

Chapter 5  
***The agony of rapprochement***  
***(February-April 1934)***

I

The crisis in the Polish-Soviet relation was viewed with growing anxiety by political leaders of both Moscow and Warsaw. By signing the non-use of force declaration with Germany, the Polish leaders achieved a *détente* in relations with her, but did not fail to understand how precarious this state of affairs was. Unlike the Soviet-Polish pact of 1932, this declaration left the vital problem of Poland's western borders, as well as the minority problem, unsolved; the only obligation the sides assumed by concluding this agreement was to refrain from use of force in bilateral disputes. Moreover, the Poles knew that they could not count on the ten-year truce which the Polish-German declaration implied<sup>1</sup>. Warsaw's initial success was based on the growing animosity between Russia and Germany, but given the dynamic changes on the European scene, Soviet-German "peaceful" political rivalry could not last for a long time<sup>2</sup>. It would eventually either turn Poland into their battlefield or lead to resuming collaboration between her great neighbors. The most recent public exchanges between Berlin and Moscow indicated both possibilities must be kept in mind. While the Poles themselves were uncertain about prospects for a lasting German-Polish *détente*, no one in Moscow was able to discern whether reciprocal obligations spelled out in the declaration of January 26 were of a purely negative character or this agreement represented a step toward a coordinated anti-Soviet policy of Poland and Germany. The Polish foreign minister's visit to the USSR soon offered a chance to clarify those issues.

Such a visit had been contemplated by both sides since Radek's discussions with Pilsudski's representatives in Warsaw in the middle of 1933. In the end of July, Miedziński and Matuszewski conveyed to the Russians Poland's wish to have Litvinov stop in Warsaw on his way back from Geneva<sup>3</sup>. According to Litvinov's explanations to Nadolny in early 1934, upon receiving this request, the Peoples' Commissar "had replied that he could not do that, since so far not even the visit of Foreign Commissar Chicherin [to Warsaw] had been reciprocated"<sup>4</sup>.

In August, the Collegium of the NKID welcomed the possibility of Beck's visit to Moscow, though they thought "this question should be raised at a more appropriate moment, taking into account the [likely international] effect of his trip"<sup>5</sup>. Such a moment came five months later. To Lukasiewicz's suggestion that the Baltic declaration might be issued on "an appropriate occasion," Litvinov intimated that this could be provided by the Polish minister's visit to Moscow. Stalin gave his approval, and on December 21, the Poles were informed that the Soviet leaders were "ready to receive Beck at any time after closure of the TsIK session"<sup>6</sup>. On January 3, Jan Berson called on Radek to bring a message from Miedziński, notifying him that Beck preferred to come to Moscow "after the Council of the League of Nations' meeting and before Paul-Boncour's planned visit to Poland, i. e. approximately at the beginning of February"<sup>7</sup>.

In strained conversations with the Polish envoy on February 1 and 3, Litvinov reaffirmed the Soviets' desire to host Beck, even if it were useless to discuss the Baltic declaration<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, some in Moscow probably thought, as *polpred* Antonov-Ovseenko did<sup>9</sup>, that there still was some hope that Polish-Soviet cooperation in Northeast Europe would receive some impetus from anticipated conversations in Moscow. These expectations were probably fostered by explanations of the Polish policy that Matuszewski and Miedziński, both influential Polish representatives, offered the *polpred* on January 30. Antonov was particularly told that, the Poles were

“ready to develop M. M. [Litvinov's] initiative [...] Now Poland has her hands free to work together with the Sov.[iet] Union to maintain the positions ("our common front") in other directions. This ought to be discussed[;] this is what the Marshal wants, [and] for this he is sending Beck [to Moscow]... ”<sup>10</sup>.

In early February, the Peoples' Commissar told the envoy that since his Baltic plan was no longer considered as valid by Warsaw, he would refrain from making other proposals for discussions in Moscow. The Poles, however, displayed reserve and informed Litvinov that "Beck is not going to raise any concrete questions"<sup>11</sup>. It is unclear whether those differences in the diplomatic reports from Warsaw reflected an evasiveness bordering on hypocrisy by Beck or revealed real divergences of views among the Polish élite. Perhaps, they resulted from a reanalysis of the general situation and observation of the Soviets' astonishing ability to forget the wide program of Soviet-Polish *rapprochement*, which had been presented to them some months earlier<sup>12</sup>.

After these exchanges, the significance of a first visit by a Polish minister to the Soviet Union seemed reduced to a demonstration of friendly mutual relations and an exploration of each other's intentions. While Warsaw wished to show that the Berlin declaration was compatible with its good relations with the USSR<sup>13</sup>, Moscow wanted to demonstrate that Russia could still exercise impor-

tant influence on Polish policy<sup>14</sup>. A vague Polish-Soviet *communiqué* had been sketched at Kuznetski Most on February 6 and 7, just a week before Beck arrived on his official visit to the Soviet Russia, which he, then a representative of the Polish Military Organization, had had to leave sixteen years earlier to save his life.

Not only Beck, but also Pilsudski, to whom the minister reported immediately after his return to Warsaw, regarded the visit as a great political success, worth raising glasses of champagne<sup>15</sup>. What beside extreme official courtesy extended to Beck and "spontaneous public applause" in his honor at the Bolshoy opera<sup>16</sup> could substantiate such an assessment?

In his Moscow conversations with Litvinov, the minister assumed the role of a listener. While the Peoples' Commissar countered Beck's remarks about the decline of Prussian influence over German foreign policy by pointing out that the whole of Germany had become a military state as Prussia used to be, his interlocutor responded as if he remained unconvinced. He refused to recognize any substantial danger of war initiated by Germany in the near future and any need to issue a formal declaration in favor of maintaining the independence of the Baltic states. The only idea of which Litvinov persuaded Beck was that of prolonging the Soviet-Polish treaty to ten years in order to diminish the comparative significance of the Berlin declaration.

Beck was indisputably pleased with most parts of Litvinov's survey. The Foreign Commissar's obvious intransigence toward the German Reich and his assurances that "no political speeches which Hitler pronounces switching to pacifist phraseology" – a transparent allusion to the appeal to cultivate joint Russian-German interest, made in the Chancellor's address to the Reichstag two weeks earlier – would affect Soviet mistrust of him should have strengthened Beck's belief that by maneuvering between Russia and Germany Poland could keep them apart. Upon his return to Warsaw, the minister was glad to be able to point out in an interview with ambassador Laroche that "l'ampleur de l'évolution des dirigeants soviétique qui pratiquement désormais, à l'extérieur, une politique 'bourgeoise' favorable au maintien de la paix." Beck supported the French ambassador's opinion that owing to her external and domestic difficulties the Soviet Union needed peace above all and emphasized that he believed this fact represented the best guarantee of stability in the Soviet policy. "Il est revenu à ce propos sur l'aversion manifeste qu'il avait constatée à Moscou à l'égard de l'Allemagne"<sup>17</sup>. Thus, as the Poles saw it, if Germany's revisionist demands for Polish Silesia and Pomerania were revived, Poland would be likely to find the USSR an agreeable partner in resisting pressures from the west. Those considerations might become crucially important for Polish policy in the not-too-distant future.

In the short run, Beck probably felt that he had managed to secure a tolerant attitude of the Kremlin toward the Polish-German *détente* and some understand-

ing for Poland's motives. In the course of his journey to Moscow he had remarked to W. Besterman, a Polish journalist who accompanied the minister, "that it was his impression that France had intentionally represented to Poland that the Soviet Government was much more irritated by, and suspicious of, Polish policy with regard to Germany than was in fact the case". Some days later, Beck told the correspondent with satisfaction that "he had been quite true in his belief that France [had] misrepresented to Poland the Soviet attitude"<sup>18</sup>.

Most certainly, Beck could not derive those impressions from his interviews with Litvinov. Although the Polish request to arrange a meeting with Stalin for Beck had been mildly rejected<sup>19</sup>, the minister probably exchanged views with those he regarded to be Stalin's confidants. In mid-March, 1934, Boguslav Miedziński, speaking before the Sejm in his official capacity as parliamentary leader of the Non-Party Bloc, attacked the allegations made by Czapiński of the Polish Socialist Party that Beck had to go to Moscow in order to justify Poland's alignment with Germany. Miedziński continued:

"Any justification of our policy was completely out of the question in discussions there; instead I am in a position to state with full responsibility that the most authoritative persons in Moscow congratulated Poland's minister for foreign affairs on the conclusion of the known agreement with Germany. This is not a secret... "<sup>20</sup>.

Remembering Stalin's generous offers to Poland in spring and summer of 1933 and knowing very little about his later controversies with the NKID over the stance toward Poland, Beck by this time probably already viewed Litvinov and his gestures with more mistrust than they actually deserved. His feelings were also profoundly influenced by traditional national prejudices. To the end of his life Beck firmly held the belief that the "Litwaks," to whom Meyer Wallach (Maxim Litvinov) undoubtedly belonged, were "the worst type of Jew"<sup>21</sup>. Beck thought he found more understanding for Warsaw's behavior in "national Russian" and military circles close to Stalin<sup>22</sup>. Describing, with subservient sarcasm, the lavish reception of February 17, at Beck's apartment with "Moscow gifts" exhibited on the tables, the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* noted an especially significant detail of the party: "...Beck crosses the hall to approach me and for the first time tells [me] in Russian that in a conversation with C. Voroshilov he declared: 'Let us work to make our foes fear [us]'"<sup>23</sup>. According to Ignacy Matuszewski, the minister informed him that "he [had been] very satisfied specifically with the contact with the Soviet military. He thinks that there had been created an atmosphere which would allow [the Polish and Soviet military?] to solve practical questions easily"<sup>24</sup>. That he had "received the greatest satisfaction from the lunch with the military" Beck told Lukasiewicz as well<sup>25</sup>. It was from the Polish envoy that Litvinov discovered that Beck had reached an agreement with the chiefs of the Defence Commissariat about naval exchanges

and a return visit of Soviet aviators to Poland (with Air Force Chief Jan Alksnis as the head of the delegation) to be paid in May 1934. In the conversations with Litvinov, the Polish minister demonstratively raised no questions of bilateral ties, except for routine issue of changing the status of diplomatic representation. Even when Litvinov touched upon the problem of Japanese intelligence activity in Poland directed against the USSR, justifying his forewarning by a desire to prevent any possible misunderstanding between the Polish and the Red Armies, Beck refrained from using this occasion to express the Poland's attitude regarding the prospects of military contacts<sup>26</sup>. It seems that keeping in mind the history of the Rapallo cooperation, Pilsudski and his disciple attempted to turn military contacts between Moscow and Warsaw into something similar to what the Reichwehr—Red Army collaboration had been for Soviet-German relations — a pledge and a firm link, that could prevent diplomatic complications from overriding the long-term interests and goals of both states.

Pilsudski and Beck probably shared the illusion that the tendency toward reconciliation with Germany which they had detected in Soviet behavior, could provide more tolerance and understanding for Polish overtures towards her, while a "bourgeois" peaceful course ruled out Russia's return to anti-Polish projects and plotting with Germans. Both approaches, if balanced carefully, could theoretically provide Poland with a breathing-spell, while strengthening direct ties with the Soviet high command might have offered one more channel to reach Stalin and could lay the basis for actual negotiations between General Staffs in the future. If this reconstruction of the Pilsudski-Beck perception is correct, their calculations were largely erroneous. The "collective security" ("pro-Western") and "isolationist" ("pro-German") tendencies of Soviet foreign policy could hardly be reconciled with each other.

Although Beck's stay in Moscow and his agreement to prolong the Russo-Polish non-aggression pact had partly assuaged fears over Poland's alignment with Germany, Soviet appraisals of his visit were less optimistic. The five-point "Conclusions", which Litvinov attached to his records of the conversations with the minister, are still the main source for examining the evolution of Soviet policy towards Poland in early 1934<sup>27</sup>. This document is anything but simple, and since it was written as a memorandum to Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov it would hardly be prudent to take it at its face value. Litvinov implied to them that the most significant result of his meeting with Beck was the fact that "[political] cooperation with Poland in regard to Germany in the near future should be considered dropped," but he refrained from a prognosis about more distant perspectives. The People's Commissar stated that "Poland from the conversations with the Germans had been convinced of the possibility" "of a secret accord with Germany" "at the moment Poland would wish it". He did not believe such an agreement then existed. Both theses were perfectly correct, as were the suspicions that Germany wanted to drag the Poles into an anti-Russian

collusion. One should have concluded from these observations that Poland did not wish to collaborate with Berlin against the USSR. Litvinov instead pointed out that "Poland's new orientation or even new plans" were incompatible with maintaining "good relations with us." The question whether Litvinov reported what he really thought or what the Kremlin wanted to hear from him can be partly clarified by Stomoniakov's letter to the Warsaw Legation of February 19, which offered a more penetrating analysis of Polish motives:

"The main significance of Beck's visit to Moscow is contained in the fact that it has brought more clarity in our relations with Poland. C. Litvinov's conversations with Beck have revealed that Poland, by coming closer to us, is striving above all to preserve [her] freedom of hands and that at present she does not want any cooperation with us against Germany"<sup>28</sup>.

Boris Stomoniakov, who appeared to be on best terms with Litvinov<sup>29</sup>, had undoubtedly discussed those issues with him after Beck's departure from Moscow; one has every reason to believe that the Collegium's Member expressed the opinion of the Foreign Commissar rather than his own. The practical recommendation which Litvinov offered to the leading members of the Politburo was more in line with the appraisals of Stomoniakov's letter than with the argumentation put forth in his own memorandum. Having pointed out that the Poles intended to obscure their course "by maintenance of outwardly good relations with us or even by their improvement", Litvinov provided the seemingly illogical advice: "This disguise is useful for us too and that is why *we ought to meet them half-way*." No less surprising was the language the Foreign Commissar used to justify this course. While avoiding reference to any foreign policy considerations, he loyally paid tribute to official Soviet rhetoric: "This masking will demobilize the public opinion in Poland in regard to us and will somewhat hinder the Polish government's transition to a hostile road. We must therefore encourage this demobilization by furthering close cultural relations with Polish social circles. It would be easier for us than for Poland to mobilize our public opinion in the direction required, in case of necessity."

Stomoniakov's letter to the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* in Warsaw might have clarified original Litvinov's idea as he wrote: "These negative results of Beck's trip to no extent affect that line of systematic *rapprochement*, which we pursued and must pursue in the future in our relations with Poland"<sup>30</sup>.

Thus, in a situation somewhat similar to that of 1927<sup>31</sup>, Litvinov, while paying lipservice to Stalin's apprehensions, tried to win his consent to the course not favored in the Kremlin. In fact, after Beck's visit the Narkomindel wished to adhere to the joint *communiqué* which proclaimed "the firm determination of the two Governments to continue their endeavors for a further improvement in mutual relations between Poland and the USSR, as also for an all-round *rapprochement* between the peoples of both States"<sup>32</sup>. The Collegium's Member

explained: "We are not at all interested in exposing any disappointment over results of Beck's visit and, generally, of the state of our relations with Poland after her having concluded the treaty [sic] with Germany"<sup>33</sup>.

Stomoniakov himself faithfully followed this tactic. Having enlightened the French *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow as to Litvinov's and Beck's differences of opinion over German intentions, he concluded that, actually,

"l'appréciation polonaise, tout erronée qu'elle soit, est cependant sincère et qu'elle repose sur une illusion et non sur des arrière-pensées. L'état actuel des ses informations ne lui permet pas de conclure à une collusion polono-germanique susceptibles de porter atteinte aux intérêts vitaux de l'U.R.S.S, soit en Ukraine, soit dans les pays baltes..."<sup>34</sup>.

Given the major political and strategic considerations, good relations with Poland were for Litvinov a valuable asset and an important lever for maintaining intimate contacts with France on collective security issues. Both Paul-Boncour and Daladier instructed the ambassadors to the Soviet Union and Poland to remind their respective host governments of France's interest in "direct Soviet-Polish cooperation" and encourage it<sup>35</sup>. Though it might be doubtful that in this way the French foreign ministry expressed its wish to retain an opportunity for an effective Russo-French alliance, Quai d'Orsay definitely wanted to arrest Poland's drifting away from the anti-revisionist camp by recruiting the Russians to defend its rationale in Warsaw<sup>36</sup>. There seemed to be no disagreement with the French on this point in the NKID. As Alphand wired to the MAE on February 25, "Il est bien inutile d'indiquer aux Soviets que nous avons intérêts a leur bonne entente avec la Pologne: ils sont bien persuadés que c'est leur propre intérêts et ils ne négligent rien pour y parvenir"<sup>37</sup>.

The deep political crisis, which reached its pinnacle in the Paris riots of February 6, 1934, forced Daladier to resign and brought to power a conservative-Radical coalition. The Gaston Doumergue government included six former premiers, with Louis Barthou assuming the portfolio of minister for foreign affairs. "Not an easy man to read", Barthou admired Briand and was attracted by his conciliatory policy, while being constantly aware of the potential German menace to France. "Consistent in every respect with his character and distrust of dogmatism, he wanted to keep his options open in the belief that French interests and French security required a good measure of flexibility"<sup>38</sup>. Herriot, also in the new cabinet, was quick to reassure the Soviet ambassador that France would continue the policy of *rapprochement* towards Russia. Some days later, Barthou told Dovgalevski that he was more disposed to the USSR than to Germany<sup>39</sup>. These "soothing noises" were a long way from the talks Litvinov and the Soviet ambassador had with Paul-Boncour in the preceding months. Meanwhile, British disarmament negotiations with Germany reached their culmination as Eden, a minister for the League of Nations, met with Hitler<sup>40</sup>. The im-

pressions that the French – still plunged in domestic turmoil and uncertain as to what foreign policy to pursue – were to gain while observing the Polish-Soviet relations, could become the deciding factor in determining the course of the Doumergue government, and the Narkomindel busied themselves with providing a favorable effect.

Simultaneously, the NKID, while assuring Paris that they counted on "solidity of the Franco-Polish alliance", began to seek French support for Soviet-Polish *détente*. If French diplomats had previously had reasons to view the Soviet-Polish *rapprochement* as influenced by Moscow's desire to drive a wedge between France and her ally and to take Poland's place<sup>41</sup>, the Foreign Commissar, at a meeting with Alphand on February 26 for the first time gave the ambassador to understand that he wished the French to exert pressure on Warsaw in order to secure Polish assent to Russia's entry into the League. Litvinov expressed his belief "que la meilleure preuve d'une plus grande rapprochement soviéto-polonaise serait l'adhésion de la Pologne aux demandes formulées par M. Dovgalevsky concernant l'entrée de l'U.R.S.S. à la Société des Nations. Il m'a semblé craindre que cette adhésion ne soit pas donnée"<sup>42</sup>.

Though its significance was fully revealed only in the course of Eastern Lorcarno negotiations in the summer and fall of 1934, Litvinov's statement to Alphand represented a decisive turn in the Soviet approach towards cooperation with Poland and France. Poland was well ahead of France in signing a non-aggression treaty with the USSR and, in 1933, their improving relations provided strong evidence for the feasibility of Russia's *entente* with France. Now the Foreign Commissar came to ask for French assistance in solving difficulties in his dealing with Poland.

What had made Litvinov change his mind, despite the fact that in early 1934 Poland's preference for bilateral exchanges as a method of solving international problems was more manifest than ever before? As the NKID documents cited above indicate, its head undoubtedly wished to maintain the Soviet-Polish relations as best as possible and to keep them at the stage they had reached by late 1933, by meeting the Poles halfway and pursuing the previously defined policy of a "systematic *rapprochement*" with them. Very little, however, could be done to achieve this end without Stalin's explicit consent to Litvinov's counsels and requests. Even minor officials of the First Western Department were aware of the fact that most initiatives in this field since August 1933 had been meeting stubborn resistance in the Kremlin. If there had been any doubts in this regard, the Politburo's attitude was soon confirmed by its response to Litvinov's memorandum of mid-February, after his talks with Beck. None of the proposals submitted to the Politburo as the NKID's collegial decision in January met with a warm reception there. The Politburo resolution, which countenanced the agreement (reached between Litvinov and Beck and publicized in the official

*communiqué*) to elevate the countries' respective legations to embassy rank, came only at the end of March<sup>43</sup>.

The only resolution relevant to relations with Poland passed by the Politburo in the month following the reception of Beck in Moscow was one concerning Soviet participation in a Polish-German rye agreement. The idea originated with the Poles when, in late September 1933, Beck suggested to Neurath that they "enter into an exchange of view on how the 'rye competition', as he [Beck] expressed it, could be eliminated"<sup>44</sup>. Soon after Polish-German negotiations on this issue had begun, the commercial counsellor of the Polish legation asked at the Economic Division of the NKID whether Russia would wish to join the envisaged convention. On November 20, the Collegium approved a reply which alluded Rosenblum, the head of the Division, to continue exchanges with Zmi-grodzki in Moscow and Ritter in Berlin<sup>45</sup>. These discussions were successful and on February 2, the Collegium decided: "If the NKVT has no serious objections of an economic character, the joining [the agreement] is desirable (Berezov, Rosenblum)"<sup>46</sup>.

Stalin's consent to the NKID position on this issue might have had more than one meaning and may be scrutinized in the context of his maneuvers *vis-à-vis* Germany, but Berezov's sponsorship of the project shows that the NKID was guided primarily by concern over Soviet-Polish relations. On February 19, the Politburo (then out of session) stamped the decision. Another resolution of the Political Bureau, on March 17, empowered the NKID to start negotiations with Poland on an authors' rights convention. As a recent comprehensive study of Soviet-Polish cultural interactions in the interwar period suggests, by this time the publication of Polish writers in the USSR had been almost completely curtailed<sup>47</sup>. In these circumstances, a convention securing copyrights could hardly interest Poland, and such an offer must have been regarded by her as one more indication of the Soviet reluctance to seek agreement on the issues of mutual interest for both states. It is no wonder that the Polish comments to the Soviet proposal were protracted. The cool reserve or complete silence with which Soviet official agencies reacted in late February and March to invitations from the Polish legation in Moscow concerning an international conference of Unions of Authors and Composers and an International Classic Dance Contest (both of which were to be held in Warsaw in the summer)<sup>48</sup> provide additional evidence of the attitude the Kremlin had taken on the NKID's proposal for further cultural *rapprochement* with Poland, not to mention more important projects, which had been contemplated previously.

Nor were Litvinov's and Stomoniakov's wishes to avoid revealing to the outside world any misgivings over the state of Polish-Soviet relations and new directions in Polish foreign policy satisfied. Soon after Beck's visit, the central Soviet press displayed a growing reserve bordering on overt criticism of the

Polish policy. As early as February 23, a TASS correspondent in Warsaw, Ivan Kovalski, informed the head of the agency J. Dolecki that:

"After a few days during which only triumphant articles appeared in the Polish press [about Beck's visit], I feel a certain sudden change in the press sentiments too. It seems to me that they here have taken into consideration the fact that despite plenty of articles in the Polish press there were no articles in the Moscow press summarizing results of the trip. Although the Poles understand that there is little and nothing [sic] to summarize, nevertheless, they react to our press' reserve, I would say, 'painfully'"<sup>49</sup>.

Litvinov and his associates must have felt trapped. They needed Poland's cooperation (or at least the outward signs of it) to induce Doumergue and Barthou to decide upon an alliance with Russia. But since the Kremlin's doubts over the wisdom of pursuing the course for *rapprochement* with the West had increased along with its pessimism over chances to exploit Polish-German contradictions, the NKID had no strong arguments to overcome Stalin's refusal to meet Poland's clearly-stated desire to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union. To assuage Stalin's – and, perhaps, his own – apprehensions, Litvinov needed France to demonstrate her commitment to pursue *rapprochement* with the USSR and Poland to take positive steps towards Russia. Whether or not it was seen from a long-term perspective, the improvement of Russo-Polish relations was of primary importance because Barthou obviously preferred to delay making the difficult choice between new efforts of appeasement of Germany and rebuilding France's eastern alliances. Thus, the only opportunity open to Litvinov to revitalize a course for collective security was to remind the French minister about Moscow's proposals communicated earlier to Paul-Boncour<sup>50</sup>, this time laying the principal stress upon the Soviet preparedness to join the League of Nations under specified conditions, and, by playing on France's desire to see the USSR in the League, to induce her to defend Russian interests in Warsaw.

## II

In the meantime, Moscow impatiently waited for Poland's final decision concerning prolongation of the 1932 non-aggression pact. Beck had supported the Soviet proposal for extension only in his own name, and the official *communiqué* spoke about it in rather vague terms: since the foundation of Soviet-Polish *rapprochement* were the pact of non-aggression and the convention for the definition of non-aggression, "it was thought desirable to give these as permanent a character as possible"<sup>51</sup>. Antonov-Ovseenko tried – with no visible results – to persuade the Poles to speed up their examination of the Soviet initiative<sup>52</sup>.

Pilsudski's inclination to preserve a certain distance and to postpone official response to the latest Russian move displeased Moscow. In early March, Stomoniakov commented that this delay, set against the reserved attitude of the pro-government press and the cautious tone of an *expose* by J. Radziwill, chairman of the Sejm's Foreign Affairs Commission, must be regarded as serious evidence that the Soviet Union was faced with Pilsudski's "directive to check further *rapprochement*" with her. The Member of the NKID's Collegium was further disturbed by the reports that pointed to "Hitler and Pilsudski's aspiration to prepare the public opinion of their countries for close cooperation between the two governments". Still, he reiterated to the Russian envoy in Warsaw, that "faced with these events, our line [towards Poland] remains the same"<sup>53</sup>. This, however, was difficult to maintain. Two weeks later, Stomoniakov characterized Matuszewski's assurances that Pilsudski and Beck attached greater importance to good relations with Russia than to Polish-German *détente*<sup>54</sup> as "obvious misinformation," and informed the *polpred* about the change in Moscow's diplomatic tactics: "The absence, up to now, of an official reply by the Pol[ish] gov[ernment] to C. Litvinov's proposal concerning the prolongation of the pact indicates that the Poles do not even intend to bother with us. We consider it pointless to show further interest in this matter"<sup>55</sup>.

Litvinov understood that Soviet reluctance to adhere to the joint *communiqué's* provision concerning "all-round *rapprochement*" had discouraged Poland and made her less willing to satisfy Moscow by providing an early response. On March 16, he resumed his efforts to gain Stalin's support in the NKID's argument with the Foreign Trade Commissariat over the issue of concluding the trade treaty. Litvinov thought it desirable from both economic and political points of view to immediately open full-scale trade negotiations with the Poles<sup>56</sup>. The Commissar's appeal probably stemmed from the promise he had allegedly made to Beck (and, if so, kept this in secret) during their Moscow conversations "that negotiations for a Polish-Soviet commercial treaty shall start 'at as early a date as possible'"<sup>57</sup>.

The reaction from Stalin and Molotov to Litvinov's new suggestions of March 16<sup>58</sup> was negative. It seems that the dictator was increasingly inclined to demonstrate a firm hand in dealing with Poland and made any decision for strengthening Soviet contacts with her conditional upon Pilsudski's explicit consent to prolong the non-aggression treaty. Litvinov's ability to influence events was additionally hampered by severe pneumonia which kept him in bed for almost six weeks beginning in late February<sup>59</sup>. On March 18, the Politburo approved directives to the NKID to approach Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia with an offer to prolong their respective non-aggression pacts with the USSR. As the French ambassador, Charles Alphonse, found out later, this initiative was primarily intended to isolate Poland and force her to join the Baltic states in negotiations with the Soviet Union<sup>60</sup>.

Of even greater potential significance was the idea of a Soviet-German protocol on non-violation of the independence of the Baltic countries which was put forward at that moment. Moscow had decided to offer the Reich Government to join in an undertaking "to be guided invariably in their foreign policy by the obligation to preserve the independence and integrity of the Baltic states and to refrain from any action capable of directly or indirectly injuring their independence"<sup>61</sup>. Scholars' widely varying interpretations of this proposal<sup>62</sup> seem to reflect the real complexity of the motives behind the scheme, described differently by the official Soviet sources. In a mid-April letter to the ambassador in Poland, Litvinov instructed him to stress in exchanges with the Poles the relative unimportance of the obligations the USSR and Germany would have assumed under the Baltic protocol. While "we [the Soviets] had offered Poland to declare [common] interestedness in the independence of the Baltic region, we attempted to tie up Germany by certain obligations of non-aggression on the Baltic region"<sup>63</sup>. A year later, the official party journal slipped a line (in its review of books section) that by approaching the Germans with the protocol, the Soviet Union had "offered Germany to give joint guarantee for the Baltic countries' borders"<sup>64</sup>. These discrepancies are well worth analysis.

The resolution which instructed the Narkomindel to forward this proposal to the Germans was passed by the Politburo on March 20, after listening to Krestinski's report<sup>65</sup>. Implementation of the Politburo decision was postponed until March 28, ostensibly, because Litvinov had been too ill in the previous days to meet the German ambassador and did not want to delegate the mission to his deputy. On the evening of March 28, the day that the Foreign Commissar received Nadolny to communicate the Soviet proposal for the protocol to him, Voroshilov and Krestinski met the ambassador for a dinner in his private apartment. This coincidence offers a rare opportunity to trace the difference in their approaches. Litvinov did not bother to tell the ambassador about the official character of the initiative; Nadolny came to this conclusion after hearing War Commissar Voroshilov's remarks. Though the ambassador introduced the issue of German claims on Memel as a possible obstacle to Germany's consent to the idea of a Baltic protocol, Litvinov was silent on this point. His deputy and War Commissar, instead, stressed that the Soviet draft characterized the region as part of the territory of the former Russian Empire, thus leaving open the problem of Lithuania's sovereignty over Memel<sup>66</sup>. Luring the Germans into agreement, "Krestinski pointed to the great importance of the proposal as a documentation of the [Soviets'] will to eliminate the existing distrust and an appeal to the same will in us... " Voroshilov confirmed the correctness of this statement. The Foreign Commissar, however, ruled out the possibility of a confidential Soviet-German agreement, which Nadolny prompted to him<sup>67</sup>. Later, Litvinov shocked the Germans with statements that Moscow had undertaken the whole affair to find out whether their "assurances in regard to the independence of the Baltic

states were honestly meant or not" and "to establish through Germany's rejection of it [the Soviet proposal] that she had aggressive designs" in the region<sup>68</sup>.

The series of misfortunes for the collective security policy that occurred immediately after it had been proclaimed by the Foreign Commissar on December 28 (misfortunes that partly had been provoked by Stalin's overtures to Germany since early January) — Poland's withdrawal from the negotiations on the Baltic declaration, her non-aggression agreement with Germany, disappointing results of Beck's visit to Moscow and deliberate delay in replying to the offer to extend the Soviet-Polish treaty as well as France's telling silence — evidently weakened Litvinov's position. Coupled with Hitler's responsiveness to Soviet wishes after Stalin's major speech, those difficulties challenged the choice for collective security course and should have made the Kremlin more disposed to seek other options. Litvinov's misgivings over the idea of the Soviet-German protocol are further evident from an explanatory remark in his letter to Davtian, the newly appointed Soviet ambassador to Poland, that "Pilsudski's refusal of the declaration had forced us to approach Germany with a request on [i. e. made at] our own risk"<sup>69</sup>.

The risk, as it occurred, was not that great. On April 14, the Germans gave a negative reply to the Soviet proposal. However, the German memorandum spoke about "numerous common interests of both states", and while rejecting the Soviet proposal for a joint declaration<sup>70</sup>, appealed to Russia to "build up relations not on the basis of artificial projects, but on the natural and positive foundation of the Berlin treaty. This Treaty provides for both Governments to maintain friendly contact in order to secure agreement on all political and economic issues, that concern both countries"<sup>71</sup>. Such vague promises seemed insufficiently attractive to the Kremlin. After a week of examining Hitler's reply, prudence prevailed. On April 21, Litvinov appeared to have been empowered to counter the German move with the following statement: "I do not imagine useful proposals which could [sic] not be completed by fixing something on paper"<sup>72</sup>.

Of no little importance for such an outcome were the decisions taken in Warsaw and Paris during the Soviet-German exchanges: in these weeks Moscow had received Poland's consent to discuss prolongation of the non-aggression treaty, while France had agreed to enter negotiations for the security pact with the USSR. Covering Moscow's retreat, the Soviet press and diplomatic service did their best to put the blame for failure of the Baltic project on Germany and present the USSR as "the only real advocate of the independence of the Baltic"<sup>73</sup>.

Despite its happy end, this episode had dire consequences for Polish-Soviet relations. Both Moscow's overture to Germany and the manner in which the Soviets treated her refusal were most probably viewed in Poland as an utterly cynical double-game, which one could hardly be expected to join voluntarily.

**III**

In late March 1934, immediately after Moscow had informed the Baltic capitals about its wish to prolong the bilateral non-aggression pacts with them, Lukaszewicz returned to his post with instructions to begin similar talks with Russia. This simultaneity does not necessarily mean that Poland's long-awaited decision resulted from the latest Soviet initiative, but the timing certainly suggested this to the Russians. On March 25, the envoy was received by Boris Stomoniakov. Lukaszewicz communicated his government's proposal to limit upcoming discussions to the issue of providing for "infinite automatic prolongation of the pact for periods of two years", as it had been stipulated in article 6 of the Soviet non-aggression treaties with Riga and Tallinn. If the Soviet government had no objections, Lukaszewicz told the member of the NKID's Col-legium, he was "empowered to sign such a protocol immediately." Keeping in mind that the Polish-German declaration was valid for ten years, it must be expected that the Soviets did not agree to this idea. Stomoniakov resisted it and suggested that the Poles should return to Litvinov's initial proposal to extend the agreement for ten years. The envoy warned that in such a case Poland would make her concurrence conditional upon making similar provisions to Soviet pacts with the Baltic states. Speaking on his own, Lukaszewicz expressed the belief that Warsaw would also ask the USSR to nullify Chicherin's note to Lithuania of September 27, 1926, which supplemented the Soviet-Lithuanian non-aggression pact. The conversation was concluded by Stomoniakov's promise to report its content to his government; he did so by forwarding the minutes to Stalin, Molotov and the War and Foreign Commissars<sup>74</sup>.

The Soviet leaders apparently felt relief over the Polish reply and acted as if they now thought that Poland deserved their immediate encouragement. On the next day the Politburo formally approved the resolution that provided for elevation of the diplomatic mission in Warsaw to embassy rank<sup>75</sup>. On March 27, Lukaszewicz was invited to the Deputy Commissar, who ran the office during Litvinov's illness, to hear the news. Simultaneously the Poles were asked to give *agrément* to Jakob Davtian to confirm his appointment as the first Soviet ambassador to Poland<sup>76</sup>. A disciplined diplomat, he rather than the ambitious Antonov-Ovseenko, with his famous political past and deep-rooted sympathy to Poles, suited Moscow's aims at a new stage of Russian-Polish relations.

Of more significance was a resolution stamped by the Politburo on the same day. Vaguely titled "On Poland", it stated, as cross-examination of available data indicates, the expediency of a Soviet Air Force visit to Poland and an exchange of naval visits between her and Russia. But Pilsudski's proposal of December 1933 – about which the Soviets were reminded several times and which

Lukasiewicz reiterated on March 25, 1934 – to invite a top man from the Red Army (presumably Voroshilov or Tukhachevski) to Warsaw and to send General Fabrycy on a return visit to the USSR was again ignored by the Kremlin<sup>77</sup>.

The Politburo's resolution of March 27 probably also included instructions to the diplomatic service on the attitude to be taken in negotiations concerning the prolongation protocol. The Polish condition of synchronizing their pact with Russia with similar pacts she concluded with the Baltic countries had been partly fulfilled by the Soviet overture to them on March 20. Therefore, the problem of reinterpreting "Chicherin's note" was now to become the sole major obstacle in the negotiations. The note of the then Foreign Commissar to the Lithuanian Government constituted a part of their 1926 agreement to sign a Soviet-Lithuanian non-aggression treaty and, in fact, gave support to Lithuanian claims to Vilnius (Wilno), annexed by the Poles in October 1920. A decision to conduct negotiations with Warsaw on the basis of Litvinov's original proposal for a ten-year extension should have implied that the USSR no longer favored Kaunas' demands. There are some signs that by the end of March Stalin was not averse to such an aboutface. After the completion of the talks, Alphand – now the best informed diplomat in Moscow – reported to Barthou that from the Russian point of view, the reinterpretation of Chicherin's note in the Soviet-Polish protocol "n'implique pas une concession nouvelle par rapport à la position prise par les Soviétés des le début des negotiations engagée avec la Pologne au sujet de la prolongation du pacte. La déclaration annulant la lettre Tchichérine était, en effet, prévue des le moment où se sent engagées les negotiations pratiques"<sup>78</sup>.

Although Moscow had probably softened its stance toward Poland, the negotiations proved to be anything but easy for both sides. As he had done previously, Litvinov, still not healthy, took conducting the talks into his own hands. In the course of the first meeting with Lukasiewicz on April 2, the Commissar proposed to mention in the final protocol that both sides had "no obligations inconsistent with the provisions of the Peace Treaty". The Polish envoy, in his turn, pointed to the desirability of a special reference to the third article of this treaty. Having reread its text, Litvinov agreed to the proposal since, as he put it in his minutes, such a reference should have "forced Poland to recognize the absence of any accords with Hitler concerning Byelorussia and the Ukraine"<sup>79</sup>. Litvinov, in a jubilant mood, expected after the conversation that he would sign the Soviet-Polish protocol the "day after tomorrow", simultaneously with the prolongation agreements with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. "I have caught the Poles completely," he told Bullitt<sup>80</sup>. Striving to complete the talks as soon as possible and to sign the protocol of prolongation together with the representatives of the Baltic states<sup>81</sup>, Lukasiewicz probably misunderstood some nuances in the MSZ instructions; this put the Poles into an awkward position at the negotiation table.

On April 3, Lukaszewicz clarified the Polish stand by communicating Beck's demand to refer only to "the second paragraph of Article 3 of said treaty," which did not mention the issue of Soviet-Polish borders and exclusively addressed the Soviet obligations of non-interference in the Polish-Lithuanian dispute. Beck thought that since the first paragraph was "interpreted by us differently" it was of no use to reiterate compliance with it in the final protocol<sup>82</sup>. He was reluctant to reaffirm, without special reasons, Poland's refusal of territorial claims to the Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Byelorussia. Given the resumption of anti-Polish attacks in the propaganda campaigns in the Ukraine and strong words about the forthcoming liberation of the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia published on the occasion of the Seventeenth Congress of VKP(b), this attitude was far from absurd. Nonetheless, it aroused additional resentment in Moscow and was regarded there as revealing the true nature of Polish-German contacts. Litvinov promptly rejected Beck's approach to this issue as biased and pointed out that adherence to the whole Article 3 constituted an indispensable condition for continuation of the negotiations<sup>83</sup>. The crux of the problem was whether the Soviets would agree to formally withdraw their support for the Lithuanian claims to Wilno and Grodno in return for a Polish concession concerning the first paragraph of the third article of the Riga Treaty.

On the next day, Lukaszewicz handed the Foreign Commissar Poland's revised draft of the agreement. Comparing this document with the version both sides signed a month later, one might notice that both dealt with the Lithuanian problem in almost the same way. However, in early April neither Beck nor Litvinov was disposed to agree to a compromise. The Foreign Commissar displayed overconfidence, writing to Rosenberg in Paris that "Poland is driven into a corner by us"<sup>84</sup>. On April 4, the protocols providing for obligations of non-aggression between Russia and three Baltic states to remain in force until December 31, 1945 were signed. On this occasion, Litvinov delivered a speech, praising the Baltic governments for their readiness to serve the cause of European peace. His remarks contained "disguised but unmistakable reproaches to Poland for delay in signing and insinuations that there were ulterior motives" on her part<sup>85</sup>.

Polish aspirations to leadership in the Baltic region had received a serious setback. As it had been two years earlier in negotiations concerning non-aggression pacts, Poland failed to exert decisive influence on Russia's negotiations with the Baltic countries and prevent their completion independently of Polish-Russian talks. Warsaw responded to Litvinov's success with the statement that she did not intend to hurry the completion of the negotiations. Litvinov reacted forcefully, asking Lukaszewicz at their encounter on April 5,

"to relay to Mr. Beck my proposal at first to prolong the pact of non-aggression without any conditions and formulae and then enter into negotiations on the meaning of Chicherin's note or other 'sources of misunderstanding'. All the world knows now that the proposal for the prolongation of the

pact was made to Poland earlier than to our other neighbours, with whom the prolongation is already officially approved. Poland's delay might cause in our country and all the world such perplexed questions and comments which are not in harmony with improvement of the relations that are declared by us and Poland"<sup>86</sup>.

Acceptance of this demand, however, would have amounted to Poland's recognition of the USSR's leading role in Northeast Europe. The Polish tactic was to raise new claims. On April 13, Lukaszewicz presented to Litvinov a draft of the additional protocol, which Litvinov with good reasons characterized as a "completely independent act about recognition of Polish sovereignty over the Vilno region, which has nothing in common with the pact of non-aggression"<sup>87</sup>. The Foreign Commissar, however, bent to Poland's stubbornness and agreed to continue talks on the basis of Beck's draft and, on April 16, showed Lukaszewicz his amendments to the document. A week later, both diplomats reached a compromise. Lukaszewicz, just promoted to the rank of ambassador, agreed to recommend that his government reaffirm, in the text of the final protocol, Poland's adherence to both paragraphs of Article 3 of the Peace Treaty. In return, Litvinov promised to "think about" omitting the term "disputes" in regard to the Polish-Lithuanian controversies. The agreement was forwarded to Warsaw, but two days later, Lukaszewicz explained that the Foreign Ministry would be able to reply only after completion of Barthou's visit to Warsaw and Krakow<sup>88</sup>. Beck's reaction was positive, and in early May, Litvinov and Lukaszewicz settled the minor issues that remained.

The protocol of prolongation, signed in Moscow on May 5, provided that the treaty of non-aggression "shall remain in force until December 31, 1945" and that if it was not revoked by that date it would automatically be considered valid for an additional two years. No document that either Poland or the USSR had signed hitherto surpassed this agreement in period of validity, an outstanding achievement for Soviet diplomacy in view of Moscow's preoccupations with the possibility of German-Polish and Japan-Polish secret alliances. Another major success was winning Poland's consent to state in the final protocol that each of the contracting parties had no obligations and was not bound "by any declarations inconsistent with the provisions" of the Riga Treaty of 1921 "and in particular of Article 3 thereof"<sup>89</sup>. Thus, by signing the protocol, Warsaw officially repudiated rumours concerning aggressive implications of the Polish-German declaration of January 26, 1934.

In the final paragraph of the protocol the Russians "confirmed" (thus giving it a retrospective interpretation) that the Note from the Peoples' Commissar, of September 28, 1926, to the Lithuanian Government "cannot be interpreted to mean that Note implied any intention on the part of the Soviet Socialist Government to interfere in the settlement of the territorial questions mentioned therein"<sup>90</sup>. This statement, set against the Soviet policy in Northeast Europe,

appeared to diplomatic observers to be an unexpected and somewhat mysterious turn of events.

The Polish-German *détente* had aroused serious anxiety in the Baltic countries, thus offering the USSR a chance to strengthen her influence in the region. The Narkomindel reappraised the Soviet diplomatic course towards them, probably in this spirit<sup>91</sup>. This view seemed to be supported by the Kremlin. The March 3 resolution of the Sovnarkom instructed the NKID "to begin negotiations with the Lithuanian government about the conclusion of a navigation convention and, upon reaching an agreement, to sign this convention"<sup>92</sup>. This approach was followed by the extension of non-aggression treaties with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Commenting on the recent Soviet moves, the Italian ambassador, B. Attolico, in a conversation with Stomoniakov in mid-April, interpreted them as evidence of "the decisive struggle between the USSR and Poland for influence in the region." He continued:

"All people understand that the USSR by means of her proposals wanted to undermine the Baltic's trust, first in Poland, and then in Germany, and to strengthen the Balts's confidence in the USSR as the only Great Power interested in their independence. In fact, the influence of this or that Great Power in those countries is based not on documents, but only on trust. Up to now the Balts have been putting their trust mainly in Poland; now they have more trust in the USSR. By systematically misinforming [the Baltic states] on the issues of prolongation of the pact, Poland wants to create there [in the Baltic region] the impression that the USSR, yielding to her pressure and striving to prolong the pact, agrees to denounce the document which she [the USSR] has just signed with Lithuania. It seems as if Poland wished to tell the other Baltic states that they should not rely on the USSR and that what is happening to Lithuania today, might happen to them tomorrow. Poland wants to undermine trust to the USSR in the Baltic region."

Stomoniakov replied "evasively, that, may be, he [Attolico] [was]. right"<sup>93</sup>

Even if the Soviet-Polish rivalry in the region could be described in milder words, than was done by the Italian ambassador, in this context Russia's decision to stop providing political and moral support and the encouragement to the Lithuanian cause appears almost inexplicable. The "Note on international press comments on the final protocol of May 5, 1934", drawn by an official of the First Western Department testified that the European press had accentuated the inconsistency, if not duplicity, of the Soviet policy which put Lithuania in such an awkward position. The study showed that

"all the Polish press, without party distinctions, while greeting the prolongation of the pact..., concentrated all its attention on the Final [P]rotocol. It is noteworthy, that the main bulk of the Polish newspapers, pointing to Lithua-

nia's complete isolation after the USSR signed the final protocol, suggests that now Lithuania has to capitulate to Poland"<sup>94</sup>.

Such reactions could have been foreseen long before the document was signed, and – what is more important – Moscow had little to say to change the impression. The instructions the NKID conveyed to the ambassador in Warsaw regarding the language to be used in discussions with foreign diplomats tended to omit rather than to repudiate Poland's joyful comments or allay the Baltic countries' suspicions. Although Stomoniakov's point that the final Soviet-Polish agreement differed greatly from the initial Polish ideas was not too far from reality, he thought the only thing the ambassador should say in regard to the Soviet attitude to the Lithuanian-Polish knot was that it "remained the same as before"<sup>95</sup>. The undeniable change in the Soviet attitude could hardly be explained by the suggestion that Moscow wished to profit from further exacerbation of the conflict between Warsaw and Kaunas. Stomoniakov advised Lithuania's envoy on April 29, to avoid actions which might damage her relations "either with Germany or with Poland"<sup>96</sup>. There are, therefore, reasons to suppose that the Russian withdrawal of support for Lithuania in her dispute with Poland over Wilno resulted primarily from the desire to reach a political agreement with the Poles. It might even be that the USSR's concession was not merely the price she ultimately had to pay for the extending her pact with Poland.

Immediately after his return from Moscow with Beck, Wladyslaw Besterman, an *Iskra* correspondent, informed a staff member of the American Embassy in Poland that in the course of Litvinov and Beck's discussion of the Baltic project, the minister had asked his interlocutor

"how Poland could find it possible to enter into an agreement for the purpose of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of a group of [s]tates one of which (Lithuania), has steadfastly refused to accept officially the present frontier with Poland. Colonel Beck supplemented this query with a statement to the effect that Poland could enter into such an agreement only upon the conditions that the existing Polish-Lithuanian frontier is recognized by Lithuania, and that diplomatic relations between the two countries are established. Thereupon, according to Mr. Besterman, Mr. Litvinov undertook that the Soviet Government would act as mediator between Poland and Lithuania in the matter. The Soviet Government is to bring pressure to bear upon Lithuania, and the Soviet Minister at Kaunas soon is to be instructed to make representations [to this effect]... "<sup>97</sup>.

It might be somewhat imprudent to reexamine the whole story of Soviet-Polish relations in the winter and spring months of 1934 in light of this evidence<sup>98</sup> which contradicts the bulk of sources, but the temptation is great. Not only could it reveal one of Poland's motives for supporting the idea of a Baltic declaration and help to clarify and reassess obscure maneuvers of both sides in

March and April 1934. Besterman's report, which was understood to be based on his conversations with Beck, also implies that Litvinov hid this key agreement – however vague may have been his promise to the Poles – from his superiors and submitted to them a falsified version of the negotiations with the Polish minister. Allegedly, the Foreign Commissar found only half-hearted support for the course he wanted to pursue in exchanges with the Poles. This account further implies that disappointed with Soviet withdrawal from a *démarche* in Kaunas the Polish leaders decided to drop the issue of Soviet-Polish guarantees to the Baltic completely and to introduce the revision of Chicherin's note into their negotiations with Moscow about the extension of the non-aggression pact.

The chances for a combined Polish-Soviet action in Kaunas were unusually high in the spring of 1934 and the opinion that an agreement in this regard had been reached between Litvinov and Beck in Moscow was shared by some Baltic diplomats. Shortly before the Soviet-Polish Final Protocol was signed, the Estonian Assistant Foreign Minister referring the conversation with the American *chargé d'affaires* to the Soviet-German memoranda, expressed his belief

"that the latest Soviet venture into the field of Baltic neutrality had for its object the bringing of pressure to bear upon Lithuania. In recent conversations between Litvinov and M. Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, the former had agreed to interest himself in the situation of the Vilna question. Now that Germany had rejected a Baltic neutrality proposal, the Soviets were in a good position to approach Lithuania on the subject of conciliation with Poland. The situation was now such that mention might be made of an actual German menace to the Baltic States in general and to Lithuania in particular because of its exposed position"<sup>99</sup>.

Whether or not "Besterman's story" represents an accurate account of an actual episode in the negotiations in Moscow, the Soviet agreement to meet Poland's demands concerning the Wilno problem indicated that recent Polish-Soviet exchanges on this issue – the salient points of which were Radek's generous offers in July and 'Duo's remarks about Lithuania's importance in German charts in September 1933 – were not completely forgotten and might reappear on a future agenda.

The opinion that the main reason why this was not the case in spring of 1934 was Stalin's attitude, might be again substantiated by referring to his continuing opposition to Litvinov's efforts to revitalize bilateral cooperation with Poland. At the tensest moment of the negotiations with Lukaszewicz, in early April, the Foreign Commissar had forwarded to the Politburo a request for its approval of two proposals. First, Litvinov asked for permission to allow Polish sportsmen to undertake a project of the motorcycle-bicycle race from Warsaw to Moscow. The inter-ministerial commission, which included representatives of the War Commissariat and the OGPU, had no serious objections to realization of this project<sup>100</sup>. However, the Politburo's consideration of this request was postponed

until June<sup>101</sup>. The second proposal dealt with the Polish Government's invitation to Soviet scientists to take part in the International Geographical Congress, which was to be held in Warsaw in the summer. Litvinov reminded his superiors about it in May, but the request was shelved<sup>102</sup>.

Despite Stalin's negative reaction to these and previous initiatives by the Narkomindel, Litvinov believed that the completion of thorny negotiations concerning the extension of the non-aggression pact would eliminate a stumbling block in the bilateral contacts. On May 13, after friendly conversation with the Polish ambassador<sup>103</sup>, the Commissar presented the Kremlin with far-reaching proposals, which he justified with familiar argumentation:

"The NKID considers it purposeful, after the prolongation of the pact, to examine and take decisions concerning all concrete questions of political, economic, and cultural relations, which were raised during the past year by the Polish government or by the NKID and which have not yet been resolved. The greatest result of our policy of *rapprochement* [with Poland] for the last two years was the undeniably decisive improvement [perelom] in relation to the USSR on the part of the Polish society [... ] It is quite obvious that we are not interested in demobilization of the Polish society's interest in the USSR and, on the contrary, [that we] must, in planned manner and systematically, seek further [improvement] in order to win over and deepen sympathies in Poland for the *rapprochement* with the USSR, thus making it more difficult [for the Polish government] to pursue [its] policy of *rapprochement* with Germany".

The list of proposals was impressive; it included military exchange visits (which the Polish ambassador reminded Litvinov about on May 13), conclusion of the commercial treaty, a trip by a delegation of "our cultural figures to Poland" (possibly, headed by Russian Commissar for Education, A. Bubnov, "the proposal [had been] made by Lukasiewicz more than once"), visits by Soviet historians and geographers to Poland and a study trip of students and professors of the Krakow Ore Academy to the USSR, and exchange visits by Polish and Soviet economists. To these Polish initiatives, Litvinov added the VOKS's proposals to organize several Soviet cultural exhibitions in Poland and reiterated his suggestions concerning a joint study of Polish historical documents in the Soviet archives. The last paragraph read: "Besides the above mentioned questions, there remains the issue of concluding the air convention, which interests Poland most"<sup>104</sup>.

In fact, while presenting his ideas in very innocuous terms, the Foreign Commissar stressed to Stalin the need to revive the program of close cooperation, which had been completed in the NKID by January 20, before the conclusion of the Polish-German agreement. Litvinov evidently believed the mid-1933 decision to seek an all-round *rapprochement* with Poland must remain in force,

and, at least in the field of the bilateral relations, not be limited to merely outward demonstrations of friendliness between neighbors.

Litvinov's sensitivity to the Polish point of view and his attempts to find compromise solutions in order to prevent the collapse of the already damaged Soviet-Polish relations can provide the key to Soviet European security designs of which he was the main author.

Notes to chapter 5

1. P. S. Wandycz. *Op. cit.*, 325.
2. See S. Mackiewicz (Cat). *Historia Polski od 11 listopada 1918 r. do 17 września 1939 r.* L., 1941, 284-285.
3. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 17, folder 164, f. 3, p. 148.
4. DGFP: 2, 525.
5. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 17, folder 165, f. 8, p. 25.
6. DVP: 17, 756, 876.
7. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 99, f. 61, p. 9.
8. DiM: 6, Nos 102, 103.
9. DGFP: 2, 459.
10. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 168, f. 7, p. 295.
11. DiM: 6, No 103; AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 5, p. 43.
12. From the Polish point of view, I. Matuszewski wrote in *Gazeta Polska* on February 12, 1934, "the visit of Minister Beck to Moscow is a confirmation of the good relations that exist between Poland and the Soviet Russia, based on mutual respect. It is to be hoped that on this basis they will become even closer." The editorial reflected a shift in emphasis in the official Polish position toward reciprocity and bilateral contacts. A week earlier in his report before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate, J. Beck was somewhat less reticent on international issues when he stressed that the non-aggression pact and London convention with the USSR "ha[d] created an atmosphere in which it became possible to establish a diminution of contradictory political tendencies in other spheres" and "to make clear our harmony of views on many matters." (J. Beck. *Przemówienia, deklaracji, wywiady*, Warszawa, 1938, 98).
13. J. Beck. *Final Report*, 51; R. Debicki. *Op. cit.*, 75, 76. Cf. Prince J. Radziwill in the *Czas*, 20. 02. 1934.
14. In the conversation with Litvinov and Stomoniakov on February 9 the Polish envoy, "speaking in complete privacy", complained about biased comments in the press regarding the Polish-German agreement: "What this is being done for? Do these people want to create the impression that Poland has made a serious mistake and Beck is going to Moscow to give explanations? If so, we must know that he is coming not for

explanations and does not intend to give any explanations" (AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 4, pp. 76-77).

15. J. Beck. *Op. cit.*, 53; Jadwiga Beck. *Kiedy była Ekscelecja*. Warszawa, 1991, 27.

16. *Kurier Poranny*, 20. 02. 1934.

17. DDF: 5, 886.

18. J. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, Febr. 20, 1934, SDNA 760c. 61/670. Wladyslaw Besterman, political correspondent of the ISKRA agency, shared this information with an American diplomat in Warsaw. See also P. Starzeński. *Trzy lata z Beckiem*. L., 1972, 40.

19. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 6, p. 92.

20. *Gazeta Polska*, 14. 03. 1934. The NKID chiefs thought such Soviet statements should be kept in secret. Responding to Miedziński's revelations of Soviet duplicity, Stomoniakov, in a letter to the Warsaw Legation, did not deny that this was the correct account of what had really happened in Moscow. His irritation took another form: "Miedziński's statement in the Sejm (and especially its form) that Beck was officially congratulated in Moscow upon conclusion of the Polish-German pact is notable for its unusual impudence, – however, we consider it purposeless to deny it" (AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 121).

21. J. Beck. *Op. cit.*, 134. The minister referred to Litvinov as "our notorious enemy" (*ibid.*, 168). The degree to which Beck's anti-Semitism affected his perception of Soviet foreign policy might be demonstrated by his comment on Litvinov's resignation in May 1939. Even after the September catastrophe, he believed that Litvinov's dismissal had created chances for a more benevolent Soviet attitude to Poland, because earlier it had been influenced by Litwak's "psychological complex" (*ibid.*, 190). Beck explicitly preferred Galician Jews, who were more familiar with Polish culture and fluent in the language. Carl Sobelson-Radek, who was one of them, missed no occasion to remind the Poles of this. Meeting Jadwiga Beck at the Moscow railway station, he asked in a loud whisper: "Why do you speak French? We are all Polish Jews here [in Moscow]" (In the original the first phrase is in Russian, the second in Polish. Jadwiga Beck. *Op. cit.*, 23).

22. J. Beck. *Op. cit.*, 52.

23. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167, f. 8, p. 85.

24. *Ibid.*, f. 7, p. 263. "Nothing reminded protocol formalities. Noise, loud laugh, cordial mood, without any concern ... but, 'for appearance'," the minister's wife later wrote about the reception (Jadwiga Beck. *Op. cit.*, 24). Józef Beck noted: "At Voroshilov's luncheon, Litvinov was sitting as if on burning coal and did not appreciate my remark that soldiers were also a kind of international brotherhood having full solidarity between them" (J. Beck. *Op. cit.*, 52).

25. DVP: 17, 154.

26. *Ibid.*, 138.

27. DVP: 17, 139-140.

28. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 142.
29. J. Haslam. *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-1933*, 15, 17.
30. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 135.
31. See the excellent first-hand account by L. Fisher of the controversy between the NKID and the leaders of the Politburo following the rupture of Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations and assassination of the Soviet envoy in Warsaw. "Pilsudski is war," Litvinov wrote, only to establish after ceding this point to Stalin that Poland would hardly invade the Soviet Union (M. Tanin. [M. M. Litvinov] *Desiat' let vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 196-197, 202-204). Lois Fisher concludes that, "while seeming, therefore, to give importance to the official Kremlin view of impending war, Litvinov refuted it" (L. Fisher. *Russia's Road*, 171-172).
32. J. Degras (ed). *Op. cit.*, v. 3, 75.
33. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 135. Stomoniakov also spoke against any Soviet *rapprochement* with Danzig authorities and the invitation of H. Raushning to the USSR (Ibid, p. 137).
34. DDF: 5, 828. In a similar way the visit of the Polish minister was presented by Dvoglevski in his conversation with Bargeton (Ibid, 835).
35. DDF: 5, 349, 660, 679;6, 263.
36. See also: DBFP: 6, No 167; L. Radice. *Op. cit.*, 31-32.
37. DDF: 5, 815.
38. R. Young. *Op. cit.*, 64; R. Young. *Power and Pleasure: Louis Barthou and the Third Republic*. Montreal etc, 1991, 208-211.
39. L. Radice. *Op. cit.*, 30.
40. After a "heavy day of interviews" with Hitler, Neurath and Bulow on February 20, A. Eden wrote to J. Simon, "of one thing I am confident, the new Germany of Hitler and Goebels [sic] is to be preferred to the old of Bulow" (D. Carlton. *Anthony Eden: A Biography*. L., 1981, 45).
41. DDF: 2, 672-673; P. S. Wandycz. *Op. cit.*, 295.
42. DDF: 5, 815.
43. The Politburo resolution No 69/45 of March 26, 1934.
44. DGFP: 1, 842.
45. AVP RF: 082, inv. 16, folder 71, f. 2, p. 36.
46. Ibid, inv. 71, folder 71, f. 2, p. 36.
47. In 1933, 67 Polish works of fiction and science were translated abroad and 567 translations from foreign languages appeared in the USSR. Of the Soviet publications only one was by a Polish author (K. Malak. *Op. cit.*, 230).
48. For more details see: Ibid, 246, 247.

49. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 100, f. 65, p. 9.
50. Cf. L. Radice. *Op. cit.*, 30-31.
51. DVP: 17, No 53; J. Degras (ed). *Op. cit.*, 75.
52. DiM: 6, No 110.
53. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 17, folder 167, f. 2, p. 126-127. Nothing in the Soviet documents indicates that the NKID took into account, as a possible reason for postponement of the Polish reply, the severe influenza with which Beck had paid for his visit to Moscow (Jadwiga Beck. *Op. cit.*, 28).
54. *Ibid.*, folder 168, f. 7, pp. 260-261.
55. *Ibid.*, folder 167a, f. 7, pp. 120-121.
56. The text of Litvinov's letter of 16 March 1934 No 9608/L is not available. The Foreign Commissar mentioned it in his note to the Kremlin later (AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder. 99, f. 61, p. 70).
57. J. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, Warsaw, Febr. 20, 1934, SDNA, 760c. 61/670.
58. It is highly possible that Foreign Commissar did not limit himself to the issue of trade treaty.
59. DDF: 6, 81, 436. E. Konits mentioned that "solution of some concrete questions [of the Soviet-Polish bilateral cooperation] is delayed by the illness of M. M. [Litvinov]" (AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 15).
60. DDF: 6, 431. According to the information received by American Embassy from a Lithuanian colleague in Moscow, the Soviet approach to the three Baltic States was "presumably a counter *manoeuvre* which kills two birds with one stone; it deprives Poland at once of any convincing pretext for not extending her non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and considerably negates the possibility of the Baltic States being eventually drawn into an anti-Soviet bloc" (W. Bullitt to the Secretary of State, Moscow, April 3, 1934, SDNA: 761. 0012(A)/66).
61. DVP: 17, 280, 787. The full text of the draft protocol was not published.
62. J. Hochman refers to it as a "guarantee pact for the Baltic region" (*Op. cit.*, 96). "Behind this move lay more than a hint of condominium", according to J. Haslam (*Op. cit.*, 36). Both authors base their brief account on Nadolny's dispatches to the *Auswärtige Amt*. Cf. H. Phillips. *Op. cit.*, 142; A. Skrzypek. *Nie spełniony sojusz? Stosunki sowiecko-niemiecki. 1917-1941*. Warszawa, 1992, 69.
63. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 111.
64. *Bolshevik*, No 4, 1935, 91. The article was signed by the A. Yerusalimski, a prominent historian of German imperialism, who was close to party upper echelons. In 1941, Stalin personally edited Yerusalimski's introduction to Bismark's memoirs.
- This statement was in telling contrast with vehement official denials that an idea of guaranteeing borders or security of the Baltic states could arise out of the draft protocol (J. Degras (ed.). *Op. cit.*, 81).

65. RTsKhIDNI: 17, inv. 3, f. 941, p. 2.

66. It should be noted, however, that the same formula had been adopted in Litvinov's draft of the Baltic declaration of December 19, 1933.

67. DGFP: 2, Nos 362, 364. Krestinski's record of the conversation confirms that the discussion involved main problems of the Soviet-German relations (DVP: 17, No 95). Neurath, envious of Nadolny and aloof to his zealous efforts to revive Soviet-German cooperation, gave less thought to inner conflicts in the Soviet leadership. He did not excluded a possibility that "the proposal was not made solely to place us in an embarrassing position, but saw no necessity for accepting it (DGFP: 2, No 390).

68. *Ibid.*, 903; DGFP: 3, 683.

69. In the original "risk i strakh (fear)" (AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 110). See also Litvinov's telegram to Rosenberg, April 28, 1934 (DVP: 17, 306).

70. Bülow, favoring "a more positive policy towards Russia", on this occasion tried to convince his superiors of the importance of the USSR — not Poland — securing Germany's flank. Neurath, however, refused to submit his memorandum to the Chancellor (M. Messerschmidt. *Op. cit.*, 612).

71. DVP: 17, 286.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Letter from Litvinov to Brodovski, 17 April, 1934 (AVP RF: 082, inv. 17, folder 77, f. 6, p. 102). See also: J. Haslam. *Op. cit.*, 37; H. Phillips. *Op. cit.*, 142.

74. DVP: 17, 204.

75. See note 42.

76. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 99, f. 61, p. 51.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

78. DDF: 6, 432.

79. DiM: 6, No 120.

80. W. Bullitt to the Secretary of State, tel., Moscow, April 2, 1934, April 3, 1934, SDNA: 761. 0012(A)/63, 67.

81. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 5, p. 10.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

84. DVP: 17, 234.

85. W. Bullitt to the Secretary of State, tel., Moscow, April 5, 1934, SDNA: 761. 0012(A)/65. See also editorial in *Izvestia*, 5. 04. 34. For the full text of Litvinov's speech, see J. Degras (ed). *Op. cit.*, 78-79.

86. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 5, pp. 11-12.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

88. Ibid, pp. 8-10.
89. L. Shapiro. (ed) *Op. cit.*, 102.
90. Ibid, 103.
91. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 2, p. 132.
92. RGVA: 37977, inv. 5s, f. 338, p. 1.
93. AVP RF: 0122, inv. 18, folder 167a, f. 4, pp. 43-44.
94. Ibid, inv. 17, folder 55, f. 11, pp. 94-95.
95. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 99, f. 61, p. 66. A similar line of argumentation was adopted by the Soviet press. The Soviet envoy to Kaunas, Mikhail Karski, had to "muster all his ingenuity to explain the final clause of the protocol". Not only did he deny that it meant the withdrawal of support from Lithuania, but "tried to show that any detrimental effect which it might have on Lithuania was more than made up in favor of this country by the fact that the protocol referred to a territorial question". Karski interpreted this term as "an official admission on the part of Poland" that such a problem did exist. The Lithuanian government preferred not to express its scepticism over Soviet explanations (M. L. Stafford to the Secretary of State, Kaunas, May 23, 1934, SDNA: 760c. 6111/69).
96. AVP RF: 082, inv. 17, folder 77, f. 6, p. 118. The same note was voiced by the editorial in *Pravda*, 6 May, 1934: "The Soviet government confirmed its old point of view, which has found expression in various documents, that in its opinion disputable territorial questions should be settled by agreement between the parties. It goes without saying that the Soviet government will welcome the amicable solution of the existing territorial dispute between Poland and Lithuania" (Cited in X. J. Eudin. *Op. cit.*, No 121).
97. J. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, Warsaw, Febr. 20, 1934, SDNA: 760c. 61/670. See also J. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, Warsaw, Jan. 2, 1935, SDNA: 760c. 60m15/260.
98. John Cudahy, a cautious and penetrating observer, gave it full credence. In addition, Besterman's account was basically confirmed a month later by a political correspondent of the PAT agency (His name was not mentioned in the dispatch. If it was Tadeusz Katelbach, the unofficial agent of the Polish government in Kaunas in 1933-1937 and a man in personal touch with Pilsudski, this evidence undoubtedly deserves special attention). In conversation with an American diplomat this unnamed correspondent enlightened him on the implications for the meeting between the Marshal and Count Zubov and for Beck's statement to the *Iskra* agency, March 23. France, he said then, "is employing its good offices with the Lithuanian government to this end [mutual diplomatic recognition], and he confirmed what I previously have reported to the Department, i. e. that Mr. Litvinov informed Colonel Beck when the latter visited Moscow last February that the Soviet Government would take in Kaunas similar action" (J. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, Warsaw, March 27, 1934, SDNA: 760c. 60m/386).
99. H. E. Carlson to the Secretary of State, Tallinn, April 27, 1934, SDNA: 761. 62/303.
100. It gave its consent, conditional upon some alterations in the projected route from the western Soviet border to Moscow (RGVA: 37977s, inv. 5s, f. 335, p. 106).

101. The content of the resolution is unknown. The project was not realized.

102. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 99, f. 61, p. 72. The Politburo resolution of 14 April sanctioned the dissolution of the Soviet-Polish mixed commission, which for a decade had been working over return of Polish relics to the country. Submitting this routine issue for the approval indicated nothing else than the extreme caution on the part of the Russian Federation's Commissar for Education, A. Bubnov (See his minute on Stomoniakov's letter, March 29, 1934 (Ibid, folder 100, f. 64, p. 3).

103. DVP: 17, No 166.

104. AVP RF: 05, inv. 14, folder 61, pp. 69-72. The address and the distribution note were clipped off the copy of Litvinov's letter. The scope and importance of its content reveals as unlikely the supposition that it could have been addressed to the Chairman of the Sovnarkom V. Molotov or to the leading Secretary of the Orgburo L. Kaganovich.