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## Curzon's Ultimatum and Its Impact on the USSR Policy Towards Poland

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**Abstract:** The author raises the issue that was practically unexplored on the impact of the British ultimatum delivered to the USSR in May 1923 on the relations between Moscow and Warsaw. The author cites new documents from the diplomatic correspondence of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs' central office (NKID) with the Polish embassy which show that the uproar caused by the Curzon memorandum in the Soviet leadership extended far beyond the sphere of Soviet-British relations. There are analyzed the concessions that Moscow was ready to make in order to prevent Poland from joining the new anti-Soviet front. The comparative-historical analysis is used to examine the dynamics of changes in the nature and scale of these concessions depending on the tension in Soviet-British relations. The conclusion is made that the Curzon memorandum provoked a turn in the Soviet policy towards Poland which Moscow did not fully abandon even when the fears of forming a new anti-Soviet coalition were dispelled. The article also substantiates the reasons why the Soviet leadership decided not to give up its readiness to make a number of concessions to Poland, despite the fact that in June 1923 there was no threat of a new anti-Soviet intervention and Warsaw's participation in it.

**Keywords:** Polish-Soviet relations, most-favored nation treatment, transit to Persia, foreign policy, diplomatic isolation

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## Ультиматум Керзона и его влияние на политику СССР в отношении Польши

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**Аннотация:** Поднимается практически неисследованный ранее вопрос о влиянии на советско-польские отношения предъявленного Советскому Союзу в мае 1923 г. ультиматума Великобритании. Автор приводит новые документы из дипломатической переписки центрального аппарата Народного комиссариата иностранных дел (НКВД) с полпредством в Польше, которые показывают, что негативный эффект, который вызвал меморандум Керзона в советском руководстве, простирался далеко за сферу советско-британских отношений. Анализируются варианты уступок Варшаве, на которые была готова пойти Москва, чтобы не допустить присоединения Польши к новому антисоветскому фронту. Путем сравнительно-исторического анализа исследуется динамика изменения характера и масштаба этих уступок в зависимости от остроты накала советско-британских отношений. Делается вывод, что меморандум Керзона спровоцировал поворот в по-

литике СССР в отношении Польши, от которого Москва не отказалась в полной мере даже тогда, когда опасения относительно формирования новой антисоветской коалиции были развеяны. Обосновываются также мотивы, по которым советское руководство решило не отказываться от готовности пойти на ряд уступок Польше, несмотря на то что уже в июне 1923 г. угроза новой антисоветской интервенции и участия в ней Варшавы миновала.

**Ключевые слова:** советско-польские отношения, режим наибольшего благоприятствования, транзит в Персию, внешняя политика, дипломатической изоляции

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## Introduction

The study of Polish-Soviet relations in the early 1920s, despite the rather high degree of knowledge, still remains one of the most urgent tasks for historians. This is due both to the increased tension of current Polish-Russian relations in recent years, many of the problems in which date back to the events of a century ago, and to the discovery of previously unknown facts and documents that allow taking a fresh look at the formation and development of relations between Poland and the Soviet state in the period between the two world wars. One of the hitherto unexplored aspects of Polish-Soviet relations is the influence on them of the Curzon memorandum presented to Moscow on May 8, 1923 by London.

This document occupies one of the key places in the national historiography of the USSR foreign policy and Soviet-British relations in the 1920s. The ultimatum demands put forward in it by George Nathaniel Curzon, the head of the Foreign Office, became a serious test for the Soviet leadership, which, on the one hand, launched a tough anti-British campaign condemning it, on the other hand, made a number of concessions that led to the end of the crisis in relations with London.

Following official propaganda, Soviet historians assessed the outcome of the crisis in connection with the presentation of the Curzon memorandum as a victory for the USSR. The opinion was expressed that Curzon “had to be content with concessions on nonessential issues.”<sup>1</sup> Such assessments can be found in many works of the Soviet period.<sup>2</sup> In some publications, without relying on documents, it was even stated that “the failure of his aggressive foreign policy pursued towards the USSR” played a “decisive role” in the defeat of Lord Curzon in the struggle for the post of Prime Minister of Great Britain to Stanley Baldwin who became the head of the British government on 22 May 1923 after the resignation of Andrew Bonar Law.<sup>3</sup>

Such assessments dominated modern Russian historiography for a long time.<sup>4</sup> Only in the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the implications of the Curzon memorandum

<sup>1</sup> V.G. Truhanovskii, *Vneshniaia politika Anglii na pervom jetape obshhego krizisa kapitalizma (1918–1939 gg.)* [England's foreign policy in the first phase of the general crisis of capitalism (1918–1939)] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo IMO Publ., 1962), 117–118.

<sup>2</sup> I.M. Lemin, *Vneshniaia politika Velikobritanii ot Versalia do Lokarno 1919–1925* [British foreign policy from Versailles to Locarno 1919–1925] (Moscow: OGIZ Publ., 1947), 406–410; F.D. Volkov, *Krakh angliiskoi politiki interventsii i diplomaticheskoi izoliatsii sovetskogo gosudarstva (1917–1924 gg.)* [The collapse of the British policy of intervention and diplomatic isolation of the Soviet state (1917–1924)] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury Publ., 1954), 299–322; R. Karpova, *L.B. Krasin sovetskii diplomat* [L.B. Krasin Soviet diplomat] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury Publ., 1962); B. Kremnev, *Krasin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia Publ., 1968), 227–229.

<sup>3</sup> *Istoriia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR 1917–1939 gg.* [History of international relations and foreign policy of the USSR 1917–1939], vol. 1 (Moscow: IMO Publ., 1961), 251.

<sup>4</sup> V.A. Shishkin, *Stanovlenie vneshnei politiki poslerevoliutsionnoi Rossii (1917–1930 gody) i kapitalisticheskii mir: ot revoliutsionnogo ‘zapadnichestva’ k ‘natsional-bol'shevizmu’* [The formation of the foreign policy of post-revolutionary Russia (1917–1930) and the capitalist world: from revolutionary ‘Westernism’ to ‘National Bolshevism’] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Dmitrii Bulanin Publ., 2002), 169; O.V. Vasilenkova,

were reassessed. An important role in this was played by the studies of E.Yu. Sergeev who focused on the discrepancy between the statements of Soviet propaganda on the official refusal of the USSR to comply with the terms of the memorandum and Moscow's subsequent practical concessions to London on all the demands. The author supported his position with a telegram from M.M. Litvinov, the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to Ya.A. Berzin, the Deputy Plenipotentiary of the USSR in Great Britain, which noted that Moscow accepted "on all counts" the "demands that are absolutely incompatible with our sovereignty."<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, in foreign historiography, the concessions of the Soviet Union in response to the Curzon memorandum were initially regarded as Moscow's fulfillment of the main demands of London, as evidenced by publications in the then press.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that both during the USSR and in the post-Soviet period, the Curzon memorandum was the focus of numerous studies, the issue of its influence on the USSR policy outside the Soviet-British direction has not yet been studied in detail. In particular, the influence of the Memorandum on Polish-Soviet relations has not been disclosed, including in the most detailed works of Soviet expert in Polish studies P.N. Olshansky and Polish researcher E. Kumanetsky.<sup>7</sup> This subject is not mentioned in the collective Russian-Polish monograph devoted to the acute issues of Polish-Soviet relations either,<sup>8</sup> which is due to the rather late declassification of archival materials on this topic.

### Curzon's memorandum and Moscow's response to London

Threatening to break the Soviet-British trade agreement concluded in 1921, in the memorandum London demanded from the USSR a series of actions that limited the sovereignty of the young nation in foreign and domestic policy.

Moscow was accused of anti-British activities, and London demanded that it stop supporting the national liberation movements in the Near and Middle East, as well as in India. Presenting compromising excerpts from the intercepted Soviet diplomatic correspondence with the embassies in Iran and Afghanistan, Great Britain also insisted on the recall of Soviet plenipotentiaries Boris Shumyatsky and Fyodor Raskolnikov from these countries. In addition, Moscow was to refuse to arrest British trawlers detained for fishing along the coast of the Arctic Ocean, to limit the territorial waters in these areas to 3 miles, not to interfere with British fishing outside this zone, to release the arrested trawlers and pay compensation to their owners and commands, to abandon repressions against the clergy, to pay compensation to the families of the British subjects who had died and those who had been repressed by the Soviet authorities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Anglo-sovetskie otnosheniia v 1918–1924 gg. [Anglo-Soviet relations in 1918–1924]" (PhD diss., Vladimir State Pedagogical University, 2007), 147–152.

<sup>6</sup> E.Yu. Sergeev, "Curzon's Ultimatum to the Soviet Russia in 1923: New Interpretation," *Vestnik RGGU. Serii: politologiia, istoriia, mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, zarubezhnoe regionovedenie, vostokovedenie*, no. 11 (2015): 97–105; E.Yu. Sergeev, *Dzhordzh Nateniel' Kerzon: poslednii rytsar' Britanskoi imperii* [George Nathaniel Curzon: the last knight of the British Empire] (Moscow: Tovariishestvo nauchnykh izdaniia KMK Publ., 2015), 252–256.

<sup>7</sup> "Britain's dispute with Russia ended; Curzon says the Soviet has complied with his essential conditions," *New York Times*, June 14, 1923, 3.

<sup>8</sup> P.N. Ol'shanskii, *Sovetsko-pol'skie otnosheniia v 1921–1924 gg.* [Soviet-Polish relations in 1921–1924] *Sovetskoe slavianovedenie*, no. 1 (1972): 21–34; P.N. Ol'shanskii, *Rizhskii dogovor i razvitie sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii 1921–1924* [The Treaty of Riga and the development of Soviet-Polish relations 1921–1924] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1974); P.N. Ol'shanskii, *Kumaniacki J. Stosunki Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej zpaństwemradzieckim 1918–1943. Wybór dokumentów* (Warszawa: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Adam D. Rotfeld, and Anatolij W. Torkunow, *Biale plamy – Czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich 1918–2008* (Warszawa: PISM Publ., 2011).

<sup>10</sup> *Anglo-sovetskie otnosheniia so dnia podpisaniia torgovogo soglasheniia do razryva (1921–1927). Noty i dokumenty* [Anglo-Soviet relations from the date of the signing of the trade agreement to the break (1921–1927). Notes and documents] (Moscow: Litizdat NKID Publ., 1927), 32–39.

In the reply note handed over on 12 May to British trade representative in Moscow Robert Hodgson by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR, attempts to oppose Great Britain in the East were denied, and counterclaims were made concerning London's subversive work against Soviet power in Turkestan and the Caucasus. The note also expressed readiness to pay compensation to the British subjects who had suffered from the Soviet regime if the British government paid compensation to the families of the dead 26 Baku commissars, whose deaths were blamed on Great Britain. In addition, Moscow agreed to release the arrested British trawlers.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, there was launched a propaganda campaign demonstrating to Soviet citizens and working people of other countries Moscow's determination not to concede to Great Britain on the issues that limited sovereignty. And yet, despite the active anti-British rhetoric, in May – June 1923 the USSR took a number of steps aimed at satisfying London's ultimatum demands. In fact, in the note of Plenipotentiary of the USSR in Great Britain L.B. Krasin dated 23 May, in the response of the Soviet government dated 4 June to the 29 May memorandum of the British Foreign Office and in the response of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs G.V. Chicherin on 29 June, Moscow made concessions to London in all areas, except for the replacement of plenipotentiaries in Persia and Afghanistan. The Soviet authorities released the arrested English trawlers, allowed the British to fish in the northern coastal waters outside the three-mile zone until the issue was settled at an international conference, paid compensation to the British who had suffered from Soviet power, and temporarily stopped the most high-profile trials against the clergy.<sup>11</sup> In addition, having officially refused in May – June 1923 to recall the Soviet plenipotentiaries from Afghanistan and Persia, Moscow nevertheless recalled them later: F.F. Raskolnikov in February 1924 and B.Z. Shumyatsky in April 1925.

### **New policy towards Poland**

The documents of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) declassified in the post-Soviet period testify that the ultimatum presented by Curzon gave rise to such a big stir in Moscow that it caused the turn of the Soviet foreign policy towards Poland. Based on the documents of the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation stored in the fund of the secretariat of G.V. Chicherin, it follows that in May – June 1923, contrary to its previous policy, Moscow was ready to make large-scale concessions to Warsaw, only to prevent the formation of a new anti-Soviet front with the participation of Poland. Such a turn was largely facilitated by the opinion that was established in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the Politburo about the preparation of a new foreign intervention against the USSR in 1923. At the same time, the Curzon memorandum was considered by the Soviet leadership until the end of May as a stage of diplomatic preparation for its beginning.

In March 1923, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs saw the threat of a new large-scale attack on the Soviet state along the perimeter of its borders. In a letter to General Secretary of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) (Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)) J.V. Stalin dated 20 March 1923, G.V. Chicherin reported that “we must be ready for anything” in connection with Poland's plans to mobilize people of three ages at once during the spring and summer. Among other threats, he also outlined a “probable outburst of the Basmachi movement,” a possible attack from Manchuria, and three probable opponents at once: the ruler of the three northeastern provinces of China Zhang Zuo-

<sup>10</sup> *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* [Documents of foreign policy of the USSR. T. 6.], vol. 6 (Moscow: Gospolitizdat Publ., 1962), 288–302.

<sup>11</sup> *Anglo-sovetskie*, 40–58.

lin, the Manchu White Guards and the Japanese, a possible uprising in Georgia, as well as an invasion of Karelia.<sup>12</sup>

After the Curzon memorandum was received on 8 May 1923, there reinforced Moscow's opinion concerning the possibility of a new foreign intervention. In an effort to prevent it, the Soviet leadership tried by the end of May – the beginning of June not only to fulfill the key provisions of the ultimatum, but also to weaken the prerequisites for creating a broad anti-Soviet front. They decided to interest the potential participants in such a front with economic and political concessions.

As a result of the government crisis that erupted in Poland in May, there came to power a new centre-right government of Wincenty Witos. It included the parties traditionally oriented towards Great Britain, which strengthened Moscow's suspicions of Warsaw's possible participation in the expected intervention. One of the reasons for Poland's aggression at that time could be the failure of the Soviet republics to fulfill the financial, economic and property articles of the Treaty of Riga. Moscow feared that the Curzon memorandum would be followed by a demarche from Warsaw. On 25 March 1923, in a letter to Soviet plenipotentiary in Warsaw L.L. Obolensky Member of the NKID Collegium Ya.S. Ganetsky stated:

In recent days, we have had a little panic <...> they started a rumor that Knoll<sup>13</sup> was coming with an ultimatum, only his visit to me, where he calmly raised a few specific questions, gave me the opportunity to convince the public that fears were absolutely groundless.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of May, due to Curzon's defeat in the struggle for the post of British Prime Minister, the panic caused by the presentation of the British memorandum also waned.

However, before Moscow's fears concerning a new intervention finally disappeared, the Collegium of the NKID recommended the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) to change the previously pursued policy towards Poland. The corresponding proposals were developed at the meeting of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs Collegium held on 20 May 1923, which took place with the participation of representatives of the People's Commissariat for Finance G.Ya. Sokolnikov, People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade (NKVT) – M.I. Frumkin and P.L. Voikov who headed the delegation of the RSFSR and the Ukrainian SSR at the negotiations with Poland on the implementation of the terms of the Treaty of Riga.

It was planned to intensify the implementation of the extremely difficult provisions of the financial and economic part of the 1921 Treaty of Riga and offer Warsaw three options for repaying debts. In the field of trade policy, “when concluding a trade agreement with Poland, to provide for goods of Polish origin unhindered transit in any direction.” In addition, it was proposed to grant Poland the status of the most favored nation in trade, however, with a possible reservation – to extend it to all countries, as well as to encourage the creation of mixed societies with Polish industrialists. The Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs also recommended establishing preferential rates of customs duties for Polish goods and increasing the issuance of Soviet state orders to Polish enterprises.<sup>15</sup>

M.I. Frumkin took a special position at this meeting; he objected to granting Poland the most favored nation status in the customs sphere and free transit to the East.

<sup>12</sup> Archive of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation (henceforth AVP RF), f. 04, op. 32, p. 213, d. 52571, l. 4.

<sup>13</sup> From December 12, 1922 to December 30, 1923 Roman Knoll headed the diplomatic mission of Poland in the RSFSR.

<sup>14</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 213, d. 52571, l. 5–6.

According to Ya.S. Ganetsky (in his message to L.L. Obolensky in Warsaw), Frumkin believed that “transit would be strong competition for our industry, mainly textile industry.”<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that from 1921 the NKVT consistently opposed granting Poland the right to transit to the East, primarily to Persia, including in exchange for freedom of transit through Polish territory in trade between the Soviet state and the countries of Central Europe. However, until May 1923, the main dispute on this issue was between People's Commissar for Foreign Trade L.B. Krasin and L.L. Obolensky and the victory in it was invariably won by the NKVT. L.B. Krasin insisted that the issue of transit to the East, due to its importance for Poland, could be resolved only in case of more significant political and economic concessions on the part of Warsaw. In May 1923, it was the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs G.V. Chicherin that openly spoke out against the position of the NKVT on this issue.

In the cover letter to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) to this decision of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs dated 20 May, G.V. Chicherin pointed out:

In order to counter hostile influence and win over Poland to our side, Polish industry should be interested in the Russian market and in the Eastern markets in transit through the Soviet republic. In the issues of our payments, Poland should be given verbal satisfaction and some advance payment in case of delaying payments in any form.<sup>17</sup>

Such a drastic turn towards Poland, the readiness to make concessions on a number of issues, made L.L. Obolensky bewildered; he saw no reason to fear a new Polish attack on the USSR in the near future. In a letter dated 1 June 1923, Ya.S. Ganetsky was forced to explain to the plenipotentiary in Warsaw the motives for changing the policy towards Poland. In particular, he recalled Curzon's ultimatum, behind which, in his opinion, there were attempts to create an anti-Soviet front with the participation of Poland and France. He also explained generous concessions in the matters of transit and most favored nation status in trade:

We undertook to give transit through Russia to Poland on the basis of the peace treaty, <...> the meeting with economic agencies unanimously came to the conclusion that in the coming years such transit cannot be a detriment even to our textile industry, <...> the most favored nation principle, if we give it, then only as a fiction that would not bind us in other treaties...<sup>18</sup>

In the same letter, Ganetsky listed Moscow's possible concessions in the political sphere “against the insidious plans to draw Poland” into the struggle against Russia. It was supposed to extend the optation of the Poles to the Far Eastern Republic, which in November 1922 acceded to the RSFSR, and to give consent to the opening of Polish consulates in several cities of the USSR upon signing the consular convention.<sup>19</sup>

### **Reassessment of possible concessions**

By the beginning of June 1923, the fears concerning the creation of a new anti-Soviet front and a possible attack by Poland seem to have finally disappeared. In any case, the most radical options for accelerating the implementation of the 1921 Treaty of Riga and granting economic preferences to Poland were rejected. At the same time, Moscow's policy towards Poland did not return to the direction in which it had been pursued

<sup>16</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 97.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213, d. 52571, l. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 102–103.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

before the presentation of Curzon's ultimatum. The representatives of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the financial and economic bodies of the USSR continued discussing possible concessions designed to appease Warsaw and prevent new aggression on its part in the future.

In a letter to J.V. Stalin dated 8 June 1923, G.V. Chicherin reported on the meeting of the NKID Collegium on the Polish issue that had taken place on the same day with the participation of People's Commissar for Finance G.Ya. Sokolnikov, as well as M.I. Frumkin and P.L. Voikov. During the meeting, G.Ya. Sokolnikov's proposal to pay Poland immediately 10 million golden rubles on account of debt repayment under the Treaty of Riga was rejected. The discussion of the issue of granting Poland transit to the East went smoothly. Representative of the Supreme Council of National Economy P.A. Bogdanov reported on the number of goods that could be placed in Persia and on the possibility of transit of goods from Poland to Persia. After listening to P.A. Bogdanov and M.I. Frumkin,

the meeting decided that it was necessary to protect Russia's export of sugar and paper manufactory from the competition of Polish transit.<sup>20</sup>

In the resolution of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of 8 June 1923, it was proposed to introduce the above-mentioned restrictions on the transit of sugar and paper manufactory. It was also noted that the state of Soviet industry made it impossible for the main items of Polish export to fully satisfy the Eastern markets at affordable prices with Soviet-made goods. This caused discontent in the East and "undermined our political position." At the same time, it was considered desirable to allow the transit of Polish goods in order to "increase the profitability of our railways." As a necessary condition for such transit, the demand was put forward for the abolition of Poland's right to restrict the transit of goods from Germany, Austria and other countries to the USSR through its territory and the transit of Soviet goods to these countries. The USSR People's Commissariat for Communication Routes was to determine "acceptable <...> transit routes with the closure of the Caucasian and Kuban ports for it." It was also recommended that instructions be given to encourage the creation of mixed societies with groups of Polish industrialists.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that the fears of the Soviet leadership concerning a new intervention and Warsaw's participation in it did not come true, on 14 June 1923, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) approved the change of the course towards Poland. Its greatest mitigation was to occur in the economic area. Informing L.L. Obolensky of this decision, in a letter dated 15 June 1923, member of the Collegium of the NKID V.L. Kopp gave explanations on the transit issues:

The Polish industry needs Eastern markets and, above all, transit to Persia. It needs sales to the Caucasus and Ukraine. We are ready to resolve these issues by concluding a trade agreement <...>, as regards transit to Persia, only formally of course, we will give it for sugar and paper fabrics, however, demanding, in the form of compensation, Poland's renunciation of the right to establish restrictions for transit to Russia with Germany and Austria.<sup>22</sup>

Given the political views of the center-right government of W. Witos and his close ties with large industrial circles, V.L. Kopp wrote to L.L. Obolensky in the same letter:

<sup>20</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 213, d. 52571, l. 12–13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., l. 14–15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 212, d. 52564, l. 108–111.

Let the National Democrats feel that we are well aware that their staying in power is largely conditioned by the possibility of achieving diplomatic success in relations with Russia. We will give these successes in the area of greatest interest to them - the economic one, and we expect them to draw appropriate conclusions from this readiness of ours.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, whereas in May 1923 the main motive for changing the Soviet policy towards Poland was the fear of a possible military attack on its part, then in June Moscow set economic and diplomatic tasks, rather than military ones. First of all, it was concerned about the need to get Poland to abandon the demands for the Soviet state to comply with the economic articles of the Treaty of Riga as well as the issues of Warsaw's recognition of the formation of the USSR.<sup>24</sup>

The transition to a new policy towards Poland expressed in an attempt to “buy” the favor of the national bourgeoisie and the proletariat through economic concessions and the placement of Soviet orders in order to achieve through them softening of the anti-Soviet course by the Polish government, apparently inspired the NKID so much that it began to probe the possibility of spreading such tactics to other countries. In particular, on 19 June, in a letter to L.L. Obolensky V.L. Kopp stated, with reference to M.I. Frumkin, the intention of the NKVT to make large purchases of coal and boilers in Poland in the near future; due to this he asked for data on unemployment in these industries and to find out in which metallurgical and coal firms French capital was invested.<sup>25</sup>

### **Polish Republic's attitude to the initiatives of Moscow**

The first reaction of Polish diplomats to the new Soviet policy towards Poland including transit to the East was not particularly encouraging. In a letter to L.L. Obolensky dated 28 June 1923, G.V. Chicherin recounted the conversation with R. Knoll, Poland's Charge d'Affaires in the RSFSR. In response to an attempt by the People's Commissar to explain the benefits of revising and abandoning the financial and economic provisions of the Treaty of Riga in exchange for economic preferences from the USSR, the Polish diplomat began to insist on the prompt payment of 30 million golden rubles to Poland. R. Knoll pointed out the importance for the Polish government to take into account public opinion in Poland regarding Russia's implementation of the Treaty of Riga.<sup>26</sup>

In late June – early July L.V. Kopp sent L.L. Obolensky several letters. He demanded that they “put two ideas into the Poles' heads”: that if they insisted on Moscow's strict implementation of the Treaty of Riga, they would not receive the promised economic benefits in trade, while the Soviet side would urge financial counterclaims for the damage from “the raids of Polish and Petliura's gangs into our territory.” L.V. Kopp also asked L.L. Obolensky for any figures and reports that could confirm the damage from the raids into the Soviet territory by these gangs.<sup>27</sup>

Warsaw's refusal to revise the financial and economic terms of the Treaty of Riga in exchange for economic preferences caused controversy among Soviet diplomats. In a letter to L.L. Obolensky dated 6 July 1923, L.V. Kopp expressed disagreement with the proposal of I.L. Lorenz, the first secretary of the RSFSR embassy to Poland,

<sup>23</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 211.

<sup>24</sup> In 1923, the problem of international recognition of the Soviet republics' unification in the USSR in December 1922 was one of the key issues in Moscow's foreign policy. Poland delayed the recognition of the formation of the USSR and the extension to it of the obligations concluded with the RSFSR and other Soviet republics, because it did not recognize the very existence of some Soviet republics, in particular, the Georgian SSR, continuing to maintain relations with the former Menshevik government of Georgia and considering the territory of Georgia annexed by Soviet Russia.

<sup>25</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 114.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 126–129.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 130–131, 135–136.



in order to give the Poles some economic benefits putting aside the issue of the Treaty of Riga and thereby get their goodwill.<sup>28</sup>

According to I.L. Lorenz, after concluding a trade agreement that provided for the transit of Polish goods to the East, the most favored nation status in trade and even contingents for the supply of goods, the Poles would remain silent about Moscow's failure to comply with the Treaty of Riga. L.V. Kopp objected believing that with such tactics "the Poles will receive the largest economic advantages without any equivalent,"<sup>29</sup> while they would retain all claims regarding the non-compliance of the Treaty of Riga by the Soviet state, which can be put into action at any moment. He noted:

when the ruling circles in Poland realize, that without the abolition of the Peace treaty we will not open the doors to the East for Polish capitalism, our game will be won.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, Moscow's proposals caused some hesitation in Warsaw as well. In a letter to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) dated 11 July 1923, V.L. Kopp reported on the agreement of the Polish government to enter into the discussion on the conditions for the liquidation of Soviet obligations to Poland under the Treaty of Riga. By that time, according to his estimates, Warsaw demanded payment of approximately 140 million golden rubles, including 30 million golden rubles in the form of reparations under Article 13 of the Treaty of Riga for the exploitation of Polish lands under tsarism, 100 million golden rubles – for the industrial property lost by Polish citizens during the evacuation in the period of the First World War deep into the Russian Empire and 10 million golden rubles – for the railway property. Due to the lack of reliable legal grounds and evidence, as well as counterclaims from the Soviet side, "the amount of which can also be significant", V.L. Kopp suggested that claims only for 50 million golden rubles be considered real, including 30 million – under article 13 of the Treaty of Riga, 10 million – for the industrial property and 10 million – for the railway property.

Since under the terms of the Treaty of Riga, 1 golden ruble was equal to 50 Polish marks, and in 1923, due to the economic crisis in Poland, the Polish mark was devalued, further delay in payments under the conditions of depreciation of the Polish mark was to further reduce the size of Soviet debts to Poland. According to V.L. Kopp, under these conditions, Poland was not supposed to seriously resist the abolition of the Treaty of Riga, and agree to evaluate all Moscow's debts without reference to the weakening Polish mark at 20 million golden rubles. Moscow was to pay immediately 5 million golden rubles of these, and the remaining amount – within 10 years with the accrual of six percent per annum on the balance.

In return, upon conclusion of a trade agreement, Warsaw was supposed to receive freedom of transit to the East and the most favored nation in setting customs rates. At the same time, it was proposed that at first there should not be granted the general licenses for certain goods, the so-called contingent requested by the Polish side during the first negotiations. V.L. Kopp requested the consent of the Politburo to the indicated figures for starting negotiations.<sup>31</sup>

In a letter to L.L. Obolensky dated 13 July 1923, V.L. Kopp reported on the consent received from the Politburo:

...it is the benefits of the trade agreement that should be the object of compensation for Poland's refusal of further claims, namely: free transit to the East and most favored nation treatment.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 138–141.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 213, d. 52571, l. 18–19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 212, d. 52564, l. 148–149.

At the same time, he noted that the Polish government would discuss these conditions only

after preliminary and very strong diplomatic pressure <...> and under pressure, we will finally need to increase both the value of the entire monetary equivalent, and in particular to raise the size of the immediate contribution.<sup>33</sup>

V.L. Kopp also wrote that in the future, Moscow would apparently have to make concessions to Warsaw in matters of providing it with contingents for the supply of goods to the USSR or more or less long-term orders for Polish industry. He explained the need for further concessions by the fact that Poland already had the right to transit to the East under the Treaty of Riga, and the most favored nation treatment was of a formal nature, since without it any trade with the Soviet state which had established a monopoly on foreign trade was impossible. As the most extreme argument, at the negotiations with Polish Foreign Minister Marian Seyda, V.L. Kopp advised to carefully use the opinion that if Warsaw did not meet halfway on the issue of abolishing the Treaty of Riga, then there would be no progress in its implementation. V.L. Kopp concluded the letter with the following phrase:

In fact, the matter will be reduced to what it has been reduced to so far, i.e. to the most minimal payments on our part, which will give Poland, on the whole, hardly more than the accord we have just proposed.<sup>34</sup>

However, the negotiations did not yield a positive result. Warsaw refused to change the financial terms of the Treaty of Riga for the economic benefits offered by Moscow. During the conversation on 19 July with L.L. Obolensky, Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Henryk Strasburger parried the Soviet proposals. He stated that due to the devastation and falling purchasing power of Russian peasants, in the near future Poland would not be able to receive special benefits from the admission of its goods to the Russian market "even if it is granted <...> the widest benefits." Moreover, he questioned the benefits of opening transit to the East "due to the [bad] condition of our means of transport," L.L. Obolensky reported to Moscow. In the course of the conversation, H. Strasburger agreed to the lumping up of the Soviet obligations under Articles XV, XVI and XVII of the Treaty of Riga. At the same time, in the matters of payment of 30 million golden rubles under Article XIII of the Treaty of Riga, he refused to make any concessions.<sup>35</sup>

### Results of the new course

As the subsequent events showed, the transition to a new course towards Poland, despite the not quite successful first experience, turned out to be quite justified. On 13 December 1923, the Polish government officially recognized the USSR. All subsequent years Warsaw never discussed plans for a military invasion of the Soviet Union, and by the mid-1920s the issue of Moscow's non-payment of the part of the reparations envisaged in the Treaty of Riga gradually lost its urgency. Poland actually resigned itself to the impossibility of obtaining from the USSR the fulfillment of obligations worth 30 million golden rubles on account of the economic contribution of Poland to the economy of the Russian Empire. Other material obligations under the Treaty of Riga were settled only partially in 1924 under the pretext of the absence of documents confirming their size and the expiration of the period given in the contract for their implementation.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> AVP RF, f. 04, op. 32, p. 212, d. 52564, l. 148–149.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 213, d. 52570, l. 31–34.

<sup>36</sup> P.N. Ol'shanskii, *Rizhskii dogovor i razvitie sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii 1921–1924* [The Treaty of Riga and the development of Soviet-Polish relations 1921–1924] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1974), 160–221.

At the same time, Soviet orders grew smoothly until the early 1930s becoming an important support for individual enterprises of the Polish metallurgical and textile industries. Whereas on the whole these orders did not play a big role for Polish trade, accounting for a few percent in the goods turnover of the Polish state, they had a more significant effect on its foreign trade balance of payments. The peak of orders occurred during the industrialization in the USSR. In 1930 and 1931 they exceeded 128 and 125 million zlotys, and Poland's surplus in Polish-Soviet trade then amounted to more than 83 and 89 million zlotys, respectively.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Moscow did not allow the free transit of Polish goods to Persia.

### Conclusions

Thus, the presentation of the Curzon memorandum in May 1923 exacerbated the fears of the Soviet leadership and the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs regarding the possible creation of a new anti-Soviet coalition to attack the USSR and Warsaw's intentions to join it. Trying to prevent a negative development of events, Moscow made serious concessions to London on almost all the demands put forward by it in the memorandum. At the same time, the Soviet leadership decided to change its policy towards Poland. Various options for concessions to Warsaw were considered, primarily in the economic sphere. After the worst assumptions of the Soviet leadership had waned by the beginning of June 1923 and it became clear that Great Britain was not preparing a new intervention, and Poland was not going to attack the USSR, Moscow decided not to refuse the concessions made to London, as well as the foreign policy turn towards Poland.

At the same time, initially, during the period of the greatest fears in Moscow, in order to prevent the presentation of an ultimatum by Poland and a possible military attack on its part, there were considered options for paying large sums on account of the reparations provided for under the Treaty of Riga granting Poland the most favored nation treatment in foreign trade and free transit of goods to Persia, as well as the placement of Soviet orders for Polish enterprises that had lost the traditional Russian sales market. After the most pessimistic fears disappeared in June 1923, the Soviet leadership did not refuse to change the course. The new line of conduct provided for concessions to Poland on the placement of Soviet orders, the status of free favored nation in trade and the granting of the right to limited transit of Polish goods to the East in exchange for the recognition of the USSR and Warsaw's renunciation of the reparations due to it under the Treaty of Riga.

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