

OUTLINE OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE POLISH GOVERNMENT AND THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE IN LONDON IN THE YEARS 1940–1945

MAGDA GAWINECKA

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

ABSTRACT. This article presents some aspects of political relations between the Polish government and the Norwegian government in years 1940–45 when both governments were in exile in London. The author emphasizes that Polish–Norwegian relations in the period of war were quite tough, full of tensions, misunderstandings and journalistic incidents. While remaining in London, both governments rejected to recognize one another as the significant partners. They encountered different political problems, so the close cooperation between them was doomed from the start. In the conclusions the author underlines that relations with the Soviet Union appeared to be fundamental for Norwegian foreign policy. The Norwegian government was unwilling to cooperate with Poland, as it could have threatened the good relations Norway had with the Soviet Union. Besides Norway felt closer to Great Britain and the United States, whereas Polish plans referred to the cooperation of small countries. That is why their diplomatic relations had rather formal than real character.

When the Second World War broke out the Norwegian government did not share the German viewpoint about the alleged disappearance of the Polish state. Administered by Władysław Neuman, the Polish diplomatic establishment in Oslo still carried on its work. On the other hand, for as long as it was possible the government of Norway would not undertake anything that might have prematurely assessed the constitutional position of Poland.¹ Consequently, from the autumn of 1939 the diplomatic relations be-

¹ Riks Arkivet (hereafter: RA), Legasjon i Warszawa, 3 C19534, boks 69, Pol D. Ditleff to Lagerberg 3 November 1939.

tween the two countries worked on a one – sided basis. The Norwegian government agreed to the functioning of the Polish diplomatic institution but no diplomat on its part was sent to the Polish government seated first in Paris and then in Angers. After the collapse of France the Polish government was evacuated to Great Britain.

In June 1940 the Norwegian government joined many other governments in exile in London. The Polish deputy accredited to the Norwegian government was one of the few diplomats to accompany the king Haakon VII and the government in their escape from Oslo, first to Tromsø and then to London. In the summer of 1940 Władysław Neuman paid a visit to the Norwegian ministry of foreign affairs. He asked then whether the government of Norway intended to appoint a diplomatic representative to the Polish government. Norwegian minister of foreign affairs promised to do so as soon as an appropriate candidate was found.² Finally on 22 November 1940 Halvdan Koht appointed Hans Christian Berg chargé d'affaires to the Polish government in London,³ thus restoring a full range of diplomatic relations between Poland and Norway.

Officially the diplomatic relations were reinstated in January 1941. On 14 January a reception was organised for the Norwegian government in the Polish House (in a Polish cultural institution) in London. President Władysław Raczkiewicz and Prime Minister Gen. Władysław Sikorski hosted the Norwegian king, Haakon VII. Members of Polish, Norwegian, and British governments were also present.⁴

In 1941 the cooperation between the two countries went well. As Trygve Lie, the Norwegian foreign minister from November 1940, wrote in his diary "Med England i ildlinjen", it was thanks to minister Neuman that Norway had better contact with the Polish government. Although the relations among the Poles in London were far from being stable, the Norwegians were always well familiarised with current opinions of the Polish government.⁵

When the Soviet Union and the United States, two economic and military powers, declared war on Germany, it was clear for the Polish authorities that their rather strong position among other British allies would then be weakened. That is why it became so important that the position of the Polish government in London should be strengthened, by performing the role of a leader of all allied governments. In 1941–1943 the Norwegian government had to take a stand on several propositions made by the Polish government, which aimed at finding some forms of cooperation between "the smaller allies". One of them was a concept of creating a federation or associations of European countries.

² RA, Utenriksdepartementets arkiv 1940–1949 (hereafter: UDs arkiv 1940–1949), Fru Gleditsch arkiv for UD i London, 4.01/9 Polen-Norge, Boks 9225, Address to cabinet meeting, 15 November 1940.

³ Ibidem, Letter from H. Koht to H. Ch. Berg, 22 November 1940.

⁴ Ibidem, Minutes of Polish-Norwegian reception, 14 January 1941.

⁵ T. Lie, *Med England i ildlinjen*, Oslo 1956, p. 319.

Gen. Sikorski had a wide programme of creating closely cooperating regional agreements in Europe. He was counting on forming a central-European, Balkan, and Scandinavian federation.⁶ Norwegian foreign policy in the WWII period, called the Atlantic policy, completely broke with the interwar neutrality and aimed mainly at close relations with Great Britain and the United States. The government of Norway was only to a small degree concerned with the debate over different forms of federal organisation of Europe. To Norway, a country on the periphery of Europe and with strong connections with Great Britain and the United States, the thought of closer political or military relations with the continent must have been a distant one. The Norwegians also knew that the Poles did not intend to provide them with an important function in such a system as the leadership was bound to fall to Sweden. Norway's main goal was to avoid any associations that might have instigated tension or conflicts between the allies. Moreover, it was not insignificant that the Soviet Union was against any attempts at creating an independent federation of countries in this part of Europe.⁷

Trygve Lie expressed negative judgement of the Polish plans. He said that "the Atlantic policy annoyed central-European countries. The first to express their opinion were the Poles, who kept on creating problems during the whole war. They were afraid that growing interest in the Atlantic policy would move them aside. They promoted their viewpoint through magazines, interviews, intrigues, and rumour spreading, believing they were serving Poland's and central Europe's best interest".⁸

Saying this the Norwegian minister certainly thought about the articles "Sweden's policy of neutrality" and "The underground front grows" which were published in January and February 1942 in *Free Europe*, a Polish biweekly magazine. In the articles the former Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, Halvdan Koht had been criticised for his policy of neutrality and the rejection of a Swedish motion to form a defensive Scandinavian bloc.⁹ These articles assured the Norwegian government that the Poles wanted to win Sweden for a prospective anti-Soviet bloc and counted on this country to gain leadership in Scandinavia.

The second project launched by Polish government was the organisation of a common front of eight occupied countries: Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia, Greece, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Luxemburg, and Norway. The first step to do this was to be a declaration signed by these governments that would establish the foundations for the common policy towards post-war Germany.¹⁰ In the talks with the Poles the Norwegians did not conceal their lack of enthu-

⁶ E. Duraczyński, *Rząd polski na uchodźstwie 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1993, p. 212.

⁷ S. Holtsmark, *Mellom rusefrykt og brobygging, Sovjetunionen i norsk utenrikspolitikk 1940–1945*, Oslo 1988, pp. 157f.

⁸ T. Lie, *Hjemover*, Oslo 1958, pp. 55f.

⁹ RA, UD s arkiv 1940–1949, 25.1/2, Boks 10383, *Free Europe*.

¹⁰ Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 4 lutego 1942 r., [w:] *Protokoły Posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, t. 4, grudzień 1941 – sierpień 1942, Kraków 1998, p. 137.

siasm or even hostility towards this project.¹¹ The Norwegian ministry of foreign affairs was against Polish plans for two main reasons. Firstly, Norwegian foreign policy aimed at close cooperation with Great Britain and the United States, whereas Polish plans referred to the cooperation of small countries. Secondly, the project might have harmed Norwegian-Swedish relations and might have aroused the suspicions of the USSR.¹² Therefore, Lie thought it advisable to inform the Russians that the Norwegian government had been invited to sign a declaration of small countries, but declined this invitation.¹³

In spite of rather regular meetings of Prime Ministers and ministers of foreign affairs of all the eight countries, such a declaration as Sikorski wanted it was never signed. Growing tensions between Poland and the USSR worsened the atmosphere and the prospects of the smaller allies' cooperation. Not unimportant was also the behaviour of Sikorski, who obviously acted as a leader of the smaller allies. In January 1943 at another meeting of the representatives of the allied countries he presented a report on his journey to the United States. Annoyingly enough, he was reading it for an hour and a half, but the audience was more irritated with the information that the Polish Prime Minister introduced himself to President Roosevelt as a representative of all the allied countries with their alleged authorisation; the authorisation which many of them categorically denied having given, when talking to the British ambassador to the Polish government, Sir Cecil Dormer. Disgusted Trygve Lie even said that "these meetings were a waste of time".¹⁴ T. Lie ascribed the main role in hampering Sikorski's plans to his own actions. In the letter to a Norwegian envoy in Moscow, Rolf Andvord, he wrote: "When Gen. Sikorski returned from the USSR he immediately started to work on creating a bloc of the eight occupied nations. To my mind this bloc is a sting for Russia. Therefore, I did what I could to ruin Polish plans with the help of the Dutch, the Czecho-Slovakians, and the Belgians".¹⁵

Fundamental for Norwegian foreign policy appeared to be the relations with the Soviet Union and the desire to regulate the contacts with this country. Fears of further steps taken by the Russians mingled with the tendencies for active cooperation. Hypotheses that giving support to Polish plans might cause troubles in the relations with the Soviet Union were the most important reasons for the Norwegian government's disinclination towards the project of Gen. Sikorski. Moreover, the Norwegians perceived Polish activities as an attempt to take over the leadership of the governments in London exile, which, in addition to the fact that the administration of Norway carefully observed whether

¹¹ RA, UD s arkiv 1940–1949, 25.1./2, boks 10383, Note of T. Lie, 21. March 1942.

¹² S. Holtsmark, op.cit., p. 164.

¹³ RA, Ud s arkiv 1940–1949, 25.1/2, boks 10383, Note of T. Lie, 5. March 1942.

¹⁴ M. Hulaś, *Goście czy intruzi? Rząd polski na uchodźstwie wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1943*, Warszawa 1996, p. 302.

¹⁵ S. Holtsmark, op.cit., p. 162.

other governments dominated or were favoured by the powers, must have influenced the negative assessment of Polish activities. After 22 June 1941 Norwegian policy towards the USSR aimed at adjusting any former disagreements. Apart from that, the government was looking for some grounds for cooperation in waging war and tried to build good relations as a head start for a post-war time. At the same time the uncertainty and anxiety over possible Soviet intentions was still present. It was specifically the question of the ports for the Soviet Union in the north of Norway that strengthened Norwegian distrust, even though the Soviets emphasized they did not demand anything from Norway. The government of Norway also believed that particularly the Poles in London purposely propagandised so as to "draw Russian attention to the north Norway and thus push them away from the Baltic Sea".¹⁶

A Polish brochure entitled "Baltic Sea, Great Britain and peace" printed in December 1942 instigated such feelings in the Norwegian milieu. The author of the brochure, presenting the Baltic question from the Polish viewpoint, concluded by pointing out the danger of Russian influence over the north waterways. He sought to prove that the USSR had no actual interest in the Baltic Sea. The natural route for the Soviet ports Archangielsk and Murmansk led through the North Cape but when Archangielsk froze in winter the Russians would have liked to have an ice-free port in Scandinavia with access to the Atlantic and this was where the idea of the ports in the north of Norway had come from.¹⁷

In January 1943 Arne Ording, a close adviser to Trygve Lie, wrote in his journal about a rumour of Soviet demands towards Northern Norway among the soldiers in Scotland as well as in Belgian circles. Ording blamed the Poles for it as the representatives of the Polish government on many occasions discussed the Soviets' supposed demands with the British, the Americans, and the Norwegians. Gen. Sikorski discussed this matter with Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, whereas Józef Retinger (a close collaborator and adviser to Gen. Sikorski) with Hans Christian Berg.¹⁸

The Poles believed that the Norwegians' attitude towards the Soviets was based on the unwillingness to acknowledge a Soviet danger threatening Norway, whether considering their internal influences or external aggression. The opinion of the Polish envoy was that among the Norwegian authorities there was a tendency to positively evaluate any experience, actions, and especially values of both the Soviet Union and Stalin. According to Władysław Schwarcburg-Günther, a Polish envoy to the government of Norway from November 1942,

¹⁶ Regjeringen og hjemmefronten under krigen, nr. 80, „Politisk oversikt” av Arne Ording 8 februar 1943.

¹⁷ RA, UD s arkiv, 25. 4/91, boks 10494, The Baltic, Britain and Peace of R. Piłsudski.

¹⁸ Documents on Polish-Soviet relations 1939–1945, volume I 1939–1943, London 1961, doc. Nr 179, conversation between Gen. Sikorski and Churchill, 31 January 1942; nr 194 conversation between Gen. Sikorski and Roosevelt 24 March 1942; Arne Ording Dagbøker 19 juni 1942 – 23 juli 1945, Tano Aschehoug 2000, p. 161.

what accounted for this was the fact that the Norwegians in London did not know Russia and their representative in the Soviet Union, Rolf Andvord, was not a clear-sighted expert on Soviet relations. His reports, highly praised in Kingston House, were full of appreciation not only for Russian military effort, but also for work abilities, organisation, or even politics. Judging by the Norwegian attitude towards the Russians Władysław Günther clearly stated that there would have been virtually no likelihood for the Norwegians to take the Polish side in the Polish-Soviet disagreement, especially about the territorial question. Some criticism could arise about the Soviet demands for direct interference into Polish internal affairs, but on the other hand it would not have led to any active anti-Soviet opposition. He also doubted in the participation of Norway in any action, even a general one, aiming at the protection of the European status quo ante, in central Europe in particular.¹⁹

As soon as the news of the liberation of Norway and the announcement of the departure of the Norwegian government to Oslo reached the Polish government, the steps were taken to send Polish representatives there. In order to settle the matter as well as to congratulate the Norwegians on 12 May 1945 Günther talked with king Haakon and on 15 May with minister Lie. During both the meetings the Polish envoy described the Polish situation under the rule of the Lublin Government and expressed his hopes of repeating his congratulations on the liberation of Norway in Oslo when he would be there with the whole diplomatic corps. In neither case, however, did Günther's declaration meet with confirmation. King Haakon deeply regretted that Oslo was in such a lamentably uninhabitable state that those legations, which did not have their own buildings, would not be able to live there for a while. The king did not change his opinion even when the Polish envoy expressed his willingness to live and work in a hotel, despite all the inconveniences. This declaration was met with silence and it became clear that the habitation conditions were only a pretext to discourage the Polish legation from leaving together with the Norwegian king for Oslo. Similarly, when asked about the possibility for Polish representatives to depart together with the Norwegian government T. Lie said that there were serious difficulties concerning the transport of the government and the whole diplomatic corps on a single ship given to their disposition by Great Britain, so only a few people from the corps would leave on 25 May. The date of departure of the Polish legation was to be decided when the government of Norway settled in Oslo and invite the Polish government; in this way the arrival of the Polish legation would only be delayed for a few weeks.

In the case of the departure of the representatives of the Polish government in London the Norwegian government decided to temporise. The way the Norwegians denied the Polish legation a chance to depart with them was full

¹⁹ The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (hereafter: IPMS), A.51/9, W. Gunther to Polish Foreign Ministry, 12 February 1944.

of courtesy. Both interlocutors declared different technical obstacles, which were to be dealt with in a few weeks' time. Nevertheless, it was evident that the government of Norway considered the position of the Polish government as unsettled and thus their presence in Oslo as unwelcome. The Norwegian government believed it was better to stop the Polish legation from entering Norway than to turn them out later on. The Poles were aware of the fact that behind the hampering of their departure to Oslo lay Norwegian fear of becoming politically involved on the Polish side. In contacts with the Norwegian circles they tried to emphasise the bad impression that would be made on the public opinion by the absence of the representatives of the government whose army was one of the three armies fighting in Narvik.²⁰

All the same, it did not influence the decision the Norwegian government made on 5 July 1945. During this afternoon session the Storting acknowledged a new Polish government and wished to initiate diplomatic relations without further delay.²¹

The relationship between Norway and Poland during the war was not a close one. Although, both governments were in some respects in a similar situation mutual relations contained tensions. Both governments showed little understanding of their special position in this period. Norway was determined to establish the closest possible cooperation with the western powers, her natural allies. She felt closer to Britain and the United States than to countries on the European continent. At the same time it was important to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union. In spite of paying courteous visits and highlighting the friendship between the two countries in official government newspapers – Polish *Gazeta Polska*, Norwegian *Norsk Tidend* – Polish diplomacy could not count on the Norwegians to support their claims. It was clearly visible that Norway kept its distance and was unwilling to cooperate with Poland or support the country, as it could have threatened the good relations Norway had with the Soviet Union.

²⁰ IPMS, A 11 E/187 MSZ 1945 Norwegia, Telegram from Polish Foreign Ministry to the Polish legation in Stockholm, 29 May 1945.

²¹ IPMS, A 11 E/842, MSZ, Uchodźcy z Norwegii, W. Patek to Adam Tarnowski.