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**THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION IN THE FOREIGN POLICY  
OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC AT THE TURN OF 1938 – 1939**

**Abstract.** *The purpose of the proposed article is to elucidate the role and place of the Ukrainian issue in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic at the turn of 1938 – 1939, in particular its relations with Germany, the USSR, and Romania. The study of Poland’s foreign policy in 1938 – 1939 is central to understanding the dynamics of international processes in East-Central Europe on the eve of World War II. After all, the fate of peace on the continent ultimately hinged upon Warsaw’s relations with Berlin, Moscow, London, and Paris. The background of these relations was the Ukrainian issue, which entered a new stage of its internationalization in the wake of the “Czechoslovak crisis” and the emergence of Carpatho-Ukraine as a factor in international politics. The formation of Ukrainian autonomy south of the Carpathians in October of 1938 exposed the Ukrainian issue on a global scale as the largest unresolved national issue in interwar Europe. In 1938 – 1939, Subcarpathian Rus’/Carpatho-Ukraine turned into a geopolitical frontier, a zone of conflict of interests of key European players (Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the USSR, Great Britain, France, Italy). The research methodology is based on the approach of “histoire croisée”, “entangled history” and “connected history”, as subspecies of global history. This approach, in our opinion, serves as an effective means of integrating the Ukrainian history into a global historical context, giving the national metanarrative features of inclusiveness. The scientific novelty consists in the fact that the author tried, based on a wide range of published and unpublished archival documents, to comprehensively reveal the role of the Ukrainian issue in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic against the background of international relations during the turning point in the history of interwar Europe. The Conclusions. It has been established that the post-Munich period of international relations was marked by the actualization of the Ukrainian issue in European politics, the impetus for which gave the formation of Carpathian Ukraine as an autonomous unit within the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic. At the turn of 1938 – 1939, the Ukrainian issue became a central topic on the agenda of the Polish diplomacy, which was an important factor in its relations with Germany, the USSR, Romania, and Czecho-Slovakia. The balance of power in the east of the continent, the state of relations between them, and ultimately the fate of peace and war in Europe depended largely on the attitude of the key subjects of international relations to the Ukrainian issue. The period of 1938 – 1939 was marked by the active rapprochement of Poland and Germany against the background of the dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia and Berlin’s determined efforts to draw Warsaw into its orbit of influence in order to*

form a military and political alliance against the USSR. In the bilateral German-Polish negotiations, the Ukrainian issue appeared as a certain “bait” and “bargaining chip” that the Nazis actively traded, hoping to attract Poland to their side to realize their long-term goals in the East. Despite the existence of a pro-German wing among the Polish ruling camp, which advocated cooperation with the Third Reich in solving the Ukrainian issue and a joint campaign against the USSR in the spirit of the concept of Prometheism, the Polish diplomacy led by Józef Beck at the beginning of 1939 rejected German demands and gradually took a course towards resumption of cooperation with Western democracies – Great Britain and France. At the same time, at least until the end of March 1939, there was still room for the German-Polish negotiations, in which the Ukrainian issue ceased to play a leading role.

**Key words:** Carpatho-Ukraine, Ukrainian issue, Second Polish Republic, international relations, Munich conference.

## УКРАЇНСЬКЕ ПИТАННЯ У ЗОВНІШНІЙ ПОЛІТИЦІ ДРУГОЇ РЕЧІ ПОСПОЛИТОЇ НА ЗЛАМІ 1938 – 1939 рр.

**Анотація. Мета статті** – розкрити роль і місце українського питання у зовнішній політиці Другої Речі Посполитої на межі 1938 – 1939 рр., зокрема її відносин з Німеччиною, СРСР та Румунією. Дослідження зовнішньої політики Польщі на переломі 1938 – 1939 рр. є центральним для розуміння динаміки міжнародних процесів у Центрально-Східній Європі напередодні Другої світової війни, адже від відносин Варшави з Берліном, Москвою, Лондоном і Парижем, зрештою, залежала доля миру на континенті. Загальним тлом цих відносин було українське питання, яке увійшло в новий етап інтернаціоналізації у зв'язку із “чехословацькою кризою” та появою Карпатської України як фактора міжнародної політики. Формування у жовтні 1938 р. української автономії на південь від Карпат оголило у глобальному масштабі українське питання як найбільше нерозв'язане національне питання у міжвоєнній Європі. У 1938 – 1939 рр. Підкарпатська Русь / Карпатська Україна перетворилася на геополітичний фронтір, зону зіткнення інтересів ключових європейських гравців (Німеччини, Угорщини, Польщі, Румунії, СРСР, Великої Британії, Франції, Італії). **Методологія дослідження** базується на підході “перехресної історії” (histoire croisée), “заплутаної історії” (entangled history) та “зв'язаної історії” (connected history) як підвидів глобальної історії. Саме такий підхід, на нашу думку, слугує ефективним засобом інтеграції української історії у світовий історичний контекст, надаючи національному метанаративу рис інклюзивності. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що автор спробував на основі широкого спектру опублікованих і неопублікованих архівних документів, комплексно розкрити роль українського питання у зовнішній політиці Другої Речі Посполитої на широкому тлі міжнародних відносин у переломний період історії міжвоєнної Європи. **Висновки.** Встановлено, що постмюнхенський період міжнародних відносин був позначений актуалізацією українського питання у європейській політиці, поштовхом до чого стало створення Карпатської України як автономної одиниці у складі Другої Чехо-Словацької республіки. На зламі 1938 – 1939 рр. українське питання стало центральною темою на порядку денному дипломатії Польщі, яке виступало важливим фактором її відносин з Німеччиною, СРСР, Румунією та ЧСР. Значною мірою від ставлення ключових суб'єктів міжнародних відносин до українського питання залежав баланс сил на сході континенту, стан відносин між ними, а у підсумку – доля миру та війни у Європі. 1938 – 1939 рр. були позначені активним зближенням Польщі та Німеччини на фоні розчленування Чехо-Словащини та рішучими зусиллями Берліна втягнути Варшаву у свою орбіту впливу для формування воєнно-політичного союзу проти СРСР. У двосторонніх німецько-польських переговорах українське питання виступало як певна “приманка” та “розмінна монета”, якою нацисти активно торгували, сподіваючись залучити на свій бік Польщу для реалізації своїх довгострокових цілей на сході. Попри наявність серед польського правлячого табору пронімецького крила, яке виступало за співпрацю з Третім Рейхом у розв'язанні українського питання та спільному поході проти СРСР в дусі концепції прометеїзму, польська дипломатія на чолі з Юзефом Беком на початку 1939 р. відкинула німецькі вимоги та поступово взяла курс на відновлення співпраці із західними демократіями – Великою Британією і Францією. При тому, ще принаймні до кінця березня 1939 р. залишався простір для німецько-польських переговорів, в яких українське питання перестало відігравати провідну роль.

**Ключові слова:** Карпатська Україна, українське питання, Друга Річ Посполита, міжнародні відносини, Мюнхенська конференція.

**The Problem Statement.** Historians distinguish several stages in which a global interest in Ukrainian affairs was shaped in the first half of the 20th century (Ziba, 2010, p. 107). One of them falls on the turbulent times of geopolitical changes in East Central Europe on the eve of World War II when the autonomous entity of Podkarpatska Rus' (Carpatho-Ukraine) was proclaimed within the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic, which was considered in Ukrainian political circles as the first stage before the formation of an independent united Ukraine. In the period following the Munich Conference (29–30 September 1938), after a long break from the Ukrainian Revolution and the Liberation Struggle of 1917 – 1921, the Ukrainian issue again surfaced on the international agenda and was actively discussed in connection with the project of “Greater Ukraine”.

As the most unresolved national issue in Europe, the Ukrainian issue directly affected the interests of four countries at once, which in the wake of WWI held the Ukrainian lands, namely the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. For the Second Polish Republic (PR), which during Józef Piłsudski's 'sanation regime' was considered one of the main “depositories” of the Ukrainian issue in interwar Europe, the emergence of Carpatho-Ukraine as an autonomous entity and later, for a short period, as an independent state, created a significant challenge to its foreign and domestic policies. Polish contemporaries compared this challenge to the “mining” of the borders of the Second PR (Pilarski, 2008, p. 162).

The study of Poland's foreign policy at the turn of 1938 – 1939 is central to understanding the dynamics of international processes in East-Central Europe on the eve of WWII. After all, the fate of peace on the continent hinged upon Warsaw's relations with Berlin, Moscow, London, and Paris. The background of these relations was the Ukrainian issue, which entered a new stage of its internationalization in the wake of the “Czechoslovak crisis” and the emergence of Carpatho-Ukraine as a factor in international politics.

**The Review of Recent Publications and Researches.** The history of Poland's foreign policy of the interwar period is regarded perhaps as one of the best-developed problems in Polish historiography. The European crisis of 1938 was the subject of many studies and publications in both Polish and Western history writing (Batowski, 1962; Batowski, 1973; Stanisławska, 1962; Polska a Monachium, 1967; Cienciała, 1999, pp. 48–81; Kornat, 2007; Batowski, 2008; Kornat, 2012; Żerko, 2020; Kornat, Wołos, 2021). Nevertheless, some of the key aspects remain on the periphery of scientific research. This especially concerns Poland's policy towards Carpatho-Ukraine and the broader Ukrainian issue in 1938 – 1939. While analysing this aspect of the Second PR's policy, the Polish historian Jan Pisuliński drew attention to the lack of sources and dominance of numerous hypotheses as the main obstacles to a comprehensive study of the problem (Pisuliński, 2008, p. 115).

Although Polish historiography can boast of several fundamental monographs devoted to Poland's policy towards Transcarpathia in 1938 – 1939 (Dąbrowski, 2007; Jarnecki, Kołakowski, 2017), their authors, however, failed to present the problem in a larger international context and connect it with the Ukrainian issue.

One of the first historians who drew attention to the special role of the Ukrainian issue in international politics in general and Poland's foreign policy in 1938 – 1939, in particular, was the Canadian Slavist and a researcher of the Polish-Ukrainian relations Bohdan Budurovych. While analysing the limited scope of sources available to him at the time, the author concluded that the liquidation of Carpatho-Ukraine was the Second Polish Republic's most important foreign policy task between the annexation of Cieszyn Silesia at the beginning of October of 1938 to the establishment of the Polish-Hungarian border in mid-March of 1939 (Budurovych, 1958, p. 61).

In modern Ukrainian historiography, several attempts have been made to highlight the role of the Ukrainian issue in the Polish-Soviet relations and the broad context of international relations in 1938 – 1939 (Zlepko, 1994, pp. 249–308; Sviderska, 2001a; Sviderska, 2001b; Hetmanchuk, 2008; Hetmanchuk, 2003, pp. 46–55; Shkandrij, 2015, pp. 121–136; Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2018, pp. 48–56; Trofymovych & Trofymovych, 2013; Trofymovych & Trofymovych, 2018, pp. 309–328; Trofymovych & Trofymovych, 2019, pp. 251–270; Vidnianskyi, 2019, pp. 67–93; Vidnianskyi, Hrytsiuk & Lysenko, 2019, pp. 4–24).

**The Purpose of the Research.** Based on a large scope of diplomatic documents, diaries, and memoirs of diplomats, to elucidate the role and place of the Ukrainian issue in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic at the turn of 1938 – 1939, in particular, its relations with Germany, the USSR and Romania. The sources of our research comprise both unknown and already published documents from the Archives of New Acts in Warsaw, which primarily originate from the collections of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland and its diplomatic representations abroad.

**The Results of the Research.** During the period following the Munich Conference (29–30 September 1938), the idea of creating a common border between Poland and Hungary on the territory of Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathia) became the central element of Poland's foreign policy strategy on the Czechoslovak track. For Warsaw, it was more important than the annexation of Cieszyn Silesia, the solution to the Slovak issue, or minor territorial corrections on the Polish-Czechoslovak frontier. A common border with Hungary was designed to open a gateway for Poland to the Danube basin and the Balkans. Without it, a full-fledged union between Poland and Hungary could not be materialized, as well as the ambitious project of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland Józef Bek – the “Third Europe” or “Intermarium”. It was also about cutting the so-called “Czech corridor”, through which the Soviet Union, as the Poles feared, could have established a common frontier with the Czechoslovak Republic by separating Eastern Galicia from the RP.

However, the emergence of Carpatho-Ukraine, which was considered in many European capitals as the “Ukrainian Piedmont”, “a springboard to Ukraine” and “a starting point for igniting the Ukrainian movement”, became an obstacle to the realization of Poland's foreign policy aims in the region following the Munich Conference (DBFP, 1950, p. 201). In Warsaw, the existence of Carpatho-Ukraine was foremost seen as an existential threat that challenged the Polish status quo in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia. At the turn of 1938 – 1939, the conflict between two geopolitical projects – the “Third Europe” and “Greater Ukraine” entered its acute phase.

The declaration of Carpatho-Ukraine's autonomy on 11 October of 1938 took place at the time when Western diplomacy and the wider public were considering Hitler's immediate plans and were preoccupied with the protection of Western European countries from possible Nazi aggression. Despite Germany's reticence on the issue of Carpatho-Ukraine and its future (the Führer never expressed his official position regarding the fate of the region, vailing it under the general declaration about the realization of the Czecho-Slovakia peoples' rights to self-determination), Western politicians and diplomats were convinced that the German propaganda was completely directed towards the Ukrainian nationalism. Britain and France believed that Germany would seek to conquer Ukraine, hence the autonomy in Transcarpathia was considered the German idea, the first stage towards the subjugation of the Soviet Union. While facing a strong threat from Berlin, the Western governments expected that Hitler's “Ukrainian card” would serve as a means of directing German expansion to the east (Pahiria, 2017, p. 113–135).

Starting from the end of October 1938, the Ukrainian issue firmly established itself on the agenda of the Polish-German relations and was linked with Hitler's attempts to involve Poland in his coalition in the upcoming war in Europe. During this period, the Führer left open the question of where he would make his first strategic strike – in the west or the east. The direction and time of his next move to a greater extent depended on Poland's position. According to the Polish historian Krzysztof Rak, the latter played the role of a geostrategic cornerstone that influenced the overall balance of power on the continent. On the one hand, whether Warsaw sided with Paris and London or Berlin influenced whose sphere of influence Central Europe would be – those of the Western countries or Germany. The combined military potential of Great Britain, France, and Poland did not give Germany a chance to win a two-front war. However, infected with the “appeasement virus”, Britain and France refrained from triggering their alliances with Poland against the Third Reich. On the other hand, the Second Polish Republic stood in the way of Hitler's eastern “crusade” aimed at the Ukrainian lands, while the combined military potential of the two states significantly increased the chances for success in a potential military campaign against the USSR. Therefore, turning Poland into a satellite ally was the most optimal way for the Führer to implement his long-term military and political plans to subjugate the Soviet Union and to create a “living space” (Lebensraum) in the east. In addition, Poland was supposed to provide Germany with a reliable rear from the east in the event of an outbreak of hostilities in the west and to help it avoid a two-front war (Rak, 2019, pp. 416–417, 478–479). In 1938, it might have seemed that Poland had no choice but to accept the German offer.

For the first time, Germany used the issue of Carpatho-Ukraine as a “bargaining chip” in its strategic negotiations with Warsaw on the “general cleansing” (gesamtlösung) of the German-Polish relations during the meeting between the Polish ambassador Józef Lipski and the Reich's Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on October 24, 1938 in Berchtesgaden. Then, the German side offered, in exchange for the transfer of Gdańsk (Danzig) to the Reich and permission to build an extraterritorial highway and railway through Pomerania to connect Germany with East Prussia, to positively resolve the issue of Carpatho-Ukraine in the interests of Poland (PDD, 2007, p. 730). If the Poles had direct territorial claims to the region, the Nazis were prepared to satisfy them in exchange for the Polish government's consent to resolve the Gdańsk and extraterritorial highway issues by German wishes. While observing Poland's excessive interest in the problem of Subcarpathian Rus' and the common border, Berlin decided to use this factor in blackmailing Poland and inclining it to accept the German proposals.

After the First Vienna Award on November 2, 1938 (which resulted in the transfer of south-western territories of Transcarpathia mostly inhabited by the Hungarians to Hungary, whereas Germany and Italy guaranteed the borders of autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine), the Ukrainian factor became decisive in Poland's foreign policy in East-Central Europe. Reports about the involvement of the Nazi officials in promoting the Ukrainian cause provoked great concern in Warsaw (PDD, 2007, p. 775). Suspicions were additionally reinforced by reports of the Polish consular representations from Germany, particularly Vienna, which spoke of German-Ukrainian cooperation towards the realization of “Greater Ukraine” project (AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 474, sygn. 385, p. 140).

In November – December of 1938, Polish diplomatic missions abroad observed the actualization of the Carpatho-Ukraine problem in the Western press and public opinion and rapid internationalization of the Ukrainian issue in European politics. Reports on this



topic came both from the capitals of leading European states and from centres having less weight in international politics (AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 474, sygn. 385, pp. 119–121, 127–131). Polish diplomats monitored threats to Poland's international security and tried to intervene whenever possible. Against the background of the country's enormous diplomatic efforts to achieve a common border with Hungary, combined with a propaganda campaign and sabotage actions in Subcarpathian Rus', Warsaw tried in every possible way to counteract the spread of the viral Ukrainian campaign in the European press and to guide it in a direction beneficial to itself.

Concerns about the use of the "Carpatho-Ukrainian card" by the Germans forced the Deputy Director of the Political and Economic Department and at the same time the chief of the Eastern Division of Poland's MFA Tadeusz Kobylański to take an unusual step. On November 17, 1938, he visited the first secretary of Germany's Embassy in Warsaw, Rudolph von Scheliga, to openly appeal to the Germans in the Carpatho-Ukrainian case, which, in his opinion, greatly overburdened the German-Polish relations. Historians know several versions of the recording of this conversation. According to the German report sent to Berlin, Kobylański warned that if the Nazis intended to use Carpatho-Ukraine as a springboard to resolve the Ukrainian issue, then Poland would end up in the camp of Germany's enemies. The Deputy Director of the Political and Economic Department stated that Poland would use all available means to establish a common frontier with Hungary and thereby prevent the loss of Ukrainian lands in Poland. Instead, Kobylański presented the Polish idea: Warsaw was aware of Berlin's plans to acquire a sphere of influence on the Soviet territory and, in this regard, was ready to cooperate with the Germans in solving the Ukrainian issue "without reducing its territory" and to reach an agreement with the Nazis ensuring their interests in access to Soviet Ukraine (Żerko, 1998, pp. 139–140).

The most sensational description of the Kobylański-Scheliga conversation is contained in a so-called short version, which, according to the German diplomat, was documented by the Soviet agent in Warsaw. According to this report stored in Russian archives, Kobylański had to say the following: "The issue of Subcarpathian Rus' is of a decisive importance to us. You see the anxiety this issue causes in our Ukrainian regions. We suppress and will suppress this unrest. Don't make it impossible for us to carry out our policy. If Subcarpathian Rus' joined Hungary, then Poland would later agree to side with Germany in the campaign against Soviet Ukraine. If Subcarpathian Rus' remains a centre of unrest, you will make a joint march impossible for us" (God krizisa, 1990, p. 105).

While analysing various versions of the recordings of the mentioned conversation, the Polish historian Stanislav Žerko concludes that all of them confirm the transfer of the Polish proposals to the German side, which effectively amounted to the signaling of Poland's readiness to take joint participation alongside Germany in a military campaign against the USSR, once Berlin found a positive resolution of the issue of a common border between Poland and Hungary. At the same time, the scholar believes that the chief of the Eastern Division acted on his initiative without instructions from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in a very frivolous way tried to persuade the Germans to resolve the issue of Carpatho-Ukraine (Żerko, 2020, p. 147).

This allows to suggest the existence of a pro-German group within the Polish MFA led by the head of its Eastern Division Kobylański, which advocated Poland's participation in a joint campaign with Germany against the USSR and cooperation with the Nazis in the resolution of the Ukrainian issue based on Warsaw's military and political aims. This assumption is

corroborated by assessments of some contemporary diplomats (Hory, 2017, p. 335; Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie, 2006, pp. 145–146). For instance, according to the observation made by the American ambassador to Warsaw, Drexel Biddle, there was a long-standing camp within Polish government circles that counted on Poland's cooperation with Germany in the creation of an independent Ukrainian state in exchange for "proportionate remuneration" for "services rendered" in the form of territorial possessions. Minister Beck, according to this information, had a rather sober view of the situation and cherished no illusions about the potential benefits of cooperation with the Nazis in the east (Poland, 1976, pp. 267, 270, 273).

The failure of Hungary's plans for the occupation of Carpatho-Ukraine on November 20–21, 1938 marked the defeat of Beck's foreign policy, who was firmly convinced that implementation of the common border policy would not meet serious international resistance, especially from Germany. Poland's great power ambitions were put into doubt, as well as its international prestige. After the German-Italian demarche on November 21, 1938 against Budapest's plans to conduct a military operation to occupy the region, Poland together with Hungary was isolated in the international arena. Against the background of rumours concerning the German plans to utilize Carpatho-Ukraine as a springboard for a campaign in the east, the Poles felt surrounded and deceived. According to testimonies of foreign diplomats, the Polish government circles experienced a real shock as the consequence of the unexpected change in Germany's policy on the Carpatho-Ukrainian issue (Hory, 2017, p. 292; DIMK, 1970, p. 417). It seemed that the ambitious "Third Europe" project suffered a serious blow.

According to Minister Beck, the position taken by the German Foreign Ministry on the common frontier and Carpatho-Ukraine had driven the German-Polish relations to a dead end. He was convinced that after the Munich crisis, which became the apogee of the German-Polish cooperation against the background of the dismemberment of the Czechoslovak Republic, the events surrounding Subcarpathian Rus' called into question the political line defined by the treaty of January 26, 1934. The host of Brühl Palace (the building that in the 1930s housed the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Poland) sought to find out a true attitude of the Nazi leadership towards Carpatho-Ukraine and the Ukrainian problem in general and remove them from the agenda of the Polish-German negotiations (DTJS, 1972, pp. 376–377).

After the failure of the Hungarian tactics of *fait accompli*, the issue of the common border completely shifted to the realm of German-Polish relations. Warsaw was wary of directly addressing Berlin with a request to lift its veto on resolving the Carpatho-Ukrainian problem while fearing that the Nazis would immediately present a bill on the Gdańsk track. The most optimal tactic for Poland was to wait and counteract the consolidation of the Ukrainian movement in the region by strengthening control over its southern border with the view to prevent the penetration of the Ukrainians from Poland into Carpatho-Ukraine.

To secure its "diplomatic rear", Poland took steps to normalize relations with the Soviet Union. On November 26, 1938, the two countries signed a joint communiqué, which became an international sensation, giving rise to numerous speculations in the international press about the Ukrainian leitmotif of this move. The Polish leadership primarily sought to balance its relations with its eastern neighbour that experienced a serious escalation during the September 1938 crisis (including a demonstration of military force on the border, the penetration of the Soviet aircraft into Polish airspace, and border incidents) – the largest since the signing of the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921. The 26 November Polish-Soviet declaration aimed to restore the political status quo in bilateral relations based on the bilateral non-aggression pact concluded in July of 1932 (PDD, 2007, p. 794).

However, many external observers read explicit anti-German motives into the Polish-Soviet communique (Hory, 2017, p. 56). The Soviet press deliberately inflamed the anti-German slant of the 26 November declaration while trying to drive a wedge between Poland and Germany. Although the Germans tried to hide their negative reaction to the signing of the Polish-Soviet communique and publicly downplayed its significance, they still believed that it was Beck's response to the Germans blocking the establishment of a joint Polish-Hungarian border and playing the "Ukrainian card" (Konrat & Wołos, 2021, p. 613).

The Polish diplomats knew that Germany's geostrategic goal was to establish control over the mineral and food resources of Soviet Ukraine. German interest in the latter was part of a larger colonial problem and the Lebensraum policy in the east (Poland, 1976, pp. 20–21). The Poles realized that the Nazis did not have crystallized views on the solution of the Ukrainian issue and the broader problem of transforming the Soviet space. Germany's engagement in Subcarpathia was therefore viewed by them as an attempt to create a base for a propaganda campaign aimed primarily at the sub-Soviet Ukrainian territories, rather than at the Ukrainian lands within Poland (DTJS, 1972, pp. 388, 458).

In connection with the international actualization of the Ukrainian issue at the end of 1938, the Polish government began developing its vision for solving the Ukrainian problem both within the country and in the context of the expected collapse of the Soviet Union. On December 11, 1938, the Director of the Political Department, and the chief of the Western Division of the Polish MFA, Józef Potocki, informed State Secretary Jan Szembek about the pressure exerted on the government in Warsaw regarding the shaping of Polish domestic policies on the Ukrainian track, in particular, regarding the autonomy of Eastern Galicia. At the same time, with the prospect of the USSR's disintegration looming on the horizon, different corners of the Polish ruling elite discussed the idea of a possible expansion of the Polish borders to the east, including the capture of Kamianets-Podilskyi and Zhytomyr, which was supposed to signal the restoration of the 1772 historical borders of the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (DTJS, 1972, p. 381).

In the context of international discussions about the possible collapse of the Soviet Union and the resolution of the Ukrainian issue, cooperation with Romania became especially important for the Polish government. As early as on November 1, 1938, the Deputy Director of the Political and Economic Department of the Polish MFA, Kobylański presented in detail to the Romanian Ambassador Richard Franasovici ideas related to the solution of the Russian and Ukrainian problems from the perspective of common interests of Poland, Romania, and Hungary. In response, on November 8, 1938, the Romanian ambassador emphasized that Poland and Romania should start a detailed study of the Ukrainian issue, given the disintegration process affecting the Soviet state and the actualization of the Ukraine problem (DTJS, 1972, pp. 337, 347). The Romanians were also not against joining the German-Polish company in deciding the fate of Ukraine, so as not to suddenly become a victim of the so-called Nazi plans to create "Greater Ukraine". Bucharest believed that London and Paris would support the direction of the German aggression against the USSR while taking a neutral position in this case (Poland, 1976, p. 269).

By exploiting the Romanian government's fears of the Ukrainian problem Poland eventually managed to change the position of its ally on the issue of the common border. This took place in mid-December of 1938, after the arrival of Grigore Gafencu, a strong supporter of cooperation with Poland, as Romania's Foreign Minister. The first meeting of Polish Ambassador Roger Raczyński with the newly appointed minister on December 27, 1938,



saw new approaches in Bucharest. During the conversation, Gafencu expressed interest in Minister Bek's views on the entire complex of the Ukrainian problem and offered to strengthen bilateral cooperation in studying this issue for policy development. The Romanians sought to obtain as much information as possible from the Poles to assess the likelihood of the German intentions in the East (PDD, 2007, p. 858).

On December 14, 1938, during a meeting of Poland's highest government circles with President Ignacy Mościcki at the Warsaw Castle, Minister Beck was given a task to find out the Nazi goals in Eastern Europe in general and about Poland in particular (Poland, 1976, p. 268). Trying to bring clarity to the German-Polish relations, particularly in the light of Ribbentrop's proposals for "general cleansing" as of October 24, 1938 and the international situation surrounding Carpatho-Ukraine, Minister Beck sought a personal meeting with Hitler. He did not trust the Reich's Foreign Minister and assumed that his policies did not align with the Führer's vision. The top Polish diplomat wanted to test the limits of Hitler's flexibility in the Gdańsk issue, to probe his further intentions in Eastern Europe, and to obtain assurances that the resolution of the Ukrainian issue would not contravene Poland's interests (Poland, 1976, p. 298).

Beck's meeting with Hitler took place on 5 January 1939, at the Berghof residence in the Bavarian Alps, in the presence of Minister Ribbentrop, Ambassadors Lipsky and Moltke, and his chief of staff Michał Łubieński. Two key issues surfaced prominently on the agenda of the Polish side: the dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia and the problem of Gdańsk (DTJS, 1972, p. 463). Additionally, the Germans also sought to exchange views on the USSR and the Ukrainian issue. At the beginning of the negotiations, Führer highlighted the consistency of his policy of maintaining good-neighbourly relations with Poland based on the non-aggression pact of January 26, 1934 and pointed at the common interest of the two states about Russia (USSR) (PDD, 2005, p. 14). Then, upon his initiative, the German Chancellor turned to the Ukrainian problem and declared that he was interested in Ukraine only from an economic point of view, not a political one and that he would not have gone against Poland in this matter in any case. According to Führer, solving the problem of Ukraine was a matter of a distant perspective, as part of the wider Soviet question. Instead, the issue of colonies was on the agenda, not Ukraine, and Poland, he assured, had nothing to fear about this (DBFP, 1953, p. 153; DTJS, 1972, p. 465; Poland, 1976, pp. 302–303).

Even though Germany was allegedly not interested in Ukraine's issue, it intended to continue closely monitoring its development. According to Lipsky, the Führer was generally not against the separation of the Ukrainian SSR from the USSR as a means of weakening and finally disintegrating the Soviet empire. Beck agreed with this argument, stressing Poland's special interests in the east, while also stressing the importance of maintaining the integrity of the territories inhabited by the Ukrainians as part of the Polish Republic (DIMK, 1970, p. 346).

Hitler devoted much of the time to dispelling Beck's suspicions about the Reich's policy in Carpatho-Ukraine, which cast a shadow on the Polish-German friendship. According to Führer, he rejected the scenario of the Hungarian occupation of the region as it threatened to trigger an armed conflict in Central Europe (DTJS, 1972, p. 464; DBFP, 1953, pp. 154–155). In response, Beck said that if Carpatho-Ukraine turned into "a hotbed of unrest and agitation" against Poland, then Warsaw "would crush it with all ruthlessness". The Führer took note of this statement, thereby making it clear that Germany would not resist Polish plans of aggression against Subcarpathian Rus' (PDD, 2005, pp. 31–32). On this occasion, Beck presented his vision of the Ukrainian issue to the Führer. According to him, the population of

Carpatho-Ukraine had nothing in common with the population of “real Ukraine” located on both banks of the Dnipro River (DBFP, 1953, p. 158).

According to Michał Łubieński, one of the participants of the meeting in Berchtesgaden, Hitler presented a plan of Polish expansion towards Ukraine, which he was ready to recognize as a sphere of Poland’s exclusive interests. This also included the issue of Carpatho-Ukraine and the common border with Hungary. In return, he expected the Poles to accept his wishes regarding Gdańsk (Łubieński, 2012, p. 142). In response to the Führer’s statement about the German nature of the city and its quick return to the Third Reich, Minister Beck stated that he did not see any equivalent in this matter (PDD, 2005, p. 14; DTJS, 1972, pp. 462–464).

On January 6, 1939, Beck held a separate conversation with Minister Ribbentrop over dinner in Munich in the presence of Łubieński, during which the parties followed up on the issues of Danzig and Ukraine. The chief of Polish diplomacy said that he was greatly relieved after having heard the Führer’s assurances about the lack of interest in the Ukrainian issue. Ribbentrop clarified that Berlin was interested in Soviet Ukraine as a means to weaken Russia but assured his interlocutor that Germany had never dealt with Polish Ukrainians. The top Nazi diplomat offered the Poles a close cooperation in the Ukrainian domain, which, according to him, could have become the absolute “prerogative of Poland” if the latter had agreed to resolve common problems in relations with Germany (the issue of Gdańsk and the ex-territorial highway). Ribbentrop asked whether the Poles had renounced Marshal Pilsudski’s aspirations regarding Ukraine. Beck, smiling, declared that the Poles had once (in 1920) even been in Kyiv and that these dreams were, without any doubt, still alive in Poland (DBFP, 1953, pp. 159–161).

Beck’s visit to Germany did not change the positions of the two sides, even though the Germans raised the stakes in talks by putting the Ukraine issue on the table. As a result of the negotiations, it became clear that there was no fundamental difference between Hitler and Ribbentrop in the matter of “general cleansing” of the Polish-German relations. Although the Nazi leaders assured Beck that their aim remained to deepen cooperation with Poland, after the meetings in Berchtesgaden and Munich, the Polish minister for the first time, according to his closest associates, became pessimistic about the prospect of reaching a compromise with Germany on the Gdańsk issue (DTJS, 1972, p. 467). Even if the Polish Minister did not find confirmation that Hitler had been personally involved in solving the Ukrainian problem, he assumed that Rosenberg and Ribbentrop could have been behind the agitation in Carpatho-Ukraine (Poland, 1976, pp. 43–45).

After Beck visited Germany, rumours began to circulate in European diplomatic circles on the postponement for several years of alleged German plans to create “Greater Ukraine” (DTJS, 1972, p. 475). It seemed that the problem of Ukraine was finally taking a secondary place, while the issue of Gdańsk was firmly established on the Nazis’ agenda.

In this context, on January 25–27, 1939, German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop paid a three-day visit to Warsaw intending to continue diplomatic pressure on Poland to join an alliance with Berlin. Symbolically, the arrival of the top Nazi diplomat took place on the fifth anniversary of the signing of the German-Polish non-aggression pact. Despite Polish expectations, the topic of Carpatho-Ukraine and the broader Ukrainian issue once again found itself among the important issues on the agenda, alongside Gdańsk, the situation of the German minority in Poland, and the Soviet-Polish relations (DBFP, 1953, p. 167).

Trying to exploit the “Ukrainian map”, Ribbentrop announced that following the Beck-Hitler meeting in Berchtesgaden on January 5, 1939, the Nazis issued instructions strictly

prohibiting the German agencies from carrying out anti-Polish activities in Ukraine. The parties devoted much of the time to exchanging views on the situation in the USSR with an emphasis on the internal weakening of the Soviet state due to Stalinist repressions. Ribbentrop assured Beck of Germany's readiness to go "hand in hand" with the Poles in the event of a collapse of the central government in Moscow and the start of centrifugal tendencies in the non-Russian peripheries of the Soviet empire, as well as in the case of any external aggression by the Kremlin. In the scenario of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Berlin was ready to recognize Poland's special interests in the east and for the second time offered cooperation in solving the Ukrainian issue (PDD, 2005, p. 48). In particular, this concerned the acquisition of certain territories in Soviet Ukraine by Warsaw. The chief of Polish diplomacy did not hide the fact that Poland pursued ambitions extending to Soviet Ukraine and the Black Sea shores but denied the possibility of any German-Polish agreement directed against the Soviet Union. At the same time, Beck did not voice objections against conducting bilateral consultations with Berlin regarding the fate of the USSR and the policy in the East in case of "any fundamental changes taking place in this area". According to some sources, it was about the possibility of joint consideration of ways to solve the Ukrainian issue in the future (PDD, 2005, p. 90).

After that, Ribbentrop proposed to positively solve the problem of Carpatho-Ukraine and the common border in advance by the Polish vision. Realizing that the Germans wanted to connect these issues with the Gdańsk case, Beck deliberately rejected the proposal, since, as he later would admit to his colleagues, he did not want to "pay the mortgage on the Gdańsk track later" (DTJS, 1972, pp. 479–480). The second meeting with Ribbentrop confirmed that Carpatho-Ukraine was not included in the Nazi's far-reaching plans, and the issue of the region remained open.

An important document shedding light on the views of the pro-German wing within the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the problems of international politics and security and the role of the Ukrainian issue in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic is a memorial, which was prepared by the Eastern Division of the Polish MFA on January 27, 1939, apparently in the context of Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw. It presented arguments in favour of Warsaw's policy regarding the liquidation of the so-called "Czech corridor" and the establishment of a common frontier in the Carpathians, as an important point of the Polish foreign policy in the post-Munich period. The unknown author argued that it was in Germany's interests to strengthen Poland, which could have prevented the march of the Soviet troops into Eastern Europe. This was possible in the case of Hungary's annexation of Carpatho-Ukraine and the creation of a joint Polish-Hungarian border, through which Poland, by analogy with 1920, could have received military aid from Hungary in the event of an outbreak of a new Polish-Soviet war. The document presented arguments in favour of the German-Polish cooperation in resolving the Ukrainian issue as a tool of anti-Soviet policy. "Poland will initiate the state independence of Ukraine in the event of a war between Poland and Bolshevik or some other Russia (...) When creating this state, Poland will consider Germany as its partner, just as it will seek to conclude an alliance with Germany in the event of a war with Russia" (AAN, MSZ, sygn. 5463, pp. 234–242).

This allows to establish the adaptation of the Prometheism concept to a potential union between Poland and Germany in a future war against the Soviet Union. Faced with the challenge of the Ukrainian issue due to the appearance of Carpatho-Ukraine on its southern borders, Warsaw once again sought to instrumentalize it for the realization of its geopolitical

goals. At the same time, in relations with Germany, Poland tried to seize the initiative and demonstrate its critical role in deciding the fate of a future Ukrainian state east of the Zbruch River. Trying to take into account the lessons of the Polish-Ukrainian alliance against Soviet Russia in 1920, the author of the memorial believed that the reason behind the failure of Pilsudski's policy back then was the inability to create powerful Ukrainian armed forces. "I do not want to claim that the creation of an independent Ukraine is an impossible task, on the contrary, it can be achieved with the joint efforts of Poland and Germany. And then this issue can be resolved in the interests of Poland, not against them", the author noted (AAN, MSZ, sygn. 5463, pp. 234–242).

According to Hungarian Ambassador András de Hory, the meeting in Berchtesgaden and Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw largely dispelled the fears of the Poles regarding Germany's Ukrainian plans in the context of the Carpatho-Ukraine problem. At the same time, Warsaw realized that Germany's next strike would be directed not to the east, but to the west. This, in turn, was supposed to improve Berlin's relations with its eastern neighbours and to create prerequisites for the implementation of the common border (Hory, 2017, pp. 292–294).

Warsaw was convinced that the Reich's next foreign policy step would not concern Ukraine, but rather the issue of colonies, as one of the last uncorrected injustices of the Treaty of Versailles. According to Minister Beck, Hitler did not seek war, and by all accounts did not plan it in 1939, because he was not prepared for conflict from a military point of view. Such strategic short-sightedness and narcissism played an evil joke on the Second RP, which, having underestimated the threat from Germany, fell victim to a double aggression from the Third Reich and the USSR six months after the liquidation of Czecho-Slovakia as an independent state.

**The Conclusions.** At the turn of 1938 – 1939, the influence of the Ukrainian issue on Poland's foreign policy reached its peak, which was sparked by a general discussion of this problem in international circles in connection with the project of forming "Greater Ukraine" based on Carpatho-Ukraine. Foremost, the Ukrainian issue was used by Hitler as a "bargaining chip" and a "bait" in his strategic negotiations with Poland with the final goal to attract the latter into his military and political alliance against the Soviet Union. Despite strong fears in Warsaw, Germany's involvement in the affairs of Carpatho-Ukraine was nothing more than a means of blackmailing Poland, the biggest target in the diplomatic battle of the Nazis during the post-Munich period. One can suggest that the failure of a diplomatic "cavalry attack" on Poland at the beginning of 1939 to force it into an alliance with Germany largely prompted Hitler to speed up the development of plans to resolve the "Czechoslovak issue". By occupying Czecho-Slovakia, the Führer sought to establish the Reich's dominance in East-Central Europe to dictate his terms to Warsaw from a more advantageous military and strategic position.

Despite the existence of a pro-German wing in the Polish ruling camp, which advocated cooperation with the Third Reich in solving the Ukrainian issue and waging a joint military campaign against the USSR in the spirit of the concept of Prometheism, at the beginning of 1939, the Polish diplomacy led by Józef Beck rejected the German demands and gradually took a course towards resumption of cooperation with the Western democracies – Great Britain and France. At the same time, at least until the end of March of 1939, there was still room for the German-Polish negotiations, in which the Ukrainian issue ceased to play a decisive role. One should agree to the thesis of the Polish historian Krzysztof Rak that Hitler's decision at the time of the start of the war and the direction of the first strike largely depended on Poland's position, in particular on its choice of the appropriate military and

political alliance. Since the Polish-German alliance did not work, Hitler returned to Rapallo's idea – the German-Soviet alliance, which cleared the way for him to start World War II.

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