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In the Middle of the Whirlwind: Romania and Poland in the Tripartite Negotiations

Abstract

Even if the works dedicated to European diplomacy from the period 1939–1940 are extremely numerous, the research we propose allows us to identify a less common approach, but which can provide more clarity on the diplomatic resources that generated the well-known events in 1939. We opted for an analysis focused on a somewhat novel angle, that of the foreign policy scenarios that ultimately guided the policy of Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union in the period we are referring to – the spring and summer of 1939 – and the place that Poland and Romania occupied within these variants of projects. These possible scenarios generated intense diplomatic agitation in most European capitals in 1939, and Warsaw and Bucharest were no exception. The multitude of variants analyzed in the three European chancelleries ultimately generated actions with deep consequences and dictated by cynical reasons of state but were considered necessary at the time. Therefore, we hereby analyze the motivations that led the great Western powers to opt for negotiations with the Soviet Union, in order to give more consistency to the guarantees granted in the spring of 1939 to Poland, Romania and Greece, but our study also follows the actual evolution of the negotiations, with their endless series of proposals and counterproposals. In this way, we believe, the importance that the British, above all, gave to Eastern European states – we have in mind here, first of all, Poland and Romania – because precisely these countries and, obviously, their destiny, were at stake during these negotiations, failed due to the reluctance of the British to "capitulate" to the growing demands of Moscow, the Soviet-German rapprochement and the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

Keywords: Romania, Poland, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, Tripartite Negotiations, The Second World War

Even if the works dedicated to European diplomacy from the period 1939–1940 are extremely numerous, the research we propose allows us to identify a less common approach, but which can provide more clarity on the diplomatic resources that generated well-known events in 1939. We opted for the analysis focused on a somewhat novel angle, that of the foreign policy scenarios that ultimately guided the policy of Great Britain, France and

the Soviet Union in the period we are referring to – the spring and summer of 1939 – and the place that Poland and Romania occupied within these variants of projects. These possible scenarios generated intense diplomatic agitation in most European capitals in 1939, and Warsaw and Bucharest were no exception. The multitude of variants analyzed in the three European chancelleries ultimately generated actions with deep consequences and were dictated by cynical reasons of state but were considered necessary at the time.

Therefore, we hereby analyze the motivations that led the great Western powers to opt for negotiations with the Soviet Union, in order to give more consistency to the guarantees granted in the spring of 1939 to Poland, Romania and Greece, but our study also follows the actual evolution of the negotiations, with their endless series of proposals and counter-proposals. In this way, we believe, the importance that the British, above all, gave to the Eastern European states – we have in mind here, first of all, Poland and Romania – because these countries and, obviously, their destiny, were at stake during these negotiations, failed due to the reluctance of the British to "capitulate" to the growing demands of Moscow, the Soviet-German rapprochement and the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

Once the guarantees were granted for Poland, Greece and Romania, on March 31 and April 13, 1939, respectively, the Western powers and especially Great Britain, even though they harbored a deep distrust and reluctance towards Moscow, understood that they needed constant and active Soviet support to create an effective barrier against foreseeable German action in Eastern Europe[1]. Without them, the guarantees would have become inoperable, especially since Poland did not seem to be a very convenient partner.

On the other hand, it must be emphasized that when Josef Beck, the Polish foreign minister, declared, immediately after Poland received guarantees from Great Britain and France, that Soviet Russia was also indirectly included in this arrangement, on the path of the Franco-Soviet pact[2], there was a certain consistency in his statements. At that time, the Soviets had already taken advantage of the treaty they had concluded in 1935 with France, sending a note to the Estonian authorities asking them to agree to be included in a military agreement that would complete the Franco-Soviet treaty. Estonia's refusal did nothing to change Moscow's plans, the Soviets still being determined to include the Baltic states in a treaty, even without their consent[3].

For their part, the French tried to ensure, along the same path of the 1935 bilateral treaty, Soviet support for Romania. The French foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, emphasized to the Soviet ambassador in Paris, Yakov Zakharovich Surits, the urgent need for the two powers to take immediate measures to prevent German aggression against Romania and Poland, which would obviously have represented a danger both for France and the Soviet Union. From the point of view of Paris, an improvement in the terms of the treaty concluded in 1935 would have paved the way for Soviet support for French commitments to

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[1] The National Archives/Central National Historical Archives, Bucharest (hereafter C.N.H.A.), England Microfilm Fund, Inventory 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 18*, April 5, 1939, f. 213.

[2] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest (hereafter A.M.F.A.), Fund 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Telegrams*, f. 153–154.

[3] *Audition by M. Georges Bonnet, ancien ministre des Affaires étrangères (May 1938–June 1939)*, in: *Commission d'enquête parlementaire, Les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, Témoignages et documents recueilis par la commission d'enquête parlementaire*, Tome IX, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1951, p. 2671.

Poland and Romania. The Soviet response, however, was evasive, but Moscow emphasized that it was still prepared to consider any concrete proposal from the French government[4].

Georges Bonnet went even further, proposing to the Soviets either the conclusion of separate mutual assistance pacts with Romania and Poland, or the immediate signing of a tripartite declaration, together with Great Britain, without specifying its terms. And again, Moscow refused the French proposal. It was far too vague, and the Kremlin believed that to be effective it should have been backed up by military consultations. From the Soviet point of view, these things should have been resolved through a conference of the interested powers. It was the turn of the French to back down, preferring to continue supporting the need for the Soviet Union, along with France and Great Britain, to sign a tripartite declaration. But without the participation of Poland, such an approach was for the time being considered as lacking any consistency[5].

Under these conditions, the Soviets preferred to wait. From their point of view, Franco-British policy had not changed in any way, although important diplomats from Paris and London, such as Georges Bonnet or Edward Halifax, argued otherwise. Moreover, Moscow believed that Western leaders were approaching the problem of European security wrongly, emphasizing individual guarantees and not the principles of collective security that had dominated Europe for the past two decades and that the Soviets had assiduously promoted. However, when Chamberlain declared in the plenary of the House of Commons, on 13 April 1939, that Great Britain and France guaranteed the independence of Greece and Romania, Litvinov had already sent instructions to Ivan Mikhailovich Maiski, the Soviet ambassador in London, to inform the Foreign Office the Soviet Union was still prepared to cooperate with the Western powers to provide assistance to Romania. But before anything else, the Soviets wanted to know what should have been, from the British point of view, the help that the Soviet Union should have offered and what would have been the actual contribution of the Western powers in support of Romania[6].

The Soviet offer met the British demands, but after the guarantees offered to Greece and Romania on April 13, London would have wanted something more from Moscow. Great Britain had given unmistakable proof of its commitment to the Eastern European states threatened by the prospect of a potential German aggression, and under these conditions, if the Soviets also wanted to offer their contribution, they had to give up the declarations in vague terms until then and emphasize, at least formally, that if any state that had fallen victim to aggression had asked them for help, they would have done everything in their power to grant it[7].

For now, however, Viscount Halifax, the head of British diplomacy, wanted a gesture from the Soviets somewhat similar to the unilateral guarantees of London and Paris in favour of Poland, Greece and Romania. In this regard, he sent a telegram, on April 14, 1939,

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[4] A. Resis, *The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact*, "Europe-Asia Studies", Jan. 2000, vol. 52, iss. 1, http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=2723186&db=afh (date accessed: 04.01.2024).

[5] Ibidem.

[6] Ibidem. See also *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939* (hereafter D.B.F.P.), Edited by EL Woodward, MA, FBA, and R. Butler, MA, Assisted by M. Lambert, Ph.D., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 161, pp. 198–199.

[7] C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 20*, April 13, 1939, f. 290–291.

to the British ambassador in the Soviet capital, Sir William Seeds, through which he argued his position before the political leaders in Moscow. Through this document, the British diplomat emphasized, above all, London's desire not to abandon efforts aimed at ensuring Soviet cooperation in the direction of maintaining peace in Europe. Great Britain considered it opportune for Moscow to make a public statement, on its own initiative, in which it repeated the fact that in the event of an aggression committed against a state neighboring the Soviets and which was determined to resist, Moscow would grant, upon request, its entire assistance, in the way it considered the most appropriate[8]. From the point of view of British diplomacy, such a declaration would not only have strengthened the security of Eastern Europe but would also have emphasized the great power status of the Soviet Union[9].

However, on the same day as the British, on April 14, the French also made an offer to Moscow, in terms somewhat closer to what the Soviets wanted. The government in Paris proposed the conclusion of a secret agreement between France and the Soviet Union, aiming at the joint defense of Poland and Romania against German aggression. Even if Moscow had in mind, from this perspective, at least a tripartite agreement, in which Great Britain would also participate and which would include the condition of reciprocity[10], the French offer seemed to leave the way open for more fruitful negotiations[11]. However, the negotiations were abruptly ended by the French side, Georges Bonnet declaring to the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, that France fully adhered to the British initiative of a unilateral declaration from Moscow[12].

The Soviet response to the British and French proposals of April 14, 1939, took shape with some difficulty. The Soviets emphasized that they were considering the offers of the two Western powers as a starting point for building a solid tripartite relationship, but they wanted to combine, in their own way, the terms of the two proposals. Thus, they demanded that the three parties conclude an agreement, for a period of five to ten years, through which they would commit to mutual assistance of any kind, including military, in the event of aggression against any of them in Europe. The same assistance was provided in case the states located on the western border of the Soviet Union, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, were, in their turn, victims of aggression. In addition, the Soviets wanted the British to explain that the assistance recently promised to Poland was to be given only in the event of German aggression, and as far as the alliance between Romania and Poland was concerned, it was to be declared operable in the event of any aggression or, otherwise, to be annulled because it was interpreted as being directed directly against the Soviet Union. In addition to all this, the Soviets demanded that, in the event of a conflict, none of the parties should conclude an armistice or separate peace without the common agreement of all three powers and, as a final point, the opening of joint negotiations with Turkey, with the aim of concluding a special mutual assistance agreement, to prevent a possible limitation of Ankara's commitments to the Balkans or the Mediterranean area[13].

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[8] Ibidem, doc. no. 170, p. 205–206.

[9] A. Resis, *The Fall of Litvinov*...

[10] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 198, p. 225.

[11] A. Resis, *The Fall of Litvinov*...

[12] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 182–183, pp. 215–216.

[13] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 201, pp. 228–229. See also C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 5, *Cabinet 21*, April 19, 1939, f. 314.

Under these conditions, the French and the British immediately started consultations to draft a response. From the beginning, however, the Soviet offer represented, both for France and for Great Britain, an extremely difficult landmark. From the point of view of diplomacy in Paris, the Soviets were clearly trying to draw France and Britain not to some well-defined commitments and limited circumstances, but to a general agreement, valid for several years and without clearly specified conditions. A closer analysis shows that the two Western powers would have pledged to give aid to the Soviet Union if it had been attacked, but they could not have done the same for Poland if the latter had fallen victim to aggression other than from Germany. France accepted the principle of reciprocity but considered that a tripartite agreement should be concluded in the simplest and clearest possible form. Such an agreement should have been concluded by April 28, 1939, at the latest, by which time Poland should also have clarified its relationship with Romania. Finally, the inclusion in the agreement of commitments to all the European states neighboring the USSR, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, was completely unacceptable from the French point of view[14].

The attitude of the British was even more restrained, a position reinforced by a telegram sent to the Foreign Office, on April 21, 1939, by the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, which emphasized the Soviet Union wanted Germany and the Western powers to engage in a new costly war, while it would have remained with all her forces intact and with the favorable prospect of dominating all of Europe[15].

At the end of April 1939, however, probably also alarmed by the fact that Germany had unilaterally denounced the treaty with Poland, the French were very seriously considering a formula that would satisfy Moscow, possibly accepting Estonia, Latvia and Finland to take part in an agreement[16]. If Germany had occupied the Baltic states, the entire Baltic Sea would have been turned into a German lake, and Poland would have been practically encircled[17]. Moreover, there were various rumors circulating in Western diplomatic circles about the imminence of a German attack on Poland through Latvia and Lithuania, an attack which, it was said, had it not been executed in early May 1939, would have resulted in a four-month postponement of German aggression[18].

In this context, the British Secretary of State for War, Sir Leslie Hore-Belisha, drew the attention of the government in London, on May 3, 1939, to the fact that, although the idea might seem rather fantastic, the natural orientation of the Soviet Union was towards Germany and not to Great Britain or France. On the other hand, such a perspective, although it could have serious repercussions for London's European interests, would have removed the specter of a more concrete rapprochement of Japan with the Reich[19]. On the same day, the British fears of a possible Soviet-German rapprochement were amplified by a new

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[14] Ibidem, doc. no. 241, pp. 261–262.

[15] C. Gerrard, *The Foreign Office and Finland 1938–1940. Diplomatic Sideshow*, London, New York, Frank Cass, 2005, p. 63–64.

[16] G. Bonnet, *De Munich à la guerre. Défense de la paix*, Paris, Plon, 1967, pp. 352–353.

[17] M. Nurek, *Great Britain and the Baltic in the Last Month of Peace, March–August 1939*, in: *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, J. Hiden, Th. Lane (eds.), Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sidney, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 41.

[18] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 334, pp. 390–391.

[19] Ibidem, f. 129–130.

element. On that day, the Kremlin decided to replace Maxim Litvinov as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs with a figure much closer to Stalin, namely Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov. Litvinov's sudden replacement caused concern in Western diplomatic circles. Although a first-rate political figure, Molotov practically represented, for most French or British politicians, an enigma[20], and the fact that he took over the portfolio of foreign affairs at a delicate moment in the relations between Moscow, Paris and London, due to the lack of any official reaction from of the latter to the Soviet proposals of April 17, could signify the abandonment by the USSR of the collective security policy and the decision to adopt an isolationist attitude, in accordance with Stalin's statements in his most recent speeches[21]. The Kremlin was not yet willing to give up the collective security policy, but Molotov's appointment warned the Western powers that Moscow might consider the option of an agreement with Germany[22].

In London, the message was perceived as such almost immediately, without the need for official confirmation from Moscow or the British ambassador in the Soviet capital. However, most assumptions were related to the fact that the replacement had occurred as a direct result of the Kremlin's dissatisfaction with Litvinov's apparent failure to conclude a tripartite pact with France and Britain, but the option of signaling a policy of isolation or of the eventual approach of the Soviets to Germany was not to be excluded[23].

On the other hand, according to the Romanian minister in Moscow, Nicolae Dianu, the causes of Litvinov's dismissal were political. According to his information, the speculation in the Soviet capital regarding this replacement was inconclusive. Some diplomats accredited to Moscow saw this as a sign that the Soviet Union was going to bet on a policy of neutrality, while others argued that this change at the top of Soviet diplomacy meant that the Kremlin would seek an agreement with Germany. However, according to Nicolae Dianu, most attributed this change to the attitude shown by Poland and Romania, whose intransigent position would have led the Kremlin to change its foreign policy line. The Romanian diplomat believed, however, that the real reason for replacing Litvinov was that the Bolshevik leaders were aware that the Soviet Union could not measure up to or oppose Germany, and they had a choice between two options: they could risk the regime's fate and therefore their own, or they could use the states from Eastern Europe (primarily Poland and Romania) as a barrier against Germany. The lack of precision and procrastination in the tripartite negotiations until then had strengthened the Soviets' enthusiasm for this second option[24].

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[20] D. Watson, *Molotov's Apprenticeship in Foreign Policy: The Triple Alliance Negotiations in 1939*, "Europe-Asia Studies", June 2000, vol. 52, iss. 4, http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=3325598&db=afh (date accessed: 04.01.2024).

[21] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 359, pp. 412–413.

[22] A. Resis, *The Fall of Litvinov*...

[23] A.M.F.A., Fund 71, England, vol. 10, 1939, *Telegrams*, f. 263. It should be emphasized that despite Moscow's assurances, the rumors about a Soviet-German rapprochement, following Molotov's appointment as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, persisted in Western diplomatic circles. For example, the French ambassador in Berlin communicated to his British counterpart, on May 8, 1939, the fact that there was information, coming from several sources, according to which Hitler had already reached an agreement with Stalin, in the form of a non-aggression pact. Moreover, Molotov's appointment to Foreign Affairs had been commented on in "friendly" terms by the German press, which had considerably softened its usual anti-Bolshevik attitude since then. See D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 413, p. 463.

[24] A.M.F.A., Fond 71, Romania, vol. 49, f. 53–53.

Regardless of the motivations behind the Kremlin's decision, it is certain that immediately after his appointment, Molotov had an intensive exchange of messages and instructions with his country's ambassadors in Paris and London, thus sending a signal that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union had not undergone any changes[25] and that it still gave particular importance to the tripartite negotiations with France and Great Britain[26].

For their part, the British also tried to convince themselves that nothing had really changed in the Soviet attitude towards the tripartite negotiations. On May 6, 1939, Viscount Halifax sent instructions to the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, asking him to explain to the new People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs that the government in London, notwithstanding the reasons behind the formulation of the Soviet proposals of April 17, must take into account some difficulties that could derive from their acceptance; therefore, it still considered the option of a unilateral declaration from Moscow as the most suitable action in the context of that time. In turn, the British government was prepared afterwards to discuss with Moscow any other problem that might arise[27].

Halifax, for the matter, resumed the argumentation in favor of this variant. An agreement like the one the Soviets had proposed would have required lengthy negotiations. In addition, neither Poland nor Romania wanted to be associated directly and openly, in peacetime, with the Soviets. Moreover, the authorities in Warsaw and Bucharest considered that such a gesture could be seen by Germany as provocative and therefore entailed risks that had to be avoided. As a result, although the hesitations of these two states could have been considered unjustified from Moscow's point of view, they were still realistic and therefore had to be considered. Nevertheless, the British government declared itself fully aware of the value of the aid which the Soviet Union was able to offer to the states of Eastern Europe which would have fallen victim to aggression, and of the fact that the mere prospect of such help could be a strong deterrent to potential aggressors. For this reason, Great Britain, considering the proposals made by the Soviet side on April 17 and following consultations with other governments, stated that it had modified its own proposal of April 14, in a form that it wanted to submit to the attention of the government from Moscow[28].

Furthermore, on May 6, 1939, the head of British diplomacy had a long discussion with Maiski, the Soviet ambassador in London, seeking to make sure, once again, that Molotov's appointment did not mean a change in Soviet foreign policy. Halifax used the occasion to argue again the British point of view regarding Moscow's adoption of a unilateral declaration. In his opinion, this was the best option. On the contrary, the Soviet proposals seemed to lead to the creation of a triple alliance, which, although it would have represented a great diplomatic success, would have contained terms that automatically implied Soviet support for Poland and Romania, if the Western powers entered the war for their cause. Either Great Britain or France wanted to avoid such a circumstance, liable to cause precisely the effects that the two powers wanted to avoid. In addition, the Soviet

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[25] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 372, p. 429.

[26] D. Watson, *Molotov's Apprenticeship*... From this point of view, it must be said that Molotov deceived the expectations of many Western diplomats, who, considering the fact that he also held the position of President of the Council of People's Commissars, that he had no diplomatic experience and did not know foreign languages, considered him an unsuitable negotiating partner. See D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 359, p. 413.

[27] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 389, pp. 443–444.

[28] Ibidem, doc. no. 397, pp. 448–449.

proposal did not consider the sensitivities of the governments in Bucharest and Warsaw, related to their open association with the Soviets[29]. Moscow, on the other hand, wanted to conclude an alliance with Great Britain and France, expressing its conviction that only in this way could the security of the USSR and Eastern Europe be ensured. They were determined to reject the proposal formulated by the British on May 8, being confident that other Eastern European states, such as Poland, would adhere to their position[30].

On the evening of May 14, 1939, Molotov handed the British ambassador in the Soviet capital Moscow's official response to the May 8 proposals. The Soviet government considered that, in order to create a barrier of peaceful states against the expansion of aggression in Europe, it was necessary to fulfill three conditions: the conclusion by Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union of a pact of mutual assistance against aggression; a guarantee by the three powers towards the states of Central and Eastern Europe, including Latvia, Estonia and Finland, and, finally, the conclusion of a tripartite agreement regarding the forms and size of the assistance that the three powers should provide, both mutually and towards the guaranteed states, an agreement without which the pact of mutual assistance could prove to be completely ineffective, as had happened in the case of the deceased Czechoslovakia[31]. In short, Molotov explained to the British ambassador, the Soviet Union was asking for only one thing through this note, namely reciprocity, and as far as the reserves of the targeted states were concerned – and especially Finland, which did not consider itself an Eastern European or Baltic state, but one Nordic, Scandinavian one – to be included in such a system, they could be alleviated by the participation and direct involvement of the Western powers in this security arrangement[32].

Moscow's message was reinforced by the Soviet ambassador in London, IM Maiski, in a discussion held on May 16, 1939, with Sir Robert Vansittart, then first diplomatic adviser at the Foreign Office. In Moscow's opinion, the proposals submitted on May 14 were likely to lead Great Britain to clearly define its position, that is, to accept the conclusion of a comprehensive pact, in which the Baltic states would also be included. Vansittart disagreed. The Soviet proposal was far from what London wanted[33]. The British government had repeatedly stressed that the Baltic countries did not want to be part of such an arrangement, which

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[29] Ibidem, doc. no. 401, p. 454.

[30] A.M.F.A., Fund 71, England, vol. 10, 1939, *Telegrams*, f. 289.

[31] Ibidem, doc. no. 520, pp. 558–559. See also C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 28*, 17 May 1939, f. 187. The British recognized the correctness of the Soviet arguments regarding the Czechoslovak case, but the fact that they tended to demand new and new guarantees made some members of the diplomatic corps wonder whether the Soviet government is indeed a serious negotiating partner. See D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 546, p. 590. See also M. Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War. An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939–1940*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 80.

[32] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 530, p. 568. It must be emphasized that the British did not allow these proposals to be published in the press, fearing the possible reaction of the states listed by the Soviets and especially of the Baltic states and Finland. However, there were some information leaks, and newspapers such as "The Times" or "News Chronicle" wrote that Moscow had demanded that all European states neighboring the USSR be guaranteed. As a result, Finland immediately protested, claiming that it did not want such a guarantee, which was likely to affect its relations with the other Scandinavian states. See G.A. Gripenberg, *Finland and the Great Powers. Memoirs of a Diplomat*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska University Press, 1965, pp. 24–25.

[33] C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 28*, May 17, 1939, f. 187.

would also have required further consultations with Warsaw and Bucharest, so other postponements and delays, while the current situation demanded quick action by the three powers, to discourage aggression[34]. As for the possibility of a German attack against the Soviet Union through Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, it was an unlikely prospect. It was almost impossible for the Germans to attack the USSR on such a narrow front. The Soviet Union could be invaded, with chances of success, only on a wide front, that is, through Poland and Romania. These states had received guarantees from the Western powers. It was a perfectly logical argument that seemed to impress and convince Maiski. He abandoned the subject of the Baltic states but stated that a tripartite agreement had to necessarily include military treaties, which would consider mutual assistance in the event that Germany attacked the Soviet Union through Poland and Romania. Vansittart ended the meeting, assuring Maiski that he would expose all these issues to his government and would later continue the discussion[35].

Vansittart immediately notified his superiors about the discussion with the Soviet ambassador[36], and the next day, the Foreign Office drafted and made available to him the text of a formula to present to Maiski. According to this document, under the conditions in which Moscow would have accepted the assumption of a declaration in favor of Poland and Romania and if the governments of France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union would have been put in a position to fulfill their common task of resisting an aggression against the two states as a result of the declarations and guarantees assumed, the three parties were to give each other mutual support and all possible assistance. Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union were to agree, in such circumstances, on the methods and the nature that mutual support would involve, so that it would be as effective as possible. Only later could such an agreement be extended, in similar terms, to other states that would have fallen victim to the aggression, but without the position and the rights of these countries to be affected in any way[37].

These terms, otherwise provisional, were presented by the British to the governments in Warsaw and Bucharest. London, thus trying to probe the position of the two states towards a possible tripartite agreement and their willingness to be included in such an arrangement, the adoption of this formula being argued by the fact that it was very possible that Great Britain would have to choose between such a variant of a tripartite agreement and breaking off negotiations with Moscow[38].

The response of the two governments was prompt. Warsaw informed London that it was not opposed to a tripartite alliance in which Poland was not directly involved[39]. For his part, Grigore Gafencu, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, informed the British Minister in the capital of Romania, Sir Reginald Hoare, that, although he could only approve the indirect formulas that the Western powers understood to use to strengthen the security of Eastern Europe[40], it was preferable that the tripartite negotiations between Great

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[34] Ibidem, f. 185.

[35] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 527, pp. 564–565.

[36] C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 28*, May 17, 1939, f. 186.

[37] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 527, p. 565. See also doc. no. 556, pp. 597–598.

[38] Ibidem, doc. no. 556, p. 598.

[39] A.M.F.A., Fund 71, England, Volume 10, 1939, *Telegrams*, f. 302.

[40] G. Gafencu, *Ultimele zile ale Europei. O călătorie diplomatică întreprinsă în anul 1939* [The Last Days of Europe. A Diplomatic Journey Undertaken in 1939], Traducere de R.M. Scafeş, Prefaţă şi note: C.I. Scafeş, Bucureşti, Editura Militară, 1992, p. 134.

Britain, France and the Soviet Union took place "without the formal knowledge of the Romanian government"[41]. In addition, it was emphasized that any guarantee of Romanian territory, from any power or any group of powers, was considered welcome[42], but the negotiations of Great Britain and France and the Soviet Union, being carried independently by the guarantee offered to Romania on April 13, could only be judged at their fair value by the two Western powers, the Romanian government being unable to assume the responsibility of formulating a suggestion[43].

Under these conditions, the British considered two alternatives, which they also presented to the French. The first was the conclusion of a tripartite pact, by which the parties would engage in mutual assistance in the event of direct aggression against one of them, or as a result of one of them engaging in war, owing to the aid offered to another power, and the second consisted from an arrangement – possibly a formal pact – by which the three powers express their agreement to act jointly if one of them were to be at war as a result of the fulfillment of obligations against another power. From the point of view of the Western powers, either of the two options would have covered the case of the Baltic states, if the latter had requested help and assistance[44].

Starting from these formulas, the British presented the Soviet government, on May 21, 1939, with a new proposal. This time, London's project stipulated that if any of the three powers found themselves in a state of war, as a result of their involvement in the aid of another European state – which would have fallen victim to an aggression that would have threatened its independence and who would have asked for that assistance – the other two powers would offer it all the help and assistance possible. The parties were to agree on the methods that, in such a case of aid and mutual assistance, would have been the most effective. Finally, the final point of the document specified the fact that the provision of support and assistance to another state that would have fallen victim to aggression would not have prejudiced the rights and position of the latter in any way[45].

The Soviets, however, considered that it was too little. From their point of view, for Germany to be stopped[46] a tripartite pact was needed. In addition, Moscow considered that the new British offer was based exclusively on the guarantees already offered to Poland and Romania. Or, if the two states changed their foreign policy, getting closer to Germany or if, simply, the Reich had managed to intimidate or even corrupt them in any way to obtain free transit for German troops through their territory with the aim of attacking the Soviet Union, the British arrangement could not have worked. The same could happen with the Baltic states, Germany being capable, through intimidation and corruption, to obtain free access of their troops to the territory of these countries or even

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[41] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 567, p. 607.

[42] A.M.F.A., Fund 71, England, vol. 10, 1939, *Telegrams*, f. 302–303.

[43] Ibidem, f. 312. See also A. Cretzianu, *Ocazia pierdută* [The Lost Opportunity], Prefață de V. Fl. Dobrinescu, Postfață de Sh.D. Spector, Iași, Institutul European, 1995, p. 52.

[44] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 576, p. 623.

[45] Ibidem, doc. no. 578, p. 626.

[46] On May 20, 1939, Germany had concluded a commercial agreement with Lithuania. The terms of this agreement were worded in such a way as to hide the fact that most Lithuanian exports were going to Germany, but it was still enough to fuel Soviet fears of eastward expansion of influence the Reich. See R. Ahmann, *Nazi German Policy towards the Baltic State on the Eve of the Second World War*, in: *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, J. Hiden, Th. Lane (eds.), Cambridge 1992, p. 64.

permission to establish air bases there. Moreover, Moscow was required to offer guarantees to Poland and Romania, but Warsaw, for example, had not been asked to offer guarantees to the Soviet Union, so that, in the event of a German-Soviet conflict, it could very well remain neutral, and in this situation, the character of its neutrality could be called into question[47].

Under these conditions, the Soviet government also considered that it had two options. The first would have been that of not assuming any obligation towards other powers; in the event of an attack, it would have to defend itself with its own forces, the advantage being that in this way it would have preserved its full freedom of action. Regarding the second option, although Moscow assured its negotiating partners that in the long term it was perfectly capable of winning any defensive war without any outside help, it emphasized that it could not have prevented the outbreak of a conflict on its own, so that it was prepared to collaborate with other powers in this regard, even if by doing so it would have lost its freedom of action. If it had accepted the last proposal of Great Britain, it would have lost this freedom without obtaining, in return, the prospect of deterring aggression. For this reason, the Soviet government considered the principle of a mutual assistance pact to be essential and was not willing to make any compromises in this regard, considering it indispensable as a deterrent[48].

The British government did not agree. A tripartite pact of mutual assistance would have determined the formation of an ideological bloc directed against the Axis powers and, implicitly, the elimination of any chance of an amicable agreement with Germany, armed confrontation becoming inevitable. The association of the Western powers with the Soviet Union could represent the very element that would push Hitler towards the start of a general European war, and this would have been just one of the effects. In addition, Great Britain's relations with the European states neighboring the Soviet Union could be seriously affected, and the oscillating and, for now, reserved attitude of countries such as Spain, Italy, Portugal and Japan towards Great Britain could change, and that not in a favorable meaning. Finally, the Soviet plan did not make any reference to the smaller states in western Europe, such as Belgium, the Netherlands or Switzerland[49].

Although dissatisfied with Moscow's proposals, the British considered that the tripartite negotiations had reached too advanced a stage to allow a sudden rupture or irremediable failure, with obviously unfavorable consequences. After all, the differences between the Soviet and British proposals were not insurmountable, so a final, definitive agreement was still possible[50]. For their part, the French considered it essential to conclude a tripartite agreement as quickly as possible – even if the Western powers should not give Moscow the impression that "they are running after it"[51], otherwise Paris, fearing a possible division

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[47] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 581, pp. 630–632, passim.

[48] Ibidem, p. 632. See doc. no. 582, p. 633 and C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 30*, 24 May 1939, f. 270–271.

[49] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 589, pp. 643–644. See C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 30*, 24 May 1939, f. 275.

[50] The British even considered that they must be prepared to conclude a direct agreement of mutual guarantees with Moscow. See C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 30*, 24 May 1939, f. 273.

[51] C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 31*, June 7, 1939, f. 302.

of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union[52], would not agree that the names of other states should be mentioned[53].

Starting from these premises, the British government drafted, on May 23, 1939, a new project, intended to meet the Soviet grievances. According to this new proposal, if the USSR were engaged in war with a European power, either due to the aggression of that European power on a state to which the USSR had undertaken to provide assistance, upon request, or due to assistance provided to another European state which had requested it to resist the violation of its neutrality[54], either due to direct aggression against the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain were committed to giving Moscow all possible assistance. The same conditions were also provided if the Western powers were at war, in the given situations. The three governments were to agree on the methods that such assistance and mutual aid would prove the most effective. The provision of assistance to the states that found themselves in the situations mentioned was to be done without prejudice to their rights or position, and the three great powers would communicate to each other the commitments they would assume towards another European state[55].

From the British point of view, such an arrangement would have satisfied not only Romania and Poland, states that did not want to be mentioned in the text of a possible tripartite agreement, but also the Baltic countries, the latter stating that they were not opposed to a tripartite agreement between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union to include them, if this was done in the form of a guarantee of their neutrality[56].

On May 24, 1939, an amendment was made to this new formula that the British wanted to submit to Moscow's attention, to eliminate any other reluctance or reservation of the Eastern European states towards a tripartite agreement of the Western powers with the Soviet Union. In the meeting of the British Cabinet that day, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Sir Samuel Hoare, suggested to his colleagues that the new plan be presented to the Soviet side in the form of an interpretation of the principles contained in the Covenant of the League of Nations and not as a regional pact, possibly copying the model established at Locarno. The proposal was accepted unanimously, the prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, being convinced that such a formula would have allowed Great Britain to conclude an agreement with Moscow on the terms agreed by it and that the Soviets would accept it without difficulty[57]. Not only the relations with Moscow, but also agreements with other states, would be linked to the Geneva forum, even if this required,

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[52] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 740, pp. 790–791.

[53] Ibidem, Third Series, vol. VI, 1939, London, His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1953, doc. no. 2, p. 2.

[54] References to neutrality were intended to cover the situation of the Baltic States, since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had already decided in November 1938, on the occasion of the Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Baltic States – which took place periodically, in accordance with the provisions of the treaty establishing the Baltic Entente – to adopt distinct laws on neutrality, following the model of the Scandinavian Declaration of Neutrality of May 27, 1938. As a result of this decision, the Committee of the Baltic Jurists compiled a legal text that was approved by the foreign ministers of the three states. The first to proclaim its Neutrality Law was Estonia on December 1, 1938, followed by Latvia on December 21, 1938 and Lithuania on January 25, 1939. See Dr. A. Bilmanis, *Baltic States and World Security Organization*, Washington, DC, 1945, http://www.letton.ch/lvx_38.htm (date accessed: 04.01.2024).

[55] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 592, pp. 649–650.

[56] C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 30*, 24 May 1939, f. 273.

[57] Ibidem, f. 276 and f. 278.

in the case of the Baltic states or Turkey for example, some preliminary consultations. Even the policy of conciliation towards Germany could be resumed under such conditions, because the association of the League of Nations would have been able to eliminate any suspicion of Berlin related to the fact that the tripartite agreement between France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union would have been directed directly against it. In addition, Halifax specified that the insertion of a time limit for the validity of the tripartite agreement could be accepted without any problem, if, for example, the German-Italian pact had been concluded for a period of ten years, and the Soviets had anyway proposed to Great Britain and France concluding a five-to-ten-year agreement[58].

The British Cabinet commissioned Halifax to draft the new proposal. The next day, on May 25, he sent the text of a seven-point agreement to the British ambassador in Moscow, to be presented to the Soviet government. According to the first two paragraphs, if Great Britain, France and the USSR were engaged in war with a European power, either due to the aggression of that European power on a state to which the Western powers or the Soviet Union had committed to provide assistance, and if that country had requested it, due to the assistance offered to another European state, which had requested it to resist the violation of its neutrality, or due to a direct aggression against them, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain pledged to give each other all help and possible assistance, in accordance with the principles provided for in article 16, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Covenant of the League of Nations[59]. The three governments were to agree on the methods by which the aid and mutual assistance would be, in case of necessity, the most effective. In the case of any threat that would claim the granting of mutual assistance and aid, the three parties had to consult immediately, the methods and purpose of these consultations being the subject of immediate discussions. It was self- evident that providing assistance against the states that would be in the situations mentioned by the first two paragraphs was to be done without prejudice to their rights or position, and the three great powers were to communicate to each other the commitments they had already assumed towards another European state, any other new commitment being the subject of consultations between the parties. Finally, the final point of the document mentioned that the agreement between the three great powers would be concluded for five years, after which, within six months, it could be extended, with or without changes[60].

Molotov's reaction to this new project was a negative one, his impression being that Great Britain and France wanted to continue the negotiations and discussions endlessly.

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[58] Ibidem, f. 279–286, passim.

[59] The text of these two paragraphs is as follows: "1. If a member of the League resorts to war, contrary to the commitments made under articles 12, 13 or 15, he is *ipso facto* considered to have committed an act of war against all other members of the League. They undertake to immediately sever all commercial or financial relations with it, to prohibit any relations between its citizens and those of the State that violated the Covenant, and to cease all financial, commercial or personal communications between the citizens of this State and those of any other State, member or not of the League. 2. In this case, the Council has the duty of recommending to the various governments concerned the military, naval or air forces with which the members of the League will contribute, each separately, to the armed forces intended for the observance of the commitments of the League". The Covenant of the League of Nations has been published in the preamble of every treaty signed at the Paris Peace Conference since the end of the First World War. See *Treaty* [sic!] *of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Protocol*, Signed at Versailles on June 28, 1919, Bucharest, State Printing Office, 1920, p. 8.

[60] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 624, pp. 679–680.

Although he recognized that these proposals represented a step forward, because the Western powers accepted the principle of mutual assistance and reciprocity between the three parties[61], he still considered that the terms were far too vague, and the introduction of references to the League of Nations was a clear sign that the Western powers wanted possible tripartite cooperation to depend on the endless delays inherent in the cumbersome procedures of the Geneva forum. On the contrary, the Soviet government wanted immediate guarantees of effective mutual assistance against the aggressors, and not that an obscure state could block the whole arrangement in Geneva.

The objections did not stop there. Another problem was raised by point 5 of the document, according to which the assistance offered to other states should not affect their rights and their situation. The Soviet diplomat considered that the phrase *other states* could be understood as each other and the aggressor states and, in addition, he was confused about the need to preserve the rights and status of these countries, since the assistance was given precisely to protect them against aggression[62]. However, Molotov specified that he would inform his government about these proposals and present, as soon as possible, an official answer[63].

However, Halifax was convinced that this time the British government could reach an agreement with Moscow, at least on the level of the main objectives that had to be met. London was even prepared to accept the conclusion of a tripartite agreement, based on full reciprocity[64], being, moreover, in a position to formulate a project acceptable to all parties involved in the negotiations and which, considering the rights and interests of other states, would ensure cooperation between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union to resist aggression. There remained only one or two matters which needed to be resolved. This primarily concerned the situation of those states that did not want to receive guarantees, on the grounds that they would have compromised their neutrality – although Halifax expressed his hope that suitable ways would be found to obtain favorable solutions, if the Soviets also showed goodwill – but also some problems, more or less important, inherent in the adjustment of more general provisions[65].

The reaction of the Soviet side was not an encouraging one, and the conclusions of the Kremlin were presented to the Western representatives on June 16. Moscow believed that by adopting the options put forward by Great Britain and France, the Soviet Union would commit itself to immediate assistance to Poland, Romania, Belgium, Greece and Turkey, if they were attacked by an aggressor or if the Western powers were entered the war for their cause, while France and Great Britain refused to provide immediate assistance to the Soviet Union if it became involved in armed conflict in the event of aggression against the Baltic states[66]. In addition, Molotov raised another problem, which worried the repre-

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[61] G.A. Gripenberg, *Finland and the Great Powers*, p. 26.

[62] M. Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, p. 82.

[63] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 648, pp. 701–702.

[64] From this point of view there had been some objections in the British cabinet. The list of states presented by the Soviets did not include the Netherlands and Switzerland, while Moscow had requested guarantees for all its western neighbours. See C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 6, *Cabinet 31*, June 7, 1939, f. 301.

[65] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. V, 1939, doc. no. 735, pp. 787–788.

[66] Ibidem, doc. no. 69, pp. 85–87.

sentatives of the Western powers. He believed that the treaty proposed by Great Britain and France did not cover the possibility of Poland attacking the Soviet Union, while Moscow was required to provide guarantees to Warsaw. Therefore, it could very well be that in such a conjuncture, the Western powers would stand aside. Moreover, Poland had concluded an alliance with Romania directed against the USSR, and the Soviets considered that this could not be ignored[67].

The governments of Great Britain and France, in their turn, took very seriously the objections formulated by Molotov, agreeing on a variant that would meet them. This new document stipulated that if one of the three powers considered that there was a threat to the independence or neutrality of a European state – whether neighboring or not – which endangered its own security or peace in Europe, the three parties, without prejudicing the actions taken in defense of their own security or as an effect of assistance obligations, were to hold consultations to decide, by mutual agreement, the application of the mutual assistance mechanism[68]. Only the question of Poland remained in abeyance. A possible Western guarantee offered to Moscow against a Polish attack would have led Warsaw to demand, in turn, a guarantee against Soviet aggression. However, London was determined to give satisfaction to Moscow in this matter as well, because it considered it purely hypothetical and completely improbable. Moreover, Halifax authorized William Seeds, the British ambassador in the Soviet capital, to give firm assurances to Molotov that, should Poland join Germany in an attack against the USSR, Britain would assist the latter[69].

Molotov initially expressed his agreement to this new Western approach, but on July 4, 1939, the Soviet diplomat brought an amendment to the previously formulated proposals, requesting that a possible alliance treaty include an explicit guarantee granted to the Baltic states – which included Finland – with or without their consent, with the aim of preventing the danger of "indirect aggression"[70]. The term "indirect aggression" was defined by the Soviets as "an internal coup d'état or a reversal of policy in the interests of aggression" in states such as Estonia, Latvia, Poland or Romania[71]. It was an element that suddenly removed the prospect of concluding a tripartite treaty.

From this moment, the efforts of the Western chancelleries to obtain a convenient arrangement proved in vain, and the whole situation became a dialogue between the deaf. On the other hand, the Soviets had become increasingly aware that an alliance with France and Great Britain greatly increased the prospect of an open conflict with Germany in the near future[72]. Nicolae Dianu, Romania's minister in Moscow, signaled, for his part, to Bucharest, that the tripartite negotiations did not seem to lead to any kind of agreement, and the Soviet demands and claims were multiplying and amplifying as France and Great

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[67] Ibidem, doc. no. 73, pp. 89–91.

[68] Ibidem, doc. no. 83, p. 98.

[69] Ibidem, doc. no. 113, pp. 128–129.

[70] P. Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890–1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 354. It is possible that Molotov took over the term originally proposed by the ambassadors of France and Great Britain in Moscow, changing only its meaning.

[71] *Apud* K. Girnius, *The Historiography of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, "Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences", Summer 1989, vol. 34, no. 2, Editor of this issue: A. Dundzila, http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_2_04.htm (date accessed: 04.01.2024). See also C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 7, *Cabinet 35*, July 5, 1939, f. 75–76.

[72] K. Girnius, *The Historiography of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.*

Britain showed themselves more interested in getting a concrete arrangement. The Romanian diplomat saw this attitude of the Soviets as revenge for the fact that the Soviet Union had not been invited to Munich in 1938[73].

In this context, the reluctance constantly shown by France and Great Britain during the tripartite negotiations towards the claims of the Soviet Union – although, at least from the point of view of the Western powers, there was always a willingness to compromise as long as the rights and status of the Eastern European countries and the Baltic States were not violated – made a Soviet-German rapprochement more and more likely. Therefore, the Soviets decided to follow the German proposals and politely send back the delegations of Great Britain and France, which were to negotiate and eventually conclude the tripartite treaty[74].

The British were aware, however, that the German-Soviet agreement had brought the question of Poland back to the forefront of European politics. Great Britain and France had engaged in the tripartite negotiations with the Soviet Union precisely to strengthen the "eastern front" against Germany and to give consistency to the guarantees offered to Warsaw and Bucharest on March 31 and April 13, 1939. But the failure of the negotiations and the neutrality of the USSR denied Great Britain any alternative or room for maneuver, being forced to bet everything on the strength of Poland and, possibly, to honor its guarantee[75].

London complied with Warsaw's wish, concluding on August 25 – just two days after the Soviet-German non-aggression pact – a mutual assistance agreement[76], based, in large part, on the conclusions resulting from the discussions held by Neville Chamberlain and Edward Halifax with Josef Beck, at the beginning of April 1939[77]. The consequences were, under these conditions, predictable, so that when Hitler attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, the British had no way out. They declared war on Germany two days later, on September 3, 1939[78].

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[73] A.M.F.A., Fund 71/Romania, vol. 50, p. 56.

[74] Universitatea de Stat din Moldova, Catedra de Istorie Universală, *Polonezii în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial. Culegere de documente* [Poles during the Second World War. Collection of Documents], Alcătuitor, introducere, note şi comentarii – Anatol Petrencu, doctor habilitat în ştiinţe istorice, profesor universitar, Chişinău, Cartdidact, 2004, doc. nr. 8, *Textul discursului lui Iosif Stalin în cadrul şedinţei Biroului Politic al P.C. (b) al U.R.S.S. din 19 august 1939* [The text of Joseph Stalin's speech at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CP (b) of the USSR on August 19, 1939], p. 24.

[75] D.B.F.P., Third Series, vol. VII, 1939, doc. no. 206, pp. 168–169.

[76] See *The British War Blue Book*, *Documents Concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939*, Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, s.a., doc. no. 19, pp. 50–52.

[77] The conclusion of such an agreement had been considered by the British government as early as June 1939. See C.N.H.A., Microfilms Fund England, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 7, *Cabinet 33*, June 21, 1939, f. 7.

[78] The declaration of war was preceded by an ultimatum addressed to Germany by the British government, with the following content: "His Majesty's Government accordingly notify the German Government that unless they can immediately satisfy His Majesty's Government that these reports [it was about the information related to the German attacks on Poland] are unfounded, or, in the alternative are prepared to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that the aggression against Poland has been stopped and the German troops will be promptly withdrawn from Poland, His Majesty's Government will without hesitation fulfil their obligations to Poland". See C.N.H.A., England Microfilm Fund, Inv. 1085, Roll no. 7, *Cabinet 47*, September 1, 1939, f. 448.

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