
ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE THE NATIONAL AFFILIATION OF LVIV AND VILNIUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 1944 MOSCOW CONFERENCE

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Abstract

As a result of the outbreak of the Second World War, Poland's territory was divided between the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Lithuania lost its own independence as well by becoming one of the republics of the USSR. During the war the Polish government-in-exile solicited to determine the post-war borders of Poland as they had been established in 1920 by the Treaty of Riga. However, the most significant issue in the problem of the inclusion of Lviv and Vilnius in Polish territory was the consent of Joseph Stalin. The final shape of the borders was determined by Three Great Powers at conferences in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam.

Introduction

The issue of Polish-Soviet relations, in particular after the outbreak of the Second World War and after its ending, has always aroused great interest, not only among scientists who research this matter, but also among numerous societies other than in Poland – in particular, those nations which suffered the horrors of the war.

It is no wonder that discovering issues that were unknown and not necessarily based on the contemporary facts, or studied only in a general way, is confusing for those historians who have different opinions on this matter. I feel authorised to make such a hypothesis because of the fact that in archived records of collections concerning the topic I discuss, there are not many entries of scholars dealing with the above-mentioned period. I do not exclude that with the change of political

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system in Poland, surely in the coming months new studies based on reference documents will appear. These will show that the drama of the war period and several years after the war concerns not only Poland and the Poles. A favourable political climate supports this, including the declassification of files as well as the possibility of accessing foreign archives.

The subject matter of the article is an attempt to reveal probably still unknown or not very widespread facts that deserve to be studied separately and that concern the attempts of Polish politicians to keep Lviv and Vilnius within the boundaries of the Republic of Poland.

I was very fortunate because, as one of the few people working for the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, I studied fonds (archived documents) concerning the cooperation of the Soviet Union and Poland including delimitation of the eastern border. Files more than five metres deep, unavailable until recently, now allow us to reveal the truth of what happened at that time. I have also broadened my knowledge thanks to the fonds available in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, commonly known as the Archives of Bolesław Bierut. What is more, a wide access to Polish archives abroad, mainly in London and New York, allowed me to learn about facts that can now raise some doubts.

Comparing archived documents that have been made available, including stenographic reports of talks between the most important people in the Polish government-in-exile (in London) and Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov, allow generalizations to be made that will be presented later in the article. At the same time, I only emphasise the fact that cited references were customarily prepared in three identical copies: the first written by hand during the talks, and the next two as typescripts, for example, in London.

This article is the outcome of archival research conducted as part of my quest for materials for my thesis on habilitation. Its subject matter, generally speaking, concerns the process of shaping of the eastern borders of Poland after the Second World War.

1. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the issue of the eastern borders of Poland

1939 went down in the history of Europe as the beginning of what would be the most devastating war for many countries. Before its outbreak, many diplomatic steps were taken to prevent the impending global conflict, or at least postpone it for a while.

1.1. Attempts to preserve peace in Europe

Poland made specific efforts to keep the peace, including soliciting the support of Great Britain and France. As early as 19 February 1921, Poland and the French Republic signed a treaty of alliance.¹ The treaty guaranteed the obligation of mutual consultations on international issues for both parties and stipulated economic cooperation and assistance in the event of unprovoked aggression.² France confirmed its validity in August 1939.

What is more, Poland signed non-aggression agreements with Germany and the Soviet Union, and on 25 August 1939 formalized the Polish-British military alliance in the Agreement of Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Poland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Article 1 of the latter agreement guarantees: “Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter against that Contracting Party, the other Contracting Party will at once give the Contracting Party engaged in hostilities all the support and assistance in its power.”³

It should be emphasised that in the cited document, Great Britain did not postulate for any territorial restrictions of Poland concerning the guarantees that are mentioned in article 1. That is why the Polish government-in-exile could have believed, and, incidentally, it did believe, that it was synonymous to providing guarantees concerning the whole territory.

We can also attempt a different, common argumentation of the standpoints of France and Great Britain on the eastern boundaries of Poland, taking into consideration, for example, the fact that when Germany attacked Poland, both countries declared war on it but after 17 September 1939 they did not make such a decision in relation to the Soviet Union, which annexed territories given to Poland as a result of signing the Treaty of Riga.

Officially, Stalin did not retreat from occupied eastern territories of Poland, but “Churchill did not want to force anything on this matter as the British government reckoned that the Polish Eastern boundary should run along the Curzon Line which more or less corresponded with new divisions determined by

¹ Polish-French treaty signed in Paris on 19 February 1921, *Journal of Laws*, no 63, item 563. Polish version of the document contained two words referring to the treaty.

² Stręk Ł., *French-Polish Relations in the Interwar Period, sine nomine, sine loco*, p. 2.

³ The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM), Documents – PCM.Z. Files of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Special Office of the Prime Minister the so-called J. Żarański Archives, sig. PCM.Z.10, p. 91, 93.

Stalin. Eventually, British views on the issue of boundaries were closer to those of Russians than Polish.”⁴

Władysław Stadnicki, a pro-German publicist and above all a consultant of several ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as lecturer at the Institute of Business and Economic Sciences in Vilnius, issued a short article, “Facing the oncoming Second World War” (June 1939). In the article Stadnicki commented negatively on the alliance with the United Kingdom and correctly assessed and anticipated that the German Reich would begin with the invasion and annexing of Poland. The greatest danger he saw in the alliance with the British was that the British were making diplomatic efforts to create an alliance between Great Britain and the USSR. According to Stadnicki, the price for such an alliance would be the eastern regions of Poland, which would be given to the Soviets.⁵

It is worth adding that the government of the Republic of Poland did not allow the article to be published and confiscated it.

1.2. German-Soviet preparation for a “new Europe”

The new political division of Europe in 1939 was made on the basis of the pact of 23 August between Germany and the Soviet Union. This document was signed by the representatives of the states: Joachim von Ribbentrop, Foreign Minister of the Third Reich and Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister. At that time, the line determined by the demarcation ran along the Pisa-Narew-Vistula-San.⁶ According to Professor Waldemar Kozyra, Ribbentrop was awarded with the Order of Lenin during one of the banquets held to celebrate the signing of the pact.⁷

In signing the treaty, there was a German concept which concerned leaving “independent remains of Poland”.⁸ Joseph Stalin did not agree with the proposal of the Reich and he suggested that Germany include the territory situated

⁴ Walker J., *Poland Alone. Why Did Great Britain Betray its Most Devoted Ally?*, Cracow, 2010, p. 42.

⁵ Stadnicki W., *Facing the Oncoming Second World War*, Wydawnictwo Antyk–Marcin Dybkowski, Warsaw 1939, p. 62.

⁶ *Blank Pages – the USSR-Germany 1939-1941*, “Mokslas” Vilnius, 1990, p. 100.

⁷ Kozyra W., “Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty and Eastern Lands of the II Republic of Poland” in *The Soviet Aggression of 17 September 1939 on Kresy Wschodnie and Lubelszczyzna*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Grodna i Wilna, 2011, p. 24.

⁸ *Blank Pages – the USSR-Germany 1939-1941*, “Mokslas” Vilnius, 1990, p. 100. The issue is brought up in the telegram from the German ambassador in Moscow addressed to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is dated 25 September 1939.

eastwards from the demarcation line; i.e., the whole Lubelskie voivodeship and a considerable part of Warszawskie voivodeship, in “our portion”.⁹ It is also known that if this could be agreed upon, Stalin was willing to drop his claims concerning Lithuania.¹⁰ The above-mentioned note, which includes inter alia some information on Lithuania, is the first reference presented in German-Soviet official documents for 1939. It is also known that in October 1939, Richard Butler, the undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the United Kingdom, during a conversation with Ivan Mayski¹¹, the Soviet ambassador in London, suggested that his government was inclined to accept that after the war Poland would be reduced to ethnic territories and its independence would be guaranteed by Great Britain, France, Germany and the Soviet Union.¹² One may be tempted to conclude that at the same time,¹³ Great Britain was trying to reach a political agreement with the Soviet Union that would prevent the possibility of armed conflict arising. This was difficult because Stalin, conducting doubles, wanted the war to break out, which was the main reason for his political cooperation with the Germans. One of the main aims of the Soviet leader was to quickly occupy the territories of eastern Poland and the Baltic States, including mainly Lithuania with Vilnius and Vilnius oblast.¹⁴

Another author states that “taking advantage of general ferment in Europe, Soviets would like to take maximum advantage for political expansion and in a given case to solidify its hegemony over the Baltic Sea”.¹⁵

It was Winston Churchill who used to say “that he is ready to enter into agreement with a devil if it was beneficial for Great Britain”.¹⁶ Professor Marek Kazimierz Kamiński, PhD, an expert in the history of Poland and international relationships, thinks that Poland could have submitted to German demands and

⁹ The term is quoted literally.

¹⁰ *Blank Pages – the USSR-Germany 1939-1941*, “Mokslas” Vilnius, 1990, p. 100.

¹¹ This surname is written Majski in two copies of this document.

¹² Drabik S., *British Diplomacy Towards Polish Matters in 1939–1941s*, <http://historiaswiata.com.pl/wpis/12/>, 11 10 2013.

¹³ It is not possible to determine the date of the talks.

¹⁴ “Defeated in the Winners’ Camp” – Władysław Bułhak and Barbara Polak Talk with Marek Kazimierz Kamiński and Tadeusz Kisielewski on the Polish Issue within the Years of War World II”, *The Bulletin of National Remembrance*, 2005, 5–6, p. 23.

¹⁵ Mazak T., “Józef Mackiewicz Towards Communism in 1939-1945” in *Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny*, t. II, 2005, p. 302.

¹⁶ “Defeated in the Winners’ Camp” – Władysław Bułhak and Barbara Polak Talk with Marek Kazimierz Kamiński and Tadeusz Kisielewski on the Polish Issue within the Years of War World II”, *The Bulletin of National Remembrance*, 2005, 5–6, p. 24.

not let the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact be signed, at the same time maintaining the status quo regarding the territory of the Republic of Poland.¹⁷ However, there were also other opinions. It was claimed that one should not have any illusions about any benefits for the Republic of Poland resulting from cooperation with the Third Reich. Some arguments are given that Germany, after the fulfilment of its initial demands relating mainly to the passage connecting Germany with the free city of Gdańsk, would come up with others, the last of them being total Polish submission to the government in Berlin.¹⁸

It is worth quoting some of the prophetic visions of Władysław Stadnicki here concerning the essence of cooperation between Poland and Great Britain as well as the military alliance. Despite the fact that on 3 September 1939 Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, a meeting of both parties took place in Abbeville during which the decision was made that “these states will not come to Poland with the promised help”.¹⁹ On 17 September the USSR attacked Poland; this is considered by military analysts to show that the USSR waited for the reactions of France and Great Britain to the Third Reich’s previous act of aggression on 1 September 1939.

In line with Stalin’s concept, in a secret additional document signed on 23 September 1939 the territory of Lithuania was considered as within the zone of Soviet influence, while the territory that the Germans had intended to be a small Polish state was passed to the Third Reich. Many Polish historians and political scientists claim that the secret services, involved in the war later, knew the contents of this document. It is believed that it was familiar to the Americans, the French and the Italians. Whether the British were familiar with it remains unknown.²⁰

Meanwhile, the last sign of friendly German-Soviet relations was the treaty on friendship and borders of 28 September 1939 that was concluded between those states. As early as 10 October 1939, a thirty-thousand-strong Soviet army invaded the territory of Lithuania and at the same time Vilnius and Vilnius oblast were included in Lithuania.²¹ As follows from the German documentation of 2 August

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Konrad M., “The way of Germany to Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and Polish Matters (Events and Interpretations)”, *Remembrance and Justice*, 2008, 1, p. 46.

¹⁹ ““Defeated in the Winners’ Camp” – Władysław Bułhak and Barbara Polak Talk with Marek Kazimierz Kamiński and Tadeusz Kisielewski on the Polish Issue within the Years of War World II”, *The Bulletin of National Remembrance*, 2005, 5–6, p. 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹ Kozyra W., “Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty and Eastern Lands of the II Republic of Poland” in *The Soviet Aggression of 17 September 1939 on Kresy Wschodnie and Lubelszczyzna*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Grodna i Wilna, 2011, p. 29.

1940, the USSR was expecting Germany to transfer the part of Lithuania granted on the basis of the Moscow agreements of 1939. Ribbentrop advised Ambassador Schulenburg to take note of Russian expectations and to wait to find out what the Soviet government would propose in exchange.²² In reply, Molotov suggested paying 3.86 million US dollars in gold for the territory remaining so far under German administration. This amount was so high that it was presented as half of the sum paid to Russia by the USA for giving up the rights to Alaska.²³

In a telegram to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September, Schulenburg informed that “Molotov was very interested in the fact that the government of the Reich was generally willing to renounce the specific compensation for the zone of Lithuanian territory previously granted on the basis of the Moscow agreement”.²⁴

In Nikita S. Khrushchev’s diaries from that time, there is a note that after signing a treaty with Germany (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty, as the author recalls) Stalin “was beside himself with joy, shouting: ‘I managed to cheat Hitler’”.²⁵

1.3. Lithuania loses its independence

In 1940 Lithuania lost its independence and became a republic of the Soviet Union, which was done with the consent of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.²⁶ The full name of Lithuania was changed to the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. With the creation of a new republic, its inhabitants received Soviet citizenship.²⁷ This was possible thanks to the silent consent of the Germans, who were probably leading discussions about a new plan for the conquest of Europe.

Nevertheless, the fact that Lithuania was a part of the Soviet Union in the following years gave Stalin the right to represent the interests of the Soviet Union at its sole discretion. This was particularly noticeable during his numerous talks

²² *Blank Pages – the USSR-Germany 1939–1941*, “Mokslas” Vilnius, 1990, p. 197.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202. Document no 59 dated 17 September 1940.

²⁵ “‘Defeated in the Winners’ Camp’” – Władysław Bulhak and Barbara Polak Talk with Marek Kazimierz Kamiński and Tadeusz Kisielewski on the Polish Issue within the Years of War World II”, *The Bulletin of National Remembrance*, 2005, 5–6, p. 28.

²⁶ The Consulate of the Republic of Lithuania in Szczecin, *The History of Lithuania*, <http://www.konsulat-litwa.pl/historia-informacje-o-litwie-8.html>, 25 05 2013.

²⁷ Głowacki A., “General Assumptions of the Soviet Occupying Politics in Poland”, *Remembrance and Justice*, 2008, 1, p. 64.

in Moscow with representatives of the Polish government-in-exile (the so-called London government) in which the Lithuanians had never participated.

2. New Polish-Soviet relations

The arrangement of forces was changed by the Reich's invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941. This changed the relations to the Soviets of the British, the Americans, and the majority of Polish politicians forming the cabinet of the Polish government-in-exile. Especially active were the Polish generals, such as Kazimierz Sosnkowski and Władysław Sikorski, who exchanged among themselves remarks and observations, as well as their own plans for the future of Poland.

2.1. The Sikorski-Mayski Treaty as the hope of the Republic of Poland's prime minister

It is worth quoting a fragment of a letter from General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who was a minister without portfolio, to General Władysław Sikorski, the prime minister of Poland at that time. The letter is dated at 22 June 1941. Sosnkowski, giving his opinion on the German invasion of the USSR, wrote, *inter alia*:

“1) The German-Soviet war is very beneficial to Poland and its interests on condition that Russia will not be quickly and totally defeated by the German army. Quick and total German victory besides purely military results for the Western Front may have political consequences in the form of the reconstruction of pro-German Lithuania and including northern portions of Poland in its territory again, creating an independent Ukraine including Lviv, Eastern Malopolska and Volyn as well as reconstructing a reactive, pro-German Russia and passing Poland under its administration up to the borders of the territories attached to the Reich.”²⁸

On 16 July 1941 General Sosnkowski, in connection with previous correspondence, proposed an alternative version of the postulate on the matter of Poland's future boundaries, suggesting that a relevant notation in the future Polish-Soviet document would be the following: “The Soviet government states that it considers that the treaties with Germany in 1939 which concerned Poland did not

²⁸ Józef Piłsudski Institute of America (JPIA), the Polish Government-in-exile file 701/9/3, p. 3. Translation is based on the document prepared by the Polish side.

happen and as far as the matter of Polish-Russian boundaries are concerned, the legal status before September 1939 is recognised.”²⁹ In the cited document there is also a shorter version of the notation proposed by the general: “As for the matter of boundaries between Poland and the Soviet Union, the Soviet government recognises the legal status as of July 1939.”³⁰

Also at that time, the Polish government presented its standpoint concerning the eastern boundaries of Poland, which was that those boundaries should be compatible with provisions of the Treaty of Riga.

A comment made by above-mentioned politician and military man, who was afraid of a quick defeat of Soviet Russia and predicted some negative effects of such a state for post-war Poland, attracts the attention. Sosnkowski indicated at the same time that his fears also related to the reconstruction of pro-German Lithuania, as it was described by him, to which the north-western territories of Poland from the period before 1 September 1939 would be granted.

In retrospect, the general’s argument is difficult to understand. On the one hand, he wanted a quick victory for the Reich over the Russians, but on the other hand, he opposed the alliance between Poland and the USSR.

Meanwhile, the eastern borders of Poland and the USSR were officially mentioned for the first time after the Sikorski-Mayski Treaty was signed on 30 August 1941. The former, Władysław Sikorski, was the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile; the latter, Ivan Mayski, was at that time the USSR’s ambassador in London.

At the beginning of the document the following was written: “Article 1. The government of the USSR acknowledges that the German-Soviet treaties from 1939, concerning territorial changes, are no longer in force. The government of Poland declares that Poland is not bound towards any other state with any treaty intended against the USSR.”³¹

Consequently, my own interpretation is that when accepting the above-mentioned notation, the Soviet Union acknowledged that decisions made with Germany concerning the division of Polish territory before the war are not applicable. Thereby, the annexation of Lithuania and its effects could have been

²⁹ IJPUSA, the Polish Government-in-exile, file 701/9/3, p. 4.

³⁰ JPIA, the Polish Government-in-exile, file 701/9/3, p. 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. The text contains some stylistic mistakes which do not occur in the original version. Because the Treaty stirred up great controversies among Polish politicians and military men as well as among many communities of the Polish immigrants, the text in the JPIA was deliberately quoted.

treated as non-existent, as well as the matter that recognised Lithuania's right to independency and self-determination.

It should also be added that the treaty was signed because of strong pressure from the prime minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill. The main opponents of the treaty were the Władysław Raczkiewicz, President of the Republic of Poland; Kazimierz Sosnkowski, General and Minister without Portfolio; and August Zaleski, Minister of Foreign Affairs. They found the contents of the treaty too general – in particular the lack of definite provisions on the specific acknowledgement of the eastern borders of Poland from the period prior to 1 September 1939. It was also maintained that such agreement with the USSR was signed too early.

In one of the documents kept in the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York and concerning the aftermath of the treaty, it was written that “there is no question of reconstructing the old Poland, no matter what the term means. Therefore, the continuation of the present war under the banner of reconstruction of the previous Polish state is nonsensical.”³²

From a further part of the quoted study it follows that both France and Great Britain realised that the reconstruction of the territory of Poland along the borders from the period prior to 1 September 1939 would not be possible, inter alia because the main player, as it was then predicted, would be Joseph Stalin. *Ipsa facto*, Poland remained alone in its political desires concerning fixing the eastern borders in accordance with the Treaty of Riga of 1921,³³ even though the document the Treaty of Riga had been signed by the Soviet Union. The eastern borders of the Republic of Poland were fixed by the Soviet Union's authorities, who were also acting on behalf of the governments of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

2.2. Historical determinants of the Polish border before 1939

To understand what the Polish government-in-exile fought for I will quote part of article 2 of the Treaty of Riga concerning the Lithuanian border and part of the Belarussian one:

“Both negotiating parties, according to the rule of self-determination of nations, recognise the independence of Ukraine and Belarus and they agree and

³² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³³ Treaty of Peace between Poland and Russia and Ukraine, signed in Riga on 18 March 1921, *Journal of Laws*, 1921, 49, item 300.

decide that the eastern border of Poland, which is a border between Poland and Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, is marked: along the Dźwina river (Zap. Dwina) from the border of Russia and Latvia to the point in which the border of former Vilnius province meets the border of former Vitebsk province; then the border of former Vilnius and Vitebsk provinces to the road that joins the village of Drozdy with the town of Orzechowo (Oriechowno), leaving the road and Orzechowo on the side of Poland; then, crossing the railway near Orzechowo and turning south west, it goes along the railway leaving Zahacie (Zagaje) station on the side of Poland, the town of Zahacie on the side of Russia and the village of Stelmachowi (Stolmachowo) on the side of Poland (village not marked on the map); next, along the eastern border of former Vilnius province to the point at which the Dziśnieński, Lepelski and Borysowski districts meet; then, along the border of former Vilnius province on the area of about one verst to its turn towards the west near Sosnowiec (not marked on the map); then with the line from sources of the Czernica river (Czernica) on the east of Hornowo (Gornowo), then, along the Czernica river to the village of Wielka Czernica (B. Czernica)”³⁴

It should also be said that an agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania was signed on 7 October 1920 in Suwałki in order to arrange a temporary *modus vivendi* until the final regulation of relations between both states was ready.³⁵ The following note was found in the document:

“a/ the following fixed demarcation line between the Polish and Lithuanian army which does not predetermine any territorial rights of any of the contracting parties: from the border of East Prussia up to the mouth of the Czarna Hańcza River to the Neman – the line established by the regulation of the Supreme Council on 8 December 1919. Then along the Neman River up to the mouth of the Grawa River; then from the Grawa River to the point of the crossroads with the Marecz-Rotnica road; then in a straight line up to the mouth of the Skroblis River to the Mareczanka River; then the Mareczanka River, up to tributary of the Dereźnica stream, leaving the country of Solorowce on the Lithuanian side whereas Małe-Dubno is on the Polish side; then the Dereźnica stream to the crossroads of the Wilno-Orany railways, approximately 2 km north-west of the Orany station; then along the road crossing Bartele, Kucie, Nowy-Dwór, Ejszyszki, Podziewa and

³⁴ Treaty of Peace between Poland and Russia and Ukraine, signed in Riga on 18 March 1921, *Journal of Laws*, 1921, 49, item 300, pp. 815-819.

³⁵ The National Archives in Suwałki (NAS), the minutes from the Polish-Lithuanian conference from 1920, fonds 583, sig. 13, no page numbering.

Horodecka to Bastuny station, leaving the whole road and Bastuny station under the jurisdiction of the Polish authorities.”³⁶

The Conference of Ambassadors in Paris on 16 March 1923 acknowledged *de jure* the borders of Poland with Russia and Lithuania. The representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan participated in the conference; thus, making use of the law that was reserved by the Main Allied Powers in Article 87 of the Treaty of Versailles concerning the decisions on Polish borders. America joined the group of ambassadors with a separate note of 5 April 1923³⁷.

The government of Poland, with General Władysław Raczkiewicz at the spearhead, waited after the war for the creation of the Polish state with the preservation of territories situated westward or southward from the above-mentioned border arranged in 1920, considering the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors and the United States of 1923 as an additional argument.

Acknowledging the arguments listed above, the reaction of President Raczkiewicz should not be a surprise. In his letter to the prime minister he wrote: “The general signed the treaty at his own responsibility not foreseen in the constitutional act, depriving it of any legal grounds.”³⁸

2.3. Churchill and Eden and the Polish matter

It is worth stressing that, while discussing the matter of the signed treaty in the House of Commons on 30 July 1941, Great Britain’s minister of foreign affairs also answered questions from the MPs. One of them, Mr Mender, asked, “In the matter of guarantee of the borders, obviously the existing borders of Poland remain valid?” Eden answered: “No, as I said, there is no guarantee of any borders.”³⁹

Once again the representatives of the British government publicly presented their negative standpoint towards the Polish government’s expectations about the eastern boundaries of post-war Poland.

³⁶ NAS, The minutes from the Polish-Lithuanian conference from 1920, comp.583, sig.13, no page numbering.

³⁷ PISM, Documents – PCM.Z. Files of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Special Office of the Prime Minister the so-called J. Zarański Archives, sig. PCM.Z.10, p. 113.

³⁸ Wyrwa T., “Sikorski-Majski Treaty”, *Historical Books*, Paris, 1992, p. 200.

³⁹ Ślusarczyk J., *Government’s Politics of General W. Sikorski towards the USSR*, Warsaw: Instytut Krajów Socjalistycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1985, p. 50.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sikorski, in his radio address of 31 July 1941, claimed that “this treaty does not allow any suggestion to call the borders of Poland from the period prior to September 1939 into question and [...] it does not take into consideration the possibility that Poland will resign”.⁴⁰

Signing the treaty led to a governmental crisis. The following people resigned from their positions: August Zaleski, Minister of Foreign Affairs; General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Minister without Portfolio and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers on State Affairs; and Marian Seyda, Minister of Justice. Just after his resignation, Zaleski issued a circular to each of the Polish diplomatic outposts “ordering to disavow the concluded agreement and informing the governments at which they were accredited that general Sikorski signed the agreement having no authorisation of the president of the Republic of Poland”.⁴¹

In the situation where Great Britain stood in favour of Poland but without the guarantee of its borders and with the acceptance of such an attitude by America, the coalition known as the Big Three was formed, which aimed to defeat Germany and its alliances after the conclusion of military alliances between its particular members.

Meanwhile, the Polish government-in-exile still had expectations concerning the eastern border of Poland. Prime Minister Mikołajczyk, discussing the shape of the borders of Poland wrote, in the letter to Marian Seyda⁴² no 83⁴³ on 4 July 1943: “In the north, Lithuania must be considered as a territory in which Poland has a special interest, for example, in the form of federation.”⁴⁴

In such a politically tangled situation for Poland, the first conference of the Big Three in Tehran took place (28 November – 1 December 1943), where the solution proposed by Churchill concerning Poland was accepted. It said that “the seat of the state and Polish nation should be placed between the so-called Curzon Line and the line of the Odra River with inclusion of Eastern Prussia and Opole province”.⁴⁵ In addition, it pointed out that the final arrangement of the border,

⁴⁰ Żaroń P., *Eastern Direction in the Military-Political Strategy of General W. Sikorski 1940-1943*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, 1988, p. 37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴² Marian Seyda was the minister of justice from 1940; then he became president of the Ministry of Congressional Affairs in the Polish government-in-exile

⁴³ The content of the telegram is unknown.

⁴⁴ PISM, Documents – PCM.Z. Files of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Special Office of the Prime Minister the so-called J. Zarański Archives, sig. PCM.Z.1, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Majerski, W., *Teheran, Yalta, San Francisco, Potsdam*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warsaw 1987, p. 93.

which was consistent with the expectations of Stalin, requires a “precise study and possible resettlement of people in some places”.⁴⁶

However, it should be emphasised that from 1943 to 1945 British politicians excluded the possibility of creating a Soviet zone in liberated territories of the future Polish state.

Knowing the standpoint of three big coalition members from Tehran, which gave rise to opportunities for more beneficial solutions in the matter of the eastern border other than the Curzon Line, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Prime Minister of the Polish government and his cabinet, developed tactics of dialogue with representatives of the Soviet government concerning the future of Poland and first of all its eastern borders. It was also decided that direct dialogue with Joseph Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, would be necessary.

One of the documents prepared for the above-mentioned conversations, in the study that included eight points, assumed the possibility of a peaceful revision of the Treaty of Riga inter alia on the principle that the territory of post-war Poland would not be reduced and the most important centres of Polish culture in the East; i.e., Lviv and Vilnius, would remain the territory of Poland.⁴⁷

The first of the conversations took place on 31 July 1944 upon request of Churchill. The Polish side was represented by Prime Minister Mikołajczyk; Tadeusz Romer, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Stanisław Grabski, Chairman of the National Council; and an interpreter, Aleksander Mniszek. The opponents of the Polish delegation from the side of the USSR were Vyacheslav Molotov, Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as an interpreter whose name is not mentioned. During the conversation, Mikołajczyk stated: “I came to Moscow in order to discuss all contentious issues with the Soviet government”.⁴⁸ Molotov answered: “It seems that it would be better if you had reached an agreement with the Polish Committee of National Liberation first.”⁴⁹ Nothing was achieved during this conversation besides the assurance that Stalin would talk to representatives of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of the Polish government-in-exile.

⁴⁶ Majerski, W., (note 45), p. 93.

⁴⁷ PISM, Documents – PCM.Z. Files of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Special Office of the Prime Minister, the so-called J. Zarański Archives, sig. PCM.Z.4, p. 160.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

3. The strategy of Prime Minister Mikołajczyk

Mikołajczyk developed a strategy of conversation before the meeting with Stalin. A typescript consisting of five pages may be summarized in four main propositions: “1) military cooperation in the war with Germany; 2) the matter of future borders of Poland; 3) reorganisation of the Polish government and its return to Poland; 4) normalization of permanent and friendly relations between Poland and the Soviet Union.”⁵⁰

3.1. First negotiations with the Soviets

An interesting plot concerning the eastern border was preceded by a long monologue on the subject and the importance of the decisions in the peace treaty signed in Riga, including problems connected with the subject matter of the article. The following paragraph was found in Mikołajczyk’s notes:

“Mr Marshal, would you be willing to leave the great centres of national and cultural life and tradition such as Lviv and Vilnius within the new eastern borders of Poland taking into consideration these arguments? Such a decision in accordance with nationalistic criteria and with the heated feeling of the entire Polish nation could greatly facilitate solving any other Polish-Soviet difficulties and at the same time it would win you, Sir, the gratitude and acclaim of the wide masses in Poland.”⁵¹

In this statement Mikołajczyk is inconsistent, to say the least. On the one hand, he talks about the so-called Riga borders of 1921, but at the same time he had a precise question concerning the inclusion of Lviv and Vilnius in the territory of Poland. It is obvious that in case of a positive decision from Stalin relating to the first demand, the second motion would simply be obsolete. Bringing it up during the discussions with Stalin clearly suggested particular concessions from the Polish delegation in relation to its territory.

The discussion with Marshal Joseph Stalin took place on 3 August 1944. The generalissimo reminded Mikołajczyk of the existence of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PCNL) with which the USSR came into agreement. When the Polish prime minister expressed his doubt and asked “will they govern?” Stalin answered: “No, no, it should not be understood in such a way; however, it is

⁵⁰ *Supra* note 47, p. 18.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

necessary to end the situation where two governments exist at the same time; e.g., the London government and the PCNL. A temporary government is necessary.”⁵²

Mikołajczyk, in accordance with the predictions, asked Stalin directly how he imagined the future borders of Poland and the marshal answered: “on the east the Curzon Line, on the west the border will be the Odra and the Nysa Rivers, and Poles get Szczecin. Königsberg [he is thinking for a while] and its region will be given to the Russians. Yes, the Russians.”⁵³

From the transcript of Mniszek, the Polish interpreter, it follows that it was “a lengthy monologue defending Lviv and Vilnius on the subject of harm”.⁵⁴ However, one of Stalin’s comments was written down:

“If it has to be harmful for the Poles, it will also be harmful for Lithuanians; for Ukrainians. However, all nations are equal. I do not want to wrong Poles, Ukrainians or Belarusians. Let Slavs agree with each other. It is not about the fact that friends should not take land from each other. It’s what I think and believe. Also, that is what the Soviet citizens think.”⁵⁵

Elsewhere, Stalin added: “The border, which I’m proposing at the moment, is neither a Russian invention nor a Polish one, but it is a compromising border, studied by the umpire. Hardly anyone in Russia would agree to give Białystok back ... but we give it back.”⁵⁶ There is also the following sentence: “I am too old; I cannot harm people any more. I cannot act against conscience. Anyway, please remember that Ukrainians demand Chełm”,⁵⁷ and then: “please remember that if you insist, there will be no friendship. But Wrocław is better than Lviv”.⁵⁸ He also adds: “We, giving Lviv back to Poland, cannot offend Kiev; anyway, Poles have their own centre of culture in Krakow, Warsaw.”⁵⁹

The presented fragments of discussions concerning the borders show that Stalin, having already arranged their shape with the British and the Americans, did not agree to any concessions and did not accept any arguments. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that the generalissimo was well prepared to this negotiation.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 22. In the cited fragments I have used only the archival materials of the Polish government-in-exile (London government) which, in my opinion, are sufficiently reliable and do not require comparative studies.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In accordance with Molotov's suggestion of 31 July 1944, there was a meeting of delegations of the Polish government-in-exile (the London government) and representatives of the PCNL, who were described as "present from that side" on 6 August 1944. Attending were Edward Osóbka-Morawski, Chairman of the PCNL; Wincenty Witos, Vice-President of the PCNL; Wanda Wasilewska, Vice-President of the PCNL; and General Michał Rola-Żymierski, Minister of National Defence.

In the first paragraph of the transcript, "Prime Minister Mikołajczyk, referring to his discussion with Stalin, begins with border matters. Lviv and Vilnius. Our programme: Poland should not come out of this war smaller."⁶⁰ Also, Wanda Wasilewska made an important comment: "None of us negates sentimental factors. Warm bonds of Poles with Vilnius and Lviv. But we cannot give in to sentiments on one side only. The policy of not letting Ukrainians or Belarusians touch these cities, but I do not negate that Lviv and Vilnius are Polish cities. But these are islands in the sea of other nations."⁶¹

Edward Osóbka-Morawski, among others, expressed his point of view on the eastern border in the second part of the conversation. In his opinion, "in the cause of the good of Poland it is high time to regulate this matter, on this assumption that everywhere where there is a majority of Poles, the land should belong to Poland".⁶² In response to this, Professor Stanisław Grabski, President of the National Council, asked: "Is there a majority of Poles in Vilnius voivodeship or not?" The president of the PCNL, "Osóbka-Morawski, admitted that there are some Polish islands in the east. This problem is hard to solve."⁶³ Professor Grabski stated: "We, on our part, came up with the demarcation line going eastwards from Lviv and Vilnius."⁶⁴

General Żymierski commented: "How can you expect that the Soviet armies have not had some impact on this war in the form of the liberation of Ukrainians and Belarusians? How is Stalin to explain to Ukrainians that he leaves a part of them behind the Bug River (in Chełmszczyzna)? These are realities, not sentiments, which are crucial in politics."⁶⁵

There was a second meeting of the PCNL delegation with the Polish government-in-exile on 7 August. This time Bolesław Bierut also participated in

⁶⁰ *Supra* note 47, p. 26, 27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

the negotiations. The matter of the eastern border was brought up many times. I quote two comments from the archival document that I consider the most crucial. The first one was made by Wanda Wasilewska:

“One should view this matter-of-factly. The Soviet position has been strict from the beginning, and consistent. The UPP (the Union of Polish Patriots) has brought up the matter of Vilnius and Lviv many times. We do not have any real support from England and America. Is it worth putting pressure on Russia from England and America? If Russia sees that the whole of Poland wants to be in friendly relationships with it, then maybe we will bargain something.”⁶⁶

Wincenty Witos took the floor after Wasilewska. He explained that:

“the matter of eastern borders is not ultimately finished. Both Stalin and Molotov declared that some changes are possible but roughly the borders should be determined during the war. ... Today, we do not have any choice. The matter of Vilnius and Lviv caused crisis in the UPP and particularly in the case of Osóbka-Morawski. Can we afford to bargain more?”⁶⁷

Bolesław Bierut said: “There are no differences between us in the matter of Vilnius and Lviv as far as our personal attitude is concerned. But what conditions are we in? (...) We should subordinate these difficult border issues to a more important matter – the future development of Poland.”⁶⁸

Up until now the quoted fragment of the comment by Bolesław Bierut, who was the next president of Poland, was unknown and unpublished in Polish historiography. The comment is even more crucial if the transcripts are correct, as they show two-sided actions both of the UPP and the London environment concerning the most beneficial shape of the eastern borders of the state.

On 8 August 1944 tripartite negotiations took place on the invitation of Vyacheslav Molotov, during which the issue of the affiliation of Vilnius and Lviv to Poland was not brought up.⁶⁹ A day later, another meeting of the delegation of the Polish government-in-exile took place. This was the meeting with Joseph Stalin,⁷⁰ during which the issue of the eastern borders was again not raised.

Taking into consideration the results of the first visitation of Mikołajczyk and other members of the London delegation to Moscow, one should acknowledge that, with the exception of propagandist effects, it did not result in any decisions

⁶⁶ *Supra* note 47, p. 95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126–132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143–148.

concerning the eastern borders of Poland. The government of the USSR maintained that the Curzon Line should be a starting point for other possible decisions.

3.2. Negotiations of the last chance

In that situation the Polish government-in-exile strove for further negotiations with Joseph Stalin. The meeting with the representatives of the USSR took place on 13 October 1944. The Soviet side was represented by Joseph Stalin; Vyacheslav Molotov; Fiodor Gusiew, the ambassador of the USSR in Great Britain; as well as an interpreter and secretary – Pawłow. The British delegation, which arrived for the negotiations, was composed of Prime Minister Winston Churchill; Anthony Eden, Minister of Foreign Affairs; as well as Archibald Clark-Kerr, Great Britain's ambassador to the USSR.

The following constituted the Polish delegation: Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk; Adam Romer, Minister without Portfolio and Director of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers; prof. Stanisław Grabski, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Republic of Poland; and the interpreter Aleksander Mniszek.

William Averell Harriman, a secretary of the embassy of the United States of America in the USSR, observed the negotiations.⁷¹

Joseph Stalin continued to claim that the eastern borders of Poland should be marked with the Curzon Line, and he called Prime Minister Mikołajczyk an imperialist because he refused to let this happen.⁷² Mikołajczyk took the floor and stated: "I suggested a demarcation line some time ago but I did not think that we were talking about a new partition of Poland." Stalin answered: "I am against the partition of Poland but you want us to make the partition of Ukraine and Belarus."⁷³ Also, Molotov said, quoting the words of President Roosevelt from the conference in Tehran, that he completely agreed for the Curzon Line to be used and that he thought it would be a proper border between Poland and the Soviet Union.⁷⁴

The final part of the discussion is the most important from a political point of view relating to the eastern border of Poland. This was when Stalin made

⁷¹ *Supra* note 47, p. 39.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 46, 50.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

himself perfectly clear: “the Curzon Line is the basis for the border. It is a definite delimitation to which I agree with some corrections caused by local problems which may change the border by 6 - 7 kilometres to one side or the other.” Then, the Polish prime minister asked: “May I know what is considered as the Curzon Line? Is the Curzon Line identical to the demarcation line of 1939?” And Stalin answered: “No, it is not the same. The Curzon Line gives to you Białystok, Łomża and Przemysł.”⁷⁵

Winston Churchill and Stanisław Mikołajczyk met in Moscow on 14 October 1944. The conversation was started by the British prime minister, who delivered quite a long introduction in which he claimed that the future of Poland was in danger and that a crisis threatened the situation in the state. He said that if there was no consensus in Moscow, such an opportunity may never appear again. Everything depended on one issue: the eastern border of Poland. Churchill added that an agreement could be concluded very quickly. He also added that an agreement and a solution to the problem had been very close at the beginning of the year. If agreement had been reached, there would not have been other people (referring to the representatives of the PCNL) involved who may do terrible harm. They will create a competitive government and will gradually take over the rule in Poland.⁷⁶

Churchill told also Prime Minister Mikołajczyk that Mikołajczyk must go to Poland in order to create a united government. The British prime minister added that British relations with Russia had never been better and he said that he had talked to General Anders, who deluded himself that after the fall of Germany, Russia would be defeated. “It is madness. You cannot defeat the Russians”, claimed the head of the British government. Turning directly to Mikołajczyk, Churchill said: “I beg you to fix and settle the matter of the border. If we reach the agreement, I will visit Stalin today. (...) If you agree for the borders, the Russians will withdraw their support for the Committee (the PCNL). If you do not agree now, use your *liberum veto*, it will shatter the independence of Poland. (...) If you lose the moment, everything will be lost.”⁷⁷

In reply, Mikołajczyk declared that he “was thinking all night about the matter discussed during yesterday’s conference. It follows that the decisions referring to Poland had been taken at the conference in Tehran whereas now what is expected is that Poland confirms them.”⁷⁸ The prime minister of the government-in-exile said that there was still the issue of the independence of the rest of Poland. He added

⁷⁵ *Supra* note 47, sig. PCZ.Z.5, p. 58.

⁷⁶ See JPIA, Polish-Soviet Treaty, file 701/9/16, p. 151.

⁷⁷ JPIA, Polish-Soviet Treaty, file 701/9/16, p. 151.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

elsewhere: “Should I sign my own death verdict?”⁷⁹ Minister Eden, who joined the discussion, answered: “If the formula concerning the Curzon Line is agreed, then it will be possible to obtain from Stalin full guarantees of the independence of Poland.”⁸⁰

The interchange of ideas between Mikołajczyk, Churchill and Eden contains quite dramatic and, at the same time, realistic political options for the world of that time. In response to Mikołajczyk’s statement “that Stalin declared that the Curzon Line must be a border between Poland and Russia”, Churchill said, “we will not lose peace in Europe because of the dispute between Poles. You do not see this because of your stubbornness. This is not friendship in which we will participate. We should tell the world how unreasonable you are. You will start another war in which 25 million human beings will lose their lives but you do not care about this.” Mikołajczyk, defending himself against the accusation, said, “I know that our destiny was decided in Tehran.” He received the following reaction from the British prime minister: “It was saved in Tehran.”

The remaining part of the conversation was as follows. Mikołajczyk: “I am not a person who is totally deprived of patriotic feelings to give back a half of Poland.” Churchill: “You do not have any patriotic feelings. We reconstructed Poland 25 years ago, even though more Poles were fighting against us than with us in the previous war. Now again we are trying to deliver you from destruction but you do not want to participate in it. You are totally mad. (...) Until you accept the border, you will be out of this business forever. Russians will grind through your country and your people will be terminated.” [...] Mikołajczyk: “Can we announce that the Three Powers decided about the fate of Poland without us?” Churchill: “You must be ill and tired if you insist on this argumentation.”⁸¹

The statements of Minister Romer and Professor Grabski were also noted in the quoted document. The president of the National Council of the Republic of Poland, turning to Churchill for the first time during the conversation, “explains the meaning of Lviv and the oil basin and finishes expressing the idea that public opinion in Poland could not understand and submit to this paradox consisting in the fact that Poland, which was the first to oppose the German armed aggression, should leave the war a smaller country”.⁸²

The conclusion of the meeting, which is recorded in the minutes, reads: “as a result it was negotiated that the Polish side cannot agree to accept the Curzon Line as

⁷⁹ JPIA, Polish-Soviet Treaty, file 701/9/16, p. 152.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

the border between Poland and Russia and that this decision will be communicated orally to Prime Minister Churchill by Prime Minister Mikołajczyk”.⁸³

It was the last discussion conducted in Moscow by Stanisław Mikołajczyk as the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile. His attempts relating to the borders of Poland from the period prior to 1 September 1939 were unsuccessful and, in fact, yielding to both Stalin and Churchill, he handed in his resignation on 24 November 1944.

The borders of Poland were confirmed during the conference in Yalta (4–11 February 1945) and in Potsdam (17 July – 2 August 1945).

Conclusions

1. As a result of the assault of Nazi Germany on Poland, the country lost large areas east of the German-Soviet demarcation line, at the same time losing its independence for almost five years.

2. In order to improve Polish-Soviet relations, under pressure from the British government, the Polish government-in-exile signed with Soviet Russia the so-called Sikorski-Mayski Treaty, as a result of which the Soviets acknowledged that the agreements concluded with the Third Reich were not valid. Tens of thousands of Polish citizens put under arrest, staying in Gulag camps or prisons, were released. What is more, the Poles obtained permission for the formation of their own armed forces.

3. After the Soviet army crossed the pre-war border of Poland, the Polish government-in-exile. London government started diplomatic measures relating to the acknowledgement of its right to establish Polish administration on liberated territories.

4. Stanisław Mikołajczyk travelled to Moscow twice in 1944. The main aim of his visits was to fix the eastern borders of the Republic of Poland, taking into consideration the inclusion of Lviv and Vilnius into the post-war territory of Poland.

5. Finally, the post-war border of the Republic of Poland was fixed with some diversions along the Curzon Line. Vilnius stayed with Lithuania, whereas Lviv became a part of the Soviet Ukraine.

6. Decisions concerning the borders were made during the conferences of the Big Three in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam.

⁸³ *Supra* note 79, p. 156.