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## Status and Prospects for Research on Functioning of the Second Polish Republic Government since mid-October 1938 till 31 August 1939

*Stan i perspektywy badań nad funkcjonowaniem rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej od połowy października 1938 do 31 sierpnia 1939 r.*

### ABSTRACT

The topic of the Council of Ministers in Poland, which was also termed during the interwar period, as was the Government, has not seen a monographic publication on its history, decisions, and actions. The same situation is for individual ministries and government institutions. Some fine texts were printed but all this allows only to get superficial knowledge on their organizations and activities. This leads to the first research postulate – to change this state of affairs. This will be neither easy nor simple, as it would be indicated in the text of this article. Secondly, it would be also necessary to launch

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basic research on this specific period, preferably on a large scale. Due to the period on question, it is also essential to link domestic research with archival research in foreign archives, also in Romania, which have not been so far properly and thoroughly explored by Polish historians. This seems not only justified but also very logical as Romania had been the place of evacuation for the highest state authorities (President of the Second Polish Republic, Polish Government, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces) and many top Government officials. Third research postulate refers to publication in response to main research postulates. This should take a form of a monograph on the Polish Council of Ministers and/or several separate articles to cover many dimensions and a number of the most important problems. It would also be advisable to complement the picture with biographies of ministers from the last prewar Cabinet, the Government, which not only firmly accepted the challenge from Germany, but also coordinated defence preparations of the State and Polish society. There were multiple reasons for the defeat and a big number of texts on this topic has been written and published. However, it is still necessary to consider plans, decision, and activities of the Polish Government in the context of the armed conflict. This text presents the status of research on the Polish Council of Ministers and should allow work on next research perspectives. Research questions should support the discussion on the Polish Military September 1939 Campaign, which should continue to be an important and obligatory element of any scientific discourse.

**Key words:** Council of Ministers, Government-Cabinet, research status, research perspectives, 1938–1939

#### STRESZCZENIE

Rada Ministrów w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym zwana popularnie rządem nie doczekała się dotychczas monograficznego ujęcia swoich dziejów. Stan ten dotyczy także poszczególnych ministerstw. Poświęcono jej kilka drobnych tekstów, które pozwalają jedynie na dość powierzchowne zapoznanie się z jej organizacją i działaniem. Pierwszym postulatem badawczym jest więc zmiana tego stanu rzeczy. Nie będzie to proste ani łatwe, co starałem się wykazać w tekście. Po drugie koniecznie należy rozpocząć badania podstawowe, najlepiej na szeroką skalę. W odniesieniu do tytułowego okresu trzeba je powiązać z zagranicznymi kwerendami archiwalnymi ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem archiwów rumuńskich, dotychczas słabo eksploatowanych przez polskich historyków. Wydaje się to nie tylko uzasadnione, ale wręcz logiczne zważywszy na fakt, że Rumunia stała się miejscem, w którym znalazły się najwyższe władze państwowe (Prezydent Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, rząd-gabinet i Wódz Naczelny) wraz z częścią podległej sobie administracji. Trzeci postulat badawczy dotyczy opublikowania efektów badań podstawowych. Należy ująć je w formę monografii Rady Ministrów (rozumianej jako rząd-gabinet) lub kilku artykułów obrazujących jej wieloaspektową działalność. Zasadnym byłoby ponadto dopełnienie tego obrazu biografiami ministrów ostatniego rządu dwudziestolecia jako tego, który nie tylko przyjął wyzwania ze strony Niemiec, ale swoimi działaniami starał się przygotować państwo i społeczeństwo polskie do wojny. Wiele przyczyn złożyło się na przegraną, o czym napisano niepoliczalną liczbę tekstów, ale warto zastanowić się nad działaniami i rolą rządu-gabinetu w kontekście konfliktu zbrojnego. Prezentowany tekst przedstawia stan badań nad Radą Ministrów, ale jest także próbą zastanowienia się nad ich perspektywami. Pytania badawcze służą natomiast wywołaniu dyskusji, która przy realizacji tematu „Polskiego Września” jest obowiązkowym elementem naukowego dyskursu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Rada Ministrów, rząd-gabinet, stan badań, perspektywy badań, 1938–1939

So-called 'Piłsudski Camp' or 'Sanacja' establishment started to disintegrate after Marshal Józef Piłsudski death. Inner divisions and animosities led to establishment of three centres of power: 1. Presidential faction headed by president Ignacy Mościcki (the most important representative of this faction in the Sławoj Składkowski Government was Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski); 2. The faction led by the General Inspector of the Armed Forces, Edward Rydz-Śmigły (in the Government his most important representative was... the Prime Minister himself); 3. 'Wierzbowa' faction headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Józef Beck. Each faction gained an influence on a part of political powers, which directly leads us to the conclusion that such construction was *de facto* the 'factionary coalition government'<sup>1</sup>. It can be proved by the fact of selection of the Prime Minister. He was quite surprised with the outcome of Mościcki-Śmigły-Rydz talks (December 1935), as he had not even been informed about this discussion and its results (*sic!*). Decisions were announced to him only on 13 May 1936. General Lucjan Żeligowski described this situation as abuse of power 'the Śmigły's order is a violation of the Constitutions. This is mixing the military with politics'<sup>2</sup>.

In the Polish historiography there are some statements that such initiative was to support Śmigły-Rydz in his plans to achieve the main objective, from the defence preparations point of view – i.e. modernisation and building the military power of the Country<sup>3</sup>. The way of establishing the composition of the Government<sup>4</sup> (excluding the Minister of Internal Affairs) and participation of the General Inspector of the Armed Forces in the inaugural meeting of Składkowski Government clearly showed that two top officials (although Śmigły-Rydz in an informal way) simply did not care and pay too much attention to constitutional provisions. In this specific case, the end justified the means.

Two days after the new Government was sworn in, the pro-Sanacja newspaper "Gazeta Polska" wrote that 'Appointment of General

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<sup>1</sup> Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski wrote: 'This compromise led not only to the establishment of General Sławoj-Składkowski »temporary« Government, but also to building the static balance of two factions with »presidential ministers« – Kwiatkowski, Poniatowski, Świętosławski, Kaliński, Kościałkowski, and Rydz-Śmigły »ministers« Składkowski, Kasprzycki, Ulrych, and Grabowski. Beck had a special position within the Government, and he additionally demanded to have with him the former Polish Ambassador in Stockholm'. See: W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864–1945*, vol. 2, 1919–1939, Londyn 1956, p. 595.

<sup>2</sup> "Polska Zbrojna" 1936, no. 108, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> E. Kozłowski, *Wojsko Polskie 1936–1939*, Warszawa 1974, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> J. Faryś, *Gabinet gen. Felicjana Sławoja-Składkowskiego 16.V.1936–30.IX.1939*, in: *Gabiny II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. J. Faryś, J. Pajewski, Szczecin–Poznań 1991, p. 266.

Sławoj-Składkowski to the Prime Minister's post and taking by him the position of the Minister of Internal Affairs, although only temporarily, clearly shows the political nature of tasks and challenges ahead of the Government [...]'<sup>5</sup>. The Prime Minister in his expose on 4 June 1936<sup>6</sup> put additional accents on improvement of economic situation and morale of the Polish society. He admitted that he took the post on orders of the President and General Inspector. It was commented by the conservative "Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy" that 'the Government will be guided by Polish national interests as defined and interpreted by General Śmigły-Rydz. Do not expect independent initiatives and actions. It would limit itself to an element following instructions and orders'<sup>7</sup>. Had it been like that? I will try to answer the question in the article.

#### RESEARCH STATUS AND POSTULATES

Research on problems indicated in the title requires not only scientific reflexion on 'status and perspectives', but also on the term 'Government' as such. It is necessary to define how it should be understood. Do we talk about it as a Cabinet, in simple terms the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, or as a 'set' of individual ministries, with ministers representing their institutions during session of a *nomen omen* Government.

Much closer to my heart and more congruent with my thinking about the Polish Government is taking the approach similar to the British model, i.e. team of ministers, which is able to discuss, work on specific problems and take necessary decisions. In such a case the Government-Cabinet is led by the Prime Minister, i.e. President of the Council of Ministers.

However, also another approach should not be *a priori* excluded as we also need information on specific decisions of the Council of Ministers related to individual ministries and their impact on the Government as a whole. Special attention should be paid to elements related to defence preparations of the Country.

In both cases, the research status is far from satisfactory. This is mainly the result of a small number of scientific works on the Cabinet as well as on individual ministries. Therefore, questions should be asked about the Government's status and its activity just before the outbreak of WWII as well as on defence preparations of the Country. Also, some decisions

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<sup>5</sup> *Rząd gen. Sławoj-Składkowskiego*, "Gazeta Polska" 1936, no. 137, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z 26. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej w dniu 4 czerwca 1936 roku*, [no place and date of publication], cols. 6-7, 9.

<sup>7</sup> "Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy" 6 June 1936, p. 1.

should be taken, also on approach to research problems. Should we analyse particular ministries or treat the Government as a whole and look for its achievements, problems, and deficiencies?

The answer is not clear and simple. There is no doubt that the most important element to be evaluated for this project, in the direct threat of an armed conflict situation, had been the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), headed by Józef Beck. He was the person responsible for the Polish foreign policy. There is an extensive subject literature on this specific area<sup>8</sup>. It is no secret and no new scientific discovery that Beck played a key role in shaping and implementation of the Polish foreign policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Even a cursory analysis of the Polish historiography shows that authors focused on Józef Beck as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on his plans, decisions, and activities. The Government has not been presented as a factor of the Polish foreign policy. See: Prints: *Expose ministrów spraw zagranicznych 1919–1939*, eds. P. Ceranka, M. Pernal, Warszawa 2011; J. Beck, *Przemówienia, deklaracje, wywiady 1931–1939*, Warszawa 1939. Memoirs and diaries: J. Beck, *Ostatni raport*, introduction M. Wojciechowski, Warszawa 1987; J. Meysztowicz, *Czas przeszły dokonany: wspomnienia ze służby w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych w latach 1931–1939*, introduction H. Batowski, Kraków 1984; S. Schimitzek, *Drogi i bezdroża minionej epoki. Wspomnienia z lat pracy w MSZ (1920–1939)*, Warszawa 1976; P. Starzeński, *Trzy lata z Beckiem*, introduction and ed. B. Grzeleński, Warszawa 1991; M. Łubieński, *Refleksje i reminiscencje*, introduction and ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2012; *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*, vols 1–4, ed. T. Komarnicki (vol. 4, J. Zarański), Londyn 1964–1972. Subject literature: *Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych II Rzeczypospolitej. Organizacja, polityka, ministrowie*, eds. P. Długołęcki et al., Szczecin 2014; *Dyplomacja w służbie Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939, (artykuły i studia). Publikacja pokonferencyjna z okazji dnia służby zagranicznej 16 listopada 2018 roku*, MSZ Warszawa 2019; *Polish diplomacy art and architecture 1918–1930*, [Warszawa] 2017; J. Laptos, *Dyplomaci II RP w świetle raportów Quai d’Orsay*, Warszawa 1993; K. Szczepanik, *Dyplomacja Polski 1918–2005. Struktury organizacyjne*, 2nd edition, Warszawa 2005; M. Kornat, M. Wołos, *Józef Beck. Biografia*, Kraków 2020; M. Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Mołotow. Problem zbliżenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2002; *Płk Józef Beck (1894–1944). Żołnierz, dyplomata, polityk*, ed. S.M. Nowinowski, Łódź–Warszawa 2017; S. Mackiewicz (Cat), *O jedenastej – powiada aktor – sztuka jest skończona. Polityka Józefa Becka*, London 1942; J. Chociński, *Najpierw Polska, rzecz o Józefie Becku*, Warszawa 2019; P. Raina, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1937–1939: prawdziwy charakter polityki zagranicznej Józefa Becka. Geneza wybuchu II wojny światowej*, Warszawa 1999; L. Rzymowska, *Sprawa honoru. Przemówienie Józefa Becka, 5 maja 1939 roku w Sejmie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, na tle zasad retoryki, “Acta Universtatis Wratislaviensis. Oblicza komunikacji”* 2017, 10, pp. 23–56; S. Stanisławska, *Wielka i mała polityka Józefa Becka (marzec–maj 1938)*, Warszawa 1962; M. Rodzik, *Polska a Wielka Brytania: od kryzysu sudeckiego do 15 marca 1939 roku*, Warszawa 2019. Other works without a review process: J.A. Chociński, *Skierujmy agresję Hitlera na Francję i Anglię! Oferta min. J. Becka składana Moskwie od 20.10.1938 r.*, Warszawa 2016; idem, *Choroba (umysłowa – alkoholowa) ministra Józefa Becka jako główna przyczyna wybuchu II wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2013.

In most of the cases, in practical terms, his attitude and assessments had been accepted by the Government. This has not been the only one ministry so important for functioning of the Cabinet. In my opinion, the second most important was the Ministry of Internal Affairs responsible for internal security, providing law and order, shaping the public mood, and crisis management<sup>9</sup>. What also should be noted is the important role of the Ministry of Communication.

The next research question refers to functioning of the Government. However, an important problem arises, how this should be understood? In my opinion, any considerations on such a topic should be done in two most important dimensions: 1. Presidium of the Council of Ministers and its functioning; 2. Government's meetings.

For both, we do not have too much data and information. Still, additional basic research is needed. We already collected, collated, and evaluated elements that had been officially published and a number of fragmentary works were prepared and distributed. However, we do not know all the things, which took place and were played behind the scenes. Next research projects are needed to examine legacies and works of people linked with the prewar ruling establishment, who had supporting or walk-on role in the Government. Priceless Składowski Diaries (eleven volumes) had been destroyed by Składkowski himself in 1940 in Romania, as he had been very afraid that papers could fall into the hands of Germans during his trip to the Middle East. I wonder, what was the content and what would have been political and military impact if they would had not been lost. Words of Składowski seem to be credible, but there is always some *but....* There is always hope that these and other lost materials somehow survived, and they wait to be discovered.

The archival research should be conducted on a larger scale and focus on Romanian archives, which have not been properly and thoroughly explored by Polish historians. Before launching such actions, we have to identify the greatest possible number of people, who worked for the Presidium of the Council of Ministers and individual ministries, including their personal data. Even a low-level employee could become a good historical source if he/she left written memoirs, documents, and other materials. Therefore, we should start with the detailed analysis of the fond *Prezydium Rady Ministrów w Warszawie*, which is stored in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw and has 35,219 files.

This will allow to build a fundament for restoring the proper structure and personnel establishment of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers

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<sup>9</sup> See also: W. Kozyra, *Polityka administracyjna ministrów spraw wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1918–1939*, Lublin 2009, pp. 517–613.



during last ten months before the outbreak of the armed conflict with Germany. It could contribute to the preparation of a new monograph or series of scientific articles, which would include the detailed analysis of this specific topic. It is also worth considering a concept for a work on the Presidium of the Council of Ministers<sup>10</sup>, as the institution directly and only subordinated to the Prime Minister. In my opinion, it is feasible as now we have access to fonds and files of the Archive of Modern Records, and it is also possible to launch archival research in Bucharest, London, and New York. Such arrangements would certainly increase number of findings on functioning of the Government from October 1938 till August 1939, also with regard to the Presidium of the Council of Ministers as a specific and important part of the Cabinet.

The next problem that should be addressed is the publication of biographies of ministers and deputy ministers of the Second Polish Republic Government. Not all its members got enough historical attention and number of works on their lives and political activities, including their contribution to defence preparation of the Nation is rather small. There are three prints on the Prime Minister Składkowski, much more on Jozef Beck, but for example we will not find biographies of Emil Kaliński or Juliusz Ulrych. This makes the description and evaluation of plans, decisions, and activities of the Government more complicated and difficult, including comparative analysis of the most important elements of the Council of Ministers.

One important element are research postulates, but defining a research status is equally important, especially with regard to months and years just before the outbreak of the Polish-German armed conflict. Worth noting are the present achievements, however modest, in fields of general and military history.

Some important works should be mentioned here, as *Gabinety Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*<sup>11</sup> and *Od Moraczewskiego do Składkowskiego*<sup>12</sup>. Some more prints could also be added to the list, as publications of Jaceka Goclon<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> First such efforts were taken by Jacek Goclon in the article: *Prezydium Rady Ministrów w latach 1918–1939. Struktura, zakres kompetencji i działalność projektodawcza. (Zarys problemu)*, "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne" 2012, 64, 2, pp. 371–390.

<sup>11</sup> *Gabinety Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, eds. J. Faryś, J. Pajewski, Szczecin–Poznań 1991.

<sup>12</sup> *Od Moraczewskiego do Składkowskiego. Gabinety Polski Odrodzonej 1918–1939*, eds. J. Faryś, A. Wątor, H. Walczak, Szczecin 2010.

<sup>13</sup> J. Goclon, *Prezydium*, pp. 371–390; idem, *Rząd Mariana Zyndrama-Kościalkowskiego 13 X 1935–15 V 1936. Pierwszy gabinet powołany w dobie obowiązywania Konstytucji kwietniowej*, "Krakowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa" 2016, 9 (4), pp. 547–566.

Marek Sioma<sup>14</sup>, Marek Konarski<sup>15</sup>, as well as some source editions on the Council of Ministers<sup>16</sup>, both published and those still in manuscript or in editing and preparatory publication phases<sup>17</sup>.

Memoirs of Kazimierz Marian Morawski, who worked for the Political and Press Office at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, are one of the best examples of such situations<sup>18</sup>. Of course, new elements do not exhaust the whole analytical range of plans, decisions, and activities of the Polish prewar Government, but they will provide the basis for further, in-depth research.

None of the elements mentioned above provide good answers for problems presented in the title of the article. However, there is one exception with text of Marek Sioma, who carefully analysed policies of Polish authorities before the outbreak of WWII, also from October 1938 to August 1939<sup>19</sup>. Also available archival materials would allow to draw some important, additional conclusions and propose some theses on functioning of the Cabinet with the war already on the horizon.

The most important source to present elements mentioned above are the minutes of Council of Ministers meetings. However, we should take into account that there is a number of missing documents of this provenance. Such shortages concern Council of Ministers meetings in the second half of 1930s. There are no such documents for the whole year of 1938, but agendas are available. It would allow to explore and evaluate priorities, main topics of discussions and problems that were to be raised during the meetings<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> M. Sioma, *Rada Ministrów w latach 1936–1939. Rola i zadania premiera Sławoja Felicjana Składkowskiego w procesie kierowania pracami rządu*, "Res Historica" 2004, 16, pp. 65–81; idem, *Rząd gen. dyw. Sławoja Felicjana Składkowskiego we wrześniu 1939 roku*, "Niepodległość" 2002, LII, pp. 7–26; idem, *Polityka władz Rzeczypospolitej w dobie zagrożenia wojennego (październik 1938–sierpień 1939)*, in: *Kampania Polska 1939 r. Polityka – Społeczeństwo – Kultura*, vol. 2, *Polityka i społeczeństwo. Imponderabilia, pamięć, kultura*, eds. M.P. Deszczyński, T. Pawłowski, Warszawa 2014, pp. 7–26.

<sup>15</sup> M. Konarski, *Rada Ministrów w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (1918–1939)*, "Rada Narodowa. Gospodarka. Administracja" 1982, 18, pp. 39–42.

<sup>16</sup> See: *Transport samochodowy w latach 1935–1936 w świetle akt Prezydium Rady Ministrów*, ed. M. Jabłonowski, in: *Od projektu do legendy: Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy po osiemdziesięciu latach (1937–2017)*, eds. P. Grata, G. Ostasz, B. Pasternski, Rzeszów 2018, pp. 215–242.

<sup>17</sup> Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, msc 13045.

<sup>18</sup> Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, msc 9799 II.

<sup>19</sup> M. Sioma, *Polityka*.

<sup>20</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych [hereinafter: AAN], Prezydium Rady Ministrów w Warszawie [hereinafter: PRM], ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/7.



As for the next year of 1939, there are no minutes from the first meeting of the year and from meetings No. 13–24 (the last meeting was announced on 31 August 1939 and planned for the next day)<sup>21</sup>. We have remaining documents<sup>22</sup> and agendas for the meeting No. 13 (20 May 1939) and No. 24 (1 September 1939)<sup>23</sup>. Also indices for Council of Ministers resolutions are available from the period of 1936–1939<sup>24</sup>.

It would be useful to examine and assess some activities launched by the Council of Ministers at that specific time, which are available in separate fonds in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw, as draft resolutions and draft decrees related to provisioning issues<sup>25</sup>, *Announcement of the Minister of Military Affairs of 12 September 1938 on Promoting Cars of Domestic Production*<sup>26</sup>, and circular from the Ministry of Communication on *Adapting Cars to the Requirements of Regulation on Traffic of Motor Vehicles*<sup>27</sup> (1939).

As for available printed sources, two very important series should be mentioned here: *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne*<sup>28</sup> and *Przygotowania obronne państwa 1935–1939*<sup>29</sup>, as well as the work of Marek Jabłonowski<sup>30</sup> on the Polish economy. They could be supplemented by the collective work of Polish historians, which was a significant effort to synthesize the most important issues of the prewar period: *Kampania Polska 1939 r. Polityka – Społeczeństwo – Kultura*, vol. 2, *Polityka i społeczeństwo. Imponderabilia, pamięć, kultura*, eds. Marek Deszczyński, Tymoteusz Pawłowski, Warszawa 2014.

Any scope of theoretical considerations on research status and research postulates should also be complemented by information and knowledge on activities and functioning of the Council of Ministers since October 1938 till August 1939.

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<sup>21</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/8.

<sup>22</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88 and ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9.

<sup>23</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/8.

<sup>24</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 105.

<sup>25</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.68/VI 68-14/7-14.

<sup>26</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.96/VI 96-19.

<sup>27</sup> AAN, ref. no. 6.96/VI 96-20.

<sup>28</sup> *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1938*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2007; *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1939 styczeń–sierpień*, ed. S. Żerko, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>29</sup> *Przygotowania obronne państwa 1935–1939, Prawo i administracja*, ed. A. Wesołowski, "Wojskowe Teki Archiwalne" 2014, 6, 1; *Przygotowania obronne państwa 1935–1939, Gospodarka*, ed. A. Wesołowski, "Wojskowe Teki Archiwalne" 2016, 6, 2; *Mobilizacja marcowa 1939. Dokumenty i relacje*, eds. A. Wesołowski, K. Stepan, "Wojskowe Teki Archiwalne" 2012, 2.

<sup>30</sup> M. Jabłonowski, *Cztery lata przed wojną. Z dziejów gospodarki polskiej 1936–1939*, Olsztyn 1996.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR FUNCTIONING OF THE CABINET

Any effort to examine and evaluate activities and functioning of the Government during the period defined by the project shall begin with an inspection of the legal status of the Council of Ministers. The starting point for such an analysis should be the 1935 Constitution, which stated in the Article 26 that: 'Ministers, to rule cases, which require adoption of a Resolution of all members of the Government, form the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of the President of the Council of Ministers/Prime Minister'<sup>31</sup>. In relation to 1921 Constitution<sup>32</sup> such a provision meant that the Government (Council of Ministers) was obliged to 'resolve cases', with a clarification that it should be done under the chair of the Prime Minister. Since 19 February 1936, the Council of Ministers conducted its deliberations basing on provisions of the circular issued by Marian Zyndram-Kościałkowski<sup>33</sup>.

This document confirmed the competences of the Prime Minister, i.a. he was responsible for convening of the Council of Ministers meetings, preparing agendas, giving the floor to speakers, and taking decisions on participation of lower-level officials in Council of Ministers meetings. The deliberations of the Council are written down in minutes, but transcripts of discussions were prepared only after the decision of the Prime Minister.

The next Prime Minister introduced new arrangements for Council proceedings with the directive of 27 June 1936 'President of the Council of Ministers Directives'<sup>34</sup>. According to new guidelines, only ministers

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<sup>31</sup> *Nowa Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, ed. and introduction S. Car, Warszawa 1935, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> The Constitution of 17 March 1921 stated that: 'Ministers form the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of the President of the Council of Ministers'. It did not specify in detail and make clear lines between rights, responsibilities, and scopes of activity. See: *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 17 marca 1921 z uwzględnieniem zmian ustalonych ustawą z dnia 2 sierpnia 1926*, comments prepared A. Paszkudzki, Lwów-Warszawa 1927, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [hereinafter: CAW], Gabinet Ministra Spraw Wojskowych [hereinafter: GMSW], ref. no. I.300.1.81; Temporary nature of the Regulation resulted from provisions included in Article 25 Point 5 of the 1935 Constitution, which stated: 'The organization of the Government, and especially competences of the Prime Minister, relations of Ministers, as well as the competence of the Council of Ministers, the President of the Council of Ministers, Council of Ministers and Ministers will be defined by the a Decree of the President of the Polish Republic'. See: *Nowa Konstytucja*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheet 553; *Tymczasowy Regulamin Obrad Rady Ministrów* (Eng. Provisional Rules for Council of Ministers Meetings) issued by Kościałkowski also allowed participation of Department Directors. See: CAW, GMSW, sygn. I.300.1.81.

or deputy ministers were allowed to participate in Council meetings. This was to increase the effectiveness of Council proceedings and motivate ministers to participate in person in all sessions. New Directive also included provisions that were to increase the quality of legal proceedings, new regulations, and legal acts, which were to be submitted to the President for signature. It should be underlined that ministers conscientiously followed the guidelines, which could be exemplified by their commendable presence at Council meetings. There had been only few cases when no representative from a ministry was present.

The provisions were very clear as well as interpretation by Marek Konarski, who stated that: 'It is the Prime Minister, not the Cabinet, who was responsible for government programs. The 1935 Constitution gave the President of the Council of Ministers the rights to represent the Government, to direct the work of the Council and to determine main principles of national policies. The same Constitution strengthened the position of the President, who had the authority over the Government. It consumed much of the competences of the Prime Minister'<sup>35</sup>.

We should add that the Prime Minister operated under provisions of 25 to 30 Articles of the Constitution and 'Ministers lead individual sections of the national administration, or they are entrusted with specific tasks'<sup>36</sup>. Such provisions made the Prime Minister the real creator within his executive powers, i.e. he had similar competencies to the German Chancellor. Such construct was to strengthen the executive branch of the State and Constitution included a broad scope of executive instruments. Ministers, members of the Council of Ministers, were responsible to Sejm and they might have been held accountable before the Tribunal of State.

In reality (although only theoretically) they depended upon the will of the Second Polish Republic President. This was the result of terms adopted by the Commission for Public Economics and Public Administration (Pol. Komisja dla Usprawnienia Administracji Państwowej) in 1933. It proposed that 'the Presidium of the Council of Ministers should integrate supervisory functions with regard to legislative projects of ministries, to organization of national administration, personnel policy and finally – related to the budget'<sup>37</sup>.

The political reality was more complicated and so obvious. According to Andrzej Ajnenkiel, 'the Prime Minister had never dominated

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<sup>35</sup> M. Konarski, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> *Nowa Konstytucja*, art. 25, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> A. Ajnenkiel, *Administracja w Polsce. Zarys historyczny*, Warszawa 1977, p. 93; See also: J. Przygodzki, *Komisje dla usprawnienia administracji publicznej w II Rzeczypospolitej. Studium historyczno-prawne*, Wrocław 2019, pp. 206–225.

the Government. After the death of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski some internal problems surfaced within the 'Sanacja' camp. Later, there had been multiple efforts to patch things up and finally, for the last prewar Cabinets, (of M. Zyndram-Kościałkowski, October 1935–May 1936 and F. S. Składkowski, May 1936–September 1939), the situation was a little bit different. Some ministers received their instructions from the President, some from the Marshal E. Rydz-Śmigły. Almost none of the members of the Council of Ministers were really dependent of the Prime Minister<sup>38</sup>. Of course, Council of Ministers meetings were chaired by the Prime Minister, but real foreign policy and national security decisions, especially taken in the time of a direct military threat, i.e. in 1938–1939, were taken by respective ministers.

#### PRIMUS INTER PARES

Assuming that each minister 'was king by his own hand' in their ministry, the question should be asked as to what kind of situation had been present during Council of Ministers meetings and if the Prime Minister was essentially a figurehead or the most important decisions were taken by above-mentioned Triumvirate. The Prime Minister had relative freedom of action with regard to organization of work of the Council of Ministers. However, some ministers have not fully respected his prerogatives and even ignored his directions and guidelines. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski stated: 'The Prime Minister had to give up his constitutional rights and duties. He was neither able to »propose and enforce general political principles«, nor »to guide the Government«, as each minister was supported either by the President or Rydz-Śmigły. As a result, their relations with the Prime Minister had been mostly of a nominal nature. Almost each minister behaved like he had his own country'<sup>39</sup>. This assessment was confirmed by Składkowski himself when he stated: 'I tried not to enforce my will or my point of view with regard to legal acts and resolutions. As a matter of principle, I tried to avoid voting, except some very formal cases or on demand by a member of the Council. What I wanted was to improve mutual understanding and work out joint opinions and reconciling views. I wanted to integrate the Council and not to introduce any new divisions. I followed the example of Prime Minister Bartel, who was able, during his term in the office, to chair Council's meetings in a very balanced and organized way [...]. As for me, many

<sup>38</sup> A. Ajnenkiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95.

<sup>39</sup> W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 645.

times I avoided many difficult situations as the President of the Council of Ministers, only with patient listening to sometimes long explanations and discussions and repeated argumentations. I accepted that they want not only to explain the situation, but also to highlight the matter and explain it in a comprehensive way. However, I have never succeeded in trying to reconcile all participants and find necessary compromises and solutions'<sup>40</sup>.

This sounds very tragic, taking into account the constitutional role of the Prime Minister, but at the same time was very logical – with a Triumvirate in action in Poland at the time. Due to political necessity and with political realism, the President of the Council of Ministers contented himself with the role of 'mediator' or 'coordinator'. Here, one remark of Arkadiusz Adamczyk should be noted: 'In all fairness, it has to be said that the Prime Minister, who found himself in a very difficult situation, was able to adapt to the needs and requirements and most of the time he did well in his role as a leader of such political construct'<sup>41</sup>.

#### PRACTICAL DIMENSION OF CABINET OPERATIONS

The way of functioning of the Council of Ministers till 30 August 1939 can be characterized as a standard process with standard procedures. Council officials were preparing documents for discussion during Council meetings and the Government either accepted documents and conclusions or rejected submitted proposals. During the section of time that is of interest for the project, Council meetings were regularly held every two, three weeks. The exception was November 1938, with six meetings during the month<sup>42</sup>. This was not however the effect of the international political and security situation, at least if we look into transcripts and protocols of these sessions.

The Government worked on different legal acts and resolutions related to the situation in various spheres of the life of the Country: starting with foreign policy up to economic issues. The frequency of meetings had significantly increased in May–August 1939, with 13 meetings organized by the Prime Minister.

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<sup>40</sup> S. Składkowski, *Nie ostatnie słowo oskarżonego. Wspomnienia i artykuły*, Londyn 1964, p. 187.

<sup>41</sup> A. Adamczyk, *Generał dywizji Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski (1885–1962). Zarys biografii politycznej*, Toruń 2001, p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/17.

Table 1. 1938–1939 Council of Ministers Meetings

Year	1938 <sup>a</sup>	1939 <sup>b</sup>
Number of meetings	13	23

<sup>a</sup> Data for the period 3 October till 31 December 1938

<sup>b</sup> Data till 30 August 1939

Source: Own calculations on the basis of: AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88; ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/7; ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/8; ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9.

Available archival material allows to draw a conclusion that meetings of the Council of Ministers were called to examine and assess draft legal acts, laws, and bills, including those that were to become Presidential Decrees or submitted to Sejm for further proceedings. In March 1939, also the procedure for telephone consultations was introduced. After such a phase, a project was presented to the Prime Minister for acceptance and further work in the Council.

Theoretically, all projects, before their inclusion to agenda, were to be submitted to the Prime Minister, who was supposed to take a decision on the final order of business for the upcoming meeting. He had 28 days to take such a decision. Then, the final agenda was distributed to ministers (according to the established Distribution Lists) a day ago before a meeting. Senior officials in the Presidium of the Council of Ministers were also addresses of the agenda, but they got such papers without annexes and appendices. The Cabinet debated according to the approved plan and agenda. There had also been *ad-hoc* meetings, which were held due to the important developments and to debate most urgent problems<sup>43</sup>.

Planned meetings always started with voting, possibly also with discussion on the protocol of the previous Council meeting(s). Then, proposals of bills and laws were examined, according to the points in the agenda for the day<sup>44</sup>.

Council debates had always been an important and integral part of meetings. However, due to a lack of transcripts, we do not have the knowledge on courses of such discussion. Sometimes, they had been very fervent, as described by an Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Treasury, who presented such a situation in the following way: '[...] General Sławoj-Składkowski was much more flexible and elegant [than

<sup>43</sup> These meetings were not properly numbered. In 1938, Minister Beck requested a meeting on 1 October 1938 to brief other ministers about Polish diplomatic actions with regard to Czechoslovakia. See: AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/7, sheet 125.

<sup>44</sup> As a matter of a routine, the Council of Ministers discussed and considered several or dozen or so points from the agenda and also last-minute requests approved by the Prime Minister but submitted after preparing of minutes.



General Władysław Sikorski – M.S.]. He knew well, when to allow for more vivid and fierce discussions and when it was necessary to disarm simmering tensions, stop a cavalry charge of the Minister of Justice [Witold Grabowski – M.S.], or speech of the Minister of Agriculture [Juliusz Poniąkowski – M.S.], who was always defending his views and proposals in his ascetic and decisive way<sup>45</sup>.

The tempo and fierceness of Council discussions were not always reflected in the duration of sessions. Meetings lasted from over a dozen minutes to several hours. There had been some regularities for this format, as a meeting had been relatively short if chaired by the Prime Minister, and much longer if the session was led by Deputy Prime Minister E. Kwiatkowski.

According to regulations, at the end of a meeting a voting session was to be conducted. However, Składkowski in most of the cases concluded meeting without such procedure, most likely to build an impression of unanimity with regard to decision-making process of the Government<sup>46</sup>.

If decision was taken to conduct voting, the procedure of ordinary qualified majority was applied. The Prime Minister voted as the last member of the Council. In the event of an equal number of votes – the vote of the Prime Minister was the decisive factor.

As a matter of principle, meetings were considered as classified sessions. After a meeting, official statements were prepared with a summary of the most important elements. However, there had also been cases when no official announcement was published<sup>47</sup>.

Most of project of decrees and bills concerned elements related to budget<sup>48</sup>, economy, finances, administration, and current issues, all that required official position of the Government. Political issues had been only occasionally pursued. This did not mean that the Council of Ministers was not involved, but pressing problems were debated during separate meetings convened by the Prime Minister, outside the approved agenda, when it was necessary to take appropriate and relevant decisions.

It should be signalled that during the internal fight within the ruling establishment in the autumn 1937, Council of Ministers meetings had very interesting course of events with no bills adopted but with

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<sup>45</sup> K. Morawski, *Tamten brzeg. Wspomnienia i szkice*, Paryż 1960, p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> A. Adamczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> See: *15th Council of Ministers Meeting on 22 September 1938*, AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/7, sheet 119.

<sup>48</sup> Such proposals were submitted by the Minister of Treasury. The question of the Budget for 1939/1940 had become a key political issue due to upcoming armed conflict. See: M.M. Drozdowski, *Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. Człowiek i dzieło*, Kraków 1989, p. 153.

vivid discussions and exchange of views and opinions<sup>49</sup>. Political problems of that time had been regulated with Presidential decrees. In such a case, Sejm was not supposed to be involved and approve these legal acts.

The question therefore is what plans, decisions and actions were taken by the Council of Ministers during the time of a direct military threat (since mid-October 1938 till 30 August 1939)?

Those had been different draft bills, decrees, and regulations, which were to improve the tempo and widen the scope of national defence preparations. The only source available for such analyses are meeting minutes and agendas, but still, they do not fully reflect the main problems and topics of discussion as well as course of events during Government sessions. However, they can be used for general description and assessments.

For example, it is worth noting the case of the draft Presidium of the Council of Ministers Regulation submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs 'on Peacetime Preparations in the Area of Air Defence and Anti-Gas Defence in the Industry', which was taken out from agenda of 18 October 1938 meeting<sup>50</sup>. It was re-planned for the next 19th meeting on 31 October 1938. The next project on national security had been the draft law on the use of arms by the State Police and border security elements. It was presented on 22 November 1938 by the Minister of Internal Affairs<sup>51</sup>. Other papers were submitted by the Minister of Military Affairs during the 26th Council of Ministers meeting:

'Draft Regulation Amending the Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 21 October 1932, the Uniform Code of Military Justice',

'Draft Regulation Amending the Regulation of 17 February 1922 on the National Civil Service', and;

'Draft Regulation Amending the Regulation of 23 January 1937 on Voluntary Training Flights'<sup>52</sup>.

It is necessary to underline that plans, decisions and activities of the Government were influenced to a great extent by Beck, who continued, after the München Conference, to ensure Polish authorities that there was no real threat of an armed conflict with Germany<sup>53</sup>. It had a great impact on the official position of the Government and Polish President. As the result, both institutions officially had not raised any concerns about the international political and military situation. However, many questions

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<sup>49</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 7/VII 63, sheet 9.

<sup>50</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/7, sheet 140.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 178.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 189.

<sup>53</sup> L. Noël, *Agresja niemiecka na Polskę*, ed. S. Zabięłło, Warszawa 1966, p. 229.

and doubts had been raised by two Polish diplomats, at the time already not working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, i.e. Alfred Wysocki and Anatol Mühlstein<sup>54</sup>. Also members of the Sejm Foreign Affairs Committee voiced their concerns about problems with the implementation of the policy of balance and lack of proper in-depth analysis of the situation<sup>55</sup>.

The change started after Beck's return from Berchtesgaden. Beck talked to Adolf Hitler, with Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hans von Moltke, Józef Lipski, and Michał Łubieński also present during the discussions. Beck summed up talks that as for the relations with Germany, everything goes in the direction of armed conflict and Poland would find itself in a difficult situation<sup>56</sup> (Ger. *Ich sehe keine Gegenleistung*)<sup>57</sup>. It resulted in rapid reactions of the Government, which started serious and intensive defence preparations in January 1939.

During the second meeting of the Government in 1939 (24 January 1939), the resolution was adopted to define obligations of natural and legal persons, institutions, and authorities in preparing their personnel for air defence and anti-gas duties in the peacetime. Changes included provisions on the age of men who would be called up for such service – 16 years, and schools were included to the category of public buildings<sup>58</sup>.

Also the draft bill on 'evacuation of institutions, population and property from threatened locations and areas of the Country' was adopted<sup>59</sup>. Next two agenda items referred to the discussion on draft law 'about communications in the service of national defence' and 'on general obligations to provide provisions in kind /Annex 4/, with comments and remarks of the Legal Office /Annex 4a/'<sup>60</sup>. Unfortunately, no annex is available for analysis, but just the fact that such elements had been examined and discussed during Government's meetings showed that the Cabinet began taking the possibility of an armed conflict with Germany more seriously.

The whole day on 25 January 1939, the Government dedicated for discussions on elements related to Eastern Lesser Poland (Pol. Małopolska). It was the Prime Minister who played the main role in the meeting, who

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<sup>54</sup> Mühlstein, in his discussion with Szembek on 23 September 1939, presented some very controversial views. See: J. Szembek, *Diariusz wrzesień–grudzień 1939*, ed. and prep. B. Grzełoński, Warszawa 1989, p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 4, 1918–1939, ed. P. Łossowski, Warszawa 1995, p. 581.

<sup>56</sup> J. Beck, *Ostatni*, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> M. Kukiel, *Rozgrywka dyplomatyczna przed drugą wojną światową (L.B. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude 1938–1939*, London 1948), "Bellona" 1948, 2, p. 33.*

<sup>58</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheet 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 3.

commissioned ministries to prepare and submit till 15 February 1939 detailed plans 'to support Polish elements in the Eastern Lesser Poland'<sup>61</sup>.

This project was coordinated by Stanisław J. Paprocki from the Prime Minister Office, who was to be supported by officials from ministries. Next special Government meeting was planned for 28 January 1939, with the participation of the Marshal of Poland, E. Śmigły-Rydz. Minutes from that meeting (28 January 1939) included the point, which indicate that the full report on the Eastern Lesser Poland and the summary of Śmigły-Rydz speech were included to annexes. Such documents are regrettably not available in the Archive of Modern Records. It can therefore only be assumed that topics related to this area were related to plans of upcoming military conflict with Germany (i.e. to areas at the Polish-Romanian border, Pol. *przedmoście rumuńskie*).

It should also be added that the Prime Minister also announced the implementation of project, which was presented, during the 25 January 1939 Government meeting, by the Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Bronisław Nakoniecznikow-Klukowski. It included provisions to organize periodic conferences of heads of voivodeship administration in Lviv to 'coordinated activities of national authorities in three voivodeships of Southeastern Poland'<sup>62</sup>.

It was notable that during the meeting at the Royal Castle on 9 February 1939, Śmigły-Rydz warned about upcoming war, already in a few months' time. At the same time, Deputy Prime Minister Kwiatkowski tried to challenge such opinion.

As there is no transcript or minutes from the 4 February 1939 meeting, it does not allow any speculations if such opinion of the General Inspector of the Armed Forces was presented to members of the Cabinet during the session.

During the next meeting, on 17 February 1939, the next draft Regulation amending the President of the Second Polish Republic Regulation 'on obligation to hand over draught animals, carts and wagons, mechanical vehicles and bicycles for defence purposes /Annex 7/'<sup>63</sup>. On 23 March 1939, after telephone consultations with some ministers on six regulations on national security, Prime Minister agreed for further legal proceedings. Drafts were submitted by the Minister of Military Affairs and referred to some important issues: calling up soldiers of the Reserve of the Polish Armed Forces and the general muster for six weeks exercises, calling up men for an auxiliary military service, activate duties for provisions

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 12.

<sup>63</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheet 4.

in kind for the defence, and obligation to hand over draught animals, carts and wagons, mechanical vehicles and bicycles 'for national defence purposes'<sup>64</sup>, as well on personal services for the defence. Council of Ministers approved projects, although there had been no formal meeting<sup>65</sup>. All above-mentioned project entered into force in late March and beginning of April and applied to the whole territory of Poland.

In the rationale to the project on calling reservists, General Tadeusz Kasprzycki stated that Armed Forces had only 50% of trained and prepared soldiers in the peacetime personnel establishment and acting pursuant to the Article 91 Section 1 of the Law Regarding General Military Service, it was necessary to call reservists for additional training and exercise<sup>66</sup>. *De facto*, it had been a secret mobilization that was launched and carried out without delay due to the political situation<sup>67</sup>.

During the 7th Council of Ministers meeting on 24 March 1939, which started at 17.30, ministers modified the regulation on peacetime preparation of air defence and anti-gas defence for the industry and put the new date to this document '1 May 1939'<sup>68</sup>. They had also been informed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs 'on foreign policy issues'<sup>69</sup>. Unfortunately, there is no transcript or report summarizing this presentation available in the archives. The content of the Beck's brief could however be restored from other sources.

We know that in the morning of that day another meeting was organized in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Beck presented the Polish *non possumus*. In practical terms, it could be presented with a short sentence, which concluded the Polish position 'we will fight!'

Despite the correct picture of a German intent, brief of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Cabinet on the German threat in the afternoon of 24 March 1939, and accepting Beck's position vivid discussion started. During its course members of the Council assessed possibility of executing Hitler's strategies as low and German plans an impossible task.

This fact influenced the Polish attitude and made it less flexible. New Polish position was presented to von Ribbentrop two day later<sup>70</sup>. Waclaw

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<sup>64</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheet 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 18.

<sup>67</sup> See also: *Mobilizacja marcowa 1939*, vol. 2, *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheet 56v; *Posiedzenie Rady Ministrów*, "Gazeta Polska" 1939, no. 84, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheet 56v.

<sup>70</sup> *Raport Józefa Lipskiego z 26 marca 1939 r.*, in: H. Batowski, *Niedoszła "Biała księga" z roku 1940. Rozprawa źródłowa*, Kraków 1993, pp. 66–75.

Lipiński summarized these events with the statement: 'The Government is united and its decision of the greatest importance for the Nation and the State does not need formal promulgation: it is deeply embedded in its psychological structure of the Nation, attachment and dedication to the Polish statehood. The opinion of Poles is clear as the Polish society for years had been brought up in the atmosphere of worship to our fight for independence. Recently, such attitude was strengthened by determination showed by Government's policies towards Germany'<sup>71</sup>.

Decisions and announcements by the chief of Polish diplomacy were accompanied by new domestic policies<sup>72</sup>. Three days later, i.e. on 27 March 1939, during the next meeting of the Government, Składkowski initiated the plan to prepare ministries for war, i.e. division of ministries to Main Staffs (I echelon) and ministries (II echelon), with the final date for completion of the task on 16 August 1939. He presented ten points instruction on the topic. The wording of this document made it clear that the Government was getting ready to defend the Nation<sup>73</sup>.

The content of this document is known to historians and it is not necessary to discuss here the paper. However, it should be noted that

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<sup>71</sup> Gwizdo [W. Lipiński], *Polityka zagraniczna Piłsudskiego i Becka (Próba syntezy)*, Warszawa 1943, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> Marshal Śmigły-Rydz ordered, on 23 March 1939, the secret mobilisation (for the IX Corps District and some selected units). See: K. Sosnkowski, *Pamiętniki (marzec-sierpień 1939)*, "Niepodległość" 1983, 16, p. 127. The opposition changed its critical attitude towards the Government and tried to convince the President to start a reconstruction to include people from other political groupings and parties, form a wider social base and build up support. The very fact of an increase of an external threat was, certainly, not without significance and generated new bold postulates by the opposition. Grigore Gafencu, who was in Poland in the beginning of March 1939, recorded that "the public opinion was so excited. Students organized noisy demonstration on the streets". See: G. Gafencu, *Ostatnie dni Europy. Podróż dyplomatyczna w 1939 roku*, introduction, afterword and ed. S. Zabiegło, Warszawa 1983, p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheets 25–27; M. Jabłonowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 220–222; the initiative of General Składkowski was aimed at re-examination of 1932 'Principles of the Wartime National Authorities Organization' (Pol. 'Zasady organizacji władz państwowych w czasie wojny') from the perspective of the political-military situation in 1939. See: AAN, PRM, ref. no. 7/VII 76, sheet 15; Józef Beck wrote: 'This was [evacuation plan – M.S.] set and preparations started several weeks before the outbreak of the armed conflict. This action was entrusted to delegates from specific ministries, under the supervision of the senior official from the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. It resulted in the situation that only evacuation areas for ministries were assigned and some proposals for organizational changes prepared. It included splitting ministries into two echelons, so-called heavy echelon, and the Main Staff. However, before the war little has been done'. See: J. Beck, *Komentarze do historii dyplomatycznej wojny 1939 roku*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 1971, 20, p. 95.



this directive did not refer to any other institutions but just to Cabinet. Similar activities for other structures and institutions were to be regulated by other guidelines and separate decisions.

We have to take into account that an evacuation of the Government was to be launched on orders from the Prime Minister. Such directions referred only to main staff part of specific ministries with the destination of Lublin and its vicinities (in 100 kilometres radius).

Such places should be a kind of surprise, but most likely the Prime Minister assessed that due to the direct threat to Warsaw, Lublin and its surroundings would be much safer location and such undertaking would secure the business continuity and allow effective command and control.

Such plans were brutally verified by Germans few months later. What should also be mentioned is the case of handwritten note on the Council of Ministers papers, which proved that above-mentioned directives were prepared 'only for first days of war'.

Such documents were to be supplemented by directives of individual ministries. It started with draft tasking lists (competences list), with guidelines for their implementation<sup>74</sup>. There is no proof they had been prepared and distributed, but in April 1939, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in cooperation with the Main Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, prepared the general instruction on withdrawal of administration organs from areas under the direct military threat, mainly from the West and North.

Some elements were added to the document, i.e. Temporary Guidelines on Withdrawal and Deployment of National Administration Elements dated 11 April 1939<sup>75</sup>. On 27 March 1939, the Council of Ministers adopted the Resolution on Articles 20 and 25 of the Ordinance of the President of the Second Polish Republic on Organization and Scope of Activities of the General Administration Elements with provisions giving emergency powers to voivodes and starosts<sup>76</sup>, and announcement about establishment of the internal State Loan to improve combat capabilities of the Air Force and anti-aircraft artillery units<sup>77</sup>. Next telephone consultations took place on 30 March 1939 and resulted in the decision of the Prime Minister to accept the draft bill on special allowances for soldiers

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<sup>74</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheet 30.

<sup>75</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych w Warszawie [hereinafter: MSW], ref. no. 993, sheet 4.

<sup>76</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheets 35–36.

<sup>77</sup> *Rozbudowa lotnictwa wojskowego i artylerii przeciwlotniczej. Wewnętrzna pożyczka państwowa*, "Polska Zbrojna" 1939, no. 87, p. 1; *Wielka ofiarność społeczeństwa na rzecz lotnictwa. Przemówienie Komisarza Generalnego Pożyczki gen. broni Leona Berbeckiego*, "Gazeta Polska" 1939, no. 88, p. 2.

‘securing the Southern border of the State’<sup>78</sup>. Minister for Military Affairs requested that they should be at the same level as those for soldiers of the “Śląsk Operational Group” (Pol. Grupa Operacyjna „Śląsk”)<sup>79</sup>, who took part in Cieszyn Zaolzie operation.

At the same time, a number of meetings of President, Government and Camp of National Unity (Pol. Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego, OZN) activists with representatives of the opposition was organized at the Royal Castle, the seat of the President. However, they only confirmed that the highest authorities of the Republic of Poland did not see the necessity to cooperate with the opposition and/or reconstruct the Government, even in the situation of a direct military threat to the Nation<sup>80</sup>.

Such position was clearly articulated by President Mościcki, when he had discussions with representatives of higher education institutions and tried to convince them that their postulates were not justified: ‘They do not have a direct contact with the society, with the Polish population. They do not know what the nation thinks, in what Poles believe, what they want and do not want to do. The President is well informed that the society is satisfied with the situation. Everything goes well in Poland. Everybody in Europe just envy us that we have minister Beck. Also we are happy to have such a Prime Minister. We do not need any changes’<sup>81</sup>. Such posture resulted from earlier events, including the speech delivered by General Stanisław Skwarczyński, the leader of OZN, in the Polish Parliament and classified memo of Prime Minister Składkowski dated 10 March 1939 confirming close cooperation of the Government with the Camp of National Unity. The Prime Minister wrote, several years later, a bit surprised: ‘Their attitude [opposition parties – M.S.], has not changed at all’<sup>82</sup>.

The assessment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and approval of his line of action by the Government, on the unreality of threat from the German side, had no impact on plans, decision, and actions of military authorities. In April 1939, ‘due to the unpredictability on the German side’, they decided to deploy some equipment and troops, including

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<sup>78</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheet 75.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 79.

<sup>80</sup> *Czy będzie rząd zaufania narodowego? Ozon nadal pragnie zachować wyłączność, “Polonia”* 1939, no. 5200, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> *List J. Drohojowskiego do S. Strakacza w sprawie propozycji przyjazdu I. Paderewskiego do Polski*, in: *Archiwum Polityczne Ignacego Paderewskiego*, vol. 4, 1935–1940, eds. T. Jędruszczak, A. Leinwand, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1974, document 208, p. 221.

<sup>82</sup> S. Składkowski, *Dlaczego nie powstał rząd jedności narodowej?*, “*Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza – Tydzień Polski*” 1959, no. 32, p. 3.

fortification crew to the Western border<sup>83</sup>. April 1939 was also a month of many other important foreign policy developments that in practical terms sealed the fate of Poland and paved the way to the open armed conflict. Those issues are very well known and had been described and assessed many times. Research on this really does not need to be resumed.

However, one element should be mentioned here – the meeting organized on 7 April 1939 at the Royal Castle in Warsaw (Mościcki, Beck, Smigły-Rydz, Składkowski, and Kwiatkowski), just after Beck's return from London. It is characteristic, especially in the context of decision-making processes and causality, that those most important Polish politicians supported the chief of Polish diplomacy. This support was a kind of unconditional as they did not have the full insight into the most important geopolitical problems<sup>84</sup>. We should remember that they all operated under the immense external and internal pressure, without a proper analysis of the situation on the international policy arena and with threats already on the horizon.

In April, the first meeting of the Council of Ministers was organized only on 29 April 1939, when the outbreak of an open armed conflict with Germany seemed more and more likely. The Council adopted the regulation on wartime allowances (mission subsistence allowance, combat subsistence allowance, food allowance – Annex 6), allowances for gendarmerie NCOs and privates (Annex 7). Also the duration of reservists training was extended with four more weeks (Annex 11)<sup>85</sup>.

It would be also worth to draw attention of reader to the request submitted by the Minister of Military Affairs on the Main Military School of Engineering (Pol. Wojskowa Szkoła Główna Inżynierii). The document referred to the necessity to change the name of the school and its academic status, but in the context of this article – another thing was important. This was the content of the general explanatory statement, which accompanied this report. It proved that the Polish Government had appropriate knowledge with regard to the upcoming war.

General Tadeusz Kasprzycki wrote in the paper: 'The general political situation and the actual position of our neighbours; military expenditures and armaments, causes we have to prepare not only the military to the armed conflict, but we must do the same with regard to our society as a whole, and economy. We should be prepared for a new wartime reality. Only broadly understood defence preparations could prepare us

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<sup>83</sup> K. Sosnkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 128, 130.

<sup>84</sup> J. Beck, *Preliminaria polityczne do wojny 1939 roku*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 1971, 20, p. 82; P. Starzeński, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 1.2/I 88, sheets 91–92, 104.

to fight with the opponent, who is better equipped and armed as well as with the utter lack of scruples. No doubt, future battles would be fought and won not only during the direct battles with an enemy, but also in rear areas and within the economic dimension. Capabilities of industry and political action would play a great role, as well as combat power of modern air forces<sup>86</sup>.

It is difficult to imagine a better and more tangible proof that the supreme Polish authorities (both civilian and military) were absolutely aware of challenges connected with a future conflict with Germany. Another issue had been accepting and taking into account analyses presented by the Ministry of Military Affairs. However, even this single example proved that the military establishment had been well aware of problems and limitations, and that without technically educated and professionally well-prepared soldiers and officers any modernization effort would not be feasible and successful. Minister also pointed out that lack of such personnel influenced the personnel establishment situation and 'our significant industrial efforts are sometimes taken against principles of a future war'<sup>87</sup>.

He also presented some examples and concluded that the main reason for such situations had been difficulties of finding adequately trained and prepared military engineers. On 2 May 1939, the Council of Ministers adopted one very important draft bill that was to allow the President to 'sign, till the day of opening of next session of Sejm, presidential decrees on national economic, financial and defence issues'<sup>88</sup>. Prime Minister was responsible for bill implementation and a person responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act.

Again, justification of the bill showed that the Government was aware how severe the situation really was. The Council of Ministers tried to use all methods, also from the legal domain, to prepare the Nation for the coming war. The rationale included the following statement: 'The current situation confronts us with many difficult issues, which require immediate, energetic, and flexible actions. The most important are elements related to develop military capabilities, build resilience of the State, and reinforce defence readiness'<sup>89</sup>.

This trend was strengthened by ensuing Government's efforts and decisions taken during the next meeting of the Council of Ministers. During this session the request from the Minister of Military Affairs to change

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, sheets 97–98.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 98.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 115.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 116.

provisions of the 1919 Government Regulation was discussed. Proposal referred to the Article 8 only and had materialized with the addition of a new paragraph: 'The right to the allowance referred to in the Section 1 does not apply during the time of war, mobilisation or if it is required by defence interest of the State as defined by the Council of Ministers resolution'<sup>90</sup>. This specific case proved that the Government considered the war as a kind of joint national and patriotic effort, not in modern terms and standards, by which every effort and work should be suitably remunerated.

Government was well aware that the military service is a contribution to the national security, very responsible and dangerous job. Therefore, the rationale included the following sentence: 'Project proposes exclusion of rights for receiving so-called assistance allowance during the time of war, mobilisation and direct threat to the State, as in such a situation any effort of using the military to support civilian authorities loses its exceptional character'<sup>91</sup>.

All above mentioned information should be complemented by an additional piece of information on submission, in May 1939, of a draft Council of Ministers Resolution on the Introduction of the State of Emergency Across the Whole Country, signed by the Prime Minister, to the Secretariat of the Committee of National Defence (Pol. Sekretariat Komitetu Obrony Rzeczypospolitej). It had also an annex with the project of a notice to be signed by the Minister of Internal Affairs<sup>92</sup>.

The next important legal act was adopted on 26 May 1939. A number of bills was proceeded this day. The third had been (!) was the draft „Act on the Martial Law /Annex 3/, with the reservation that the text of Article 9 Section 3 would additionally be agreed by the Minister of Military Affairs and Minister of Agriculture and Agricultural Reforms. Next draft resolution was also approved – 'on the special criminal liability for a flight to an enemy or through the State borders /Annex 4/'<sup>93</sup>.

It is worth to mention that during the Council of Ministers meeting on 2 May 1939, the content of the famous Beck's speech, which was delivered on 5 May 1939, was agreed. Stanisław Mackiewicz (Cat) assessed that the Government 'went with the flow and did not make any effort to find complicated and unpopular arguments and explanations, which would at least delay the moment of the outbreak of the armed conflict'<sup>94</sup>. This was followed by the Circular No. 18 issued by the Prime Minister

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 121.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 121v.

<sup>92</sup> *Przygotowania obronne*, 6, 1, pp. 201–203.

<sup>93</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 6.2/VI 2-1/9, sheet 42.

<sup>94</sup> T. Katelbach, *Spowiedź pokolenia*, ed. S. Cenckiewicz, Gdańsk 2001, p. 220.

and sent to all ministers, after involvement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, which introduced the ban on ministers with regard to public interventions, and presenting views and opinions related to elements of the national foreign policy<sup>95</sup>.

Several weeks later Składkowski tried to convince others that it had been a good move as 'one Great War for a generation is more than enough'<sup>96</sup>. Nevertheless, the Cabinet decided to move some funds from investments to the Ministry of Military Affairs budget. It stopped all construction and investment in the Country, including the Central Industrial Region (Pol. Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy). As the result, it seriously damaged the public sentiment<sup>97</sup>.

At the same time, the Minister of Internal Affairs instructed voivodes to 'be extremely vigilant with regard to our efforts to prepare the defence of the Nation and maintain proper conditions for such actions'<sup>98</sup>. People and groups considered dangerous, in terms of the security and public order, were to be closely monitored. List of people for internment had been constantly updated and modified<sup>99</sup>. All suspects (more than 6,000) were to be imprisoned in Bereza Kartuska or in other jails.

On 23 August 1939, after discussions of the General Inspector with the Polish President, the decision to launch general mobilisation was taken<sup>100</sup>. Day later, the Prime Minister called off leaves of all ministerial officials<sup>101</sup>. On 29 August 1939, after the meeting at the Royal Castle with the participation of top brass and most important politicians (President, General Inspector of the Armed Forces, Minister of Foreign Affairs), the Council meeting was organized and Minister Beck informed ministers about the British mediation<sup>102</sup>. In the early afternoon that day, British and French ambassadors were informed about the mobilisation. However, both ambassadors wanted the Polish Government to call the mobilisation

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<sup>95</sup> AAN, PRM, ref. no. 7/VII 5, sheet 2; In May 1939, the policy of the Polish Government focused on avoiding of any anti-German actions, avoiding any hostile and retaliatory actions. See: *Diariusz i teki*, vol. 4, *Diariusz i dokumentacja za rok 1938. Diariusz i dokumentacja za rok 1939*, ed. J. Zarański, London 1972, pp. 603, 630.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 630.

<sup>97</sup> W. Kozyra, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 577.

<sup>99</sup> W. Jastrzębski, *Realizacja polskiego planu unieruchomienia tak zwanych elementów antypaństwowych (sierpień–wrzesień 1939 roku)*, "Res Historica" 2004, 16, pp. 96–97.

<sup>100</sup> *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej*, vol. 1, *Kampania wrześniowa 1939*, part 1, *Polityczne i wojskowe położenie Polski przed wojną*, Londyn 1951, p. 402.

<sup>101</sup> AAN, Biuro Sejmu RP w Warszawie, ref. no. 80, sheet 72.

<sup>102</sup> *Historia dyplomacji*, vol. 4, p. 610.



off as the British Government waited for Hitler's answer to Neville Chamberlain's diplomatic note.

Polish officials accepted such arguments, and they stopped all mobilisation activities, including tearing down all posters already put up in Warsaw. The Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered all voivodes, with urgent telephograms, 'to do not allow any message on mobilisation to be printed in the press and if something like that had already happened, it should be stopped, and prints withdrawn'<sup>103</sup>.

The answer of Berlin to British note reached London on 28 August 1939 in the evening<sup>104</sup>. Ambassador Lipski immediately informed Warsaw about the development. Next day, Smigły-Rydz re-announced the general mobilisation and Ministry of Internal Affairs revoked the decision to classify such information<sup>105</sup>.

## SUMMARY

1 September 1939 is the date of breakout of WWII and the day all external and internal political considerations changed. The Council of Ministers switched to the wartime mode, as previously decided and prepared. It was almost ready for this kind action. New phase of the Polish modern history started.

To summarize achievements of ten months of Składkowski Government in power, we should state that the Council of Ministers was not so effective as it was supposed to be, at least with regard to some important issues. The Prime Minister had not become, despite constitutional provisions, a real chancellor. What should however be acknowledged is that the authorities tried hard to prepare the Country and population to upcoming armed conflict. All was consistently implemented despite the main strategic objective, which was... to avoid war (although not at any price).

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<sup>103</sup> AAN, MSW, ref. no. 916, sheet 40; Information on this specific topic was published by "Gazeta Polska" on 31 August 1939. See: *Stan zagrożenia Rzeczypospolitej wskutek agresywnej polityki Rzeszy Niemieckiej*, in: *W obliczu wojny. Z prasy polskiej 1939 roku*, Kraków 1984, pp. 319–320.

<sup>104</sup> See: *Documents concerning German-Polish Relations and the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939*, London 1939, pp. 135–137, document no. 79.

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs had advocated two conditions. Both referred to prohibition to use words and terms of 'mobilisation' and 'general mobilisation'. They were to be replaced by 'next defence regulations' and 'mobilisation regulations'. See: AAN, MSW, ref. no. 916, sheet 43; Press informed about 'mobilisation' on 1 September 1939, with the reference to 30 August 1939. See: *Uzupełniające zarządzenia wojskowe*, "Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny" 1939, no. 241, p. 1.

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Marek Sioma – PhD with habilitation, associate professor, works in the Institute of History of the Maria Skłodowska University in Lublin. His main field of research are followers, supporters, and associates of Marshal Piłsudski. He focuses on ‘Sanacja’ elites, Piłsudski Camp decomposition and Youth Movement (Pol. Legion Młodych). He has written several dozens of publications, including three monographs and edition of monographs: *Stawoj Felicjan Składkowski 1885–1962. Żołnierz i polityk* (Lublin 2005); *Zamach stanu Józefa Piłsudskiego 1926 roku*, ed. M. Sioma (Lublin 2007); *Piłsudczycy i sanatorzy drugiego planu (1926–1939). Portrety zbiorowe i indywidualne*, eds. R. Litwiński, M. Sioma (Lublin 2019). Together with Robert Litwiński he prepared for publication and edited diaries of Kordian Zamorski for 1930–1938 (Warszawa 2011). He also published 63 scientific articles, 7 review articles, 27 publication review and some smaller texts. Participated in 10 scientific debates.

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