-1935)," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 17, (1968), 74.

<sup>233</sup> The Danzig Senate itself began to accept Germany's view that eventually the city would be returned to the German state. Dopierała, 74, 75. Beck cites in his memoirs that "the state of affairs every day created situations unbearable for us and it fostered the intrigues of the Government of the Reich and the local Danzig authorities which aimed at undermining our prestige and paralyzing our interests." What this meant was that Warsaw increasingly saw the Danzig problem being not only exacerbated by Berlin, but another point of tension in German-Polish relations. Beck, 11.

warships into the harbor. Warsaw refused to abide by the city whose actions benefited Germany's trade and political desires to reduce Poland's claim to Danzig. Warsaw felt that its rights to the harbor were still intact under the expired agreement until a new one was put into effect. But Danzig decided to enforce its new regulations by requesting that Great Britain send some of the Royal Navy's warships to create a sign of foreign support. Despite Polish protests, the British agreed and sent three ships that were to appear in the harbor on June 15.

Pilsudski decided to make a move of his own in the form of a *fait accompli*, to counter Danzig's attempt to make the dispute over the port agreement an international issue. Along with Beck, he dispatched the *Wicher* destroyer to join the *Westerplatte* in Danzig's harbor to greet the British warships, and exchange customary salutes in accord with procedures for when foreign ships paid visits to a state. However the Marshal had given special instructions to the *Wicher's* captain to fire shots at the nearest public building in Danzig should the city commit some insult to the Polish flag during the British visit.<sup>234</sup> But in reality the ship's guns were set on all of the city's buildings. Tension had filled the city, but no conflict ensued as the *Wicher* withdrew from the harbor after greeting the Royal Navy. But an international outcry to the Polish move followed, as British and French circles in Geneva practically accused the Poles of attempting to provoke an incident with the Free City. At the time, Zaleski was participating in a League session and was caught by surprise. No one in Warsaw had notified him that this action was to take place or even took place, as the minister found

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<sup>234</sup> Danzig's Polish representative had warned its Senate that "all attempts at an assault or an offense would be met with ruthless and active reaction." Beck, 15.



out about it from Geneva's newspapers.<sup>235</sup> Seeing how the German warship, *Glazenau*, was to visit Danzig after the Royal Navy's departure, his job was to calm international circles in Geneva and assure Poland was not going to repeat its actions. In a meeting with the League's General Secretary, Eric Drummond, Zaleski requested that the League try to acquire some guarantee from Danzig that it reach a new port agreement with Warsaw. In return, the Foreign Minister would try and persuade the Marshal to refrain from sending the *Wicher* to meet the *Glazenau*, which both statesmen feared could provoke an exchange of fire and ignite a conflict between Germany and Poland.<sup>236</sup> The request was a success, as Drummond and the British delegation were able to force Danzig to conclude a new agreement with Poland, while Zaleski had acquired Piłsudski's reserve in dispatching the *Wicher* again.<sup>237</sup>

The *Wicher* incident stands out in Sanacja's foreign policy, particularly as it fell under not only Piłsudski's supervision but also Beck's. Thus it became one of the earliest examples next to the concluding of the Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, to symbolize the regime's new direction in foreign policy. No longer was Piłsudski interested in dealing with Danzig through the League's international forum, but instead choosing to use "new methods toward the League of Nations and the Gdańsk Senate," and to mark "the end of the former Polish policy of submission."<sup>238</sup> Since both states could not come

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<sup>235</sup> The French and Genevan press had viewed the incident as a type of "war-like occupation." "Wicher," Box 14, Folder 2, Zaleski Papers, 1. Beck contends in his memoirs that he had personally notified Zaleski. Beck, 15.

<sup>236</sup> "Wicher," Zaleski Papers, 2.

<sup>237</sup> It should be noted that the *Glazenau*'s visit was completed successfully without any incident. Later in the summer another German ship's visit the *Schlesien*'s, also went about without any difficulties. It was in August that Danzig and Warsaw were finally able to conclude a new agreement regarding the harbor's use. von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 369, 370. Beck, 15.

<sup>238</sup> Dopierała, 83.

to an agreement, with Danzig bringing the British into the matter, it seems Polish foreign policy was no longer hesitant in using strong arm tactics to assert its interests.

But there was more symbolic meaning to the *Wicher* incident than to force Danzig to concede to Polish demands in concluding a new and similar port agreement. Piłsudski and Beck's aim was to send a message to Berlin that in lieu of the growing revisionist trends, Poland would not hesitate to use force to protect its interests in Danzig and its overall territorial integrity. While the Danzig and German press chose not to put much interest in interpreting the incident, it was of the opinion of Ambassador Laroche that Poland's actions were to finally bury the growing tensions between Warsaw and Danzig.<sup>239</sup> Other interpretations focused on Warsaw testing Paris' reaction to its use of force and whether France would finally stop its conciliatory approach to Germany's demand for further concessions. If anything, the event was to send a message that Poland would not tolerate any further foreign meddling in its relations with Danzig.

#### **A Transition Coming to Full Circle: Zaleski's Resignation and Beck's Appointment**

The era of uncertainty from 1930 to 1932 was a period of transition for Sanacja's foreign policy. It was no longer based solely on executing goals through an international forum, or even through its system of alliances. Rather Piłsudski had shifted foreign policy towards a new direction, an independent one where Poland would solely dictate its interests and not condition them on any foreign power or institution. Sanacja broke away from the vicious cycle where European powers made decisions without taking Poland's voice or welfare into consideration. Instead it began to approach the hindrances to good neighborly relations through direct negotiations with the respected state. Whereas it took advantage of the opportunity to finally conclude some kind of peace agreement with the

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<sup>239</sup> von Riekhoff, *German-Polish*, 370.

Soviet Union, the inflammation of preexisting tensions with Danzig and Germany itself prompted Poland to meet the complications head on with strong-arm tactics. In both cases the results were more favorable than risky, even if they were to only satisfy security concerns temporarily and not permanently.

While the nonaggression pact with Russia was met with overall satisfaction, a European community who for the past decade had chosen to neutralize conflict through peaceful concessions and uniform litigation, largely frowned upon the *Wicher* incident's aggressive manner. Yet for Poland, more favorable results had been attained through such independent actions as opposed to conforming to the decisions made by the Great Power-led League of Nations or the lopsided Franco-Polish alliance. Although Zaleski continued to push for Polish presence in Geneva, and cooperation existed with Poland's French and Romanian allies during negotiations with Moscow, Sanacja no longer made its decisions dependent on other institutions. Piłsudski and his right-hand man, Beck, were no longer interested in maintaining solidarity with allies when opportunities had arisen to stabilize Poland's security.

The final piece to this transition from cooperating with Europe to becoming independent and self-reliant came in late October 1932 when Zaleski submitted his resignation. The Foreign Minister had always been an advocate of promoting Poland's position and security through Geneva and its alliances with France and Romania. But during this period of uncertainty, his views increasingly contrasted with those of Piłsudski who, in reality, was Polish foreign policy's true architect. While the Marshal chose to abandon the ineffective approaches from the late 1920s, Zaleski refused to adopt the former's more aggressive and independent tactics.

On November 1, both men met at the Marshal's Belweder residence to discuss the resignation. "He [Zaleski] informed the Marshal [of the creation] of a particular system in treating personal affairs and addressing ranking officers, who in the view of its director [Zaleski], is not only unacceptable but in opposition to his nature."<sup>240</sup> Zaleski underlined that a situation had emerged where mistrust existed within the Foreign Ministry's ranks. What all of this meant was that there were under-ranking officers within the Ministry who were implementing their own decisions, a power reserved for the Foreign Minister himself. Zaleski was particularly alluding to the actions of his Undersecretary, Beck. When he tendered his resignation to President Mościcki a few days prior to the Belweder meeting, the Marshal asked Zaleski who his replacement would be, in which the latter awkwardly pointed at Beck and replied that his replacement was present.<sup>241</sup> Thus the Foreign Minister knew that Beck would eventually replace him, especially with the latter's growing role in executing major decisions in Polish foreign policy such as the nonaggression pact with Russia and the *Wicher* incident. Since the latter event came as a surprise and embarrassment to Zaleski, it is only correct to assume that it influenced his resignation.<sup>242</sup>

In addition to his official resignation on November 2, Zaleski also refused to take the Marshal's offer in accepting the Ambassador to London's portfolio, choosing to disassociate himself with a government who tolerated a breakdown in discipline, where a subordinate like Beck began to increasingly wield greater power than his superior. But a mutual agreement was made between both parties, where the Sanacja regime would

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<sup>240</sup> Tekst rozmów autoryzowany, Box 1, Folder 1, Zaleski Papers, 3.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>242</sup> The majority of Interwar Poland's historiography on foreign policy cite this as the main reason for Zaleski's resignation.

notify the press that they had chosen his dismissal. This may have been an effort to uphold Poland's international reputation by underlining that its recent actions were the product of a new course in foreign policy, one distinguishing itself from Zaleski's tactics. But before relinquishing his post, the former Minister sent a communiqué to all the Polish Embassies where he got the last word in on this transition within the Foreign Ministry. "The significant cause of my decision is not illness, but personal affairs."<sup>243</sup>

With this substantial shift in foreign policy, exhibited by actions and internal changes within the Foreign Ministry, does one consider this period of uncertainty a success or failure for the Second Polish Republic? Or is it more appropriate to deem this period neither, but rather an experimentation in what Poland could do through its own exit from the crumbling post-Versailles European order? The latter seems to be most fitting since only major results came from the nonaggression pact signed with the Soviet Union. In the same day that the Romanians had finally broken off talks for their own pact with Moscow, the Poles signed a conciliation convention to the pact with the latter, designating both parties to seek a peaceful settlement for any future disputes.<sup>244</sup> The major milestone in Polish-Soviet relations came full circle four days later on November 27, when Poland ratified the pact and successfully found an answer to its eastern security concerns.

Yet this period of uncertainty did not yield any concrete solution to security concerns with the Republic's western neighbor, Germany. By the late 1920s, relations between both states had been on track towards normalization. But from 1930-1932 those developments were put on hold if not completely scrapped. Although Berlin was

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>244</sup> Budurowycz, 21. A copy of this convention is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, I, 490-494.

preoccupied with the continuous domestic changes occurring throughout Germany, what little foreign activity it practiced was largely anti-Polish and aimed at maintaining the long-term goal of revisionism. Aside from the *Wicher* incident that affected Danzig more than Berlin, nothing substantial occurred between Germany and Poland. If anything this period of time was most likely used by Piłsudski and the Foreign Ministry to study the radical changes occurring in Germany, in order to prepare Poland to adjust its foreign policy in relation to its western neighbor once the latter had stabilized.

But was it wise for Poland to distance itself from its direct allies, France and Romania? If not much had occurred, wouldn't this have been an opportunity to reevaluate and strengthen ties to repair the divisions from the previous years? The predominant thought here lies within Marshal Piłsudski's feelings towards the alliances. Whereas he still wished to see Romania strengthen itself and increase its cooperation with Poland, he had no patience for the French based on their track record of abandoning Poland and its interests when more beneficial opportunities arose. In defense of Polish actions for not working in solidarity with Paris and Bucharest during negotiations with Moscow, it seems that the Poles turned the tables on the former and gave up on the latter when it chose stagnancy over progress. When looking at Paris and Bucharest's domestic situations, the continuous change in governments and or foreign policy most likely encouraged Warsaw that it was wiser to take the opportunity at hand, and conclude a bilateral agreement with Moscow. Sanacja had learned from the past couple of years that its foreign allies were not completely reliable. And while it was risky to conduct a new foreign policy that required almost complete independence from outside influences, the

venture proved successful as Poland found a greater guarantee for its security through bilateral agreements.

#### **IV. RÓWNOWAGA: 1933-1935**

##### **A Turn to the West: Piłsudski's "Preventive War" and the Four Power Pact**

The growing power of the Nazis in the previous year had culminated in Germany's domestic paralysis by late 1932. Papen's government had resigned and its successor, Kurt von Schleicher's government, did not fare much better as no coalitions could be formed to prevent the Nazis from taking power. On January 30, 1933 Europe saw the latter score their greatest feat to date when Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany by President Paul von Hindenburg to resolve the crisis. Weimar Germany was dead and replaced with Nazi Germany. If the previous two years had created a cloud of worry over the continent, the ascendancy of an aggressive nationalist and his radical party now added thunder.

With its eastern front secured, Warsaw now turned to face its western neighbor and the difficult task to create better relations with a new government that was much more revisionist and anti-Polish. Piłsudski did not view Hitler in the same negative way that the rest of Europe had.<sup>245</sup> For one, the new Chancellor was of Austrian birth and did not hail from the typical anti-Polish Prussian background as the majority of his predecessors had.<sup>246</sup> And secondly, the Marshal knew that Hitler and the German state were in no way capable of launching any military venture to revise the German-Polish border, as the Chancellor would be too preoccupied consolidating domestic control.<sup>247</sup> He did however acknowledge that down the road Hitler could be a serious threat. But for the

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<sup>245</sup> Beck, 21.

<sup>246</sup> The Marshal considered Hitler's predecessor, von Schleicher, to be more hazardous to Poland, and considered the Nazis "nothing but windbags." If anything, Piłsudski felt the poor domestic scene in Germany would cause Hitler more problems and even threaten the Nazis' control over the state. Zygmunt Gasiorowski, "Did Piłsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" *The Journal of Modern History* 27, (1955), 149, 150.

<sup>247</sup> Report from Wysocki to Beck, 9 April 1933, Box 67, Folder 2, Archiwum Ambasadora Józefa Lipskiego, PI, 1.



time being he instructed his new foreign minister, Beck, to speak of Germany with “definitions which would be steadfast but also calm and moderate and would not anticipate the future as bearing exclusively negative possibilities.”<sup>248</sup>

Before Hitler’s appointment to the chancellorship, the Poles wanted to gauge French opinion over the German situation. In mid-January the Marshal had sent Polish envoy Jerzy Potocki to Paris with verbal instructions to test French reactions to Germany’s elevation to equal rights in the Disarmament Conference. He was to make direct contact with top French officials and avoid facilitating diplomatic channels.<sup>249</sup> The mission proved to have been a failure as the French showed no interest in discussing the German rearmament question.<sup>250</sup> When Hitler entered office, the French response was split and showed no immediate hostility or alarm. There was more focus on France’s financial difficulties, and the government was at odds with its military, as the latter aggressively opposed the former’s attempt to impose larger budget cuts.<sup>251</sup>

The next month proved to be quite turbulent in German-Polish relations when Hitler touched upon the territorial question in an interview with a London newspaper. He stated that he had regarded the Polish Corridor as a “hideous injustice to Germany,” and called for its German restoration.<sup>252</sup> Although Sanacja did not concern itself too much

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<sup>248</sup> Beck, 21.

<sup>249</sup> Beck had sent a letter to the Polish embassy clarifying that this mission was to bypass it in order to maintain the secrecy of the sensitive information Potocki was to convey to the French. “List ministra J. Becka do ambasadora Chłapowskiego w Paryżu w sprawie misji J. Potockiego,” January 1933, IHGS-MSZ, A.11.49/F/3 reprinted in *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1935-1945): Tom I*, ed. Tytus Komarnicki (London: Polish Research Centre, 1964), 5-6.

<sup>250</sup> Sources differ on whether Potocki had in fact met and spoke with the Foreign Minister at the time, Joseph Paul-Boncour. Jan Ciałowicz cites that the Poles may have met a French relative who knew the French diplomatic circles well enough to advise the former not to waste his time. Paul-Boncour years later denied every coming into contact with Potocki. Ciałowicz, 182. Waław Jędrzejewicz, “The Polish Plan for a ‘Preventive War’ Against Germany in 1933,” *The Polish Review* 11, (1966), 81.

<sup>251</sup> There was a fear that if the army was emasculated, the state would be in a weak state when the “day of danger” came. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 262.

<sup>252</sup> Gasiorowski, “Did Pilsudski,” 141.

with these comments, the actions of Danzig three days later on February 15 did raise alarms in Warsaw. Influenced by extreme nationalism with the rise of Hitler, the Free City decided to revoke its 1923 agreement with Poland that gave the latter the right to station a detachment of harbor police responsible only to Warsaw. Danzig had notified the Poles of this decision and stated it would replace the Polish detachment with one of their own. Polish envoy to Berlin Alfred Wysocki had even remarked to a German diplomat that both states were on the eve of a war breaking out.<sup>253</sup> Faced yet again with escalating tensions and another connection between Danzig and German foreign policy, Pilsudski did not hesitate in responding to the city's second act of defiance in less than a year.

According to Beck, the Marshal had stated that the appropriate response would be through a "new energetic act" to confront the Danzig Senate and send a warning to the new government in Berlin.<sup>254</sup> On secret orders, the Polish Naval Transport *Wilja* entered Danzig's harbor on March 6 and unloaded 120 soldiers on the Westerplatte basin to reinforce the stationed Polish military garrison there. Soon after a Polish envoy informed the Senate that the reason for this act was in response to rumors that German military organizations were staging a coup to take the Free City.<sup>255</sup> Warsaw's *fait accompli* was successful as the League yet again stepped in and pressured Danzig to restore Polish rights to maintaining the port's harbor police, on the promise that Poland would withdraw the additional reinforcements. As a sign of good will and after the Danzig Senate's new

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<sup>253</sup> "Memorandum by the Director of Department IV," 17 February 1933, 6601/E495037-40, reprinted in *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1919-1945: Series C, Vol. I* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1957), 46. "DGFP" here after.

<sup>254</sup> Beck, 22.

<sup>255</sup> The Poles had justified their actions by stating they could not wait for a League session to examine the situation and make a decision. Ibid, 22.

elections that ushered in greater Nazi presence, two of the city's representatives arrived in Warsaw and met with Piłsudski. The latter bluntly informed them, "I am very glad that you sought the only sensible way for our mutual relations. I wish you would not come here as foes, as it might end badly, much worse than you could imagine."<sup>256</sup>

The results of Warsaw's actions were both positive and negative. Positive in the sense that not only had the Poles used force again to put an end to the Free City's rebellious actions, but the greater message it evoked was that Poland would still protect its rights and interests even with a new, perhaps more anti-Polish regime in Berlin. But the downside to this action was that it drew harsh reactions from European delegations at the League of Nations. Although Danzig's provocation was puzzling, the British and French denounced Poland's aggressive tactics and showed more interest in not taking a stance just yet on Hitler and the Nazis.

One of the greatest questions regarding Polish foreign policy at the time is whether Piłsudski attempted to initiate a "preventive war" against Germany in 1933. After the German equality of rights fiasco, Hitler's ascension, and his subsequent declaration to undo the rest of the Versailles Treaty's restrictions, there had been this question whether the subsequent moves made by Sanacja were aimed at possibly coercing Poland's allies to join it in a venture to remove Hitler and restore order in Germany. Often cited as one of Piłsudski's possible motives for attempting a preventive war was the invocation of the Treaty's Article 213, which called for an Allied investigation of whether Germany had illegally rearmed (Hitler's paramilitary groups as

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 23.

possible evidence). If Hitler refused to allow the investigation, it would result in an Allied invasion and occupation of key areas.<sup>257</sup>

The Potocki mission and the Westerplatte episode have been cited as precedents for the preventive war in two ways. First, the Potocki mission was seen as a way to gauge French interest in potentially putting an end to the growth of radicalism in Germany. A similar mission took place at the end of 1932 when Szembek (now Undersecretary) was dispatched to London and Paris to feel out the atmosphere in those two governments with regards to Germany's role in the Disarmament Conference. He had also stopped in Berlin to question where Polish-German relations stood and declare that the relations between both sides were in a dangerous position of uncertainty.<sup>258</sup> When Szembek reported that political circles in Paris and London displayed anxiety, Piłsudski may have formulated further methods in stopping Germany's resurgence. Days after the Westerplatte episode Piłsudski had sent another mission to Paris, this time instructing Colonel Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski to confer with French military circles on their opinion of the Hitler regime and Poland's recent actions in Danzig. The goal was to see if there was enough support from the military side to propose a joint mobilization against Germany.<sup>259</sup> Długoszowski's mission was futile as he failed to meet with any top military leaders.

The Westerplatte episode had two important ways of figuring into the preventive war.<sup>260</sup> Its main function was to exhibit Polish interest and initiative in taking up arms

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<sup>257</sup> It would not be a general attack on Germany, but rather an occupation of certain areas similar to French moves in 1920 and 1923. The plan most likely would require Poland to occupy East Prussia and Danzig, while France reentered the Rhineland. Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy 1933-1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), 50.

<sup>258</sup> Jędrzejewicz, "The Polish Plan," 79.

<sup>259</sup> Ciałowicz, 181.

<sup>260</sup> Some historians have grouped the June 1932 *Wicher* incident with the topic of the preventive war. But due to the distance in time, it doesn't make enough sense that the topic or "plan" existed that far back. However, one could still see it as a general display of Polish willingness to take up arms against Germany.

against Germany if met with positive response from primarily France. The second function served to possibly provoke Germany into mobilizing against Poland and thus allowing the latter to brand its neighbor as an aggressor who broke international agreements such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Yet like the previously dispatched missions, both methods failed to draw any provocation or interest. If anything, it certainly brought unease to Hitler to the point that he issued orders to Nazi party organs to put a hold on any further agitation towards the Polish state via Danzig.<sup>261</sup> However, it has been noted that all of these events and the topic of a preventive war did make their way into “very serious political circles.”<sup>262</sup>

The Four Power Pact was seen as an opportunity to directly negotiate with Hitler, rather than seek military force to soften Nazi Germany’s revisionist desires. The pact had been designed by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, and first presented to the British in late March. Its composition obviously pointed to the desire to restore a nineteenth century type of Great Power directorate to possibly replace the League of Nations. Whereas Mussolini intensely disliked the international institution, he strongly admired the Locarno agreements and saw them as an “attempt to preserve the international order by a Great Power directorate and claimed them as spiritual ancestors of the Four Power Pact.”<sup>263</sup> His aim was to create this concert in order to help fulfill his own foreign policy desires of imperialism and revisionism. But in order to make this project appealing to other states such as Great Britain, France, and Germany, he had to show that it could maintain peace and security more efficiently than the decaying League. The pact would essentially

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<sup>261</sup> Weinberg, 51.

<sup>262</sup> “List radcy A. Mühlsteina w sprawie niechęci Francji,” 17 April 1933, IHGS, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 12. Also consult Mühlstein’s attachment, pages 14-18.

<sup>263</sup> Hugo Jarausch, *The Four Power Pact 1933* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 9-10.

promise Germany an easier way of achieving its revisionist aims because it would only have to deal with the approval of the other three states. For Great Britain and France, the pact was interpreted as a tool that could peacefully limit Germany's excessive demands and prevent them from potentially transforming into an armed conflict.

But the pact was not outright accepted by these three states. The German Foreign Ministry held some reservations, fearing that it could be an attempt for the West to create a front to subjugate Germany to its will and limit the latter's freedom of action.<sup>264</sup> The French political spectrum was split, with the Left showing enthusiasm while the Right vehemently opposed it. The country was torn between repairing its domestic problems and preventing Germany from gaining any more concessions. Due to this political malaise, Paris decided to follow whatever path the British chose to take, lest they become labeled as obstructionists to peace.<sup>265</sup> London was probably the most optimistic about the pact, as they saw an opportunity to build cooperation with Berlin and circumvent its revisionist aims.

But not all European states approved of the project, particularly France's allies, the Little Entente and Poland. The former had viewed Mussolini's Italy with suspicion almost as much as they had with Hungary, and viewed the pact as a threat to their states' existence. Poland on the other hand was more critical of than endangered by the pact. Pilsudski saw it as a "menace to the rights and interests of the smaller powers threatened by the Great Powers' cartel," a view directly in line with the Little Entente's.<sup>266</sup> The chief

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>265</sup> Acceptance came at an expense as it would not only jeopardize the relationship between France and her Eastern alliances, but also undermine the role of the League. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 276.

<sup>266</sup> Beck, 38. "Since nobody can dispose of someone else's property, the states of the Little Entente formulate, at present, their most expressive reservations concerning the eventual conclusion of these accords, in any way in which they can infringe (sic) upon their rights and policies." Jarausch, 95.

problem with the pact was that it would allow these Great Powers to have jurisdiction over issues that did not even pertain to them. According to Beck, the pact also mixed its privileges with the League's, thus making the latter useless as an international tribunal whose decisions were binding to all states.<sup>267</sup> Although the League would still remain in existence, decisions would be based on the desires of the Great Powers. Polish foreign policy's main interest was to protect its state's borders from revisionism, something that this pact aimed at doing just as Locarno had.<sup>268</sup> They also saw the pact as an opportunity for Hitler to continue to bring Germany out of diplomatic isolation among the Great Powers.<sup>269</sup>

Seeing the danger in potential German rearmament, Sanacja adopted a hardline in response to the Four Power Pact.<sup>270</sup> As a sign of protest, Piłsudski had instructed Potocki, the new Polish ambassador to Rome, to resign. Beck went even further by threatening to withdraw Poland from the League.<sup>271</sup> After the *Wicher* incident, Piłsudski had asserted that Poland would no longer let other institutions meddle in Polish affairs. With regards to this new institution and rumors of sanctioning revisionism, Beck thunderously told Ambassador Laroche, "If a state, alone or with others wants to take possession of a single square meter of our territory, the cannon will speak! They know that in Berlin...I am afraid that this is not well enough known in London and in Rome, or even in Paris...It was foreign intervention that led to the disappearance of the old Poland."<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Beck noted that the pact's realization would bankrupt the League's use. Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 23.

<sup>268</sup> Telegram from Chłapowski to Beck, Spring 1933, Box 17, Folder 3, Poland (Ambasada) France Records, 3.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>270</sup> Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 20-21.

<sup>271</sup> Beck, 37. See Beck's report on Potocki's resignation in "Depesza sekretowana z Warszawy," 24 March 1933, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 28.

<sup>272</sup> Gasiorowski, "Did Piłsudski," 145.

In April tensions between Hitler's Germany and Poland began to heat up as incidents increased between both sides. A monument to Germanism was unveiled that alluded to the injustice of the German-Polish border.<sup>273</sup> Propaganda intensified on both sides as the German and Polish press accused each side of provoking war. Some of these attacks were influenced by the increase in reports flowing into Berlin on the buildup of Polish border patrol units on the frontier. According to a former *aide-de-camp*, on April 18 Piłsudski supposedly had drawn up an outline of a decree establishing a special government in case war had broken out with Germany. When the aid had asked the Marshal whether Hitler would attack Poland, the latter remarked, "Even if we attack him, it will also be a defense."<sup>274</sup> Three days later the Marshal had arrived in Vilna to celebrate the city's fourteenth anniversary of liberation. The celebrations were highlighted by a parade of 35,000 Polish soldiers adorned in full combat gear and in battler order, who had just been transferred from the East Prussian border. This show of strength may have been a sign of protest against France for considering the Four Power Pact, or to show it that Poland was ready to move against Germany. Or it may have been dually aimed at Germany to reinforce Poland's position that it would not tolerate any further hostility. This would include Berlin's use of the Four Power Pact to accomplish its revisionist aims. Thus the idea of a preventive war was not yet shelved, as it gave the French another opportunity to see that Poland was willing to act against Germany before it struck first, whether now or down the road.

Negotiations to finalize the Four Power Pact were beginning to conclude in May. But a missed opportunity had occurred to prevent its completion when both Poland and

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>274</sup> Jędrzejewicz, "The Polish Plan," 83.



the Little Entente had failed to oppose it in solidarity. Polish-Romanian relations had cooled since the latter's failure to conclude a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union in the previous year. It is not to say that the diplomatic channels between both states were idle, but it seems that Warsaw no longer saw Bucharest as an ideal guarantor of Polish security against Germany or the Soviet Union. The feeling may have been mutual as Romanian foreign policy was still directed by Titulescu, who personally disliked Beck and saw the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact as a betrayal by Romania's northern ally.<sup>275</sup> The Poles held their own gripe about Titulescu's new pro-Soviet policy beginning in 1933. In the face of German fascism, the Romanian felt that collective security with France and Russia could guarantee his state's security.<sup>276</sup> However, this drew the ire of Warsaw who feared the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. As a result, Polish-Romanian relations fully froze until their thaw in 1936.

Polish-Czech relations had lacked normality due to territorial and political differences. But most Czech political circles saw German revisionism in the Corridor as a precedent to Hungarian revisionism in the Danube region. In the fall of 1932 Beneš had allegedly suggested proposing a political agreement with Poland, which he approached Beck with in February 1933. It entailed both states signing a friendship treaty that would have both sides avoid any foreign issues that would hurt their relations with each other, and it would promise Czech restraint in the event of a German-Polish conflict if Poland pulled its border patrol away to assist its army. Despite Beck's rejection of the

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<sup>275</sup> Lungu, 86.

<sup>276</sup> Bucharest felt that the Red Army's strength superseded that of Warsaw's, whose self-reliance on their own army protecting Poland's borders dually worried government circles. It seems that Titulescu took the advent of Hitler and the Nazi party seriously enough to seek a pact with the Soviet Union that would allow the Red Army passage through Romania in order to assist Czechoslovakia against a German attack. Sergiusz Mikulicz, "Wpływ dyplomacji sanacyjnej na obalenie Titulescu," *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 12, (1959), 104, 105.

proposition, there was a Polish attempt to conclude a secret military agreement with Prague.<sup>277</sup> But nothing ever materialized as the Czechs felt that Beck was inexperienced, their own envoy to Warsaw was never treated accordingly, and that Poland's foreign policy strayed too much away from France's. Beneš had also rejected any terms that reopened the Teschen question.<sup>278</sup> But personally, the Czech Foreign Minister did not see any conflict between his state and Germany. Ultimately it seems that even Warsaw's new independent foreign policy could not accommodate Czech interests.

But the reason for this divide between Poland and the Little Entente could have been that Paris presented the latter a better offer. French Foreign Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour had sent a letter to all three states that downplayed the importance of the pact. Investing their trust in France, the Little Entente proclaimed its support for the Four Power Pact on May 30. To reassure their allies, the French had also promised assurances to protect their states' interests by underlining that any revisions could only be made under Article 19 of the League's Covenant with the complete unanimity of all parties.<sup>279</sup> It seems that the Little Entente had given in to France's sponsorship for the pact as a sign of loyalty. Although Poland refused to buy into the Four Power Pact, it did give its approval for a stipulation in the pact that required the Four Powers to examine the

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<sup>277</sup> Lewandowski, 243. Beck had rejected his counterpart's terms because it would complicate Poland's political stance to maintaining its claim to Teschen. Beneš' offer is "alleged," as historians have failed to find any further evidence of its existence other than in the Foreign Minister's own memoirs. Beck makes no mention in his own memoirs of such a deal, only that the Marshal attempted to seek a more favorable agreement with Prague. The Beck-Piłsudski initiative may have been to align Poland and Czechoslovakia against France's decision to support the Four Power Pact. But this failed due to Czech fears of allowing Polish influence and its potential hegemony in the Danubian region. The Beck-Piłsudski initiative may have been to align Poland and Czechoslovakia against France's decision to support the Four Power Pact. But this failed due to Czech fears of allowing Polish influence and its potential hegemony in the Danubian region. Jerzy Tomaszewski and Jarsolav Valenta, "Polska wobec Czechosłowacji w 1933 r.," *Przegląd Historyczny* 70, (1979), 700-701, 717.

<sup>278</sup> "The condition of Czechoslovakia's existence relied on the precise Franco-Czech relationship." Kozeński, 53-54, 63.

<sup>279</sup> The Little Entente accepted this more detailed French assurance, and their "ambassadors expressed deepest gratitude at the Quai d'Orsay." Jaraus, 175-176.

limitation of armaments, as this could have at least stemmed Germany's future military buildup. Beck had even remarked that had this stipulation not been put in, "Something would have had to change in the relations between Poland and France."<sup>280</sup> But through this compromise, Paris could not accuse Warsaw of trying to disrupt another European design for peace and security, while the latter could still maintain its independent policy and overall objection to the pact.

After a few months of negotiations and some revisions, the Four Power Pact was signed on July 15, 1933 in Rome. "Refusing to wage a preventive war, and yet unwilling to condone Hitler's disturbance of the equilibrium, the Western statesmen had to face the brutal choice, either to fight or to appease. The Four Power Pact could equally well have served for both."<sup>281</sup> Unfortunately the pact had quickly run into problems soon afterwards, as it became nothing more than a reinforcement for the League of Nations. This came to the dismay of Hitler and Mussolini who desired nothing more than to speed up the League's decay and bring about the vulnerability of its smaller member states. Mussolini's designs for the pact to allow an easier method for revisions were ineffective. The bigger blow to the pact came on October 14 when Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference, stating it would not return "until this real equality of rights is no longer withheld from our people."<sup>282</sup> Despite British and French determination to keep the pact alive, it nonetheless became a dead letter and was never ratified by any of the Four Powers.

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<sup>280</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 286.

<sup>281</sup> Jarausch, 224.

<sup>282</sup> "Proclamation of the German Government to the German Nation," 14 October 1933, reprinted in *DGFP*, II, 2.

The emergence of the Four Power Pact may have ended Piłsudski's designs for a preventive war. But with Germany's withdrawal, the opportunity reemerged to seek support for the original plans due to the new uncertainty that Hitler had now presented Europe with. A week later the Marshal met with Beck and Szembek to discuss the status of German armaments. It seems the results were favorable as Piłsudski decided to test the French response to recent events. Having a great relationship with both the Marshal and French General Maxime Weygand, Ludwik Morstin was entrusted with this mission and instructed to only approach the latter and avoid political circles. He was to present Weygand with two questions: would France mobilize if Poland was attacked by Germany on any part of its frontier, and if so, would France put all of its forces on their German frontier?<sup>283</sup> Weygand received both the envoy and his inquiry, but chose to present it to his government superiors. The government's response was negative and Weygand informed Morstin that no general mobilization would take place and that Poland would only receive material aid. In light of this, the Franco-Polish alliance had ceased to function as an actual guarantee for security, becoming a mere document that became "history."<sup>284</sup> If Poland were to face Germany, it would have to do it alone. But after weighing the pros and cons of a preventive war, Piłsudski chose to attempt a direct understanding with Germany.<sup>285</sup>

### **The Policy of Equilibrium**

With the Four Power Pact gaining more interest in European capitals than the idea of a preventive war, the Sanacja regime needed to adopt another approach in facing the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany. This would take the form of directly approaching

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<sup>283</sup> Jędrzejewicz, "The Polish Plan," 86-87. Ciałowicz, 192.

<sup>284</sup> Ciałowicz, 193.

<sup>285</sup> Beck, 62.

the Chancellor and sounding out his intentions with regards to Eastern Europe. The preventive war would not be abandoned, but this new approach would assist Polish foreign policy in its attempt to adapt a stronger line that could counter Berlin's own desires.

On February 9 President von Hindenburg held a gala for all foreign diplomats where Hitler was present. It was here that Wysocki created the first unofficial Polish *démarche* with regards to the new German government by exchanging a few words with the Chancellor as the latter greeted all the diplomats. Wysocki stated that relations between both states were based on the actions of certain individuals and the German press, but that in reality they truly were not so poor. He finished by underlining that Poland held no hostility towards Germany, particularly dismissing rumors of an attack on Danzig and East Prussia.<sup>286</sup> Hitler's response was nothing more than a "thank you." Yet the importance in this exchange was that regardless of the new government in Berlin, Warsaw was willing to continue seeking a normalization in relations.

Nothing really materialized between both states until May. The Poles had attempted to request a meeting between Szembek and Hitler, or even Wysocki and Hitler in April. But both plans were abandoned, as Hitler was too preoccupied with sensitive domestic issues that could be aggravated by early German-Polish talks.<sup>287</sup> But Hitler had reportedly stated that he was interested in coming to an agreement with Poland, but that Piłsudski was the only man he would do it with.<sup>288</sup> By late April Piłsudski and Beck had instructed Wysocki to request a meeting with Hitler, which the latter had granted.

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<sup>286</sup> Report from Wysocki to Szembek, 9 February 1933, Box 1, Folder 1, Zaleski Papers, 3.

<sup>287</sup> "P. Wysocki do Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych," 8 April, 1933, IHGS, A.I. 1106, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 50.

<sup>288</sup> Gasiorowski, "Did Piłsudski," 146.

The Hitler-Wysocki talk took place on May 2 in the presence of German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath. Wysocki informed the Chancellor that differences between both states had prevented the reaching of an understanding for normal neighborly relations. Poland was quite worried by Nazi activity in Danzig, but Wysocki maintained that it would defend its “rightful position in the Baltic.”<sup>289</sup> Hitler stated that his intention was not to violate any existing treaties, yet asserted that he would not recognize any rights that exceeded the latter’s boundaries. With regards to Poland he underlined that he did not support the numerous arguments in various German offices that were aimed against the existence of a Polish state. In the end, he defended himself as a pacifist who did not support war and ordered a communiqué issued declaring his peaceful intentions towards Poland.<sup>290</sup>

This event was a milestone for Polish foreign policy as both sides presented their views on relations between both states. Wysocki’s aim was to create a cordial atmosphere as to not upset Hitler, but at the same time display Warsaw’s firm conviction that it could not be intimidated into conceding to any German desires. The Poles were also able to gain some clarification on Hitler’s foreign policy, but remained cautious in accepting it at face value. The next step was to see if Poland could circumvent the impending Four Power Pact by continuing negotiations with Germany. This way an opportunity could possibly arise that would soften the repercussions of the pact through some direct

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<sup>289</sup> “Wysocki to Beck,” 2 May 1933, reprinted in *The Polish White Book 1933-1939* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1942), 11. “*Polish White Book*” here after. For a reprint of von Neurath’s similar account of the Hitler-Wysocki talk, consult, “Memorandum by the Foreign Minister,” 2 May 1933, 2945/575833-36, reprinted in *DGFP, I*, 365-367.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, 13. “The Chancellor expressed the wish that both countries should examine and treat their common interests dispassionately.” “COMMUNIQUÉ issued by the Wolff Agency on an Interview between Chancellor Hitler and M. Wysocki,” 3 May 1933, reprinted in *Polish White Book*, 13.

understanding with Berlin. If anything, this rapprochement could have been aimed at denting the chances of the pact's signing.

Sanacja was compelled to continue talks with Hitler, particularly after hearing about the latter's remarks a day after the meeting with Wysocki. In a speech to the Reichstag, Hitler stated that "Germany is ready to take part in any solemn pact of nonaggression, for Germany has no thought of attack, but thinks solely of her security."<sup>291</sup> Even though he did not mention anything about the Four Power Pact, he displayed a willingness for bilateral agreements with any country. Poland may not have been exclusively mentioned, but it must have given the impression that an agreement could be reached with Germany, particularly in the interest of Poland's security. Two days after the meeting, Beck had sent a communiqué to all Polish posts in Europe stating that due to the results of the Hitler-Wysocki meeting, "our latest *démarche* cancels the plans for a preventive war."<sup>292</sup> The preventive war idea still loomed in the fall after Germany's exit from the League, but Beck's move may have been a strategic effort to calm Berlin who had been aware of it. It was important for the Poles not to abandon their plan, but to ease the pressure in order to avoid aggravating the newly constructed approachment created with the Hitler government.

Two days before the Four Power Pact was signed, Wysocki was granted a second meeting with Hitler. The topic of discussion was Danzig and the Polish Corridor in general. Hitler accused the Versailles Treaty for creating the Corridor, an "enduring abyss" between both states. In a gesture of goodwill, he told Wysocki that he had given orders to his party officials in Danzig to end the city's quarrels with Warsaw. He also

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<sup>291</sup> "EXTRACTS from Chancellor Hitler's Speech to the Reichstag," 17 May 1933, reprinted in *Polish White Book*, 15.

<sup>292</sup> Jędrzejewicz, "The Polish Plan," 72.

touched upon the economic war between both states, claiming that it was in his and his state's interest to start buying foodstuffs from Poland.<sup>293</sup> The results of this meeting could be considered as another step towards a genuine German-Polish rapprochement.

There was not much activity between both sides in the next two months. Germany had signed the Four Power Pact, while Poland continued its objection to the whole project. It was in September that Marshal Piłsudski instructed Beck to conduct a survey on the Hitler government before resuming talks with it, in order to measure its stability. Beck yielded five key points from his study the first of which saw the National Socialist movement embodying the character of a revolutionary movement. As a result, the second postulate saw that some new agreement on an old subject could be attained as reformers had a tendency to desire a brand new start in their state's history. The third postulate suggested that every reformer desired internal change, thus Hitler would want a period of "calm" in external affairs. The fourth one was linked to Piłsudski's earlier views of the Chancellor, in that he was an Austrian and not the typical anti-Polish Prussian. The final postulate stated that the goal of the Hitlerite movement was the last act of the German people's national unification.<sup>294</sup> Beck concluded that an "exceptional opportunity for straightening our own position in the European balance of power" existed with regards to Germany, and that the National Socialists were not as anti-Polish as the various governments of Weimar. This study may have induced Piłsudski to continue German-Polish talks.

Before any talks were continued with Hitler, Beck had met with the Chancellor's Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and von Neurath during a League Assembly in

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<sup>293</sup> "EXTRACTS..," *Polish White Book*, 15-16.

<sup>294</sup> Beck, 25.



Geneva on September 25. Goebbels explained to Beck that previous German policies had been riddled with errors that had only hurt the German nation. He went on stating that only direct understandings with other European states could produce more détente than Geneva ever could.<sup>295</sup> Beck decided to take the moment to underline that the Poles had attempted such methods with Germany in the past, citing the Piłsudski-Stresemann encounter six years ago. After Goebbels had compared the League to the Tower of Babel and accused it of never providing any solutions to international problems, Beck replied that Poland took its membership in the institution very seriously but assured that it would not contradict an improvement in German-Polish relations.<sup>296</sup>

Goebbels' opinion of the League may have been a forewarning that Germany would abandon the institution. While its exit from the League sparked much alarm around Europe, Warsaw did not jump to conclusions. Instead, there were two options for Sanacja to counter this move with. As previously discussed, one was to approach the French yet again with the Morstin mission as part of this idea of the preventive war. But the second option was to continue direct talks with Germany. In September the Director of the Foreign Ministry's Western Department, Józef Lipski, replaced Wysocki as the Polish envoy in Berlin. The German government in early October approved his credentials, and while he was able to conduct talks with von Neurath in mid-October on economic matters, he would have to wait for an audience with Hitler.<sup>297</sup> But before that crucial meeting with the Chancellor, Piłsudski held a conference on October 21 to discuss

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 27. Beck also stated that Warsaw was stringent in not letting the direct wire to Berlin break off again. "Memorandum by the Foreign Minister," 25 September 1933, 2945/575849, reprinted in *DGFP*, I, 840.

<sup>297</sup> At the Lipski-von Neurath meeting, the latter told the new Polish envoy that it was important to finally eliminate all quarrels between both states. Korbel, 283.

Germany's armaments for military and diplomatic-political purposes. There he expressed that it was important to work with France, but that any dealings with it must be maintained in complete secrecy as to prevent Poland from being the state that rings the "alarm bell."<sup>298</sup> The results of this conference, particularly the Marshal's interest in working with France, may have been the reason to send the Morstin mission to Paris. Since the French showed no interest in mobilizing in the event of a German-Polish conflict, this strongly suggests why Warsaw gave Lipski the green-light to finally request a meeting with Hitler.<sup>299</sup>

In early-November, Lipski had been recalled to Warsaw to confer with Piłsudski and Beck. It was there that the Marshal gave him detailed instructions on how to conduct the talks with Hitler.<sup>300</sup> On November 15 the Hitler-Lipski talk took place where the Polish envoy began by repeating exactly what the Marshal had instructed him to. He stated that Poland's security was founded on two elements. The first one was that Poland enjoyed conducting direct bilateral relations, and that second, it collaborated with other States through the League of Nations as a security reinsurance.<sup>301</sup> Germany's exit had deprived Poland of the second element, and so Lipski asked Hitler how he planned on compensating Warsaw for this? Hitler's response was that both states were obliged to live side by side, and that he considered Poland an outpost against Asia. He concluded that he

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<sup>298</sup> "Notatka min. Szembeka z konferencji u pana Marszałka," 21 October 1933, AS, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 81.

<sup>299</sup> It should be noted that the preventive war most certainly penetrated German circles because of October 25, the German General Staff's General Werner von Blömburg had sent out an order for all of Germany's armed forces to "make special preparations for war." Karski, 116.

<sup>300</sup> "Declaration of Nonaggression Memorandum," n.d., reprinted in *Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939: Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland*, ed. Waclaw Jędrzejewicz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 94-98.

<sup>301</sup> Report from Lipski to Beck, 15 November 1933, Box 67, Folder 2, Archiwum Ambasadora Józefa Lipskiego, 1, 2. For a copy of the German report please consult, "The Director of Department IV to the Legation in Poland," 16 November 1933, 6177/E463472-73, reprinted in *DGFP*, II, 128-129.

was anxious for good relations with Poland, and proposed the possibility of German-Polish relations excluding war in the form of a treaty.<sup>302</sup>

The Hitler-Lipski meeting initiated the process of bilateral negotiations to create a nonaggression pact between Germany and Poland. Most of the pact's work was conducted in December and although it was drawn up by Berlin, the Germans heavily consulted Piłsudski on its nature. The ultimate aim was for the agreement to be in line with the European order and not contradict any of Poland's previous engagements.<sup>303</sup> In order to fulfill these assertions, Warsaw maintained the stipulations of the Franco-Polish alliance by informing Paris of these negotiations. Beck had actually informed Paul-Boncour of them, but did not give his counterpart any details on the project. Although the French had no flat out objections, they did communicate a feeling of unease to their Polish allies. In a December 7 meeting between Massigli and the Secretary to the Polish Ambassador to France, Anatol Mühlstein, the latter informed his French counterpart that Poland's desire was to reach France's level in terms of relations with Germany.<sup>304</sup> He emphasized that current German-Polish negotiations should not raise any concerns in Paris, citing Poland's need to remedy its practical exclusion from the Locarno agreements. Massigli expressed concern over the repercussions of these negotiations, mentioning that it would put France in a precarious position where it would almost be forced to open up its own bilateral talks with Hitler, something the Frenchmen refused to give a concrete answer on the possibility of it. Mühlstein reminded Massigli that it was this kind of French tiptoeing around important issues that made relations awkward

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<sup>302</sup> Report from Lipski to Beck, 15 November 1933, 3 and Report from Lipski to Beck, 30 November 1933, Box 67, Folder 2, Archiwum Ambasadora Józefa Lipskiego, 1.

<sup>303</sup> Beck, 29.

<sup>304</sup> "Notatka radcy A. Mühlsteina z rozmowy z R. Massiglim," 7 December 1933, IHGS, MSZ, A.11.49/F/3, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 97.

between France and Poland, with the latter unsure of what the former actually wanted. He concluded by stating that Poland's own politics could not be dependent on these tactical, heat of the moment kind of actions exhibited by the French government.<sup>305</sup>

The disconnect in Franco-Polish relations did not intensify due to German-Polish negotiations in late 1933. While the alliance had considerably weakened since the last years of the 1920s, it was in early 1933 that a polarization in interests became quite evident. European businessmen began to adopt a more favorable stance towards Germany and the issue of territorial revisionism. When a similar incident to this nature occurred in Paris, the French government was quite passive if not sympathetic. Some French diplomats like the French Ambassador to Italy, Henri de Jouvenel, expressed support for the revision of the Polish Corridor, the latter considering its creation a grave mistake.<sup>306</sup> And while the French invested in a Great Power directorate to contain Germany, the Poles were more willing to resort to force. Since Warsaw had no interest in the Four Power Pact and France refused to become involved in plans for a preventive war, the disconnect within the alliance not only became visibly clear, but had considerably widened. Under these circumstances, it is of no surprise that Polish foreign policy continued its independent track when it came to bilateral negotiations with Berlin that resulted in the signing of the German-Polish Nonaggression Pact on January 26, 1934.<sup>307</sup>

Under the agreement, both sides agreed to renounce the use of war to settle disputes, but purposely left out any stipulations that stated the use of a third party

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>306</sup> He also stated that the Polish construction of Gdynia exacerbated the already-present tension. "The Ambassador in Italy to the Foreign Ministry," 10 March 1933, 7360/E536356-59, reprinted in *DGFP*, I, 133.

<sup>307</sup> A copy of the pact is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Dokumenty*, II, 32-34.

arbitrator to settle them.<sup>308</sup> The pact was to adhere to previous agreements such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and stated that both sides would use direct negotiations as a means to maintaining peace between them. Finally, the pact was set to last for ten years and continue to remain valid unless renounced six months prior to its expiration. Both sides saw the agreement quite beneficial. For Hitler, he secured Germany's eastern flank by coming to a peaceful agreement with Poland. Due to Germany's withdrawal from the League and Disarmament Conference, this pact may have brought the state out from geopolitical isolation and added to the weakening of the Franco-Polish alliance.<sup>309</sup> But for the Sanacja regime, the pact became almost as good as an Eastern Locarno. Although no third party was involved in this bilateral agreement, Poland had secured its western boundary not permanently, but at least for the time being. The other benefit from the pact was that both sides would renounce the tariff war and sign a number of economic agreements in the next two years.<sup>310</sup> But the French were not equally as thrilled, as the press and the government expressed suspicion. Paris feared that Poland was potentially reversing its "attitude" towards its ally by now working directly with whom the alliance was originally aimed against.<sup>311</sup> But Piłsudski and Beck had made the effort to assure the French that the pact did not change anything with regards to the alliance. The latter had "emphasized that Poland retained full freedom of action and that, if France would initiate

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<sup>308</sup> The Poles had rejected one of the first German drafts of the pact that included this question of arbitration, on the suspicion that its interpretation could include territorial questions. Dębicki, 76.

<sup>309</sup> Weinberg, 60. The latter should not be discounted nor completely taken at face value. There was never a renunciation of the alliance and if anything, Piłsudski made sure that the pact acknowledged existing alliances. With regards to the secrecy of the pact, Weinberg fails to mention that Beck had notified Paul-Boncour in November of ongoing negotiations in November, despite withholding details.

<sup>310</sup> The first agreement came in March 1934 that eliminated restrictions and prohibitions and freed trade and commerce between both states. The second came in October 1934 in the form of a compensation agreement. And finally, in November 1935 both sides signed a limited most-favored nation agreement. Kruszewski, 313-314.

<sup>311</sup> Dębicki, 74.

an active policy toward Germany, she could count on full cooperation from Poland.”<sup>312</sup> Either way, Poland had taken a page out of France’s playbook from Locarno: come to an agreement with Germany without its ally.

Marshal Piłsudski was not quick to celebrate the recent achievement in Polish foreign policy. Hitler and the Nazis were never shy of voicing their extreme dislike and contempt for communism and the Soviet Union. Bearing this in mind, Piłsudski felt that it was extremely important to avoid arousing Soviet suspicion of the beginning of a German-Polish collaboration against Russia. Since the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact, relations between Moscow and Warsaw had been quite good. Sanacja’s policy towards Poland’s eastern neighbor was based on three postulates: adhering to the nonaggression pact and demanding Moscow’s adherence as well, promoting better relations, and holding a “careful attitude with regard to all Soviet political schemes.”<sup>313</sup> There was a steady decline in the Soviet disbursement of anti-Polish propaganda, as well as hostility towards the Soviet Union in the Polish press. Improvements were continuously made even diplomatically. In July 1933, Poland was among the many signatories that agreed on the Soviet Union’s Convention for the Definition of Aggression. It not only reaffirmed the nonaggression pact Warsaw had with Moscow, but it even pleased the former because it helped further facilitate the restored negotiations the latter had with Bucharest.<sup>314</sup> But the Poles were careful not to get swept up in the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. When Moscow proposed an agreement with

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>313</sup> Beck, 33.

<sup>314</sup> The other reason may have been Eastern Europe’s answer to the Four Power Pact. Beck, 35. Budurowycz, 30.

Warsaw to guarantee the independence of the Baltic states in November 1933, the latter refused.<sup>315</sup>

When the German-Polish nonaggression pact was announced, Moscow remained calm but was certainly alarmed about the pact. Its press speculated that territorial deals would be made, and private sources feared that Poland might now be under the German sphere of influence.<sup>316</sup> And so Piłsudski dispatched Beck to Moscow in mid-February not only as a gesture of goodwill between both states, but to largely dismiss the wild rumors that had immediately sprouted after the signing of the German-Polish pact.

The simultaneous timing of these two events [signing of the German-Polish pact and Beck's visit to Moscow] was to stress our position in Eastern Europe most clearly. It was necessary to make it known that our direct contacts, negotiations and agreements with each of our big neighbours were to clear the situation, aiming at positive results, i.e. the improvement of political relations in that European region, and that they were by no means diplomatic plots, and could not be interpreted as a submission of Polish politics to influences coming either from Berlin or from Moscow.<sup>317</sup>

The Foreign Minister's visit went quite well to the extent that both sides agreed to continue to work towards an improvement in relations and extend the nonaggression pact of 1932 for another ten years, effectively aligned it with the German-Polish pact.<sup>318</sup> Moscow also refuted any claims of a German-Polish collaboration, and formally agreed not to interfere on any territorial questions between Poland and Lithuania, such as the Vilna dispute.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> The Soviet aim was to protect the Baltic region from falling under the influence of Berlin. Warsaw did not officially reject Moscow's offer, instead it cited that "the policy of 'protecting someone against his will' could lead to dangerous consequences." It advocated for the participation of the Baltic states, but the latter refused to take part in such a proposal. Budurowycz, 39-40. Dębicki, 75.

<sup>316</sup> Budurowycz, 42.

<sup>317</sup> Beck, 33.

<sup>318</sup> Beck was careful to prevent both pacts from expiring simultaneously and placing the Polish state in a difficult position to renew them in the same year. Thus he placed one year in between their expirations. Beck, 51. A copy of the protocol is reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, II, 51-53.

<sup>319</sup> Budurowycz, 47. "Polsko-radziecki Protokół Końcowy w sprawie litewskiej," 5 May 1934, *Zbiór dokumentów* 1934, nr 6, s. 157-158, reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, II, 53-54.

The conclusion of the German-Polish nonaggression pact signaled Sanacja's foreign policy coming to full circle through the creation of a sub-policy called *równowaga* or "equilibrium." Poland had been able to secure its frontiers through the conclusion of nonaggression pacts with both of its large neighbors in a matter of two years. The policy was to exhibit the success of Poland's independent decision-making through bilateral negotiations. But Piłsudski attached even greater importance towards maintaining this balance between two large neighbors by stressing that Poland should avoid aligning with either side. It was absolutely necessary to prevent Berlin or Moscow from suspecting Warsaw of siding with one against the other, or else it would make Poland "...a territory where foreign interests might clash."<sup>320</sup> Moving forward, Sanacja's foreign policy was to apply this sub-policy of equilibrium to all of its relations in order to maintain Poland's status quo.

### **A New Eastern Locarno: Containment and Collective Security**

The attainment of two nonaggression pacts and the practice of the sub-policy of equilibrium provided Poland with the best guarantee for its security. But Piłsudski knew that this balancing act would not last forever. "Having those two pacts [with Germany and Russia] we are sitting on two stools – that can't last long. We must know...which one we will fall off first and when."<sup>321</sup> Thus on April 12, 1934 the Inspector General of Armies' Conference was called to order with the Marshal presiding over an audience that included Beck, Szembek, and an assortment of the Polish army's most charismatic and competent leaders. The topic was Poland's position in between Germany and the Soviet Union, with each attendant assigned the task of conducting a study to determine which

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<sup>320</sup> Beck, 34.

<sup>321</sup> Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 155.



one would be the first to threaten Poland's security?<sup>322</sup> The conference reconvened on May 12 with the following results. Out of twenty participants, thirteen indicated that Germany would be the first to attack Poland in the future, while only two pointed towards Russia. The remaining four individuals indicated both sides, citing whereas one may be more dangerous for Poland, it would be the other state that would attack first.<sup>323</sup> It is difficult to ascertain what conclusion was made at the conference, but it is clear that it may have been unsettling for Piłsudski who had always regarded Russia as the greater evil. While he considered the Red Army's rebuilding in a backwards state, he did not quite agree with the German threat because he considered Poland's western neighbor still isolated with no significant rearmament having taken place.<sup>324</sup> The conference may have been to direct Polish foreign policy as to where the majority of its attention should be invested for the next couple of years. Unfortunately it failed to give an estimate when an attack would actually occur.

It was in the summertime of 1933 that Moscow began to contemplate what measures of its own it could take to counter the growing anti-Soviet hostility in Germany. There were countless talks of reopening negotiations and concluding some kind of pact with France. That opportunity arose when Germany exited the League and Disarmament Conference, throwing Western states such as France into frenzy as their plans for cooperation with Hitler's government were in jeopardy. In late October Litvinov approached Paul-Boncour and suggested resuming talks for a nonaggression pact that

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<sup>322</sup> Beck, 59, 60.

<sup>323</sup> The detailed results of the study are reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, II, 58-59.

<sup>324</sup> Marian Leczyk, *Polska i Sąsiedzi: Stosunki Wojskowe 1921-1939* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Filii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1997), 305-306.

would grant mutual aid to both states. But the French did not immediately choose to cooperate, choosing to hold off talks until early 1934.

When the Daladier government fell in February 1934, Louis Barthou took over the Foreign Ministry and despite some initial skepticism, he decided to fully invest in this project of a Franco-Soviet pact that would come to be known as the Eastern Pact. But with French public opinion cynical of a bilateral agreement with Russia, the Frenchman successfully petitioned Moscow to open up the project to all of the Baltic states. French foreign policy under Barthou had a few reasons to take up the initial Soviet offer. Like the Soviet Union, France was fearful of what Germany's next steps may be after its various exits from institutions and the failed Four Power Pact. But another common interest both sides had was this suspicion of German-Polish collaboration after signing a nonaggression pact without the latter consulting its allies before negotiations had commenced. The French objective may have been to find a stronger ally in Eastern Europe that was impenetrable of German influence and willing to directly align with Paris' desires. But working with Moscow did not necessarily mean Paris was willing to drop Warsaw and the subsequent alliance the two had shared for more than a decade. By turning this bilateral agreement into a multilateral one, France was hoping it could bring Poland back into its sphere of influence and together with Russia, create an Eastern Bloc against Germany.

Despite Beck's visit and assurances that Polish foreign policy did not gravitate towards Berlin or Moscow, the latter still held reservations over Warsaw's nonaggression pact with the former. To the Soviets, the Eastern Pact was to become a multilateral nonaggression agreement that would shield not just Russia from Germany, but also the

Baltic states from falling under the umbrella of Berlin's influence. The pact became a second opportunity for Moscow to realize its desire to guarantee the Baltic states, an agreement that fell apart in late 1933. An even greater prospect to all of this was that France was now willing to back the project and become an ally, if not a guarantor of Soviet security.

Before any formal negotiations could begin, Barthou needed to examine where the Franco-Polish alliance stood. It was important to first straighten relations between both sides in order to discard the misunderstandings that had plagued the alliance in recent years.<sup>325</sup> His visit would also embody a public relation's move to improve the alliance's atmosphere, as it would mark the first official visit of a French foreign minister to Poland. He set out for a three-day visit to Warsaw on April 22. The next day the Foreign Minister met together with Piłsudski, Beck, and Szembek. While the visit was cordial, it did show signs of strain between both sides. When Barthou asked what the state of Franco-Polish relations was, the Marshal was quite frank with his response. He stated that both of Poland's allies (France and Romania) had brought it "much embarrassment."<sup>326</sup> On the subject of German rearmament, a famous dialogue ensued that highlighted why the Poles had begun to distance themselves from their ally in the last couple of years:

"I have had enough of these concessions, the Germans must feel that we will not yield one more step more," declared Mr. Barthou.

"You will yield, gentlemen, you will yield," answered the Marshal, "you would not be what you are if you did not."

"How can you suspect us, Marshal, of such a thing?"

"Maybe you yourself will not wish to yield but then you would withdraw from the Cabinet, or you would be outvoted in parliament, and fall," was the Marshal's reply. "Do you remember when we visited the battlefield of Verdun you staggered on ground furrowed with shells? Someone in your suite wanted to

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<sup>325</sup> Ciałowicz, 199. A list of Barthou's agenda in Warsaw can be found on page 200.

<sup>326</sup> "Notatka z rozmowy pana Marszałka Piłsudskiego z ministrem Barthou," 23 April 1934, AS, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 157.

help you, but you said it was not necessary, as you were accustomed to falling, as a Minister who had done so a score of times.”<sup>327</sup>

The Marshal’s comments embodied the feeling of déjà vu that the Poles experienced anytime the French made a declaration first, then later granting concessions to Germany. By this time the Poles refused to listen to any further assertions made by the French. When Barthou brought up the possibility of making changes to the military convention, the Marshal immediately dismissed the idea and grew annoyed when the Foreign Minister suggested a new French military attaché.<sup>328</sup> Piłsudski tried to convey a serious tone with this issue in light of the growing German problem. But when Barthou asked what the Poles wanted the French to do to mend the relations between both sides, the Marshal directed him to discuss the matter with Beck.<sup>329</sup> The meeting was concluded with an exchange of kind and heartfelt words despite the dead end talks. Barthou was assured that the nonaggression pact with Berlin did not change anything within the alliance, but he left Warsaw worried. Although he did not mention the Eastern Pact project, any time he touched upon the Soviet Union he was met with the Marshal’s skepticism.<sup>330</sup> If France was going to go through with this pact, it clearly was going to encounter great difficulty from Poland.

On June 4 Barthou hosted Colonel Beck in Paris to propose the Eastern Pact and gauge his counterpart’s response to it. He provided details and gave it the look of an “Eastern Locarno,” by selling it as a collective security pact for Eastern Europe. But he did mention that one condition applied, namely that it could only be realized upon the Soviet Union’s entry into the League and with Germany’s inclusion in the scheme

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<sup>327</sup> Beck, 54-55.

<sup>328</sup> The Poles were frustrated by the proposition of General Victor Pétin as the new attaché because the General held no important position in the French military. Ibid, 55.

<sup>329</sup> “Notatka...,” reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 159. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 342.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 159 and “Raport ambasadora A. Chłapowskiego,” 5 May 1934, reprinted in Ibid, 160.

(despite Moscow's tendency to argue against it).<sup>331</sup> Barthou then asked Beck whether the Poles would have any objections or conditions. The latter's response highlighted the argument that for the past eight years, Poland had worked for and achieved a balance of power in Eastern Europe in which it must maintain. In order to keep this policy of equilibrium, he agreed that Germany must be included in the pact. But he reminded Barthou that it was Tardieu who had influenced Romania's indecision to conclude a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union.<sup>332</sup> Beck's reasoning may have been to warn Barthou of his predecessor's hesitancy to conclude anything with Moscow, as well as remind him that Tardieu's actions irritated Poland's own initiative in 1932. Yet he stated that although Poland would not discourage France from going through with the project, it would not allow the latter to dictate Polish interests as it had in the past with regards to multilateral agreements. If Beck made one thing clear, it was that Poland was to be treated "as partners and not as clients."<sup>333</sup>

But the Poles never truly gave a definite answer as to whether they supported the Eastern Pact. They only expressed doubt and uncertainty over whether it would truly stabilize security in Eastern Europe. Beck had once remarked that he "was not keen on a scheme that would include Germany and Russia."<sup>334</sup> Sanacja's policy of equilibrium was not only to keep Poland neutral between both neighbors, but to also prevent their cooperation to an extent. When the project was extended to Lithuania and Czechoslovakia, the Poles refused to take part in negotiations citing the absence of good

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<sup>331</sup> Although originally the pact was designed to be against Hitler's Germany, Barthou saw Germany's inclusion as a way to neutralize it. This way if it displayed any aggression, it would be accused of violating the pact and justify action being taken against it by the other participants. In reality its inclusion was meant to avoid any physical confrontation.

<sup>332</sup> "Notatka z rozmowy Becka z Barthou, w Genewie," 4 June 1934, AK, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 166.

<sup>333</sup> Beck, 56.

<sup>334</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 358.

relations with those neighboring states. If anything, the true Polish skepticism could generally be seen in getting involved in a multilateral pact.<sup>335</sup> According to a report made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Polish foreign policy works to consolidate peace and security through its initiatives of bilateral relations with other states, with priority given to her neighbors.”<sup>336</sup> Hypothetically, this pact would void the bilateral agreements Warsaw had scored in the last two years and upset the peaceful atmosphere that they had purchased for the time being. The Ministry’s report concluded that the pact did not present anything new or better than the League, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and the Franco-Polish alliance.<sup>337</sup> The belief also existed that this pact would bring the Baltic region under Soviet hegemony and potentially dismantling Poland’s alliance with France. But the provision on mutual assistance was of greater magnitude for Polish resentment, as it would allow foreign troops to enter Poland while on their way to aid France or the Soviet Union in case of conflict with Germany.

On September 18, 1934 the Soviet Union officially joined the League of Nations and gained a permanent seat in the Council. This event had spurred mixed reactions in Warsaw. For years, Piłsudski had expressed a dislike for the idea of admitting the Soviets into the League. Although he was never completely against it, he saw it a potentially detrimental to Poland’s interests within the institution. When Barthou had proposed the idea during negotiations for the Eastern Pact, Beck also held no objections to the idea. Polish passivity may have been to prevent Warsaw from being seen as an even greater

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<sup>335</sup> Beck had stated, “... wide and loose pacts do not lie within the traditions of our politics.” Telegram No. 43 and 44 to Beck, 19 April 1934, Box 11, Folder 15, Poland (Ambasada) France Records.

<sup>336</sup> “Uwagi wydziału ustrojów międzynarodowych (pi) oraz wydziału zachodniego,” 15 August 1934, AK, reprinted in Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 167.

<sup>337</sup> The report also stated that the Eastern Pact might have adverse affects on the League and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. *Ibid*, 167.

obstacle to the Franco-Soviet alignment. But Beck undertook an initiative to underline Poland's position within the League before Soviet entry. To prevent the Soviets from using the League as Germany had with regards to minority issues, he put forth a motion to draft a resolution that generalized minority protection and bound every League member to it.<sup>338</sup> The aim was to prevent the Soviets, who now wield considerable influence due to their Council seat, from exploiting those issues in the borderlands at Poland's expense. Unfortunately the resolution found more objection than support, even from states like Czechoslovakia and Romania who also had their share of minority problems. Since Beck saw his effort as futile, he decided to revoke the 1921 Minority Convention and declared that Poland would not abide by it until all League members were forced to do so. His move was questionable but never denounced. It made in order to prevent Soviet influence from challenging Polish interests, in this case domestic policy with regards to minorities. Upon Soviet entry, the Poles sent a note to the former's delegation stating they would support this move only if preexisting agreements remained intact.<sup>339</sup> The Soviets agreed and the Poles supported the Soviet Union's official entry.

Although Barthou was careful in ensuring that the pact was not anti-German, one could hardly see it as anything else. France wanted to further fortify its defensive position by procuring a multilateral guarantee for its own security, by using Eastern Europe as a counterweight to the uncertainty that Germany continued to emit. Yet Poland proved to have been the major obstacle, because Barthou failed to grasp that the years of French superiority over Poland had left the latter with "intense bitterness" and with a new foreign

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<sup>338</sup> Dębicki, 84-85. The move by Beck may also have been an attempt to check the League's competence in equally enforcing all laws and restrictions upon its members. Karski, 201.

<sup>339</sup> Dębicki, 85-86. Beck, 65.

policy that was of an independent substance.<sup>340</sup> Like Warsaw, Berlin chose to stay away from getting involved in multilateral agreements that could constrain it and weaken the drive for future changes to the European order. Barthou had attempted to sway Polish and German support by opening up the pact to Great Britain and Italy as its guarantors. Yet he did not live to see any further developments in bringing the Eastern Pact to fruition as he was assassinated on October 9, 1934.

### **A Busy Two-Year Period**

The European community was quite proactive in the two-year period from 1933-1934, due to the formation of Nazi Germany through the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. This advent did not set off mass panic in Europe but did increase tensions due to the expansionist ideology and policies that Hitler planned to direct the German state with. At first however, no uniform policy existed to serve as a defense against this. Despite being a tool to sanction revisionism, Mussolini's Four Power Pact was adopted by France and Great Britain as a weapon to contain the growth of Nazi Germany by cooperation within the framework of a Great Power directorate. But this idea became stillborn with Germany's exit from the League and Disarmament Conference. The next method to counter the Germanic state was through a collective security system set up by a potential Franco-Soviet alliance. The Eastern Pact or "Eastern Locarno" was an attempt to create a Soviet-led and French-backed bloc of Eastern European and Baltic states. Although it was defended as a security guarantee to the region, it clearly exhibited an anti-German character. Only after problems surfaced that there lacked a uniform support for it, then did it transition from being a pact against Nazi Germany into one that would contain it by

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<sup>340</sup> Lisanne Radice, "The Eastern Pact, 1933-1935: A Last Attempt at European Co-operation," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 55, (1977), 53.



tying it up within a security framework. But with little support and the assassination of its chief architect, this solution to Hitler and the Nazi threat to European peace and security failed as well.

Polish foreign policy maintained its independent character that it had developed since the conclusion of the nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union in the previous year. Faced with a new German regime that was staunchly revisionist and nationalist, the Sanacja regime decided to examine the possibility of removing the threat before it became deeply rooted. Yet Piłsudski's preventive war idea found little to no support from Poland's chief ally France. Although the Marshal had been skeptical of the alliance's value, his desire was to test its reliability one more time to see if it would stand up and prevent the Nazis from slowly dismantling the Versailles system. But did this preventive war actually exist? Like the archival evidence, the historiography is limited on the subject and quite divided. Whereas some historians such as Zygmunt Gasiorowski see it as no more than a psychological war waged against Hitler in order to coax him into bilaterally negotiating with the Poles, others like Waław Jędrzejewicz have argued that there is enough evidence to prove that there were genuine Polish overtures to the French despite the lack of existence of any contingency plans.<sup>341</sup> The discussions within the Potocki and Wieniawa-Długoszowski missions are still unknown, but various diplomats in their memoirs have recalled hearing about the preventive war. Two decades later, top French officials like Paul-Boncour and General Weygand denied having knowledge of such an initiative. Despite the existence of written testimony contradicting Paul-Boncour, it is still difficult to ascertain the preventive war's validity, as the historiography has cited that Piłsudski trusted military circles more than political ones in discussing such sensitive

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<sup>341</sup> Gasiorowski, "Did Piłsudski," 149, 151. Jędrzejewicz, "The Polish Plan," 76.

matters.<sup>342</sup> Either way, Gasiorowski's argument wields significant weight because the idea did fall on German ears and perhaps motivated Hitler, a man who preferred bilateral agreements, to reopen talks with Poland in May 1933.

But could Sanacja's refusal to go along with the Four Power Pact and the Eastern Pact be considered a hindrance to containing the Nazi threat in Europe? Piłsudski and Beck may have had their gripes when it came to the League, but both still firmly adhered to it and the overall Versailles system. To Sanacja, the Four Power Pact would severely weaken both and allow four states to form a cartel and dictate the interests of smaller states based on their own desires and plans. Polish objections existed in order to block the possibility of the pact from becoming a tool for legally sanctioning revisionism. But the Eastern Pact is a different story, stemming from sour relations between France and Poland. It is without a doubt that the alliance between both states had severely weakened over the years. Whereas Poland chose to find security through bilateral agreements, France's continuous change in foreign policy led Sanacja to steer clear of investing in any French ventures such as the Eastern Pact. The latter itself was of an interesting nature, as France abandoned its nine-year policy of negotiating with Germany in favor of reverting to alliances. Since Poland was now seen with suspicion if not contempt for concluding a nonaggression pact with Hitler, Paris chose to reopen the possibility of an alliance with the Soviet Union, who was equally threatened by Nazi Germany. But the problem with the Eastern Pact was that Sanacja did not want it to become a precedent for Soviet hegemony over the region. Not only did the regime adamantly oppose any Soviet influence from crossing the Soviet Union's borders, it wanted to maintain this sub-policy of equilibrium and maintain neutrality between Germany and Russia. The real hindrance

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<sup>342</sup> For examples of French denials and their contradictions, please consult the Jędrzejewicz article.

to cooperation was that Polish and French foreign policy were extremely polar opposite by 1934, with neither side willing to come to a compromise for the sake of general European security.

The question that now begs to be asked is whether Poland had made the right choice in concluding an agreement with Hitler. According to Anna M. Cienciąła, the majority of Western and Eastern historiography is quite critical of this event.<sup>343</sup> The criticism lists various accusations, among these that Poland abandoned its French ally and brought Germany out of geopolitical isolation. But given the decay of France's eastern alliances and its predisposition to negotiate directly with the given threat, could one necessarily blame Poland for acting independent of its Western ally? For years Paris had a tendency to leave Warsaw out of major diplomatic negotiations such as Locarno, and secure its own protection at the cost of leaving out its other allies. Past Polish efforts to create an Eastern Locarno with France and Germany were never accepted by Paris due to technical and legal issues. It should be recalled that despite losing faith in France, Piłsudski made sure that the nonaggression pact recognized the alliance and that Poland was willing to cooperate with any French initiative towards Germany. It is also hardly reasonable to blame Warsaw for unleashing the Nazi beast as well. Since Locarno, French foreign policy had been strongly influenced by Great Britain to the point it copied almost all of London's moves.<sup>344</sup> The latter had always been against using force or starting a war to maintain the Versailles system, choosing instead to grant concessions. This is not to say that Great Britain's passivity and France's ignorance in following that

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<sup>343</sup> Anna M. Cienciąła, "The Significance of the Declaration of Nonaggression of January 26, 1934, in Polish-German and International Relations: A Reappraisal," *East European Quarterly* 1, (1967), 5.

<sup>344</sup> "A survey of the situation as it existed in 1933 shows that international relations were in a state of flux. There was no united front against Germany. France was anxious to put limits on German rearmament, but was unwilling to do anything drastic without British support." *Ibid*, 27.

model should be given complete blame. Since the West refused to take a stand against Nazi Germany and its actions in late 1933, it was quite reasonable for Poland to pursue its own security interests through a nonaggression pact.<sup>345</sup> One must wonder if this also applied to Polish relations vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia and Romania, as Polish foreign policy did not align with that of Prague or Bucharest's. This may have further given Warsaw a reason to negotiate bilaterally with Berlin, since there was a failure to align with the Little Entente in the face of Nazi Germany. Perhaps the blame should be laid upon all European states for failing to come to a compromise and stand in solidarity against Hitler. After all, Nazi Germany would have still rearmed even in geopolitical isolation.

As Marshal Piłsudski had noted, the completion of two nonaggression pacts with Poland's large neighbors was an extraordinary accomplishment for Polish foreign policy. The German-Polish nonaggression pact was another example of Sanacja's independent policy that saw a guarantee for Poland's security tied through bilateral agreements. Upon its completion, the sub-policy of *równowaga* or "equilibrium" came full circle and proved to have been a stronger security system for the Second Polish Republic than any multilateral-collective agreement in the past fifteen years. But it did come at a price. Although Polish foreign policy also added to the weakening of the Franco-Polish alliance, perhaps the greater sacrifice was Poland's cooperation in a 1934 Eastern Locarno project. It makes one wonder whether France would have chosen Poland and not the Soviet Union, to be its key partner in this design had the nonaggression pact not been signed.

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<sup>345</sup> Contrary to Beneš' views, Czechoslovakia was indeed threatened by Nazi Germany. It should also be noted that the failure of Prague to take up Warsaw's overtures for a united front in late 1932, early 1933 may have been another reason for Piłsudski to stabilize Poland's own Western frontier. Ibid, 25, 27.

## V. END OF AN ERA

### The Last Months of Sanacja's Foreign Policy under Pilsudski

Polish foreign policy entered 1935 with the sub-policy of "equilibrium," branding it a success in balancing Poland's two immediate dangers, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. But there was also considerable worry mounting in Warsaw, as Pilsudski's history of ailments began to catch up to him and his physical appearance had greatly deteriorated. Nothing could be foreseen with regards to the Marshal's health, and so no changes to foreign policy were instituted by the Sanacja regime. Rather, it now had to see what moves Poland's two neighbors would make and whether its French ally would continue to push for an Eastern Locarno.

With its chief architect now dead, it seemed as if the idea of an Eastern Locarno would be buried with Barthou. But the Frenchman's successor, Pierre Laval, revived the project despite having greater reservations than his predecessor about tying France in to an agreement with Moscow. His initial preference had been to attempt some sort of reconciliation between France and Germany in order to counter Hitler's sweeping reforms and actions.<sup>346</sup> But Laval decided to resume talks with his Soviet counterparts, particularly when London increasingly became interested in the prospect. But Polish and German refusal to take part in the pact caused the Soviet Union to declare that it would prefer to conclude the pact without the two. France grew particularly impatient with its Polish ally and the latter's firm stance against joining the Eastern Pact. Laroche, who had generally been a supporter of Warsaw's policies, now became one of Sanacja's vocal critics. In a meeting with Szembek in late January, the French Ambassador stated that

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<sup>346</sup> Laval was more interested in appeasement through the normalization and rebuilding of relations with Germany, as opposed to Barthou's policy of containing France's eastern neighbor. Radice, 54.

continuous German-Polish talks had evoked a feeling in France that Poland was beginning to attach minimal importance to the Franco-Polish alliance.<sup>347</sup> A few days later on February 3, Szembek asked Laroche if France would sign the pact without Poland and Germany. The Frenchman replied that it was quite possible and accused the Poles of walking hand-in-hand with the Germans, causing a general belief in Paris that Warsaw's political moves were in line with Berlin's.<sup>348</sup> The Ambassador's comments underlined overall French opinion at the time, with its frustrations over this front that Warsaw had unintentionally formed with Berlin in opposition to the Eastern Pact.

German-Polish relations had greatly improved with the concluding of a nonaggression pact in early 1934. The tariff war was officially discontinued and exchanges between both sides found more cordiality than tension. One notable exchange occurred in early February when Nazi Minister President Prussia Hermann Göring joined Lipski and Polish military officers on a hunting trip to Poland's Białowieża Forest. He met with Piłsudski after the endeavor to sound out the possibility of further improvement of German-Polish ties. He had previously met with Beck in January where he declared Hitler's intent to continue building relations with Poland, and abandon any chance at rapprochement with Russia, and assured Beck that Berlin would not sign the Eastern Pact.<sup>349</sup> When he met with the Marshal, Göring made similar statements starting with his desire to see further advances in good neighborly relations between both states. But despite being warned not to broach the topic, he began to express Berlin's dislike for

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<sup>347</sup> Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 222.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

Russia.<sup>350</sup> It was here that Piłsudski stopped the conversation from going any further by informing the Minister President that Poland's sole policy towards Moscow was "calm and moderate," stressing that Warsaw would not take up any new ventures that could bring about renewed tensions on the Eastern frontier. "We cannot allow ourselves to come to a state when we should have to sleep with a rifle in our bed."<sup>351</sup> The goal was to stress the sub-policy of equilibrium, and prevent Göring from reporting to Berlin that Poland could be seen as a supporter of its anti-Russian policies. But when the Göring broached the topic of Czechoslovakia, Piłsudski did not stray from stating Poland's dislike for its southern neighbor. The conversation returned to a cordial and calm setting when both men spoke of creating stronger ties between Danzig and Warsaw.

Germany's rearmament became public in early March when Hitler announced the existence of an air force and the reintroduction of military conscription. The announcement was met with protest and hostility throughout Europe, as it was a clear violation of the provisions for Germany's disarmament under the Versailles Treaty. To address this issue, various states convened at the Stresa Conference in April, where French, British, and Italian representatives agreed to reaffirm their commitment to maintaining the Locarno treaties and lodge an official protest against Germany for its violation. Yet neither side was willing to take up arms against Germany, a clear sign of idleness that was reaffirmed shortly afterwards with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Poland itself did not denounce Germany's violation, but rather expressed unease towards it as a way to prevent the favorable relations between both states from breaking. If

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<sup>350</sup> In an exchange with Szembek on January 31, Göring first touched upon these feelings to the Undersecretary, stating, "Germany needs a strong Poland, so that together their strengths could create a firewall against Russia." Ibid, 224.

<sup>351</sup> Beck, 30.

anything, Warsaw expressed deep resentment for being left out of the Stresa Conference. The so-called “Stresa Front” did little to pressure Hitler in to ceasing the rearmament. If anything, Hitler sought ways to falsely reassure the West of Germany’s peaceful intentions. Though he refused to involve Germany in the Eastern Pact, he ordered the Foreign Ministry to communicate a counterproposal to Laval where the clause on mutual assistance would be replaced with one that reaffirmed the provisions of the Kellogg-Briand Pact.<sup>352</sup> Paris and Moscow’s response to Berlin’s suggestion was negative and no breakthrough in negotiations occurred.

Throughout the interwar period, Great Britain had always expressed interest in reintroducing Germany to European politics and trade. Yet the island state had always been aloof to getting involved in any continental problems. But the quick rise of the Nazis and Germany’s announcement to rearm had forced London to take a more proactive role in meeting the European problem head on. Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Simon and Lord Privy Seal Anthony Eden embarked on a tour of European capitals including Berlin, to discuss German rearmament. Berlin assured the two diplomats that rearmament was just to ensure that Germany could protect itself in the event of conflict. Moscow however professed deep concerns over the issue, particularly when coupled with the increasing anti-Russian rhetoric being professed by key German officials. It was there that Eden had an exchange with Polish Ambassador Juliusz Łukasiewicz, informing the latter of the fear German rearmament was producing. He also broached the topic of the

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<sup>352</sup> Lisanne Radice argues that this German counterproposal may have been an effort to “weaken the new unity” created at the Stresa Conference. Radice, 58.



Eastern Pact and Soviet desires for a collective security system, only to be rebuffed by the Ambassador who cited Moscow's fears as being "unjustified."<sup>353</sup>

Eden soon made his way to Warsaw to meet with Beck and Piłsudski on April 2. In his meeting with the Polish Foreign Minister, the Lord Privy Seal recounted his meeting with Hitler. He stated that Hitler's dislike for the Eastern Pact was drawn from his preference to conclude nonaggression pacts with Germany's direct neighbors. The Chancellor also had no desire to return his state to the League and defended German rearmament by citing that Germany's neighbors possessed far more troop divisions than it did.<sup>354</sup> Eden also repeated the conversations he had with Stalin and Litvinov during his stay in Moscow, where tensions were quite high with regards to Germany's recent actions. Although there were no direct Polish-Soviet negotiations for the Eastern Pact, Litvinov stated that the Soviet Union would give "uncompromised assistance" to Poland if the latter acquiesced to the project.<sup>355</sup> Yet he did underline the Soviet line that the pact would be concluded with or without Poland and Germany. Quite receptive to Eden's report, Beck then took the opportunity to examine the above circumstances vis-à-vis the grand scheme of Polish foreign policy. He reminded the Lord Privy that Poland's security was in a favorable position now, with its borders stabilized, the existence of good relations with its two large neighbors, and its continuation of alliances with France and Romania. Though Beck had his reservations about the reliability of the League, he reaffirmed Poland's commitment to factoring in that institution with its foreign policy.

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<sup>353</sup> He argued that in the event of conflict, Soviet or German troops would have to cross Poland. But that possibility was eliminated since the latter had concluded nonaggression pacts with both sides, thus warranting the Ambassador's remark over Soviet fears. Karski, 199.

<sup>354</sup> "Notatka z rozmowy ministra spraw zagranicznych RP J. Becka z lordem tagnej pieczęci A. Edenem," AAN, MSZ, t. 110, reprinted in Jędruszczak and Nowak-Kiełbikowa, *Dokumenty*, II, 87-88.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

Eden then proceeded to inquire whether Warsaw would object to joining a pact that included both Germany and Russia, in which Beck responded that the Poles did not object to a multilateral pact as long as it guaranteed a dual stabilization of Poland's frontiers.<sup>356</sup>

According to Piłsudski, his meeting with Eden was an opportunity for the "clearing of relations between Warsaw and London."<sup>357</sup> It began with the Marshal complimenting the British Intelligence Service but also delicately criticizing it for investing too much confidence in the Denikin and Wrangel armies of the Russian Civil War.<sup>358</sup> The two spoke about Eden's trip to Moscow where the Englishman did not refrain from expressing his dislike for the Soviets. Though not much else is known about the Piłsudski-Eden meeting, it was regarded as a step towards a British-Polish rapprochement. When taking into account Beck's meeting with the Lord Privy, it seems Eden's trip to Warsaw was not necessarily to convince the Poles to join the Eastern Pact, but rather to feel out whether there existed a German-Polish collaboration in opposition to the pact. But more so, one should consider the visit as a British attempt to potentially bridge the gap in the Franco-Polish alliance through a British-Polish rapprochement. If France was so dependent on British foreign policy and if Great Britain could bring Poland onboard to cooperate amongst the two, it might lead to the future formation of a stronger block to counter the German threat. Eden left Warsaw satisfied but Beck and Piłsudski felt that he had severely underestimated the strength of the Soviet Union. The

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>357</sup> Beck, 84.

<sup>358</sup> Generals Anton Denikin and Pytor Wrangel were key leaders of the Russian White Army, whose goal was to retake control over Russia from the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War (1917-1922).

Marshal had warned Eden that, "...one could not judge Russia without first coming to know it deeply and substantially."<sup>359</sup>

As time went on, the pact lost most of its appeal to Moscow as provisions for mutual assistance vanished and were subsequently replaced by French demands for promises of nonaggression and consultation to resolve disputes. The Soviets began to slowly back away from negotiations due to these drastic makeovers, causing Paris to reconsider the pact's framework. To prevent Soviet abandonment and to find a counterweight to Nazi Germany, Laval proposed two separate agreements to keep the project alive. The new version would entail one agreement that created a provision for mutual assistance between France and Russia, while the second one would allow for the inclusion of Poland and Germany in the form of a multilateral pact. The Foreign Minister's aim was to "entangle the major powers and lesser allies in a network of accords, pacts, and fronts constituting a complex security system that would prevent a direct threat to France."<sup>360</sup> Like his predecessors, Laval's primary focus was France's security in light of the German threat. The Eastern Pact was unique because it entailed tying up its participants in legalities, rather than creating an advanced defensive system similar to the France's with East Central Europe.

Despite the new formula, Poland and Germany continued to resist becoming involved in this multilateral project. And so on May 2, 1935, the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Agreement was signed in Moscow, with the Czech-Soviet version following on May 16. The Polish response was overwhelmingly negative and in order to calm it, Laval headed to Warsaw on May 10 as a gesture of goodwill towards the Franco-Polish

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<sup>359</sup> Dębicki, 94. Komarnicki, *Diariusz*, I, 255.

<sup>360</sup> Wandycz, *Twilight*, 372.

alliance. It was there he attempted to give one last attempt at swaying Warsaw to join the second multilateral pact. However the Marshal's health had drastically declined to the extent that Beck was sent to meet with the French Foreign Minister. He reiterated the same points he made to Barthou in June 1934 and avoided any agreement on the matter.<sup>361</sup>

On the evening of May 10, Beck visited Piłsudski for the last time. In the short conversation, the Marshal expressed his concern over the agreement that Paris had concluded with Moscow, stating, "This cannot end well."<sup>362</sup> He directed Beck to disassociate Warsaw from that alliance, but to strengthen and maintain Poland's own with France. Marshal Piłsudski's last advice to Beck was for Polish foreign policy to stay idle for a certain time and to wait and see what the rest of Europe would do, presumably in response to the Franco-Soviet pact and Germany's continuing rearmament.<sup>363</sup> Two days later Marshal Józef Piłsudski succumbed to liver cancer, exactly nine years after his coup d'état. His death brought great mourning to the Second Polish Republic, from admirers and critics alike. But it also concluded the nine-year period of time that Sanacja directed Polish foreign policy, one that provided the Republic with stability and a steady path to follow in order to maintain its independence in the continuously changing European political scene.

### **A Fateful Epilogue: The Last Four Years of Independence**

After Piłsudski's death, the Sanacja regime came to be known as the regime of the Colonels, based on its makeup of military men who were close confidants of the late Marshal's. Beck continued to solely dictate foreign policy himself, one that would follow

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<sup>361</sup> Dębicki, 95.

<sup>362</sup> Beck, 88.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 88.

“the lines established by the Marshal...but that tactical means should be adapted to the standards attainable by ordinary men, lest the dangerous error should be committed of imitating the means of action as well the activities of a personality of such greatness.”<sup>364</sup>

What this meant was that Beck would carry out Piłsudski’s last wishes but refrain from using the latter’s fame or legacy as a means to achieve or execute them.

The new Constitution that was completed in April empowered the presidency to a greater extent, strengthening Mościcki’s position in Polish politics. Before his death, Piłsudski had issued a decree for the position of Inspector General of Armies to be bestowed upon one of his long-time and loyal subordinates, General Edward Rydz-Śmigły, which was granted by the President within days. It was the General and other various military personnel that made up the Colonels’ regime, with the President and Beck steering clear of associating themselves with the faction. Over time, the Colonels began to exploit their positions in government and gradually seek greater ruling autonomy within them. This eventually created a political rivalry between their camp and the Presidency’s, which was supported by the government supraparty the BBWR. Although the majority of Polish historiography has downplayed the rivalry, it is without a doubt that it came at a poor time following the Marshal’s death. It failed to alleviate the economic, social, military, and foreign issues that plagued the Republic in its final four years of existence.<sup>365</sup>

The road to World War II lay in Nazi Germany’s foreign policy for the last four years before war engulfed Europe. Hitler had played a double game in executing his

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>365</sup> For a closer study on the regime of the Colonels, consult Edward Wynot’s *Polish Politics in Transition: The Camp of National Unity and the Struggle for Power, 1935-1939* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974).

designs to completely undo the Versailles system and conquer the continent. While he continued to practice a policy of nonaggression and stress Germany's intentions to coexist peacefully with its neighbors, a façade lay behind this where he progressed German rearmament and pushed for more concessions from the West. But the latter did not come from the kind of diplomacy that individuals like Stresemann had used to rebuild postwar Germany. Hitler would find situations vulnerable to a *fait accompli* in Berlin's favor, at the expense of the four-year period that was also known for the West's infamous policy of appeasement. The latter wanted to avoid war at all costs, and so step-by-step Hitler increasingly took full advantage of that position.

On March 7, 1936 German troops marched into the demilitarized Rhineland, clearly violating the Versailles Treaty and the agreements made seven years prior to prematurely evacuate the area. An immediate danger arose that in the case of a German attack on France's allies, Czechoslovakia or Poland, Paris would not be able to easily march into the Rhineland and separate Germany from its industrial heartland.<sup>366</sup> While Hitler justified the action by citing the Franco-Soviet pact as a violation of the 1925 Locarno agreement, the irony in the Rhineland's German remilitarization lay in that Locarno's guarantors Great Britain and Italy remained idle. Mussolini had for some time flirted with the Nazis and chose neutrality, while London evaded the option of using force as they saw it as a French matter to initiate mobilization. Reliant on British foreign policy, Paris chose to sound out Warsaw's response rather than mobilize. Beck may have had reservations about the French, but in carrying out the late Marshal's wishes, he maintained the alliance with France by issuing a declaration that Poland would not

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<sup>366</sup> George Sakwa, "The Franco-Polish Alliance and the Remilitarization of the Rhineland," *The Historical Journal* 16, (1973), 129.

hesitate to carry out its obligations to aid its ally if it was attacked by Germany.<sup>367</sup> However he made it known that the declaration only applied if German troops had stepped on French soil as stated under the alliance's military convention.<sup>368</sup> This move may have been to prevent any ripples from forming within German-Polish relations, but also to reapproach Poland's ally with caution, based on the previous years of maligned cooperation.

Throughout the spring, the French General Staff approached its Polish counterpart in an effort to procure a more concrete promise of Polish allegiance to the growing threat of Nazi Germany. The growth of his political influence and power compelled General Rydz-Smigły to take up the matter of bringing closer cooperation between both sides. It was in late August that the General visited Paris and concluded the Rambouillet Agreement where France agreed to transfer a credit of one billion francs in hard currency to Poland for the modernization of its military forces.<sup>369</sup> It became a milestone in the Franco-Polish alliance as it began a genuine rapprochement between both sides after years of estranged relations.<sup>370</sup> Although there was an effort by France and Poland to improve their military cooperation as a precaution, no concrete measure was taken by the West or Poland in response to the remilitarization of the Rhineland.

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<sup>367</sup> Beck, 110. Warsaw made it clear that Warsaw's nonaggression pact with Berlin did not impede its "freedom of action within the framework of the alliance." *Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939: Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Ambassador of Poland*, ed. Waclaw Jędrzejewicz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 8-9.

<sup>368</sup> Szembek had mentioned that Poland would not assist France if it undertook a mission to enter the Rhineland to banish German forces, as this was not a defensive measure. An interesting thought comes to mind as to whether the French used this argument to dismiss Piłsudski's plan for a preventive war. Karski, 149. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 441.

<sup>369</sup> Jędrzejewicz, *Diplomat in Paris*, 18. It should be noted that the French attempted to attach some political and military measures to the agreement only to be rebuffed by the Poles, who may have felt such an extensive initiative could provoke Berlin's suspicion.

<sup>370</sup> The Agreement was also the subject of a controversy, as Rydz-Smigły had executed it without Beck's full discretion. Beck and historians alike have noted that French dealings with the General may have been an attempt to create a rivalry between both men and even lead to Beck's dismissal. Beck, 121-122. Jędrzejewicz, *Diplomat in Paris*, 15. Wandycz, *Twilight*, 417.

Having taken the Rhineland with very little opposition, Berlin now fixed its eyes on Austria. For years, Hitler and the Nazi party had stressed the unity of the German-speaking people through an *Anschluss* where the German Reich would incorporate the Austrian state. Since the assassination of the latter's president, Engelbert Dolfuss, Vienna had come under heavy Nazi influence. But Dolfuss' successors refused to yield to Hitler's demands, leading to the entrance of German troops into Austria on March 12, 1938, where the public displayed very little opposition. While the West took no action, Poland took advantage of a highly publicized border incident with Lithuania as part of Warsaw's desire to create some sort of defensive bloc of states between Germany and Russia.<sup>371</sup> Beck saw the reopening of diplomatic relations with Lithuania as the first step towards this conception.

In the past ten years there were some efforts to conclude a Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement, only for Piłsudski to dismiss them on the grounds that Kaunas continued to send unaccredited diplomats to negotiate with Warsaw. In late 1934, Beck had met with Prime Minister Stasys Lozoraitis at the latter's request to begin the thaw in their states' relations. But the talks went nowhere as Beck felt that his counterpart did not offer a clear solution to the improvement of relations.<sup>372</sup> Thus border incidents continued as did the mutual oppression of each side's minorities, culminating in a highly publicized incident on March 11 when a Polish border guard was shot and killed by some Lithuanians. After a conference held in Warsaw's royal castle on March 17, Beck issued a forty-eight hour ultimatum to Kaunas to resume diplomatic relations in order to put an

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<sup>371</sup> Beck's design for a defensive bloc involved the Scandinavian, Baltic, and Danubian states. The goal was to create closer cooperation and unity in an effort to prevent Soviet or German influence from penetrating these states. Most historians have argued that this idea came far too late to find success or interest. Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 49.

<sup>372</sup> Beck, 76-77.



end to the exhausting disturbances, or face the consequences. While key military figures in the Colonels regime favored a more severe response to the incident, Beck felt that an immediate military move would only worsen Poland's reputation in the eyes of the West.<sup>373</sup> Two days later, the Lithuanians officially accepted the ultimatum primarily due to the failure of the West to restrain Poland and find a better solution. The whole affair in itself was a Polish response to the *Anschluss* in two ways. Not only did Poland seek solidarity with its northern neighbor in the wake of Nazi Germany's territorial expansion; its ultimatum was perhaps a warning directed at Berlin that Warsaw remained vigilant of Germany's increasing aggressive tendencies.

Hitler now turned his attention to Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland, a strip of land that bordered the Reich and contained a large German minority. In the wake of the *Anschluss*, pro-Nazi propaganda and agitation rapidly increased in the region to the extent that it gave Berlin a precedent to demand Prague's secession of it. The latter appealed to the West and its French ally for aid to combat Hitler's ultimatum, which had been backed by military preparations to invade the Czech state. But the Western policy of appeasement infamously prevailed yet again in the hope that the Reich's appetite for territory could be satisfied through moderation as opposed to the barrel of a gun. Thus British, French, Italian, and German representatives convened in Munich on September 29, 1938 to conclude the Munich Agreement, where the Sudetenland was peacefully awarded to Nazi Germany.

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<sup>373</sup> In order to back up the ultimatum, the Poles had taken military measures by placing army garrisons on alert near the border. But like Piłsudski, Beck had not intention to annex or even invade Lithuania. He defended that Poland's northern neighbor had a right to independence and to conduct its own policy. Ibid, 146. George Sakwa, "The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania in March 1938," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 55, (1977), 215-216, 221. For a more detailed study of the ultimatum, please consult Piotr Łossowski's *Ultimatum polskie do litwy: 17 marca 1938 roku* (Warszawa: Trio, 2010).

But just a few days prior to Munich, Prague faced another territorial crisis when it received Warsaw's announcement that it would no longer recognize the minority agreement between both its governments signed in 1925. Attached to this statement was also the demand for Prague's secession of Teschen, something that Beck had formulated a few weeks prior in order to align with Germany's demand for the Sudetenland.<sup>374</sup> Anti-Czech propaganda was ramped up as were preparations for the mobilization of Polish forces on the border, all aimed at pressuring Prague to accept the demand. Beck's argument was that Poland needed to take the valued area back before Berlin laid claim to it, as the Sudetenland's annexation would put the German-Polish boundary close to Teschen.<sup>375</sup> The Polish move caught the West by surprise and drew its scorn, particularly from France who held alliances with both Eastern European states. Preoccupied with moderating Hitler's demands and preventing a German attack on Czechoslovakia, the West did not respond to the Czech-Polish crisis. Beneš, who had succeeded President Masaryk a year earlier, vainly attempted to moderate the situation by writing to Mościcki. Finally on September 30, the Poles put forth a twelve-hour ultimatum for the secession to be completed by noon of October 1 or Polish troops would march in and seize Teschen. Powerless, Prague gave in and the Poles annexed the territory that the Czechs had forcefully seized from them in 1919 during the Polish-Soviet war. The Munich crisis not only became the highlight of Western appeasement, but also the affirmation that Poland

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<sup>374</sup> Warsaw feared that the Sudetenland debacle may open the Czech border to Soviet interference which was considered "intolerable." But they also were not keen to German concessions at the expense of Czechoslovakia. Thus the Poles laid claim to Teschen in order to protect their interests from the above postulates. Jędrzejewicz, *Diplomat in Berlin*, 406.

<sup>375</sup> Beck justified the Polish demand by citing that the recent territorial adjustments (i.e. the Munich Conference) were being made by a conference held by the Four Powers, and not the League's Covenant, whose foundation had been destroyed by this. Thus he cites that Poland needed to act immediately, most likely to avoid having another conference seize Teschen in the near future. This came at the clash of German-Polish interests over the important railway junction in the town of Bogumin. Beck, 160. Cienciala, *Poland and the Great Powers*, 135.

would conduct its own aggressive policy to protect its interests and position in Europe in the wake of new attempts to establish a Great Power directorate.

With Central Europe increasingly falling under Nazi control, Warsaw began to examine Poland's position in the region. Beginning in October 1938, Poland began to search for allies within the region as it assumed that Germany would continue to drive east with its expansionist agenda. In mid-October Beck paid a visit to Romania to propose the idea of Warsaw becoming a broker for a Hungarian-Romanian *détente* and territorial settlement. Beck was under the strong assumption that Germany would continue to swallow up the Czech state and divide the Baltic region from the Danubian basin.<sup>376</sup> Under these circumstances, it would be wise to form a tripartite collaboration in order to shield the region from German penetration. Beck's idea was for Budapest to annex sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, while Bucharest could extend its border up to the Jablonica-Marmaros Sziget region. The end result would be Poland having a border with Hungary and Romania. Yet this plan did not materialize because Beck refused to militarily aid Hungary's annexation of Ruthenia.

But the bigger obstacle to the formation of the bloc was Poland's Romanian ally. Relations between both states were cold since the Romanian-Soviet debacle in late 1932. As the years went on, Titulescu began to weaken the alliance by replacing Polish influence with French and Russian ones.<sup>377</sup> In his view, the latter's collective security schemes were of greater value and interest for Romania's security. Since Beck refused to

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<sup>376</sup> Beck recounts in his memoir, "...whether one liked it or not Czechoslovakia was definitely disintegrating." Beck, 165.

<sup>377</sup> It is a striking how the staunchly anti-Soviet Titulescu became favorable towards a collective scheme involving the Soviets in a matter of two years. The cause of this may have been to satisfy Romania's French ally and to avoid being an obstacle to something like the Eastern Pact. But the other reason may have been that Romania began to fear Nazi Germany to a greater extent, thus joining the other anti-German states in the search for collective security.

involve Warsaw in them, Titulescu began to view him as more of an enemy than an ally. But in 1936 the Romanian threatened to resign from his post following a disagreement, only to have the King refuse to give in to his demands this time. Titulescu was dismissed, and according to some sources, it was thanks to Warsaw exploiting the King's interest in reaffirming the Polish-Romanian alliance.<sup>378</sup> Despite the return to a pro-Polish policy, Bucharest continued to forestall any genuine rapprochement politically and militarily. Thus it was no surprise that Romania rejected the Polish overture of a *détente* with Hungary for fear of the annexation of Ruthenia triggering the latter's territorial aggrandizement.<sup>379</sup>

Poland began to feel the pinch of being geopolitically isolated yet again as relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated considerably since 1935. The relationship suffered considerable strain due to the failure of the Eastern Pact. While Warsaw tried to influence the West to reconsider entering an agreement with Moscow, the latter accused the former of sabotaging the collective security scheme. But since Warsaw possessed favorable relations with Berlin since the conclusion of their nonaggression pact, Moscow continuously accused the Poles of becoming partners with the Nazis. Although tensions cooled to a degree when both sides concluded economic agreements in the first half of 1939, any cooperation in the wake of the expanding Third Reich was out of the question. Moscow resumed its distrust for Warsaw, while the latter had adopted a new

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<sup>378</sup> For a discussion on Warsaw's influence over Bucharest and Titulescu's subsequent dismissal, please consult the Mikulicz article. Although the article may be very critical of Beck, Warsaw's general dislike of Titulescu was no secret and has been expressed in various government correspondences.

<sup>379</sup> Dębicki, 128.

conviction that siding with Russia would “provoke Berlin’s wrath and could conceivably lead to an outbreak of hostilities.”<sup>380</sup>

Nazi Germany’s next victim was Poland when Hitler’s new Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop submitted a proposal to Lipski on October 24, 1938. It outlined the return of Danzig to Germany, the building of a superhighway across Pomerania, and asked for future cooperation starting with Poland joining the 1937 Anti-Comintern Pact aimed against the Soviet Union.<sup>381</sup> Without hesitation the Poles refused the offer, citing that cooperation against Russia would end disastrously for Poland, and reminding Berlin of Hitler’s statements a year ago that Danzig should remain in Poland’s sphere of influence. By early spring, Warsaw decided to take steps to counter the increasing German pressure. Since 1935, there was not much activity in the British-Polish rapprochement. But with Nazi Germany’s continuous aggrandizement, both sides reopened negotiations to form an alliance to oppose any further concessions to Hitler’s demands. Thus in April 1939, Great Britain formally guaranteed Poland’s security should the latter become the victim of German aggression. Seeing the change in British foreign policy, the French soon reaffirmed their commitment to the alliance with Poland.<sup>382</sup>

Berlin viewed these recent events as defiant and a rejection to the German proposal that Poland become a satellite state. Hitler made one last attempt at demanding the return of Danzig only to have Beck outright refuse the ultimatum in a famous speech given before the Sejm on May 5. Poland now became an obstacle to Nazi Germany’s

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<sup>380</sup> Budurowycz, 148.

<sup>381</sup> Germany had actually touched upon Poland’s involvement in the Anti-Comintern Pact as early as November 1937 and March 1938. As compensation for agreeing to this proposal, Germany offered Poland a twenty-five year nonaggression pact. Jędrzejewicz, *Diplomat in Berlin*, 453, 535.

<sup>382</sup> In April, French and Polish General Staffs were able to conclude a new interpretation to the alliance’s military convention where both sides agreed to “reciprocal, immediate, and direct assistance in the event of aggression.” Dębicki, 145.

foreign policy, thus prompting Berlin to cut a deal with its enemy, former ally, and above all, Poland's feared rival: the Soviet Union. The concluding of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact on August 23, 1939 reaffirmed both states' renunciation to wage war against each other or for one side to aid a third party against the other. But a top-secret protocol was attached to the agreement that sealed the fate of the Second Polish Republic. In the early morning hours of September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland to start World War II. As a result, Great Britain and France declared war only to have their actual mobilization to aid their ally delayed by several weeks. Help never came and Polish forces were forced to protect their rear after Soviet forces invaded on September 17. The policy of *równowaga* or "equilibrium" had failed and by October 6, the Second Polish Republic ceased to exist on the map of Europe.

## CONCLUSION

Sanacja's foreign policy was based on the premise of removing Poland from its geopolitical isolation and attaining a guarantee for its security. For the first six years while Marshal Józef Piłsudski consolidated Sanacja's control over Poland's domestic scene, August Zaleski directed foreign affairs where Polish security interests were advanced in a more proactive way through the League of Nations and the establishment of direct contact with neighbors and allies. But like his predecessors he too learned the difficulty in doing this, as Great Power states such as Great Britain and France favored cooperating with Germany, yesterday's enemy but today's partner. By the 1930s the latter had made more progress in shedding the shackles of Versailles, as the attainment of an early evacuation of Allied troops from the Rhineland could now be placed next to the accomplishments made at Locarno by German foreign policy. Having secured its western frontier, Berlin could now shift its attention to the east to undo further undo the injustice that Versailles had caused Germany.

Seeing the likely possibility of a future negotiation for territorial revision, Marshal Józef Piłsudski decided to direct Polish foreign policy towards a more independent course, where full cooperation with Poland's allies or the League would no longer be stressed due to their willingness to sacrifice the Polish security interests. He appointed his long-time and loyal subordinate, Colonel Józef Beck, to succeed Zaleski and direct the new orientation that Polish foreign policy had taken. The latter was highlighted by adoption of strong-arm tactics towards the Free City of Danzig, which continued to be a hotbed for Polish-German relations. But the greatest feat that defined Sanacja's reign over foreign policy was the creation of its sub-policy of *równowaga* or "equilibrium."

Just two years after securing Poland's eastern frontier via a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, Beck and Piłsudski had taken advantage of the thawing of Polish-German relations to conclude a similar pact with Berlin that secured the western frontier. The second pillar of Sanacja's foreign policy had been raised, with Polish concerns over security now satisfied through peace with its two aggressive neighbors and the preservation of its alliances.

But was Polish foreign policy under Sanacja a success, and if so, did it come at a price? There were plenty of setbacks and only a few triumphs, but the main conclusion to draw from this nine-year period is whether it placed the Republic in a better position than its predecessors, and to an extent, its successors as well. The small historiography that actually examines the successes and failures of Polish foreign policy tends to study the policy of equilibrium under Beck and Piłsudski, and not so much the first few years under Zaleski. Yet it is worth reviewing before a critique and or appraisal of the nine-year period is presented. Of course there are two schools of thought for Polish foreign policy: those that are critical of it and goes as far as to blame it for contributing to the start of World War II, and those that seek to exonerate it of the latter charge and argue that its decisions were favorable in light of the dangerous changes being made to the postwar-Versailles system.

The typical criticism of Polish foreign policy stems from the German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934, where historians accused it of breaking the Franco-Polish alliance and bringing Nazi Germany out of geopolitical isolation. With this, the members of Sanacja have often been labeled as pro-Nazi or "Nazi agents," the latter being an accusation Soviet historiography has particularly subjected Colonel Beck to. But Anna



M. Cienciała's 1975 article dismisses many of these stereotypes by looking at their sources. The early works that reviewed Polish foreign policy tended to level harsh criticisms against it, mainly because they examined it through the scope of British foreign policy, one that held no interest in Polish affairs and favored Germany's recovery, whether economically or territorially.<sup>383</sup> Most works that label Beck as a German agent or collaborator tend to be Soviet sources, which attempt to justify the failure of the Second Republic by grouping it in the same fascist camp as Nazi Germany. Cienciała acknowledged that Beck may have overly expressed his dislike for his French and Czech counterparts, but based on the shortcomings of the latter two and the European community as a whole, one could hardly find substantive evidence that Beck tried purposely weaken the alliance with France or collude with Hitler against Czechoslovakia in 1938.<sup>384</sup> According to Henry L. Roberts, Beck's actions may have added to the further weakening of the international order at the time, but unlike other European leaders he took a courageous stand by defying Hitler and his territorial demands.<sup>385</sup> Yet there are still some Polish historians like Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz who completely blame Beck for blindly playing into the hands of Germany. Others like Jan Karski have been softer in their critiques, citing that Beck should bear all the responsibility for his policy's

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<sup>383</sup> According to Cienciała, the liberal British newspapers and periodicals that tended to be critical of Polish foreign policy heavily influenced British foreign policy. Anna M. Cienciała, "Polish Foreign Policy, 1926-1939. 'Equilibrium': Stereotype and Reality," *The Polish Review* 20, (1975), 44-46.

<sup>384</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz's "Colonel Beck and the French: Roots of Animosity?" *The International History Review* 3, (1981), 115-127, examines why the French held reservations over Beck beginning with his days as a military attaché in Paris. Yet one should still consider the troubles Beck experienced with the French, as many their Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers expressed their dislike of him and his policies. It brings up the question whether personal rivalries could have poisoned the Franco-Polish alliance and caused both sides to divert their interests from it.

<sup>385</sup> Roberts, 611.

successes and failures, since he molded the Foreign Ministry after his own image and philosophy.<sup>386</sup>

Cienciala is part of the group of historians who attempt to exonerate Polish foreign policy of the above accusations, by justifying its methods and decision-making due to the difficult positions the European community was putting states like Poland in. The most popular example is the deterioration of the Franco-Polish alliance, which this camp tends to point the finger at the former for attempting to retreat from its obligations. French foreign policy was similar to that of Great Britain's, in that it chose to sacrifice Eastern Europe's interests in return for stabilizing its own border with Germany. When attempts were made by Paris to revise the alliance's military convention, the Poles outright refused. For precautionary measures, they began to conduct an independent policy from that of their ally's, since the French continuously failed to support or even include them in major negotiations and schemes. Defending the policy of equilibrium is not only linked to citing the problems plaguing the Franco-Polish alliance, but also the advantageous opportunity that Poland had found itself in, to conclude nonaggression pacts with both of its two large neighbors. In 1932 and 1934, relations with the Soviet Union and Germany were favorable enough where negotiations could take place to reach some kind of an agreement. Warsaw primarily accomplished this because both of its neighbors began to drift away from their own mutual cooperation, dampening the spirits of Rapallo and Berlin. Yet Cienciala has cited that historians have misinterpreted the policy, as Beck and Piłsudski did not aim for Poland to balance Germany and Russia alone and forever. Rather, the goal was to strengthen "Poland's position so as to counterbalance France's concentration on security in the West to the detriment of the

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<sup>386</sup> Karski, 91.

East.”<sup>387</sup> What this probably meant was that Polish foreign policy still intended to strengthen the alliance with France and maintain the sub-policy of equilibrium until something better and stronger came along to replace it, preferably in cooperation with the West.

Yet the two-sided historiography still tends to overlook other issues that give strength to either interpretation of Polish foreign policy. Perhaps the number one problem that the Republic faced was territorial disputes with its neighbors. Without a doubt this issue caused tension if not an absolute severance in relations between Poland and states like Germany, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. The Sanacja regime inherited the burden of the Republic’s territorial acquisitions and losses from the immediate postwar years. Yet it maintained its arrogance of entitlement to certain areas like Upper Silesia and Vilna, and the stubbornness to let the Teschen question poison Polish-Czech relations. With regards to the latter, the Republic was better off renouncing its claims to it and resurrecting the failed Polish-Czech negotiations for better relations in the early 1920s. Although Teschen was heavily Polish in ethnic makeup, one can make the argument that Poland got away with its ownership of the predominantly ethnic German Pomerania. The Polish claims to Vilna are themselves questionable, whether its ownership was truly worth the extinction of relations with Lithuania. A Polish Vilna was part of Piłsudski’s postwar vision to rebuild the borders of pre-1772 Poland. But the Marshal failed to realize that his concept did not fit in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century makeup of postwar Europe, as there now existed an independent Lithuanian state whose claims to Vilna long outdated Poland’s. In terms of security against the likes of Germany and Russia, the Republic might have benefited more from stronger strategic relationship with

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<sup>387</sup> Cienciala, “Polish Foreign Policy,” 49.

its Czech and Lithuanian neighbors, rather than pieces of territory that made its borders all the more awkward and difficult to defend.

Frustrations over the alliance with France were clearly present, but Piłsudski never desired to abandon it despite his growing doubt over its reliability. Yet the Polish decision to simply keep the exclusive partnership around does not excuse the Republic from accepting an equal weight in blame for the alliance's impotence. Yes, the foreign policy of both states widely differed in how to achieve the greatest guarantee for security. But this did not mean that Poland had to completely stray away from cooperation with France. Though Warsaw had preferred to act independently of its ally, it made a great error in not regularly informing France of negotiations with Nazi Germany in late 1933. Piotr S. Wandycz has cited that the alliance and the nonaggression pact were "clashing" with each other, probably because French and Polish policy towards Germany never once aligned at the same time.<sup>388</sup> The latter may have had its shortcomings throughout the 1920s in consulting its Polish ally on political decisions, but Poland would have been better off not imitating French gestures of disrespect and violations of the alliance's political clause. Thus this Polish tit-for-tat attitude weakened the alliance by inadvertently promoting further alienation and mutual distrust, rather than it strengthening Sanacja's self-dependent foreign policy.

Poland had mainly refused to join the Little Entente after the conclusion of World War I, due to the Teschen dispute with Czechoslovakia. Thus it is fair to accuse the state of creating a division in France's Eastern European defensive system right from the start of the Interwar period. Years later this would have repercussions for the Sanacja regime, as individuals like Beck and Piłsudski continued to withhold their willingness to

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<sup>388</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz, "Polish Foreign Policy: Some Observations," *The Polish Review* 20, (1975), 60.

negotiate with Poland's southern neighbor lest it rectify the territorial dispute. But could Warsaw have been able to accept Prague's pro-Russian philosophy? Possibly. It still maintained the alliance with France despite the latter's courting of Germany and later, the Soviet Union. Romania regarded the latter as its number one threat to independence, yet it still cooperated with Czechoslovakia within the framework of the Little Entente. If anything, Warsaw could have negotiated its neutrality from supporting any Czech-Russian schemes, and perhaps focus relations more towards a Polish-Czech military cooperation.

Since touching upon Romania, it is only fair to critique that alliance with Poland as well. Polish complaints over its southeastern ally stemmed from the weakness of Bucharest's military command and later, that the alliance did not benefit Polish concerns over Germany. Perhaps diverting more attention towards cooperation between the Polish and Romanian General Staff would have alleviated the first issue. With regards to the second, the Poles should not have attempted to change the alliance to now accommodate both, a Russian and or German attack. The Polish-Romanian alliance should have been maintained and strengthened to keep the Russian threat in check. Whereas some may say that the personality of Nicolae Titulescu was unbearable, others would defend the Romanian by citing him as being cut from the same cloth as Beneš or Briand, and adhering to the League and the Little Entente's interests. Regardless, Sanacja may have missed its opportunity to settle tensions with the Foreign Minister when he began to realize that Romania could be threatened by Germany. When adding a stronger Polish-Romanian relationship to an improved Polish-Little Entente one, maybe Piłsudski and

later Beck's vision of a East Central European bloc of states could have been realized to maintain the peace of Europe and the security of its individual states.

The leadership of Marshal Piłsudski and the Sanacja regime also deserves some criticism for any shortcomings or negligence during this nine-year period. One of the great problems that Poland ran into during the September 1939 campaign was the inefficiency of its military. Despite having one of the largest militaries during the Interwar period, by the mid-1930s its technology, arsenal, and strategy was beginning to become outdated.<sup>389</sup> The Republic was able to procure French loans to build its war stockpile, but it never truly got around to it. Piłsudski may have been preoccupied with domestic and foreign policy, but it comes as a shock that the Marshal would allow the military's capabilities to deteriorate dangerously, especially given his position as Inspector General of Armies, War Minister, and his personal dedication for "his" army. But by the time he realized that the army needed work and that the buildup of a navy was necessary in 1934, it was too late.<sup>390</sup> The great mind and talents of the Marshal's began to fade away and were replaced by a prolonged illness that would claim his life just a few months later.

One must wonder whether the three primary leaders of Sanacja's foreign policy were cut out to direct it? Above all else, Piłsudski was a capable and intelligent military leader who lacked the qualifications of a diplomat. He understood the dangers that faced Poland, but he may have failed to realize how relations with other states truly worked,

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<sup>389</sup> One should consult the chapter entitled, "The Army after the Coup," in Joseph Rothschild's *Piłsudski's Coup D'état*, pages 188-193. The chapter allots space for a lively debate on the extent that the army and its state of modernity played with regards to the September 1939 disaster. Rothschild considers the argument that the Marshal's coup had inflicted deep emotional and psychological wounds within the army that lasted up until the end of the Republic. Other factors that rendered it ineffective were the forced-retirements of Piłsudski's opponents, who were more qualified and talented than their replacements. Essentially, the army became politicized rather than focused on modernization and preparation for future conflicts. Rothschild,

<sup>390</sup> Beck, 74.

which at times allowed his impatience and frustration to get the better of him. At times the end result was something as severe as alienating Poland's neighbors and or allies, if not logic in general. One may even see his obsession over a Russian threat as one that negatively affected his decisions, particularly when the General Staff's report in 1934 saw Germany as the greater threat to Poland in the future. Beck too, lacked the diplomatic skills and like his mentor, approached foreign policy from a military strategic standpoint. According to Roberts, the problem with Beck was that he rose through the ranks of the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry too fast.<sup>391</sup> His previous positions were all military and intelligence related, thus he probably would have been more valuable in that facet of Poland's government. One must wonder whether he too, obsessed over a Russian threat and perhaps made incorrect judgments on the Nazi regime in his own study of it. Zaleski on the other hand, possessed all the qualifications and skills of a diplomat. The only error to his methods was that he placed too much emphasis in conducting Polish foreign policy vis-à-vis the League of Nations, which realistically had always been dominated by the Western states who overlooked Polish interests. Thus when it came to protecting the latter in light of events such as the premature evacuation of the Rhineland, Zaleski found himself in the same position as his predecessor, Aleksander Skrzyński, appeasing Western desires and accepting a risky promise that Poland's security was not in jeopardy.<sup>392</sup> One hesitates to but finds it appropriate to label the former foreign minister as hypocritical, as he failed to set himself and his methods apart from his predecessor's.

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<sup>391</sup> Roberts, 580.

<sup>392</sup> Wandycz cites that up until 1932-1933, there was a continuation of Skrzyński's foreign policy. Wandycz, "Polish Foreign Policy," 59.

Briefly looking at the last four years of the Republic's existence, one must wonder whether Sanacja's foreign policy set up the Colonels regime for disaster. Even though Beck continued Piłsudski's policies and final wishes, he did have a tendency to maintain better contact with Germany than with Russia. When it came to major events like the *Anschluss* and the Sudetenland crisis, Beck arguably took a page out of Hitler's playbook by handing Lithuania an ultimatum and annexing Teschen when Czechoslovakia was vulnerable. These kinds of actions drew disappointment from the West and could have sent Hitler the wrong messages of hope that Polish aggression could be used in the Nazi crusade against Russia.<sup>393</sup> But when Poland refused such a venture and garnered British guarantees for its independence instead, it may have provoked the Führer to now devise a plan with the Soviet Union to bring about Poland's fate. Though the alliance with France was solidly reaffirmed in 1939, it was too late and earlier efforts had been wasted in the wake of the Rhineland's remilitarization. Thus not only was the sub-policy of equilibrium not maintained in the last four years, too much time had been wasted in creating a new security system to replace the former and the West's outdated Locarno guarantee.

Yet when looking at the drastically changing political atmosphere in Europe during this nine-year period, can one truly blame Sanacja for directing a self-dependent foreign policy that created an equilibrium that solely favored Poland? World War I had created this great stigma or rather fear throughout Europe, of another small conflict dragging all states into another continental war. As a result, many states such as the Western ones chose to avoid confrontation through arbitration and or concessions. Once

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<sup>393</sup> I find Cienciala's following observation quite interesting that Beck's foreign policy had been one of "...tacking with the wind to avoid isolated confrontation with Germany as long as this was possible." Cienciala, "Polish Foreign Policy," 52. If one takes this into consideration and the failed concept of a united bloc of states from Scandinavia to the Danubian basin, Beck's policies had backfired on him and thus by late 1938, early 1939 Poland had found itself geopolitically isolated yet again.



Germany scored a victory at Locarno, it continued to push for greater reintegration into European politics, and demand more concessions to reduce its Versailles punishments. The critical error committed by the West was the failure to abandon their accommodating stance and uphold the postwar settlements, even after Adolf Hitler had taken power and removed Germany from the League of Nations and Disarmament Conference.

But another significant problem lay in the League's decay. Its original purpose was to preserve peace and promote security, acting as an arbitrator when conflict arose between member states. Yet Piłsudski's observation that the institution had become a tool for the Great Powers to dictate theirs and the smaller states' interests proved correct. But a dangerous precedent arose within it, as the small powers began to follow and support almost all decisions made by the Great ones. This opened the door for schemes such as the Four Power Pact to come to fruition with little to no opposition, with the League being reduced to a rubber stamp in approving the Great Powers' desires and decisions. Since the latter institution lacked practically any plurality, it thus became more of a social club whose powers to enforce the postwar Versailles order became utterly ineffective and reduced to nothing more than a platform for verbal shaming.

The Second Polish Republic's independence and existence heavily relied on the above. As the League decayed and Germany's strength grew, Poland's security diminished and its fears amplified. With the deterioration of the alliance with France, the Republic had two choices: follow the West's lead to uncertainty or take a new, self-controlled direction. With the emergence of the Sanacja regime, the second choice was arguably forced upon it. Although risky, it allowed Poland room for maneuverability in making decisions that benefited the state and its security concerns. Thus when the

opportunities arose to conclude mutual agreements with Germany and the USSR, they were taken without hesitation and created a balance in the East to make up for the gaps created by Locarno. Warsaw's decisions did not always come with the rest of Europe's approval, but nor did the often accepted French or British ones either. If the West only accommodated its own position, it thus set a precedent if not a model for the rest of Europe to follow. Sanacja's Poland saw this and adopted this method. And when it fell in 1939, so did the Western trendsetters.

In general, the absence of European unity and the domination by individual states' selfish tendencies to seek out solely their own security at the cost of everyone else's, may have been the ultimate mistake in which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union capitalized on in 1939. But if there is one last thing to consider in defense of Polish foreign policy during the Interwar period as a whole, it is that the geopolitical positions of states like France or Great Britain's were never truly endangered, as history was in their favor. The same could never be said for the Second Polish Republic, as it was reborn and forced to make any decisions to protect its position between not one, but two large and aggressive neighbors.

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