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## THE ACTIVITY OF WŁADYSŁAW GÜNTHER-SCHWARZBURG, ENVOY OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN ATHENS, TO HELP POLISH AND JEWISH REFUGEES IN GREECE IN 1939–1941

### Introduction

The issue of Polish citizens who were refugees in Greece during the Second World War has not been the subject of a separate study by Polish research centres until now.<sup>1</sup> The only work about Poles in that country, published in 1997, describes the Second World War period rather sketchily and deals with the Jewish question marginally.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the unfamiliarity with Jewish languages

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<sup>1</sup> Polish scholars have studied the military presence of Poles in Greece, and more broadly in the Balkan region, including conspiracy, partisan and intelligence operations: W. Biegański, M. Juchniewicz, S. Okęcki, E. Stachurski, *Antyhitlerowska działalność Polaków na Węgrzech i Bałkanach* (Warsaw, 1971), p. 114; W. Grabowski, “Polska Misja Morska w rejonie Morza Śródziemnego w czasie II wojny światowej,” *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy*, 16 (2015), pp. 91–114; L.A.B. Kaliszewicz, “Grzegorz”. *Placówka Wojskowej Łączności w Grecji*, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 63 (1983), pp. 92–112; *Polsko-brytyjska współpraca wywiadowcza podczas II wojny światowej*, vols 1–2, ed. by T. Dubicki, D. Nałęcz, and T. Stirling (Warsaw, 2004), *passim*. From the few Polish partisan memoirs referring to experiences in Greece, see J. Juźków, *Tagma thanatu. Wspomnienia z greckiej partyzantki* (Warsaw, 1977); J. Traczykowski, “Elas” *znaczyło wolność* (Warsaw, 1980). In particular, in People’s Poland the legend of the agent Jerzy Ivanov was promoted: J. Landowski, *Jeden przeciwko Niemcom* (New York, 1946); S. Strumph-Wojtkiewicz, *Agent nr 1* (Warsaw, 1959); M. and J. Przymanowscy, *Leonarda i jej synowie* (Cracow, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> J. Knopek, *Polacy w Grecji. Historia i współczesność* (Bydgoszcz, 1997).

hindered scholarly inquiries<sup>3</sup> Polish historiography on Polish–Jewish relations on Greek soil has only one good account, albeit not source documented, of efforts to rescue Jews by one Emil Leyk,<sup>4</sup> aka “Inżynier.” When Leyk was the head of the Kriegswirtschaftskommando in Thessaloniki, he allegedly attempted to prevent the extermination of Greek Jews who were deported from there to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.<sup>5</sup> Leyk was of Polish descent (a Mazurian<sup>6</sup>). He collaborated with the Greek Resistance and British intelligence. From 1 January 1942, when his immediate German superior was transferred to the Third Reich, he developed extensive sabotage operations in Greece. When he became aware of plans to deport Jews to the extermination camp, he decided to organise a mass transfer of Jews to Italy and Spain. He recommended that those who had forged documents should be sent to work in the mines as a means of protecting them. Unfortunately, this initiative was apparently not accepted by the Jews themselves, who did not take the risk of coordinating it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The last Polish review of the Polish academic literature on Greece and Polish-Greek relations in different historical periods was produced in 1998, See J. Knopek, “Nowożytna Grecja w najnowszej historii polskiej,” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2 (1998), pp. 145–154.

<sup>4</sup> Emil Leyk (1893–1972), an engineer, architect, Polish activist in the Mazury region, went to Germany between the wars, where he developed a career as a construction specialist. In 1940 he was appointed in the rank of captain to the Wehrmacht’s Inspectorate of Armaments and War Economy, after which he was sent to Thessaloniki in the autumn of 1941. In February 1943 he was transferred to Denmark, and in July that year, when he was temporarily transferred to Warsaw thanks to his brother Fryderyk, he became a member of the Polish Liberty Union (*Polski Związek Wolności*) (subordinated to the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*] from 1942). He returned to Poland in 1946, but was arrested by the Department of Security in 1950. After his release from prison, he became involved with Mazury and the life of the local Evangelical Augsburg Church. See also G. Jasiński, “Grupa autochtonów o profaszystowskim nastawieniu zostanie pozbawiona kierowniczego czynnika...”. Okoliczności aresztowania księdza Jerzego Sachsa, Emila Leyka i Waltera Późnego w 1950 r.,” *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 4 (2010), pp. 435–492; S. Okęcki, “Polacy w greckim ruchu oporu,” in W. Biegański, M. Juchniewicz, S. Okęcki, *Polacy w ruchu oporu narodów Europy 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1977), pp. 228–230; *idem*, “Na ziemi duńskiej,” in *ibid.*, pp. 156–157.

<sup>5</sup> Information on this subject appeared for the first time in a 1969 study, which may have resulted in its author, on the wave of the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign, writing about Jewish affairs and embellishing the theme somewhat. The article was published in the non-scientific journal *Argumenty*, which had state patronage. It was published by the Society for the Cultivation of Secular Culture. See W. Nawik, “Prawdziwy Kloss mieszka w Szczytnie,” *Argumenty* 42 (1969), pp. 1–9.

<sup>6</sup> Mazurian – an inhabitant of Mazury, a geographic and cultural region in north-eastern Poland. In the nineteenth century and between two world wars, this area was part of the German state. Only after the end of the Second World War did it become part of Poland.

<sup>7</sup> Jasiński, “Grupa autochtonów;” Okęcki, “Polacy w greckim ruchu oporu,” pp. 228–230; *idem*, “Na ziemi duńskiej,” pp. 156–157.

The deportation of Greek Jews, mainly from Thessaloniki, to the concentration camp KL Auschwitz-Birkenau (15 March 1943) understandably attracted more interest among Polish historians.<sup>8</sup> However, it can hardly be classified as an issue of Polish-Jewish relations. On the other hand, in the studies of Greek and English-speaking historians, although refugee and diplomatic issues concerning foreign states in Greece are taken into account, there is no information on Polish themes.<sup>9</sup> To date, only one paper (from 1986) can serve as a starting point for this study. It presents the survival strategies and attempts to rescue Jews in Greece. Its author is Yitzchak Kerem.<sup>10</sup> He distinguished between the following types of fleeing from occupation and from death in an extermination camp located in occupied Polish territory: leaving a town or region, especially crossing into an area under Italian occupation, diplomatic intervention, intervention by Jews in Palestine, evacuation with Greek or English military personnel, assistance by Greek fishermen and sailors to get out of Greece, hiding, participation in partisan warfare and service in the Greek army outside the country. In terms of diplomatic assistance, Kerem briefly characterised the activities of representatives of neutral countries: Argentina, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

Given this gap in research, the subject of this article has become relief and rescue efforts<sup>12</sup> undertaken by the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Athens

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<sup>8</sup> The literature on this subject is very rich. Let us just mention that in Poland, the first work that dealt with this topic was written in the late 1960s. See D. Czech, "Deportacja i zagłada Żydów greckich w KL Auschwitz (w świetle tzw. 'Ostatecznego rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej')," *Zeszyty Oświęcimskie* 11 (1969), pp. 5–35.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, a relatively new book, which is a record of up-to-date knowledge on the Holocaust in Greece and other related topics, e.g. relations with the Christian environment, published by Cambridge University Press: *The Holocaust in Greece*, ed. by G. Antoniou and D. Moses (New York, 2018). See also Ch. Avni, "Spanish Nationals in Greece and their Fate during the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies* 8 (1970), pp. 31–68.

<sup>10</sup> Y. Kerem, "Dar'chej hacalah szel j'hudijm b'jawan b'mil'chemet-haolam hasz'nijah," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 27 (1986), pp. 77–109. In 2012, Yitzchak Kerem expanded his research with a new study on the Greek government-in-exile's efforts to save Greek Jews. However, it lacks diplomatic threads. Kerem concluded that the overall Greek effort, which also took into account the efforts of the Jewish side, did not produce the expected results. Help from the government side was only possible for Greek Jews who found themselves outside Greece as refugees: *idem*, "The Greek Government-in-exile and the Rescue of Jews from Greece," *Holocaust Studies* 2–3 (2012), pp. 189–212.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Kerem, "Dar'chej hacalah szel," p. 78. This publication, due to the fact that it was written in Hebrew, is unknown to Greek scholars.

<sup>12</sup> The author distinguishes between the terms "relief" and "rescue". Strictly relief operations were organised in conditions where there was no imminent threat to the health and life of Jewish people. Rescue operations, on the other hand, were those that were undertaken in a specific area when the lives

during the Second World War for Polish citizens, including Jews, providing them with support and saving them from being left under the sphere of influence of the German and Italian occupiers. Staying there, as the course of history has shown, meant death in an extermination camp on Polish soil.<sup>13</sup>

On 1 April 1936, Władysław Günther-Schwarzburg (1885–1974)<sup>14</sup> became the head of the Polish diplomatic mission. His tenure ended on 22 April 1941, when he left Greece.<sup>15</sup> The article focuses on efforts taken for the benefit of Polish citizens and the duration and results of these efforts, taking into account local circumstances. Wartime diplomatic assistance is discussed after giving biographical sketches of the most important members of the Polish diplomatic corps in Greece who took part in the rescue of Jews. Günther's interwar record as a diplomat on Greek soil is also provided to give context. The pre-war themes are noteworthy since the Polish envoy established a more substantial Polish presence in Greece during peacetime and revived economic and cultural exchanges with Greek partners. In the 1930s, Günther and his colleagues created a team of people who were exceptionally committed to their work, which is not irrelevant when assessing the actions of this group during the Second World War. Integration also extended to the Polish consulate in Thessaloniki. At the time, the office of consul was held by a Sephardic Jew, Albert Nehama, who established good relations with Jews (the Jewish community) in the area.<sup>16</sup>

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of Jews could be endangered as a result of German policy. Obviously, "relief" has a broad meaning, and rescue operations are part of the relief, i.e. any activity aimed at protecting the Jewish population from the various aspects of German occupation terror.

<sup>13</sup> This article should be treated as another in a case study type series on the activities of Polish diplomacy on behalf of Jewish refugees. See A. Gontarek, "Polish Diplomatic and Consular Representation in Havana and the Case of Jewish Refugees in Cuba during World War II," *Polish-Jewish Studies* 1 (2020), pp. 464–499; *eadem*, "Działalność Poselstwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Hiszpanii na rzecz pomocy uchodźcom żydowskim w czasie II wojny światowej (w świetle akt Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych przechowywanych w Archiwum Instytutu Hoovera). Zarys problemu," *Almanach Historyczny* 13 (2022), pp. 235–266. For a broader context of research on diplomatic assistance provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic posts, see *eadem*, "Dyplomacja polska a pomoc udzielana Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką w latach 1939–1945," in *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa*, ed. by T. Domański and A. Gontarek (Warsaw, 2022), pp. 113–174.

<sup>14</sup> In the rest of this article, I use the name Günther. This is how the envoy signed his name on documents.

<sup>15</sup> Hoover Institution (hereinafter HI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter MFA), box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 26 April 1941.

<sup>16</sup> *Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 4 (1927), p. 71.

In addition, as an introduction to the topic, the group of Polish citizens residing in Greece until the outbreak of the war, known as the Polish colony, is described. Other issues concerning activities during the war include: the situation of the diplomatic mission and its main tasks after the outbreak of the Second World War, Jewish refugees and the evacuation of Polish citizens; the situation in which the diplomatic mission found itself after Germany invaded Greece (6 April 1941) and efforts to obtain visas; the Polish contribution to the organisation of an evacuation from Greece; Günther's assessment of the evacuation activities taken by British envoy Michael Palairet (1882–1956); and the fate of Jewish Polish citizens in Greece after the closure of the Polish Legation.

Most of the sources used to write this study were the fonds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stored at the Hoover Institution Archives. The encoded communications sent by the diplomatic mission in Athens and by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped to outline the main problems Envoy Günther faced during the war. The fonds are the only compact archival material on the basis of which we can analyse the activities of the envoy, since the files of the Polish Legation in Athens, now located at the Polish Institute and the General Sikorski Museum in London, have only two catalogue numbers. In addition, occasional use was made of the Archives of New Records, Yad Vashem, press sources of Polish, British and Jewish provenance and the memoirs of Günther himself. In the search for information about Jewish refugees from Poland, two memorial books about the Jews of Thessaloniki were also consulted.<sup>17</sup>

Two sources are attached to the article – one is a “Letter from Władysław Günther, Envoy for the Republic of Poland in Athens, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, dated 27 May 1941,” in which the envoy briefly describes his efforts to evacuate the refugees, and the other is the “List of surnames of Polish passport holders at the disposal of the Department for Aliens of the Greek police, seized by the German secret service (1943).” Unfortunately, we cannot say anything further about the list of names, as it was included in the file without any correspondence explaining where and

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<sup>17</sup> Reference is made to these books: *Saloniki, 'ir va-em be-Israel* (Jerusalem–Tel Aviv, 1967); *Zichron Saloniki: gedulatah hurbanah szel Jeruzalajim de-Balkan*, ed. D. Recanati, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1971).

how it came to the MFA. It is proof of the keen interest taken by German agents in Polish citizens in Greece. It may also prove useful for genealogical research.

## Polish Diplomatic and Consular Mission in Greece during the Interwar Period: A Biographical Aspect

To date, there has been no extensive research into the biography of Günther and his colleagues at the Polish Legation. It is worth mentioning that the first Polish representative in Athens, as extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary, was August Zaleski, who later became Poland's foreign minister. He held this office from 1919 until December 1920.<sup>18</sup> Then, in January 1921, a very experienced diplomat Mikołaj Jurystowski, who had worked for a long time in the Austro-Hungarian consular service, was appointed envoy. His mission ended in 1924. By the time Günther was posted as head of the Polish Legation in Athens in 1936, it was headed by Czesław Andrycz (1924–1926), Paweł Juriewicz (1926–1934), and Zygmunt Wierski (1934–1936). Two of them – Andrycz and Wierski – served as chargé d'affaires. Four of those mentioned (Zaleski, Jurystowski, Juriewicz and Günther) came from the landed gentry. The activity of Polish diplomats on Greek soil was not very noticeable until the 1930s. Before 1936, the Polish authorities considered this area to be of little importance.<sup>19</sup> Jacek Knopek claims that the local Polish community in Greece became more active after Günther was posted to Athens.<sup>20</sup>

We can learn a great deal about Günther's pre-war activities from his biographical note in the *Słownik biograficzny polskiej służby zagranicznej* [Biographical Dictionary of Polish Foreign Service], as well as from his memoirs published in 1963, *Pióropusz i szpada. Wspomnienia ze służby zagranicznej* [The plume and the sword. A Foreign Serviceman's Memories<sup>21</sup>]. The future envoy was born in

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<sup>18</sup> A. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia*, ed. by K. Kania, K. Kloc, and P.M. Żukowski (Warsaw, 2017), p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> On this subject, see M. Kornat, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1938–1939. Cztery decyzje Józefa Becka* (Gdańsk, 2012), p. 107; B. Łyczko-Grodzicka, *Dyplomacja polska a Ententa Bałkańska 1933–1936* (Wrocław, 1981); *eadem*, *Polska, Turcja, Grecja w latach międzywojennych* (Cracow, 1985). In the 1985 publication, Greek issues were somewhat marginalised in favour of a deeper analysis of Polish-Turkish relations.

<sup>20</sup> Knopek, *Polacy w Grecji*, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see "Władysław Günther-Schwarzburg (1885–1974)," in *Słownik biograficzny polskiej służby zagranicznej 1918–1945*, ed. K. Smolana, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 2007), pp. 118–119; W. Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada. Wspomnienia ze służby zagranicznej* (Paris, 1963). This author's memoirs have not been published in full – the Paris edition contains only one fragment.

1885 in Dołęga (in Austro-Hungary, now the Małopolska Voivodeship) into a landed gentry family. In 1908, he graduated from the Sorbonne with a doctorate in philosophy. He also studied at the universities of Paris and Geneva. During World War I, he was a prisoner of war in Russia, and in 1915 became a member of the Polish Independence Committee in Kazan, and a year later in Kyiv.<sup>22</sup>

After the Polish state regained its independence in 1918, he soon began working as a desk officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He owed his job to the patronage of Roman Knoll (1888–1946), who was a good friend of Günther's family. He moved in Piłsudski's circles and was a member of the Promethean movement and a freemason. He was a friend of Foreign Minister August Zaleski.<sup>23</sup>

In May 1919, Günther was posted to the Polish Legation in Prague as legation secretary first class. At the same time, from March 1919 to mid-March 1920, he served as the Polish MFA delegate to the Inter-allied Control Commission in Cieszyn and then, from 24 May 1919 to 1 August, to the Inter-allied Plebiscite Commission.<sup>24</sup> During this period, he clearly identified himself with the Warsaw Freemasonry milieu.<sup>25</sup>

In July 1920, he returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he worked in the Political Department and was promoted to a ministerial counsellor. He then headed the North Section from August 1923 to May 1924. Günther's career flourished not only due to Knoll's constant backing but, above all, due to his own abilities. When Knoll was appointed as a legate in Ankara in 1924, Günther took up the post of legal adviser to the Polish Legation. Later, their paths crossed when

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<sup>22</sup> L. Hass, *Masoneria polska XX wieku. Losy, loże, ludzie* (Warsaw, 1996), p. 247. Günther was one of Leon Chajn's informants when he wrote his book on Polish freemasons. This is clear from the correspondence exchanged between them. See L. Chajn, *Polskie wolnomularstwo 1920–1938* (Warsaw, 1984), pp. 139, 266–267, 331.

<sup>23</sup> Günther remembered the way Knoll encouraged him to take the job: "Knowing my family relations, he added a personal comment: Since Ukraine has been taken by the devil, i.e. the Bolsheviks, so they have also taken your Mother's income. As a diplomat, you will be able to travel and engage in literature. Remember Claudel, who was an ambassador, or our own Chłędowski and his *Dwór w Ferrarze* or *Rzym papieży*, even though he was secret advisor to the Ministry for Galicia in Vienna." Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> D. Miszewski, *Aktywność polityczna mniejszości polskiej w Czechosłowacji w latach 1920–1938* (Poznan, 2002), pp. 56–57.

<sup>25</sup> Hass, *Masoneria polska*, p. 247.

Knoll became a legate in Rome in 1926 – at that time, the diplomatic mission there was headed by Günther in the rank of chargé d'affaires ad interim. Knoll also reached out to his protégé when, as deputy minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was put in charge of reorganising that Ministry. At that time, he appointed Günther as head of a new territorial division (South Section), where he was responsible for Southern Europe in the Political and Economic Department. At the time, the future envoy to Greece was already regarded as an expert on the region. From that moment on, the affairs of Italy, Spain, Portugal, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, South and Central America, Egypt, Palestine and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as the independent countries of Africa, were to receive more attention from Polish diplomacy than before.<sup>26</sup>

In 1931, Günther was appointed an envoy in Belgrade. In May 1935, he was recalled from Yugoslavia and put on hold. He returned to the diplomatic service later that year and, on 1 April 1936, he was appointed an envoy in Athens. In April 1938, he was also accredited as Poland's diplomatic representative to neighbouring Albania (Tirana).<sup>27</sup>

Günther's mission in Athens ended in 1941 when, as a result of the German invasion of Greece (6 April), he was forced to evacuate with the Greek government to Crete on 22 April that year.<sup>28</sup> After the Greek retreat from the island, the diplomat was an envoy to the Greek government-in-exile in London (until January 1942). Then, at the request of the head of the Foreign Office, he travelled from the British capital to Cairo together with King George II and the Greek government. From June 1942 to June 1945, he held a similar post as envoy to the Norwegian government-in-exile in London.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> H. Bartoszewicz, "Misja dyplomatyczna Romana Knolla w Rzymie," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (2011), pp. 55, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Knopek, *Polacy w Grecji*, p. 155; "Białogród," *Kurjer Warszawski* 108 (1938), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> In May 1941, the envoy, while on Crete, suspected that the British were anxious for him to leave the island as soon as possible: "I have the impression that the intention to get us to leave now stems from the desire of the English to absolve themselves of their responsibility towards us." HI, MFA, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 2 May 1941.

<sup>29</sup> *Dokumenty Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie. Suplementy do tomów I–VIII. Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów październik 1939 – sierpień 1945*, ed. by W. Rojek and A. Suchcitz (Cracow, 2010), pp. 420, 445.



After the war, he remained in exile. In 1950, he started working as a lecturer and in 1960, as a Polish language and literature professor at the Polish University Abroad in London. He died on 27 March 1974.<sup>30</sup>

Just before the outbreak of the war, in the summer of 1939, besides Günther, other full-time employees (functions not stated) at the Polish diplomatic mission in Athens included Secretary Zygfryd Englisch, Zofia Gulińska, Zdzisław Kamiński, Irena Przykorska and Władysław Woynowski.<sup>31</sup>

In the context of the relief efforts undertaken for Jews during the war, the biography of Zdzisław Kamiński, a commercial counsellor at the Polish diplomatic mission, also deserves mention. When he arrived in Athens in the 1930s, he helped to revive Polish-Greek commercial relations.<sup>32</sup> Kamiński had a background in economics, and probably graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics (WSH). In the interwar period, before he and his wife were posted to Greece, he had worked at the thriving Ostrowiec Steel Mill.<sup>33</sup> His wife, from 1938 or 1939, was Zofia Galicówna, a highlander from Zakopane and a great-granddaughter of Szymon Tatar (the elder). She was a mountain climber, a co-founder and a motivator of an emancipation movement among women mountaineers.<sup>34</sup> Kamiński was also the brother-in-law of Wanda Henisz-Kamińska, a pioneer among women mountain climbers.<sup>35</sup> During the war in 1940, the Kamińskis ascended Mytikas (with a summit elevation of 2,917 metres), the highest peak of Mount Olympus.<sup>36</sup> They were probably the first Poles to set foot there. After being evacuated from Greece in 1941, Zdzisław and Zofia went to Crete and then England, where they settled, only visiting Poland for brief trips after the end of the Second World War. In the 1970s, they opened a successful interior design business.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Günther-Schwarzburg Władysław," in *Kto był kim w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. by J.M. Majchrowski, G. Mazur, and K. Stepan (Warsaw, 1994), p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> *Rocznik Służby Zagranicznej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Stan 1 czerwca 1939* (Warsaw, 1939), p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 146.

<sup>33</sup> K. Tarasiewicz, *Cały wiek w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 2005), p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> In the interwar press she was called "one of the best, if not the best Polish women mountaineers." H. Jabłczyńska-Jędrzejewska, "Walka o równouprawnienie w taternictwie," *Start* 20 (1930), pp. 8–9.

<sup>35</sup> H. Ptakowska-Wyżanowicz, *Od krynoliny do liny* (Warsaw, 1960), p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> A. Łojek, "Pionierskie wyczyny Polek na górskich szlakach i skalnych ścianach," *Słupskie Prace Geograficzne* 5 (2008), p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> Other employees of the legation also went to Crete: Szczęśny Zalewski and Jerzy Szczeniowski. HI, MFA, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 5 May 1941; Tarasiewicz, *Cały wiek*, p. 290.

Albert Nehama, a Sephardic Jew, who was an honorary consul of the Republic of Poland in Thessaloniki, was another important figure. He ran the consulate from the time it was established on 27 May 1927. The consulate in Thessaloniki, which also covered Macedonia, was located at 6 Hermou St.<sup>38</sup> Little is known about Lio Basso and Rustem Kiazim, his two secretaries working alongside him. Researchers also have little data about the consul himself. Gościwit Malinowski made an attempt to draw Albert Nehama's biographical profile, which still needs to be filled with more information and checked.<sup>39</sup> Since at least 1920, Nehama ran a bank, established in 1907. When a consulate was opened in Thessaloniki, it was Albert Nehama rather than Aleksander Śliziński who was credited with developing Polish-Greek trade relations, being posted there as consul against the wishes of the Polish diaspora in Thessaloniki.<sup>40</sup> According to Ares Chadzinikolau, it was Zygmunt Mineyko, an esteemed and respected diplomat, who had supposedly been appointed consul. Nehama did not speak Polish, so the consulate's correspondence was conducted in French.<sup>41</sup> The only member of the staff who spoke Polish was Maryła Chmielewska.<sup>42</sup>

From February 1937, Poland had a second consulate in Greece, in Piraeus, headed by Arvanitidi Cosmas, though he was not involved in providing support to Jews and Poles in Greece during the war. While Nehama's remit included commercial and maritime activities, as well as socio-cultural, legal and propaganda activities, the work of the consul in Piraeus was limited to tasks related to the participation of Poles in the town's port trade.<sup>43</sup>

Last but not least, there was Julian Rummel, who had been the Greek consul in Poland in 1938. He was a shipbuilding engineer by profession, director of the Office

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<sup>38</sup> *Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 12 (1929), p. 258; *Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 4 (1927), p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> This researcher, without relying on archival material, speculated on Nehama's wartime fate. He suggested that the consul was probably deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. See G. Malinowski, *Hel-lenopolonica. Miniatury z dziejów polsko-greckich* (Wrocław, 2019), p. 546.

<sup>40</sup> Aleksander Śliziński was, among other things, founder and honorary vice-president of the Greek-Polish Chamber of Commerce. National Digital Archives, box 1-G-463a.

<sup>41</sup> W. Skóra, *Służba konsularna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Organizacja, kadry, działalność* (Torun, 2006), p. 216.

<sup>42</sup> A. Chadzinikolau, *Polsko-greckie związki społeczne, kulturalne i literackie w ciągu wieków* (Poznan, 2001), p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Rocznik Służby Zagranicznej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, p. 78.

of the Sea League in Warsaw from 1921, founder of the French-Polish Consortium for the construction of the seaport in Gdynia (1924) and organiser and first director of the State Enterprise “Żegluga Polska” (1926-1932). In addition, he founded the Polish-British Shipbuilding Society and the Gdynia-America Shipping Lines company. He also excelled as the first president of the Polish Shipowners Association (1929). In addition, he was a member of the Gdynia City Council, serving for a time as its mayor (1928). Among his major initiatives, was the establishment of the Holiday of the Sea, the co-organisation of the Polish Yacht Club and the Rotary Club. During the Second World War in Greece, when there was no longer a Polish diplomatic post in the country in April 1941, Rummel took care of Polish citizens. After the war, in 1946, he came to Poland, where, until 1951, he served as an advisor to the Minister of Shipping.<sup>44</sup> He wrote his memoirs.<sup>45</sup>

### The “Polish Colony” in Greece during the Interwar Period and Envoy Günther’s Diplomatic Activity in the 1930s. An Outline

Until 1939, only a few Polish citizens regularly resided on Greek soil. Those who did were members of what was known as the Polish colony.<sup>46</sup> The 1920s saw a heightened role of Polish diplomacy in relief operations at a time when Polish refugees fleeing revolution-torn Russia were arriving in Greek ports. The influx of refugees grew after the Treaty of Riga was signed in March 1921, and repatriated Poles from the East began pouring in. It is estimated that between 1920 and 1922, a total of 750 to 1,000 people, including around a dozen Jews, made their way to the Greek ports. The refugees were mainly officers, soldiers and members of the Polish intelligentsia.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hass, *Masoneria polska*, pp. 288–289; Z. Nowak, *Słownik biograficzny Pomorza Nadwiślańskiego*, vol. 4 (Gdańsk, 1997), pp. 112–113; J. Pertek, “Rummel Julian Eugeniusz (1879–1954),” in *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 32 (Wrocław, 1989–1991), pp. 90–92.

<sup>45</sup> Only part of it has been published. From the preface, we learn that the author did not write a memoir of the war time. J. Rummel, *Narodziny żeglugi*, selection, introd. and notes by M. Rdesiński (Gdańsk, 1980).

<sup>46</sup> Colonies in Greece were groups of settlers representing foreign countries, e.g. Great Britain, France, Poland, etc.

<sup>47</sup> For more, See J. Knopek, “Repatriacja polskich uchodźców cywilnych i wojskowych z Rosji przez Grecję i Cypr w latach 1920–1922,” *Nautologia*, 3–4 (1996), pp. 15–17; W. Stępiak, “Potencjalna sojuszniczka czy drugorzędny partner? Grecja w polityce polskiej w latach 1920–1923,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 3–4 (1995), pp. 151–167.

Jacek Knopek estimated that, throughout the interwar period, there were, on average, one hundred or so Poles in Greece. They were mainly associated with the Polish diplomatic service and the commercial enterprises operating there. Of the more significant Polish business initiatives, mention can be made of a chemical and pharmaceutical factory owned by A. Gąsecki (first name not provided). This group of Poles also included sailors and<sup>48</sup> Polish miners working in Greek pyrite mines between the wars.<sup>49</sup>

In mentioning statistics for this Polish group, a separate treatment must be given to Polish Jewish citizens who made a stop in Thessaloniki on their way to Palestine as part of the illegal emigration (*aliyah bet*), which was particularly strong in the 1930s. Greece was, if not the most important, then certainly a key transfer point for Jews heading to Palestine both between the two World Wars and during the Second World War, until it was occupied by the Third Reich forces.<sup>50</sup> The specific nature of Thessaloniki and the difficult economic conditions, anti-Semitism and, at the same time, a very thriving Thessaloniki Zionism meant that a large number of local Jews were also among the emigrants – the city's Jewish population fell from around 93,000 in the 1930s to, according to researchers, 53,000–55,000 (20% of the total population). Jews were heading not only to Palestine but also to Western Europe and South America.<sup>51</sup>

The transport of Polish Jews arriving illegally in Thessaloniki was handled by two shipping companies based in Warsaw: the Italian consortium Società di

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<sup>48</sup> J. Knopek, "Z dziejów kontaktów polsko-greckich," *Śląskie Studia Historyczne*, 2 (1993), p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, "Polscy górnicy w greckich kopalniach pirytu w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej," *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 3–4 (1995), pp. 275–282; *idem*, *Polacy w Grecji*, p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> A. Patek, *Żydzi w drodze do Palestyny 1934–1944. Szkice z dziejów aliji bet nielegalnej imigracji żydowskiej* (Cracow, 2009), p. 73. A short diary by an unknown author, written in Polish in 1934, has been preserved in the Yad Vashem Archives (hereinafter YVA). It discusses the difficult journey that the participants of the *aliyah bet* had to make. On the ship *Velos*, the author and other Jews arrived, among other places, at the Greek port of Siros (Syros), located on the island of the same name in the Cyclades archipelago in the Aegean Sea. See YVA, O.33, Testimonies, Diaries and Memoirs Collection, file 9693, Diary of an unknown person, apparently born in Poland, regarding an unsuccessful attempt to make *aliya* to Eretz Israel on the ship, *Velos* as part of a group of illegal immigrants in September 1934, and the forced return of most of the illegal immigrants to Poland, November 1934).

<sup>51</sup> P.I. Hagouel, "History of the Jews of Salonika and the Holocaust: An Expose," *Sephardic Horizons* 3/3 (2013), p. 6; J. Nehama, "The Jews of Salonika and the Rest of Greece under Hellenic Rule: The Death of a Great Community," in *The Western Sephardim*, vol. 2, ed. by R.D. Barnett and W.M. Schwab (Grendon, 1989), p. 247. On Zionists in Thessaloniki, see S. Shrougo, "The Thessaloniki Jewish Pioneers in the Haifa Waterfront 1929–1932," *Israel Affairs* 26 (2020), pp. 875–888.

Navigazione a Vapore – Lloyd Triestino and the French company Compagnie Française de Navigation à Vapeur – Fabre Line. The former transported emigrants by rail from Greece to Trieste, and from there by ship to Palestine via the port of Alexandria, while the latter took them to Constanța in Romania, from where they travelled via the Black and Aegean Seas to ports in the Middle East. Jacek Knopek claimed that for the Polish diplomatic representation:

They were elusive. They lived, without completing registration and passport formalities, with relatives and friends. These Jews did not show up to complete their military records or respond to announcements from the Polish Legation.<sup>52</sup>

According to sources, however, the issue of Jewish emigrants and the position of Jews in Greece was monitored primarily by the Honorary Consul Nehama. Not only did he discreetly observe the practice, but also, among other things, carried out relief activities for illegal Jewish emigrants.<sup>53</sup> In addition, he took a keen interest in the anti-Jewish riots in Thessaloniki in 1931.<sup>54</sup> He also tried to maintain good relations with the local Jewish community.<sup>55</sup>

The revival of the life of the Polish colony in Greece, combined with increased tourist traffic from Poland and new Polish-Greek trade and cultural contacts, occurred during the period when Günther arrived in Athens.<sup>56</sup> In particular, between 1936 and 1938 he took a number of initiatives that brought the two states and their elites closer together. These issues have already been discussed in the literature,

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<sup>52</sup> Knopek, *Polacy w Grecji*, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> We can draw our knowledge of the situation of people of Jewish origin in interwar Greece from Polish sources – the Polish Legation in Athens and the Polish Consulate in Thessaloniki. A total of six folders on Jewish affairs in the interwar years can be found from these. See Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records, hereinafter ANN), Legation of the Republic of Poland in Athens, 228, 367, 457; AAN, Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Thessaloniki, 6, 41, 58.

<sup>54</sup> AAN, Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Thessaloniki, 6. On the anti-Jewish violence in Thessaloniki in the early 1930s, See A.A. Kallis, “The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege: The Anti-Semitic Violence of the Summer 1931,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20/1 (2006), pp. 34–56; G.D. Michalopoulos, “The Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy and the persecution of Jews in interwar Salonica,” *Studia Krytyczne* 1 (2015), pp. 48–63.

<sup>55</sup> Between 1933 and 1943, the rabbi was the German-born Tzvi Koretz. For more information, see: M. Rozen, “Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933–1943),” *Jewish Social Studies* 12/1 (2005), pp. 111–166.

<sup>56</sup> Knopek, *Polacy w Grecji*, p. 155.

although rather superficially.<sup>57</sup> Consul Nehama also successfully contributed to the reinvigorating of Polish-Greek relations in the Second Polish Republic. He was active primarily in the field of trade.<sup>58</sup>

## The Situation of the Legation and its Main Tasks after the Outbreak of the Second World War

In September 1939, the Polish Legation in Athens began to operate in a war-time mode, following instructions. The envoy wrote as late as 12 August: "Athens in August and September becomes deserted because of the heat. Having returned from Warsaw [...], I found the city empty, a lack of work at the Legation and boredom in the air."<sup>59</sup> As he confessed in his memoirs, however, he was not surprised by the outbreak of war. He stressed that he had learnt of the fact from dispatches flowing to the editorial office of the Greek daily *Eleftheri Vima*, rather than from the British Legation, from which he had expected to receive this kind of news.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For more, see J. Knopek, "O kontaktach wybrzeża gdańskiego z Grecją," *Nautologia* 1 (1995), pp. 56–57; also *Biuletyn Ogólny PAT* 126 (1936), p. 8; "Król Jerzy grecki przyjął wiceministra Bobkowskiego na specjalnej audiencji," *Chwila*, 6303a (1936), p. 4; "Ulica Polska w Salonikach," *Czas* 23 (1936), p. 4; "Poseł Rzplitej u króla Grecji," *Czas*, 119 (1936), p. 1; "Pierwszy lot do Palestyny," *Czas* 286 (1936), p. 4; "Echa wypadku polskiego samolotu komunikacyjnego," *Czas* 335 (1936), p. 3; "Olbrzymi 2-motorowy Douglas leci po raz wtóry do Palestyny," *Dziennik Polski*, 309 (1936), p. 2; "Międzynarodowy Kongres Teologii Prawosławnej," *Kurjer Warszawski* 330 (1936), p. 4; "Prelekcja uczonego polskiego w Atenach," *Kurjer Wileński* 142 (1936), p. 6; "Współpraca polsko-grecka w dziedzinie lotniczej i kolejowej," *Polska Zbrojna* 275 (1936), p. 2; "Wręczenie insygniów Orderu Białego Orła królowi Grecji," *Czas* 116 (1937), p. 2; "Polski Krzyż Zasługi dla wioski greckiej," *Wieczorna Gazeta Wileńska* 137 (1937), p. 2; "Ateny," *Biuletyn Ogólny Polskiej Agencji Prasowej* 164 (1938), p. 6; *Biuletyn Ogólny Polskiej Agencji Telegraficznej* 166 (1938), p. 13; "Król grecki dokonał otwarcia wystawy sztuki polskiej w Atenach," *Czas* 13 (1938), p. 3; "Medale greckie dla Krakowa," *Czas* 211 (1938), p. 8; "Grecja," *Czas* 248 (1938), p. 2; "Adres Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności dla Tow. Archeologicznego w Atenach," *Czas* 302 (1938), p. 5; [no title], *Polska Zbrojna* 164 (1938), p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> For more information, see Malinowski, *Hellenopolonica*, pp. 546–547. See also "Wycieczka grecka w Krakowie," *Czas* 108 (1928), p. 2; *Wiadomości Gospodarcze Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej we Lwowie* 10 (1928), p. 235; "Reprezentanci życia gospodarczego Grecji na PWK," *Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny* 182 (1929), p. 9; [no title], *Ziemia Lubelska* 181 (1931), p. 1; "Konsulowie honorowi nad morzem," *Kurjer Warszawski* 254 (1933), p. 3; "Goście zagraniczni w uzdrowiskach polskich," *Kurjer Warszawski* 276 (1933), p. 6; "5-lecie LOTU w Salonikach," *Polska Zbrojna* 123 (1934), p. 2; "Wysokie odznaczenie konsula polskiego w Salonikach," *Nowy Dziennik* 282 (1936), p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> In 1939, right before September, the plan was to recall Günther from his diplomatic post and send Karol Dubicz-Penther as his replacement. H. Batowski, *Z dziejów dyplomacji polskiej na obczyźnie wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941 r.* (Cracow–Wrocław, 1984), p. 41.

Under the new wartime conditions, the staff of the Polish post initially increased to 17 people and work intensified due to the influx of refugees, both military and civilian. Years later, Günther singled out the work of Secretary Stanisław Szydłowski, Władysław Woynowski and Józef Lipski, Tadeusz Szumański and Zdzisław Kamiński. The latter three had left their commercial councillor posts to take up “heavy administrative work.”<sup>61</sup> The insubordination of the then Secretary Zygfryd Englisch, who “deceitfully changed orders and arbitrarily burned cipher archives” that contained documents dating back to September 1935 and was dismissed from the Legation for this, became an obstacle in the implementation of tasks.<sup>62</sup>

At the end of April 1940, the diplomatic staff in Greece were downsized. Günther wrote:

The departure of [Stanisław] Szydłowski coincides with the departure of our accountant. This leaves me without a deputy, head of the Consular Section, cashier [...]. Urgent need to assign a civil servant with diplomatic and consular experience as from 1 May.<sup>63</sup>

The new civil servant turned out to be *Szczęśny Zalewski*, who had been reassigned from Bucharest.<sup>64</sup> The loss of the Legation’s staff was associated with its voluntary enlistment with the armed forces.<sup>65</sup>

The actively running anti-Polish German propaganda was another problem. The envoy tried to counter it systemically by asking that Counsellor Śmieszek (first name missing), a person whom he valued, be restored to his post as press attaché to parry the Third Reich and Greece’s attacks in 1940.<sup>66</sup> The diplomat informed the headquarters that, in February 1940, the Greek newspapers published an official

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<sup>61</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, the matter was not discussed in depth by the envoy. HI, MFA, box, 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 8 to the MFA from Angers, 3 February 1940.

<sup>63</sup> HI, MFA, box 214, f. 9, Coded telegram No. 37 from Günther, 24 April 1940.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 11, MFA Coded telegram No. 39, 25 April 1940.

<sup>65</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 167.

<sup>66</sup> HI, MFA, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 15, 6 March 1940; *ibid.*, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 25, 31 March 1940.

German communique concerning alleged atrocities committed by Poles against the German minority in Poland and announced a big publication concerning the acts of alleged terror committed against Germans.<sup>67</sup> Even though the German propaganda was certainly actively operating in Greece, no noticeable tensions in German-Polish relations happened. In confidential reports sent from Greece to his headquarters, Envoy of the Third Reich, Victor von Erbach-Schönberg, tried to describe Günther's position as weaker than it actually was. Henryk Batowski estimated that the German envoy wanted to curry favour with Berlin by so doing, because there was little he could have done to weaken Günther's position in Athens.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, the fact remains that, in the context of the ongoing propaganda war, the Polish diplomatic mission in Athens was not regarded by the MFA as important. One of its manifestations was the fact that anti-German propaganda materials published by Poland arrived at the French Legation in Greece sooner than they arrived at the Polish diplomatic mission. This was the reason why the Polish envoy was unable to engage in more effective countermeasures against the German disinformation targeting Poles.<sup>69</sup>

The October aggression against Greece by the Italian armed forces (28 October 1940) had a huge impact on the Polish Legation's internal affairs, just as it did the entire country. Greece lost its neutral country status. The atmosphere of threat also affected the envoy – as early as in June of that year, Günther had considered the possibility of evacuation,<sup>70</sup> and – following the invasion in October 1940 – he suggested that his duties be taken over by the Brazilian Legation.<sup>71</sup> Handing over the Polish affairs to the British Legation was another option that was considered. However, these plans became irrelevant after the Greeks defended their country against the botched Italian invasion.<sup>72</sup> Regarding evacuation, the chief of the mis-

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 11, 13 February 1940.

<sup>68</sup> The German representative reported to Berlin that the Polish envoy was “tolerated” in diplomatic circles, while he was treated as an equal with other diplomats. See H. Batowski, *Walka dyplomatycznej hitlerowskiej przeciw Polsce 1939–1945* (Cracow–Wrocław, 1984), p. 66.

<sup>69</sup> HI, MFA, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 24, 29 March 1940.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 61, 11 June 1940.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, box 38, f. 11, Coded telegram from the envoy to the MFA, 28 October 1940.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram from the envoy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 30 October 1940. During the Italian invasion of Greece, the Kamiński couple became involved in helping the army. As it was extremely cold at the time, the Greek soldiers, unaccustomed to low temperatures, began to suffer from frostbite. Thanks to the Kamiński's passion for mountaineering, Greek apothecaries, unfamiliar



sion received a clear and decisive instruction from London, penned by Foreign Minister August Zaleski, telling him that because Greece had acceded to the Allied group,<sup>73</sup> evacuation would only be possible together with the Greek government.<sup>74</sup>

In early autumn of that year, other important changes occurred in the Polish Legation. In 1940, Günther was appointed, albeit briefly, as head of the “A” Field Office of the Supreme Commander’s Second Department. Captain Tadeusz Szefer and *rotmistrz* (Cavalry Captain) Antoni Smodlibowski were assigned to help him. The first acted as a private person (a downgraded diplomat with the right of stay), and the second worked on a contract for the Legation. By the same token, Günther was able to use the military cypher.<sup>75</sup> In October, Colonel Edward Lewandowski was appointed head of the field office.<sup>76</sup> A radio transmitter was installed and operating since September, through which contact with the Polish government was maintained. Information about the radio station reached the Greeks and the British allies as late as during evacuation in 1941.<sup>77</sup>

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with the subject, received instructions from them on what and how to prepare remedies and protective measures against frostbite. They were prepared on the basis of sheep suet. The initiative may not have had a huge impact, but the Greek elite remembered how the Kamińskis’ reacted. See Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 174.

<sup>73</sup> Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Greek issues were extremely rarely discussed in the Polish press. Let us quote how, on 31 August 1939, the need for Greece to stand clearly on the side of the opponents of Hitler’s policy was argued: “In an alliance with England it can gain everything, i.e. the preservation of its present possessions and the liquidation, once and for all, of the Italian threat, probably also the liquidation of Italian rule in the Dodecanese and perhaps even the autonomy of Cyprus. Without this alliance, on the other hand, it will be exposed to constant exploitation and abuse by those for whom the guarantees and even the alliance commitments were only worth as much as there was something to be gained. Of course, there is no fear that Greece would even for a moment consider siding with Italy and Germany. To have to submit in everything to these strong and ruthless possible allies would spell the end of Greek independence. [...] It must, therefore, be reiterated that, although no special act of alliance has, so far as is known, been signed between Greece and England, the Kingdom of Greece, with its innumerable valuable naval and air bases, with its not the worst naval fleet of a dozen light craft and its excellent naval material, and with its ever-improving army, today one hundred thousand strong, and in the event of mobilisation six times stronger, can be regarded as an ally of the peace front.” See “Ateny w sierpniu,” *Kurjer Warszawski*, 240 (1939), p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> HI, MFA, box 224, f. 2, MFA telegram No. 52, 28 October 1940. The envoy’s doubts about his decision to remain in Greece at that time were mentioned by the military attaché there, Tadeusz Machalski (1893–1983). T. Machalski, *Co widziałem i przeżyłem* (London, 1980), p. 177.

<sup>75</sup> HI, MFA, box 224, f. 2, MFA telegram No. 45 [date illegible; on the analysis of the contents of the telegram, probably September].

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, MFA telegram No. 49, 15 October 1940.

<sup>77</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, pp. 162 ff. The literature on the subject emphasises Günther’s negative attitude towards the organisation of a liaison and intelligence outpost crypt. “Grzegorz” on the

As regards the Legation's main tasks, in September 1939, the MFA returned to its pre-war plans to create a central reloading station in Athens for all transports, especially military ones, sent from the West to Poland. Tadeusz Kobylański and Wiktor Tomir Drymmer had been put in charge of this operation, but it never took off.<sup>78</sup>

Even though this plan had been doomed to failure because of the ramifications of Greece's policy, the Legation succeeded in going through with other operations that helped the Polish state fight for its existence. One of them was the evacuation of the Polish Armed Forces from Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia across Greece to France, the Middle East and England. Thanks to Günther's efforts and despite Greece's initial obstructions, between 12 and 15 thousand Polish army servicemen were systematically moved in 1940. Every day, fifty or so people would arrive in Greece and be given the right to stay for one week in Athens and Thessaloniki. However, the Greek authorities, who were kindly disposed towards the Polish army, did not check if they overstayed.<sup>79</sup> The Polish Legation even succeeded in increasing the daily contingent to 70 servicemen. They were sent to the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade formed under the command of Stanisław Kopański.<sup>80</sup> The flexible stance of the Greek authorities on the issue led to discussions in the Foreign Ministry about trying to win the Greek government's consent for mass transports, but it was eventually decided that they were doubtful, and no official intervention was recommended on the matter.<sup>81</sup> The diplomatic mission also conducted recruitment for the armed forces.<sup>82</sup>

Regarding other minor tasks, the Polish diplomatic mission also attempted to save tobacco purchased in Greece. Unfortunately, since April 1940, the Polish Legation had not been able to trade it, i.e. it had not been able to take it out of Greece

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territory of Greece. It stemmed from a conflict with General Kazimierz Sosnkowski – and in practice Department II and VI of the Supreme Commander's Staff – and the MFA and its agencies in Greece. It was intended to paralyse intelligence activities in the area. See Kaliszewicz, "Grzegorz," p. 92; Peplowski, *Wywiad Polskich Sił Zbrojnych*, vol. 1, pp. 310–311.

<sup>78</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 156.

<sup>79</sup> W. Biegański, *Wojsko Polskie we Francji 1939–1940* (Warsaw, 1967), p. 134.

<sup>80</sup> HI, MFA, box 224, f. 2, MFA telegram to the Legation No. 69(?), 14 December 1940; *ibid.*, MFA telegram No. 42, 12 October 1940.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 14, 2 March 1940.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8, J. Graliński's coded telegram No. 1 from Angers, 15 February 1940.

as a result of German pressure, although the Greek Government had promised the Polish side that the transport of this commodity to a safe place would be possible, as long as the Poles were able to collect it. According to information provided by the envoy, disloyalty was also shown by the French mission in Greece, which behaved passively in this matter despite declarations of assistance, and then took action to the detriment of Poland, which the envoy described as “insincere” behaviour. In view of the development of the war situation, Günther, therefore, judged that any expenditure on monopoly agendas was ill-advised.<sup>83</sup>

In discussing the wartime circumstances of the Polish Legation’s activities, it is also important to note that, during the evacuation, which formally began on 12 April and lasted until 22 April, care was taken to ensure that its archival materials did not fall into German hands. When Third Reich troops occupied Athens on 27 April, Eberhard Künsberg’s special group immediately went to the Polish legation building, but the German side informed in its report to Berlin that it had not found any interesting materials there. The building of the diplomatic mission was taken over by the German army as quarters.<sup>84</sup>

### The Problem of Jewish Refugees and the Issue of the Evacuation of Polish Citizens

Günther wrote in his post-war memoirs that as early as in September, there were refugees from Poland, but from the end of 1939, the Greek authorities – due to the country’s neutral status at the time – were reluctant to allow Polish groups to stay permanently.<sup>85</sup> The first information about the number of refugees on Greek soil appeared in May 1940. At that time it was estimated that there were 50 Polish citizens, in October – as many as 60,<sup>86</sup> and the following month this number grew

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 25, 4 April 1940. It was about the handover of Polish tobacco to the French treasury. *Ibid.*, Coded telegram No. 20, 21 March 1940.

<sup>84</sup> Eberhard Künsberg headed a special diplomatic group, which in fact operated within the SS. Künsberg was an officer of this formation. After the defeat of the Second Republic, he went through the Polish MFA archives in Warsaw and then Polish diplomatic missions in other European countries. See Batowski, *Walka dyplomacji*, p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> HI, MFA, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA concerning the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 48, 17 May 1940; *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, czerwiec 1940 – czerwiec 1941*, vol. 2, ed. W. Rojek (Cracow, 1995), p. 159.

to 100. The Council of Ministers assessed that, as a result, the refugees in Greece “did not present much of an issue.”<sup>87</sup> The government’s attention was focused on larger problems caused by displacements, e.g. in Wilno.<sup>88</sup>

Until November 1940, Jewish issues were not separated from the overall refugee issue. The situation changed after the Italian attack on Greece in the autumn of 1940 (28 October). The envoy stressed that initially, all the newcomers were materially worse off than the soldiers, as no government funds could be found to support them. For this reason, the head of the Polish diplomatic mission was forced to turn to his compatriots in the USA for help, thanks to which the first modest sums arrived, sent by an anonymous priest.<sup>89</sup> Günther also asked the Greeks for help, and they donated and organised a fundraiser for Polish refugees. Greek financiers K. Papastratos and G. Pesmazoglou (no first names in the sources) spearheaded the campaign. They managed to raise about half a million drachmas, a relatively large amount.<sup>90</sup>

Zdzisław Kamiński, responsible for dealing directly with refugees, was put in charge of distributing the funds:

A special commission was set up to oversee and properly distribute these funds. Commercial Counsellor Zdzisław Kamiński represented the Legation on the Commission. Thanks to his tact and diligence, the welfare section could act in Athens for almost two years to the satisfaction of the people whom it served and operating within its means.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps at the end of 1939 or in early 1940, relief funds for the masses of refugees began to flow from the Polish government in Angers, never fully meeting the growing demand. The envoy, aware of the financial constraints, promoted the idea of evacuation to Turkey.<sup>92</sup> He first turned to the MFA with a request for funds for

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<sup>87</sup> HI, MFA, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 61, 11 June 1940; *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów*, p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> For more, see Leon Rappaport, *Komitet Pomocy Uchodźcom Polakom w Wilnie (19 września 1939 – 1 stycznia 1941)*, ed. A. Gontarek (Lublin, 2020).

<sup>89</sup> Günther mentioned Father Mieczysław Figas, but he was in the Dachau camp during the war.

<sup>90</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 166.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

evacuation purposes in June 1940.<sup>93</sup> Even though his request was granted, he had problems with cashing funds allocated in June, because checks made out to the Legation were not honoured. The Legation most acutely felt the lack of funds in the summer of 1940. Günther wrote at the time: “The legation has not a penny to spend – it is of the utmost urgency to hand over a larger sum for the upkeep of the civilian refugees, or optionally, to send them on Romanian ships or by train to Turkey.”<sup>94</sup> Günther specified that he is short by 10 thousand pounds sterling and 150 thousand French francs.<sup>95</sup> The monthly upkeep of one person, or the cost of their immediate evacuation by trail to Turkey, was estimated at five thousand drachmas.<sup>96</sup>

The financial situation of the diplomatic mission was not faring any better either. The funds fell to a critical low point in February 1941. The envoy complained that he had no funds to engage in active diplomacy. His own means were so modest that he was unable to keep up with other European diplomats in Greece when it came to maintaining social contacts and the salaries of the other legation staff allowed them to – as he put it – “lead a student’s existence.”<sup>97</sup>

In November 1940, seventy Polish Jews were living in Greece, according to documents.<sup>98</sup> Actually, there were more because the statistics that provided the number of passport holders did not include children, who were added to their parents’ documents.<sup>99</sup> Jewish refugees arrived in Greece in waves. The first and biggest wave came in May and June 1940, triggered by the German invasion of France, followed by the same year’s autumn military attack on Greece by Italy. The envoy reported that Jewish refugees had also been arriving from Vienna through

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<sup>93</sup> HI, MFA, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 62, 12 June 1940.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram No. 59, 6 June 1940.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram No. 57, 3 June 1940.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram No. 61, 11 June 1940.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 26 February 1941.

<sup>98</sup> The number of Jews varied all the time thereafter. Sometimes the envoy singled out a Jewish group and sometimes he did not, which makes it impossible to trace the refugee statistics precisely in terms of nationality. The inconsistency was due to the fact that he had neither the need to check whether a Polish citizen was Jewish or not, nor were there any guidelines for dividing Polish citizens by nationality. The nationality statistics were certainly presented at the request of the superiors, who in turn were perhaps motivated to do so by the British side.

<sup>99</sup> HI, MFA, box 516, f. 11, Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Polish Ambassador in London, 21 November 1940.

Hungary and even Odessa, but the majority had come through Italy.<sup>100</sup> He reported that in May 1940, a refugee transport was not possible.<sup>101</sup> The influx of Polish Jews into Greece was resisted by the Greek authorities, mainly because Turkey, Palestine and Egypt imposed a ban on visas, including transit visas for Polish citizens, especially Polish Jews. This resulted in refugees piling up in Greece, which the local elite believed was bad for the country.<sup>102</sup>

The situation was made more complex also because of the allies' activities. In the first week of June 1940, the British and French admiralities stopped their ships from sailing the Mediterranean eastwards and westwards. This caused all refugees (both military and civilian) to remain for an undetermined period of time in Athens. The Greek visa programme was also put on hold. At the end of July or August, the MFA recommended that the Legation intervenes with the British to start sea transports from Alexandretta (present-day Iskenderun) to Haifa. The envoy was also urgently called on for more transit visits through Bulgaria and Turkey.<sup>103</sup>

The situation on the ground forced the Polish diplomatic mission to create evacuation channels from Greece. Interestingly enough, the head of the Legation of the Republic of Poland offered his opinion as early as in May that year, whereby all refugees should leave Greece because it was not safe for Polish citizens. The envoy was aware that the success of Poland's evacuation plans from Greece hinged on British and French actions regarding the availability of their ships and other types of infrastructure. In May, he asked British and French diplomats for their opinion about the fate of Polish refugees. Unfortunately, as he would later report to the MFA, the former "had no plan," while the latter "intends to advise those of his compatriots who have no connection to Greece to leave the country."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 53, 25 May 1940; *ibid.*, Coded telegram No. 50, 21 May 1940.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, box 224, f. 2, MFA telegram, 31 July or September [poorly legible date].

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, box 214, f. 10, Coded telegram No. 48, 17 May 1940.

The envoy's first diplomatic efforts concerning Jewish refugees can be dated to September 1940, still before the Greek-Italian war.<sup>105</sup> They were continued after that war broke out. The envoy paid a visit to the British representative in Athens – Michael Palairet – but he only managed to be criticised for causing panic.<sup>106</sup> Talks concerning refugee affairs with the aim of sending this group of Poles to a safe place were also held at the Foreign Office that November.<sup>107</sup> The same month, the MFA Secretary – Jan Ciechanowski – also took an interest in the fate of those Poles in Greece. He instructed the Polish ambassador in London to intervene on their behalf during talks with the British side but to no effect.<sup>108</sup>

Foreign Minister August Zaleski also spoke out about the Jewish group in Greece. He drew Günther's attention to "the impossibility of nagging the British government with incessant interventions to increase the refugee contingent" to Palestine. At a Council of Ministers meeting on 19 November 1940, the minister argued that:

Just as we barely managed to get Foreign Secretary Halifax to promise that he would kindly increase the contingent in Palestine, the Envoy of the Republic of Poland in Athens sends a dispatch requesting visas to Palestine for seventy Jewish families, who had arrived in Greece thanks to bribes, weigh heavily on the reputation enjoyed by the Polish colony in Greece, who are well looked upon by the Greek authorities.<sup>109</sup>

It is hard to find much understanding for Jewish refugees in these words. After the Italian attack on Greece, Günther also spoke about them in unfavourable terms, but it did not stop him from helping them:

The last few weeks have seen the arrival in Athens of about a dozen Jewish families, Polish citizens, on visas obtained through bribes. [...] They are regarded

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *HI, MFA*, box 516, f. 11, Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Polish Ambassador in London, 21 November 1940.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from Jan Ciechanowski to the Polish ambassador in London, 21 November 1940.

<sup>109</sup> *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów*, pp. 173–174.

in Greece as unwanted elements, especially since the time of the Italian war. In addition, by being an uncertain element, they discredit the native Polish colony politically. We have made efforts via the English Legation to send them to Palestine, but visas there depend on the immigration contingent.<sup>110</sup>

In another document, he called them not only an “uncertain element” but also “unnecessary” and “harmful.”<sup>111</sup> This atmosphere was most likely caused by reports that unidentified Jews in Greece and in the Balkans were working for Germans. The envoy was informed about this by the “A” Field Office of the Supreme Commander’s Second Department and from the Greek police’s semi-official reports. He also received information about large-scale arrests in October in Warsaw that resulted from their activities. The envoy took an interest in the issue as early as October of that year when he asked the MFA for a speedy clarification of the role that Jews who were Polish citizens played in Greece. He motivated his request by arguing that the Legation had neither the funds nor the instruments to carry out an investigation into the matter. A note inscribed on the telegram says that this issue was planned to be raised with the Foreign Office, but no subsequent correspondence between the envoy and the MFA made any mention of it.<sup>112</sup>

The next steps taken to further the cause of refugees involved non-stop negotiations with the British side. In November, the envoy suggested to the MFA that it initiate talks regarding this matter with the British side, which would “lead to such Jews being treated as refugees and not as immigrants and to granting them refugee visas, as well as creating for them special conditions of stay, concentration camps notwithstanding.”<sup>113</sup> Most probably, Great Britain recognised this group as refugees on Greek soil – the moment they wanted to set foot in Palestine, British civil servants treated them as immigrants.

The MFA’s response to the refugee question in Greece came as late as in February 1941. The Ministry informed the envoy about its decisions regarding the

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<sup>110</sup> HI, MFA, box 516, f. 11, Coded telegram, 18 November 1940.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, box 516, f. 11, Coded telegram No. 132, 3 December 1940.

<sup>113</sup> It is not a type of German Nazi concentration camp, but an internment camp. *Ibid.*, Coded telegram, 18 November 1940.



refugees, which had been consulted with the Foreign Office. The refugees were to be evacuated, and initial procedures for that were agreed: the first group was to include refugee groups who had been evacuated from Yugoslavia and people at risk who had come from Hungary, and finally – from Greece. Moreover, Minister Zaleski wrote: “At the moment, we are also unable to take measures to evacuate 100 refugees from Greece, which does not mean they cannot try to do so on their own.”<sup>114</sup> In March, their number increased to 150.<sup>115</sup> Possibly some Jewish refugees managed to leave for Palestine by their own efforts. This is evidenced by an account published in *The Australian Jewish Post*, which reported the arrival in Haifa of 49 Jews from Greece in February 1941. They came from Italy.<sup>116</sup>

Günther showed his dissatisfaction with his Ministry’s response. A month later, having put pressure on the English envoy in Greece and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, talks with the British partner about refugees resumed. This time the Polish Ministry presented the results of negotiations with the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Social Welfare. With regard to visas, the British side, declaratively announced that, if the Polish government was prepared to support all such refugees on British territory throughout the war, it would be willing to consider, as part of its overall evacuation plans, placing those refugees that were at risk on its soil. The British, however, ruled out Palestine as a destination. The subsequent round of Polish-British talks also ended with a request from the Foreign Office for:

A comment from the Polish government on the evacuation of Polish nationals from Greece, specifically to see whether there are sufficiently urgent grounds to seek the evacuation of refugees from Greece, as there may be other areas more currently at risk and, therefore, requiring that Polish refugees who were most vulnerable were taken out from there.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 8, MFA telegram, 15 February 1941.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Telegram, 20 March 1941.

<sup>116</sup> “News from Palestine,” *Australian Jewish Post* 21 (1941), p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> HI, MFA, box 522, f. 7, Letter from the MFA to the MSW, 8 March 1941. See also *ibid.*, Letter from the Foreign Office to the Polish Embassy in London, 3 March 1941 (T.M. Snow to Antoni Baliński).

In addition, at the beginning of March 1941, the British proposed a new evacuation route to the Polish MFA – Bombay.<sup>118</sup> The suggestion was made on hearing that the Greek government had issued a decree in mid-February 1941 ordering the “definite departure” of Jewish refugees, with the number of Jews with Polish citizenship fluctuating until 12 March 1941: initially, there were about 70, then the number went down to 40, only to rise again to 60. This shows that they were constantly making their way to Greece, and then either turning up at the Polish diplomatic mission or disappearing from its sight.<sup>119</sup> The variability in the numbers was not great, but knowledge of them had to be continually updated. We assume that, at the time, it was a group of several dozen people, not counting family members.<sup>120</sup>

At the beginning of March 1941, the Greek government ordered the immediate departure of all foreigners from the country but never followed through with its implementation. All foreigners were officially given ten days to leave the country.<sup>121</sup> In the wake of these events, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while preparing the envoy for the planned Bombay evacuation, instructed him to provide more information on the refugees (occupation, level of danger) and to identify the ones that were financially prepared to cover the costs of leaving and living in the asylum area.<sup>122</sup> The talks concerned a total of one hundred Polish citizens at the time, including 40 Jews.<sup>123</sup>

However, Günther and his superiors soon realised that sending a Polish group to distant Bombay was beyond the capabilities of even the UK, which also recognised this and quickly abandoned the initiative. What remained, therefore, was the well-worn and only way to solve the refugee problem in Greece, namely, to seek Palestinian visas. In the second half of March 1941, the envoy once again sought to obtain them personally – in correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 7 March 1941.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram, 12 February 1941.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Coded telegram, 7 March 1941; *ibid.*, Letter from the MFA to the MSW of 22 March 1941.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 7 March 1941.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8, Coded MFA telegram, 17 March 1941.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 7, Coded telegram, 7 March 1941.

<sup>124</sup> On the issue of visas, there was a fruitless exchange of letters between the Polish and British sides: the British envoy, at the request of the Polish envoy in February 1941, requested visas for Palestine, from where the matter went to the Colonial Office in London. *Ibid.*, f. 7, Coded telegram, 12 February 1941.

Unfortunately, the British were still reluctant to issue them, although they were aware that, according to the decision of the Greek authorities, there was a real danger of Jews without the required documents being sent to an internment camp on one of the Greek islands.<sup>125</sup>

Despite his failures to obtain visas, the envoy had the full support of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who believed that pressure had to be continually exerted on the British regarding Jews. The head of the Ministry added, however, that “this category of refugees from Greece should also not burden the State Treasury in the future,” which, for unknown reasons, suggested that the cost of their upkeep in the evacuation area would not be borne by the Polish state.<sup>126</sup>

By the end of March, it had become clear that the Greek authorities did not intend to take radical steps against either Jewish foreigners or the rest of the foreigners, but this did not solve the refugee problem. At the time, Günther described the situation of the Polish group as follows, pointing out the ever-present issue of refugees with Polish citizenship:

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month, the English Legation received instructions not to grant visas to Polish nationals other than professionals to Palestine and even India. This decision detains in Greece 70 Polish citizens unfit for the army and makes it impossible for any Polish citizen to obtain entry or residence except those already present, as the Greek authorities are absolutely opposed to increasing the number of foreigners.<sup>127</sup>

### The Situation of the Legation after the German Attack on Greece (6 April 1941) and Efforts to Obtain Visas

Four days before the German invasion, i.e. on 2 April, the Ministry of Social Welfare sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicating the need for an organised evacuation from Greece.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the Ministry spoke up about the refugee issue as a result of the intervention of Günther himself, who, certainly

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Coded telegram, 20 March 1941.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 27 March 1941.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from the MSW to the MFA of 2 April 1941.

by the time of the German attack on Greece, had sent a large number of coded messages to the MFA about visas. He also used the complaints procedure. This is evidenced by the Foreign Minister's reply to them, sent on the day of the German invasion of the Greek state:

Please stop sending visa complaints against the English and Polish governments. Both these governments, as one can guess, also have other problems than visas. Despite this, they are doing what they can to ease the plight of refugees.<sup>129</sup>

A day later, another reply came out of the MFA office from Minister Zaleski, addressed to Günther, recommending that he make renewed efforts to obtain 70 refugee visas.<sup>130</sup> The change in tone was due to the fact that the prior coded message had been prepared before the German attack. From that point on, both the Legation of the Republic of Poland and the MFA were in intensive work mode. The envoy, in a reply sent to the MFA, quickly revised the refugee count. He demanded that the MFA cause the English Legation to make visa and transport facilitation and allow a Polish colony of not 70, but about 100 people to go to Egypt.<sup>131</sup> The coded telegram of 11 April refers precisely to 100 Egyptian visas and the remaining Palestinian visas in an unknown number, indicating that the envoy may not have known the exact figure of the refugee group.<sup>132</sup>

One can sense a lot of tension in the envoy's correspondence. On 12 April, a short message from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed that visas for Polish refugees had been obtained.<sup>133</sup> However, the envoy managed to send a telegram to London on the same day, asking the Foreign Office for the fourth time to "cause a proper response from the English" – six days had passed since the invasion, and in Greece, no energetic action had been taken by the British or Greek sides to organise evacuations.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 8, Coded MFA telegram, 6 April 1941.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded MFA telegram, 7 April 1941.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, box 5, f. 5, Coded telegram, 9 April 1941.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 11 April 1941.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8, Coded MFA telegram, 12 April 1941. British promises and assurances on visas were not taken for granted. On 14 April came a one-sentence coded telegram from the MFA, again announcing the granting of visas: "FO [Foreign Office] has promised to issue all visas." *Ibid.*, f. 8, Coded MFA telegram, 14 April 1941.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 12 April 1941.

At this time, the MFA ordered the Polish Legation in Athens to evacuate, with its staff reduced to a minimum and a radio station to maintain direct communication. In addition, the envoy was to draw up a list of 20 refugees at risk discreetly. Unfortunately, there is no data about who was on that list.<sup>135</sup>

However, there were significant obstacles during the preparatory work for leaving Greece. These were caused by the envoy's lack of knowledge of Greek evacuation procedures and accompanying plans. This resulted in difficulties in initiating exit discussions in Greek government circles. Unfortunately, at the time, Greek policy managers were not yet considering the option. The envoy, realising the consequences of inaction, had a conversation with the deputy head of the Greek Foreign Ministry, Minister Dalmouzo (no name given), and then with the British and Turkish envoys. As a result, the Turkish envoy approached the Greek Foreign Ministry on 14 April about the evacuation and received a specific answer. The Greek authorities suggested that the foreign delegations would be divided into three groups: those that would remain in Greece despite the German threat, those that would leave with the Greek government, and those that would leave on their own in the face of the threat. The Polish envoy, after consultation with his superiors, opted for option two – evacuation with the Greek government.<sup>136</sup>

Since the Greek government guaranteed a departure from Greek soil only by cargo-type vessels (cargo ships, container ships, etc.) without protection, in the end, according to the envoy, only the Polish, British and Yugoslavian embassies decided to leave. The American, Belgian, Brazilian and French, among others, stayed behind.<sup>137</sup>

At that time, around 11 April, something shocking happened from the point of view of Polish-British relations in Greece. As a result of great negligence and a dismissive attitude on the British side, the Honorary Consul in Thessaloniki, Albert Nehama, was forced to leave Greek soil in extremely uncomfortable conditions. According to Günther's coded telegram, he hastily left the city, fleeing from

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8, Coded MFA telegram, 12 April 1941.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, box 40, f. 9, Letter from Günther to the MFA regarding the accompaniment of the Polish envoy to the Greek government in Crete, 24 May 1941.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

the German troops, due to the fact that the English consul in Thessaloniki – despite receiving instructions from Athens – notified Nehama of his departure at the last minute and “did not allow [him] to board the ship on which the British and Yugoslav colonies were evacuating. This situation meant that, left to his own devices, Nehama sailed from Thessaloniki on a barge that unspecified Englishmen had helped him hire. This enabled him to sail to Chalcis on the island of Euboea. The evacuation took place at such a rapid pace that he did not have time to take any of his belongings with him.”<sup>138</sup> This information is the last source trace of the consul’s fate that has been found.

For the Polish evacuation operation, the decisive date was 14 April, when it was launched by the UK. On that day, once again, the London authorities assured the envoy that the refugees would receive visas – the FO [Foreign Office] has promised to issue all visas.” The Foreign Office had already written to the Polish side about this on 12 April.<sup>139</sup>

Until then, i.e. from 12 April until the night of 15-16 April, when Palestinian visas were finally granted to the refugees, the situation had been very tense.<sup>140</sup> Namely, they noticed that Yugoslav citizens were leaving Greece without the required visas. As Günther relayed in a coded telegram, “upon hearing this, the Polish colony staged a scandal at our Legation about the failure of the Polish Government and the Legation to protect them from the German danger.” The Polish group numbered 194 at the time. Indeed, frightened by the advancing German invasion, the crowd of Polish refugees did not realise that the British ally was solely to blame for the delays. The envoy wrote on 12 April that the British were using vague criteria, indicating clear discrimination against Polish citizens. This was incidentally communicated to Günther without embarrassment. This situation says a lot about the British side’s fear of issuing visas to Polish refugees, especially Jews, who were suspected of wanting to remain forever in the Palestinian territories, which was against the interests of the United Kingdom at the time.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 11 April 1941.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram, 14 April 1941.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 12 April 1941; *Ibid.*, Coded telegram, 14 April 1941.

Tensions between the Polish Legation and the refugees culminated on 15 April. At that time, the envoy informed the MFA that the English and Egyptian legations had not received any instructions from their superiors and had not issued visas. He also pointed out that the departures of other legations and refugees representing other nations were going smoothly, except for the Polish group. The disappointment and fear in the Polish group were all the more remarkable as the German air force was bombing the country then, and the German navy was blocking Greek ports with magnetic mines.<sup>142</sup>

The formalities dragged on until 17 April. At that time, the MFA informed the envoy that it had officially applied to the Foreign Office for visas for 194 Polish citizens. At this point, the Ministry instructed Günther to set up a social committee to make a selection: the first to leave Greek soil should be those at risk as a result of their activities and those deemed worthy, as well as the families of military officers and “members of the Palestinian brigade.” This instruction did not explicitly mention Jews.<sup>143</sup>

Visa matters were formally settled for the last time on 20 April, when a coded telegram arrived from the Foreign Office to Günther, the last one he got in Athens, informing him of the outcome of the talks with the British. It was proposed that one hundred refugees were to go to Palestine, thirty Jews to Burma (now Myanmar) and the rest to India. From this breakdown, we can conclude that the British side requested and received information on the number of Jews in the Polish group. However, this was a selection that was not applied in practice, as the evacuations to Burma and India did not take place.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram, 15 April 1941. The treatment of the German Consul in Piraeus has become a symbolic expression of the real attitude of the Greek political leadership towards the Third Reich. While German troops were attacking Greece in April 1941, as the Polish envoy recorded after the war, he “remained throughout the war in his villa, at the highest point of Piraeus, which was the natural observation point of the port and all the traffic in it, thus being able to strictly control the transport of every English unit and all war material.” It was not until the 16th day of the war that the Greek authorities demanded that he go to Egypt on the ship *Elsi*, but he protested, announcing that he would only yield to physical force, and remained still at the consulate, awaiting the Germans in Athens. *Ibid.* 5, f. 5, Günther’s letter on the political collapse of Greece to the Foreign Office, 29 May 1941.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8, MFA telegram, 17 April 1941.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 7, Coded telegram, 17 April 1941; *ibid.*, f. 8, MFA telegram, 20 April 1941.

## The Polish Contribution to the Organisation of the Evacuation from Greece

The main problems proved to be not only obtaining visas in time but also organising embarkation, which took place on the night of 16–17 April 1941.<sup>145</sup> The refugees were placed on board of a ship under the care of a certain Milecki – a person of undescribed functions, probably an intelligence officer.<sup>146</sup> This operation would not have succeeded had it not been for the attitude of Zdzisław Kamiński. While Günther concentrated on procedures, Kamiński dealt with bureaucratic-technical matters, i.e. “he was constantly running from Greek offices to foreign consulates, stamping passports at night, grouping together departing travellers and putting up with all their complaints and excuses with a smile before they turned into assurances of undying gratitude on departure.”<sup>147</sup>

The Polish envoy was forced to work extremely intensively and very quickly, as the main blocker of the Polish departure turned out to be the British envoy in Greece, with whom Günther had already tried to discuss technical matters related to the evacuation on 10 April. Unfortunately, the consultations did not result in any decisions. The Polish group was deprived of English protection after receiving their visa permits. In his memoirs, Günther spared no malice towards Palairot, describing a key meeting with him concerning the evacuation:

I remember it was 4 in the afternoon. [...]. As befits a good Englishman, although he came from a Catholic French family, he indulged in the “cup of tea” ritual with his wife and daughter. The hushed atmosphere of the drawing room, the nature of the family sitting and the deliberate distancing of the topic of conversation from current events, prevented me from proceeding immediately to the matter with which I had come, so that it was only after consuming the cake imported from England – which was emphasised – and after the obligatory cup of tea that I was able to present to him the necessity of the Polish colony’s departure.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 16 April 1941.

<sup>147</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 181.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179–180.



At the time, the British envoy still believed that the evacuation of the Poles would cause “comments and panic, to which he did not wish to contribute.”<sup>149</sup>

Because the British envoy refused to take real care of the Polish refugees, Günther had to act solely on his own. The success of his mission was determined above all by a happy coincidence, as a Polish ship, aptly named *Warsaw*, arrived in Athens on 14 April, so an opportunity presented itself to put the refugees on board.<sup>150</sup> The ship was transporting Argentine meat to Europe, sailing under the British flag, but nonetheless subject to Polish control.<sup>151</sup> When Günther found out about this, he pressured the English admiralty to make the ship available for Polish nationals.<sup>152</sup>

Another problem after embarkation proved to be the departure itself, delayed by wrong decisions on the English side. In this situation, there were also difficulties in accessing the British envoy. Günther could not communicate with Palairat because he “had been in church since 9 am, where he was completing the liturgical ceremony of washing the feet of beggars and giving alms. For it was Maundy Thursday.”<sup>153</sup> The convoy eventually set off on 18 April.<sup>154</sup>

It was estimated that, just before the evacuation, the Polish group numbered around 200 people (including 30 Jews).<sup>155</sup> In his evacuation report of 27 May 1941, Günther reported that a total of 300 refugees had been deported from Greece – 100 Polish nationals, 100 British and 100 other nationals. The envoy explained the presence of citizens of other countries on the Polish ship as a general “confusion,” which was the fault of the English envoy’s inept handling of the evacuation.<sup>156</sup> The envoy gave the same estimate in his memoirs, adding that the majority of these people were Jewish.<sup>157</sup> Another source referring to the statistics of refugees who success-

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>150</sup> HI, MFA, box 226, f. 7, Coded telegram, 14 April 1941.

<sup>151</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, pp. 180–181.

<sup>152</sup> HI, MFA, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>153</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, pp. 181.

<sup>154</sup> HI, MFA, box 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from the MFA to the MSW, 24 April 1941.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.

<sup>157</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, pp. 179–180.

fully fled Greece is *The Palestinian Post*. In the article “400 refugees arrived here from Greece,” the newspaper gave a figure of 400 refugees arriving on a ship from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Yugoslavia.<sup>158</sup> Another British newspaper, *The Scotsman*, reported that the same number of “British, Poles, Czechs, Germans, Jews and Yugoslavs” arrived.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps in the future, other available sources will make it possible to establish the exact number of Jews evacuated from Greece.

### Günther on Michael Palairet’s Evacuation Measures

The British attitude throughout the evacuation process proved so problematic that the Polish envoy did not leave the issue unmentioned. Of particular importance in this situation was the behaviour of Michael Palairet. Günther discussed it at length in two documents sent to the MFA: in a letter on the evacuation of the Polish colony from Greece dated 27 May 1941 and another letter on the political collapse of Greece dated 29 May 1941.

These documents are consistent with each other. Günther presents the actions of British Ambassador Michael Palairet in Greece as imprudent, to say the least. According to the Polish envoy:

It has to be said that the English Legation, as an expression of the second factor and, as events unfolded, almost the same factor as the Greek government, did not rise to the occasion either in terms of awareness of its duties or even in terms of the efficiency with which it carried them out.<sup>160</sup>

Günther believed that Palairet’s inept management of the British embassy, which was noticeable from the very beginning of his presence in Greece (June 1939), was the main cause of this state of affairs. The former claimed that the latter showed a tendency to isolate himself, i.e. to take almost no action. Immediately after his arrival, he locked himself up in his summer residence, did not participate in socio-political life and did not counteract the skilful and aggressive German propaganda within Greece. Günther also devoted considerable room to Palairet

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<sup>158</sup> “400 refugees arrived here from Greece,” *Palestinian Post*, 4553 (1941), p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> “Situation in Greece,” *Scotsman* 30/554 (1941), p. 5.

<sup>160</sup> HI, MFA, box 5, f. 5, Günther’s letter to the MFA on the political collapse of Greece, 29 May 1941.

in his post-war memoirs. He also criticised the wife of the British diplomat.<sup>161</sup> Perhaps this is a somewhat exaggerated and intentionally simplified description, nevertheless it is indeed possible to clearly see Günther's loneliness in the documents he sent from the Polish Legation and from the documents sent to him by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>162</sup>

In the opinion of the Polish envoy, although Palairet was superficially helpful and did not refuse to be sympathetic to the Polish cause, he nevertheless ranked among "average diplomats" and was incapable of making sound decisions ("lacked a sense of realism"). Günther wrote bluntly that Palairet's slow action not only led to the risky Polish evacuation, but also caused the evacuation of the English colony from Athens to take a tragic course. For the decision to leave was taken too late in relation to the developments of the war.<sup>163</sup> Günther claimed that the evacuation was carried out haphazardly and recklessly by the English – one of the ships carrying the British envoy's closest colleagues hit a mine and sank. The same fate befell 2,000 English soldiers on another ship.<sup>164</sup> In his memoirs, Günther also described Palairet's escape, attempting to get out of Athens on a yacht on 22 April:

The British envoy [...] who was convinced that there was no reason for him to welcome the Germans to Athens by none other than the king, boarded that day a private yacht capable of holding 10 to 12 people, belonging to some compatriot of his, placing in it his archives, coffers, the Legation's silver and his own baggage, the envoy's staff and a closer colony of a few dozen men. But he was out of luck. German planes quickly tracked down the British Legation's yacht and the next day, during a stopover off an island, when most of those travelling had gone ashore to bathe and relax, they hurled two bombs at it. The yacht began to sink.

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<sup>161</sup> He pointed out her omissions. She was supposed to be "busy all day long with yarn work," and besides – due to her clericalism – instead of supporting Greeks or representatives of other nations whose countries had suffered from German aggression during the war, she took care of Italian prisoners of war, arousing, to say the least, the astonishment of the Greek public. The reason for her behaviour was, as the Polish envoy put it, concern about "who among them would end their lives without receiving the Holy Sacraments." *Ibid.*, Günther's letter on Greece's political fall to the MFA, 29 May 1941.

<sup>162</sup> Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 176.

<sup>163</sup> HI, MFA, box 5, f. 5, Günther's letter to the MFA on the political collapse of Greece, 29 May 1941.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, Coded telegram from Günther to the MFA, 24 April 1941.

Of the dozen or so people who remained on it, eleven died from the explosion or drowned. At the same time, all the possessions of the mess, the archives, money, silver, the private belongings of the travellers were lost, including Palairet's entire wardrobe, who was wearing a swimsuit at the time. It was only a few hours later that a Greek ship sailing nearby rescued these modern Robinson Crusoes.<sup>165</sup>

However, this description does not convey the horror of the situation – a British consul named Meade was killed as a result of a German bombardment and shelling on land. He died buried under the rubble of a building. His grave was hastily dug with a brass flowerpot because no other tool could be found.<sup>166</sup> The tragedy surrounding the withdrawal of British troops and civilians from Greece was due, at least in part, to the relatively late military agreement reached by the Greek and British sides on how to support the country in the event of war.<sup>167</sup>

Günther's criticism, moreover, extended to all of the seventy or so members of the British personnel, with the exception of Col. Jasper Blunt<sup>168</sup> – “a man alive and active at least.” He called the rest “mechanised functionaries” who were locked in “a circle of strictly their own relations, without even social contacts, capable of only shallow office work.”<sup>169</sup>

## The Fate of Jews, Polish Citizens, in Greece after the Evacuation of the Diplomatic Post

We do not know how many Polish Jews left Greece. This group, like the Greek Jews, faced deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau. During the German occupation,

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<sup>165</sup> Palairet went to Crete after his evacuation. See Günther, *Pióropusz i szpada*, p. 185; see also “Royal 'hunch' saved 'Greek' king,” *Palestine Post* vol. 4505 (1941), p. 3; “Sir Michael Palairet,” *Gloucestershire Echo*, 30 April 1941, p. 1; “Sir Michael Palairet,” *Evening Despatch* 15/542 (1941), p. 1; “Still Resisting. Final Stand in Greece,” *Birmingham Mail*, 30 April 1941, p. 1; “King's Escape,” *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 May 1941, p. 5 (some of the journals listed do not have continuous numbering).

<sup>166</sup> “Greek king slept in a hut,” *Evening Dispatch* 15/564 (1941), p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> A. Rosiak, “Brytyjska koncepcja militarnego wsparcia Grecji (styczeń–marzec 1941 r.),” *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Historica* 61 (1998), pp. 211–228. Tadeusz Machalski, the Polish military attaché in Athens, on the other hand, stated that Britain, in the face of German superiority, was not going to give real support to Greece while under attack. It limited itself, as he put it, to “symbolic aid to save England's honour.” See Machalski, *Co widziałem*, p. 226.

<sup>168</sup> The British military attaché in Athens is referred to here.

<sup>169</sup> HI, MFA, box 5, f. 5, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the political collapse of Greece, 29 May 1941.

Polish citizens were taken care of by Julian Rummel, who had left occupied Warsaw for this purpose in February 1940.<sup>170</sup> He undertook care activities through the International Red Cross, among others. He remained in contact with the MSW and Alexander Ładoś. In September 1942, the Ministry gave him one thousand francs for the purpose of providing care.<sup>171</sup>

According to information from Relico (Relief Committee for the War-stricken Jewish Population), the Jewish refugees from Poland and Germany who ended up in Thessaloniki between 1938 and 1940 made a bad record in the history of the city's Jewish community. A report written in French documenting the extermination in Thessaloniki noted that they formed a Jewish civic guard, called the Civil Guard, which overzealously obeyed all German orders. The German occupier took advantage of their weakest position (they were poor and lived in slums) – intimidating and terrorising them, forcing them to carry out German extermination policies.<sup>172</sup>

Danuta Drywa established that, in June 1943, the presence of Jewish Polish citizens in Greece was no longer noted. Statistics covering southern Europe indicated that some 1,500 Polish Jews were then living in the area of Italy, Dalmatia, Slovenia and Albania. A few survived – in mid-June 1944, Józef Czapski asked Aleksander Ładoś to intercede with the Swiss authorities and/or the International Red Cross to take care of a small group of Polish citizens who were in Greece. Among them was one Jewish family living in Thessaloniki.<sup>173</sup>

## Conclusions

Envoy Günther's relief and rescue activities were multi-dimensional. They should be seen in the context of the two most important events on Greek soil: the invasion by Italian troops and then by German troops. His most important

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<sup>170</sup> Nowak, *Słownik biograficzny*, pp. 112–113; Pertek, "Rummel Julian Eugeniusz," pp. 90–92.

<sup>171</sup> As Danuta Drywa has determined, it was most likely a group of just over twenty people. See D. Drywa, *Poselstwo RP w Bernie. Przemilczana historia* (Warsaw–Oświęcim 2020), p. 148.

<sup>172</sup> Relico's report on the first deportation from Thessaloniki (March 1943) reads: "The operation took place under the direct supervision of the Jewish Civil Guard, whose members behaved like real brutes. They were cruel to the poor deportees, even whipping sick and old men because they were unable to board the train without assistance. [...] A delegation of the International Red Cross wanted to help them. The Germans did not allow it." See YVA, Abraham Silberschein Archive, file 107 (3687294), *La deportation des Juifs de Salonique*, pp. 7–8; J. Jakoel, *Haszwaah w'hachurban inSaloniki: Ir va-em be-Israel* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 276, 288.

<sup>173</sup> Drywa, *Poselstwo RP w Bernie*, pp. 148–149.

task during the Second World War, apart from carrying out the evacuation of Polish army personnel across Greece, was to organise the departure of Polish civilian refugees (Poles and Jews). The envoy's first official diplomatic efforts in the matter of Jewish refugees date back to September 1940, i.e. even before the Greek-Italian War. After the outbreak of the war, the activity of the Polish diplomat increased greatly – he tried to obtain visas for all Polish citizens enabling them to leave. The envoy was constantly sending telegrams to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this matter, pushing the Ministry to convince the British side to issue these documents. Of great importance here was the case of the Polish Jews, who were refused permission by the Foreign Office to go to Palestine (the only possible direction of evacuation). The British services feared that they would remain there permanently in contravention of British policy in the area. Thus, a large percentage of Jewish people in the Polish group stymied visa procedures. Correspondence about visas for all Polish citizens began in November 1940 and ended on 20 April 1941.

Noteworthy is the initiative presented by Günther to the MFA in November 1940 that the British partner should treat Polish Jews residing in Greece not as immigrants but as refugees who should go to Palestine. The problem of visa document limits could then be solved.

When the German attack on Greece began, in the face of inaction by the British ally and the lack of visas for Polish citizens, the envoy, in his correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, started to apply the complaints procedure for exit visas. During this period, the Ministry made intensive efforts to obtain the necessary documents from the British side. In his endeavours in Greece, Günther was alone – he could not expect help from the British Envoy Michael Palaert. The lack of professionalism on the British side resulted in numerous failings, for example, in failing to inform Honorary Consul Albert Nehama in Thessaloniki about the evacuation. There were also no agreements or guidelines from the Allied side on the evacuation procedure and its rules. In the course of the British-led operation to leave Greece, the solidarity mechanism arising from Allied commitments also did not work. The Polish group was the last to receive official British permission to leave. It was also unable to use English ships. This situation led to Polish citizens being deprived of protection by the British side. The envoy single-handedly tried

to get hold of a ship on which the Polish group, by a happy coincidence, could sail away from Greece, which was being bombarded by the German air force.

According to Günther's post-war memoirs, there were about 300 refugees on the Polish ship, most of them Jews. Newspapers reported about 400. Unfortunately, there is no data in the archival documents on how many refugees (broken down by nationality) were on board. Certainly, in the course of the evacuation, these statistics changed - influenced by information about the boat waiting to depart, the number of refugees may have increased significantly even at the last minute. This issue requires in-depth research.<sup>174</sup>

Günther's activity should be seen in a broader context than Polish diplomatic activities. The story reveals the mechanisms of the Polish representation's dependence on the Allied position, i.e. the British side. The Allied side, failing to uphold the standards of good cooperation, disregarded the security of the Polish representation and, by extension, the civilian population in its care, placing them at risk of remaining in the German sphere of influence. The main reason for Britain's long-standing blocking of the departure of Polish refugees from Greece appears to have been the high proportion of Jewish nationals. Since the only possible direction for evacuation turned out to be Palestine, the state in whose jurisdiction the area lay wanted to grant permission for evacuation as late as possible. Britain's political interests and current war aims therefore outweighed humanitarian concerns.

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<sup>174</sup> More people might also have boarded the ship during the voyage.

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## SUMMARY

This article deals with the activities of the Polish Legation in Athens from 1939 to 1941, i.e. until the post was shut down and its staff evacuated in the face of the German occupation of the Greek state. The diplomatic mission was then headed by Władysław Günther-Schwarzburg (1885–1974), who had held office in Greece since April 1936. His main task was to protect Polish citizens – Poles and Jews. In 1941, their evacuation in the face of the escalating German threat became paramount. The efforts to ensure that this evacuation was carried out efficiently and effectively are the main content of this article. The main obstacle proved to be the position of Great Britain and its representation in Greece, which hindered or even blocked the departure of Polish citizens and contributed to the chaos. This put at risk the health and lives not only of Polish citizens but also of British citizens, among others. The article contributes to the analysis of the Allied refugee policy during the Second World War and the links between this policy and the issue of the extermination of the Jews. The envoy and his colleagues managed to transport out of Greece a group of 300 people of various nationalities (including Poles, Jews and Britons) on the ship *Warsaw* without the help of the Allies.

## KEYWORDS

Holocaust • Greece • Günther-Schwarzburg Władysław  
 • Ministry of Foreign Affairs • government in-exile-of the Republic  
 of Poland • Jews

## Appendix No. 1

*Letter from the Envoy of the Republic of Poland in Athens, Władysław Günther, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding evacuating the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941.*

Alexandria, 27 May 1941

No. 3/Gr/Al.

Concerning evacuation  
of the Polish colony from Greece

To  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
in London

Soon after the outbreak of war, as a result of the evacuation of our citizens from Romania and Hungary, more and more groups of Poles began to arrive in Greece as refugees, who wished either to pass through Greece to Italy or France, or to wait out the storm of war in Greece. The Greek government, which more or less willingly and easily granted transit visas until the end of 1939, immediately took a negative stance towards the permanent settlement of Poles on its territory. Then, in agreement with Ambassador Raczyński<sup>1</sup> in Bucharest, and with Envoy Orłowski<sup>2</sup> in Budapest, who rightly wished to reduce the influx of refugees from Romania and Hungary, I addressed the Greek government and asked King George II to grant asylum in Greece to several thousand Polish refugees, but I received a reply that the difficulty of supplying food in Greece, which coincided with the outbreak of the war, because of problems of land and especially sea transportation, dictated a policy of restrictions on any foreign citizen intending to settle in Greece for any extended period of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bernard Raczyński (1891–1991). From 1 November 1934, throughout the Second World War (until 5 July 1945), he was Polish ambassador to Great Britain. From 22 August 1941 to 18 July 1943, he also served as minister of foreign affairs (as acting minister until June 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Leon Orłowski (1891–1976) served as envoy of the Republic of Poland to Hungary from 15 May 1936 until 31 December 1940.

As a result of this position of the Greek government, Greece soon became a transit-only area for foreign citizens, only a few individuals of whom, and only thanks to the efforts of the Legation, were able to reside in Greece. Their numbers were fluid but generally close to 100, apart from a huge transport of military personnel who were evacuated with the assistance of the Messenger via Thessaloniki, Athens and Piraeus by ship to Marseille. This state of affairs prevailed until Italy entered the war, i.e. mid-June 1940. At that time, the outflow of Polish refugees to France was automatically closed, and the easy granting of transit visas, let alone residence visas, came to a halt.

During this period, Polish citizens of Jewish origin began arriving in Greece, without first asking the Legation for help, coming from Vienna via Hungary, others via the Soviets (Odessa), and there was also a group of about 50 arriving via Italy. This influx was the reason for Greece's negative stance on the arrival of Polish citizens, due to the fact that Turkey, Palestine and Egypt have now banned the issuing of visas, even transit visas, to Polish citizens, especially those of Jewish origin. At the time – this was in September and October 1940 – there were 180 refugees in Greece at that time, 70 of whom were of Jewish origin, in difficult material circumstances, wishing to go to Palestine, but without the possibility of obtaining any kind of visa, or even a transit visa, because, as was mentioned, these were refused.

At this point, i.e. from the end of September 1940, the Legation took into its own hands the effort to evacuate the immigrant colony, treating it before the British Embassy and the Greek Government as a fundamental and official issue, without, however, finding it sufficiently understood or adequately supported by English factors.

The Greek authorities, meanwhile, had threatened in writing to remove the Polish refugees residing in Athens to the islands as nuisance citizens but never went as far as carrying out this threat, extending their residence permits for a mere 10 days and forcing the refugees to appear in person each time at the police to obtain residence rights for a further period of time.

With the outbreak of the Greco-Italian War, the situation of the Polish refugees in Greece became even more serious, in view of the Greek government's tendency [to] remove all foreign citizens, all the more so as the Greek police

obtained information from abroad about the easy subjugation of the Polish Jews to the Axis powers and even to Germany.<sup>3</sup> On two occasions, the Greek political police semi-officially warned the Legation that the persecution of young people in the German-occupied Polish territories was a consequence of indiscretions from Jewish refugees in Athens and Istanbul, revealing the “Polish job” in the Balkans and the Middle East to German secret agents.

When I presented this state of affairs and the need for the Polish colony to leave the Greek borders to the English envoy, I twice exposed myself to the accusation of causing panic and an unjustified alleged aversion to the stay of Poles in Greece, incomprehensible to him, as he was, on the contrary, of the opinion that the departure of any of the English citizens from Athens was inappropriate, claiming that the actions of the Legation were always reinforced by the existence of colonies in a given country. It was with real effort that I had to explain to him and, in turn, to several of his subordinate officials, in which I was very actively assisted by the commercial attaché of the Legation, Mr Z[dzisław] Kamiński, that the character of the Polish colony in Greece was quite different from that of the English colony, as it was not a settled, gainful and prosperous colony, but, with the exception of a group of officials and about ten people, literally, already resident in Greece before the war, it consisted entirely of newcomers, uprooted from their normal living conditions, 95% deprived of any means of subsistence and therefore living on minimal social subsidies, in poor conditions and without any ties to Greece, being an unnecessary and therefore harmful element. It was with real reluctance that he and the members of his Legation took note of this view and began, as late as the end of September, to allegedly try to obtain Egyptian and Palestinian visas for our colony. Nor can I state, even retrospectively, whether the English Legation carried out these efforts insincerely or ineptly; the fact is that in seven months they produced no result, so that only after many letters, telegrams, endorsements, etc., known to the Ministry, and only in view of the danger of our colony being taken prisoner by the Germans already advancing on Athens, did it decide on the night of 15–16 April to grant Palestinian visas.

During this period of several months, our Legation, regardless of the efforts it made in the Greek Foreign Ministry, was subjected to constant criticism from

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<sup>3</sup> The resident of the Polish intelligence service also knew about this, as stated in the article.



the more aggressive members of the Polish colony, especially Jews, for its inaction and ineptitude of conduct. The development of events, going against hopes and worsening the personal situation of the colony, increased their nervousness and resentment towards the Legation, causing the Greek authorities to take an increasingly negative attitude towards further arrivals of Polish citizens as unnecessary and only increasing the size of the colony unable to find a passage.

Already in the summer of 1940, this situation had an adverse effect on the permits granted to Polish officials, so difficulties arose in obtaining Greek visas, especially residence visas, even for the service passport holders who had been assigned to the Polish Legation in an official capacity.

Consequently, when, in the autumn of 1940, our authorities wished to assign special operations agents to the Polish Legation in Athens or to the Honorary Consulate in Thessaloniki by asking Athens for permission to increase the number of diplomatic personnel, I encountered serious and insurmountable difficulties in Athens when I asked for permanent residence and work permits for the apparent vice-consuls, concerning whom (this happened in two cases) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in my first conversations about them, made me understand that, knowing who they were dealing with, they could not count them among the ranks of established and recognised members of the Polish Legation.

As I have mentioned, this state of affairs lasted for the entire duration of the Greco-Italian War, and continued during the Greco-German War, which, as we know, soon led to Greece's catastrophe and its occupation by the Germans, and thus had an impact on the fate of all Poles on Greek territory, necessitating their definite and rapid evacuation. However, even after the German entry into Thessaloniki, representatives of the English Legation, as well as its head, the envoy himself, delayed making any real arrangements for the evacuation of the Polish colony, despite knowing that the only technical possibility of taking foreign citizens outside Greece, by sea to Egypt and Palestine, was in their hands, in view of the immobilisation, for several weeks now, of the railway line leading through Adrianopole to Turkey.

It was not until 12 April that I finally obtained permission from the English envoy to grant Palestinian visas to Polish nationals, thanks largely to a fortunate coincidence, namely the arrival in Piraeus a few days beforehand of the Polish

ship *Warszawa* and my request from the English admiralty that this ship be used primarily for the evacuation of Poles.

Unfortunately, 12 April was Easter Saturday, as a result of which the visas were not arranged until Tuesday night, already in the face of the horror of the retreating front, due to the discharge of Greek soldiers during the battle by their treacherous navy and air force ministers of war. The issuing of visas was not completed until noon on 16 April, so that the Polish colony, as well as the officials of the Legation going to Egypt and Palestine, could be loaded onto the ship on the evening of the 16th.

I deliberately emphasise these dates in order to show the tardiness and administrative ineptitude of the English agents who decided to allow the departure of the colonies only during the days of dangerous and incessant bombardment of Piraeus and sinking of ships standing in the harbour, and when the departures of these colonies increased the difficulties of the English Admiralty, already evacuating its army returning from the front, as well as the English colony and the numerous officials of its own Legation evacuated to Egypt. The English envoy, for reasons of prestige, kept them there [? illegible] for a few more days, giving permission for them to leave only after 20 April. The main evacuation of Athens took place on 22–24 April with the population in a panic, the lack of transport facilities literally under bombardment and the light of burning ships being bombed in succession. On these critical days, 23 Greek and English ships were reportedly sunk, including the *Hellas* with about 400 people of the English colony and an ill-advised private yacht mobilised by the English envoy's closest associates and their families, carrying four times the normal number of passengers, about 100 people, which sank off the coast of Kimonia with a few people and all their luggage. The English envoy himself and his family made the [journey] from Athens to Crete by plane without luggage. The envoy's official and private luggage (archives, silver, clothes) sank completely. If, on the other hand, the evacuation had been devised by the English Legation as planned, and if it had been carried out discretely a few weeks earlier, it would have taken place without disaster, without complicating the evacuation of the army, which lost several thousand soldiers in Piraeus and in the Peloponnesian ports en route to Crete as a result.

That part of the Athenian English colony that succeeded in reaching Alexandria or Cairo, as well as senior English military officers, now spared no criticism for the

English envoy and Legation in Athens for their incomprehensible and disregard for reality conduct, which caused the death of a serious number of people and the loss of serious English property. Envoy Plaeiret [PalaiRET] is also called by the English colony in Cairo “a murderer of children and a plunderer of the possessions of the people close to him.”

Evidence of the confusion which prevailed in these days of evacuation among the English leadership is the fact that the ship *Warszawa*, which contained about 100 people from the Polish colony, about 100 representatives of the English colony and 100 people of foreign colonies, and which was, it is understood, to leave Piraeus on the day of boarding, was forgotten by the moving convoy and stood in the harbour for 60 more hours, being subjected to several serious bombardments, and sailed off on the night of 18 April. However, fortune favoured the evacuation of the Polish colony, as, apart from the bombardment in Piraeus, the journey on the ship *Warszawa* took place calmly and without much danger, heading via Port Said to Haifa.

On 18 April, i.e. two days after the Polish colony boarded the ship, a dispatch from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its request to the Foreign Office to instruct the English envoy to grant visas enabling the evacuation of the Polish colony.

The group of officials of the Polish Legation going to Crete, headed by me, departed when the Greek Government considered it necessary to leave Athens, i.e. on the night of 22–23 April 1941.

In my desire to exhaust the subject of the evacuation of the colonies and the members of the Legation, I am also compelled to mention that the efforts for the departure of the recently assigned fictitious officials to the Legation were also carried out by the Legation, dealing with their passport matters simultaneously and on an equal footing with its own. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to clarify that one of the members of the Polish colony most actively demanding to be evacuated at the first suitable opportunity was Count Adam Korab,<sup>4</sup> who even

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to Colonel Major Alfred Krajewski “Adam Korab.” In October 1940, on behalf of Department VI of the Supreme Commander’s Staff, he tried to set up an intelligence and liaison outpost code-named “Grzegorz” in Greece. It was tasked with keeping communication routes open with the “Romek” (Budapest) and “Beya” (Istanbul) bases. It was also to contact the “Sawa” communications outpost in Belgrade.

suggested to me that I hire a special ship on my own account for a few hundred thousand drachmas – as he even had it in his ordinance – and that his closer colleagues and possibly members of the envoy should leave in it as soon as possible. The arrival of the “*Warszawa*” and my assurances that his diplomatic passport was treated on a par with those of my colleagues travelling on the *Warszawa* calmed him down somewhat, thanks to which he abandoned the thought of hiring his own ship. On the day of loading onto the *Warszawa* he received a radio station from Istanbul, which the Legation helped him to transport along with his private luggage. I mention these details deliberately, as I have already been repeatedly told of Mr Korab’s regrets and complaints in Egypt, that he had an order and desire to go to Crete together with the Legation, but I personally opposed his intentions and made his departure to Crete impossible. I hereby state that Mr Korab never approached me with the intention of accompanying the Greek government or the Polish mission to Crete, but that, on the contrary, he made it abundantly clear to all the members of the mission and the Polish colony that he wished to leave Athens as soon as possible and to evacuate to a safer place.

I learned only of the order given by the Interior Ministry to Col. Lewandowski<sup>5</sup> and Mr Smodlibowski telling them to stay in Athens as long as the relevant English circles remained there. This order, which was repeated to me by Colonel Lewandowski, would separate them from their families leaving on *Warszawa*, as a result of which, I suppose, Colonel Lewandowski asked me on 14 April to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and thus to the Ministry of Military Affairs, on his behalf, as well as on behalf of Mr Smodlibowski,<sup>6</sup> with an explanation that their further stay in Athens was unnecessary, and personally dangerous. I did so most

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Lewandowski (1892–1960) – during the Second World War, he was in Paris on 6 January 1940, and then became head of the Polish Military Evacuation Post in Athens. From 1 September 1940, he served as head of Field Office “A” of Department II of the Supreme Commander’s Staff in Athens. Then, on 19 April 1941, he was evacuated to Jerusalem, where he joined the Polish Army in the Middle East.

<sup>6</sup> Antoni Smodlibowski (1901–1988) – in September 1939, he was head of the Consulate General in Leipzig, then joined the Supreme Commander’s Staff in Paris. In October 1939, he was assigned to Department II of the Supreme Commander’s Staff in Budapest, where he organised the evacuation of Polish soldiers to France. Wanted by the Gestapo, he went to Athens, where he served as deputy chief of Field Office “A” until 25 April. Then, after the German army occupied Greece, he made his way to the Middle East, where he became squadron commander of the Carpathian Lancers Regiment in early July 1941.

willingly, and on the same day, i.e. 14 April, I sent the relevant dispatch to the MFA, especially as it coincided completely with my personal conviction.

I presume that, as a result of my dispatch, they received permission from the Ministry of Military Affairs to evacuate also on the *Warszawa*, despite the fact that the English agents responsible for them would remain in Athens for a few more days and then go to Crete.

Returning to the matter of the evacuation of the Polish colony, I cannot resist the need to express my deep personal satisfaction that the Polish Legation has fulfilled its duty and task of protecting Polish citizens from falling under German occupation by timely and successfully evacuating the Polish colony, the Polish refugees, as well as the Legation staff and the official and its semi-official offices, from Greece to Egypt and Palestine. Only a few Polish citizens remained in Athens, consciously unwilling to go into further exile, who renounced in advance and officially all pretensions to the Polish Legation, moral and material, for the fate which the German occupation in Greece might expose them to.

[handwritten signature] W[ładysław] Günther  
Envoy of the Republic of Poland

*Source: A HI, MFA, 522, f. 7, Letter from Günther to the MFA on the evacuation of the Polish colony in Greece, 27 May 1941, typescript in Polish.*

## Appendix No. 2

List of names of Polish passport holders at the disposal of the Department for Aliens of the Greek Police, seized by the German Secret Service (1943)

No	Surname	First name	Father's name
1.	Altachul	Hermina	Isidor
2.	Brozkova	Terezia	Ignac
3.	Friedmann	Katarina	Vladimir
4.	Gablonski	Helena	Jiri/George?/
5.	Gablonski	Jiri/George?	Jan
6.	Geringer	Fany	Ferdinand
7.	Geringer	Helena	Jan
8.	Geringer	Matylda	Mikulacz/Niclas
9.	Geringer	Regina	Ferdinand
10.	Glowacki	Ana	Samuel
11.	Glowacki	Vasilje	Kazimir
12.	Hajmanova	Marie	Leopold
13.	Holiczer	Amalia	Maksimilian
14.	Hotze	Voltemar/?/	Evzen
15.	Jarmolinsky	Ladislav	Miczeslaw
16.	Julinkova	Ruzena	Jan
17.	Kaczvinsky	Karol	Ladislaw
18.	Koslowska	Helena	Stanisław
19.	Kurniska	Marie	Josef
20.	Lazarew	Aloisia	Ludwik
21.	Lustgarten	Anna	Piotr
22.	Lustgarten	Filip	Jan
23.	Maciejowska	Aleksandra	Czislau
24.	Maciejowska	Cela	Ferdinand
25.	Maciejowska	Ana	Czislau
26.	Maciejowsky	Czislau	Erik
27.	Matousek	Evzenie	Frantisek

No	Surname	First name	Father's name
28.	Matousek	Frantisek	Vaclav
29.	Mlynek	Ida	Jan
30.	Mlynek	Jan	Jan
31.	Orsa	Janette	Heindrich
32.	Orsa	Lukas	Josef
33.	Pavlovska	Maria	Lukas
34.	Petrik	Helena	Karol
35.	Petrik	Karol	Frantisek
36.	Pograniczny	Josef	Ondrej
37.	Rajsky	Alzbeta	Frantisek
38.	Sianko	Olga	Vasilje
39.	Smiela	Evzenia	Michal
40.	Sponti	Dimitrij	Karol
41.	Stampf	Artur	Israel
42.	Steiner	Kazimira	Valentin
43.	Vasile	Eleonora	Albert

*Source: HI, MFA, box 515, f. 5, List of Polish passports seized by the German secret service from the Aliens' Department of the Greek Police.*