THE POLICY OF THE PIŁSUDSKI'S CAMP TOWARDS THE SLOVAK QUESTION (1918–1939)

POLITYKA OBOZU PIŁSUDCZYKOWSKIEGO WOBEC KWESTII
SŁOWACKIEJ (1918–1939)

*Łukasz Lewkowicz**

— ABSTRACT —

The Slovak question played a key role in the foreign policy implemented by the Second Republic of Poland during the interwar period. Representatives from the most important currents of the Polish interwar political scene highlighted the significance of the relations between Warsaw and Bratislava, as evidenced by the presence of this issue in the programmatic documents, journalism, memoirs and speeches of particular politicians. Slovakia was the object of interest among many socialists, nationalists, Christian-Democratic politicians, conservatives, and peasants. Also, the leading activists of the Piłsudski's Camp, who from the very beginning had a clear yet not always precise vision of Polish diplomatic measures in this respect, largely dealt with the Slovak question. It should be emphasized that the distinctive feature of Piłsudski's political thought during the interwar period was broadly construed mid-European consolidation.

— ABSTRAKT —

Kwestia słowacka odegrała ważną rolę w polityce zagranicznej realizowanej przez Drugą Rzeczpospolitą w okresie międzywojennym. Wagę relacji dwustronnych między Warszawą a Bratysławą dostrzegali przedstawiciele najważniejszych nurtów międzywojennej polskiej sceny politycznej, o czym świadczy uwzględnienie tego zagadnienia w dokumentach programowych, publicystyce, wspomnieniach i wypowiedziach poszczególnych polityków. Słowacja pozostawała w zainteresowaniu socjalistów, narodowców, chadeków, konserwatystów i ludowców. Problematyce słowackiej wiele miejsca poświęcali również czołowi działacze obozu piłsudczykowskiego, którzy od początku mieli wypracowaną, choć nie zawsze precyzyjną koncepcję działań polskiej dyplomacji w tym zakresie. Należy podkreślić, że szeroko rozumiana konsolidacja środkowoeuropejska

* Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Institute of Political Science and Administration. Institute of Central Europe, Department of the Visegrad Group.

The aim of the article was the analysis of the foreign policy of the Piłsudski's Camp towards the Slovak question between 1918 and 1939, with special focus on the conditions of Polish-Slovak relationship, the mutual attitude of the Polish authorities and Slovak autonomists towards each other, the role of Slovaks in Polish integration projects as well as the relations between the Second Republic of Poland and the Slovak in the years 1938–1939.

Keywords: Piłsudski's Camp; the Slovak question; Polish-Slovak relations; interwar period

stanowiła wyróżnik piłsudczykowskiej myśli politycznej w okresie międzywojennym. Celem artykułu była analiza polityki zagranicznej obozu piłsudczykowskiego wobec kwestii słowackiej w latach 1918–1939 ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem: uwarunkowań relacji polsko-słowackich, relacji władz polskich z autonomistami słowackimi, roli Słowacji w polskich projektach integracyjnych oraz stosunków politycznych Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej i Państwa Słowackiego w latach 1938–1939.

Słowa kluczowe: obóz piłsudczykowski; kwestia słowacka; stosunki polsko-słowackie; okres międzywojenny

INTRODUCTION

The Slovak question played a key role in the foreign policy implemented by the Second Republic of Poland during the interwar period. Representatives from the most important currents of the Polish interwar political scene highlighted the significance of the relations between Warsaw and Bratislava, as evidenced by the presence of this issue in the programmatic documents, journalism, memoirs and speeches of particular politicians. Slovakia was the object of interest among many socialists, nationalists, Christian-Democratic politicians, conservatives, and peasants. Also, the leading activists of the Piłsudski's Camp, who from the very beginning had a clear yet not always precise vision of Polish diplomatic measures in this respect, largely dealt with the Slovak question. It should be emphasized that the distinctive feature of Piłsudski's political thought during the interwar period was broadly construed mid-European consolidation.

The aim of the article was the analysis of the foreign policy of the Piłsudski's Camp towards the Slovak question between 1918 and 1939, with special focus on the conditions of Polish-Slovak relationship, the mutual attitude of the Polish authorities and Slovak autonomists towards each other, the role of Slovaks in Polish integration projects as well as the relations between the Second Republic of Poland and the Slovak in the years 1938–1939.

POLITICAL CONCEPTS OF THE PIŁSUDSKI'S CAMP TOWARDS SLOVAKIA

At the outset it should be explained what the Piłsudski's Camp's basic ideology premises towards mid-Europe, Czechoslovakia and Slovakia were. This group in its political thought presented a negative attitude towards Czechoslovakia. This fact did not result from phobias, prejudices or personal animosities, but from the analysis of political reality. For Józef Piłsudski, Czechoslovakia was an artificial creation condemned to disintegration. On the other hand, Józef Beck believed that it was a state "without a cohesive force, with a shaky and changing policy". For the representatives of the Piłsudski's Camp, Czechoslovakia was not only the most endangered country on the continent, but also politically and militarily incapacitated. The Piłsudians formulated the view that there were permanent and objective contradictions between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Five levels of conflict were distinguished: (1) Czechoslovakia's approach to Poland on the eve of independence and during the Polish-Soviet war (1919–1920) – Piłsudski's people believed that the Czechoslovak side was hostile then and actually supported Soviet Russia; (2) territorial disputes over Cieszyn Silesia and the Polish-Slovak borderland as well as Czechoslovakia's policy towards Eastern Lesser Poland and Prague's support for irredentist actions undertaken by Ukrainian groups in Poland; (3) national policy of Czechoslovakia towards Poles living in Zaolzie; (4) different perceptions by the Czechoslovak side of other participants in international relations (Germany, Russia, and Hungary), communism, fascism, and the most important international initiatives; (5) the way of conducting foreign policy by Czechoslovakia – attachment to peace treaties, orientation towards international organizations, clientelism towards superpowers, referring to democracy (Paruch, 2005, pp. 652–655; Studnicki, 1938, p. 62).

When analysing the Sanation political thought, we can distinguish five elements constituting the conception of mid-Europe consolidation: (1) all mid-European countries have common interests which arise from their geopolitical location between three seas (the Baltic, the Black and the Adriatic Sea) and between two superpowers (Germany and the Soviet Union); (2) Poland should shape the processes which happen in the region in such a way so as to enhance its position in the current relations with Germany and the Soviet Union, which in the case of a war would facilitate the defence against the aggressors. They addressed their offer to all the countries situated in this territory, dividing it into three zones: Baltic, Balkan, and Danubian (according to Sanation members,

the last one, which included Czechoslovakia, was the hardest one in terms of regulating relations); (3) influences of any superpower should be removed and the clientelist orientation which had been adopted by some of the mid-European countries should be eradicated (especially, Czechoslovakia was accused of such an attitude); (4) when developing the policy towards certain mid-European countries, Sanation did not take into account the policy conducted by them during WWI; (5) Piłsudski's supporters expressed their optimism as to resolving conflicts and other problematic issues existing in mutual relations between the states in this region. Sanation intensified its activity aimed at the consolidation of mid-Europe twice: 1932–1934 and 1938–1939 (Paruch, 2005, pp. 689–695).

SLOVAKIA AS A PART OF POLISH-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS IN 1918–1926

During the interwar period the relationships between Poland and Slovakia were varied. It did not depend on mutual contacts only, but also on the international situation in the mid-Europe. It ought to be emphasised that this relation was not equal since Poland was the subject of foreign policy whereas Slovakia, which did not conduct its own policy being part of Czechoslovakia, was merely the object of such a policy. Moreover, Polish interests in the Slovak question only partially concerned Slovaks themselves. The Slovak issue was, first and foremost, the element of Polish policy towards the Czechoslovak state as well as a building block in the Polish-Hungarian relations (Orlof, 1980, p. 24).

Generally, the Warsaw-Prague relationship during the period under examination can be described as “cold neighbourhood” (Paczkowski, 1997, pp. 16–17). Polish authorities considered Czechoslovakia to be an obstacle in the development of mid-European conceptions, such as gaining influence in the region of the Danube and in the Balkans. Additionally, they reproached Czechoslovakia for keeping good relationships with the Soviet Union and supporting Ukrainian nationalism. Warsaw claimed that Czechoslovakia was an artificial national entity which would fall apart sooner or later. The problem of a joint border bore a significance for the Polish-Czechoslovak relationships as well, especially in the questions of the division of Cieszyn Silesia (Baka, 2010, p. 14). A conflict over Zaolzie first appeared during WWI. It was mainly the result of different rules which Poland and Slovakia adopted when presenting their argument for their territorial claims. Polish politicians put an emphasis on the ethnographic

rule according to which Cieszyn Silesia territory in which Poles constituted the majority of population should be annexed to Poland. On the other hand, Czech activists brought the historic rule to the forefront – long-time affiliation of Zaolzie to the Crown of Saint Wenceslas and Czech economic entity. This region was of particular importance to both states since it abounded in coal mines, iron works and the strategic railway junction connecting Czech with Slovakia (Gawron, 2005, pp. 54–55).

Poland's territorial demands on the Slovak border in the years 1918–1920 were based on the foundation of the right to self-determination of nations as the basic principle of the organization of political and state life in Central Europe after the WWI. The amicable settlement of the dispute with Czechoslovakia did not bring the expected results. In this situation, the Polish authorities asked the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers with a proposal to settle the border dispute by means of a plebiscite. On September 11, 1919, this authority acceded to the Polish request and allowed a plebiscite to be held in Spiš, Orava, and Cieszyn Silesia. However, the plebiscite area, contrary to the Polish position, was significantly reduced and did not cover the land of Czadeckie and part of Spiš. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak authorities opposed the planned plebiscite, predicting that the Polish side could win in the indicated areas.

The international situation was definitely on the Czechoslovak side. In the summer of 1920, the Polish-Bolshevik conflict entered its decisive phase. As the Bolshevik army was approaching Warsaw, Czechoslovakia, together with Germany, refused to pass ammunition and military equipment to the Polish army, which significantly worsened the military situation of the Polish state. The situation on the Eastern Front ultimately resulted in a negative solution to the dispute for Poland. In difficult political and military conditions, Prime Minister Władysław Grabski decided to give up the plebiscite at the Spa conference (July 10, 1920) for the promise of support for European countries, and at the same time handed over the settlement to the Entente countries. On the basis of the agreement in Spa, the Conference of Ambassadors made an arbitrary division of Spiš and Orava on July 28, 1920, as a result of which Poland obtained only 27 villages (out of 71 located in the plebiscite area) located in the northern parts of both areas. Nearly 45 thousand people of Polish origin remained on the Czechoslovak side of the border (Roszkowski, 2011, pp. 309–333).

The territorial dispute over the course of the Polish-Czechoslovak border has not been finally resolved. The decision of the Conference of Ambassadors allowed for the possibility of introducing certain changes in the delimitation of

the new border. The Polish authorities counted on the possibility of regaining Javorina along with part of the Tatra Mountains, on the basis of an exchange of territories with Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, both countries did not come to a compromise even when delimiting the border. The Czechoslovak authorities conducted an effective diplomatic action in Western Europe, as a result of which the request of the International Delimitation Commission of September 25, 1922, which granted Poland most of the disputed territory, was not implemented. The Czechoslovak side, hoping for a positive result for itself, tried to delay the final settlement of the case. Finally, on March 12, 1924, the League of Nations issued a decision unfavorable for Poland, leaving the entire disputed area on the Czechoslovak side. A significant reason for the defeat of the Polish government was the lack of a consistent foreign policy towards the Javorina problem, caused by frequent changes of foreign ministers (Orłowicz, 1922, pp. 16–24; Chybiński, 1923, pp. 3–12; Modelski, 1924, pp. 183–191; Goetel, 1925, pp. 14–15; Jelinek, 2009, pp. 184–198).

At the onset of the independence Slovakia was in the centre of Sanation's interest. In 1919 in Warsaw, there was a meeting between priests Andrej Hlinka, František Jehlička and Štefan Mnohel with Józef Piłsudski who might have expected the Slovaks to show their eagerness to accede to the federalist bloc built by Poland in East-Central Europe. Slovak activists went to a conference in Paris with Polish passports. After travelling back, priest Hlinka was imprisoned by the Czechs and the Polish intelligence even planned to release him (later when he became an ambassador, he was released under amnesty) (Jehlicka, 1922, p. 5; Orlof, 2003, pp. 77–93; Gniazdowski, 2006, p. 32).

Ultimately, when the southern border was demarcated, it reduced the tension between Poland and Czechoslovakia. After 1920 Poland did not intend to take any military actions towards its southern neighbour. Normalisation of the relationship between Warsaw and Prague temporarily diminished the Polish government's interest in Slovakia. On May 25, 1921, National Council consisting of pro-Hungary Slovak activists proclaimed Independent Slovak Republic in Cracow, which stirred up only a bit of anxiety in Prague, but generally went unnoticed (Pilarski, 2008, p. 142).

In 1923 Feliks Gwiżdż, under the pseudonym of Stanisław Korski, wrote an article which gained big publicity in Slovakia. It was published in the magazine "Slovak" and it called the Slovaks to fraternal collaboration and accepting the loss of Spiš and Orava (Gniazdowski, 2006, p. 33). Between 1918 and 1926, the Polish-Slovak relations were characterized by low intensity. Polish institutions,

especially military ones, moderately supported Slovak separatists because of their anti-Czech attitude, nevertheless, Poland wanted first and foremost keep up good relationship with Hungary. The Polish diplomacy did not entirely resign from supporting the Slovak activity, though, and placed bigger emphasis on the Polish-Slovak development of cultural actions and funding national press (Olejko, 2012, pp. 81–82).

POLISH SUPPORT FOR THE AUTONOMIC AND SEPARATIST MOVEMENT IN SLOVAKIA

After the May Coup in 1926, there emerged a Polish action aiming at recruiting Slovak separatists against Prague policy and thus weakening the territorial unity of Czechoslovakia. From 1927 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly supported Slovak students' stay at the Jagiellonian University. Internship alumni in Poland were treated as the core of the future campaign and political apparatus. In 1929, a conference on the presence of Polish minority in the Czechoslovakian state was held in Warsaw, which was followed by further meetings devoted to the topic of the Polish-Slovak borderline. The second half of 1920s was a period of some revival of mutual social relationships, especially in the scout, tourist and mountaineering environment. A significant centre of support for Polish-Slovak contacts in the 1930s was the Polish Consulate in Bratislava after it had been taken over by Wacław Łaciński. The dealings between the Matica Slovenska and the Polish Academy of Skills as well as Warsaw Scientific Society were particularly intensive. After 1931, the conferences regarding the Polish-Slovak borderline were moved from Warsaw to Katowice where Michał Grażyński, the provincial governor, was the organizer and the so-called Cracovian activists (Władysław Semkowicz, Walery Goetel, priest Ferdynand Machay) were the participants (Olejko, 2012, pp. 84–85).

In the 1930s, the Polish foreign policy put an emphasis on supporting the autonomic and separatist movement in Slovakia, at the same time aiming at the Czechoslovakia break-up. Poland wanted to gain influences in Slovakia and started considering it as the independent formation in "the third Europe" between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany (Baka, 2010, p. 15). The very concept of "the third Europe" is quite hard to define since it was presented by Józef Beck and his co-workers in a rather general manner. However, some of its elements could be found in the programmatic documents and in the practises of Polish diplomacy

during that period. Essentially, it was supposed to be a bloc consisting of two states from Scandinavia to the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. It was presumed that a mutual Polish-Hungarian agreement would lay the foundations for the creation of “the third Europe” whereas a close cooperation between both of those countries would ensure its independence from Germany and the Soviet Union. The very idea evolved and exerted a direct influence on the Polish foreign policy from 1938 (Gniazdowski, 2009, pp. 166–167). In general, in the 1930s there was a rise in dealings with Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party [*HSLŠ*] as a party representing autonomic movement. Poland had very good relations with pro-Polish wing led by Karol Sidor (Baka, 2010, p. 15).

Taking up a position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by J. Beck in 1932 and the deterioration of Polish-Czechoslovak relationships after 1934 contributed to the increase in the political role of “closeness action”. On the initiative of the Ministry certain terminology changes were initiated. In 1933, consul Wacław Łaciński put forward a proposal of using the name “Słowacja” [*Slovakia*] instead of a previously widespread term “Słowaczyna” [*Slovak Lands*] which was associated more with a province or a region. The new name quickly came into a general use (Gniazdowski, 2006, p. 35; Gwiżdż, 1936, pp. 14–15). In the first half of the 1930s, the Polish diplomacy reinforced a conviction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Slovakia should serve as a bridge between Poland and the south. In 1936, Beck stated that they should strive to establish a joint border with Hungary at the stretch of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and to make Hungarians realize that Slovakia was irreversibly lost to them. Additionally, they were to form a Slovak buffer controlled by Poland. Polish politicians were confronted with a dilemma whether to support Slovak separatism aimed at the Czechoslovak break-up and the formation of this buffer or whether to favor Slovak decentralist tendencies in order to implement Hungarian annexation plans and at the same time have territorial acquisitions in the borderland area. The view which ultimately prevailed was that Poland should not take a clear stance on this issue (Gniazdowski, 2009, p. 175).

In 1936, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prompted the establishment of Ludovít Štúr Friends of Slovakia Society (since 1938 – the Society of Polish-Slovak Cooperation). Feliks Gwiżdż took the lead on it, being at the same time a man in position of trust in the Polish government with regards to Slovak matters. The aim of the organization was to “uphold and foster the Polish-Slovak friendship in the cultural, scientific, economic and social field and to disseminate information about Slovakia among the Polish society”. The activity of the Society concentrated on promoting Slovak literature in Poland and acting as an inter-

mediary between Polish and Slovak organizations. Another significant aspect of the Society's programme, particularly from the point of view of the Ministry, was its journalistic activity. It involved maintaining contacts with editorial offices of Slovak newspapers and issuing a bulletin dedicated to Slovakia which was made available to the Polish media. A monthly "Ziemia Podhalańska" [*Podhale Land*] was issued by the Society from July 1936. A two-volume publication titled "Slovakia and Slovaks" edited by W. Semkowicz appeared as a result of the cooperation with the Cracow Slovak environment and it contained information about the history, politics, culture and nature in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia. The Society mainly kept relationships with the autonomist associations (Ludaks and young Catholic intelligentsia). It also maintained cultural contacts with Matica Slovenska. Apart from Warsaw, the Society organized its branches in Cracow, Katowice, Zakopane, Poznań, Częstochowa, and Cieszyn. In the summer of 1937, the Polish authorities officially welcomed a Slovak delegation headed by Andrej Hlinka in Krynica and Zakopane. Later, Hlinka was decorated with the Order of Polonia Restituta. In 1938, at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Slovak language course led by Henryk Batowski was established in Cracow. It was attended mainly by scouts (Gwiżdż, 1937, pp. 6–14; Gniazdowski, 2006, pp. 38–39; Pilarski, 2017, pp. 284–285). In May 1938, the delegation of Slovaks from the United States of America was accepted in Poland. They were carrying "the original document" of Pittsburg agreement to which the Slovak autonomist movement referred to (Gniazdowski, 2005, p. 112).

At the end of the 1930s Piłsudski's supporters were assured that the experiment consisting in uniting Czechs and Slovaks within one country under the existing rules had failed and it should be abandoned for the sake of the whole region. In the years 1937–1939, J. Beck searched for an optimum solution to the Slovak problem (Paruch, 2005, p. 702). In 1938, Polish diplomats considered the autonomy of Slovakia within the Hungarian state as one of the potential options of its future political system. From the beginning of September, the Polish government endeavored to prompt the Hungarian side to take part in a joint military action against Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian authorities demonstrated some restraint though, fearing that a German-Czechoslovak conflict would urge western superpowers to intervene. For that reason, shortly before signing the Munich Agreement, the Polish side strongly supported the idea of declaring independence by Slovakia. The leadership of Slovak People's Party took into account other scenarios such as: a closeness of Slovakia with Poland in the form of a union or a federation. On September 28, at the sitting of the parliamentary

club, HSL'S leaders took a decision to place Slovakia under Polish governance. The day later Jozef Tiso submitted a relevant document of Slovak autonomists to Kazimierz Papée, a Polish ambassador in Prague. In spite of the fact that Ludak's parliamentary club was not given a mandate of public trust from Slovaks, it requested the Polish government to unite Slovakia with Poland as one state and to transform it into a dualistic union. This declaration constituted the apogee of pro-Polish atmosphere in HSL'S. It must be, however, emphasized that the whole initiative was of a provisional character on the Slovak side and its main goal was to gain autonomy as part of Czechoslovakia. What needs to be noted is the fact that the text of the Polish-Slovak union still remains unknown. In the opinion of consul Waław Łaciński, the document included a provision about retaining full territorial integrity as part of the planned union, which excluded a possibility of any border shifts to the benefit of Poland. The Munich Agreement prevented the implementation of the above-mentioned federative project (Olejko, 2012, p. 91).

POLAND'S RELATIONS WITH THE "INDEPENDENT" SLOVAK STATE IN 1939

Upon signing the Munich Agreement Poland expected that Slovakia under the leadership of HSL'S would declare independence, whereby Poland would act as a guarantor. The Polish-Slovak relationships assumed a different dimension when Poland made some territorial claims of Czechoslovakia. The border decisions of 1920 and 1924 were perceived by the Polish side as unfair throughout the interwar period. As a consequence, they became the main cause of the Polish government forcing – on November 30 and December 1, 1938 – the exchange of territories with Slovakia, which was already autonomous at that time. However, it should be emphasized that the border correction in the Slovak section was not imposed militarily, and no international arbitration took place there, as was the case with the remaining Czechoslovak borders. The new border was established on the basis of bilateral Polish-Slovak negotiations. Moreover, due to Poland's policy of supporting the new Slovak State at that time, the acquisitions in the Slovak borderland were limited to ten scraps of land, totaling 216.4 square kilometers and inhabited by approximately 2.5 thousand residents (Zaborski, 1939, pp. 1–4; Anonymous, 1938, pp. 137–145).

Given the previous official policy towards Slovakia, Slovak society treated this step as a betrayal, bearing in mind that it occurred when Slovakia lost significant

part of the southern territory as a result of the Vienna arbitration. The decisions made by the Polish authorities led to the outbreak of anti-Polish campaign in Slovakia, which consisted in propagating negative press reports about Poland and organizing demonstrations and manifestations in the borderland areas. It all resulted in a substantial propaganda success on the part of Slovaks (Kowalski, 2016, pp. 165–188). Firstly, during the unofficial census organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 1938 in the incorporated territory, 90% of the population defined themselves as Slovaks. Secondly, there was a rise in the inhabitants' protests against conducting classes at schools in the Polish language as well as against removing Slovak priests from Polish parishes there. Under the influence of press reports Slovak population began to express their hostility towards everything connected with Poland and Poles. Wincenty Witos, who was in exile in Czechoslovakia at that time, also observed and commented on such feelings. Karol Murgaš, editor-in-chief of the magazine "Slovak", perceived by the Polish authorities as an activist of pro-Polish wing of HSL'S represented by Karol Sidor, played an important role in the anti-Polish campaign. It may have been a key argument in favor of entrusting him with an executive role in the anti-Polish activities (Kowalski, 2016).

In view of the contemporary historiography the "regulation" of the Polish southern border in 1938 brought more losses than profits. In terms of benefits, beyond the propaganda aspect, Poland ended up with some facilitation of traffic and the acquisition of the most beautiful part of the Tatra Mountains. As for the losses, the Polish political influence in this region was all lost, which made Slovakia drift in the direction of German influences. There was also an increase in the anti-Polish sentiment. From 1938, the Polish government strove to minimize the tension in mutual relationships. It contemplated a scenario in which Slovakia could "get back" to Hungary whereas Germany and Poland might safeguard its autonomy. The Polish side was even eager to consider the possibility of moving the border. However, this endeavor found its response only in the economic sphere, on the part of HSL'S leadership and Catholic clergy (Baka, 2010, p. 16; Laučik & Ładygin, 2008, p. 51).

Poland became one of the very first countries in Europe which recognized the independence of the Slovak State. On March 15, 1939, the Polish embassy was established in the place of previous general consulate in Bratislava. Poland needed to secure the southern border in case of a war with Germany. The Slovak side, on the other hand, wanted the assurance of it being a sovereign state. Yet, at the end of March the mutual relationships deteriorated. The main reason for

this was signing the Slovak-German treaty on March 23, which provided for passing Slovak foreign and military policy under control of Germany. Thanks to a new agreement Germany gained the right to organize military garrisons in the territory of the Western Slovakia, in immediate proximity to Cieszyn Silesia and Cracow province. In addition, the Slovak foreign policy towards Poland would have to be conducted in close consultation with the German government. The second, equally important reason for the decline in the mutual relationships between Poland and Slovakia were the territorial claims of Slovakia made by Hungary, right after the annexation of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Bratislava feared that Poland and Hungary secretly schemed to conduct the partitions of the Slovak State. In fact, the Hungarian side put forward such proposals but its partner in this connivance was Germany (Orlof, 2006, p. 50).

At the beginning of May 1939, the mutual relationships between Poland and Slovakia got slightly normalized as they signed several agreements such as a Polish-Slovak trading agreement or a passport and cross-currency agreement. Also, the works on the acceptance of a contingent agreement were about to be finalized. There was a plan of preparing a Polish-Slovak declaration on cultural relationships. Slovaks expressed their willingness to sign an agreement on local border traffic, the idea of which was eventually rejected by the Polish side for political and security reasons. In the last months before the outbreak of the war the Polish intelligence began cooperation with the leadership of the Slovak army (Orlof, 2006, pp. 50–52). However, the exacerbated international situation made it difficult to maintain good relationships between Poland and Slovakia. On June 30, the German envoy in Bratislava officially forbade the Slovak government to have any relations with Poland as they ran counter the German interest. Germans demanded from Slovakia stricter supervision over the Slovak-Polish border, the removal of uncertain elements from the Slovak border guard and the prevention of anti-German propaganda and the Polish espionage. On August 6, J. Tiso issued an order to the Slovak army to take up positions on the Polish border. On August 28, the Slovak army mobilization was announced (Orlof, 1980, p. 146).

On September 1, Slovakia as an ally of the Third Reich took active part in the attack on Poland. The relations between Poland and Slovakia were actually broken off. There was no formal declaration of war on the part of Slovaks. Upon the outbreak of the war there happened to be some gestures of solidarity with Poles. A Slovak ambassador in Warsaw, Ladislav Szathmáry, on September 1, 1939, handed in a letter to the vice-minister Jan Szembek, which included condemnation of the activities of the government in Bratislava, some words of

solidarity with Poles and a request for Polish support of Slovak actions abroad. Following Szathmáry, a general consul in London, Milan Harminc, refused to pledge allegiance to the government in Bratislava. Many Slovaks working in the public service, in spite of the armed conflict, continued contacts with Poles. At times they even offered help to their old friends as it was in the case of a Slovak ambassador in Moscow, Fran Tiso, who appealed for a release of a former consul in Bratislava, W. Łaciński, remaining in the Soviet captivity (Gniazdowski, 2005, pp. 115–116).

Until September 3, the whole Polish territory of Sub-Tatra region (Podhale and northern Spiš and Orava) were taken over by the Wehrmacht and three accompanying Slovak divisions (Baka, 2010). Initially there was an idea of incorporating Podhale to Slovakia, which was soon abandoned for fear of the rise in the Polish influence in this country (Berghauzen, 1975, pp. 426–427). Ultimately, at the end of the warfare, on November 21, 1939, Germany officially passed territories annexed in the previous year by Poland and the so-called Polish Spiš and Orava to Slovakia as a reward for participation in the German aggression. Slovakia gained in total 770 square kilometers inhabited by over 34.5 thousand people, of which 586 square kilometers (and 27 thousand inhabitants) had belonged to Poland before 1938 (Korkuć, 2010, p. 27). A formal annexation of both territories took place pursuant to an act of December 22, 1939. In the annexed territory the Slovak authorities immediately undertook the process of “Depolonization” and “Slovakization” of the population. Furthermore, these people were offered special economic support, the aim of which was to win their favor (Zieliński, 1972, pp. 171–176).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in the interwar period the Polish government lacked a clear concept of the foreign policy towards Slovakia. In the Piłsudski's Camp there was a dominating conviction that the Republic of Poland should not take an unequivocal stance on this issue. The activity of the Polish diplomacy in the years 1926–1939 was characterized by a specific dualism – on the one hand, it actively supported the Slovak autonomist and separatist movement, on the other hand, it made territorial claims of Slovakia and strove to form a joint border with Hungary. There is no denying that steps taken by the Slovak autonomists were treated in Warsaw as an opportunity for destabilization of a situation in Czechoslovakia.

Undoubtedly a positive effect of supporting the Slovak autonomist movement by Polish dissidents was the reinforcement of a belief in Poland that Slovakia was no longer a geographical region but a state with aspirations to gain sovereignty and formulate its own interests independently.

The 1938 regulation of the southern border of Poland ended a certain stage of foreign policy conducted by the Polish authorities. Ultimately, the losses outweighed the benefits on the Polish side. Even though Poland benefited from some facilitation of traffic and possessing borderland areas attractive to tourists, it lost its political influences in the nascent Slovak State pushing it into orbit around German influences as well as arousing deep animosity of Slovak population towards the Polish state. The development of the international situation in the second half of the year preceding the outbreak of WWII forced Polish diplomats to consider the Slovak question in a broader context of the Polish-German relations. In order to have a counterbalance to growing German influences in mid-Europe, Polish authorities put forward a plan of closer relationships with Hungary to the detriment of Polish-Slovak relationships. Finally, the active participation of Slovakia in the German aggression against Poland in September 1939 constituted a tragic epilogue of complicated Polish-Slovak relationships in the interwar period.

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