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Polish-Soviet Relations from the Munich Conference to September 1939 in the Publications of Contemporary Polish and Foreign Historians. The State of Research

Stosunki polsko-sowieckie od konferencji monachijskiej do września 1939 r. w publikacjach współczesnych historyków polskich i zagranicznych. Stan badań

ABSTRACT

The historiography of Polish-Soviet relations in the inter-war period has already seen a considerable number of publications. The subject has been tackled by both Polish and foreign researchers. However, the end of these relations, i.e. the years 1938 – from the Munich Conference – to September 1939, is, despite appearances, not as historiographically abundant, especially when it comes to independent books. The present volume is an attempt to present and analyze this state of affairs, with a concomitant set of research demands.

Key words: Polish-Soviet relations 1938–1939, Munich Conference, September 1939

STRESZCZENIE

Historiografia stosunków polsko-sowieckich w okresie międzywojennym doczekała się już znacznej liczby publikacji. Temat ten podejmowali zarówno badacze polscy, jak i zagraniczni. Jednak końcowy okres tych stosunków, tj. lata 1938 – od konferencji monachijskiej – do września 1939 r., wbrew pozorom nie jest tak obfity historiograficznie, zwłaszcza jeśli chodzi o samodzielne publikacje. Niniejszy tom jest próbą przedstawienia i analizy tego stanu rzeczy, z jednoczesnym zestawem postulatów badawczych.

Słowa kluczowe: stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1938–1939, konferencja monachijska, wrzesień 1939 r.

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Historiography focusing on bilateral Polish-Soviet relations in the Second Republic, and – specifically speaking, on the last, title stage of these relations – does not currently belong (this should be forewarned in advance) in the central research trend¹. Such a statement is hardly surprising, although we are, after all, talking about one of the constitutive issues for understanding the events of 1939. There are several general reasons of such situation. Firstly, much seems to have already been said ‘from above’. This conviction is stimulated by comprehensive syntheses on the foreign policy issues of the Second Republic. Within these powerful metanarratives, reflection on the political identity of the years 1938–1939 is a fragment of a larger whole, but a fragment regarded as stable, quite exhaustively elaborated by recognized scholars; a factual, almost dogmatic point of reference. First and foremost, to be mentioned here is the fundamental fourth volume of the *History of Polish Diplomacy*². This picture is strengthened by books by, among others, Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski³, Jerzy Krasuski⁴, and Piotr Wandycz’s lecture⁵, or from

¹ The question – of course – is whether these topics have ever been part of the research *mainstream*. After all, probably always overly ‘narrow’, it was rather part of a larger whole. I put forward a thesis for consideration at this point.

² *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 4, 1918–1939, ed. P. Lossowski, Warszawa 1995.

³ Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1984.

⁴ J. Krasuski, *Miedzy wojnami. Polityka zagraniczna II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1985.

⁵ P. Wandycz, *Polish Diplomacy 1914–1945: Aims and Achievements*, London 1988.

studies written after the system transformation: Piotr Łossowski's work⁶ or a joint monograph by Marek K. Kamiński and Michał J. Zacharias⁷. The peculiar universalism of the view of matters, which suspends the discursive field somewhat, is pacified by outstanding studies referring to a holistic approach, this time *strictly to* Polish-Soviet contacts from the interwar period. This is primarily the position prepared by Wojciech Materski⁸. This historian, with spectacular panache, defined for decades the habitus of perceiving the binary opposition between Warsaw and Moscow. A specific perception of the subject matter, long ago, was finally delineated by Henryk Batowski⁹. In addition, we have a monograph on the Polish institution in Moscow¹⁰.

Furthermore, the possibilities of conducting archival searches in Poland and Russia are definitely asymmetrical. While – here another dominant notion – virtually every note containing information on the subject has been identified in the Polish archives¹¹, the documentary resources of the East remain inaccessible to researchers. Thus, one has to assume *a priori* their historical innovation. The Russian 'near different' is a kind of alien, predictable because hostile, a bit frightening adversary – perhaps such an identification would be the most appropriate – with whom co-operation is unlikely to be possible, and raises multiple ethical questions. The deconstruction of historical dialogue, constantly triggered by current politics, creates here a pair of absolute opposites – Poland *vs.* Russia. The current context, i.e. the Kremlin's attack on Kiev (2022), will ultimately paralyze the flow of data, leaving us condemned to the polonocentricity of the point of view for a long time¹². Another point is that Russian

⁶ P. Łossowski, *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918–1939. Szkice z dziejów polityki zagranicznej i położenia międzynarodowego II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1990.

⁷ M.K. Kamiński, M.J. Zacharias, *W cieniu zagrożenia. Polityka zagraniczna II RP 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1993.

⁸ W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy. Stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1994; idem, *Na widencie. II Rzeczpospolita wobec Sowietów 1918–1943*, Warszawa 2005.

⁹ H. Batowski, *Kryzys dyplomatyczny w Europie jesień 1918–wiosna 1939*, Warszawa 1962; idem, *Agonia pokoju i początek wojny*, Poznań 1984.

¹⁰ M. Kruszyński, *Ambasada RP w Moskwie 1921–1939*, Warszawa 2010.

¹¹ See, inter alia, *Polskie dokumenty dyplomatyczne 1938*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2007; *Polskie dokumenty dyplomatyczne 1939 styczeń-sierpień*, ed. S. Żerko, Warszawa 2005.

¹² In the source edition, therefore, we are still condemned to concessionary publications of the type: *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, vol. 7, *Styczeń 1939–grudzień 1943*, prep. E. Basiński, Warszawa 1973; *Документы внешней политики СССР*, vol. 21, Москва 1970; *СССР в борьбе за мир накануне второй мировой войны, сентябрь 1938–август 1939. Документы и материалы*, Москва 1971. In the late 1970s. Wojciech Materski and Andrzej Skrzypek wrote about the above volumes as 'an inexhaustible mine of

historiography, also rather marginally referring (separately) to the mutual communication of 1938–1939, liked and likes apodicticity, cultural stereotypes, prejudices, instrumentalism, choosing a paradoxical strategy of defense (about which more later). It was apparent what or whom to defend against. In this case, Charles Baudelaire was wrong when he stated that ‘the world gets along thanks to common misunderstanding’. Evading simple categorization, the Polish-Russian misunderstanding, mixed with the nature of Putin’s state, prevents international exchanges that are natural in scientific spaces. As a consequence, the self-reflection of cognitive culture is confined to the circle of a few Polish ‘professional’ scholars. Occasionally, a representative of Anglo-Saxon historiography will still speak, though again mainly from a bird’s-eye view, or at best a contributory perspective. For what matters is the end of the era, i.e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. From a global perspective, one should not be surprised by the lack of a structural and complete approach to this event, which in the West marks the sub-genesis of the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, while – only regionally, from the Vistula point of view – it marks the beginning of the military campaign and the collapse of the Second Republic. Thus, the debate, poor in terms of participants, gives a peripheral character to the title deliberations¹³. Nor does it reach a high temperature, nobly following mostly beaten paths.

newsz (W. Materski, A. Skrzypek, *Stosunki polsko radzieckie lat 1932–1939 w świetle radzieckich wydawnictw źródłowych*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 1979, 11, 3, p. 206). However, a lot of time has passed since those publications.

¹³ As an antithesis, when the factors described are absent, the discourse on the analysis of Poland’s bilateral relations with other states at the time in question remains livelier. At the same time, it remains a relative matter to assess the number of participants in the debate. There will never be as many of them as, for example, scholars undertaking a study of the history of the People’s Republic of Poland. Poland’s relations with its ally France were analysed by Henryk Bułhak, the aforementioned Piotr Wandycz, Tomasz Schramm, Małgorzata Gmurczyk-Wrońska, among others. Relations with Germany were written about by Jerzy Krasuski, Marian Wojciechowski and Harald von Riekhoff, among others. Polish-British relations were reported primarily by Maria Nowak-Kielbikowa, indirectly also by: Anna Maria Cienciała, Mieczysław Nurek, Anita Prażmowska. Polish-Czechoslovak topics include treatises by Sławomir Nowinowski, Sebastian Pilarski, Marek K. Kamiński, Alina Szklarska-Lohmanowa; Polish-Romanian: mainly Henryk Bułhak; Polish-Lithuanian: Piotr Lossowski; Polish-Italian: Stanisław Sierpowski; Polish-Hungarian: Maciej Koźmiński. Poland and the Little Entente was shown by Andrzej Essen. The actions of the Second Republic in Scandinavia were characterised by Paweł Jaworski. On the other hand, a distant perspective, i.e. the unveiling of Polish-American ties, was taken up by Hanna Marczevska-Zagdańska, Bogdan Grzełoński. Staying with non-European links, the Japanese direction was presented by Ewa Palasz-Rutkowska. Polish colonial aspirations were attempted to be described by Marek Arpad Kowalski and Zbigniew Bujkiewicz.

If anything disturbs the course, it is a possible journalistic voice, reversing the hitherto trajectory of interpretation altogether. I am talking specifically about a publication authored by Piotr Zychowicz in 2012 – about which more later in the article.

The presented state of affairs does not mean that we have final, familiarized and completed historiographical achievements describing Polish-Soviet mutual relations in the years 1938–1939. Nevertheless, one thing should also be mentioned. The works in possession – to be submitted in a moment – are dominated by mature, seasoned positions, lowering the professional inclination to competition. There has therefore been a specific positive and negative idealization: it is good that the collected publications represent milestones; it is a pity that so little is added to what has already been presented; it is a pity that the period 1938–1939 still remains an element of the larger collection – an important element, but still not a very independent one.

The writing of the communist era made a minor contribution to the research diagnosis of the subject matter I am trying to highlight. Applying ideological matrices, everything was ‘settled’ with terms characterizing the policy of the Second Republic as a ‘bourgeois’ country, programmatically ‘anti-Soviet’, vectorially ‘class-determined’, although the factual layer itself is difficult to question. Thus, I will focus on the last dozen years or so. At the same time, we have to remember that we do not have at our disposal an independent monograph on Polish-Soviet relations in the years 1938–1939 similar to (chronological and methodological) positions written by, for example, Jerzy Kumaniecki¹⁴, Marian Leczyk¹⁵ or Stanisław Gregorowicz¹⁶.

Who, then, takes part in the debate when the subject matter is not autonomous, in effect – usually – part of a whole?¹⁷ Marek Kornat, who has been following the forementioned phenomena for many years, has been and remains the main ‘guide’ to the issue. It was through him that the main themes were conceptualized and presented. In addition, this author, despite the passage of time and the individual progress of the research he has made, not only maintains the old views, but even reinforces them. In the ‘subject’ methodology of M. Kornat’s ‘object-oriented’

¹⁴ J. Kumaniecki, *Po traktacie ryskim. Stosunki polsko-radzieckie 1921–1923*, Warszawa 1971.

¹⁵ M. Leczyk, *Polityka II Rzeczypospolitej wobec ZSRR w latach 1925–1934. Studium z historii dyplomacji*, Warszawa 1976.

¹⁶ S. Gregorowicz, *Polsko-radzieckie stosunki polityczne w latach 1932–1935*, Wrocław 1982.

¹⁷ Leaving these metanarrative glances aside from the earlier enumeration, we instead seek greater close-ups.

methodology, it was the designated figures who created reality. However, they did not create it arbitrarily, but in the circumstances they found, which then determined the effectiveness of their actions. In his basic monograph from 2002¹⁸, in which Polish-Soviet relations were discussed in a multifaceted manner, juxtaposed with other directions of influence of the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the period of interest to us, the aforementioned historian proved that in Warsaw a rapprochement between Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin was not taken into consideration as a real scenario. By the same token, 'at Wierzbowa', the possibility of a confrontational joint military action by the neighboring totalitarian countries was not assumed either. Some variants of *political* cooperation on the Berlin-Moscow line were discussed – on the basis of *political fiction*. However, given the ideological differences between communism and Nazism, such suggestions were not given the force of heuristic hypotheses. Somewhat on the basis of Popper's rule of falsification, Józef Beck was supposed to have figured out the mechanisms of the game being played over the heads of the Poles. Another thing – M. Kornat strongly emphasized this point – the Polish head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had no alternative in many dimensions¹⁹. In the face of growing sentiments in Western Europe *appeasement*, this statesman – this is how the described researcher always characterizes Beck – had to take care of good relations with the Soviets, just like with Germany, finding himself in a reactive position towards his neighbors. The boundary and guideline of the minister's conduct was always to be the inalienable idea of preserving independence.

For M. Kornat, it is J. Beck who constitutes the individual axiom, controlling the course of events from the Polish side²⁰. In the ideogram of Warsaw's diplomacy in the East (and not only in the East) presented by the scholar, processes and decisions had this individualistic, personalized character. The head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, immersed in Józef Piłsudski's thought and throughout his life under the Marshal's intellectual influence, did not maintain eschatological fidelity only on a single issue, but not the one concerning relations with the Kremlin. J. Piłsudski bracketed the so-called 'policy of balance' epistemologically, assuming it to be temporary. Meanwhile, J. Beck believed that, at least in relations with Berlin, Warsaw would be able to achieve a permanent effect.

¹⁸ M. Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop–Mołotow. Problem zbliżenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2002.

¹⁹ See also M. Kornat, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1938–1939*, Gdańsk 2012.

²⁰ M. Kornat, M. Wołos, *Józef Beck. Biografia*, Kraków 2020. The issues I am interested in in the aforementioned author's monograph were presented by M. Kornat.

However, the Munich Conference led to the undermining of previous premises motivating the sense of pursuing the aforementioned policy of balance. M. Kornat – while not being an unreflective apologist of J. Beck anywhere – admits that J. Piłsudski was right, and that he was better (in this respect) at calculating future concepts for the arrangement of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the author always consistently emphasizes that the Western European idea of ‘satisfaction’, linked with the idea of creating a quartet of powers granting themselves the right to adjust borders, led to the marginalization of the Second Republic on the international arena. Poland was thus placed in an uneasy position, with a head of diplomacy skeptical – a point that does not surprise M. Kornat – about France or Great Britain.

In Polish eyes, A. Hitler’s credibility seriously declined in the autumn of 1938, when he broke a promise made earlier to refrain from further territorial pretensions after the partition of Czechoslovakia. For on 24 October 1938, Polish Ambassador Józef Lipski heard new claims from the Third Reich, now directed at Warsaw. In his books, M. Kornat meticulously reports on the minister’s negative attitude to these demands, in J. Beck’s judgement contrary to the most important interests of the state. Concentrating on events taking place beyond the Oder, he – i.e. J. Beck – underestimated the eastern arena of events. Apart from pointing out the alleged unrealistic nature of the Berlin-Moscow alliance, M. Kornat explains his protagonist by geopolitical circumstances, which he himself developed. The historian wonders why the Polish leadership failed to recognize the threat, even though – as he himself admitted back in 2002 – the threat of a similar alliance had never ceased from the beginning. Well, according to the scholar, the Pole expected that the internationalization of a possible conflict with the Third Reich, which he had obtained in the first half of 1939, would result in the neutrality of the Soviet Union, at least in the first phase of the European war (J. Beck assumed large-scale actions here). He ruled out the chance of a Soviet attack also because of the weakening of the Kremlin’s military potential caused by the personnel purge in the Red Army. The Minister only conjectured that J. Stalin was trying to persuade the Entente powers to politically sanction a kind of mutation of *appeasement* in the East. The aforementioned M. Kornat believes that J. Beck was aware of efforts to obtain territorial cessions by the USSR at the expense of the Second Republic, with the approval mainly of London and Paris. Confronted with his own judgement of events, such a scenario was rejected by the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In his recently published biography of J. Beck, M. Kornat took the opportunity to enumerate his long-standing reflections on these topics. Final, gentle to the book’s protagonist, he stated on the subject, among

other things: 'Beck's predictions for the future proved accurate. They can be summarized in five points: 1. the Germans will not win the general war; 2. by their policy, they are allowing the Soviets into central Europe; 3. the Soviets want to act as *tertius gaudens* in the coming world war; 4. for France, the defeat of Poland brings defeat for itself – sooner or later; 5. against the German dictator, only a policy of force can be effective. [...] Polish diplomacy could not solve any of the most important problems facing the Republic [...] nor could it ensure that the Soviet Union would not strike Poland from the east, making any hope of prolonged resistance against Germany illusory'²¹.

M. Kornat still repeatedly refers to the issues raised, as I said, unequivocally sticking to the original records²². Analyzing the core of Polish-Soviet relations at the titular time, the researcher also frequently emphasizes that the governments, above all, of the United States and France, did not share with Poland the knowledge covering the contents of the secret protocol to the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement. This deprived 'Wierzbowa' of the opportunity to change its previous course. The historian feels obliged to recall this case²³. Consequently, the problem of assessing Wacław Grzybowski's attitude, skills and qualifications, as well as the matter of erroneous information contained in the ambassador's reports in Moscow (1936–1939), emerges at the same time as another important element of historiographical considerations on the subject. The above element was also appreciated professionally by M. Kornat²⁴.

Firstly, this scholar formulates the theoretical assumptions of the work of diplomats in the USSR: he considers it necessary to adopt a paradigmatic commonality, expressed in the general view that the Soviet Union – 'a country of a new type' – was one of the exceptionally unfriendly

²¹ M. Kornat, M. Wołos, *op. cit.*, p. 775.

²² Among others: M. Kornat, *Polityka równowagi (1934–1939). Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem*, Kraków 2007; idem, „Historia alternatywna” – oszustwo czy zabawa?, „Arcana. Culture – History – Politics” 2013, 109, pp. 107–119; idem, *Czy zbliżenie i sojusz niemiecko-sowiecki są możliwe? Z dziejów polskiej i europejskiej wyobraźni politycznej 1933–1939*, in: *Jak patrzeć na Polskę, Niemcy i świat? Księga pamiątkowa prof. Eugeniusza Cezarego Króla*, ed. J. Szymonczek, Warszawa 2017, pp. 487–501.

²³ The monograph *Polska 1939 roku* is a kind of manifesto on the matter in question.

²⁴ M. Kornat, *Wacław Grzybowski. Ambasador w Moskwie (1936–1939). Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 2016. Earlier an outline of the case: idem, *Ambasador Wacław Grzybowski i jego misja w Związku Sowieckim (1936–1939)*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” 2002, 142, pp. 19–65. For the sake of accuracy, in an identical vein sketch: S.M. Nowinowski, *Wacław Grzybowski – szkic do portretu dyplomaty*, in: *Pokolenie spełnionego obowiązku. Studia z dziejów Polski i Polaków w kraju i na obczyźnie w XX wieku dedykowane profesorowi Józefowi Garlińskiemu*, eds. J. Faryś, R. Nir, M. Szczerciński, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2004, pp. 89–98.

places on the world map. At the level of specific directives, M. Kornat points to ideological differences, goes on to describe the phenomenon of widespread surveillance of foreigners, followed by the ensuing suffocation and distrust in the relations of the hosts with representatives of democratic states. This arrangement constituted a 'closed work', conceptualized, not subject to cognitive modification. For the Soviets were not interested in environmental *benchmarking*, i.e. juxtaposing the manner of protocol coexistence in Moscow and the other capitals. Thus, every visitor faced an impenetrable wall. In addition, Poles, more than others, were on censure as a kind of ontological enemy. No *praxis*, not even the most effective one, was actually possible under these circumstances. All the more so as the oppressiveness of Soviet everyday life, expressed in the overall obstruction of the lives of Poles accredited there, increased further in the late 1930s. This view, on a particularistic level, was simultaneously confirmed by Iwona Urbańska²⁵. The historian, who was also tempted to compile a 'Moscow' biography of W. Grzybowski on the basis of (virtually) the same materials, draws analogous conclusions²⁶.

Thus, already together (i.e. in this individual case) M. Kornat and I. Urbańska, interpreting the surviving documentation, have not built an 'accountability' model. Respecting the mindset of the Polish ambassador in Moscow – M. Kornat also looks back to his earlier service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and constantly emphasizing the peculiarities of functioning in the USSR, both scholars have shown the gap between the diplomat's formal, high professional capabilities, in counterpoint to the local constraints that paralyzed his activity. The understanding of the past, therefore, is that it was accepted and acknowledged that W. Grzybowski might have been mistaken, or might not have had all the knowledge necessary to draw the right conclusions; he might have been misled; ultimately, the current state of Polish-Soviet relations and the dangers arising from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement could not be explicated and explained with the tools at his disposal, when he was dealing in such and not any other realities. Bilateral relations were carried

²⁵ I. Urbańska, *Ambasada Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Moskwie w latach 1936–1939. Warunki pracy w rzeczywistości stalinowskiej*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2006, 4, pp. 95–107. See also: S.M. Nowinowski, *Specyfika funkcjonowania polskich placówki dyplomatycznych i konsularnych w Związku Sowieckim (1936–1939)*, in: *Z dziejów polskiej służby dyplomatycznej i konsularnej. Księga upamiętniająca życie i dzieło Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego (1914–2005)*, eds. J. Faryś, M. Szczerbiński, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2005, pp. 121–139. Both publications are based on almost identical source material.

²⁶ И. Урбаньска, Вацлав Гжибовски. Посол Польши в СССР (1936–1939), Toruń 2013.

out in a system of a kind of frame regularities, blocking the reading of reality as it actually was.

In this format, W. Grzybowski's most valuable achievement becomes the very maintenance of the diplomatic post²⁷. M. Kornat and I. Urbańska, free from historiographical arrogance or paternalism, also did not succumb to 'shallow historicism' and presentism. They have, as it were, collectively dispensed with valuing the cumulative growth of the ambassador's reporting, often based on premonitions, historiographical reflections on the nature of totalitarianism, while marking the lack of speculativeness in their author's analyses. The diplomat, reconstructing the collected experience and carrying out its exegesis, simply ruled out the chance of 'water and fire' coming together, thus failing to consider the alternative of a Soviet attack on Poland. Under so-called normal conditions, Communists and Nazis did not have a common semantic field: a homogeneous set of values, goals or social utility. The problem is that these conditions were not normal. Only that one must not, according to the aforementioned researchers, hold W. Grzybowski. Moreover, neither this official, nor his superior J. Beck, proclaimed themselves demiurges with the ability to decipher the future before it arrived. The two scholars also avoid the theoreticalization of their narratives, leaving 'what if' considerations out of the discourse. They do not dwell on the – blatant today – ambassador's statements at the end of August 1939 that the Second Republic was not threatened by anything from the east. They did not content themselves, instrumentally in such a situation, with quotations. The ambassador's name was not treated as an illustration to criticize the actions carried out 'at Wierzbowa', creating a parallel between the possibilities and the results²⁸. In this dimension, the 'naïve positivism' often controlling historiographical practice has been abandoned. The only question that remains is whether, within this construct, J. Beck himself (in the case of W. Grzybowski, such a question does not arise) merits Kornat's qualification as a statesman, inherently transcending various types of limitations. M. Kornat, on the basis of the emergent, essential categories of the description of the Soviet Union, blurs the focus of the term somewhat, thus broadening its capacity.

²⁷ At the time, the posts of various countries were put under pressure. As far as Poland was concerned, only the consulate in Tbilisi and Kharkov could not be preserved; M. Kruszyński, *Ambasada*, p. 231.

²⁸ It should be noted that W. Grzybowski was much harsher for himself than the historians mentioned. See: W. Grzybowski, *Geneza konfliktu*, in: 11 XI 1941, *Grenoble. Wojsku Polskiemu, które od 1 września 1939 roku nieprzerwanie na wszystkich frontach świata walczy o wolność naszą i cudzą*, Grenoble 1941, p. 15.

Staying with W. Grzybowski for a while longer, one would expect a description of the last moments of Polish diplomats in Moscow. We have publications on this subject²⁹. Obviously, there is no reconstruction of the historiography of Polish-Soviet relations from 1938–1939 here. Rather, we are observing a further programmatic escape from the theory of the historical process, placing emphasis on a research-encoded orientation towards a *strictly* Soviet reality. This knowledge takes on the character of preliminary knowledge, although I would not see this as a limitation affecting further learning. The pressure of that state, its commitment and even ideological fervor, its alleged defense of its own interests, are a constant point of reference for historians, making the actions of the other side (i.e. Warsaw) – whatever they may have been – largely dramatized. In fact, it is difficult to eliminate the indicated elements from the field of view, especially in the context of considering September 1939 as observed ‘in Polish’ from Moscow. By collecting individual factual findings, in intervention with general knowledge – i.e. automatically preliminary – the phases of liquidation of the Polish Embassy in Moscow were analyzed, as a whole deprived of favorable circumstances for further organizational existence. The universe of political and social phenomena, identified by W. Grzybowski and his subordinates, remained uncomplemented by an alien, hostile environment, by no means capable of being characterized by elegant descriptions. At the same time, the heroism of the institution’s staff deserves to be called *outlier*³⁰, i.e. something extremely unique and rare. Accumulating the effects of historical events, and also understanding the ‘singularity’ of Poland in the Soviet capital, they dutifully persisted in representing the Second Republic until the formal liminal status of mutual Polish-Soviet contacts allowed it, and even a little longer.

The mechanisms or processes of immobilization, a kind of dogmatization, of the presented historical convictions have been reinforced by other researchers, operating on the same classification and interpretative platform – there is no other, there cannot be another³¹. It is worth recall-

²⁹ Extensive text: S.M. Nowinowski, *Zakończenie działalności ambasady i konsulatów RP w Związku Sowieckim jesienią 1939 r.*, “Zeszyty Historyczne” 2008, 164, pp. 3–60; also M. Kruszyński, *Ambasada*, pp. 60–65.

³⁰ Meaning of the term after N. Taleb, *The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, New York 2007, pp. XVI–XVII.

³¹ It is instructive here to read the collective monograph: *Kryzys 1939 roku w interpretacjach polskich i rosyjskich historków*, eds. S. Dębski, M. Narinski, Warszawa 2009.

ing *the case of the* joint publication by Bogdan Musiał and Jan Szumski³², contrary to its title, largely devoted to the issue I am interested in. The former historian, addressing the issue of Polish-Soviet relations at the end of the 1930s³³, does not carry out any modernization of the facts described by others. Instead, by means of inductionism, he attempts to go beneath the surface of the phenomena, noting mainly the fatalism of the Second Republic's geopolitical position at the time and the voluntarism of its superpower neighbors. Collecting individual partial factual data, the scholar recognizes the originality of J. Beck's concept. However, for B. Musiał, the visions proposed 'at Wierzbowa' become the minister's own project – his own in the sense of annihilation with the world of major European players, to which the Republic did not belong. It is not even about the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the role of concierge of Entente diplomacy. Rather, it would have been a butler model, with Warsaw as a non-constitutive object, treated objectively by London and Paris, to say nothing of Berlin or, finally, Moscow. Once again, therefore, although no separation of the reality under scrutiny takes place, J. Beck – known by name – was responsible for the steps he took. Only that he had fallen into the thrall of realism.

In constructing the message, B. Musiał also fills a need for objectivity. What does it consist in? He argues that the practice of the European cultural grammar of the time meant that the Second Republic remained a state without a solution in its dealings with the Kremlin, having a mafia partner on the other side who did not respect any binding rules. This objectivity is intended to rationally explain to the viewer the difficult position of the country, actually finding itself without this good solution, without a way out. The narrative air is filled with the notion that not even J. Piłsudski or Roman Dmowski would have changed anything in favor. J. Beck is not presented here as a providential husband. Nonetheless, the author sees serious qualities in this politician, again – as in the case of M. Kornat – suspending at a decisive moment (the turn of 1938/1939 and 1939) the dichotomy of the approach to Polish foreign policy ('balance policy'), in favor of securing the western border and obtaining at least declarative support from France and Great Britain. This shift in emphasis is an important axis for understanding the optics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there, a ministry reducing the intensity of contacts with its eastern neighbor. Furthermore, B. Musiał also draws attention to the analytical activity of W. Grzybowski, who seriously contributed to this shift.

³² *Geneza paktu Hitler-Stalin: fakty i propaganda*, eds. B. Musiał, J. Szumski, Warszawa 2012.

³³ B. Musiał, *Geneza paktu Hitler-Stalin*, in: *Geneza*, pp. 12–82.

B. Musiał and M. Kornat, although formally their works are concerned with a clearly indicated chronological range, in their authorial arguments they use the *continuum* method. In order to clarify the matter, I will now make a small interlude. A major breakthrough in contemporary historiography came with the monumental publication on the history of the 19th century by Jürgen Osterhammel³⁴. This researcher proceeded on the assumption that the *human web* was present even earlier than the issues he addresses. In addition, J. Osterhammel recommends going beyond locality, as 'the world is the environment of all environments'³⁵. The same seems to be the thinking of B. Musiał and M. Kornat. For these historians, the years 1938–1939 are – in fact – an important but constituent part of the long continuum of specific vectors of behavior of both Warsaw and – perhaps above all – Moscow. Nothing new, therefore, happened between 1938 and 1939 in Polish-Soviet relations. Nothing particularly significant. Everything only has a *continuum*, and within the enlarged European constellations – then it gains relevance. As a result, these two scholars deprive somewhat of the separateness or sovereignty of the space they were trying to approach. What we have received is an intellectually meticulous, cognitively attractive synthesis, at a time when the primary monograph is lacking. It even seems that the relationship between Moscow and Warsaw from the period of interest, as a dissected fragment of Kornatowski's and Musiałowski's wide-ranging account, is not worthy of interest. They are not worthy of a micro research perspective. After all, this would be a description of subordinate events, conceived solely in terms of the 'obverse-verses' alignment of Poland in its relations with Germany and the Western states³⁶.

Historians do not draw a line of demarcation between the finality of the incidents and the rest of the earlier events. B. Musiał, already at the beginning of consideration, formulates a metanarrative steering thought by recalling Vladimir Lenin's speech of 1920: 'The Peace of Versailles made Poland a buffer state to ward off German contact with Soviet communism

³⁴ J. Osterhammel, *Historia XIX wieku. Przeobrażenie świata*, transl. I. Drozdowska-Broering et al., Poznań 2020 (1st edition 2010).

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³⁶ The title issue is also not reflected in the deliberations conducted on the so-called Promethean policy. After all, we can speak of any influence of 'Prometheists' on the MFA up to the mid-1930s at most. However, after J. Piłsudski's death, this ideological trend began to die out. Most importantly, J. Beck was not interested in using the above concepts to carry out the tasks of the MFA subordinate to him; see M. Kornat, *Idea prometejska a polska polityka zagraniczna (1921–1939/40)*, in: *Ruch prometejski i walka o przebudowę Europy Wschodniej (1918–1940)*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2012, pp. 35–90; W. Łysek, *Schyłek prometeizmu (1935–1940)*, "Studia nad Totalitaryzmami i Wiekami XX" 2020, 4, pp. 13–33.

and which the entente treats as a weapon against the Bolsheviks'³⁷. The majority of M. Kornat's reflections in 2002 are concerned with responding to the concept thus presented. After all, in writing about it, I am not trying to question Braudel's *longue durée* as a means of recognizing the actual nature of phenomena by following them in a temporal perspective. On the contrary, such an approach is very close to my professional approach. I only want to clearly emphasize this scarcity of works on *strictly* bilateral relations 1938–1939.

Elsewhere, B. Musiał cited the following statement, this time by Klimient Voroshilov, from the second half of the 1930s: 'Comrades, on the western frontier we have an enemy no less organized than Japan. Here the enemy is organized in particular, I mean Germany. Now, when we speak of our western section, we mean Germany; Poland, Romania and some Baltic countries no longer count with us. We will smash these countries down at any time and under any circumstances'³⁸.

It is that rare of moments when the opposing point of view appears, i.e. the Soviet³⁹ one. Anyway, this setting up of the opponent characterizes the description available to the reader – which again is not surprising. The incommensurability of the Polish-Soviet and Soviet-Polish viewpoints has not been diminished so far by our historiography, for reasons signaled earlier⁴⁰. On the other hand, reading what we do have at our disposal allows us to recount (in a hardly complementary way, of course) the Kremlin's normative approach to Poland just before 1939. At the same time, the discourse, even in this situation, is conducted using framework notions adequate (rather unquestionably) to dialogue with the entire interwar period. It takes place in the stylization of historical interpretation, consequently (fortunately) free of the formula of adaptive interpretation. The question is how will the whole be affected by the current Polish-Ukrainian conflict? We will probably find out soon enough. The relativisation of logical status is not subject to at least two assertions. Firstly, that J. Stalin shared V. Lenin's former view of the impossibility of peaceful

³⁷ B. Musiał, *Geneza*, p. 36.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 62–63.

³⁹ At this point, by way of showing an exception and a starting point, an older article by Mariusz Wołos must be mentioned, contrary to the title, devoted to the issue in question only in part: M. Wołos, *Polityka zagraniczna ZSRR w latach 1938–1939*, in: *Kryzys*, pp. 151–171. In addition, an even older text: E. Duraczyński, *Polska w polityce Moskwy latem 1939*, in: *17 września 1939. Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji historyków*, Kraków 25–26 października 1993 r., ed. H. Batowski, Kraków 1994, pp. 42–56.

⁴⁰ I myself spoke on this issue: M. Kruszyński, *Polska z perspektywy Moskwy*, in: *Po jednej i drugiej stronie linii Ribbentrop–Mołotow. Okupacja niemiecka i sowiecka ziem polskich w latach 1939–1941 w porównaniu*, vol. 1, eds. S. Kalbarczyk, M. Przeglętko, Warszawa 2020, pp. 51–72.

coexistence of political systems treated as contradictory: capitalist and socialist. The leader of the USSR was presumably not doctrinally attached to the slogan of 'world revolution'. In this dimension, therefore, war was for him a practical means of extending Soviet influence. *Ergo* – an armed dispute with Poland was one of the genetics of the Kremlin. Subsequently, the leader of the Bolsheviks used the category of 'spheres of influence'⁴¹, waiting for a chance to negotiate with someone about a new division of the old continent. Above all, however, he sought to demolish the Versailles order – that prime cause of Soviet marginalization in Europe⁴². He found an ally in A. Hitler, while at the same time assuming that the regional (Polish-German) quarrel would develop into a dispute between Germany and the Western powers, and only then would the USSR gain an international advantage. This batch of findings has a descriptive status in our historiography and nothing promises to change in this respect.

This rather static structure of knowledge about Polish-Russian relations in the years 1938–1939 is accompanied by historical generalization with regard to the description of intelligence activities in the USSR (also counterintelligence)⁴³ and the degree of recognition of the Soviet threat by the Warsaw military authorities⁴⁴. Again, in many publications, the

⁴¹ On this also see M. Kornat, *Polska*, p. 46.

⁴² Here again, there is a broad perspective, resulting primarily from source shortages.

⁴³ A. Peplowski, *Wywiad polski na ZSRR 1921–1939*, Warszawa 1996; idem, *Kontrwywiad II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2002; A. Krzak, *Kontrwywiad wojskowy II Rzeczypospolitej przeciwko radzieckim służbom specjalnym 1921–1939*, Toruń 2007; M. Kruszyński, *Wywiad polski na terenie ZSRR (1921–1939). Wybrane zagadnienia*, in: *Studia nad wywiadem i kontrwywiadem Polski w XX wieku*, vol. 1, eds. W. Skóra, P. Skubisz, Szczecin 2012; A. Smoliński, *Próba oceny wartości poznawczej akt pozostałych po Oddziale II Sztabu Głównego Wojska Polskiego w kontekście możliwości opisu sytuacji wojskowej, ekonomicznej i społecznej ZSRS w latach 1921–1939*, "Archiwa – Kancelarie – Zbiory" 2012, 3 (5), pp. 55–92; idem, *Armia Czerwona oraz sowiecki potencjał militarny z lat dwudziestych i trzydziestych XX w. w dokumentach Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego Wojska Polskiego. Przyczynek do dziejów i efektywności wywiadu wojskowego II Rzeczypospolitej*, in: *Studia nad wywiadem i kontrwywiadem Polski w XX wieku*, vol. 3, eds. W. Skóra, P. Skubisz, Szczecin 2016, pp. 63–144; K. Paduszek, *Wywiad polski wobec zagrożenia wojną w 1939 r.*, in: *Kampania polska 1939 r. Polityka – społeczeństwo – kultura*, vol. 1, *Strategia*, eds. M.P. Deszczyński, T. Pawłowski, Warszawa 2013, pp. 515–537.

⁴⁴ W. Włodarkiewicz, *Radzieckie zagrożenie Rzeczypospolitej w ocenach polskich naczelnych władz wojskowych 1921–1939*, Warszawa 2001; idem, *Przed 17 września 1939 roku. Radzieckie zagrożenie Rzeczypospolitej w ocenach polskich naczelnych władz wojskowych 1921–1939*, Warszawa 2002; idem, *Kierownictwo Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego (Naczelnego Wodza) i jego oceny zagrożeń zewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1938–1939*, in: *Studia*, vol. 3, pp. 289–308.

end of the 1930s becomes exclusively a fragment of general categories⁴⁵. Even when in a couple of cases the opposite happens, the most important thoughts of the authors, can be summarized together in a few basic points:

1. Polish intelligence lacked autodynamism, understood as a mechanism of change caused by the quality of information gathered in the east; this conclusion, of course, becomes relevant also in the context of actions taken by military spheres;

2. From the perspective of the subject of the action, i.e. Poland, the final result was constructed primarily by convictions and stereotypes about the USSR, and less by motivated conduct due to the scarcity of reliable sources (the Soviets – an effectively isolated country);

3. the traditionalism of looking at Russians, inherited from the past;

4. control of intelligence (counter-intelligence, military) by an ideologically homogeneous milieu, locked into a specific set of factual findings, hardly stimulated to respond, despite the (sometimes) empirical basis for doing so;

5. Consequently, standardization of the analyses, with little inclination to make corrections;

6. the widespread acceptability of once-conceptualized theses;

7. Piłsudskian axiology, more or less verbalized, evident in characterizations of the Soviet state: USSR as an invariably hostile fragment of reality; a completed cognitive process without conclusions;

8. holism of Polish diplomacy and intelligence factors, but perceived today, whereas not then – the then shaky relational systems between the two objects, with a similar assessment of the current external threats of the Second Republic;

9. the different power of Berlin and Moscow to influence the situation in Warsaw: the foregrounding (also by army-related factors) of the danger coming from the west, at the expense of a poorer treatment of the eastern risk (base opinion due to the ‘purge’ in the Red Army);

⁴⁵ From studies concerning strictly the late 1930s: R. Szawłowski, *Wywiad polski na Związek Sowiecki w 1939 roku*, in: *Europa nieprowincjonalna. Przemiany na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej (Białoruś, Litwa, Łotwa, Ukraina, wschodnie pogranicze III Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) w latach 1772–1999*, ed. K. Jasiewicz, Warszawa 1999, pp. 905–922. See also: P. Kołakowski, *Czas próby. Polski wywiad wojskowy wobec groźby wybuchu wojny w 1939 roku*, Warszawa 2012. Moreover, a publication constitutive for the subject matter – at least in terms of factography – is: Ł. Ulatowski, *Polski wywiad wojskowy w 1939 roku. Struktura organizacyjna, składy osobowe, personel, budżet, mob.*, Warszawa 2013. There are differences when it comes to the interpretation of the collected material. The dispute here is a narrow one. See idem, *Andrzejowi Peplowskiemu w odpowiedzi, czyli o „zleceń na Ulatowskiego”*, <https://docplayer.pl/49884523-Andrzejowi-peplowskiemu-w-odpowiedzi-czyli-o-zleceń-na-ulatowskiego.html> [access: 19.07.2022].

10. theoretical modelling of the situation of confrontation with the Soviet Union, sometimes even a competitive approach to the juxtaposition of the Second Republic-Germany-Soviet Union, in favor of the dynamic system caused by the activity of A. Hitler;

11. the conviction, formulated by researchers, that Poland in 1939 lacked not so much the opportunity as the time to take a proper look at and evaluate J. Stalin's attitude; there could be no question of a one-off act here;

12. Finally, there is little in the available items of scientific systematization of the data – chronicled reconstructions predominate; nothing about the cognitive processes of the elites there or theoretical reflection from the borderline of interdisciplinarity (social psychology, historical sociology, etc.);

13. the 'business as usual' problem – i.e. Polish scholars describing the object studied mainly with the help of national archives⁴⁶.

In pointing out the various shortcomings, it should be noted that the public perception of the Polish society's view of the Kremlin has so far been practically ignored. As a matter of fact, we know nothing about public opinion on the Vistula River and its views on the Eastern issues in the years 1938–1939. The signal report devoted to the above issues by Roman Wapiński⁴⁷, from a long time ago, is usually assisted by the point of view of decision-making circles. Valuing and reflecting through the prism of the 'culture of the public' therefore remains completely outside the research interests of historians. Only Marcin Zaborski's monograph⁴⁸ provides some guidance. Attempting to reflect on the two pre-war summer months of 1939, M. Zaborski – the question is how selectively – with varying degrees of generality, presents the everyday life of Poles (some of them), occupied, one might say, with routine holiday activities: from resort leisure to the order of rural duties regulated by the rhythm of nature. However, the testing of the veracity of these formulations does not take place in comparison with political everyday life, i.e. the realities of the international tension of the time, as if this everyday life of the *everyman* from

⁴⁶ One of the exceptions is W. Włodarkiewicz, who for a time was given concessionary access to Soviet archives.

⁴⁷ R. Wapiński, *Wzajemne oddziaływanie polityki zagranicznej i wewnętrznej Polski w wiosnę i latem 1939 r.*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1992, 24, 1–2, pp. 39–58; idem, *Rezultat kalkulacji czy chciejstwa? Kwestia współdziałania Niemiec i ZSRR przed 17 września 1939 roku w wyobrażeniach polskich środowisk przywódczych*, in: *17 września*, pp. 75–90.

⁴⁸ M. Zaborski, *Lato'39. Jeszcze żyjemy*, Warszawa 2019.

the Second Republic was limited solely to privacy⁴⁹. Just as researchers usually tend to overlook historical changes as perceived by individuals, here this individual has been transformed into an axis of development, but without presenting all the vectors that determine the direction of his or her behavior. A social, group or even mass psychic escape from the 'premonition' of war must not be excluded. At the same time, this would probably be a narrow-minded concept, threatening to nomologise factual knowledge. It should be added at once that, by analogy, we are unable to articulate anything at all through historiography relating to the attitudes of the population living in the USSR. What is more, I am not even aware of a publication which aims to present the Bolshevik propaganda directives towards Poland of that period, along the lines of, for example, Aleksandra Julia Leinwald's book⁵⁰.

Reliability demands that we finally mention – thus fulfilling an earlier announcement – a publication prepared by Piotr Zychowicz⁵¹, a historical publicist, but one who has a formal field of study. This author openly challenged the scheme of Polish-Soviet-German relations in the eponymous period, constructed by others and realistically interpreted. Based on the principle of building a new explanation of the integral position of the Second Republic, P. Zychowicz first disconfirmed the claims available within the historiography, then verified them by falsifying the *status quo*. In his opinion, J. Beck and those then in power in Poland had the historical alternative of agreeing to an alliance with A. Hitler, with the blade of this directed against Moscow. Relying on the texts of often recognized scholars, on the principle of postulated (!) theoretical realism, he constructed a theoretical history, completely undermining the adequacy of statements formulated, after all, on the basis of source empirical material. Moreover, P. Zychowicz seems to convince himself that he is making up for his conceptual backwardness. Moreover, he is critical of the methodological awareness of other historians. He seems to have succumbed to the myth of 'neutral methodology' and decided to speak out against the homogeneity

⁴⁹ The research paradigm of everyday life is much broader: P. Sztompka, *Życie codzienne – temat najnowszy socjologii*, in: *Socjologia codzienności*, eds. P. Sztompka, M. Bogunia-Borowska, Kraków 2008, pp. 24–50; idem, *Space of everyday life*, in: *Barwy codzienności. Analiza socjologiczna*, ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska, Warszawa 2009, p. 30 and next; M. Choma-Jusińska, M. Kruszyński, T. Osiński, *Wstęp*, in: *Życie codzienne w PRL*, eds. M. Choma-Jusińska, M. Kruszyński, T. Osiński, Lublin–Warszawa 2019, pp. 7–12.

⁵⁰ A.J. Leinwald, *Czerwonym młotem w Orła Białego. Propaganda sowiecka w wojnie z Polską 1919–1920*, Warszawa 2008.

⁵¹ P. Zychowicz, *Pakt Ribbentrop–Beck, czyli jak Polacy mogli pokonać Związek Radziecki u boku III Rzeszy*, Poznań 2012.

of historical science in the field I am interested in, postulating a departure from descriptive paradigms in favor of a kind of philosophy of history, allowing for 'non-standard' (in the guild meaning) points of reference and departure. Thus, without fearing or feeling any feelings of inferiority towards his titled 'professional colleagues', the author provided his own ready-made recipe for maintaining Poland's sovereignty in 1939, drawing attention to the contradictions guiding the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, enslaved by the 'policy of balance' algorithm and the remaining Piłsudski's set of rules, incompatible with the *raison d'état*. The essential element of the latter should have been to protect independence at all costs, regardless of 'painful concessions'. *Realpolitik* in this case is understood by P. Zychowicz as a scientific approach to the sphere of diplomacy, outside the ideological programmatic approach, i.e. outside this Piłsudskian programmatic approach, in line with the well-known slogan that 'the end justifies the means'. As a result, it follows from the argument presented by P. Zychowicz that the Polish Republic, at the expense of concessions in the West, had a genuine opportunity for territorial conquests on the horizontally opposite side, obtained through allied cooperation with the Third Reich.

A question arises at this point, concerning the right of scholars to deal with 'Cleopatra's nose' or, following Alexander Demandt, with the 'history of the non-existent'?⁵² A. Demandt, mentioned here, grants such a game of thought a legitimate status, postulating an agreement to make predictions, and fearing an environmental 'abandonment of the consideration of contingencies', leading to the disappearance of the intellectual qualities of Clio. At the same time, the German scholar reminds us that 'the professional virtues of the historian include conscientiousness, sobriety and factuality'⁵³. It is therefore a question of certain exercises, not the equivocation of counterfactual history⁵⁴. It is also necessary to raise, among other things: the question of the social responsibility of the writer on the past; the need to maintain professional credibility and integrity; the avoidance of instrumentalism in moving through the humanities; the prohibition of manipulating public opinion by legitimising controversial or even culturally harmful theses; opposition to the introduction of new

⁵² A. Demandt, *Historia niebyła: co by było, gdyby...?*, transl. M. Skalska, Warszawa 1999.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ On this see *Czy do paktu Ribbentrop–Molotow mogło nie dojść? Odpowiadają profesorowie Wołos i Kornat*, <https://belsat.eu/pl/news/23-08-2021-czy-do-paktu-ribbentrop-molotow-moglo-nie-dojsc-odpowiadaja-profesorowie-wolos-i-kornat/> [access: 20.07.2022]; M. Kornat, „Historia alternatywna”, pp. 107–119.

methods of thinking dedicated to history for a partisan purpose; and finally, the maintenance of a good balance between the commensurability of the gains of counterfactual history and the well-being of narrative (research) practices, with respect for inspirations such as postmodernism or deconstructionism. The Soviet Union, the Weimar Republic, then the Third Reich, were subjects guided by revisionism, more or less masked. Thus, in any possible model of agreement with any of them, Warsaw would first be threatened by a concessionary independence, then by a complete loss of political independence, and then by the necessity to co-participate in totalitarian crimes: Nazi or Communist. In addition, both waited patiently for Poland to take back what they considered their own (Gdańsk, Greater Poland, western Kuyavia, Upper Silesia – treated as German lands; ‘western Belarus’, ‘western Ukraine’ considered an integral part of the former Tsarist empire, in the order of history – the USSR). The leaders of Polish diplomacy throughout the interwar period were certain of this, which determined the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the international arena. On the other hand, there is no doubt that A. Hitler’s rise to power weakened the ‘Sanation’ elite’s conviction that there was a further risk of maintaining the ‘Rapallo line’. J. Beck disregarded voices warning of a ‘reversal of alliances’, raised both by close associates (Juliusz Łukasiewicz) and people removed from influence (Roman Knoll). These statements are inscribed in the state of research and can serve at most as interpretative ‘reflected light’, but they are not subject to factual doubt. It is of course legitimate to ask whether, for example, Germany saw its Polish neighbor as a candidate for a potential satellite, just as one might wonder about the possibilities for J. Stalin to overcome his aversion to ‘your Poland’, which humiliated the Bolsheviks (and himself) in 1920. Only that these considerations should not be given the status of empirical research, the format of new perspectives or talk of narrativist analyticity.

If our historiography is interested in bringing out the dramaturgy of the breakdown of the ‘policy of balance’, the internationalization of Warsaw’s position in 1938 and 1939, if our historiography is interested in bringing out the dramaturgy of the breakdown of the ‘policy of balance’, the internationalization of Warsaw’s position in 1938 and 1939, the level of personality of J. Beck or W. Grzybowski, or the realities of intelligence work in the USSR, while denying the ‘total sameness’ of the bilateral relations of 1938–1939 in question, then Anglo-Saxon and more broadly European researchers – to repeat my earlier statement – see the Second Republic of Poland of that time against the distant background of the fundamental event of 23 August 1939, i.e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It should already be mentioned that there is a lack of opinion in terms

of the submission of *strictly* Polish-Soviet relations⁵⁵. Again, there is a reference to general matters rather than the use of a systematic lecture with regard to contacts on the 'Wierzbowa' – Kremlin line. Polish historians raise this issue. Knowledge of this type takes on the character of baseline information, as it were, without any conviction of being able to correct the situation. Thus, we are dealing with a pragmatic, 'anti-violent' realism, expressed by practicing scholars⁵⁶.

Thus, as it were, above 'our heads', precisely above the 'head of the historical Second Republic', there is a discussion around the following metahistorical issues⁵⁷, among others:

1. To whom to attribute the perpetration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Germany or the Soviets?⁵⁸. The German embassy in Moscow, striving for rapprochement between the two countries in the spirit of the Berlin Agreement of 1926, is often considered to be the persuasive party. The formula of the non-aggression treaty, on the other hand, was to be imposed by the entourage of A. Hitler+. At the same time, historians are content with opinions from the circles of the Commissariat of People's Foreign Affairs (CLSZ) referring to the Kremlin's peaceful attitude⁵⁹, forgetting

⁵⁵ If the 'familiarisation' of the topic in Poland is taking place with such great difficulty, why should foreign-language researchers act differently.

⁵⁶ See: M. Kornat, *Pakt Ribbentrop–Molotow. Interpretacje, mity, rzeczywistość*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2020, 52, 1, pp. 87–88.

⁵⁷ Publications on the subject began to appear shortly after the end of the Second World War (e.g. G.L. Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939–1941*, Leiden 1954), hence it is impossible to list all these items here, especially as the Second Republic – as I have already indicated – does not appear in the subject dimension. Therefore, I confine myself to showing the basic narrative threads, based on more recent books, in accordance with the title announcement of this text.

⁵⁸ I. Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt. Hitler, Stalin und die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938–1939*, Berlin–Frankfurt 1990. Also, among others: M. Patricelli, *Le lance di cartone. Come la Polonia portò l'Europa alla guerra*, Torino 2004; S. Cavallucci, *Polonia 1939: sfida al Terzo Reich. Illusioni, inganni e complicità alla vigilia della Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, Rubbettino 2010; E. Di Rienzo, *Il patto Molotov-Ribbentrop, 1939–1941. Una rilettura geopolitica*, in: *Il patto Ribbentrop-Molotov l'Italia e l'Europa (1939–1941) Atti del convegno (Roma, 31 maggio–1 giugno 2012)*, eds. A. Basciani, A. Macchia, V. Sommella, Roma 2013, pp. 21–42.

⁵⁹ The aforementioned I. Fleischhauer, for example, does not attach any importance to Vladimir Potemkin's statement of 4 October 1938, made in the company of the French Ambassador Robert Coulondre, concerning the 'fourth partition of Poland'. For more see S. Żerko, *I. Fleischhauer, Der Pakt. Hitler, Stalin und die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938–1939, Berlin–Frankfurt 1990 [review]*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 1992, 4, pp. 209–212.

about J. Stalin's constant readiness to cooperate with the Third Reich, despite the formal atmosphere of the 'fight against fascism'⁶⁰;

2. A. Hitler pushed for closer relations with J. Stalin, but the idea of a division into spheres of influence (and thus a division of Poland) came from the latter. The only thing outside the realm of interpretation is the assertion that here the leader of the Third Reich 'put the finishing touches' to the whole thing, i.e. he pressed for and set the date of his Foreign Minister's trip to the capital of the USSR, without encountering any difficulties from the other side⁶¹;

3. colonial terminology – 'spheres of influence' – should be bracketed in this case. For the ideological framework of this formulation was not concerned with building relationships of the 'metropolis-periphery' type. The exterminationist character of the future policy in the Polish lands was assumed from the outset, both in Berlin and Moscow. Hence, the agreement of 23 August 1939 must not be regarded as a diplomatic treaty, dating back to the Congress of the 19th century⁶²;

4. without reliable sources, i.e. looking from the point of view of the preferred situation, J. Stalin's decision – which was supra-ideal in this respect – is considered in terms of excluding the current risk of war for the USSR. A joint appearance with the Entente powers in defense of Poland, and against Germany, meant the inevitability of such a conflict, when the conclusiveness of the pact with the Third Reich dismissed such a threat for a longer period, while producing tangible results⁶³;

5. However, in the context of A. Hitler's own view of affairs, negotiating with J. Stalin demonstrates a complete reconstruction of his hitherto fundamental metaphors of thinking regarding the world order. The leader of the Third Reich was drawing lessons from the Munich Conference, which he regarded as a mistake. More willing to take risks than any of the other European leaders, he wanted war. Poland, regardless of the optics chosen, proved to be a polar opposite object, deprived of the right to independence under the conditions that A. Hitler considered nativist

⁶⁰ M. Kornat, *Pakt*, p. 88. See also in the source edition: *Deutschland und die Sowjetunion 1933–1941. dokumente aus russischen und deutschen Archiven*, vol. 2, Januar 1935–April 1937, eds. S. Slutsch, C. Tischler, Berlin–Boston 2019.

⁶¹ M. Bloch, *Ribbentrop*, transl. G. Siwek, Warszawa 1995; R. Moorhouse, *Pakt diabłów. Sojusz Hitlera i Stalina*, transl. G. Siwek, Kraków 2015.

⁶² All this resonates in the work of M. Bloch and R. Moorhouse.

⁶³ R. Moorhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 43 and next.

to himself. In this sense, he would have acted against the Second Republic even without Soviet support⁶⁴;

6. At the same time, it happens that Poland is presented as the catalyst of the Soviet-German agreement. The veracity of such a conclusion is based more on premises stemming from cultural topos than the source basis. Well, J. Beck was said to be the 'bearer' of an anti-Russian phobia. This ontological-emotional prolegomenon abrogated all rationality in advance. Thus, for example, he never approved of the Red Army marching through his country. In conclusion, in some respects, the Second Republic 'owed' itself this end and not another⁶⁵. This necessarily raises the question of some foreign scholars' understanding of the reality of the time. After all, concessions to Moscow, whether slower or faster, would have meant the sovereign capitulation of Warsaw, as the later fate of the Baltic states proves;

7. Interestingly, the Western powers, are sometimes also blamed for the fiasco of the 1939 Allied negotiations with Stalin. As a result, in this view, France and Britain are also legitimately responsible for bringing about the pact in question and its wide repercussions⁶⁶;

8. Finally, from matters freed from great contexts: French, Italian and American diplomacy, among others, came into possession of information relating to the content of the so-called secret protocol. Much was owed here to the indiscretion of a German official in Moscow, Hans von

⁶⁴ G.L. Weinberg, *Wizje zwycięstwa. Nadzieje ośmiu przywódców z czasów drugiej wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2005, p. 39 and next. Also: idem, *Hitler's Foreign Policy, 1933–1939: The Road to World War II*, New York 2010. The author, one of the most renowned scholars of Nazi Germany and World War II, makes such reflections on the basis of his long professional experience.

⁶⁵ P. Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe*, New York–London 1992. Cf. M. Patricelli, *op. cit.*, p. 23 and next. In this context, see also R.D. Müller, *Wspólny wróg. Hitlerowskie Niemcy i Polska przeciwko Związkowi Radzieckiemu*, Warszawa 2013. In European historiography there is also a view of the possibility of an alliance between Berlin and Warsaw, directed against Moscow. The acclaimed German researcher R.D. Müller put forward the thesis that A. Hitler was ready to make an agreement with Poland for the sake of the fastest possible war with the Soviets. It was not until the Polish veto on the conditions concerning Danzig and the extraterritorial corridor that the Third Reich turned in a different direction. It was then that the primary task was to become the solution of the so-called Polish question.

⁶⁶ M.J. Carley, 1939. *l'alliance de la dernière Chance: une réinterprétation des origines de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Montréal 2001. M. Kornat is polemical about this content. For more on this, also with reference to his own journalistic texts, see M. Kornat, *Pakt*, p. 99.

Herwarth⁶⁷. Leaving aside his motives⁶⁸, no intelligence could have obtained such news. Nor did anyone share this data with the Poles. It has been proved that it would not have mattered, however, because the destructive process of the Versailles system went too far⁶⁹.

In conclusion, we can see scholars' struggles with the interpretation of events when various reflections on the historicity of the discussed subject are academically admitted. It seems – unlike in Polish historiography – that there are no universal 'truths', timeless in factual terms. Scientific revolutions are therefore approved as an expression of acceptance of research self-reflection. Moreover, there is often a lack of coherence here, which probably has to be taken in the dimension of an unfounded claim by the Polish historian (*sic!*). The individual visions and images seem to be eminently complex. It is impossible to describe them in a single formula. The sedimentary portrayal of events at the end of the 1930s, in the variants presented, only allows one to note the top layer of the structure of historical moments: the protagonists are known, there is an awareness of chronology, the whole of diplomatic life accelerates in 1939, one senses a kind of proto-determinism of Poland's fate, dependent on the decisions of its neighbors. If, on the other hand, one puts forward a thesis to the contrary, the 'blame' for the turn of the concrete present falls mainly on J. Beck. The voices presented, as always, also reflect the narrative vices of historians in that they have knowledge of things that happened both *ante* and *post factum*. Therefore, having identified representatives of the 'dark side of power', they (i.e. these representatives of 'darkness') are allowed autonomy in doing evil, indicating who, if any, tried to prevent it. Poland, although a victim of totalitarianisms, undergoes a kind of obliteration in favor of a conciliatory confrontation with memory. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, this center of analysis, became a global tragedy, bringing global conflict. And so, in the broad perspective, the gaze *from below*, which in the present situation must be taken as the gaze from Warsaw, is often lost. No one (or very few), therefore, bother to take a micro-history, i.e. to put a magnifying glass to Polish-Soviet relations.

And how did the past function in the opinions of Russian scholars⁷⁰? The historicity of the years 1938–1939, and above all of the events of 1939, is played out in contemporary Russia, as it were, in two interconnected

⁶⁷ See: H. von Herwarth, *Między Hitlerem a Stalinem. Wspomnienia dyplomaty i oficera niemieckiego 1931–1945*, transl., introduction and annotations E.C. Król, Warszawa 1992.

⁶⁸ See: M. Kornat, *Pakt*, pp. 101–102.

⁶⁹ This thought runs through the aforementioned foreign publications.

⁷⁰ As before, I will limit myself to presenting – in my opinion – the most important levels of historical scientific practice.

temporal dimensions: the past, i.e. characterizing what those years were (in the opinion of the participants in the discourse), and the present, where the past is actively at work, influencing current political life. In sum, this is where facts are often crossed over, reinterpreted and reduced, losing their universal global position in favor of producing 'their own truths', to which they are given binding status. In this way, historiographical 'puzzles' are built up, completely contradicting even the most casual analyses of scholars from other countries. In addition, the specific 'pressure of history' triggers certain thinking about history and the present by the local society. Not only is a plethora of historical misstatements – or outright lies – being generated, but also an atmosphere of resentment towards the westernization processes taking place in Russia as a result of the 'macdonaldization' of the world, which Russian Federation (Russian Federation) President Vladimir Putin is unable to curb, although he consistently tries (I am leaving aside the issue of the current aggression in Ukraine). The broadly understood factual-interpretative 'stability' – presented by me earlier – is thus challenged by this politician, who defines his own object of cognition, individual historical (and social) scientific practice. After all, it is not about creating an alternative, but these 'own truths', fundamentally ahistorical, completely suspending rational criticism, serving manipulation and leading to professional-ethical nihilism. Moreover, a peculiar skepticism towards the sources has been induced, losing – one might say – trust, with the full institutionalization of the message formed by those in power. The current Russian historiography⁷¹ is thus becoming a fictional creation in terms of credibility, situated outside of real, past events, with the legitimacy of research methods, cognitive procedures suspended, with fragmentary descriptions now having a 'life after life' for partisan political purposes, all according to V. Putin's recipe. In 2019, taking advantage of the 80th anniversary of the start of the Second World War in Europe, the leader of the Russian Federation in public statements, following the example of the Soviet narratives about 1939, completely rejected Moscow's responsibility for contributing to the start of the conflict⁷². The Russian leader, becoming a 'historian' (*sic!*), accused Poland of collaboration with the Third Reich, accusing J. Beck of preparing an anti-Soviet alliance with the aim of destroying the USSR. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact took on the character of a defense agreement, which J. Stalin had every right to conclude as a statesman responsible

⁷¹ Ignoring the changes that have taken place in the approach to certain historical facts in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

⁷² In a way, V. Putin summarized the historiographical message conveyed over the years about the events of the late 1930s.

for the security of the state. In addition, the Munich Conference also began to play a fundamental role: a sub-genesis of both the start of the European hostilities and (automatically) synonymous with the collective capitulation of the West to A. Hitler, with whom Britain and France were the first to negotiate⁷³. In this 'borrowed' set of metaphors and visions, it appears that Moscow at the time remained alone. J. Stalin, on the other hand, being aware of the various threats, had to creatively grapple with the reality he was reacting to rather than producing⁷⁴.

Therefore – moving already into the territory of historiography (set in these realities of anti-democratic, Putinist Russia) – the segmentation of admitted source materials⁷⁵ is accompanied by the whitewashing of the Soviets, presented as the European defender of peace. Not only did the Kremlin become the depository of this supreme idea, which becomes a hermeneutic key to the perception of international relations at the time, including, of course, bilateral Polish-Soviet relations, but it was even ready, in cooperation with the Western powers, to militarily counteract the inclinations of A. Hitler, including in defense of Poland⁷⁶. These peculiarities complete the characterization of J. Stalin's actions, separating himself programmatically from the actions of the aggressive despot from Berlin. At the same time, they constitute the opposite of cabinet diplomacy, tolerating Nazism, accepting the wrongs inflicted and ready to make any concessions at the expense of European solidarity. In conclusion, on matters of principle, the USSR was on many levels and in many dimensions superior to the French and the English, constantly overstepping moral boundaries in order to briefly secure peace with an unprincipled partner.

As if against all odds, or in spite of the attitude of the West in 1938, the Kremlin's original assumptions oscillated around bringing about cooperation with London and Paris, so as to curb Berlin's appetites. Ideological

⁷³ Putin seems not to have noticed that Great Britain and France pacted with A. Hitler not to bring about war but, on the contrary, to avoid it by satisfying the claims of the leader of the Third Reich. The Munich Conference remains, of course, a synonym for European short-sightedness or disgrace, but it in no way equals the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement.

⁷⁴ See, inter alia: <https://tvn24.pl/magazyn-tvn24/reakcja-polski-prawidlowa-a-to-corobi-putin-jest-fundamentalnie-nieuczciwe,251,4376> [access: 25.07.2022]; <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1936818,1,putin-odgrzewa-propagandowa-wojne-z-polska.read> [access: 25.07.2022]. This has been commented on academically by M. Kornat: idem, *Pakt*, p. 99.

⁷⁵ In one of the most recent Russian source publications on 1939, the selection of documents ends with...July of that year; see: *Советско-польские отношения в 1918–1945 гг. Сборник документов в четырех томах*, vol. 3, 1932–1939, Москва 2017.

⁷⁶ Л.Ф. Соцков, *Секреты польской политики 1935–1945 гг. Рассекреченные документы службы внешней разведки Российской Федерации*, Москва 2010.

and political differences were to be pushed aside for the sake of solutions guaranteeing the prevention of world conflict⁷⁷. This 'author's' vision of history has (also) the task of rewriting the behavior of the 'rest' of historiography, leading to a suspension of the perspective inherent even in event history. The question immediately arises as to why, in spite of such a conciliatory attitude on the part of J. Stalin, the treatments presented failed? The blame for this state of affairs falls (of course) on the Second Republic⁷⁸. The structural and methodological procedure, completely exempt from the compulsion to tie the narrative to facts (*sic!*), consists here in creating the following allegedly logical sequence of events: after the partition of Czechoslovakia, the USSR wanted to engage in the defense of the rest of the *status quo*; the Soviets were pushing towards the formation of a grand coalition with Great Britain and France, thus wishing to stop the Nazi march on Europe, destroying the remnants of the Versailles order; in this constellation, Warsaw should only have consented to the Red Army marching through its own territory; the conceit of the Polish authorities, their prejudices, their systemic dislike of the USSR, the 'beliefs' of J. Beck himself. Beck, shook the whole concept, putting the Bolsheviks up against a political wall. This is how the principled canon of Russian historical writing on the title topic can be summed up. This 'research culture' abhors opposition – as I mentioned at the outset – desacralizes all workshop sanctities, rejects links – in this set-up – with non-parallel external *academos* (if foreign scholars disagree with the opinions

⁷⁷ Other works on Soviet foreign policy in the years 1938–1939, contextualizing relations with Poland, include *Советско-польские отношения в политических условиях Европы 30-х годов XX столетия. Сборник статей*, eds. Э. Дурачинский, А.Н. Сахаров, Москва 2004 (here, after all, there is a 'Polish variant', i.e. an article by W. Materski); Л. Млечин, МИД. Министры иностранных дел. Тайная дипломатия Кремля, Москва 2003; *Международный кризис 1939–1941 гг.: от советско-германских договоров 1939 г. до нападения Германии на СССР: материалы международной конференции, организованной Институтом всеобщей истории Российской академии наук, Университетом Латвии, Институтом современной истории (Мюнхен), Московским отделением Фонда им. Конрада Аденауэра*, Москва, 3–4 февраля 2005 г., eds. Н.И. Егорова et al., Москва 2006; СССР, *Восточная Европа и Вторая мировая война 1939–1941. Дискуссии, комментарии, размышления*, ed. С.З. Случ, Москва 2007; А.О. Чубарьян, *Канун трагедии. Сталин и международный кризис. Сентябрь 1939–июнь 1941 года*, Москва 2008; М.И. Мелтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина. Схватка за Европу 1939–1941 гг. (Документы, факты, суждения)*, 3rd edition, Москва 2008; Г. Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion, Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, Yale 1999; russian edition: Г. Городецкий, *Роковой самообман. Сталин и нападение Германии на Советский Союз*, Москва 2001. Many of these works are mentioned and discussed by M. Wołos, *op. cit.*, pp. 159–171.

⁷⁸ These things are analyzed in: M. Kornat, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 100.

formulated by Russian colleagues, so much the worse for the former), depreciates the findings of others, imposes alleged politicking on the rest, fiddling with 'objective truth' (whatever that may be), constantly and constantly wanting to damage the image of the always peaceful Russia. Russia, then, is a realistically besieged fortress, not least since the 1930s.

The title of an article prepared by Sergei Sluch and published in the Polish journal "*Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*" is significant, it reads: *Stalin's long road to a settlement with Hitler*⁷⁹. This, otherwise one of the once most conciliatory Russian scholars towards Poland, was also not entirely able to go beyond official 'dogma'. Presenting the contours rather than the factual details of the USSR's foreign policy construction of the time, this historian – in an attempt to justify J. Stalin's actions of 1939 – first draws attention to the ideological differences prevailing between the Soviets and the Third Reich. He believed that the 'national communism' implemented by the Soviet leader, after rejecting the idea of a 'world revolution', caused the real abomination of the leader of the German Nazis. The other side did not remain indebted either. S. Sluch states: 'Stalin, who was no less a dogmatist than the Führer himself, was unable to part with his ideas about the National Socialist regime and was unwilling to acknowledge the overly significant role that ideology played in the process of shaping his foreign policy.'⁸⁰

As a result, under so-called normal conditions, the Kremlin host would never have agreed to any – and the shortest – intermedia in relations with the Soviet Union's almost organic adversary. So, what was so extraordinarily wrong that 'fire' nevertheless married 'water'? It will come as no surprise to us that the perpetrator of this supernatural marriage was Poland. S. Sluch writes elsewhere: An important element in the various combinations aimed at establishing a 'blood-sealed friendship' with the Third Reich became, for the Kremlin during this period, relations with Poland. Moscow was pursuing the goal of splitting or at least significantly weakening the Warsaw-Berlin tandem, but not at all in order to get closer to Warsaw, but solely so that the most ruthless possible disruption of Polish-German relations could help to bring the USSR closer to National Socialist Germany at the expense of Poland. The Soviet leadership measured the temperature of the German-Polish negotiations extremely carefully and drew a line of tactical moves in relations with Poland according to their development. As long as the course of these talks gave Moscow views of compromise with Berlin, as always only limited, the

⁷⁹ S. Slucz, *Długa droga Stalina do ugody z Hitlerem*, "*Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*" 2009, 1 (14), pp. 27–47.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

Soviet side did not stop in its efforts to 'build a bridge' to Warsaw. However, Moscow's interest in ostentatious cooperation with Warsaw was diminishing in direct proportion to the amount of information about the tightening of German-Polish relations reaching Stalin and the NKID – the 'Polish card' was no longer needed'⁸¹.

In an unvulgarized way, aesthetically, the scholar describes what was mentioned earlier. J. Stalin was defending himself; he was defending his own country against a recognized risk that threatened to upset Moscow's international position. In the narrative of S. Sluch, to whom I devote some space because of his generally exceptional moderate attitude, this J. Stalin was not one of the diplomatic meek lambs, but at the same time he was not a dilettante, but a realist on the model of Cardinal Armand Jean de Richelieu. Well, sometimes, in the name of the higher interest, a compromise has to be made with ideality. After all, 'Statesmen must not act demonically, but it would be absurd to demand that they behave like saints'⁸². On the other hand, quoting another sentence, this time from the will of a French clergyman: 'My first thought, therefore, was the majesty of the king, my second: the greatness of the state'⁸³, for J. Stalin the first and only thought was to be the majesty and greatness of the former Tsarist empire, whether one likes it or not, whether it is easy for 'non-Russians' to grasp this or not. Finally, there is the point of view of the Russians, for whom the Kremlin's conduct at the time – yes, controversial – was in their interests. After all, let us also remember that in the end, a compromise with Berlin was sought 'as limited as ever'. The whole historiographical confusion thus becomes exaggerated. It only raises the question of where the good of the state, the privileged status of each homeland, ends, and from which point decency, ethics, the consciousness of belonging to something more than a nation – the consciousness of belonging to the human family – enters⁸⁴.

To summarise the reflections presented in this article:

- In Polish historiography – so far – the title subject has no subjectivity;
- dominate either holistic narratives about Polish-Soviet relations in the inter-war period or the described bilateral relations from 1938–1939 are a fragment of a larger, geopolitical whole;

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁸² J. Baszkiewicz, *Richelieu*, Warszawa 1984, p. 132.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

⁸⁴ At the same time, the aforementioned S. Sluch unequivocally states that the Soviet aggression of 17 September 1939 marked the USSR's entry into the Second World War; see С.С. Случ, *Советско-германские отношения в сентябре – декабре 1939 года и вопрос о вступлении СССР во Вторую мировую войну*, "Отечественная история" 2000, 5, pp. 46–58.

– On the one hand, both the former and the latter are to be welcomed, all the more so as the issue of Polish-Soviet contacts has had the good fortune to have distinguished scholars producing seminal works;

– However, applying a scientific magnifying glass to a smaller section, actually on a ‘micro-history’ basis, remains an unfilled gap;

– There is still, and probably will remain for a long time, the risk of constructing a homogeneous message – a Polish-centric one – due to the lack of access to sources of Soviet provenance. Here one must rely on the skills of historians, as the depositories of the best academic rules. Scholars should not allow the creation of an unreflective narrative in an attempt to understand the complexity of the matter and the different points of view;

– The axis of consideration – it probably cannot be otherwise – will remain the decisions of J. Beck and the various assessments of W. Grzybowski’s reporting;

– I wonder if we are able to add anything further to the findings made by experts in Second Republic intelligence;

– So far we know nothing about the reactions of Polish society to the events happening on the Warsaw-Moscow line. At the beginning of 1939, for example, a trade treaty was signed, which historians mention in passing: how were these things seen in the press, for example?;

– The attitudes of Russian society at the time will probably never be known; at best, reliable research will have to wait a long time;

– it is good to record the ‘Polish point of view’ in congressional languages in an attempt to reach the Anglo-Saxon worldview of reality more effectively. To date, this has been done mainly by M. Kornat, preparing cross-country studies;

– The optics of Russian historiography will not change. This is a sad statement. In turn, the following advice should be sent to V. Putin himself, supporting the thought once expressed by Lord John Acton: ‘Advice to those who intend to write history – don’t write it’;

– perhaps the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, concluded at the expense of Poland, was intended to prevent a new Munich for the USSR, perhaps it served to counteract the isolation of the Kremlin – while appealing further to the leader of the Russian Federation – let others check this out, as the canonical theses of Russian historiography mostly do not deserve even the briefest consideration;

– and, finally, at the very end: there is much to be done, which the historian only welcomes.

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