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Why did Poland reject the draft of the Eastern Pact?
The three-part agreement was to cover: Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany (incorporated at the request of France), Poland and the Soviet Union.



The concept of a multilateral treaty called the Eastern Pact - intended to be a practical implementation of the idea of collective security - was

born in Moscow, while its consistent promoter was the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Louis Barthou.

The assumptions of the Pact were presented in Warsaw during the visit of the head of French diplomacy (April 22-25, 1934). The Polish side, Minister Józef Beck and Marshal Józef Piłsudski, expressed deep reserve regarding the project which did not protect the interests of the Republic of Poland. In Warsaw, it was feared that the multilateral agreement would result in Paris withdrawing from the provisions of the Polish-French agreement of 1921, and the French would seek to cede some of the obligations arising from it to Moscow. One of the main reasons for Poland taking a sceptical position was its reluctance to accept any security guarantees on the part of the USSR, and by the Vistula River the Pact was treated as a tool to increase Soviet influence in the region.

After Berlin expressed a decidedly negative opinion on the idea of the agreement, it became clear that accepting it would be contrary to the policy of "equal distances", pursued in Warsaw, between the Third Reich and the USSR. Its assumptions were based on the principle of not entering into an agreement with any of the powerful neighbours, so as not to find itself in conflict with Berlin (in the event of rapprochement with the Soviets) or Moscow (in the event of closer cooperation with the Third Reich). Acceptance of the assumptions of the Eastern Pact by Poland would have been negatively assessed in Germany (as a step aimed directly at this state), which would cancel the significance of the Polish-German declaration of January 26, 1934 on non-violence in

mutual relations (incorrectly referred to in historiography as a non-aggression agreement) . For these reasons, Poland's participation in multilateral agreements was possible only in the case of agreements that would cover both Germany and the Soviet Union, but due to the conflicting interests of both countries, the implementation of such a concept was practically impossible. It should be emphasized that in 1934 Soviet diplomacy deliberately disseminated false information about the existence of secret clauses in the January declaration, including Poland's alleged consent to support German military postulates, and *désintéressement* of Warsaw on Anschluss. Moreover, the Soviets demanded that Paris forced Warsaw to change its position on the Eastern Pact. The pressure of French diplomacy (including the threat of breaking the alliance of 1921) proved unsuccessful.

There is no doubt that the Eastern Pact was an element of the diplomatic game aimed at rebuilding the traditional Franco-Russian alliance in the future, which would threaten Warsaw's interests in the longer term as a result of the expected loosening of the Polish-French alliance. A rapprochement between Paris and Moscow would therefore weaken the position of the Republic of Poland in Central and Eastern Europe and make the USSR an important ally of France in the region, being also the main factor influencing (also at the expense of Paris) the development of the political situation. In Poland, the conclusion of the Pact was considered a step leading to "opening the way to Europe for the Soviets". For Poland, a sufficient platform for an agreement with Moscow was the non-aggression treaty of July 25, 1932.

According to the leadership of Polish diplomacy, after joining the Eastern Pact, Poland did not obtain any additional guarantees in the event of a war with Germany, and the possible entry of the Red Army into the territory of the Republic of Poland was considered a solution that threatened sovereignty.

Moreover, the leadership of Polish diplomacy was afraid that France, by pushing for the idea of the Eastern Pact, perceived as a tool to increase real security in Europe, would be inclined to make concessions regarding the rearmament of Germany. Needless to say, the approval of the plans to expand the German army was perceived by the Vistula River as a threat to the security of the Republic of Poland.

By joining the Eastern Pact, Poland would have to guarantee the durability of the borders of the signatory states. Recognition of the borders of Czechoslovakia would therefore ultimately destroy the chance for restitution of the western part of Těšín Silesia (Zaolzie) and the areas of Spiš and Orawa. The conclusion of the agreement would also strengthen the position of Prague weakened by the Polish-German declaration of January 26. Meanwhile, the ČSR was treated by Warsaw as a competitor in the region and a state competing with Poland for the favour of France. The participation of Czechoslovakia in the Pact did not, however, have a decisive influence on the rejection of the French concept by Warsaw, as Beck was primarily concerned about the threat to the idea of the "policy of balance".

After presenting the final version of the draft Eastern Pact through Ambassador Jules Laroche on May 24, 1934, Beck replied evasively,

demanding participation in the Pact of Romania in place of Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, who were reluctant to Poland. In addition, the participation of the ČSR was contrary to the principle of the Second Polish Republic's non-interference with the Danube issues, which included the problem of Austria and the policy of the Little Entente. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "It does not seem that the Pact, which by extending it to Czechoslovakia would involve the problems existing by the Danube River, could really strengthen the security system in Eastern Europe." The government of the Republic of Poland expressed its position on the French proposals in a note sent to Paris on September 27, although it did not include any statements about an absolute rejection of the idea of a multilateral agreement of Central and Eastern European states. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a reservation that in a situation where the idea of the Pact were to be implemented, the government of the Republic of Poland "would apply for the inclusion in the text of the proposed diplomatic act of an article stressing in its entirety that the Polish-German treaty of January 26, 1934 constitutes the fundamental basis for relations between the two countries".

Summary:

- The Eastern Pact actually served to implement French and Soviet political interests and would weaken Poland's position in the region. Contrary to Paris, Warsaw did not treat the USSR as a country striving to maintain *status quo* in Europe, and the draft itself did not include an *expressis verbis* provision on maintaining

the binding borders (such a provision was contained in the Rhenish Pact signed in Locarno in 1925). The conclusion of the Pact would elevate the USSR to the rank of a superpower determining the balance of power in Europe.

- The negative stance of Warsaw and Berlin towards the Eastern Pact did not prove the existence of close cooperation in this field, although in the summer of 1934 both parties exchanged views on this issue. In Poland, the Eastern Pact was rejected for the above-mentioned reasons, while it was feared by the Spree River that the Pact would make it impossible to pursue an aggressive foreign policy that would undermine the Versailles order in Europe.

- The plans of the alliance omitted Poland's ally (Romania), and the signatories included countries that had bad relations with the Second Polish Republic (Czechoslovakia, Lithuania). The Pact would be of political value for Poland in the event of the accession of Great Britain, with whom Piłsudski and Beck wanted to strengthen contacts.

- Poland's position did not have a decisive impact on the failure of the Eastern Pact concept, and out of the nine countries that were to participate in the alliance only Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and the USSR accepted the French draft agreement without any

reservations.

- The abandonment of the Eastern Pact concept was largely the result of the death, on October 9, 1934, of Minister Barthou and the change in the vectors of French politics. Barthou's successor, Pierre Laval, was a supporter of cooperation with Italy and Great Britain and not with the USSR, and saw the need to work out an agreement with Germany, treating the Eastern Pact only as a tool of pressure on Berlin.

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