

*Elżbieta Znamierowska–Rakk*

## THE POLICY OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC TOWARDS THE BALKAN STATES

Lying as she did between the German Reich in the west and north and the Soviet Union in the east, Poland had in her international relations to keep in sight the threat posed to her by these two hostile powers. This was the supreme task to which Warsaw's foreign policy and its relations with medium-sized and small Balkan countries were subordinated.

Warsaw's interest in the Balkans was mainly of a political character. Poland endeavoured to seek a rapprochement with the countries of that region in order to strengthen the security of the Polish state in the event of Polish diplomacy failing to settle relations with Berlin and Moscow. Another factor inducing the Polish government to seek an additional guarantee of the state's independence was the growing feeling of being isolated by the pro-Versailles powers, especially allied France.

However, from the point of view of the Second Republic's *raison d'état* the Balkan countries could only play a secondary role in Polish policy. This was due not so much to geographical distance and the economic backwardness and military weakness of the states of that region, as, first and foremost, to the fact that the Balkan countries were in a state of permanent conflict with one another and also with their non-Balkan neighbours. This meant that it was difficult to find points of contact which did not collide with some other equally important interests of these countries.

The inter-war international situation in the Balkans was mainly the result of the First World War. The effect of the war was that the Balkan states were divided into the victorious countries, i.e. Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania, and the defeated ones, Bulgaria and Turkey. The most unfavourable was the situation of Bulgaria, which had lost almost one-tenth of her territory to Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania. This is why territorial claims against her neighbours constituted the basis of Bulgaria's foreign policy<sup>1</sup>. Turkey, though she had been dismembered by the treaty of Sèvres concluded

---

<sup>1</sup> E. Znamierowska–Rakk, *Położenie międzynarodowe Bułgarii po pierwszej wojnie światowej (Bulgaria's International Situation after World War I)*, in: *Polska — Bułgaria przez wieki XVII–XX w.*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 88–95.

in 1920, defied its provisions by force of arms, and after her victory over Greece, forced the Entente to revise the treaty and grant her considerable concessions which were confirmed by the treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923<sup>2</sup>.

Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania felt war victors only formally, for in fact they were not fully satisfied with the results. Greece, though she enlarged her territory at the expense of Bulgaria, lost the prospect of subordinating Eastern Thrace and incorporating the western coast of Anatolia after her defeat in the war against Turkey, and was also forced to give up Monastir. Yugoslavia had also greatly enlarged her territory, but she felt to have been wronged by the decisions on her disputes with Romania over Banat, with Austria over a part of Styria, Kraina and Carinthia, and with Greece over Salonika (Thessalonike). Moreover, the federal Yugoslav state was endangered by Italy's expansionism which also threatened Albania, Greece and Turkey. Romania was granted a lion's share of Transylvania at the expense of Hungary, but she wanted her frontier with Hungary to be shifted up to the Tisa (Theiss) river, and was displeased at the division of Maramarossziget (Sighet)<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to territorial disputes, the atmosphere in the Balkans was encumbered by the legacy of the stormy past of that region, a legacy reflected in animosities and antagonisms which were a result of either a complex of inferiority or nationalistic and hegemonic trends<sup>4</sup>.

This extremely complicated international situation hampered the consolidation and co-operation of the countries of that region and opened wide the door to the interference of the Great Powers which, competing for influence, took advantage of the Balkan disputes. In addition to Italy, Great Britain, too, was at first interested in destabilising the balance of forces in south-eastern Europe. By fanning Bulgarian-Yugoslav disputes and preventing a lasting rapprochement between Bulgaria and Turkey on the basis of the pro-French orientation of the two countries, the two powers endeavoured to weaken the Little Entente and consequently France's relatively strong position in the Balkans. Moreover, Rome and London endeavoured

---

<sup>2</sup> T. Wituch, *Tureckie przemiany. Dzieje Turcji 1878–1923 (Turkish Transformations. A History of Turkey 1878–1923)*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 263–268; B. Łyczko-Grodzicka, *Problem bezpieczeństwa w polityce zagranicznej Turcji w latach 1919–1939 (The Problem of Security in Turkey's Foreign Policy in 1919–1939)*, "Studia Historyczne" Kraków 1978, vol. XXI, No. 2, pp. 197–199.

<sup>3</sup> W. Bałcerak, *System wersalski a państwa bałkańskie 1919–1939 (The Versailles System and the Balkan States 1919–1939)* in: *Państwa bałkańskie w polityce imperializmu niemieckiego*, Poznań 1982, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 134–135; K. Manchev, V. Bistriski, *Bulgariya i neinite syseidi 1931–1939*, Sofiya 1978, pp. 14–21.

to set up a bloc composed of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria against Yugoslavia and Romania, which gravitated towards Paris<sup>5</sup>.

In her Balkan policy Poland, firmly defending the post-war *status quo*, developed closer official relations mainly with the states which had a similar orientation, that is, with Romania, Turkey, which after the treaty of Lausanne gave up revisionism, and Yugoslavia.

Poland's interests coincided most with those of Romania which was the only Balkan country to border on the Second Republic. The two countries were also direct neighbours of the Soviet Union, and the need to protect themselves against Soviet danger demanded close relations between them. As regards relations with Moscow, Poland and Romania were not only concerned over the future of some controversial territories, but in their policies were also guided by their hostility to communism and profound distrust of the Soviet leadership.

A defensive alliance with an anti-Soviet edge and a military convention were the basis of Poland's relations with Romania. In Warsaw's opinion, the importance of this alliance lay in the two parties' commitment to pursue a common policy towards the Soviet Union; thus the basic trend in Poland's relations with Bucharest was to deepen the defensive alliance. Moreover, the alliance guaranteed links with the West in the event of a blockade of the Baltic, which could not be excluded in view of the almost permanently tense relations between Poland and Germany. Another factor favouring a rapprochement between Poland and Romania was the absence of controversial territorial questions and the two countries' alliance with France, which they regarded as the main guarantee of their security, especially in the first post-war years<sup>6</sup>.

Though their basic political aims were identical or interrelated, harmony and close co-operation did not always characterize Polish-Romanian relations. The two countries also experienced crises in mutual confidence, which led to the loosening of contacts, endangering the Warsaw-Bucharest alliance. This happened, for instance, in 1932-1936, when Romanian diplomacy was directed by Nicolae Titulescu, whose political line was incompa-

<sup>5</sup> K. Manchev, *Istoriya na balkanskite narodi ot osmanskoto nashestvie na Balkanite do Vtorata svetovna vojna*, Veliko Tynovo 1979, pp. 343-346; Manchev, Bistriski, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>6</sup> H. Bułhak, *Polska a Rumunia 1918-1939 (Poland and Romania 1918-1939)* in: *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1918-1939*, Wrocław — Warszawa — Kraków — Gdańsk 1977, pp. 306-316; *idem*, *Początki sojuszu polsko-rumuńskiego i przebieg rokowań o konwencję wojskową w latach 1919-1921 (The Beginnings of the Polish-Romanian Alliance and Negotiations on a Military Convention in 1919-1921)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1973, No. 3, pp. 21 ff.

tible with the policy pursued by Poland<sup>7</sup>. Differences in the two countries' attitude to Prague affected Polish–Romanian relations to a lesser extent. Whereas in Poland's view Czechoslovakia was an unfriendly country which had manifested its ill-will during the Polish–Bolshevik war and later when she rejected Poland's offer for political and military co-operation against the German threat, Romania regarded her as a valuable ally because of the Hungarian danger. As regards Hungary, the opposite was the case: Warsaw's good contacts with Budapest cast a shadow on the Polish–Romanian alliance.

The Polish concept of building an effective barrier against Soviet expansion to the west included, in addition to Romania, also Turkey, another Balkan state bordering on the Soviet Union. In the 1920s Poland succeeded in establishing promising contacts with the government of that country which though geographically distant from Poland, was linked with her by a tradition of goodwill and friendliness. This allowed Polish diplomacy to present concrete proposals for political co-operation to Ankara. The Polish proposal for close understanding to be achieved through the parallelly developed rapprochement between Turkey and Yugoslavia under the patronage of France was received favourable by Ankara, but Turkish leaders had no intention of departing from their pro-Soviet line and this was demanded categorically by the Polish side. Ankara preferred the agreement with Warsaw to be directed against Italy, and this orientation would have been favoured by the presence of Belgrade and Paris in the planned alliance. But this aim, though it coincided with Poland's aspiration to eliminate Rome's influence in the Balkans, could not overshadow the Second Republic's basic need to add a successive link to the anti-Soviet front by a alliance with Turkey<sup>8</sup>. The Turks, while not repudiating a rapprochement with Warsaw, were steering a middle course between Warsaw and Moscow, for good neighbourliness with the latter was in Ankara's interest. When the concept of dragging Turkey into a wider anti-Soviet front failed, Poland confined her political activity to mediation between Turkey, France and Italy<sup>9</sup>.

Yugoslavia was another country which was close to Poland, not only because defence of the *status quo* with France's support was the primary aim of the foreign policies of both countries, but also because of past ties

<sup>7</sup> Bułhak, *Polska a Rumunia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 328–336; M. K. Kamiński, M. J. Zacharias, *W cieniu zagrożenia. Polityka zagraniczna RP 1918–1939 (In the Shadow of a Menace. The Foreign Policy of the Polish Republic 1918–1939)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 200; for more seetails see A. Zieliński, *Rumuńskie materiały do dziejów stosunków polsko-rumuńskich w latach trzydziestych XX w. (Romanian Documents on Polish–Rumanian Relations in the 1930s)*, “Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej” 1984, vol. XX, pp. 211–221.

<sup>8</sup> W. Bałcerak, *Koncepcje integracyjne w polskiej polityce zagranicznej 1918–1939 (Integrative Concepts in Polish Foreign Policy 1918–1939)*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 1970, No. 1, pp. 45–48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

and sentiments. But the fact that the basic *raison d'état* of the two countries was the same did not mean that they wanted to apply the same measures. Both countries had a pro-Versailles orientation but they differed in their views of where the danger to their security came from. In Poland's opinion, the chief danger was the rapacity of the German Reich and the Soviet Union; Yugoslavia was afraid mainly of Italy's expansionism. Moreover, Belgrade was interested in gaining protection against Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism. Thus, even though the general political lines of Poland and Yugoslavia coincided, the two countries lacked concrete motives for starting joint international activity.

Belgrade did not share Polish fears of Germany which, after all, did not directly threaten Yugoslavia, and contrary to the Poles' chronic anti-Russian attitude, the Yugoslavs cherished warm feelings for the Russians, being grateful for the support traditionally extended by Russia to the emancipation aspirations of Balkan nations. The Yugoslav authorities were officially in solidarity with Warsaw only so far as the combating of communism was concerned<sup>10</sup>.

Poland, for her part, was not interested in undermining her friendly relations with Italy, let alone in getting involved in blocs directed against Rome. As regards attitude to Hungary, Polish policy differed even more from the Yugoslav line. Budapest was for Belgrade enemy number two, after Rome, while Poland regarded Hungary as one of the most important partners in her plans to integrate East-Central Europe<sup>11</sup>.

These differences made it difficult for Poland and Yugoslavia to co-operate closely in the international arena, but they did not hamper the development of good relations in the political, economic and cultural fields; these contacts were not seriously disturbed during the periods when relations between Warsaw and Belgrade cooled off<sup>12</sup>.

Poland's relations with another Slavic state in the Balkans, Bulgaria, were, like her relations with Yugoslavia, based on rich historical traditions. But Polish-Bulgarian political co-operation depended first and foremost on the state and national interests of the two countries. As has been mentioned above, the aim of Poland's policy was to consolidate the Versailles system, while the chief aim of Bulgaria's international activity was a revision of this

<sup>10</sup> A. Garlicka, *Balkany i rywalizacja mocarstw zachodnich w latach trzydziestych (The Balkans and the Rivalry of the Western Powers in the Thirties)* in: *Państwa bałkańskie w polityce imperializmu niemieckiego*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on this subject see A. Garlicka, *Polska–Jugostawia 1918–1939 (Poland–Yugoslavia 1918–1939)*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej" 1976, vol. XII, pp. 93–124; eadem, *Polska–Jugostawia 1934–1939. Z dziejów stosunków politycznych (Poland–Yugoslavia 1934–1939. A History of Political Relations)*, Wrocław 1977, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 110 ff.

system. In these conditions, the Polish government manifested declarative understanding for Sofia's attitude, but it did not support Bulgaria's revisionist demands and took the side of Yugoslavia, Romania and Greece in Bulgaria's disputes with these countries<sup>13</sup>.

It should however be stressed that even though Warsaw and Sofia were on the opposite sides of the barricade in their foreign policies, there were tangential points in Polish–Bulgarian relations. Bulgaria, isolated by unfriendly neighbours, was weak economically and militarily; she needed Poland's support in the international arena and wanted to win her over for the Bulgarian cause. Poland, for her part, regarded Bulgaria, which held the key position in the Balkans, as a state which could be an important element in her integrative concepts in East–Central Europe, especially in the late 1930s. That was the time when the differences in the two countries' attitude to the Versailles order were receding to the background, for in view of the threat of war, the Bulgarian leadership, too, was seeking guarantees of Bulgaria's security<sup>14</sup>.

In view of the growing German and Soviet threat, Polish diplomacy, feeling isolated by the West, made energetic endeavours to consolidate central European and Balkan countries under the aegis of Warsaw. The idea to form a bloc or a political–military grouping of these and some other countries (Baltic or Scandinavian) lying between the German Reich and Russia, a bloc which would be a counterweight to these two powers, is known in historiography and political writings as the Intermare concept, the Third Force or the Third Europe. It was promoted with greater or lesser intensity throughout the entire inter–war period<sup>15</sup>.

One of the variants of this concept was the idea to associate Poland with the Little Entente, an anti–Hungarian grouping composed of Czechoslovakia and two Balkan countries: Romania and Yugoslavia. Warsaw's accession would have mitigated the anti–Hungarian stance of the bloc and laid stress on the danger threatening Poland and Czechoslovakia from Germany,

<sup>13</sup> E. Damianova, *Stosunki bułgarsko–polskie 1918–1929 (Polish–Bulgarian Relations 1918–1929)*, “Z dziejów stosunków polsko–radzieckich i rozwoju wspólnoty państw socjalistycznych” 1980, vol. XX, pp. 35–36.

<sup>14</sup> W. Balcerak, *Problem bezpieczeństwa Polski i Bułgarii w okresie międzydwoma wojnami światowymi (The Security of Poland and Bulgaria during the Inter–War Period)*, in: *Polska–Bułgaria przez wieki*, pp. 77–85.

<sup>15</sup> W. Balcerak, *Koncepcje integracyjne*, pp. 31–54; P. Łossowski, *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918–1939 (Poland in Europe and the World 1918–1939)*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 203–209; J. Lewandowski, *Pierwsze próby integracji Europy Środkowej po I wojnie światowej na tle rywalizacji polsko–czeskosłowackiej (The First Attempts to Integrate Central Europe after World War I against the Background of Polish–Czechoslovak Rivalry)*, “Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej” 1967, vol. II, pp. 145–164; P. Zaremba, *Historia dwudziestolecia 1918–1939 (The History of Twenty Years 1918–1939)*, Wrocław 1991, p. 405; Kamiński, Zacharias, *op. cit.*, pp. 213 ff.

the Italian threat to Yugoslavia and the Soviet threat to Romania. The Polish diplomats' endeavours to put this plan into effect bore no fruit mainly because of Czechoslovakia's firm opposition as well as the reservations of Yugoslavia and the inadequate support of Romania<sup>16</sup>.

Poland did not join the Little Entente, mainly because of Prague's stance, and Polish–Czechoslovak relations were, on the whole, not good, but in spite of this Warsaw took Czechoslovakia into account in other versions of its integrative plans. In particular, through a military alliance with Prague Poland wanted to include Czechoslovakia in a bloc of countries threatened by the Third Reich. When Prague rejected the Polish proposal for close political co-operation, Poland eliminated Czechoslovakia from her endeavours to realize the Intermare concept, in which the main role was assigned to Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania<sup>17</sup>.

Instead of the abortive rapprochement with Prague, the most important element of the grouping planned at that time was to be a Polish–Hungarian agreement which was to break up the Little Entente and isolate Czechoslovakia. However, in return for an agreement with Yugoslavia and Romania, Hungary demanded that these countries should satisfy her territorial claims. Moreover, Hungary held herself aloof from the proposed Polish–ted union, preferring to co-operate with Italy within the framework of the Roman protocols and flirt with Hitler<sup>18</sup>.

The soundings taken by Polish diplomats in Yugoslavia encountered even greater difficulties. On the basis of the two countries' sceptical attitude to France and the League of Nations and their negative evaluation of Moscow's activity in the European arena, Warsaw endeavoured without success to overcome Belgrade's opposition to Budapest's claims, the *sine qua non* for the success of the Polish concept. Moreover, the Yugoslav leadership did not share Poland's apprehension about the German danger, nor was it eager to break with the Little Entente under the Poles' dictate. The Poles on their part were not inclined to back Yugoslavia's anti-Italian attitude. Differences in the external political orientations of the two countries were the reason why Belgrade showed no interest in the Polish concept<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Balcerak, *Koncepcje integracyjne*, pp. 43–44; Lewandowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–157.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lewandowski, *Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie w latach 1918–1939 (Polish–Czechoslovak Relations in 1918–1939)* in: *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy*, pp. 242–243; W. Balcerak, *Pogląd Beneša na polską politykę zagraniczną w 1934 (Beneš's Opinion of Polish Foreign Policy in 1934)*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej" 1971, vol. VII, pp. 179–182.

<sup>18</sup> M. Koźmiński, *O stosunkach politycznych polsko-węgierskich w okresie międzywojennym (1918–1939) (Polish–Hungarian Political Relations during the Inter-War Period (1918–1939))* in: *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy*, pp. 293 ff.; Kamiński, Zacharias, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>19</sup> Garlicka, *Polska–Jugostawia 1934–1939*, pp. 213–216; eadem, *Polska–Jugostawia 1918–1939*, pp. 115, 117, 120.

Romania was to be another important participant in the bloc planned by Warsaw. But even when Titulescu, who opposed Poland's policy, had been dismissed and mutual confidence was restored between the two countries, Bucharest had serious objections to the Intermare bloc. In the view of Romanian leaders, Romania's accession to the bloc would irritate the Third Reich, and this was what Bucharest decidedly did not want to do, being economically and partly also politically dependent on Germany. Nor did Bucharest see any reason for getting out of the Little Entente, as Polish diplomacy had suggested. What was an insurmountable difficulty for the Romanians was the demand to satisfy Budapest's territorial claims, a *sine qua non* for the implementation of the Polish plan. The fact that the dispute over Transylvania could not be resolved foiled the Polish attempt to set up a Poland–Romania–Hungary triangle on the eve of the war<sup>20</sup>.

In addition on the Warsaw–Budapest–Belgrad–Bucharest quadrangle which was the core of the planned bloc, the helmsmen of Polish policy also took Sofia and even Ankara and Athens into account. But the complicated Balkan disputes and the disinclination of the Balkan countries to risk Germany's displeasure stood in the way of these plans<sup>21</sup>.

Another factor which hampered their implementation was the activity of diplomats of the totalitarian states, who tried to torpedo Polish endeavours in East–Central Europe by discrediting Polish plans or by promises and blackmail. While the Third Reich and the Soviet Union were firmly against the creation of the Intermare grouping<sup>22</sup>, the Italians put forward their own concept of a Rome–Belgrade–Budapest triangle with the possible participation of Warsaw. But Rome's open espousal of a pro–Nazi line put an end to this plan<sup>23</sup>. It should be added that Poland's activity in the Balkans and Central Europe was not viewed favourably by the Western democracies which did not want to irritate Hitler.

<sup>20</sup> M. Koźmiński, *Polska i Węgry przed drugą wojną światową (Poland and Hungary Before World War II)*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970, pp. 127–128; W. Balcerak, *Polsha i politika velikikh derzhav po otnosheniyu k gosudarstvam tsentralnoy i yugovostochnoy Yevropy (1932–1939)*, "Studia Balcanica", Sofia 1973, No. 7, pp. 307–309; Zh. Avramovski, *Balkanske zemlye a velike sile 1935–1937*, Beograd 1968, p. 222; H. Batowski, *Rumuńska podróż Becka w październiku 1938* (Beck's Romanian Journey in October 1938), "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1958, No. 2, p. 434; A. Pankowicz, *Stosunki rumuńsko–niemieckie w oczach dyplomacji amerykańskiej 1937–1941 (Romanian–German Relations in the Eyes of American Diplomacy 1937–1941)*, in: *Państwa bałkańskie w polityce imperializmu niemieckiego*, pp. 323 ff.

<sup>21</sup> E. Damianova, *Balkańskie aspekty polskiej polityki zagranicznej (na tle stosunków między państwami bałkańskimi 1919–1939)* (*The Balkan Aspects of Poland's Foreign Policy against the Background of Relations between the Balkan Countries 1919–1939*), in: *Polska–Bułgaria przez wieki*, pp. 106–109; W. Balcerak, *Problem bezpieczeństwa Polski i Bułgarii*, pp. 82–83; idem, *Polsha i politika velikikh dierzhav*, p. 307.

<sup>22</sup> P. Łossowski, *Polska w Europie i świecie*, p. 208; H. Batowski, *Rumuńska podróż Becka*, pp. 436–437.



The Polish Republic's endeavours to set up an Intermare bloc ended in failure. The soundings and mediation undertaken by Polish diplomacy in order to solve the conflicts of the states of this region and win them over by showing them the necessity of integrating their forces, did not achieve their primary aim. The offer made by economically weak Poland, a country which was not strong militarily, had little political influence in Europe and was threatened on both sides by totalitarian powers, was not an alternative for countries which were even weaker, at loggerheads with one another, isolated by the West and overpowered by the hegemony of the Third Reich, Italy and the Soviet Union. In their view, the only chance of ensuring their security lay in appeasing the potential aggressors and steering a middle course between them and Britain and France.

As has been rightly pointed out by many researchers, the Intermare idea was not a broad coherent plan to integrate states neighbouring on one another in a large territory. In fact, it consisted of several loosely connected variants which differed by their composition and the character of ties between the partners. The Intermare concept should therefore be examined not as a crystallised coherent doctrine of Polish foreign policy, but as a number of more or less coordinated diplomatic actions undertaken in a complicated and changing European situation, actions which Warsaw undertook in order to sound the individual candidates for partnership in the planned bloc. In his *Dernier Rapport* Józef Beck admitted that ventures of this kind were undertaken in order to develop a certain communion of thinking and acting among states which did not pretend that they were great powers but were interested in making themselves independent of them<sup>24</sup>.

The principal aim of the Second Republic's activity in Central Europe and the Balkans was to create a common front of states which were threatened by the possibility of the great powers reaching an agreement which would pacify the aggressiveness of the Third Reich at the expense of small and medium-sized states in this macroregion. As the war was drawing near, Polish diplomacy tried by the Intermare idea to link these countries' need for a security guarantee with Poland's need to ensure the defence of the Polish state.

<sup>23</sup> For more details on this subject see B. Koszeł, *Rywalizacja niemiecko-włoska w Europie Środkowej i na Bałkanach w latach 1933–1941 (German–Italian Rivalry in Central Europe and the Balkans in 1933–1941)*, Poznań 1987, pp. 249–252, 269, 305–309; *Diariusz i teki J. Szembeka, 1935–1945 (The Diary and Files of J. Szembek, 1935–1945)*, Londyn 1972, vol. IV, pp. 51, 55; S. Sierpowski, *Stosunki polsko-włoskie w latach 1918–1940 (Polish–Italian Relations in 1918–1940)*, Warszawa 1975, pp. 529–531 ff.

<sup>24</sup> J. Beck, *Dernier rapport. Politique polonaise 1926–1939*, Bruxelles 1951, p. 118.

During the period of real socialism Polish historiography regarded the Intermare concept as a utopian aspiration to implement the adventurous megalomaniac political plans of Piłsudski and his successors, whose ambition was to raise Poland to the rank of a great power. The helmsmen of Polish foreign policy were accused of expansionism, of endeavours to subordinate the countries of East–Central Europe to the influence of the Second Republic by replacing France and eliminating the role of the Soviet Union in this macroregion. What is more, the historiography of that period asserted that the Warsaw–promoted concept of an agreement of medium–sized and small countries contained anti–national aspects which allegedly paved the way for Hitler’s aggressive plans and indirectly led to Poland’s catastrophe in 1939<sup>25</sup>.

This misleading interpretation should be categorically rejected for it is not substantiated by sources, and stress should be laid on the defensive motives of Poland’s plans to integrate the countries south of the Carpathians. It was not great–power aspirations but the realization of the state’s weakness and isolation in the face of the impending danger that stimulated Polish political leaders to feverishly look for additional security. If great–power phraseology, which so irritated our eastern neighbour, was used by the mass media at that time, this was not the leitmotif of Polish diplomacy but simply a tool for raising the morale of the public, for reviving its faith in its own strength. This important psychological element could not be ignored in those sinister days<sup>26</sup>.

Even though for many reasons the Intermare concept stood no chance of success, it did Poland no harm, contrary to what was asserted in some publications published under the old system. On the contrary, it raised the spirits of the fear– and apathy–stricken Polish people, showing them that action, be it even limited and not very realistic, was better than passivity and defeatism. It also pointed out the imminent danger to those who were not aware of it and called on them to unite and depend only on themselves.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H. Batowski, *Środkowo–europejskie koncepcje w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918–1939 (The Central European Concepts in Polish Foreign Policy in 1918–1939)*, in: *Pamiętnik X Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Lublinie 17–21.IX.1968*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 63 ff.; R. Wapiński regards the propagation of Poland’s great power status as an attempt to find compensation for Poland’s external and internal weakness, see R. Wapiński, *Wzajemne oddziaływanie polityki zagranicznej i wewnętrznej Polski wiosną i latem 1939 (The Interaction between Poland’s External and Internal Policy in the Spring and Summer of 1939)*, “Dzieje Najnowsze”, Warszawa 1992, No. 1–2, pp. 39–46.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. P. Wandyc z, *Z dziejów dyplomacji (From the History of Diplomacy)*, Wrocław 1989, pp. 14–15.

The Second Republic's interest in the Balkans was due not only to purely political considerations but also to economic, strategic and military reasons.

Generally speaking, Poland developed economic co-operation with the Balkan countries mainly in the field of transit traffic. Polish economic circles, concerned about the profitability of the ports of Gdańsk and Gdynia, endeavoured to secure a sufficient volume of goods for trans-shipment, which the domestic economy could not provide. Moreover, the structure of Polish goods handled by Polish ports was unfavourable, cheap bulk goods predominating over the more profitable general cargo. In this situation, Poland, competing with German and Italian ports, endeavoured to obtain East and Central European transit cargo which in addition to bulk goods, also included general cargo<sup>27</sup>.

Poland's southward expansion was aimed not only at developing the co-operation of Polish ports and shipping companies with the maritime economy of the states of that region. It was also important for Poland to utilize the existing Polish railway network and develop it still further by rendering transit services to the countries of East-Central Europe. In their endeavours to secure transit goods from these countries the Polish Railways had to compete with German railways<sup>28</sup>.

Polish foreign trade also needed better connections with the Balkan countries, for as a result of the Polish-German customs and tariff war Poland lost her position on the German market, and trade with the Soviet Union was carried out on a limited scale. Hence her search for new markets for her goods. However, the endeavours to expand Polish export to the Balkans were not very successful because the economies of Poland and the Balkan countries were not complementary; this could be clearly noticed during the great economic crisis, when the Polish trade offer was unable to compete with attractive German offers. The importance of Polish trade contacts with the Balkan countries cannot be overestimated, even though Poland sent more and more manufactured goods, including products of the armaments industry, to the countries of that region and through them, to the Near and Middle East<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> For more details see B. Dopierała, *Polska polityka morska a kraje naddunajskie w latach 1919-1932 (Polish Maritime Policy and the Danubian Countries in 1919-1932)*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 1963, No. 2, pp. 196-217; idem, *Polska polityka morska a kraje naddunajskie w latach 1933-1939 (Polish Maritime Policy and the Danubian Countries in 1933-1939)*, "Najnowsze Dzieje Polski" 1965, vol. IX, pp. 151-178.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem, passim.*

<sup>29</sup> E. Damiánova, *Polsha, Bylgariya i mezhdubalkanskite otnosheniya (1930-1939)*, "Istoričeski pregled" Sofiya 1974, No. 6, pp. 10 ff; eadem, *Bylgariya i Polsha 1918-1941*, Sofiya 1982, pp. 194-265; B. Dopierała, *Wokół polityki morskiej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (On the Maritime Policy of the Second Republic)*, Poznań 1978, pp. 202-203.

The Polish Republic's interest in establishing close communication connections with the Balkan countries was due to strategic and military considerations. When Germany was endeavouring to subordinate Poland's economy and policy and block Poland's access to the sea, the Polish ruling circles, wishing to actively defend the country against the measures applied by Germany, ventured on a number of measures which competed with the activity of the Reich and would have made Polish transit traffic less dependent on possible intervention. This was the reason behind Warsaw's plan to open a new water route running from the Baltic Sea along the Vistula, San, Dniester, Prut and Danube rivers, the port of Galach in Romania to the Black Sea. Such a route would have enabled Poland to expand the hinterland of Polish ports southward and would have competed with the Oder–Danube canal planned by Germany. The route would have also been of great strategic and military importance as it would have allowed Poland to import military equipment and ammunition from the West<sup>30</sup>.

Polish leaders realized that in the event of war, the Turkish straits would be closed and Poland would lose connection with the open sea through Romania, which would make the proposed route useless. This is why they kept looking for collision-free connections with the Aegean Sea, all the more so as the only existing land route running through Czechoslovakia, Austria and Italy was becoming less and less certain as international tension increased<sup>31</sup>.

A highway through the Balkans seemed to offer promising possibilities of a shorter route for a free transit of armaments for the Polish armed forces, but this required the construction of a bridge on the Danube. Polish leaders encouraged Yugoslavia and Romania, and later also Bulgaria and Greece, to launch this strategically important investment scheme. From the point of view of Polish interests, a bridge between Giurgiu in Romania and Ruse in Bulgaria would have been the best, and it would have also been of great importance for these two Balkan countries and Greece, which endeavoured to raise Salonika to the rank of an international commercial port<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> B. Dopierała, *Wokół polityki morskiej*, pp. 203 ff.

<sup>31</sup> *Diariusz i teki J. Szembeka*, vol. IV, p. 570.

<sup>32</sup> E. Damianova, *Ekonomicheskaya politika Polshi na Balkanakh v 1918–1939 godakh*, "Bulgarian Historical Review" Sofia 1974, No. 2, pp. 76–90; W. Baranowski, *Most na Dunaju między Rumunią a Bułgarią. Najkrótsze połączenie Polski z Bliskim Wschodem (The Bridge on the Danube between Romania and Bulgaria. The Shortest Connection between Poland and the Middle East)*, "Przegląd Polityczny", Warszawa 1930, No. 6; New Record Office in Warsaw (henceforward referred to as AAN) Legation in Athens, files Nos. 320, 321; AAN set of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Tsentralen Dyrzhaven Istoricheski Arkhiv, Sofiya (henceforward referred to as CDIA), f. 176, op. 5, a.e. 1174; op. 6, a.e. 1908, 1912, 2435; 2841; op. 7, a.e. 165.

But the implementation of the plan to construct a Romanian–Bulgarian bridge was hampered by inner–Balkan disputes and by obstacles put up for many reasons by third countries. Apart from the endeavours of German and Czechoslovak diplomats to torpedo the plan, France and Italy were also against a railway connection across the Danube on the Giurgiu–Ruse line<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, financial barriers would have discouraged potential investors. Poland, not being able to provide the money, endeavoured to overcome political difficulties and repeatedly engaged in mediation to solve the disputes between Romania and Bulgaria and between Bulgaria and Greece. Poland was deeply engaged in the realization of this collision–free canal uniting the Baltic with the Aegean sea as is proved by the fact that on her initiative a conference with her participation and the participation of the Balkan countries concerned was held in Bucharest in December 1938. Although the outbreak of war finally thwarted the Polish plans for a strategic transit arterial road and a water–main through the Balkan countries, the Bucharest conference marked an important stage on the road to the construction of a Romanian–Bulgarian bridge, which was officially recognized by most participants as an indispensable link in an optimal connection between northern and southern Europe<sup>34</sup>.

In summing up the results of the Polish Republic’s Balkan policy, one can say that although Poland was not in the position to fully reach her aims, her policy was not fruitless. In addition to some economic benefits, Poland received concrete help from the countries of East–Central Europe after the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939 and this was of great importance in her tragic situation.

Hungary, resisting German pressure, did not allow the Wehrmacht to cross its territory and thus prevented a German attack on the retreating Polish army, an attack which would have intercepted its retreat to Romania<sup>35</sup>. Allied Romania opened the door to the supreme Polish authorities and to Polish military units, thus making it possible for them to join the Polish Armed Forces in the West. During the September campaign the Romanian government let through transports of military equipment from the West and

<sup>33</sup> Germany’s attitude requires no comment. Czechoslovakia disapproved of the idea of a bridge linking Romania and Bulgaria across the Danube because she feared that a transit route outside her territory would deprive her of large profits. France and Italy wanted a bridge to be built between Romania and Yugoslavia for this was connected with their plans to link Western Europe with Russia, see *Damianova, Bylgariya i Polsha*, pp. 211–233; AAN, Polish Embassy in Belgrade, files Nos. 140, 141; AAN, Polish Embassy in London, files Nos. 307, 310; AAN, Legation in Prague, file No. 120; CDIA, f. 176, op. 1, a.e. 280, 1174.

<sup>34</sup> *Damianova, Ekonomicheskaya politika Polshi na Balkanakh*, pp. 76–90.

<sup>35</sup> *Batowski, Środkowo–europejskie koncepcje w polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, pp. 68–69; *Koźmiński, Polska i Węgry przed drugą wojną światową*, pp. 347–350.

allowed Poland to transport the main reserves of the Bank of Poland as well as treasures of Polish culture and the National Defence Fund through Romanian territory. Turkey, too, made a great contribution to the successful transportation of the valuable property of the Polish state<sup>36</sup>. The Turkish, Yugoslav and Greek governments let through Polish planes through their territories, and Yugoslavia agreed to the passage of all military goods<sup>37</sup>. Polish refugees escaping to the West were received in a friendly way in these countries<sup>38</sup>. It should be emphasized that to a lesser or greater extent both the governments and broad social circles in the Balkan countries repeatedly expressed their moral support for and solidarity with fighting Poland<sup>39</sup>.

It seems that the capital of goodwill which Poland has gained in the Balkan countries thanks to the consistent efforts of her diplomats to establish co-operation is sufficiently lasting to provide the foundation for a regional agreement in East-Central Europe with the participation of the Polish state. Such co-operation, even if it was established by only some of the countries of this region, would increase the sense of their security and relieve them of the necessity of waiting for Western guarantees, which are so slow in coming.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

---

<sup>36</sup> For more details see W. Biegański, *Władze rumuńskie wobec internowania rządu i uchodźstwa polskiego w Rumunii, wrzesień 1939–luty 1941 (The Attitude of the Romanian Authorities to the Internment of the Polish Government and Polish Refugees in Romania, September 1939–February 1941)*, "Najnowsze Dzieje Polski" 1964, vol. VIII, pp. 55 ff.; A. Sowińska-Krupka, *Proces normalizacji w stosunkach polsko-rumuńskich po II wojnie światowej (1945–1949) (The Process of Normalization of Polish–Romanian Relations after World War II, 1945–1949)*, "Kraje Socjalistyczne", Warszawa 1987, vol. III, No. 1–2, pp. 119–120; Z. Karpiński, *Losy złota polskiego podczas drugiej wojny światowej (The Fate of Polish Gold during the Second World War)*, Warszawa 1958, pp. 9 ff.

<sup>37</sup> A. Garlicka, *Balkany wobec konfliktu polsko-niemieckiego (lato–jesień 1939) (The Attitude of the Balkans to the Polish–German Conflict, Summer–Autumn 1939)*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej", Warszawa 1979, vol. XV, pp. 108–109, 111, 112; W. Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada. Wspomnienia ze służby zagranicznej (Panache and Sword. Reminiscences of Foreign Service)*, Paryż 1963, pp. 165 ff.; M. Sokolnicki, *Dziennik ankarcki 1939–1943 (Ankara Diary 1939–1943)*, Londyn 1965, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Garlicka, *Balkany wobec konfliktu polsko-niemieckiego*, pp. 110–113.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 108–110.