



## **Przemówienie ministra spraw zagranicznych RP Józefa Becka w Sejmie - Tekst angielski**

High Chamber! The session of the Parliament provides me with an opportunity of filling in some gaps which have occurred in my work of recent months. The course of international events might perhaps justify more statements by a Foreign Minister than my single exposé in the Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs. On the other hand it was precisely that swift development of events that prompted me to postpone a public declaration until such time as the principal problems of our foreign policy had taken on a more definite form. The consequences of the weakening of collective international institutions and of a complete change in the method of intercourse between nations, which I have reported on several occasions in the Houses<sup>1</sup>, caused many new problems to arise in different parts of the world. That process and its results have in recent months reached the borders of Poland. A very general definition of these phenomena may be given by saying that relations between individual Powers have taken on a more individual character, with their own specific features. The general rules have been weakened. One nation simply speaks more and more directly to another. As far as we are concerned, very serious events have taken place. Our contact<sup>2</sup> with some Powers has become easier and more profound, while in some cases serious difficulties have arisen. Looking at things chronologically, I refer, in the first place, to our agreement<sup>3</sup> with the United Kingdom, with Great Britain. After repeated diplomatic contacts, designed to define the scope and object of our future relations, we reached on the occasion of my visit to London a direct agreement<sup>4</sup> based on the principle of mutual assistance in the event of a direct or indirect threat to the independence of one of our countries. The formula of the agreement is known to you from the declaration<sup>5</sup> of Mr Neville Chamberlain<sup>6</sup> of the 6th April, the text of which was drafted by mutual agreement and should be regarded as a pact concluded between the two Governments.

<sup>1</sup> In 1922-1939, the Polish parliament was made up of two houses: a lower house (the Sejm) and an upper house (the Senate).

<sup>2</sup> Beck was thinking first and foremost of Great Britain which had abandoned its policy of isolationism and appeasement.

<sup>3</sup> Beck was referring to the assurance of military assistance in the event of armed conflict with Germany given to Poland by the British government.

<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of April 1939, Beck conducted talks with the British government to work out the details of the assurance given a few days previously.

<sup>5</sup> One of the consequences of Beck's talks in London was the announcement, on 6 April 1939, of a decision recognising Britain's unilateral guarantee to Poland as mutually binding.

<sup>6</sup> Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940), British prime minister in 1937-1940.



I consider it my duty to add that the form and character of the comprehensive conversations held in London give a particular value to the agreement. I should like Polish public opinion to be aware that I found on the part of British statesmen not only a profound knowledge of the general political problems of Europe, but also such an attitude towards our country as permitted me to discuss all vital problems with frankness and confidence without any reservations or doubts. It was possible to establish rapidly the principles of Polish-British collaboration, first of all because we made it clear to each other that the intentions of both Governments coincide as regards fundamental European problems; certainly, neither Great Britain nor Poland have any aggressive intentions whatever, but they stand equally firmly in defence of certain basic principles of conduct in international life.

The parallel declarations of French political leaders confirm that it is agreed between Paris and Warsaw that the efficacy of our defence pact<sup>1</sup> not only cannot be adversely affected by changes in the international situation, but, on the contrary, that this agreement should constitute one of the most essential elements in the political structure of Europe. The Polish-British Agreement has been employed by the Chancellor of the German Reich<sup>2</sup> as the pretext for unilaterally declaring non-existent the agreement<sup>3</sup> which the Chancellor of the Reich concluded with us in 1934.

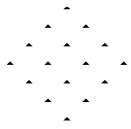
Before passing to the present stage of this matter, allow me to sketch a brief historical outline.

The fact that I had the honour actively to participate in the conclusion and execution of that pact imposes on me the duty of analysing it. The pact of 1934 was a great event in 1934. It was an attempt to improve the course of history as between two great nations, an attempt to escape from the unwholesome atmosphere of daily discord and wider hostile intentions, to rise above the animosity which had accumulated for centuries, and to create deep foundations of mutual respect. An endeavour to oppose evil is always the best form of political activity.

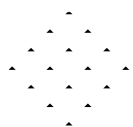
<sup>1</sup> Poland and France were bound by a political and military alliance since 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Hitler.

<sup>3</sup> The German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact was signed in Berlin on 26 January 1934.



The policy of Poland proved our respect for that principle in the most critical moments of recent times. From this point of view, Gentlemen, the breaking off of that pact is not an insignificant matter. However, every treaty is worth as much as the consequences which follow it. And if the policy and conduct of the other party diverges from the principles of the pact, we have no reason for mourning its slackening or dissolution. The Polish-German Pact of 1934 was a treaty of mutual respect and good neighbourly relations, and as such it contributed a positive value to the life of our country, of Germany, and of the whole of Europe. But since there has appeared a tendency to interpret it as limiting the freedom of our policy, or as a ground for demanding from us unilateral concessions contrary to our vital interests, it has lost its real character. Let us now pass to the present situation. The German Reich has taken the mere fact of the Polish-British understanding as a motive for the breaking off of the pact of 1934. Various legal objections were raised on the German side. I will take the liberty of referring jurists to the text of our reply to the German memorandum, which will be handed to-day to the German Government. I will not detain you any longer on the diplomatic form of this event, but one of its aspects has a special significance. The Reich Government, as appears from the text of the German memorandum, made its decision on the strength of press reports, without consulting the views of either the British or the Polish Government as to the character of the agreement concluded. It would not have been difficult to do so, for immediately on my return from London I expressed my readiness to receive the German Ambassador, who has hitherto not availed himself of the opportunity.



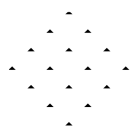
Why is this circumstance important? Even for the simplest understanding it is clear that neither the character nor the purpose and scope of the agreement influenced this decision, but merely the fact that such an agreement had been concluded. And this in turn is important for an appreciation of the objects of German policy, since if, contrary to previous declarations, the Government of the Reich interpreted the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression of 1934 as intended to isolate Poland and to prevent the normal friendly collaboration of our country with Western Powers, we ourselves should always have rejected such an interpretation. To make a proper estimate of the situation, we should first of all ask the question, what is the real object of all this? Without that question and our reply, we cannot properly appreciate the character of German statements with regard to matters of concern to Poland. I have already referred to our attitude towards the West. There remains the question of the German proposals as to the future of the Free City of Danzig, the communication of the Reich with East Prussia through our province of Pomorze, and the further subjects raised as of common interest to Poland and Germany. Let us, therefore, investigate these problems in turn.

As to Danzig, first some general remarks. The Free City of Danzig<sup>1</sup> was not invented by the Treaty of Versailles. It has existed for many centuries as the result – to speak accurately, and rejecting the emotional factor – of the positive interplay of Polish and German interests. The German merchants of Danzig<sup>2</sup> ensured the development and prosperity of that city, thanks to the overseas trade of Poland. Not only the development, but the very *raison d'être* of the city has been due to the formerly decisive fact of its situation at the mouth of our only great river, and to-day to its position on the main waterway and railway line connecting us with the Baltic. This is a truth which no new formulae can obliterate. The population of Danzig is to-day predominantly German, but its livelihood and prosperity depend on the economic potential of Poland<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Formally, the Free City of Danzig had been established under the Treaty of Versailles as an independent city state under the protection of the League of Nations. Its creation was supposed to be a compromise between the Germans (making up the majority of the population of Danzig and the surrounding area) and the Poles (who needed access to a seaport). The Free City of Danzig was part of the Polish customs area but otherwise enjoyed political and economic independence.

<sup>2</sup> Gdańsk (Danzig) was one of the cities of the nascent Polish state in the tenth century. Its state affiliation shifted over the course of the following centuries, which, however, did not impact its development. In the mid-fifteenth century Gdańsk returned to Poland and remained part of it until 1793. It then became one of the most important ports on the Baltic and the main gateway for Polish grain exports to Western Europe. At the end of the eighteenth century, it became part of Prussia, becoming – along with the latter – part of the German Empire in the 1870s.

<sup>3</sup> The geographical location of Danzig made it one of Poland's main (aside from Gdynia) windows onto the world. The provincial seaport was much less important from the vantage point of Germany.



What conclusions have we drawn from this fact? We have stood and stand firmly on the ground of the rights and interests of our sea-borne trade and our maritime policy in Danzig. While seeking reasonable and conciliatory solutions, we have purposely not endeavoured to exert any pressure on the free national, ideological and cultural development of the German majority in the Free City.

I shall not prolong this speech by quoting examples. They are sufficiently well-known to all who have been in any way concerned with the question. But when, after repeated statements by German statesmen, who had respected our standpoint and expressed the view that “this provincial town will not be the object of a conflict between Poland and Germany”, I hear a demand for the annexation of Danzig to the Reich, when I receive no reply to our proposal of the 26th March for a joint guarantee of the existence and rights of the Free City<sup>1</sup>, and subsequently I learn that this has been regarded as a rejection of negotiations – I have to ask myself, what is the real object of all this? Is it the freedom of the German population of Danzig, which is not threatened, or a matter of prestige – or is it a matter of barring Poland from the Baltic, from which Poland will not allow herself to be barred?

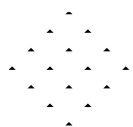
The same considerations apply to communication across our province of Pomorze. I insist on the term “province of Pomorze”. The word “corridor”<sup>2</sup> is an artificial invention, for this is an ancient Polish territory with an insignificant percentage of German colonists.

We have given the German Reich all railway facilities, we have allowed its citizens to travel without customs or passport formalities from the Reich to East Prussia. We have suggested the extension of similar facilities to road traffic.

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<sup>1</sup> Poland had put forward a proposal for Germany and Poland to take over joint oversight of the Free City from the League of Nations.

<sup>2</sup> The Polish province of Pomerania (Pol. Pomorze) extended all the way to the Baltic Sea, bordering German territory to the east and west. This is why German politicians frequently used the derogatory term “Polish corridor” to refer to the Polish strip dividing the German territories. The word “corridor” was used to designate a fragment of territory artificially carved off from Germany to allow Poland to communicate with the coast. This interpretation was untrue, as Poles made up the majority of the population of the province of Pomerania.



And here again the question arises – what is the real object of it all?

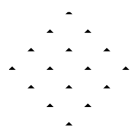
We have no interest in obstructing German citizens in their communication with their eastern province. But we have, on the other hand, no reason whatever to restrict our sovereignty on our own territory.

On the first and second points, i.e., the question of the future of Danzig and of communication across Pomorze, it is still a matter of unilateral concessions which the Government of the Reich appear to be demanding from us. A self-respecting nation does not make unilateral concessions. Where, then, is the reciprocity? It appears somewhat vague in the German proposals. The Chancellor of the Reich mentioned in his speech a triple condominium in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. I am obliged to state that I heard this proposal for the first time in the Chancellor's speech of the 28th April. In certain previous conversations allusions were merely made to the effect that in the event of a general agreement the question of Slovakia could be discussed. We did not attempt to go further with such conversations, since it is not our custom to bargain with the interests of others. Similarly, the proposal for a prolongation of the pact of non-aggression for twenty-five years was also not advanced in any concrete form in any of the recent conversations. Here also unofficial hints were made, emanating, it is true, from prominent representatives of the Reich Government. But in such conversations various other hints were made which extended much further than the subjects under discussion. I reserve the right to return to this matter if necessary.

In his speech the Chancellor of the Reich proposes, as a concession on his part, the recognition and definite acceptance of the present frontier between Poland and Germany. I must point out that this would have been a question of recognising what is *de jure* and *de facto* our indisputable property. Consequently, this proposal likewise cannot affect my contention that the German desiderata regarding Danzig and a motor road constitute unilateral demands.

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<sup>1</sup> After the Germans liquidated Czechoslovakia in March 1939, a Slovak state, dependent on the Third Reich, was established. In his speech from 28 April 1939, Hitler spoke of a joint German-Polish-Hungarian guarantee of the independence of Slovakia.



In the light of these explanations, the House will rightly expect from me an answer to the last passage of the German memorandum, which says: "Should the Polish Government attach importance to a new settlement of Polish-German relations by means of a treaty, the German Government are prepared to do this." It appears to me that I have already made clear our attitude, but for the sake of order I will make a resume.

The motive for concluding such an agreement would be the word "peace", which the Chancellor emphasised in his speech.

Peace is certainly the object of the difficult and intensive work of Polish diplomacy. Two conditions are necessary for this word to be of real value: (1) peaceful intentions, (2) peaceful methods of procedure. If the Government of the Reich is really guided by those two pre-conditions in relation to this country, then all conversations, provided, of course, that they respect the principles I have already enumerated, are possible. If such conversations took place, the Polish Government will, according to their custom, approach the problem objectively, having regard to the experience of recent times, but without withholding their utmost goodwill.

Peace is a valuable and desirable thing. Our generation, which has shed its blood in several wars, surely deserves a period of peace. But peace, like almost everything in this world, has its price, high but definable. We in Poland do not recognize the conception of "peace at any price". There is only one thing in the life of men, nations and States which is without price, and that is honour. Translated © by Jerzy Giebułtowski