

Original article

Military aspects in Polish-Czechoslovak confederation plans during World War II

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ABSTRACT

The defeat of Poland in September 1939 prompted General Władysław Sikorski, appointed Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, to take steps to implement his earlier concept of a close relationship between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The aim of the project undertaken in Sikorski's talks with Edward Beneš was to create a strong entity capable of countering the German and Soviet threats in the future. The implementation of such a plan, assuming the future expansion of the union to include other countries in the region, would provide a real opportunity to change the then geopolitical system in Central and Eastern Europe. The Sikorski-Beneš talks took place from the autumn of 1939 to the spring of 1943, when the Czechoslovak side adopted the pro-Soviet option in its policy and, in practice, withdrew from joint preparatory work to establish the Confederation Union. One of the main areas taken up during the Polish-Czechoslovak talks was the issue of shared defense policy. It is most broadly presented in two documents: in the *Principles of the Constitutional Act of the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation* prepared by the Polish side and in the Czechoslovak *Basic Principles of the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation*.

KEYWORDS

Poland, Czechoslovakia, Zaolzie, Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, World War II



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Introduction

During the Second World War, the Polish authorities in exile and the emigration authorities of Czechoslovakia attempted to repair the existing relations between them, bring about rapprochement, and establish a confederal relationship. Talks and work on this project were started by the Prime Minister of the Polish government, Maj. Gen. Władysław Sikorski, and Edward Beneš in autumn 1939 in Paris, and after the fall of France, they were continued in London. The military aspects are undoubtedly one of the most critical aspects of the planned cooperation. Too significant discrepancies in the issue of future rapprochement,

above all the Czechoslovak authorities' support in favor of the Soviet option, resulted in them failing.

The establishment of the Confederate Union between Poland and Czechoslovakia could seriously change the geopolitical system in post-war Europe. The fundamental Polish document, adopted as the basis for discussions with the Czechoslovak side, was the *Principles of the Constitutional Act of the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation* prepared in mid-1941. Military aspects played an essential role in this document. The article aims to present the historical background of the Polish-Czechoslovak talks on the Confederate Union, discuss the primary content of the *Principles of the Constitutional Act...*, and proposals for defense cooperation and the construction of joint military structures.

In the period from 1918 to 1939, many bad things happened in mutual Polish-Czechoslovak relations, ranging from the "Seven-Day" War to the Polish Armed Forces' Zaolzie operation in 1938. It intensified mutual distrust and aversion. The Zaolzie conflict seriously poisoned Polish-Czechoslovak relations. In the years 1938-1939, the two countries in conflict suffered a defeat in the confrontation with the Third Reich. In this situation, it seemed natural that bearing in mind this dramatic misfortune, Poland's and Czechoslovakia's authorities would draw rational conclusions and take steps towards neighborly rapprochement and cooperation.

The history of the talks

Władysław Sikorski, appointed on September 30, 1939, as the Prime Minister of the Polish government, presenting the main political directions and goals of his cabinet, strongly emphasized the need to rebuild relations in Central and Eastern Europe, so that they would provide the countries of the region with a guarantee of independence. Sikorski believed that the states of this region should have a shared potential that would create a chance to oppose Germany and the Soviet Union, which would enable them to block the German-Soviet alliance in the future [1, p. 54].

The first step to establish threads aimed at repairing Polish-Czechoslovak relations and building new allied relationships was the meeting of Prime Minister Sikorski with Edward Beneš, then only a former president-in-exile. It took place on October 12 or 13, 1939, in Paris [2, p. 65; 3, p. 17]. Later, these politicians talked in November that year in London. At that time, from November 13, E. Beneš was representing the Czechoslovak National Committee. In the following months, the talks were continued by the Polish ambassador in London, Edward Raczyński, and a group of Czechoslovak politicians in exile.

In July 1940, the Czechoslovak National Committee was recognized as the official government of Czechoslovakia. Father Jan Šrámek became the Prime Minister and Edward Beneš, the President. From that moment on, the Polish-Czechoslovak talks took on a different dimension. On October 17, 1940, during a dinner hosted by Edward Beneš for General Sikorski and Ministers Stanisław Kot and Stanisław Stroński, the President of Czechoslovakia presented an initial vision of the Polish-Czechoslovak confederation. According to this concept, these were to be two independent states, forming a federation on an economic basis connected by a customs union, and a single currency was to apply, both states were to have independent armed forces with a joint general staff, their own parliaments but a shared foreign policy. Moreover, a Standing Committee would be established, consisting of 8 or 10 members with

the rank of ministers (prime ministers, foreign ministers, military ministers, and trade ministers [2, p. 89].

A significant impulse from the Czechoslovak side to start talks on the future union between Poland and Czechoslovakia was the memorandum of E. Beneš to Prime Minister Sikorski of November 1, 1940. It was a specific development of the vision presented by Beneš during the dinner, as mentioned above, with Sikorski. Beneš emphasized that the confederation could not limit the sovereignty of both countries in the political field, by which he understood the functioning of independent governments, parliaments, and armed forces. The relationship would be based mainly on economic cooperation, a customs union, a shared monetary system, a shared financial policy, and protectionism in foreign trade. President Beneš spoke about the need to standardize armaments and weapons production, the central management of road, air, and rail transport. He also proposed creating a special council composed of prime ministers, foreign ministers, treasury ministers, and communication ministers, which would be an organ coordinating the main directions of foreign, defense, and trade policy [2, p. 87].

A critical topic of Sikorski's talks with Beneš in the aspect of the future union of both countries was the Soviet thread, namely the relationships between Poland and Czechoslovakia with the USSR during and after the war. Beneš emphasized on many occasions that Czechoslovakia was not at war with the USSR and that he wanted the best possible relationship with Stalin. He also persuaded General Sikorski to do the same. The main difference in Beneš's and Sikorski's approach to relations with the USSR was that the former opted for an agreement with the USSR as soon as possible and encouraged Prime Minister Sikorski to follow him. He said many times "we cannot have the Russians against us" [Quoted after: 4, p. 186]. Eugeniusz Duraczyński rightly emphasizes that: "This last thought will become Beneš's political credo defining relations with the Poles" [5, p. 132]. In turn, Sikorski first sought to establish a union with Czechoslovakia, which would give him a more durable advantage in talks on future relationships with the USSR. In anticipating the further course of events, it can already be stated that the differences in the approach to matters related to the arrangement of relations with the USSR will have a significant impact on the fate of the Polish-Czechoslovak union project.

The formal step that started the Polish-Czechoslovak work on the future union was the declaration of the Polish and Czechoslovak governments of November 11, 1940, announced during the press conference of Minister Stanisław Stroński and the Czechoslovak foreign minister Hubert Ripka at the British Ministry of Information. We read in it: "Both Governments consider it necessary to solemnly declare now that Poland and Czechoslovakia, closing the period of old resentments and disputes once and for all and taking into account the commonality of their fundamental interests, are determined to join after the war ends as independent and sovereign states into a closer political and economic union that would become the basis of the new order of things in Central Europe and a guarantee of its durability" [6, p. 257]. Later in the declaration, the parties expressed their hope that other Central European countries would join the union in the future. That joint initiative was very well received by the Polish and Czechoslovak émigré communities in Great Britain and by the British authorities, which strongly supported this plan.

Principles of the Constitutional Act of the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation

On December 31, 1940, on the order of Prime Minister, W. Sikorski, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski convened a meeting of the Political Committee of Ministers with the task of developing conclusions for the meeting of the Council of Ministers on Polish-Czechoslovak cooperation [7]. At this meeting, K. Sosnkowski presented the finished draft of *Tasks and Working Methods of the Political Committee in the field of Polish-Czechoslovak issues* [8]. The task of the Political Committee of Ministers was to coordinate, define the general framework for the negotiations, and generally lead negotiations with the Czechoslovak government on future cooperation between the two countries. Outlining the general framework for Polish-Czechoslovak negotiations, the Committee was to answer two main questions: first: "how far can the Polish-Czechoslovak agreement go and what forms must it take"; second: "what difficulties stand in the way of achieving full cooperation and what are the limits of an acceptable compromise in individual issues" [8, p. 1]. The committee was to develop a negotiation program for ongoing cooperation with the Czechoslovak government. Such a program was to be prepared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, August Zaleski, and Ambassador Edward Raczyński. Ongoing cooperation was to develop in the following areas: foreign policy (the program in this area was to be prepared by E. Raczyński and A. Zaleski), military policy (A. Zaleski, E. Raczyński and the Chief of the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Brigadier General Tadeusz Klimecki), propaganda (A. Zaleski, E. Raczyński, Stanisław Stroński, the Minister of Information), and culture and education (A. Zaleski, E. Raczyński, Gen. Józef Haller and Stanisław Kot).

The result of twenty meetings of the Political Committee was a draft document adopted in mid-1941, which was called the *Principles of the Constitutional Act of the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation* [9]. The *Principles of the Constitutional Act...* are in three parts. The first one contains regulations concerning the creation of a union and admitting other states, and lists the areas falling within the scope of the competences of the future union. In the first point we read: "Poland and Czechoslovakia form a Union to which they delegate the exercise of some of their sovereign rights. Other Central and Eastern European countries may belong to the Confederation" [9, p. 1]. The competences of the Union were to cover the following areas: representing the Confederate Union outside, foreign policy, defense of the Union, economic affairs, and common financial matters of the Confederation.

The second part of the *Principles...* presents a project of the structure of the Union authorities. The Polish proposal assumed that the supreme body of the Union would be the Supreme Union Council (NRZ) and the President of the Confederation. The Council was to be composed of the heads of the member states, the representatives of the member states "elected two by each state parliament, if the Union consists of only two states, and one if the Union comprises more than two states" [9, p. 1]. The NRZ presidency, successively for a year, was to be held by the heads of the Union member states. For the time of chairing the Supreme Union Council, its chairman was entitled to the title of the President of the Union. He/She was to represent the Union outside, receive ambassadors and foreign deputies, and exercise supreme authority over the Confederation's armed forces. At the request of the Council of State Secretaries and by the NRZ resolution, it was to conclude international agreements, decide on war and peace, convene, adjourn and close sessions of the Union Assembly, and dissolve the Assembly. Under the resolution, the NRZ had the right to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister of the Confederation, and at the request of the Prime Minister, Secretaries of

State. On behalf of the NRZ and at the request of the Council of Secretaries of State, he/she was to appoint the Chief of the Confederation General Staff, the Undersecretaries of State, Confederation ambassadors and deputies, and officers to the rank of general [9, p. 1-2].

The executive power of the future Union was to be the Council of State Secretaries composed of the Prime Minister, at least four Secretaries of State (foreign affairs, defense, Union economy, and the Confederation treasury. The Council of State Secretaries was responsible to the Supreme Confederation Council).

The Union's legislative body was pleased to be the Confederation Assembly, which was to include deputies elected based on five-adjective elections. One deputy seat was supposed to cover half a million inhabitants of each country belonging to the Union. The term of the Assembly office was to last 4 years. The chairman and his/her deputy were to be elected for a period of the year by the Confederation Assembly in such a way that the chairman function would be held every year by a deputy from another country, and the deputy chairman was always a deputy from a country other than the chairman. The competences of the Union Assembly were to include, inter alia, legislation within the scope of the Union's competences, adopting the Union's budget, and passing ratification laws on international agreements of the Union.

The draft also assumed the establishment of the Confederation Control Chamber, which would be responsible for controlling the implementation of the Union budget, the Confederation Constitutional Tribunal, which was to settle disputes regarding the compliance with the Union's Constitutional Act of laws, regulations, and orders of the Union and the state, disputes over powers in all areas between the Union and states member states [9, p. 5]. In the event of a violation of the *Constitutional Act* of the Union, the Prime Minister and Secretaries of State were to answer to the Union Tribunal of State.

The third part of the *Principles of the Constitutional Act...* was devoted to the activities of the Union. The document presents the following areas of operation: foreign policy, defense, economy, and the Union treasury. The issues of citizenship, personal movement between member states, recognition of diplomas and other official documents, etc., were also addressed.

The Union's shared foreign policy was to be managed by the Confederation's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on behalf of the Council of Secretaries of State. The Office of Foreign Affairs would include Undersecretaries of State, appointed in agreement with the governments of the member states. Citizens of all the member states of the Confederation were to be appointed to the ranks of trade union diplomacy.

Military aspects of Principles of the Constitutional Act

In the discussed document, a lot of space is devoted to defense issues. The joint organization of the Confederation's preparations in this area was to be managed by the Secretary of Defense, who also administered the joint defense budget. Military planning was to be carried out by the Confederation Defense Staff. The Secretary of State of Defense, at the request of the Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff, would determine the peaceful dislocation of military units of the member states, would present the President of the Confederation with nomination applications for general and admiral ranks. The Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff was assigned to the position of the Commander-in-Chief for the war period. During the peacetime, the Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff was to report to the Confederation

Secretary of Defense, and during the war to the Council of Secretaries of State. “The Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff is responsible for the preparation of the Armed Forces for the war. It determines the directions of training of the Armed Forces from the point of view of the needs of the future war, directs the training of senior commanders and operational staffs, expresses opinions in peacetime about candidates for the ranks of general and admiral, and sets the appointment of senior commanders in wartime, conducts field inspections, organizes, and directs major war games and maneuvers for the Armed Forces, gives general guidelines in the field of material and technical war preparation” [9, p. 7].

The ministers of military affairs were to be responsible for the organization of national armed forces in times of peace. The Confederation Government and the Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff gave them appropriate instructions in this regard. The national ministers of military affairs were responsible for the administration of state budgets for the organization, maintenance, equipment and training of national Confederation. They also had the right to submit applications for nominations for general ranks (probably also admiral ones, although they were not mentioned in the *Principles...*) to the Secretary of the Confederation Defense.

The Polish proposal provided for the establishment of the Confederation Defense Council, to which all Union Secretaries of State, Prime Ministers of the member states, the Chief of the Confederation Defense Staff, ministers of military affairs of the Union’s member states, and – if necessary – other ministers of the member states, were to be members. The Confederation Defense Council was to be chaired by the Prime Minister. In peacetime, the Defense Council was to be an organ of the Council of Secretaries of State for agreeing on essential matters in the field of the Union’s defense preparations for the war [9, p. 8].

Another body in the field of the Confederate Union defense proposed in the *Principles...* was the Military Council composed of the Confederation Secretary of State of Defense (at the same time its chairman), the Union Chief of Defense Staff (deputy chairman), ministers of military affairs of the member states, generals and admirals expected to be the highest command positions during the war. During peace, the War Council was to be an advisory body to the Secretary of State of Defense of the Union in matters related to war preparations.

During the war, the Commander-in-Chief was to be the Supreme Commander, answerable to the Council of Secretaries of State. His/Her powers were to include appointing and dismissing all commanders from the rank of regiment commander (or equivalent) and up, awarding officer ranks, awarding all military decorations (not reserved for the President of the Confederation), making demands on the warfare needs of the Council of Secretaries of State and the governments of the member states [9, p. 8].

A narrow version of the *Principles of the Constitutional Act of the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation* was developed by the secretary general of the Polish-Czechoslovak Coordinating Committee, Dr. Władysław Kulski¹. The *Constitutional Theses of the Polish-Czechoslovak*

¹ Władysław Wszębór Kulski (1903-1989), born in Warsaw, son of Julian and Antonina Ostrowska. He studied law, in 1922 he obtained a master’s degree in law. In 1928-1945 he worked in Polish diplomacy. The member of the Polish delegation in the League of Nations (1933-1936), in 1939 he was sent by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to London to negotiate a Polish-British military alliance. In 1946, he emigrated with his wife, Dr. Antonina Reutt, to the USA. In 1947-1951 he was a lecturer in political science at the University of Alabama, and from 1951 to 1963 Professor at Syracuse University. He was the member of the American Political Science Association and the American Association Slavic Studies. He retired in 1973. *Władysław W. Kulski papers, 1933-1987*, [online]. Duke University Libraries. Archives & Manuscripts. Available at:

Confederate Union prepared by him are only a three-page document, of a much more general nature, constituting the basis for a discussion on further detailed solutions in all matters raised in it [10]. Edward Raczyński presented the document to the Czechoslovak side on November 4, 1941, at the Polish-Czechoslovak Coordinating Committee meeting. E. Raczyński emphasized in his speech that “Poland and Czechoslovakia are responsible for the work aimed at organizing a new Europe. We cannot be content with the fact that we entrust this task to the superpowers, on the contrary, the decisions of the superpowers can be influenced by the amount of aid they can count on from us” [Quoted after: 6, p. 159-60].

The Czechoslovak project

At the turn of 1941/1942, the Czechoslovak side presented its own project for discussion at the meeting of the Coordination Committee, the Basic Principles of the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation² [11]. This document was discussed at the meeting of the Committee on January 19, 1942. In the first point – *Principles for shared policy sections* – it proposed that Confederation members should have a shared policy in the following areas: foreign, military, monetary, commercial, communication, postal and telegraphic, economic, social, and financial. “The fundamental precondition for the Confederation was a shared foreign policy. Therefore, the governments of its members were to coordinate their foreign policy systematically and constantly and undertake to inform and consult each other on all international and foreign issues, and that they would not conclude any agreement or settlement with other states that are not the Confederation members until they would not come to an understanding with the other members of the Confederation on this matter” [11, p. 1-2]. The Czechoslovak project assumed that any agreements concluded with another member of the Confederation would be valid “only with the consent of other members of the Confederation” [11, p. 2]. Each member of the Confederation was to have its own diplomacy, but foreign policy should be coordinated with other member states.

The Confederation members would have their own independent armed forces and military policy, and defense preparations should be unified. However, the basic organizational and training regulations were to be identical to all armed forces, armaments, and supplies, and standards for arms production were to be unified [11, p. 2]. The Joint Supreme Command was planned for the period of the war.

Member States “are in relation to other states and in mutual relationships between states independent with their sovereignty, and thus have their own heads of state, governments, parliaments, and other constitutional organs, their legislative, executive, and judicial powers, their armed forces. They limit the exercise of their sovereignty in all matters where they agree to coordinate their policies” [11, p. 5]. To implement the shared policy, the draft provided

<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/uakulski/> [Accessed: 22 February 2019]; *Władysław Wszebor Kulski*, [online]. Prabook. Available at: https://prabook.com/web/wladyslaw_wszebor.kulski/1696111 [Accessed: 22 February 2019].

² The exact date of presenting this document has not yet been determined. T. Kisielewski in his work *Federacja Środkowo-Europejska. Pertraktacje polsko-czechosłowackie 1939-1943*. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza; 1991 on page 160 states that it was in mid-December 1941 or at the beginning of January 1942. On the 6th copy of the Czechoslovakian document kept in the collections of the Archives of the Polish Institute and the Sikorski Museum in London in the team Embassy of the Republic of Poland (file no. 3) there is an annotation made with a red crayon January 1942.

for the establishment of the following bodies: the Confederation Council, the Confederation Diplomatic Council, the Confederation General Staff, the Confederation Military Council, the Confederation Economic Council, the Confederation Customs Office, and the Confederation's Parliamentary Delegation.

The Confederal Council would be established by the governments of the member states and would include prime ministers, foreign ministers, ministers of war (national defense), and ministers of economy. Its task would be to coordinate and regulate all common affairs of the Confederation and submit appropriate resolutions to the governments for adoption. Its meetings would be convened twice a year and in case of other urgent needs, and would be chaired by prime ministers in alphabetical order of Confederation members.

The Confederation Diplomatic Council was to be composed of the foreign ministers of its members. Its task would be to coordinate foreign policy, conduct negotiations, and prepare resolutions on the shared policy towards third countries. The Council would meet at least four times a year, and in any other urgent international-political situation.

The Confederation Chief Staff would be the body responsible for the preparation of joint defense and the appointment of a single, the Joint Supreme Command for the war duration. The ministers of military (national defense) affairs, the head of the Confederate General Staff and the heads of the national General Staffs were to form the Confederation Military Council. It was to agree on a shared military policy and defense. Its meetings were to be held at least twice a year, and additionally in case of any other urgent need.

For the purposes of the functioning of all the above-mentioned organs of the future Confederation, an appropriate administrative apparatus, consisting of officials from individual Member States, was intended to be established.

In part three, the Czechoslovak project contained a provision stating that joint plans to establish the Confederation "would be submitted to the legislative bodies of these countries for consideration and adoption after the independence of their states was restored" [11, p. 8].

This document, as mentioned above, was discussed at the meeting of the Coordination Committee on January 19, 1942. Nonetheless, beforehand, at the request of the Committee members, Ambassador E. Raczyński and Minister H. Ripka discussed both Polish and Czechoslovak theses in private talks [12, p. 1]. Such talks were carried out, and their effect was "the text of a declaration containing those points on which there is complete agreement between the views of both parties and which can therefore be regarded as accepted. With the significant and, as usual, competent help of the Secretaries-General, J.[osef – J.Z.] Hejret³ and Dr. Kulski, a draft declaration was prepared" [12, p. 1]. During his speech at the meeting of the

³ Josef Hejret (born November 25, 1897 in Pilzno – died June 25, 1951 in Prague), son of the well-known Pilsen journalist and promoter of Slavic cooperation, Jan Hejret (1868-1947). He graduated from the gymnasium in Pilzno, then studied philology at the University of Prague. He was the employee of the diplomatic service of Czechoslovakia. In the years 1935-1939, he was the press secretary of the Czechoslovak embassy in Warsaw. During World War II, he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia in London. He was the editor of the *Čechoslovák* magazine published there. He acted as one of the Secretaries General of the Polish-Czechoslovak Coordinating Committee. In the years 1945-1948, he was the ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Warsaw. From June 1, 1948, after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, he worked in the press section of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He authored the work *Češi a slovanstvo*, published in London in 1944. *HEJRET Josef*, [online]. Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky. Available at: https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/organizacni_struktura/utvary_mzv/

Coordination Committee on January 19, 1942, Ambassador Raczyński emphatically assured that “the Polish side still considered the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation to be the main pillar of the post-war organization of our part of the European continent. Poland retains for Czechoslovakia the first place that is reserved for the neighbor with whom it wants to share fortune and misery. Even though the road is still long and both sides have their difficulties to overcome, we, all the Poles and the Czechoslovaks, believe – I hope – that by welcoming all initiative and activities of our partner and helping each other, we will manage to overcome them effectively” [12, p. 1-2]. The Coordinating Committee adopted the text of the Polish-Czechoslovak Declaration agreed by both sides, which was then submitted to both governments for approval [12, p. 5].

The publication of this important document took place a few days later, on January 23, 1942. The issues agreed so far and did not raise any major reservations were presented in 14 points. In the first point, the parties expressed their desire that the future Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation “would also include other states of this European area, which are related to the important interests of Czechoslovakia and Poland” [13, p. 1].

The Confederation’s goal was to ensure a shared policy in the field of foreign affairs, military affairs, economic and financial affairs, social affairs as well as communication, postal services and telegraphs. As for military cooperation and shared defense policy, it was assumed that the future Polish-Czechoslovak Confederate Union would have the Joint General Staff, and in the event of a war, the Joint Supreme Command would be established.

Simultaneously with the talks with the Polish side on the future Confederation, representatives of the Czechoslovak authorities probed the attitude of the USSR to that issue. There is no doubt that for President E. Beneš, the Soviet partner, especially after the aggression of Germany on June 22, 1941, against the USSR, occupied the main place in Czechoslovak politics. His assurance of the immutability of Czechoslovak foreign policy after June 22, 1941, expressed in a letter to W. Sikorski of October 6, 1941, was not reflected in actual actions⁴ [14, p. 1]. As I. Kolendo writes: “The evolution of Beneš’s attitude towards cooperation with the Polish authorities in exile at the end of January 1942 was then very clear. It proved the volta that was being made and the abandonment of negotiations with the initiator of the future Union of both countries. The immediate cause of this shift was the Stalin and Molotov’s position on the Confederation and any other political group eliminating the USSR and its influence in Central and South-Eastern Europe. That phenomenon was not stopped even by the announcement of the mentioned Polish-Czechoslovak Declaration on January 19” [2, p. 163]. The USSR’s negative stance on the Polish-Czechoslovak Union influenced the change in the Czechoslovak side’s attitude to talks with the Polish authorities. From that time on, a real, gradual withdrawal of the Czechoslovak partner from earlier declarations began. The

specializovany_archiv_mzv/kdo_byl_kdo/hejret_josef.html [Accessed: 24 February 2019]; *Josef Hejret*, [online]. Wikipedie. Available at: https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Hejret [Accessed: 24, February 2019].

⁴ In this letter we read, inter alia: The first thing I would like to emphasize is that the far-reaching development of events since June 22, 1941, has in no way changed my views, or our Government’s, as to the general line of our policy, and in particular our future cooperation with Poland. Archives of the Polish Institute and the Sikorski Museum in London. Ministry of the Interior. General Department. Correspondence. Polish-Czechoslovak Coordination Committee. *A copy of the letter from the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Edward Beneš, to Prime Minister, W. Sikorski, of October 6, 1941 (Odpis listu prezydenta Republiky Czechosłowackiej Edwarda Beneša do premiera W. Sikorskiego z 6 października 1941 roku)*. File ref. A.9.11/4, p. 1.

Czechoslovak side increasingly insisted on Sikorski that he should settle relations with the USSR in a friendly manner, believing that without good cooperation with this state one cannot think about a new organization of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Breaking off the talks

With each successive month, the matter of the future Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation was becoming less and less real. Beneš's policy was decidedly towards friendly relations with the USSR. On July 16, 1942, the USSR ambassador to the Polish government-in-exile, Aleksandr Bogomolov, informed the Czechoslovak foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, about Stalin's opposition to continuing talks with the Polish side about the confederation. On July 31, Edward Beneš received a definitive Soviet veto from Bogomolov [2, p. 179].

The differences between the Polish and Czechoslovak approach to the Soviet question and the USSR's negative position in relation to the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation plans, expressed by Bogomolov in an interview with Masaryk on July 16, 1942, was the main factor that led to the collapse of that interesting project. An additional obstacle in the implementation of the Confederation plans was the dispute over the border in Cieszyn Silesia. Neither side was willing to make any concessions in this regard.

In May 1943, the Czechoslovak government effectively broke off talks about the confederation with Poland. The decision was officially communicated to the Polish authorities on May 17. Undoubtedly, this was closely related to the severance of Polish-Soviet relations after the disclosure of the Katyn massacre in April that year. At the meeting of the Czechoslovak State Council on May 17-19, Minister H. Ripka, criticizing the actions of the Polish government, said: "It is unthinkable that the two countries could come to a federation or only an alliance if one of the countries was on friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and if the attitude of the other state to this power was unequal or not very friendly" [Quoted after: 2, p. 220]. The atmosphere in Polish-Czechoslovakian relations at that time was already bad enough that it was difficult to have any serious hopes of returning to the talks and looking for a compromise solution. It appears evident that the change in the Czechoslovak position resulted from the pro-Soviet option adopted by Beneš, and the issue of the dispute over the border was only an additional pretext for breaking off the talks.

Conclusion

The plan to establish a Polish-Czechoslovakian Confederate Union after the end of World War II should be considered very interesting. The basic assumption of such a project was to create a counterbalance to the potential German and Soviet threat. The shared foreign policy, the joint military, economic, and population potential created such an opportunity. It should be remembered that the Union of Poland and Czechoslovakia was only to be the first step towards building a multi-state confederation, encompassing a whole range of Central and Eastern European countries. The implementation of such a plan could have undoubtedly led to major geopolitical changes in Europe.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Aspekty wojskowe w polsko-czechosłowackich planach konfederacyjnych w latach II wojny światowej

STRESZCZENIE

Klęska Polski we wrześniu 1939 roku skłoniła gen. Władysława Sikorskiego, powołanego na stanowisko Naczelnego Wodza i premiera RP, do podjęcia kroków zmierzających do urzeczywistnienia jego wcześniejszej koncepcji ścisłego związku Polski i Czechosłowacji. Celem podjętego w rozmowach Sikorskiego z Edwardem Benešem projektu było utworzenie silnego podmiotu, zdolnego w przyszłości do przeciwstawienia się zagrożeniu niemieckiemu i radzieckiemu. Realizacja tak pomyślanego planu, zakładającego w przyszłości poszerzenie związku o kolejne państwa regionu, dawałaby realną możliwość zmiany ówczesnego układu geopolitycznego w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Rozmowy Sikorski-Beneš toczyły się od jesieni 1939 roku do wiosny 1943 roku, kiedy to strona czechosłowacka przyjęła w swej polityce opcję proradziecką i w praktyce wycofała się ze wspólnych prac przygotowawczych do powołania Związku Konfederacyjnego. Jednym z głównych obszarów podejmowanych w trakcie rozmów polsko-czechosłowackich była problematyka wspólnej polityki obronnej. Najszerzej przedstawiona została w dwóch dokumentach: w opracowanym przez stronę polską *Zasadach Aktu konstytucyjnego Związku Polski i Czechosłowacji* oraz w czechosłowackich *Podstawowych zasadach konfederacyjnego związku Czechosłowacji i Polski*.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Polska, Czechosłowacja, Zaolzie, konfederacja polsko-czechosłowacka, II wojna światowa

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