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Antecedents of the internment of the highest authorities of the Second Polish Republic in Romania in September 1939

Zarys treści: Agresja Związku Sowieckiego na Polskę 17 września 1939 r. postawiła Królestwo Rumunii przed sprawą udzielenia jej pomocy, do której było zobligowane aliansem funkcyjnym od 1921 r. Kierownicy rumuńskiej nawy państwowej obawiali się podzielenia losu Rzeczypospolitej będącej ofiarą nie tylko ZSRR, ale broniącej się od przeszło dwóch tygodni przed napaścią III Rzeszy. Pragnąc uchronić swój kraj przed katastrofą poszukiwali sposobu uchylecia się od obowiązków sojuszniczych wobec Polski. Tymczasem polskie sfery rządzące w obliczu nieuchronnej klęski podjęły działania na rzecz przeniesienia politycznego kierownictwa państwa do Francji, chcąc u boku aliantów zachodnich kontynuować wojnę do zwycięskiego końca. Aby tam się znaleźć konieczne było uzyskanie od Rumunów zgody na przejazd do jednego z ich portów, by stamtąd móc kontynuować dalszą podróż. Zagrożenie inwazją sowiecką i niemiecką, sprawiło, iż władze w Bukareszcie korzystając z dość naciąganych powodów zdecydowały się na internowanie polskiej ekipy rządzącej.

Outline of contents: The aggression of the Soviet Union on Poland on 17 September 1939 faced the Kingdom of Romania with the matter of granting aid to Poland, to which it was obliged by an alliance from 1921 onwards. The heads of the Romanian state feared sharing the fate of the Polish Republic, which fell victim not only to the USSR, but had also been defending itself for more than two weeks against an assault by the Third Reich. Wishing to save their country from a catastrophe, they were looking for a way to evade their alliance duties towards Poland. Meanwhile, in the face of an imminent disaster, Polish leaders made steps to transfer the political leadership of the country to France, in order to continue fighting for victory alongside the Western allies. To move there, they needed to obtain an agreement from Romania to transfer to one of their ports, in order to be able to continue the journey. A threat of a Soviet and German invasion meant that the authorities in Bucharest, using rather far-fetched reasons, decided to intern the Polish government.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, Rumunia, sojusz polsko-rumuński, wojna 1939 roku, agresja sowiecka, inwazja niemiecka, najwyższe władze II Rzeczypospolitej, internowanie

Keywords: Poland; Romania, the Polish-Romanian alliance; the 1939 war, Soviet aggression, German invasion, highest authorities of the Second Polish Republic, internment

The alliance with the Kingdom of Romania, signed in March 1921, was for the Second Polish Republic one of the essential elements of its security. Only the alliance with France was of greater gravity. The former safeguarded Poland against danger from the Soviet Russia, while the latter served the neutralisation of the German threat. The alliance with Romania went through a number of fluctuations in the interwar period. Aside from the fairly close cooperation visible in the years 1922–1923 and 1928–1933, there were periods of limited cooperation (1924–1927), stagnation (1923–1924, 1933–1934), and even complete collapse (1934–1936). In that last period, Romania's foreign policy was headed by Nicolae Titulescu, who came to the conclusion that an alliance with Poland did not give his country the necessary protection against the dangers from the East. He believed, however, that it could be provided by a closer relation with the Soviet Union within the framework of mutual assistance involving Paris, Prague and Moscow. This course was met with disapproval among many Romanian and Polish politicians. As a result of their actions, at the end of August 1936 the head of the Romanian diplomacy was dismissed.¹

In the following months, relations between Warsaw and Bucharest were significantly more animated, showing willingness to maintain and develop the alliance; however, from the spring of 1938 onwards, ever more numerous dissonances emerged. They were connected with the Czechoslovakian crisis, caused by Germany's aggressive policy. Unlike Poland, Romania insisted on maintaining the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, its partner in the Little Entente, and sought to persuade Warsaw to refrain from participating in actions aimed against Prague. Politicians in Bucharest were critical towards the actions of the Republic of Poland supporting Hungary's claims to Transcarpathian Ruthenia and urging Bucharest and Budapest to work out a *modus vivendi* in their mutual relations. The actions of the Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck regarding these issues met with disapproval of his Romanian counterpart Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, who believed that Romania should not have a hand in actions detrimental to the interests of Czechoslovakia. Relations between Warsaw and Bucharest became warmer only after the position of the head of royal diplomacy was taken over by Grigore Gafencu,

¹ H. Walczak, *Sojusz z Rumunią w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918–1931*, Szczecin, 2008, passim; H. Bułhak, A. Zieliński, "Z dziejów stosunków polsko-rumuńskich (wrzesień 1936–sierpień 1938)", *Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej* (hereafter: SZEŚ), vol. 16, pp. 145–152; A. Skrzypek, "Zagadnienia rumuńskie w stosunkach polsko-radzieckich w latach 1932–1938", *Z Dziejów Stosunków Polsko-Radzieckich. Studia i materiały* (hereafter: ZDSPR), 11–12 (1973), pp. 189–205; A. Zieliński, "Stosunki polsko – rumuńskie (grudzień 1933 – maj 1935)", SZEŚ, vol. 12, pp. 157–190; N. Dascălu, *Relații româno-polone în perioada interbelică (1919–1939)*, București, 1991, passim; D. Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia 1918–1931. Relații politice, diplomatice și militare*, Rădăuți, 2003, passim; D. Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia – 1932–1939. Relații politice și diplomatice*, Suceava, 2005, passim; see also the article by S. Mikulicz, "Wpływ dyplomacji sanacyjnej na obalenie Titulescu", *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, 7–8 (1959), pp. 104–123 (considerably marked by the time when it was written).

who, unlike his predecessor, allowed the eventuality of annexing Transcarpathian Ukraine to the Magyar state and establishing a Polish-Hungarian border. During his visit to Warsaw in early March 1939, he also offered Poland an extension of the anti-Soviet alliance to include an *erga omnes* protection. However, Beck would not undertake this initiative for fear of its negative reception by Hungary, which could eventually lead to its closer relations with the Third Reich. In addition, the head of Polish diplomacy did not place much importance on Romania's aid in a potential conflict with Germany. Shortly afterwards, after realising that the aggression of the Third Reich would first be directed against the Republic of Poland, Romania stopped expressing interest in extending the alliance, especially that it increasingly had its own problems. After the capture of Czechoslovakia, Germans forced Romania to sign an economic agreement, which in fact subordinated the Kingdom's economy to them. In this situation, the authorities in Bucharest increasingly considered the possibility of proclaiming neutrality in the event of a Polish-German armed conflict. These tendencies were not halted by the guarantees of Romanian independence granted by France and the United Kingdom in April 1939.²

The non-aggression agreement between Germany and the USSR on 23 August 1939 also made a great impression in Bucharest. It was feared that its secret clauses may have also applied to Romania. Thus, the sense of uncertainty in Romania and attempts not to put itself at risk with any of the great powers were growing ever stronger. This attitude was reflected in the statement made by Minister Gafencu on 26 August to the German envoy in Bucharest, Wilhelm Fabricius, that Romania would adopt a strictly neutral attitude in the event of a German-Polish war. After its commencement, the Romanian government (on 4 September), and then the Crown Council (on 6 September) confirmed this position. This did not prevent Bucharest from showing a friendly attitude towards Polish matters from the beginning of the war. Its most spectacular expression was the Romanian authorities' consent to

² H. Bułhak, "Polska a Rumunia 1918–1939", in: *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1918–1939*, ed. J. Żarnowski, Warszawa, 1977, pp. 338–343; A. Skrzypek, "Zagadnienia rumuńskie..." in: *ZDSPR*, pp. 205–206; H. Bułhak H., A. Zieliński, "Z dziejów stosunków...", in: *SZEŚ*, vol. 16, pp. 153–168; A. Koryn, "Rumunia wobec zbliżającego się konfliktu światowego (1938–1941)", *Mazowieckie Studia Humanistyczne*, 2 (1998), pp. 54–56; M. Kornat, "'Trzecia Europa'. Polska koncepcja międzymorza (1937–1937)", in: *Międzymorze. Nadzieje i ograniczenia w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. E. Znamierowska-Rakk, Warszawa, 2016, pp. 142–144; M. Kornat., preface in: *W rumuńskiej pułapce. Internowanie Józefa Becka i Edwarda Rydza-Śmigłego w dokumentach rumuńskich służb specjalnych*, ed. M. Kornat, M. Morzycki-Markowski, trans. from Romanian by R. Janowska-Lascar, Gdańsk, 2011, pp. 23–26; A. Kastory, "Projekt polsko-węgiersko-rumuńskiej współpracy jako jedna z koncepcji Międzymorza w okresie międzywojennym", in: *Międzymorze...*, pp. 385–386; D. Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia – 1932–1939...*, p. 72–110; A. Vițalaru, *Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen – diplomat*, Iași, 2014, pp. 401–408; A. Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germane-române (1938–1944)*, trans. M. Alexe și studiu bibliografic de S. Neagoe, București, 2007, pp. 119–120.

transport the Polish Bank's gold stocks through its territory to Constanța, where they were evacuated further.³

Advances of the German offensive against Poland in the first two weeks of September 1939 made it vital to evacuate the highest Polish authorities from Warsaw, first to the Lublin region, then to Volhynia, and finally to Pokuttya, on the border with Romania. As a result, in mid-September President Ignacy Mościcki was in Zaluche near Sniatyn, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły with the Supreme Command in Kolomyia, the Bureau of the Council of Ministers in Kosiv, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kutu, and other Ministries in Kosiv, Rozhnov and Knyazhe.⁴

It was in Pokuttya that the supreme authorities of the Republic finalised their decision to leave its territory. This issue became apparent at the beginning of the second week of the war, when the inevitable catastrophe was becoming apparent, as a consequence of Germany's enormous advantage and the total passivity of France and Great Britain in the West. As early as on 9 September, the French Ambassador Leon Noël, concerned about the rumours of USSR's aggressive intentions towards Poland, spoke to Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Poland, with a suggestion to prepare for, in the event of Poland's military defeat, a transfer of its highest authorities to France. This suggestion, passed on to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck, aligned with his own thoughts in this regard. Only in this way would the September disaster be just a lost battle for Poland, rather than

³ Fabricius's report for the Foreign Ministry in Berlin from 27 August 1939. From the archives of the German Foreign Ministry. Series D, 1937–1945, vol. 7. The last days of peace. August 9–September 3, 1939, London, n.d., pp. 363–364; Raczyński's report for the Foreign Ministry from 1 September 1939 (52/R/67), The Archives of Modern Records (hereafter: AAN), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter: MSZ), vol. 6368, fols. 121–122; Raczyński's telegram to the Foreign Ministry from 2 September 1939, no. 114, Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter: HIA). Poland. Diplomatic mission (Romania) (hereafter: Romania). The book of ciphers (hereafter: ks. szyf.) no. 8, box (hereafter: b.) 3, file (hereafter: f.) 2; copy of Raczyński's note to the Romanian Foreign Ministry from 4 September 1939 (no. 49/R/16). Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, București (hereafter: AMAE). 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 60, fol. 294; Z. Karpiński, *O Wielkopolsce, złocie i dalekich podróżach. Wspomnienia 1860–1960*, Warszawa, 1976, pp. 210–211; A. Koc, *Wspomnienia*, ed. J. Mierzwa, Wrocław, 2005, pp. 286–288; A. Cretzianu, "Rumunia a Wrzesień 1939", *Kultura*, 3 (1954), p. 108; E. Bold, I. Seftiuc, *Pactul Ribbentrop-Molotov și implicațiile internaționale*, Iași, 2010, passim; D. Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia...*, pp. 139–140, 144–145; I. Mamina, *Consiliu de coroană*, București, 2015, pp. 177–187; W. Rojek, *Odyseja skarbu Rzeczypospolitej. Losy złota Banku Polskiego 1939–1950*, Kraków, 2000, pp. 46–47; A. Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu...*, pp. 131–135; C. Păunescu, D. Matei, *Jak ocalono polskie złoto*, Bukareszt, 2013, pp. 11–12.

⁴ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski. Okres 1939–1945*, Gdańsk, 1989, pp. 60–63; E. Duraczyński, *Rząd polski na uchodźstwie 1939–1945. Organizacja, personalia, polityka*, Warszawa, 1993, pp. 12–20; W. Michowicz, "Organizacja polskiej służby dyplomatycznej w okresie II wojny światowej", in: *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 5: 1939–1945, ed. W. Michowicz, Warszawa, 1999, pp. 10–13; H. Batowski, *Z dziejów dyplomacji polskiej na obczyźnie: (wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941)*, Kraków, 1984, pp. 9–10.

a lost war, and the highest authorities of Poland, representing a member state of an anti-German coalition, would be able to rebuild the army out of the country, in order to fight based on and along with the allies, towards the final victory.⁵

On 11 September, in a conversation with Noël, Beck returned to his earlier suggestion made to Szembek and requested to ask him “whether the French government is ready, if necessary, to grant the head of state and the Polish government extra-territorial law (*le droit de résidence*) in France, based on the Belgian precedent of 1914”. Beck intended to transfer the Polish authorities via Romania, where from one of its ports they would be transported to France by English or French ships. In response, the ambassador expressed his belief that the authorities in Paris would provide “all the requested facilities”. In this situation, it became important to form an agreement with Romania about the *droit de passage*, or right of way. Its implementation did not seem a difficult matter, as from 1921 Poland and Romania were bound, as has been mentioned above, by a defensive alliance, renegotiated in 1926 and 1931 in the form of guarantee treaties and secret military agreements, safeguarding both countries against a threat from the Soviet Union.⁶

Meanwhile, as war in Poland progressed, Romanians became the object of increasing pressure from German diplomacy, aiming to curb their clearly pro-Polish attitude. Of particular interest to the German side was also the question of the possible fate of the Polish authorities. Gafencu, when questioned on the matter by Fabricius on 11 September, said that “members of the [Polish] government will be banned from any activity, including the use of radio and international phone lines”. Officers and soldiers were to be subject to disarmament and internment, in accordance with the principles of the Hague Convention.⁷

Over the next few days, Germans made increasingly bolder demands towards Romania, requiring it to refuse “asylum [...] to the Polish government and the Supreme Command of the Polish Army [...] [and intern] in strict isolation all the members of both groups who [...] manage to reach Romanian territory”. Replying to Fabricius on 14 September, the host of the Sturdza Palace declared that the Polish military personnel would be disarmed and interned; civilians as

⁵ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, ed. A.M. Cienciala, introduction by M. Kor-nat, Warszawa 2015, p. 249; W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Z mojego okienka. Fakty i wrażenia z lat 1939–1945*, vol. 1: 1939–1940, ed. P.M. Żukowski, Łomianki, 2013, pp. 251–252; id., *Najnowsza historia...*, pp. 63–64; S. Nowinowski, “Kampania wrześniowa płk. Józefa Becka (1–17 września 1939 r.)”, in: *Płk Józef Beck (1894–1944). Żołnierz, dyplomata, polityk*, Łódź–Warszawa, 2017, p. 340; see also Y. Beauvois, *Stosunki polsko-francuskie w czasie “dziwnej wojny”*, Kraków, 1991, p. 13.

⁶ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 255; W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Z mojego okienka...*, p. 252; I. Beauvois, *Stosunki...*, p. 13.

⁷ Telegram by Fabricius to Foreign Minister from 11 September 1939, in: *Polska w polityce międzynarodowej (1939–1945). Zbiór dokumentów*, vol. 1: 1939, selection, foreword and notes by W.T. Kowalski, Warszawa, 1989, p. 551; T. Dubicki, *Wojsko Polskie w Rumunii 1939–1941*, Warszawa, 1994, pp. 14, 21; H. Batowski, *Agonia pokoju i początek wojny*, Poznań, 1984, pp. 320–321.

well as other political refugees would be brought to prepared reception centres near Iași and would be interned there as well.⁸

Meanwhile, Beck, who as of recently was residing in Kutry, on 16 September decided to search for the Romanian ambassador in Poland, Gheorghe Grigorcea, contact with whom had been lost, presumably intending to sign the *droit de passage* agreement with him. In Bucharest, the Counsellor of the Polish embassy, Alfred Poniński, undertook efforts to enable a swift meeting between Grigorcea and Beck, addressing the Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu. The Romanian Ambassador, who was in the border region, reported by telegram to his Foreign Ministry after reaching Chernivtsi, at 3:30 pm. Around 7 pm, Grigorcea called Gafencu, expressing his readiness to travel to Kutry. Poniński, present at the conversation admitted that although he did not know the Romanian language enough to understand what the Ambassador was saying, he realised that it was about a meeting between Grigorcea and Beck, and that Gafencu instructed Ambassador to contact the Polish Minister immediately and accept “his all proposals *ad referendum*”, declaring that they would be “reviewed favourably”. It seems that the Romanian diplomat arrived at Kutry the same evening and met with Beck. The head of Polish diplomacy, convinced that leaving the country should take place only in the case of absolute necessity, decided not to request the right of way. The reason for that was probably better news from the front. He informed the Romanian official about the reduced pressure of Germany on the Polish Army, pointing out, however, that it was not possible to predict further developments in the following few days, and that introducing the Wehrmacht’s new motorised forces would obviously mean that the resistance of Polish troops would not last too long. After this conversation, Grigorcea returned to Chernivtsi, from where he sent a telegram summary of its course.⁹

The Soviet aggression on Poland, which occurred the following day, became the last moment for efforts to obtain the *droit de passage*. The meeting between Beck

⁸ Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the German Reich J. von Ribbentrop to the German embassy in Bucharest from 12 September 1939, in: *Polska w polityce...* pp. 556–557; Fabricius’s report for Ribbentrop from 14 September 1939. *Ibid.*, p. 561; a report from a conversation between Fabricius and Gafencu on 14 September 1939, Arhivele Militare Române, București (hereafter: AMR). Colecția documente de arhiva privind refugiați militar și civili polonezi în România (hereafter: APRMCP), dossier 1, fol. 12; N. Mareș, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate (1938–1939)*, București, 2010, pp. 202–203; T. Dubicki, “Początek internowania władz II RP w Rumunii w świetle dokumentów rumuńskich”, in: *Polska i Rumunia w Europie Środkowej w XX i XXI wieku. Studia, materiały i eseje poświęcone pamięci prof. dr hab. Wojciecha Rojka. Polonia și România în Europa Centrală în secolele XX și XXI. Studii, materiale și eseuri dedicate în memoria prof. dr univ. Wojciech Rojek*, eds. A. Kastory, H. Walczak, Kraków, 2017, p. 80.

⁹ Grigorcea’s telegrams to the Foreign Ministry from 16 September 1939, nos. 4485 and 4487, AMAE. 71/1920-1944 Polonia, vol.60, fols. 315, 318; A. Poniński, “Wrzesień 1939 r. w Rumunii. Udział Ambasady RP w Bukareszcie w rozwiązaniu polskiego kryzysu państwowego”, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 6 (1964), pp. 167–169; J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 197; T. Dubicki, *Wojsko polskie...*, p. 26; *id.*, *Początek internowania władz II RP...*, p. 81.

and Grigorcea in Kutu likely took place in the morning. At 11 am, the ambassador informed Gafencu by telephone about the request made by the head of Polish diplomacy regarding the consent to the Polish government and President Mościcki to cross the border with Romania and the right of way. It should be assumed that Grigorcea accepted Beck's wishes "*ad referendum*" and declared that they would be "*favourably considered*".¹⁰

Meanwhile, very intense deliberations were taking place in Bucharest regarding Romania's actions in the situation. The country's politicians – despite the declaration of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, who announced at 9 am that the Soviet Union would pursue a neutral policy towards their country – feared Soviet aggression. First news about armed incidents between the Red Army and Romanian troops were now reaching Bucharest. Meanwhile, the pact requiring Romania to provide armed assistance to the Republic of Poland against possible Soviet aggression was still in effect. According to the journal of King Charles II, it appears that they were looking for a way to evade their ally obligations in the event of a *casus foederis*. What is more, Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, with the full approval of the monarch, was even proposing a non-aggression pact with Moscow.¹¹

There is only fragmentary information on the position Romania intended to take towards its Polish ally. I failed to find in Romanian archives any documentation of conversations that Romanian politicians were having in this matter. Perhaps they were not shorthanded, although it seems more likely that the records relating to them were removed and destroyed. The journals kept by King Charles II and Minister Gafencu suggest such a conclusion. The journal of the former has four pages missing, with notes that probably related to the events of the night of 16 September and the morning hours of 17 September. Gafencu, who wrote in his journal quite systematically, referred to the events of 17 September in a very general way, and in a note drafted only on 12 November. Although it is difficult to find any attempts at manipulation in the journal of Prime Minister Călinescu, his notes are only general in character.¹²

¹⁰ Gafencu's telegram to Grigorcea from 17 September 1939, no. 58014, AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 6; Evenimentele zilei de 17 Septembrie, astfel cum au fost aduse la cunoștința Ministerului de Externe, *ibid.*, fol. 2, A. Cretzianu, *Rumunia a Wrzesień...*, p. 110; A. Poniński, *Wrzesień 1939...*, p. 168.

¹¹ Telegram of the Romanian envoy in Moscow N. Dianu to the Foreign Ministry from 17 September 1939, no. 2386, in: *Relațiile româno sovietice. Documente*, vol. 2: 1935–1941, ed. A.A. Avdeev et al., București, 2003, p. 249; Gafencu's telegram to the Romanian envoy in Moscow N. Dianu [from 17 September 1939] (no. 58342). AMR. APRMCP, dossier 1, fol. 14; Regele Carol al II-lea al României, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937–1951*, vol. 2: 13 martie–15 decembrie 1939 (*Caietele 8–10*), ed. N. Rauș. București, 2003, p. 217; A. Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916–1939*, ed. Al. Gh. Savu, București, 1990, p. 432.

¹² Regele Carol, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937–1951*, p. 217; A. Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916–1939*, p. 432; G. Gafencu, *Însemnări politice (1929–1939)*, ed. S. Neagoe, București, 1991, p. 341.

It seems that on 17 September a significant change occurred in Romanian intentions towards the highest Polish authorities. While previously Romania expressed to the Third Reich their readiness to intern Polish leaders should they decide to cross the Romanian border, at the moment of Soviet aggression on the Republic of Poland, Romanians would probably decide to inveigle the Polish government and the president into entering their country in order to have them interned. Presumably, they agreed with the arguments formulated by the Legal Council of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, stating that the “invasion and occupation of almost the entire territory of Poland [...] and the leaving of the ‘national territory’ by the Polish government, if it does not justify Romania’s failure to fulfil its obligations in terms of military assistance, [it] is a material fact [...] that the performance [...] of the provisions of the treaty of alliance has been suspended”.¹³ For that to happen, as it has already been mentioned, the Polish government had to find itself outside the country and be deprived of the attributes of its power. This obviously solved the problem of its potential protests against Romania reneging on its obligations as an ally, and validated the honesty of its attempts to form a non-aggression pact to the Kremlin.

Meanwhile, on 17 September Beck, after a morning conversation with Grigorcea, went to the Headquarters of the Chief Commander in Kolomyia, where about 11.30 am he met with the Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski and Marshal Rydz-Śmigły. His proposal for the government to cross the Romanian border in order to continue fighting alongside the allies was not decided.¹⁴ After his return to Kutry, the head of Polish diplomacy met with Grigorcea around 6 pm. According to the account of Beck’s secretary Doman Rogoyski, the Romanian ambassador offered, on behalf of the king, hospitality for President Mościcki and the Polish government in case they intended to go to Romania. This proposal is confirmed by the Romanian ambassador himself in a handwritten note drawn up on the margin of a Polish note submitted in the Bucharest Foreign Ministry on 23 September. Beck rejected this proposal and demanded free transit for the President of the Republic of Poland and the government, “relying on the international Hague conventions regulating similar matters”. Based on Rogoyski’s message, it can be assumed that at the time the ambassador was in communication with King Charles II and that respective decisions were made.¹⁵ The head of Polish

¹³ Opinion of the Legal Council from 18 September 1939 in order to ascertain whether in the light of the provisions of the Romanian-Polish guarantee treaty Romania is obliged to provide military assistance to Poland in connection with the invasion of Soviet troops on Poland, AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 61, fol. 6: N. Mareş, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate...*, p. 217.

¹⁴ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, pp. 260–262; A.M. Cienciała, “Jak doszło do internowania rządu RP w Rumunii we wrześniu 1939 r.,” *Niepodległość*, 23 (1989), pp. 18–19.

¹⁵ D. Rogoyski, “Pułkownik Józef Beck więźniem w Rumunii. Garść wspomnień,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 18 (1970), p. 85; Grigorcea’s handwritten note made on the margin of Raczyński’s message

diplomacy probably had further communication with Grigorcea in mind when writing in his memoirs that “the Romanian ambassador, with whom I wanted to arrange the conditions of our passage through Romania, warned me, declaring that King Charles would offer us, i.e. the President and government, *l’hospitalité ou le droit de passage*’. Thanking the ambassador for this statement, I said that I was not asking for exercising the Polish-Romanian alliance with regard to the Soviet aggression, understanding that in such a difficult international situation Romania would probably not be able to fulfil its obligations. However, I expected that the issue of the transit of the highest authorities of the Polish state would therefore be treated particularly favourably by the Romanian government. The ambassador had no doubts about it and said that he would be expecting the decision of the President and the government in order to personally facilitate the crossing of the border”.¹⁶ In Grigorcea’s account, the head of Polish diplomacy was to tell him that “Poland understands our [i.e. Romania’s] difficult situation and therefore has not formulated a proposal regarding the fulfilment of our obligations under the treaty of alliance, however, it reserves the right to do so when the situation indicates that our entrance into the war would present real chances of success. On numerous occasions he stated that Poland does not intend to ‘unnecessarily’ push us into the war. He emphasised that the intention of the government was to remain in Kutya as long as possible, and when directly threatened by the enemy, it would ask for permission to transit to another country”. Until this moment, the ambassador’s message shows a far-reaching convergence with Beck’s statements. However, Grigorcea’s further messages were quite enigmatic. In a telegram to the Romanian Foreign Ministry he informed that he had presented the instructions he had received from Gafencu that day at 1 pm to the Polish minister, but he in no way cited them in the telegram (referring only to its number), nor did he inform about Beck’s reaction to them.¹⁷ These instructions contained the Romanian offer of hospitality to President Mościcki and members of the government, “but obviously not in the official capacity”, or “facilitating their transit to another neutral country”.¹⁸ It should be assumed that Grigorcea did not pass on the content of

to the Romanian Foreign Ministry from 23 September 1939 (no. 49/R/17). AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia. Vol. 60, fol. 342; T. Dubicki, *Internowanie płk. Józefa Becka w Rumunii (IX 1939–VI 1944)*, Opole, 1997, p. 11.

¹⁶ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 262; D. Rogoyski, “Pułkownik Józef Beck więźniem w Rumunii...”, p. 85; Declarațiile făcute de Dl. Beck D-lui N. Dumitrescu la Slanic. 21 Septembrie 1939. AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 61, fols. 14–17; W.T. Drymmer, *W służbie Polsce*, Warszawa, 1998, p. 211.

¹⁷ Grigorcea’s telegram to the Foreign Ministry from 17 September 1939, no. 4489, AMAE 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 60, fols. 173–174; Evenimentele zilei... AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fols. 3–4. A. Cretzianu, *Rumunia a Wrzesień...*, p. 109; N. Mareș, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate...*, p. 209.

¹⁸ Gafencu’s telegram to Grigorcea from 17 September 1939, no. 5814, AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 6; Evenimentele zilei... AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 3; A. Cretzianu, *Rumunia a Wrzesień...*,

this offer to the Polish Foreign Minister. If Beck had known it, he surely would have decided to reject it, as it would block plans to transfer the Polish government to France and continue the war alongside the Allies. Perhaps Romania, planning to deprive the Polish government of the possibility to demand that the alliance be activated against Soviet aggression, did not want to reveal their plans prematurely. This claim seems to align with Gafencu's telegram sent on 17 September to embassies and diplomatic missions. In it, the minister stated reassuringly that "the Polish government has not asked us today for any military assistance. Instead, it turned to us, for the third time within 24 hours, with a request to facilitate the passage through our territory of the Polish President and members of the Polish government, who have decided to leave the national territory and take shelter in another country".¹⁹ It is difficult to determine unequivocally whether Romanians revealed their plans to the Polish Ambassador in Bucharest Roger Raczyński,²⁰ who was sent by Beck to Chernivtsi with the command to "demand from there the *droit the passage* for the president and the government of the Republic of Poland from Gafencu [...] by phone". A connection was obtained only after 8 pm. Earlier, according to the assumptions of the Polish ambassador, the head of the Romanian diplomacy spoke with Grigorcea, who reported the recent exchange with Beck. When it was finally possible to establish communication, Raczyński filed an official request to Gafencu to provide the authorities of the Republic of Poland with the right of way. In response, the head of Romanian diplomacy informed his interlocutor that "the king and government [of Romania] have decided to grant the President and the Polish government hospitality on Romanian soil". To "a repeated demand not for hospitality, but for the right of passage", he gave an "evasive answer". In Gafencu's account of the conversation with Raczyński, which according to him took place at 6 pm, Gafencu said that in the matter of the passage of President Mościcki and the government of the Republic of Poland he had replied to the Polish ambassador in the same way as he had previously informed Grigorcea. If that was the case, why did Raczyński not write about it in his report? On the other hand, the Romanian minister might also have bluntly informed the Polish ambassador about the contents of instructions from 1 pm. This would explain the subsequent actions of Raczyński, who on that basis could have predicted the imminent internment of the Polish authorities and a change of the government, and for this reason failed to appear for a meeting with Beck

p. 110; T. Dubicki, *Początek internowania władz II RP...*, p. 82; N. Mareş, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate...*, pp. 208–209.

¹⁹ Gafencu's telegram to embassies and envoys from 17 September 1939, no. 58033, AMR. APRMCP, dossier 1, fol. 12; N. Mareş, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămarea și solidaritate...*, p. 212.

²⁰ Presumably, apart from Beck's two aforementioned requests to Grigorcea, the third was the initiative taken by Ambassador Raczyński [note by H.W.].

in Chernivtsi and later distanced himself from his superior and worked independently from then on.²¹

Returning to the matter of the passage of the Polish authorities across the Romanian border, it seems to be beyond doubt that the basic arrangements in this matter were made on 17 September, during the second Beck–Grigorcea meeting. The version of the head of Polish diplomacy is confirmed in a distorted form by the Romanian *aide mémoire* of 25 September addressed to Ambassador Raczyński. The Bucharest Foreign Ministry declared that “Mr. Grigorcea spoke to Mr. Beck about the possible passage of the members of the Polish Government to Romania, while respecting the principles of neutrality”. It also emphasised that “Mr. Beck repeatedly stressed that he intended to respect the neutrality of Romania”.²² It is highly probable that the legal basis for the agreement with the ambassador was Article 6 of the Fifth Hague Convention of 18 October 1907. He stated that “the responsibility of a neutral power does not come into play in the face of the fact that individuals cross its border to enlist in the service of one of the warring parties”. Presumably, Grigorcea agreed that the President and members of the government of the Republic of Poland should be understood as such “individuals”. To some extent, the fact that Beck’s agreement with the ambassador was based on this article is confirmed by a fragment of the *aide mémoire* of 25 September 1939, which justified the later internment by, among other things, the fact that the border had been crossed by “the members of the Polish government in corpore”, [and not individually – H.W.].²³

In the evening, when information reached the Polish authorities that the Soviet army had reached Sniatyn, some 40 km from Kutu, they made the decision to go to Romania. The first to leave was President Mościcki, along with his entourage. It can be assumed that by 8 pm he reached the bridge on the Cheremosh, connecting

²¹ Notes of Ambassador Roger Raczyński on the transit of Polish supreme authorities to Romania and the resignation of the former President of the Polish Republic, Professor Ignacy Mościcki (May 1940). The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (hereafter: IPMS). The Raczyński collection 482/3; the document, with minor abridgements, was published in *Kultura* (Paris), 9–10 (1948), pp. 116–129; and in: J. Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce*, ed. K. Pomian, Kraków, 1997, pp. 235–253; Evenimentele zilei... AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 3; T. Dubicki, *Początek internowania władz II RP...*, p. 83.

²² *Aide mémoire* of the Romanian Foreign Ministry to Raczyński from 25 September 1939. AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 61, fol. 20; for a Polish translation (not entirely precise) see in: F. Sławoj Składkowski, “Prace i czynności rządu polskiego we wrześniu 1939 r.,” *Kultura* (Paris), 9 (1948), pp. 112–116; this document (wrongly dated) along with an adjusted translation was included by Henryk Batowski in the appendix to his book: *Agonia pokoju...*, pp. 441–443; see M. Kornat, foreword to *W rumuńskiej...*, p. 30.

²³ Convention regarding the rights and obligations of the powers and neutral persons in case of land war of 18 October 1907. Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland (hereafter: DURP) 1927, no. 21, item 163, p. 215; *aide mémoire* of the Romanian Foreign Ministries to the Polish embassy in Bucharest [from 25 September 1939], in: H. Batowski, *Agonia pokoju...*, p. 441.

Kuty with Vyzhnytsia, located on the Romanian side of the border. In the middle of the bridge, Grigorcea and the Secretary of the embassy Rosetti met with the head of the Civil Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland Stanisław Łepkowski and the head of President's Military Cabinet General Kazimierz Schally, informing them about the intention of the President and the members of the Polish Government to transit Romania. According to Łepkowski, the ambassador (according to Grigorcea it was Rosetti) then declared that the Romanian government offered to the President and government of the Republic of Poland "one of two possibilities: a) a safe transit through Romania to a neutral country, or b) a stay of the Polish government in Romania provided that its political activity ceases". To the Romanian diplomat it was obvious that the President would opt for the first solution, so he pledged to personally lead the Polish authorities to Chernivtsi. We can see that the accounts of Łepkowski and Grigorcea agree with the instructions from Gafencu from 1 pm. It does not appear that Beck knew that such an offer had been presented to the president. Together with his retinue, he set out from Kutu towards the Romanian border at 9 pm. Its transit took place at around 11 pm, and its arrival to Chernivtsi at approximately 3 am, already on 18 September.²⁴

This begs the question why the Romanian ambassador did not present the content of Gafencu's instructions from 1 pm to the Polish side immediately, but only when the Polish authorities arrived at the border. Knowing the position of the Romanian government in advance, Beck might have sought opportunities of the *droit de passage* through Hungary and strongly demanded the implementation of the provisions of the 1931 treaty, which Romania was unable to meet. It can be assumed that the leaders of the Romanian state (Charles II, Călinescu, Gafencu), in order to avoid this situation, wanted to bring the Polish government and the President to its own territory as soon as possible. Therefore, Charles II agreed to grant Beck's request to give the Polish authorities right of transit, accepting his assurances about respecting his country's neutrality. It is likely that to deprive the

²⁴ Telegram by the US Ambassador in Paris W. Bullitt to the Secretary of State from 26 September 1939, in: *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1939, General, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, vol. 2, eds. M.F. Axton et al., Washington, 1956, pp. 692–693, *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War. The Diplomatic Papers of A. I. Drexel Biddle Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland, 1937–1939*, eds. Ph.V. Cannistraro, E.D. Wynot, Jr., Th.P. Kovaleff, Ohio State University, 1976, pp. 159–160; "Opuszczając Polskę. Notatki Drexel-Biddle'a z września 1939 r.", in: B. Grzełowski, *Dyplomaci USA 1919–1939*, Pułtusk, 2004, p. 139 (the same fragment in: *Wrzesień 1939 r. w relacjach dyplomatów Józefa Becka, Jana Szembeka, Anthony'ego Drexel-Biddle'a, Leona Noëla i innych*, ed. A. Skrzypek, Warszawa, 1989, p. 265); Gafencu's telegram to Grigorcea from 17 September 1939 (no. 58014). AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 329; Evenimentele zilei... Ibid., fol. 2; Grigorcea's handwritten note drawn up on the margin of Raczyński's message to the Romanian Foreign Ministry from 23 September 1939 (no. 49/R/17). AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia. Vol. 60, fol. 342; A.M. Cienciała, *Jak doszło do internowania...*, p. 33.

head of Polish diplomacy of room to manoeuvre, and lend credibility to their own subsequent actions leading to the internment of the President and government of the Republic of Poland, the Romanian authorities ordered Grigorcea to present Mościcki's envoys the contents of the instructions from 1 pm immediately before crossing the border. We should add that Romanians were unaffected by Beck's statement about releasing Romania from its alliance commitments, which did not, it seems, immediately reach the authorities in Bucharest.²⁵ The journal of King Charles II seems to attest to this sequence of events. Referring to the arrival of the Polish authorities in Romania, the king wrote in a note from 17 September that for Romania "it is indeed fortunate that it has occurred, because the collapse of the Polish state releases us from justifying, through arguments or equivocation, our inaction and abstention from intervening against the USSR. It is a cowardly practice". Romania's further plans towards the Polish authorities are reflected in another sentence from the king's journal: "tomorrow Mościcki is going to Bicaz, the rest of the government to Slănic din Moldova, and the marshal to Craiova". This clearly suggests that the Romanian authorities had prepared a plan of action before the Polish authorities crossed the border on the Cheremosh, and did not intend to facilitate their transit to any other country.²⁶

Along with Beck's withdrawal from enforcing alliance commitments from Romania, the reason for bringing the government and the President of the Republic of Poland to the territory of the Kingdom had disappeared. However, there was still a threat of a Soviet and German invasion, which meant that from the Romanians' standpoint the internment of the Polish government and President seemed necessary. This perspective was brought closer by the appearance of Grigorcea and the head of the Diplomatic Protocol of the Bucharest Foreign Ministry, Gheorghe Crutzescu at Beck's, very early in the morning of 18 September. They demanded from the head of Polish diplomacy a statement addressed to the Romanian minister of foreign affairs with a request to grant the Polish government the right to travel through Romania to a neutral country, including the declaration that upon entering neutral Romania, "the Polish government has waived all its constitutional, political and administrative competences". The head of Polish diplomacy said that to him and his colleagues "the text is of course not acceptable [...] and does not correspond to the principle discussed with the Romanian Ambassador in Kutuy". Beck then expressed his readiness to make a formal statement on behalf of his government "that at the time [...] of transit through Romania we are ready to fully respect the neutrality of this country." It should be emphasised that the reaction of the head of Polish diplomacy could not have been different if Poland

²⁵ A Romanian source (*Evenimentele zilei...* AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fol. 3) says that Grigorcea's information about this fact reached the headquarters in Bucharest via telegraph only at 10 pm.

²⁶ Regele Carol, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937–1951*, p. 218; see also Ch. Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei 1930–1940*, trans. D.C. Midan, București, 2008, p. 157; J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 267; N. Mareș, *Alianța româno-polonă între destrămare și solidaritate...*, p. 212.

was to continue the war with Germany alongside the allies, and the legal continuity of the Polish government – the reason for which it had crossed the Romanian border – was to be maintained.²⁷

During the exchange with Beck and “several phone calls from Bucharest [...] Crutzescu stated that due to the urgency of the events, the Romanian government proposed [...] that the [Polish] authorities travel to the territories outside Bukovina”. A few hours later, President Mościcki and Marshal Rydz-Śmigły, who decided to cross the border at the last minute, left from Chernivtsi by train. However, on the way the carriages were separated and, as mentioned earlier, the first was taken to Bicaz (Charles II’s hunting lodge), and the second to Craiova (Prince Michael’s palace). Meanwhile, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ministers were sent in separate carriages to the mountain resort of Slănic (Racovița Hotel), where Beck travelled with his closest entourage by car. The Polish authorities had thus become interned.²⁸

On 19 September, the Legal Council of the Romanian Foreign Ministry issued an opinion to justify this act. Citing Article 11 of the fifth Hague Convention, The Council concluded that a neutral country, so as not to violate the principles of neutrality, is required to disarm and intern the troops of one of the warring parties passing through its territory, in order to prevent them from their further participation in the war against the other warring party.²⁹ Admittedly, the aforementioned Convention did not contain any provisions for the civilians of warring states who held official functions (heads of state, ministers), but in the opinion of the Legal Council, the obligation to maintain impartiality in relations with the warring parties forced a neutral state to prevent such persons from fighting against another warring state. “For this purpose, a neutral state is obliged to prevent them from leaving its territory by assigning them a specific location, seat, as only in this way it would be able to prevent it from continued fight from the start in the second allied country”.³⁰ Defining neutrality in this way was not reflected

²⁷ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, pp. 265–266; Grigorcea’s handwritten note drawn up on the margin of Raczyński’s message to the Romanian Foreign Ministry from 23 September 1939 (no. 49/R/17). AMAE. 71/1920–1944 Polonia, vol. 60, fol. 342; A. Cretzianu, *Polska a Wrzesień...*, p. 110; A.M. Cienciała, *Jak doszło do internowania...*, pp. 35–36; M. Kornat, foreword to *W rumuńskiej...*, p. 31.

²⁸ J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 266; S. Zabięło, *Na posterunku we Francji*, Warszawa, 1967, pp. 23–24; T. Dubicki, *Internowanie...*, p. 16.

²⁹ Article 11 of the Convention reads as follows: “A neutral power which will accept into its territory troops belonging to the army of the warring parties should intern them, if possible, far from the war zone. The power will be able to keep the troops in camps and even lock them in fortresses, or in places adapted for this purpose. The power will decide whether the officers will be able to remain free, after verbally committing not to leave the neutral territory without permission.” DURP, 1927, no. 21, item 163, p. 220.

³⁰ An opinion of the Legal Council regarding the legal situation of the President of the Republic and members of the Polish Government, refugees on the territory of the Kingdom of Romania from 19 September 1939. AMR. APRMCP, dossier 5, fols. 25–29.

in any international legal acts, and was in fact a favour to one of the parties to the conflict, namely Germany.

Applying such an interpretation, Romanians recognised the announcement of the President of the Republic of Poland in Chernivtsi, and the appearance of Beck as the minister in office as violation of neutrality.³¹ In reality, these allegations were far-fetched. The true reasons for the internment were revealed by Gafencu in a conversation with Raczyński. He stated that he must “temporarily keep” the president and members of the government in Romania; he could not risk a war with Germany, and he also had to reckon with the possibility of a Soviet invasion.³² However, it should be reiterated that the decision to intern was taken before the Polish authorities found themselves in Romania, as evidenced by the entry from the journal of Charles II quoted above.³³

Some historians see the Romanian internment of the Polish president and government not only as a result of pressure from Germany and the Soviet threat, but also of the actions of Polish opposition parties and of certain French politicians and diplomats. The collected source material does not provide unambiguous evidence. On the other hand, can any proof remain after such actions? It seems that there was no Romanian–French–Polish conspiracy aiming to intern the Polish President and government in Romania.³⁴ There is no doubt that the actions of Romania favoured the anti-Sanation coalition, and that they turned to their benefit, nor is there any doubt that they seemed welcome to the aforementioned French circles to create a new Polish government.³⁵

The moral evaluation of the conduct of the Romanian authorities towards the Polish ruling elite is obvious. Its members did not expect such actions from, after all, an allied and friendly country. However, it should be emphasised that the Romanian authorities came to work in an extremely difficult international situation, under the enormous diplomatic pressure of the Third Reich and under

³¹ *Aide mémoire* of the Romanian Foreign Ministry for the Polish Embassy in Bucharest [from 25 September 1939], in: H. Batowski, *Agonia pokoju...*, p. 442; report from the conversation between Cretzianu and Poniński from 20 September 1939, AMR. APRMCP, dossier 3, fols. 31–34; report of an adviser to the Polish Embassy in Bucharest, A. Poniński to Prime Minister Sikorski from 15 November 1939, *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne. 1939 wrzesień–grudzień*, ed. W. Rojek, Warszawa, 2007, p. 363; A.M. Cieniała, *Jak doszło do internowania...*, pp. 37–39.

³² *Zapiski ambasadora...* IPMS. Kolekcja Raczyńskiego 482/3; A.M. Cieniała, *Jak doszło do internowania...*, p. 47; Raczyński’s telegram to London, Paris, Belgrade and Budapest from 19 September 1939, HIA. Rumunia. Ks. szyf. no. 8, p. 3, f. 2; see also L. Łubieński, “Dziennik wrzesień–grudzień 1939”, in: *Przed wrześniem i po wrześniu. Ze wspomnień młodych dyplomatów II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. Z. Czeczot-Gawrak, Warszawa, 1998, p. 84.

³³ Regele Carol, *Însemnări zilnice. 1937–1951*, p. 218

³⁴ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia...*, pp. 77–84.

³⁵ Letter of former minister Beck to President W. Raczkiewicz from 9 October 1939 in: J. Beck, *Wspomnienia o polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, p. 387; M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, *Polska — niepostrzeżony aliant Francji? (Francja wobec Polski w latach 1938–1944)*, Warszawa, 2003, pp. 178–179; I. Beauvois, *Stosunki...*, pp. 14–17.

the influence of equally great fear of Soviet aggression. Bucharest was well aware of the passivity of France and Great Britain, which not only did not help their ally in its fight against Germany, but also tacitly accepted the fact of the aggression of the USSR. Under these circumstances, one can understand the attitude of Romanian politicians who, with very limited room for manoeuvre, wished to save their country from sharing the fate of Poland, albeit through not very ethical means.

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