

Further Escalation of the International Situation – Reports to the Military Office of the President of the Republic in Czechoslovakia on the Situation in Poland in 1936

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The article focuses on the military-political reports of the Military Office of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic from 1936 and builds on the previous article dealing with 1935, which was conceived in a similar way and is a direct continuation.¹ Czechoslovak-Polish relations in the interwar period were far from ideal. However, there were mutual contacts² and the Czechoslovak military attaché in Poland and other representatives of the diplomatic corps played a very important role in this respect. Their surviving reports are quite detailed and tell of important changes and developments in Poland. This study presents them with a commentary on the events mentioned and with the necessary setting in the contemporary context.

Keywords: *Interwar period; Interwar Czechoslovakia; Interwar Poland; Czechoslovaks; Poles; Czechoslovak army, Polish army; Military Office of the President of the Republic in Czechoslovakia; 1936; Reports to Czechoslovak President about Poland*

This follow-up study offers a comprehensive look at the topic of the surviving reports of the Military Office of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic for 1936. The events discussed may serve as a reminder of the most important political and military changes in Poland at the time. This concerns

¹ Řepa, T. (2023). Reports to the Military Office of the President of the Republic in Czechoslovakia on the situation in Poland in 1935. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, issue 15 (1–2), pp. 96–100. <https://doi.org/10.5817/cphpj-2023-006>

² Further on topic see Kołakowski, P. (2018). *Polsko-czechosłowackie kontakty wojskowe 1921–1938 w dokumentach wywiadu i dyplomacji II Rzeczypospolitej*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM.

both the contemporary context itself at a time of further rising international tensions, as well as the arms race that was set in motion and the related search for security guarantees among the various European states. Poland and Czechoslovakia not excluded, and the differences in the approach of these two states to security issues reveal various contradictory tendencies even on a European scale. For this study, the direct method of archival sources from the Military Historical Archive in Prague was chosen. Secondary literature from both Czech and Polish perspectives and its reflection on the topic is an important aid.

First Quarter 1936

Again, let us recall that the scenario of the quarterly reports was always the same, with military reports first, followed by an overview of the more important changes in laws and regulations. However, a significant part of the reports to the President of the Republic was always devoted to the internal situation in Poland, then to the foreign situation. All the reports were signed at the end by their author, Colonel of the General Staff Ferdinand Silvester³, who served as military attaché⁴ in Poland from 1932 to 1937.⁵ His signature was also added by divisional general Silvestr Bláha⁶ (from 1929) in his capacity as head of the Military Office of the President of the Republic, who went through the reports and often produced only a summary of the most important information and opinions from the military attaché addressed directly to the President of the country.

For the first quarter of 1936, the military attaché of the Czechoslovak Republic in Warsaw reported on 5 May 1936 in the military section that the Inspector General of the Polish Armed Forces, Edward Śmigły-Rydz, had maintained the primacy of the army in Polish society and was continuing to strengthen this trend. He reports that the chaos in European foreign policy after the last violent intervention by Nazi Germany, by which he means

³ In some publications he is also listed as Ferdinand Sylvester, but his signature on documents for the Military Office of the President of the Republic is in the form Silvester. In the form Sylvester used for example see Zudová-Lešková, Z. (2011). *Zapomenutá elita: českoslovenští vojenští diplomaté v letech 1938–1945*. Praha: Mladá fronta, p. 38.

⁴ Military Historical Archive Prague (hereinafter known as MHA), fund Qualification papers of military persons, qualification (personal) file of Ferdinand Silvester.

⁵ Kołakowski, P. (2012). Przywileje i uprawnienia obcych attaché wojskowych w Polsce. Instrukcja z 1934 roku. In *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy*, Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne im. gen. broni Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego Wojskowe Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej w Warszawie, issue 13 (64)/3 (241), p. 106

⁶ MHA, fund Qualification papers of military persons, qualification (personal) file of Silvestr Bláha.

the remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936, contributed to this.⁷ He also speaks of the realisation that the Soviet army was developing massively and that the disparity in the armament of the German army was increasing to the detriment of the Polish army. There is thus a growing recognition of the inadequacy of the more perfect and modern equipment of the Polish armed forces. Of the two dangerous neighbouring great states of Poland, i.e., Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the decisive Polish military authorities consider the Soviet danger to be the primary one. In wider military circles, however, the German danger is perceived as still alive, as the statement by Edward Śmigły-Rydz in a conversation with Foreign Minister Józef Beck, quoted in the report of the Czechoslovak attaché, is supposed to prove: „Conduct your foreign policy as you wish, I am preparing the army mainly against Germany.“⁸

The report speaks, as it did at the end of 1935, of the spirit of the army at a good level. The increased threat from neighbours is depressing, especially for the younger officers and men. In addition, disturbing factors such as Communist agitation among the troops, the misery of the Polish countryside and, contrary to the positive military education sermons, numerous strikes and unrest in Lvov or Kraków are mentioned.⁹ The author of the report states that he observes particular difficulties in recruitment and education, especially in the non-commissioned officer corps. There have been no serious changes in the Polish-Czechoslovak relationship; the tense relationship continues.¹⁰ Military circles continue to be convinced that the Poles are being wronged in Těšín, but mainly only from the daily press. The military journals, on the other hand, remained aloof from provocations and incitement. And if they could and were allowed to publish even minor sympathetic mentions or photographs of life in Czechoslovakia. The military attaché further speaks of his personal relations with his Polish colleagues as being fair but tight. It is stated that there is increasing “secrecy” and reluctance on the part of the Poles to explicitly communicate information, and this applies to other military attachés as well; it is not just a matter of behaviour towards Czechoslovaks.¹¹

⁷ For more see Kershaw, I. (1998). *Hitler: 1889–1936 Hubris*. New York: Norton, pp. 586–587; likewise Watt, R. M. (1979). *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939*. New York City: Simon & Schuster, pp. 371–372.

⁸ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 1st Quarter 1936.

⁹ Summary of socio-economic changes in interwar Poland for example see Stachura, P. D. (2004). *Poland, 1918–1945: an interpretive and documentary history of the Second Republic*. London: Routledge, pp. 45–58.

¹⁰ Further on the subject of Czech-Polish relations Przeperski, M. (2016). *Nieznośny ciężar braterstwa: konflikty polsko-czeskie w XX wieku*. Wydanie pierwsze. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

¹¹ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 1st Quarter 1936.

In the overview of important changes and regulations, mention is made of the Presidential Decree on the provision and assistance to persons of special merit for the independence of Poland. Another presidential decree adopted is on the protection of the interests of Poles in international relations. This refers to special protective measures in the event of a foreign state treating Poles worse than others. Other changes mentioned are a decree on the reduction of the arms trade (including measures against concealment of arms), the addition of a law to combat epidemics or new medical commissions for active military personnel. Also worth mentioning is the new designation of the areas of overflight across the Polish border, including the places of overflight to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Also mentioned is the law on the use of arms by civilian guards subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Military Affairs¹² or the presidential decree on the establishment of a national defence fund. This fund is to consist of: A - profits from the sale of real estate and movable property which was state property, B - special revenues arising from special legal decrees, C - donations and contributions to the fund. An interesting remark of the Czechoslovak attaché is the following statement: "I have had several opportunities to see how the representatives of the French Embassy here judge the official reports received with a kind of blinded polonophilia. In particular, the French military attaché here conceives and interprets various information in a very distorted way. I consider it necessary to draw attention to the matter. I add to his mentality that he limits his contacts with me as much as possible in order not to spoil his name with the officials here." The remark of the German military attaché in the report about Poland, that she must have a dictatorship as a country, but must not be seen to have one because of the nature of the nation, seems similarly interesting.¹³

Several important observations are made on the domestic political situation. For example, the Sejm and the Senate have become mere decorations of the authoritarian regime¹⁴, but even within the government camp a number of mutual contradictions arise. The hopes that were placed in the new constitution and the new electoral rules have been disappointed. The author of the report states directly that the public opinion of the great majority of the Polish nation wants nothing to do with the regime and is in implacable opposition to it. By preventing participation in parliamentary work, the conditions were created for increased activity by individual political parties in the regions. At the same time, economic misery is radicalising the peasant masses, especially in the overcrowded countryside. The anti-Semitic movement also has

¹² On the subject of changes in the Ministry of Military Affairs between 1935 and 1939 Wyszczelski, L. (2010). *Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych (1918–1939)*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, pp. 183–207.

¹³ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 1st Quarter 1936.

¹⁴ Characteristics of the Polish regime at the time Topolski, J. (2015). *Historia Polski*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, pp. 275–280.

an economic background. The difficult living conditions are also radicalising young people and students. Pensioners have had their benefits reduced by one third. In this case, however, it is the least agile element in the anti-government protests. At the same time, economic influences facilitate political agitation, in which one can also observe certain influences of foreign ideology - Nazi on the right, Communist on the left. Over time, the struggle takes on serious forms and leads to serious events - daily anti-Jewish riots, lively strike movements linked in more than one case to clashes with state forces. The Polish Minister of Education was alleged in the report of this quarterly report to have declared that one million children could not be adequately educated because there were no funds to increase the number of teaching posts. The strongest political agitation was recorded among the National Democrats and the People's Party. Minority issues have taken a slight back seat in recent months. However, the self-confidence of Germans is growing rapidly in the context of an expansive German policy. In the final part of this passage, the Attaché did not mince his words, and in connection with the oppression of the Lithuanian minority and the lack of Lithuanian schools in Poland, he literally said: „It would be a grateful task to make a comparison of the situation of minorities in Poland with the situation of some Polish minorities abroad. It would show, to put it mildly, the unjustifiability of Polish complaints, applied according to the tactics used here, i.e., immediately and in an exaggerated manner, mainly against Czechoslovakia and Poland.“¹⁵

In the passage assessing foreign policy, it is stated at the outset that the opposition and the public did not find in Minister Beck's exposé on the country's course answers to the many concerns with which Beck's policy is viewed.¹⁶ Its assessment is cited as dangerous because of the possibility of becoming too dependent on Berlin. Polish foreign policy has otherwise been characterised in recent months by a desire to avoid unilateral political engagement. Nevertheless, it has been possible to observe an effort to maintain as close contact with Germany as possible. The Czechoslovak attaché, however, added in a report that Beck's policy towards Germany was apparently only opportunistic. He also stated that there continued to be brazen attacks against Czechoslovakia. There were no significant changes in the Polish-Soviet relationship. The conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Pact caused considerable nervousness in Poland, because it gave the impression that the Pact was diminishing the power of Poland and the possibilities of Polish foreign policy. Communist propaganda by the Soviets, directed particularly at the east

¹⁵ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 1st Quarter 1936.

¹⁶ The then Polish-German rapprochement was also watched with concern from Czechoslovakia for a long time. On the subject, see Kamiński, M. K. (2014). *Szkice z dziejów Polski i Czechosłowacji w latach trzydziestych XX wieku*. Warszawa: Neriton, pp. 75–87.

of the country, was said to have necessitated the strengthening of the local Border Corps.¹⁷

Second Quarter 1936

The report for the second quarter of 1936 was dated 7 July 1936. By comparison, in terms of Czechoslovakia's defence capability, it was in the spring of 1936 that great and long-prepared progress was made in the form of the adoption of Act No. 131/1936 Coll. on the defence of the state.¹⁸ Both Czechoslovakia and Poland looked to the future with the same apprehension, and the legislation adopted in both countries corresponded to this. It was in this atmosphere that the next summary report arrived.¹⁹

Both Czechoslovakia and Poland looked to the future with the same apprehension²⁰, and the legislation adopted in both countries corresponded to this. It was in this atmosphere that the next summary report arrived. In the passage on military reports, the Czechoslovak attaché reported that: "Of the two main dangers, Soviet and German, the German danger has receded even further into the background. It can be said that the Soviet danger is now the only driving force behind the immediate action of the decisive Polish circles."²¹

Another interesting note is the slogans spread in Polish society t government positions. For example, the statement is made that the basis of the strength of the state is the dedication of the worker with the soldier. To direct all the branches of the state into one united will - to have a powerful army. The new Polish Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski²² summed it up directly in the slogan: "I am going to fight - help me, all of you!" Alternatively,

¹⁷ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 1st Quarter 1936.

¹⁸ Further to the topic Řepa, T (2023). *Záměry a proces přijetí zákona č. 131/1936 Sb. o obraně státu. Paginae Historiae*, issue 31(1), pp. 444–463; likewise Řepa, T. (2022). *Proces schvalování zákona o obraně státu z roku 1936. Dějiny a dějepis*, issue 36(1-2), pp. 41–60; likewise Řepa, T. (2022). *Reakce vojenské správy na zvýšené ohrožení republiky ve 30. letech se zaměřením na přijetí zákona č. 131/1936 Sb. o obraně státu*. In S. Polnar, T. Řepa (Eds.) *Ozbrojené síly a československý stát III*. Brno: Univerzita obrany, pp. 37–63.

¹⁹ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

²⁰ For comparison, a Polish military historian's view of the Czechoslovak army at the time in the interwar period Wiśniewski, J. P. (2001). *Armia czechosłowacka w latach 1932–1938*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

²¹ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

²² For a summary of his life story see Chojnowski, A. – Wróbel, P. (1992). *Prezydenci i premierzy Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*. Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, pp. 360–373; likewise Sioma, M. (2005). *Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski (1885–1962): żołnierz i polityk*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.

the slogan: “Defence of Poland! We must begin to live a cruel life full of sacrificing everything for the defence of a strong Poland. Without falling into communism or fascism.” Somewhat surprisingly, the more educated the citizen, the more valuable the soldier.²³

Furthermore, the report for the second quarter of 1936 contained information that the collection for the National Defence Fund was having some success. Donations for the army have been coming in almost daily during the past two months. This is either from the workers in the form of overtime in the factories or in the results of the collection in monetary form. However, the author of the report also states that there can be no question of spontaneous action, that many of the donations are forced by the leaders and managers or that they do not represent a special value when compared with the intended disarmament actions. Moreover, such actions are not reported to have contributed much to raising the prestige of the army. The main observation of the internal Polish political situation is that the Inspector General of the Polish Armed Forces, Edward Śmigły-Rydz, has decided to intervene in state affairs outside the military sphere and has already become politically involved as the second man in the country after President Mościcki.²⁴ However, according to the report, he is not yet a universally recognised leader with high authority. A consequence of this political breakthrough was to be the establishment of a kind of interim Ministry of Propaganda. The primacy of the army in the Polish state was not only maintained but further consolidated during this period. The Polish-Czechoslovak relationship remained unchanged. A section of the daily press continues to focus on scathing criticism of Czechoslovakia, which it accuses of collaboration with the Soviets despite Czechoslovak denials. The military press, by contrast, is sober after the previous interventions and reservations of the Czechoslovak attaché and does not carry tendentious articles.²⁵

In a summary of important changes and regulations, it is stated, among other things, that a law on state water works has been adopted with the intention of regulating mountain rapids mostly along the border with Czechoslovakia. Other sub-legislative measures include changes in the equipment and armament of the Polish State Police. New uniforms are distributed by another measure again to court officials and bailiffs. A regulation implementing the law on the provision of care for persons especially meritorious for the independence of Poland has also been adopted. Changes have been made to the speeding up of rail freight transport and to the control of the performance of aeroplanes

²³ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

²⁴ Kosman, M. (2021). *Dějiny Polska*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova and Karolinum, pp. 293–295.

²⁵ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

and balloons, as well as to the technical supervision of them.²⁶ At the same time, competences were divided between military and civil instances.²⁷ Supplements to the military service regulations were adopted and a new fuel mixture of 25 % alcohol, 55 % petrol and 20 % benzene was introduced for all vehicles except aircraft and diesel engines. The miscellaneous military matters section of the report included information on the details of remarks made by Śmigły-Rydz²⁸ at the Legionnaires' Union congress at the end of May 1936, with the emphasis on his part that the Polish army must insist on the economic consolidation of the state.²⁹ The observation is made that the Inspector General should continue to act not only as the supreme representative of the army but also as a kind of arbiter in Polish political disputes.³⁰

The entry into the passage reporting on international events and foreign policy is also, with regard to future events and the pretext³¹ for the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany, information about the decree issued on the control of the turnover of goods in contact with foreign countries and the Free City of Danzig. Józef Beck remained Foreign Minister in the next government, where he again promoted possible cooperation with Germany, even though there were increasing signs that Germany had hostile intentions towards Poland. Traditionally good relations were reported, especially with Hungary, with whom new treaties were signed in a number of areas, and the balance of trade was to be further strengthened. On the other hand, the most distrustful attitude towards the Soviets was emphasised. Relations continued to be aggravated by increased Soviet subversion, both among the population (particularly in the east of the country) and among the military. The Czechoslovak Attaché himself states that these were at least partly justified fears. With a great deal of foresight, the attaché directly states that Poland would be happy to participate in the division of Czechoslovakia if the opportunity arose. There are also tendentious border incidents. At the end of the report on the second quarter, it is said of Czechoslovak-Polish relations: “a further cooling of sympathy for us can be reported.”³²

²⁶ Kozłowski, E. (1964). *Wojsko Polskie 1936–1939: Próby modernizacji i rozbudowy*. Warszawa: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, pp. 28–44.

²⁷ Some other changes and the establishment of new military institutions Böhm, T. (1994). *Z dziejów naczelných władz wojskowych II Rzeczypospolitej: organizacja i kompetencje Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych w latach 1918–1939*. Warszawa: Bellona, pp. 208–210.

²⁸ Further on topic see Pawłowski, T. (2009). *Armia marszałka Śmigłego: idea rozbudowy Wojska Polskiego 1935–1939*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM.

²⁹ On further political developments Watt, R. M. (1979). *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939...*, pp. 369–375.

³⁰ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

³¹ Řezník, M. (2010). *Dějiny Polska v datech*. Praha: Libri, p. 374.

³² MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 2nd Quarter 1936.

Third Quarter 1936

The report for the third quarter of 1936 is dated November 30, 1936. In the military report, it is stated at the beginning that French General Gamelin visited Warsaw. General Śmigły-Rydz in turn visited France, with whom a loan negotiation was also reached. Śmigły-Rydz was also appointed to the rank of marshal on the Polish Independence Day, 11 November. Meanwhile, the Attaché reports that the newly promoted Commander-in-Chief's position is still relatively weak. This is not only with the general public, but also with many military circles. According to a confidential private source, the report states that the Polish army command wants to build up a particularly strong anti-tank defence within one year and to motorise the army to a degree equivalent to that of Poland's two great neighbours, Germany and the Soviet Union, within four to five years. It is clearly stated that the Poles cannot yet even come close to matching the German assault vehicles.³³ Anti-tank guns are envisaged mainly for infantry, then cavalry divisions, and finally as a backup to the division commander. For future years it is to be achieved that the infantry battalions should have two anti-tank guns each, the cavalry the same number, and the division commander at least four pieces. In the passage on military affairs, the Attaché reports that despite all his efforts he has not been able to obtain further information on the planned motorisation of the Polish army, but he also sees the problem in the poor situation of the road network and the difficulties in producing vehicles. Specific new information indicates that production of Polski Fiat trucks is underway, and Polski Fiat small passenger cars are to be adapted to heavy machine gun platforms and operators. The report reiterates that at parades Polish units have a great military look. Among other minor findings, it is noted that anti-German sentiment is intensifying in the officer corps. Also, that there are changes in the hitherto rigid military discipline, which is supposed to be due to the gradual transformation of the commanding cadres, especially among those who no longer come from the ranks of the original Polish nobility.³⁴

In a review of important changes and regulations, it is noted, among other things, that, as a result of the tightening of defence intelligence, the sending of official military bulletins to all foreign diplomats and military attachés was stopped in the middle of the year. Among the changes in important laws, mention is made of the publication of the uniform text of the Post Office, Telegraph, and Telephone Act in time of war. There is also a new post

³³ On the shortcomings of the contemporary Polish army as seen by a Polish military historian further in Miśkiewicz, B. (2006). *Wojsko Polskie w XX wieku*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Kurpisz, pp. 41–54. (chapter Osiągnięcia i niedostatki Wojska Polskiego w latach 1921–1939).

³⁴ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 3rd Quarter 1936.

of Inspector of Air and Gas Defence, regulations implementing the National Defence Fund Act, regulations directed towards the promotion of motorisation, and a list of schools authorising military officer training.³⁵ Other items include the classification of the Hel Peninsula and Hel Scythe as fortified areas, the youth labour service, a decree reducing the benefits of military persons guilty in any way, and a report on the electrification of Warsaw railway station.³⁶

The miscellaneous section of the report contains information about the lack of bomber aviation in the Polish Army.³⁷ In addition, a major aviation accident was the tragedy during the testing of a prototype twin-engine aircraft, in which two outstanding Polish and two Romanian test pilots were killed. The Romanian military attaché in Poland reacted emotionally to this with a critical statement on the Polish military industry. Other changes were made to parachute training. From a private source, the report states that a sharpened registration of the military books of Ukrainians is being carried out, with agreed signs being entered in their military books. Many Ukrainians are said to have recently been transferred to the infantry, where they do not have access to special weapons and positions of greater responsibility.³⁸

There is an interesting note in the report that speaks of the ruling regime securing its position by over-involving the military in matters of internal affairs and domestic politics due to its weakness and isolationism.³⁹ The report characterizes the Polish domestic political scene in the third quarter of 1936 as follows: „In the cities the masses are divided into two great groups. First of all, it is the Right, i.e., the National Democratic Party, which does not form a homogeneous whole and shows considerable fragmentation on its wings. In fact, alongside the official National Democratic Party there is the camp of the former radical wing representing the younger elements, and then a group made up of even younger elements, grouped around the magazine *Falanga*. Secondly, there is the left, made up mainly of the socialist party and socialist trade union organisations. Supporters of the Communist Party, illegal in Poland, are also looking elsewhere for a base. The left undeniably includes a large majority of the Jewish minority, very significant in Polish cities. In the countryside, the People's Party is predominant. Its positions are particularly strong in the former *Halych*. It is difficult to estimate what is the relative proportion of these large groups. There have been no regular elections in Poland for a long time. Some basis for assessing the present-day Polish stratification can be drawn from municipal elections, but even these occur

³⁵ Generally, on the topic Feret, S. (1972). *Polska Sztuka Wojenna 1918–1939*. Warszawa: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, Biblioteka Wiedzy Wojskowej.

³⁶ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 3rd Quarter 1936.

³⁷ Kozłowski, E. (1964). *Wojsko Polskie 1936–1939...*, pp. 232–242.

³⁸ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 3rd Quarter 1936.

³⁹ Topolski, J. (2015). *Historia Polski*, pp. 275–280.

only in exceptional cases. It is possible to conclude that the greatest masses of the Polish nation follow the People's Party and the Party of Polish Socialists, between which cooperation is established. Even a remarkable part of the Polish intelligentsia sympathises with this group. The National Democrats have their old firm positions mainly in the countries of Greater Poland and then among the Polish bourgeois element and the academic youth. They benefit in their agitation mainly from the anti-Semitic sentiments which are everywhere in Poland today.⁴⁰

Foreign policy was this time developed rather more briefly. It is stated that the most important event in the past period was the strengthening of the Polish-French relationship. According to the report, the alliance between Poland and France had many supporters among the general public. As far as German-Polish relations are concerned, the Gdansk question is the most emphasised. The German political aim in Danzig was to eliminate the political opposition. The opposition parties were gaining strength, the opposition press was spreading despite all restrictions. The starting point was thus open conflict. During this period various incidents like the one with the cruiser Leipzig on 25 June 1936, which soon spilled over to the League of Nations. The German side was then to attempt a coup in Danzig by legal means, i.e., by changing the constitution after the victorious elections. Polish-Soviet relations, by contrast, remained at the same bad level as in the past. With Czechoslovakia, relations also did not undergo any substantial changes, and the intensity of the press campaign against Czechoslovakia was to be reduced because of Poland's rapprochement with France. Among European political issues, it was the events in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa that were drawing attention in Poland in view of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (17 July 1936).⁴¹ As in other countries, the question of sympathy for the rebels or, on the contrary, for the government camp divided Polish society. The parties of the left openly sympathised with the government, while the majority of the Polish right, including circles representing the Catholic Church, sided with the Spanish rebels.⁴²

Fourth Quarter 1936

The final report for 1936 mentions at the outset that the new Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz had not yet met the high expectations of his position. The biggest success is considered to be the French loan, which, even in the opinion of senior

⁴⁰ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 3rd Quarter 1936.

⁴¹ In detail Chalupa, J. (2023). *Dějiny Španělska*. Praha: NLN, pp. 483–509.

⁴² MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 3rd Quarter 1936.

military officials, should serve to rearm the Polish army quickly. This should concern mainly heavy, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery, bomber aviation, submarines and greater industrialisation of the country leading to self-sufficiency. In the opinion of the Czechoslovak military attaché, Polish society was divided after the death of Piłsudski, who was to combine the authority of a soldier and a politician. The course of Foreign Minister Beck's foreign policy⁴³ and the course of Śmigły-Rydz's military policy⁴⁴ inevitably led to a certain double track. The army itself must not politicise anything.⁴⁵

In the summary of legal changes and regulations (much more concise than in previous reports), it is stated, among other things, that the military tax has been abolished and that labour service has been introduced as a kind of alternative conscription. The reason given for this was that the collection of the military tax was not profitable for the State. A regulation implementing the Gendarmerie Act was adopted, and benefits were also introduced for users of new motor vehicles, particularly with regard to the eastern regions of the country.⁴⁶ An interesting feature was the launching of an anti-unemployment drive affecting unemployed reservists and conscripts, who were to be billeted, fed, clothed and drilled by the nearest regiment.⁴⁷

Concerning relations between Czechoslovakia and Poland, it is again pointed out that the military press in Poland refrains from attacking its southern neighbour. The civilian press, however, has continued its tendentious campaigns, but in recent months even this activity has waned. It is interesting to note that the German press campaign against Czechoslovakia is widely adopted in Poland. There is even talk of Bolshevisation, a purposeful interpretation of some Soviet articles describing the new Czechoslovak airports. From a confidential source, the attaché's report describes the fact that only 120 million francs of the French loan to the Poles is to go for heavy artillery. In this respect, even the participation of the Czechoslovak Skoda is not excluded. The latter would then want to saturate France with supplies of non-competitive material. Recent successful tests of the 220mm mortar are said to have strengthened Skoda's position again. In 1937, air lines from Poland to the south via Czechoslovakia would be expanded, and the attaché considered this in his report as a chance to remind the Poles that if they wanted to fly over

⁴³ Dejmek, J. (1997). Ministr Józef Beck a jeho zahraniční politika v pohledu československých diplomatů 1932–1939. (Příspěvek k dějinám československo-polských diplomatických vztahů). In *Slovanské historické studie: pocta Henrykovi Batowskému*, issue 31, pp. 105–143.

⁴⁴ Detailed information on the topic Pawłowski, T. (2009). *Armia marszałka Śmigłego: idea rozbudowy Wojska Polskiego 1935–1939*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM.

⁴⁵ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

⁴⁶ On the situation in the eastern regions of Poland in interwar period Brzoza, C. – Sowa, A. L. (2006). *Historia Polski: 1918–1945*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, pp. 211–231.

⁴⁷ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

our territory, he should also care about good relations with us.⁴⁸ At the beginning of January 1937, the change of the Romanian military attaché here, Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff Diaconescu, was reported after four and a half years here. He was a firm and outspoken advocate of Romanian interests. Czechoslovak Attaché Ferdinand Silvester further states that in the person of the outgoing Romanian Attaché he is losing one of his most sincere collaborators. His successor, Major Baiculescu, seems to be too pliable.⁴⁹

In terms of the internal political situation in Poland, it is stated that the last quarter of 1936 brought no major changes. The Attaché expressed the general situation in these words: „There has been no change either in the progress of further disintegration of the ruling party, or in the further growth of opposition parties, and radicalism in the popular strata. The regime, which has emerged thanks to the new constitution and the new electoral code, is actually relying only on the means of power of the state executive. On the army, both in terms of its strength and its universally acknowledged inviolability. The former sanitation camp is in decay. This increases the importance of the army as a solid and permanent component that both the government and opposition groups must reckon with. The appointment of Marshal Śmigły-Rydz as Marshal of Poland, the second man in the state and the leader of the nation, is at the same time to ensure the army's public role as arbiter⁵⁰ in Polish politics.“⁵¹

In the Polish Parliament at the end of November and the beginning of December 1936, Prime Minister Składkowski and other high officials assured that they had good will in social policy. In a speech, the Prime Minister even declared that there were only two categories of people in Poland - some who worked and others who lamented the misery of the working man. He called on MEPs to criticise only in a factual manner. In the opinion of the Czechoslovak attaché, the general debate showed the severe economic and internal political problems with which Poland is struggling today. The report also openly described the difficulties of the frequent anti-Jewish riots against which the Prime Minister also spoke out. One of the reasons given in the report is that able-bodied inhabitants with an interest in commerce and industry are moving from the overcrowded villages to the towns, where they encounter a large Jewish population.⁵² Some political parties even want to solve this by forcibly evicting

⁴⁸ In addition to European international relations in this period Batowski, H. (2008). *Między dwiema wojnami 1919–1939: zarys historii dyplomatycznej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, pp. 218–251.

⁴⁹ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

⁵⁰ Stawecki, P. (1969). *Następcy Komendanta: Wojsko a polityka wewnętrzna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1935–1939*. Warszawa: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, pp. 21–25.

⁵¹ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

⁵² For an explanation of the origins of the Jewish community in Poland at that time, see Watt, R. M. (1979). *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939...*, pp. 358–361.

the Jewish population from Poland. The report for the fourth quarter of 1936 is also specific in that it discusses in considerable detail the political tensions within the Polish governmental grouping and among the opposition. The German minority in Poland was becoming more active and Nazi influences were penetrating across the border. At the same time, a section of the Polish public is showing increased concern about the oppression of the Polish minority in Germany and is taking more notice of the comparison with the situation of the German minority in Poland. Difficulties also persist in relation to the Ukrainian minority. Ukrainians complain that very little has been done on the Polish side to meet Ukrainian demands. In particular, this concerns the situation in education and agriculture. The situation of the Lithuanian and Belarusian minorities is also dismal.⁵³

In foreign policy Poland was very active at the end of 1936. Minister Beck visited Paris (15 October 1936) and London (7 November 1936). The Danzig question is still the subject of very difficult negotiations. The situation was exacerbated by attacks on the Polish minority in the city. The press agency of the Polish Foreign Ministry immediately stressed that local incidents could not affect the action of the Polish Government. On 19 December 1936, Minister Beck made a speech in Parliament in which he praised the permanence of the Franco-Polish alliance. His aforementioned visits to Paris and London were particularly welcomed by a significant section of the Polish public concerned about the intensity of diplomatic relations between Berlin and Warsaw.⁵⁴ Poland's unfriendly attitude towards the Little Agreement remained unchanged during this period. So did the overall relationship with Czechoslovakia.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The year 1936 was characterised by a further deterioration of the international situation to which all European countries reacted, Poland and Czechoslovakia not excluded. In the reports to the Military Office of the President of the Republic by the Czechoslovak military attaché in Poland, it was, as in 1935, a period rich in important events. It concerned far-reaching social changes, also connected with social tensions, the reverberations of the economic crisis, the revanchism of the states defeated in the First World War and the associated increase in tensions. A concrete example is the remilitarisation of the Rhineland by Nazi Germany. The subsequent

⁵³ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

⁵⁴ Additionally, to the topic Friedl, J. – Jurek, T. – Řezník, M. – Wihoda, M. (2017), *Dějiny Polska*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, pp. 459–460.

⁵⁵ MHA, fund Military Office of the President of the Republic, carton 153. Summary Report on Poland – 4th Quarter 1936.

symbolic diplomatic protests by the Western European democracies were a demonstration of a policy of appeasement that not only failed to stop further aggression but, on the contrary, further encouraged it. New measures were introduced in European countries in response to advances in military technology. In Poland, attempts were made to modernise an obsolete army and to speed up the process of motorisation. It can also be reiterated that the fate of Poland and Czechoslovakia was similar in that, due to their disadvantageous geographical location, they were states surrounded on several sides by countries with hostile intentions. Their foreign policy also corresponded to this. Poland was wary of both Germany and the Soviet Union. However, the policy of the Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck towards Germany remained relatively friendly. In this situation, the Inspector General of the Polish Armed Forces, Edward Śmigły-Rydz, decided to act as the second man in the country after President Mościcki. The army was to be the main guarantor of the survival of an independent Poland. To understand the times, the reactions of politicians, the military administration and society as a whole, the reports of the Czechoslovak military attaché from Poland are a valuable and somewhat forgotten source. In many ways, we can learn from them today, when Europe is once again experiencing a serious and far-reaching conflict.

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