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POLISH DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR REPRESENTATION IN HAVANA, AND THE CASE OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN CUBA DURING THE WORLD WAR II

The issues related to the presence and activities of Polish citizens in Cuba are rarely studied in Polish academic literature. This is a general result of the weak historical relationships between Poland and Cuba. Nevertheless, a few valuable studies have been written about these issues.¹

The results of research by both Polish and foreign authors have focused on emphasising the social dimension of the lives of the Polish and Jewish diasporas in Cuba; however, the differentiation of Jews by their country of origin does not

¹ The most recent study is by M. Malinowski, 'Polonia na Kubie' in *Relacje Polska–Kuba. Historia i współczesność*, ed. K. Dembicz, Warsaw 2013. From older literature, we may mention some studies, though they do not relate to the war period: A. Dembicz, *Kuba*, Warsaw 1969; I. Klarner-Kosińska, 'Polonia na Haiti' in *Dzieje Polonii w Ameryce Łacińskiej. Zbiór studiów*, ed. M. Kula, Wrocław 1983, pp. 159–162; M. Kula, 'Polonia na Kubie' in *Dzieje Polonii...*, pp. 128–156. The memoirs of Jan Drohojowski, the Polish minister plenipotentiary in Cuba, also deserve attention, despite their many shortcomings. In those memoirs, he disassociated himself from his past which connected him with the Polish government-in-exile, and (which is most noteworthy) almost completely omitted the activities of Kazimierz Roman Dębicki, the envoy of the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Havana, whom he presented as an intriguer and thief (J. Drohojowski, *Jana Drohojowskiego wspomnienia dyplomatyczne*, Cracow 1972, pp. 11, 123, 284). Dębicki also wrote his memoirs and two volumes of diaries, which have not yet been published. Dębicki's papers are kept at the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, archival fonds no. 040, no. 2 and 3 in the inventory.

as a rule appear in studies by English-speaking authors, as they only refer to a generally defined geographical region.² However, the activities of the Polish diplomatic deputation in Cuba during the World War II have completely faded from view. This deputation organised the lives of groups of Poles living abroad, including Jewish refugees. Thus, there is a need for a detailed study that would show the nature of these activities as well as their range and reach. An analysis of the available material leaves no doubt that the most urgent problem faced by the Polish deputation in the Caribbean region was the issue of helping Jews who had arrived in Cuba from occupied Europe.³ This activity was outlined by the policy of the Polish government-in-exile.⁴

² A well-documented work by Zhava Litvac Glaser entitled *Refugees and Relief: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and European Jews in Cuba and Shanghai 1938–1943*, New York 2015, contains rudimentary information about Jews from Poland. This work is mainly dominated by deliberations about divisions within the Jewish diaspora into Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, as well as into old and new emigration. Robert M. Levine devoted a great deal of attention to issues such as culture shock, national identity, adaptation and acculturation in the war context (R.M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora. The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, Florida 1993, pp. 150–188; M. Bejarano, ‘Sephardic Jews in Cuba (from All Their Habitations)’, *Judaism. A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 2002, no. 1, pp. 96–108; J. Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba. The Golden Age 1906–1958*, Nashville 2006).

³ Let us list the most important studies devoted to Polish diplomacy and the Polish diaspora in Latin America during the World War II: M.T. Koreywo-Rybczyńska, ‘Polityka Polski wobec emigracji w Ameryce Łacińskiej. Od mirażu ekspansji do polityki współpracy’ in *Dzieje Polonii...*, pp. 443–480; J. Perlin, ‘Historia stosunków dyplomatycznych Polski z Ameryką Łacińską (part II)’, *Ameryka Łacińska* 1996, no. 3, pp. 101–103; *Polityka zagraniczna państw Ameryki Łacińskiej w okresie II wojny światowej w świetle raportów polskich placówek zagranicznych 1939–1941*, compiled by K. Smolana, Warsaw 2014; *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski. Informator*, vol. 2: *Ameryka Północna i Południowa 1918–2007*, ed. K. Szczepanik, A. Herman-Łukasik, B. Janicka, Warsaw 2008; see also E. Kołodziej, ‘Rola polskich placówek dyplomatycznych i konsularnych w latach 1939–1945’ in *Władze RP na obczyźnie podczas II wojny światowej 1939–1945*, ed. Z. Błażyński, London 1994, pp. 774–820.

⁴ On this topic, see e.g. D. Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz. The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews 1939–1942*, London 1987; *idem*, *Facing a Holocaust. The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews 1943–1945*, London 1993; A. Haska, ‘“Proszę Pana Ministra o energiczną interwencję.” Aleksander Ładoś (1891–1963) i ratowanie Żydów przez Poselstwo RP w Bernie’, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2015, vol. 11, pp. 299–309; D. Dyrwa, ‘Działalność Poselstwa RP w Bernie na rzecz polsko-żydowskich uchodźców w latach 1939–1945’ in *Okupowana Europa. Podobieństwa i różnice*, ed. W. Grabowski, Warsaw 2014, pp. 99–123; E. Pałasz-Rutkowska, ‘Ambassador Tadeusz Romer. His Role in Polish-Japanese Relations (1937–1941)’, *Silva Iaponicarum* 2008, vol. 18, pp. 82–104; D. Stola, ‘The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Final Solution. What Conditioned Its Actions and Inactions’ in *Contested Memories. Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. J. Zimmermann, New Brunswick 2003, p. 89ff. It must be noted that the documents from the collection of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs kept in the Hoover Institution were used only scarcely in all of the studies listed above. The pages in the files in this collection are not foliated, and the references only give the folder number. I have refrained from quoting the titles of documents because in a majority of cases one decision or a singular event is reflected in several, several dozen or several hundred documents, including coded dispatches with similar, though not identical, content.

Organisational State of the Polish Deputation

After the independent Polish state established diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1933, the relationship between the states deepened. However, this was a gradual process. From 1934, the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Poland, headed by Karol Sachs,⁵ operated in Havana, but the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York formally looked after Polish citizens 'from a distance'. The presence of Karol Sachs in Cuba was not coincidental; as a prominent Polish sugar manufacturer, during the post-1929 depression he strove to take care of the interests of the Polish sugar industry, which had been affected by the after-effects of the financial crisis (as Cuba was one of the main sugar exporters).⁶

The concept of 'presence from a distance' in Cuba was still practiced after the outbreak of war. At that time a secretary named Leon Wilczewski, who assisted Sachs, was co-opted to the consulate, but unfortunately the author could not find any further details about him. The Polish deputation on the island was expanded

⁵ Karol Sachs, son of Markus and Eleonora, whose family came from Kiev; he came from a family of assimilated Jews and was related to the families of Aszkenazy, Ginsberg and Oldenburg. He held a PhD, and before the war was counted as one of the most influential industrial sugar manufacturers; he held the office of vice-president of *Związek Cukrowników Polskich* (the Union of Polish Sugar Manufacturers). He was also the director of the Anglo-Polish Bank and the president of several sugar refineries, as well as a co-founder of the international sugar cartel established in 1931. The sugar factory in Zakrzówek in the Lublin region belonged to him. Jan Drohojowski counted him as one of the co-creators of the Chadbourne plan from 1931, which consisted of dividing up the sugar markets as well as regulating supply and demand for this product. The *ONR-Falanga* (National Radical Camp Falanga) denied Sachs' vital role in the Polish sugar industry before the war, ridiculing the connections of Jewish industrialists with the Polish landed gentry. In 1939, Sachs was a director of *Komitet Pomocy Uchodźcom z Niemiec* (Committee To Aid Refugees From Germany) in Warsaw. However, Drohojowski's statement that Sachs was the vice-president of *Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa* (Jewish Religious Community) in Warsaw is false ('Cukier krzepi... Izraela. Tajniki "królestwa" rodziny Przeworskich', *Falanga* 1937, no. 24, p. 1; J. Drohojowski, *Jana Drohojowskiego wspomnienia...*, p. 146; see also: H. Kawalec, 'Działalność gospodarcza', *Więści Zakrzówickie* 2016, no. 14, pp. 18–20, an issue dedicated to the Jewish community in the Zakrzówek district in the years 1918–1939; J. Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919–1939*, Berlin – New York – Amsterdam 1983, p. 116; R. Żebrowski, *Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa w Warszawie 1918–1939. W kręgu polityki*, Warsaw 2012, p. 579; see also: E. Słabińska, 'Wkład ziemiaństwa w rozwój przemysłu cukrowniczego w województwie kieleckim w latach 1918–1939', *Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej* 2010, vol. 7, p. 228).

⁶ In the 1930s, the interest in creating new consulates increased in Poland as a result of the global economic depression and the increasing social problems in the communities of the worldwide Polish diaspora. As many as 87 career consuls and 141 honorary consuls were operating in 1939 (W. Michowicz, 'Organizacja polskiego aparatu dyplomatycznego w latach 1918–1939' in *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 4, ed. P. Łossowski, Warsaw 1995, pp. 45, 56; see also: W. Skóra, *Służba konsularna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Organizacja, kadry i działalność*, Toruń 2006).

further as a result of international conditions; in 1942, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to reinforce its diplomatic structures in Cuba further.

In March 1942, minister plenipotentiary Jan Drohojowski was sent to the island.⁷ He was an experienced diplomat⁸ and quickly established relations with other envoys, especially Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, the British representative, and Ellis Ormsbee Briggs, the American *chargé d'affaires*. Both warned Drohojowski that effective cooperation with the Cuban government should be dependent on the degree of his association with the American government, which could be regarded as an attempt to have Drohojowski report to them.⁹ The following people also belonged to the circle of Drohojowski's acquaintances: Ti-Tsun Lin (the Chinese envoy), B. Verstraeten (the Belgian *chargé d'affaires*; first name unknown), Alfred Danielsen (the Norwegian *chargé d'affaires*), as well as Henry A. Hobson (the First Secretary of the Legation of Great Britain and the British Consul General) and Philippe Grousset (the representative of Free France).¹⁰ During that period, Drohojowski cooperated closely with the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington; the above-mentioned areas belonged to its jurisdiction. Until the time

⁷ The Hoover Institution Archives (hereinafter HI Archives), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collection (hereinafter MSZ), 9, f. 10. Cuba was an important point on the war map as an important surveillance point for the Allied forces. All the principal political powers were interested in the Atlantic war theatre, including the Abwehr within the framework of Operation Bolivar (for more see T. Schoonover, *Hitler's Man in Havana. Heinz Luning and Nazi Espionage in Latin America*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 2008).

⁸ After the end of his short mission in Cuba, the Polish government was considering, at the initiative of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the candidacy of Drohojowski for the position of consul general in Jerusalem. Jan Stańczyk opposed his candidacy, and wrote in December 1943 to Mikołajczyk: "In interpersonal relations among Polish people, Mr Drohojowski did not yet demonstrate either the coexistence with people or the impartiality which is necessary to control the quite difficult situation in Palestine. [...] He is not a personality whose authority, restraint and solemnity would be able to normalise relations in that place." In another letter, Stańczyk explained directly that Drohojowski has an anti-Semitic attitude, as was proved by his pamphlet about the Jewish issue and the fact that he had edited the *Przewodnik Katolicki* weekly before the war (HI Archives, MSZ, 295, f. 7). As Przemysław Różański mentioned, Drohojowski was an author of a study for Ministry of Foreign Affairs entitled *Zarys problemu żydowskiego w Polsce* (*The outline of the Jewish problem in Poland*) in which, referring to the protests by American professors related to the matter of 'ghetto benches' in Poland, he noticed that in the US "segregation was practised in many public places, seaside resorts, clubs and hotels, making it impossible for Jews to access the mentioned places" (P. Różański, 'Stany Zjednoczone i Polska w drugiej połowie lat 30. XX wieku. W kręgu spraw żydowskich', *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2010, no. 1, pp. 63–79).

⁹ HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10.

¹⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 43, f. 17. In May 1941 Jacques Soustelle was the representative of Gen. Charles de Gaulle for the countries of Central and South America (HI Archives, MSZ, 532, f. 22).

of Drohojowski's arrival, Michał Kwapiszewski, the Counsellor of the Embassy, visited the island in the name of Jan Ciechanowski, the Polish ambassador in Washington.¹¹

Soon, Drohojowski was replaced by Kazimierz Roman Dębicki, who came to Cuba as an envoy of the Republic of Poland in Havana. He held the position of envoy from October 1942 to 5 July 1945, with a responsibility also covering the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and then Jamaica from 1944 (delegated competency). Among his subordinates was the mission's secretary, Dr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, about whom – as in the case of Sachs's secretary – we know nothing.¹²

Dębicki was a vociferous supporter of creating the legation; he was also aware of the geographical and mental distance separating Cuba from Poland, so he understood that his most important activities consisted of establishing closer relations with the United States. Dębicki justified the need for a Polish post in the following way: “[it] is a necessary supplement of our network on the American continent. The already mentioned capital of sentiment, which Poland possesses in these countries and [which] can revive, ambitions and sensitivities which can be exploited there for Poland, and finally the importance the United States attaches to these countries, are elements which in the political and propaganda work can surely be useful.”¹³

His enthusiastic attitude upon arrival allowed him to look with optimism at the opportunities for developing the post. In addition to the above-mentioned people, the Polish honorary consuls – Georges Lespinasse in Haiti and Juan Gilberto Marion-Landais in the Dominican Republic – were helpful. Their importance was all the greater as there were serious communication issues related to the

¹¹ HI Archives, MSZ, 44, f. 6.

¹² HI Archives, MSZ, 125, f. 8; HI Archives, MSZ, 156, f. 27; HI Archives, MSZ, 161, f. 10. Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski was nominated to become envoy to Cuba, and he obtained the consent of Minister of State of Cuba to arrive on the island in April 1942. When Wieniawa committed suicide on 1 July 1942, a problem arose whom to appoint in his place (for more see a polemical article by Witold Dworzyński concerning Jacek Majchrowski's remarks on the theme: W. Dworzyński, 'Biografia Wieniawy', *Zeszyty Literackie* 1991, no. 95, pp. 210–214. For more on Wieniawa in the Cuban context, see also HI Archives, MSZ, 43, f. 17).

¹³ HI Archives, MSZ, 47, f. 19. When writing about these sentiments, Dębicki was referring to the Napoleonic era when Polish soldiers found their way to Santo Domingo, that is Haiti, where some of them decided to join the Haitian insurgents (for more, see e.g. A.M. Skałkowski, *Polacy na Santo Domingo 1802–1809*, Poznań 1921).

insular character of the areas under Dębicki's control, although these obstacles were overcome. Dębicki was pleased with the work of the honorary consuls; he emphasised that they represented spheres of the local elites, and in his assessment Lespinasse was particularly useful due to his friendship with the president of Haiti, Antoine Louis Léocardie Élie Lescot.¹⁴

Dębicki's improvising and his personal commitment at least partially compensated for his deficiencies in preparing for the role. He did not speak the Spanish language, nor was he acquainted with the history of Cuba or Polish–Cuban relations, and he had to become familiar with the island's modern problems at an accelerated pace. Becoming acquainted with the local elite and establishing relations – not as a quasi-representative of Poland but as a person equal to the other envoys – caused the greatest difficulty. Sachs, who had been respected and acclaimed by the Cuban government, had all these attributes; but his mission had a slightly different character than that of envoy Dębicki.¹⁵ Additionally, the newly arrived envoy suffered from a lack of funds: he complained that the post was underfunded, and tried to make his superiors aware that prices in Cuba were approximately the same as in the US.¹⁶ Based on these considerations at least, his mission could be seen as difficult, requiring commitment and dedication.

Characteristics of Jewish Refugees

When analysing the refugee problem, and more widely the migration issue, we should not lose sight of what was happening in Cuba in the interwar period, and even earlier. More than 850,000 Europeans, mostly from Spain, arrived on the island between 1898 to 1932.¹⁷ Jewish migration developed in three large waves. According to available data, around 6000 Jews from Turkey arrived in Cuba in 1902–1914. In the next wave (1925–1935), 4000 Ashkenazi Jews, speaking Russian, Polish and Yiddish on a daily basis, came to the island.

¹⁴ HI Archives, MSZ, 47, f. 19.

¹⁵ HI Archives, MSZ, 43, f. 17.

¹⁶ The monthly budget consisted of the envoy's salary (US\$350), supplement (US\$150), the attaché's salary (US\$250), material costs (US\$290), the press and informative fund (US\$40), and the so-called special fund (US\$40.25). All the expenses added up to US\$1080.25 (HI Archives, MSZ, 238, f. 11; HI Archives, MSZ, 253, f. 17).

¹⁷ A Chinese diaspora, counting 300,000 people, as well as 250,000 Haitians and Jamaicans, also lived in Cuba (R.M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora...*, p. 10).

After 1938, subsequent groups of Jews arrived from Germany, totalling about 6000. Their destination was not so much Cuba as the United States, which restricted immigration from Germany and Eastern Europe pursuant to the Immigration Act of 1924. This led Cuba to become a kind of waiting room for these migrants.¹⁸

When taking into account the diversity of the Jewish diaspora in Cuba, researchers distinguished three main groups: the numerically small but influential Portuguese-Dutch and American colony; a colony of Turkish Jews closely connected to that first colony; and a third colony, which consisted of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe, referred to locally as *polacos*. These divisions proved to be so strong that they were decisive in internal relationships; the groups were neither inclined to integrate nor cooperate. Usually, the JDC (the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, sometimes known as ‘the Joint’) and HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) undertook integration activities. Jews from Eastern Europe had the greatest problems with adapting to their new circumstances, although there were groups of Jews from Poland who quickly integrated. The editorial staff of the newspaper *Kubaner Yiddische Vort* was such a group. Polish Jews also ran a school called *Elojchem Szul*.¹⁹ In the last years before the outbreak of the World War II, the life of the diaspora was focused on the refugee issue and the fight with escalating anti-Semitism fomented by German intelligence in Cuba.²⁰

¹⁸ M. Bejarano, *Sephardic Jews...*, p. 96. The author of the Immigration Act, Albert Johnson, saw Eastern European Jews as a threat to the US, as he described them as “unassimilable, filthy, un-American, and often dangerous in their habits” (R. Daniels, *Not Like Us. Immigration and Minorities in America 1890–1924*, Chicago 1997, p. 131; Z.L. Glaser, *Refugees...*, p. 29).

¹⁹ In the 1920s, the consul general of the Republic of Poland in New York wrote: “Nearly not a day goes without scenes and scandals and press revelations, that are highly unfavourable for Poland, even though neither native Poles nor even Polish citizens are involved. The press and the Cuban government count the biggest scandals, immigrational filth and scum on account of Poland. Finally, all Communist activities are attributed to Poles” (V. Pauliuchuk, ‘Różne drogi do Ameryki. Próba nowego spojrzenia na emigrację żydowską z Polski do USA w latach dwudziestych XX wieku’, *Białostockie Teki Archiwalne* 2016, vol. 14, p. 138). Although there was a great deal of exaggeration in these words, the stereotype of a Polish Jew as a human trafficker, and the Jewess as a promiscuous woman, were perpetuated in Cuban consciousness (‘Zabludover landsleyt in der velt. In Kuba’ in *Zabludove izker-bukh; di geshikhte fun der yidisher kehile Zabludove fun ir breishes biz ir fartilikung durkh di natsishe rotskhim*, ed. S. Cesler, J. Reznik, I. Cesler, Buenos Aires 1961, p. 343).

²⁰ Z.L. Glaser, *Refugees...*, p. 30. It should be mentioned that the first synagogue for Eastern European Jews was erected in Cuba in 1925 (J. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora...*, p. 23).

In 1942, it was noted that 5000 Polish citizens or people of Polish origin were resident in Cuba, including 2000 refugees.²¹ Their lives were concentrated solely in Havana. In 1943 the number of war refugees shrank to 900, which was a result of their immigration to the US, being granted Cuban citizenship, or the use of a different registration criterion to qualify as Polish nationals. For instance, other calculations for the same year indicate that a total of 3400 people of Polish origin resided in Cuba, including 1600 Polish citizens and 1800 people ‘coming from Poland.’²² It is difficult to determine not only the basis for those estimates but also which groups were being considered: old immigration or refugees, or maybe both groups at once. It is also unknown how many Jews were in the group of Polish citizens analysed.

Despite this problem, which we probably cannot resolve, our attention will focus first on the refugees; according to estimates, 95% of these refugees were of Jewish origin. They arrived in Cuba mainly from Italy, France, Belgium and Portugal, using ‘exotic transit visas’ issued mainly in France, and to a lesser extent in Belgium, by the Honduran, Guatemalan, Haitian and Chinese consulates. Some of the newcomers had certificates issued by Polish consulates or *Offices Polonaises* in unoccupied France. The others had documents of stateless persons (some had only their *certificats d’identité*).²³ They got to the island by bribery; as Drohojowski stated in 1942, “the way [...] is still open for anyone who lodges a deposit of 650 dollars and respectively pays an often not very meticulous law firm in Europe, which has an associate in Havana.”²⁴ In 1942, Jewish refugees of Polish origin were maintained by the JDC, which had its own delegation in Havana. This situation persisted until the end of the war.²⁵

In the remaining areas under the care of Dębicki, approximately 20 people of Polish origin were in the Dominican Republic, including some who did not have Polish citizenship but wanted to renew it, and there was a small group in Haiti

²¹ Certainly, the Polish mission did not count all *polacos* in the Polish group. According to postwar estimates, in the years 1933–1944 Cuba accepted about 12,000 Jewish newcomers from Europe (M. Bejarano, ‘The Jewish Community of Cuba. Between Continuity and Extinction’, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 1991, vol. 3, no. 1/2, p. 124).

²² HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ HI Archives, MSZ, 121, f. 27; HI Archives, MSZ, 548, f. 1.

in 1943 of no more than ten Polish citizens (refugees and representatives of old immigration).²⁶

Dębicki privately estimated that the colony of ethnic Poles in Cuba amounted to merely 200 people, belonging to a circle of the local elite, and who were loyal to the Polish state. The envoy described the views of the rest of the Polish Jewish community on this matter as indifference, which is understandable because the majority had lost contact with Poland many years before the outbreak of war. According to Dębicki's data, 1600 Jewish refugees accepted Cuban citizenship after arriving on the island; the rest admitted their Polish nationality, although they had incomplete or partially destroyed documentation of Polish citizenship. The so-called old immigration was also mainly composed of Jews who had made efforts to restore their Polish citizenship.²⁷ In Dębicki's opinion, the popularity of Poland in this group rose as the world learned about the Polish contribution to the Allied war effort, although considering the rapidly expanding Communist influence in Cuba, that was an overly optimistic assessment.²⁸

Regarding the social structure of the Jewish refugees in Cuba, 10–15% could be counted as intelligentsia, and the others were engaged in trade. A special group was formed by the so-called diamond cutters from Antwerp who had substantial financial resources, and the envoy counted them among the most valuable refugees.²⁹

Attempts at Social Activation of the Jewish Refugees from Poland

The first information about the attempts to activate the lives of Polish refugees comes from May 1941 in a letter by Ciechanowski, who mentioned that

²⁶ HI Archives, MSZ, 47, f. 19; HI Archives, MSZ, 55, f. 30.

²⁷ The representative of the Polish deputation noticed that the old emigration also included Ukrainians, but he refused them the right to financial aid. "However, we have a Ukrainian element among the older immigration – considered as Polish – the control of them with current means does not lie within the bounds of possibility." The Ukrainian group mainly consisted of immigrants from the years 1920–1921 who had not managed to reach the US. They were under the influence of the community of Canadian Ukrainians, who were hostile towards the Polish government. Initially, this group supported Communism, then it was gained for promoting and spreading the racist propaganda organised by German intelligence; it also supported the Francoists (HI Archives, MSZ, 131, f. 31; HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10).

²⁸ Dębicki also pointed out that establishing the legation may by itself be "an impulse to collective restoring of passport-based Polish citizenship" (HI Archives, MSZ, 131, f. 31).

²⁹ The majority of tradesmen represented the poor, so-called *polacos*. They were mostly engaged in small-scale street trading (HI Archives, MSZ, 131, f. 31).

Sachs was active as an employee of the Polish consular deputation on the leading radio station Havana CMK.³⁰ The consul had good contacts with the pro-Polish intelligentsia of Jewish origin who had connections at the radio station, so this group was expected to help in renewing the sentiment towards Poland. After Drohojowski's arrival in 1942, there was a plan to include the Polish element on the island in a *Związek Polaków na Kubie* (Union of Poles in Cuba). Fifty people came to the first meeting of this union, and the following were appointed as an organisational committee: "Dr. Chmielnicka, the Silberners, Tendler, Dudarenko, Oelbaum, Dr. Birnbaum, Fisher and Lieutenant Gold [there are no first names in the sources]."³¹

The festive ceremony on 26 September 1942 was the group's first significant undertaking, held – as described in the report – on the anniversary of "the heroic defence of Warsaw."³² The purpose of the event was to remind both Cubans and the refugees that Warsaw was the first capital which "did not surrender to the enemy, but bravely and with selfless sacrifice defended herself against the enemy, to the last breath." During the evening, Jewish matters and news from the Warsaw ghetto were not avoided, as the number of Jewish victims in the occupied territories was discussed.³³ Six hundred people were

³⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 180, f. 7.

³¹ Drohojowski, who is the author of the report on this topic, gave selective characteristics of the committee members. Doctor Chmielnicka, as he wrote, "is a known female scholar in the field of psychology, Mr. Tendler is currently involved in a tour of Latin American countries with the Metropolitan Opera Co., Mr. Silberner was a junior lecturer at the University of Geneva, and Mr. Fisher – a Zionist leader in Antwerp" (HI Archives, MSZ, 121, f. 27).

³² The anniversary of 1 September 1939 was later celebrated as the date that embodied the spirit of Polish resistance against the German invader (HI Archives, MSZ, 183, f. 32).

³³ During the festive celebration, Karol Sachs said: "Recently it was learnt in London that more than one million Jews alone have died and that in the Warsaw ghetto, in which about 300,000 people reside, more than 300 people die daily, meaning they die at a rate of 100,000 annually! Those figures *per se* say about the enormous tragedy which Poland is living through, and that from all countries of Europe the martyred Poland has the highest number of victims, both in absolute numbers and in relation to its population size. It is tragic to say that we live in a time when we have not only a competition in heroism but also in martyrdom" (HI Archives, MSZ, 121, f. 27). Over the next few years, the mission published articles about Poland under German occupation in Cuban newspapers, also emphasising the fate of the Jewish victims. In 1944 the legation provided the press with information about the deportation of Hungarian Jews, the aid given to Jews in Warsaw, the deportation of the civilian population from Warsaw to Pruszków, and the organisational structure of the Polish Underground State. Some of the articles were published in *Vida Habanera* (HI Archives, MSZ, 161, f. 9).

present at the meeting, including a representation from the Cuban government, representatives of the US, Great Britain, Brazil and China; the event was assessed as successful. Frankly satisfied Sachs, reporting in detail about the evening's agenda, could not help praising his son, Maksymilian, who was the master of the ceremony, saying that "he skilfully fulfilled his task, for which those present there congratulated him."³⁴

Dębicki also regarded the meeting a success; he thought that it was essential to spread knowledge about Poland, her culture and problems in Cuba because it stimulated social life. Such undertakings were to take place as a counteraction to the more frequent Communist initiatives, inseparable from the influences of the USSR, that were becoming popular among the refugees. Dębicki considered this phenomenon dangerous.³⁵ Many various undertakings were used to promote Polishness, for example, Artur Rubinstein's concert in Havana, as well as other patriotic and cultural celebrations.³⁶

The growing popularity of Communism on the island was not the only obstacle for the Polish deputation,³⁷ which struggled with the problem of disintegration within the Polish colony, including the refugees, and the superficial nature of

³⁴ HI Archives, MSZ, 121, f. 27.

³⁵ HI Archives, MSZ, 548, f. 1. In November 1943 Dębicki complained about the pro-Soviet moods in Havana, which were adversely affecting "the reactions to Polish matters." He assessed that Communist influences gained popularity in "the shallow Cuban society" and were favourable seen by Cuban intellectuals. He also shared a reflection that the Polish celebration in Cuba turned out modestly in comparison to wide-ranging celebrations of 26th anniversary of the USSR, celebrated on 6th and 7th November of that year (HI Archives, MSZ, 158, f. 9; HI Archives, MSZ, 184, f. 16).

³⁶ HI Archives, MSZ, 47, f. 19.

³⁷ As the end of the war ensued, the weaker the position of Poland in Cuba was. In 1944, the legation had serious difficulties with presenting the Polish point of view on the events of the World War II on the island, especially due to the lack of diplomatic relationship of the Polish government with the USSR. Dębicki gave voice to the feeling of isolation and disillusion he experienced on Cuba by writing: "In my relations with the political world, I constantly collect evidence that even people with undoubtedly anti-Soviet beliefs do not want to muster up to either overtly take a position or express their opinion for fear of getting into a debate and exposing themselves to an accusation of »fascism«. Mr. Minister of State (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), with whom I often talk about our point of view, making use of weekly audiences for heads of missions, when I delivered documentation about Polish-Soviet relations to him, pointed to the text of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and said: »Here is the biggest crime of the Soviets and the cause of the world war!« And yet the same Mr. Santovenia, who has no illusions about the Soviets, is one of the leaders of the ABC faction (which is in a government coalition with the Communists) and does not oppose their propaganda activities" (HI Archives, MSZ, 24, f. 15).

its activities.³⁸ It was clear that the *Związek Polaków na Kubie* had not been successful with its project of integration. Furthermore, both the *Stowarzyszenie Weteranów Armii Polskiej na Kubie* (Polish Army Veterans' Association in Cuba), created at that time and affiliated with the *Stowarzyszenie Weteranów Armii Polskiej w Ameryce* (the Polish Army Veterans' Association in America), which numbered only 40 people, and the *Korpus Pomocniczy Pań* (Ladies' Auxiliary Corps), affiliated with the veterans institution, undertook virtually no activity. Dębicki stated that "this organisational plethora is not an expression of significant force," and he considered it paradoxical that people who had nothing to do with the army belonged to both associations. Additionally, Paweł Garbiński, the self-proclaimed commandant of Jewish origin, was not held in high esteem by the Polish legation or the American representation in Cuba. Dębicki portrayed this person as "a man with a very questionable past, which is burdened with a number of serious charges, probably known to the Ministry from the reports of legations in Mexico and Canada, about whom the American authorities have an incriminating dossier."³⁹

The weak identification of the Polish colony with the Polish state, its culture and traditions was especially evident during the official state holidays celebrated wherever Poles lived. The celebrations were combined with Christian liturgy, as the Polish Ministry of Information and Propaganda (Ministry of Information and Propaganda) had decided, yet the Polish colony in Cuba did not have Catholic affiliations. Therefore, when Dębicki was ordered to organise a church service for the celebration of 11 November (Polish Independence Day), he deemed this

³⁸ This phenomenon by no means concerned the Polish group alone. The disintegration and breakdown of the feeling of a community also applied to the Jews living in Cuba. As had been the case before the war, main Jewish groups (Sephardic, Ashkenazi Jews and the others) did not want to cooperate with one another throughout the wartime period. Joseph Hyman wrote with severity about the decay of social life and the lack of solidarity in January 1940: "There is no hope for a productive cooperation among so-called Sephardic, Ashkenazi and American colonies. They simply do not contact one another and are unwilling to sit at one table. [...] American rabbi Laskier [...] refuses to cooperate. American colony is, in general, a bit indifferent to the whole situation, and Polish groups are too poor and too focused on their problems to do anything. In my opinion, the process of developing better intergroup relations is not a matter of the activity of one organisation, such as Joint, because there is no organisation in this place that would take on activating the life on the spot." In the subsequent years, the situation improved somewhat (Z.L. Glaser, *Refugees...*, pp. 128–129).

³⁹ HI Archives, MSZ, 131, f. 31.

futile and proposed to move it to a synagogue. He also intended to take part in the prayers himself.⁴⁰

In general, Dębicki assessed that difficult conditions prevailed in Havana, particularly in the area of social work. He summarised this on 2 February 1943 by saying: "I wish to, in the end, highlight that the state of minds of this colony, both because of the minority complex and a typical refugee psyche, bordering in individual cases on hysteria, is not easy to captivate and direct to the framework of positive values; however, at any moment, it can lead to negative effects that are detrimental to Polish political interests. The activities of the Legation [of the Republic of Poland] in those conditions require huge amounts of goodwill, the flexibility of measures, not involving ourselves in local antagonisms, constant maintaining of maximal objectivity and authority."⁴¹

In fact, the envoy did maintain the abovementioned objectivity and authority. He was well-received not only by the Cuban press published by Cubans, but also by press in the Yiddish language. In the article 'Doktor Roman Dembicki – poylisher minister in Kuba ongekumen', published in *Vida Habanera* on 21 November 1942,⁴² his profile was presented with appreciation, mentioning the most important pieces of information in his biography.⁴³

In January 1943, the *Vida Habanera* daily conducted a long interview with Dębicki, in which he spoke about the Polish Underground State in the territories occupied by the Third Reich, the military action of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and the Polish government-in-exile. Interviewed by a journalist who was extremely friendly towards him and well acquainted with the subject, he also discussed the extermination of Jews, Raczyński's note and the differences between German anti-Semitism understood as a symptom of racism and Polish pre-war anti-Semitism in the Second Polish Republic in the 1930s that had an economic background. Moreover, Dębicki answered questions concerning the situation of

⁴⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 184, f. 16.

⁴¹ HI Archives, MSZ, 131, f. 31.

⁴² The newspaper *Vida Habanera* was a nonpartisan Jewish daily addressed to Havana's Jewish colony, and published in Yiddish from the mid-1930s. During the World War II it was edited by S.M. Kapłan (for more see *Vida Habanera Almanach (center band)*, ed. S.M. Kapłan, A.I. Dubelman, Havana 1952/1953).

⁴³ HI Archives, MSZ, 156, f. 27.

Jews in Poland after the war, foreseeing a democratic system and saying “democracy means freedom for all, without political difference due to race or religion.”⁴⁴

Diplomatic Protection: Formal and Legal Issues

The Legation of the Republic of Poland in Cuba undertook formal and legal efforts to ensure the validity and integrity of Polish documents certifying citizenship. This was especially important during the period of turbulence and chaos during wartime because it established the credibility of the Polish deputation as a partner of the Allies.

In taking care of Polish interests in Cuba, the Polish legation encountered problems; these largely resulted from the policy of the United States, which after 1939 attempted to stop the inflow of refugees. Because the escapees were mostly Jews, whom the American officials associated with Poland as a symbol of poverty and under-development, any possible methods to prevent their arrival in the US were implemented. When Polish affairs in Cuba were represented by the consulate subordinate to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York, the Consulate General of the US in Havana refused to recognise Polish consular passports.⁴⁵

A US Department of State circular of 29 June 1940 informed American foreign missions about the annulment of the validity of diplomatic passports and service passports of the old type, which caused misunderstandings in relation to consular passports. For this reason, about 700 people who were under Polish care at the end of 1940 in Cuba and wanted to leave the island were unable to do so. The Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in Havana was not allowed to renew passports, while the Consulate General of the US in Havana did not want to recognise the authority of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York, which it saw as not having the authority to make decisions on Cuban soil. For this reason, a different formula was adopted which forced the Polish deputation to issue forms to Polish citizens. This procedure, as Ciechanowski stated, “offended the authority of the Polish state.”⁴⁶ It is

⁴⁴ M. Weiner, ‘Rasizm in natsisher blaf derklert poylihzer minister in Kuba’, *Vida Habanera* 23 January 1943, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁵ The negative attitude of the US government towards Jewish refugees at moments crucial for them, sometimes called apathy, has an abundant literature which will not be listed here. The academic debate about this topic began at the end of the 1960s, and many monographs concerning this issue were written in the 1980s.

⁴⁶ HI Archives, MSZ, 514, f. 14.

worth noting that information about this circular reached the Polish side in November 1940, and the intervention of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explaining the range of authority of the Polish consulate in New York, lasted until January 1941.⁴⁷

The resolution of matters related to Polish documents was only achieved when Dębicki arrived in Cuba. He conducted a verification which uncovered the different types of forgeries made by desperate Jews in their documents when trying to escape occupied Europe. The provision of new passports to the abovementioned group of so-called diamond cutters from Belgium turned out to be especially important. Those actions increased the chances of refugees to leave Cuba and depart to the United States.⁴⁸ The majority of Polish refugees that Dębicki dealt with appear to have come from the *Kresy Wschodnie* (Eastern Borderlands), but the source materials about this topic are fragmentary.⁴⁹

The traces of those passports verifications are rare, and so the documentation concerning the above-mentioned diamond cutters, Jews who had arrived in Cuba from Antwerp, is interesting for three reasons. First, it shows that all of them had documents issued by a Polish consular mission that did not exist in that city after the German invasion, and everything indicates that they were all provided with documents produced by the same group of forgers. Second, their testimonies suggest that unknown employees of the consulate had illegally issued passports to them, but for a fee. Table 1 gives a fuller picture of the forgeries, who carried them out, what the charges were, and in what circumstances the Jews had to use false documents. The data came from testimonies of the refugees given under oath from February to July 1943. The changes consisted in renewing the validity of the passports, adding family members and using a stamp of *Konsulat Generalny RP w Antwerpii – O. Kermenic* [Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – O. Kermenic].⁵⁰

⁴⁷ This form was issued after a testimony under oath by a Polish citizen (*ibidem*).

⁴⁸ HI Archives, MSZ, 515, f. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*; HI Archives, MSZ, 125, f. 8.

⁵⁰ Oswald Kermenic (1885–1950), nominated Consul General in Antwerp in 1936; he left Antwerp after the beginning of the World War II. He reached Portugal via France and Spain. Kermenic left Portugal for Brazil in October 1940. Next he received a nomination to become Head of Legation for the Republic of Poland in Lima. The unaccredited Leon Litwiński was *chargé d'affaires* of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Brussels and Luxembourg from 1 November 1939 to May 1940 (for more see W. Grabowski, *Polska Agencja Telegraficzna 1918–1991*, Warsaw 2005, pp. 313, 365; *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 5: 1939–1945, ed. W. Michowicz; compiled by A.M. Brzeziński and others, Warsaw 1999, pp. 588, 707, 770; *Los polacos en el Peru*, Lima 1979, p. 158; M. Hulaś, 'Kontakty dyplomatyczne Polski z Belgią i Holandią w przełomowych momentach 1939 i 1940 r. Dokumenty', *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2010, vol. 1, p. 159).

Table 1. The list of people with forged Polish passports (1943).

No.	Surname, first name(s)	Origin of authentic passport	Type of forgery	Circumstances and place of forgery	Details about forgeries	Bribe (Belgian francs)	Date of testimony
1.	Apfel Dawid	District Office in Przemysł, 6 September 1938	Removal of the authentic validity date and renewing it to 10 May 1942. Entering the name of daughter Mindla	After the German invasion, Antwerp	"Arranged by son Bernard"	No knowledge about this topic reported by the person giving evidence	22 February 1943
2.	Brajbart Jakób	Consulate General in Paris, and bearing a clause – 25 August 1937, renewed 21 March 1938 for two years. Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Nice – renewed to 1 September 1942 (no number)	-	-	-	-	17 June 1943
3.	Dorf Efroim Lejb	Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 11 January 1934	Renewal to 22 March 1943. Forged stamp	May 1940, Antwerp	Contact by an individual living at Pelikaanstraat 72 in Antwerp	1000	30 March 1943
4.	Dresner Samuel Michał	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 11 December 1933	Renewal of validity to 10 May 1942, Forged stamp	Departure in August 1941 from Antwerp	"A male acquaintance who obtained visas: Cuban, Bolivian and Spanish"	7500	30 April 1943

No.	Surname, first name(s)	Origin of authentic passport	Type of forgery	Circumstances and place of forgery	Details about forgeries	Bribe (Belgian francs)	Date of testimony
5.	Fischer Zygmunt	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 28 December 1937	Renewal to 13 February 1942. Forged stamps. Entering the name of daughter Juliette Marthe (Belgian citizen)	January/February 1941, Antwerp	“Engel dealt with it”	1000	30 September 1943
6.	Fischer, Salomon (“died in the meantime”)	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 18 May 1936; added wife Gustawa <i>née</i> Dresner – 25 March 1939	Added children: son Renée and daughter Jacqueline. Forged stamp	To August 1941 in Antwerp	“An unknown male delivered Cuban, Bolivian and Spanish visas”	7000	7 June 1943
7.	Grajower Markus	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 7 July 1936	Renewal to 7 May 1942. Entering wife Estera Rywka <i>née</i> Oliwstein and three minor children	October 1940, Antwerp	“Skarbek, he presented himself as Polish”	2200	21 June 1943
8.	Hus Lejb Szyja	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 13 February 1939	Renewal to 20 February 1942. Forged stamps	Escape from Centre concentration camp near Hasselt in January 1941	“Arranged by brother Mendel via an unknown male”	“Certain amount of money”	31 July 1943
9.	Korngold Salomon	Consulate General in Paris – 27 May 1939	Renewal for a year. Entering wife Rywe and daughter Marlena (“they were deported to Russia”)	June 1940, Antwerp	“Acquaintance”	600	25 February 1934

No.	Surname, first name(s)	Origin of authentic passport	Type of forgery	Circumstances and place of forgery	Details about forgeries	Bribe (Belgian francs)	Date of testimony
10.	Parnes Eliasz	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 10 September 1938	Renewed to 12 March 1942. Added wife Rosa née Rothstein. Forged stamp	December 1940, Antwerp	“Skarbek – he was known under this surname”	2500	17 July 1943
11.	Pitzele Józef Menasze	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 15 June 1938	Renewal to 10 May 1942. Added wife Bluma née Dresner and son Silvain. Forged stamp	May 1941, Antwerp	“An unknown male who arranged visas: Cuban, Bolivian and Spanish, which made the arrival in Nice possible”	7000	7 May 1943
12.	Schachna Eisig	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 18 January 1935	Before the outbreak of the German-Belgian war, Antwerp	Renewal to 7 May 1942. Entering wife Chana née Klein.	“A man, a distant acquaintance for me, said that for a normal fee charged by the Consulate, he will make me a renewal”; “an official of the consulate”; “I did not suspect anything wrong”	220	18 June 1943
13.	Schamroth Ella	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Antwerp – 31 January 1939	Renewed to 5 February 1944	June 1940, Antwerp	“I asked an unknown male in a café”; “I knew [...], that there were [Polish] officials authorised to renew”	-	5 February 1943
14.	Sieradzki Samuel Baruch	Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Leipzig – 26 July 1937	Renewed to 10 May 1942	April 1941, Paris	“Goldberg, he was previously in Antwerp”; “he tried to falsify the date, and then put a little stamp <i>annulé</i> ”	1500 French francs	12 April 1943

Source: *HI Archives, MSZ, 515, f. 3.*

New Wave of Refugees: Diplomatic Intervention and the Question of Care

In December 1941, the peripherally located Cuba declared war on Japan, and then Germany and Italy, in solidarity with the United States. As Drohojowski wrote in March 1942, “both the physical and moral readiness of Cuba is nearly non-existent”⁵¹ because the Cubans felt the predominance of the Axis countries in the Caribbean Sea, and did not want to undertake any expeditionary actions that would indicate their active participation in armed conflict.⁵² The small Allied forces stationed at the Guantanamo base were their only guarantee of security.⁵³ However, it is necessary to mention that in fact Cuba benefited substantially from the conflict: its sugar industry developed as a result of the US becoming cut off from sugar from the Philippines and Hawaii, and the increased demand for nickel and manganese led to two large mines in Cuba being set up, leading to economic growth for the island.⁵⁴

In 1942, two ships with Jewish refugees from Europe appeared in the Caribbean: the ship *Serpa Pinto* reached the shores of Jamaica from Lisbon in February, and the ship *St. Thomé*, also sailing from Portugal, arrived in Cuba at the end of May. Both vessels were carrying passengers of Jewish origin from Poland and other countries. The history of *St. Thomé* is similar to that of the ship *St. Louis*,⁵⁵ but it did not end tragically for these passengers.⁵⁶ The arrival of refugees became

⁵¹ Drohojowski wrote about Cuba’s readiness for war: “People in leading positions, with whom I spoke about the above topic, summarise Cuba’s position resulting from its obligations of hemispherical solidarity in this way: co-participation of Cuba in the military area cannot be significant due to our limited means. The population amounts to less than 5 million, our navy can only patrol the coastline of the island, while our Army suffices only to keep internal order. We could not defend ourselves even for one day if the enemy wanted to create operational bases in our country and to begin aggressive action against the United States from them” (HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10).

⁵² For more on this topic, see D.J. Becuson, H.H. Herwig, *Long Night of the Tankers. Hitler’s War Against Caribbean Oil*, Calgary 2014; G.T. Kelshall, *The U-Boat War in the Caribbean*, Annapolis 1994.

⁵³ HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ The dramatic story of the refugees from the *St. Louis*, who sailed out in 1939 from Germany, and were sent back to the Third Reich after a long voyage after coming close to the US coastline, is probably the most often quoted story illustrating the inaction of the Western world in the face of the Jews’ sufferings.

⁵⁶ The fates of the *St. Thomé* and *Serpa Pinto* are less known than that of the *St. Louis*. The first of these ships, before it got to Cuba, attempted to dock in Veracruz, Mexico. Literature emphasises that the ship’s crew risked their own lives and those of the passengers because the vessel could have been sunk at any moment by German or Italian submarines (D. Cooper-Clark, *Dreams of Re-Creation in Jamaica. The Holocaust, Internment, Jewish Refugees in Gibraltar Camp, Jamaican Jews and Sephardim*,

a serious problem for the political decision-makers of that time.⁵⁷ Initially, there was no indication of the passengers' fate. The atmosphere on the ship was good: "Once the *St. Thomé* had crossed the Straits of Yucatán and slowly approached Cuba, the ship's passengers relaxed – they were reading and lying around in the sun, playing chess and cards, learning the Spanish language and debating about the development of the war events.' They attempted with some optimism, on the account of their children, to imagine their new lives."⁵⁸

According to Sachs' letter to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the end of May 1942, the ship was originally to have been sent to Havana, but a decree by President Fulgencio Batista was published on 5 March 1942 in Cuba, under which foreigners were forbidden to come ashore, and the Ministry of State and all Cuban consular authorities were forbidden to issue new visas. In addition, the new law annulled all visas issued to people who had not arrived in the country yet. The ship was let into Havana harbour on 25 April 1942, but the passengers were told beforehand that they would be sent back to Europe. Thanks to the efforts of representatives of the refugees' home countries, including Poland, as well as influential people and institutions, above all the US and Great Britain, as a special exception the vessels were directed to American shores.⁵⁹ Finally, the passengers were detained on 7 May in a refugee camp in Triscornia, the Ellis Island of the Cuban Bay. This place served for years as a detention centre for refugees or people regarded by the US as enemy aliens.⁶⁰

Victoria 2017, p. 27; D. Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles. Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism 1933–1945*, Leiden 2013, p. 220; J.G. McDonald, *Refugees and Rescue. The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald 1935–1945*, Bloomington 2009, p. 295; about the *St. Louis* ship see e.g.: S.A. Ogilvie, S. Miller, *Refuge Denied. The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust*, Madison 2006).

⁵⁷ The problem of both the ships and the fates of their passengers was already taken up in the literature, however, the focus was primarily on the description and reconstruction of the voyage and the later fates of the refugees, and not on the role of Polish diplomacy (for more see T. Potworowski, 'The Evacuation of Polish Citizens from Portugal to Jamaica 1941–1943', *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 2007, vol. 19, pp. 155–182).

⁵⁸ L. Maitland, *A True Story of War, Exile and Love Reclaimed*, New York 2012, p. 79.

⁵⁹ Knowing about the widespread corruption on the island, on 8 May 1942 Józef Marlewski, the director of the *Referat Uchodźczy* (Refugee Department) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote that Cuban visas could be acquired without major problems. In so doing, he was referring to the opinion of Drohojowski, who at that time was not resident in Cuba. Drohojowski stated that in order to obtain the documents it was necessary only to fill in a telegraphic application and pay a fee of US\$300, and to pay a further US\$100 after arriving in Cuba (HI Archives, MSZ, 532, f. 22).

⁶⁰ Z.L. Glaser, *Refugees...*, pp. 47, 64.

The Polish consul in Havana estimated that 57 people who had proved their Polish citizenship resided on the island, although he emphasised that in fact there were more: “There is yet a number of people who do not have their papers in order, but they are of Polish origin.”⁶¹ Although he was not able to give a precise number, Polish Jews comprised a numerous group among the refugees, amounting to 100 people.

The refugees, surprised by the fact that they could not land in the US, turned to their consuls for help and intervention; this is how the matter of the *St. Thomé* became public. In this situation, Sachs began to undertake intensive action, even though Drohojowski was already in Cuba at that time. The consul informed Ambassador Ciechanowski about his observations. The heart of the problem was that the refugees came from countries occupied by Germany – Poland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France and Luxembourg – and they could not receive permits for US residence. In this way the US was able to protect itself from German spies, but of course this was only a pretext to stop the wave of refugees. At the beginning of 1942, Briggs warned Drohojowski about the smuggling of “numerous German agents” with travel documents confirming their allegedly Polish, Czech and Belgian origin – and “he strongly and emphatically emphasised our responsibility.”⁶²

Additionally, the situation in the refugee camp in Triscornia generated tensions in American–Cuban relations, because the Cuban watchmen were easily corruptible and released refugees for bribes, which displeased the Americans.⁶³ Drohojowski mentioned the camp in his memoirs, giving some details about the bad conditions there. The camp was located “near a beautiful castle Castillo del Morro, from which political prisoners were thrown to the sharks during Spanish times. The expense for ransoming oneself from the camp was 250 dollars on the first day. Someone who endured several days paid only 50 dollars. Moreover, the police came monthly for a bribe and blackmailed the unfortunate.”⁶⁴

In the light of these adverse conditions, Sachs organised a meeting of representatives of the countries of the refugees’ origin. The former Prime Minister

⁶¹ HI Archives, MSZ, 528, f. 45.

⁶² HI Archives, MSZ, 9, f. 10.

⁶³ HI Archives, MSZ, 528, f. 45.

⁶⁴ J. Drohojowski, *Jana Drohojowskiego wspomnienia...*, p. 170.

of Belgium, Paul van Zeeland, also attended. After consultations in this circle and with the consul general of the United States, Sachs resolved to ask the Cuban Prime Minister, Dr. Carlos Saladrigas, to receive a delegation of representatives of those countries, knowing that he was solely responsible for the Triscornia refugees. Unfortunately, the meeting did not occur, and the Prime Minister resigned shortly afterwards. In July 1942, Sachs managed to visit the camp and inform the refugees about their situation and their prospects of release.

However, he could not do a lot for them – like the refugees, he had to wait for further decisions – but he attempted to support the Polish group: “When refugees, Polish citizens, asked me what the word ‘soon’ means, whether it means that they will be released in a couple of days, I answered that it is not possible to know under the circumstances of this place, that it may mean three days or so, but it may also mean 5 weeks. I added that I understand perfectly that the living conditions in Triscornia will not be very easy and the lack of freedom is morally depressing, but if the authorities want[ed] to send them back to Europe on the *St. Thomé* [ship], then the situation would be far worse, and they were happy that they could get to Triscornia. I told them that we will not forget about them. [...] I asked them for peaceful behaviour and patience.”⁶⁵

Sachs also asked Ciechanowski to inform the American Federation of Polish Jews about his efforts, and, because he had been present at the camp, he also asked Ciechanowski to deny the rumours that the refugees were insufficiently fed and badly treated. It is likely that during a single visit Sachs could not notice the problems spreading in the camp. He focused primarily on living conditions, sanitation and food; nevertheless, the general situation of those detained there was not dramatic.⁶⁶

Drohojowski also wrote in his memoirs that the exploitation of Polish refugees by Cuban officials was curbed after the Polish legate registered the Jewish refugees, issued documents to them, and monitored the recognition of these documents by the Cuban authorities. However, the fate of those that attempted to leave the camp illegally was frequently tragic: “The fishermen, who already took money for landing our fellow citizens on the beaches of Florida, simply threw them into the

⁶⁵ HI Archives, MSZ, 528, f. 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

sea to the joy of the *tiburones*, that is the innumerable sharks in this waters. Others attempted to get to Mexico, where, as it is known, the matter of visas is dependent upon the whim of one or another *jefe politico* (cacique).⁶⁷

The fates of those arriving on the *Serpa Pinto* ship were similar. Although the ship was allowed to enter Jamaica without major problems, its passengers were also detained in a camp, in conditions much worse than in the Cuban one. According to existing documents, Dębicki visited the refugees in 1943 and 1944. During that time the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made (ultimately successful) efforts to release the Polish group.⁶⁸

The Gibraltar Camp, where the Polish refugees were held, was under direct control of the British government and the Governor of Jamaica. It was located approximately 10 km from Kingston. Over 1800 people lived there, and the camp area was divided into Gibraltar Camp I and Gibraltar Camp II. Citizens without British citizenship, who mainly came from Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands, resided in Camp II. This group numbered around 350 people, among which Polish citizens were the most numerous group (148 people). Before their arrival, the place was occupied by Dutch citizens, who – as the Dutch government decided – were sent to Surinam (Dutch Guyana).⁶⁹

Dębicki submitted a detailed report after his inspection. He assessed the conditions prevailing in the camp as relatively good; there was even a working kosher kitchen, although orthodox Jews abstained from eating meat because of the lack of a ritual slaughterhouse. The JDC and the Dutch government were looking after the internees. The Polish refugees complained about discrimination because representatives of some other nationalities, e.g. the Dutch, received higher benefits, but the Polish government had no authority in this matter.⁷⁰ Dębicki intervened in the matter of freezing the refugees' assets, their employment, and similar matters. The question of restrictions of movement around the island, which the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs assessed as too rigorous, was also raised. The Jews' complaints about these hindrances especially irritated the Governor of Jamaica, but

⁶⁷ J. Drohojowski, *Jana Drohojowskiego wspomnienia...*, p. 170.

⁶⁸ T. Potworowski, *The Evacuation...*, p. 171.

⁶⁹ For extensive information about this internment camp: S.C. Francis-Brown, *Gibraltar Camp 1940–1947. Isolation and Interaction in Colonial Jamaica*, Kingston 2008.

⁷⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 14.

after consultations with him, the Polish side managed to get the camp discipline to be relaxed somewhat.⁷¹

Another aim of Dębicki's visit was to assess the mood of the Polish refugees. According to the envoy, they were largely embittered because they were not aware they would end up in a camp when they boarded the ship in Lisbon. They laid the blame for the camp inconveniences on the JDC, as its Lisbon representative had assured them that their longed-for freedom awaited them in Jamaica. They were also critical, albeit to a lesser extent, of the Polish government. The Havana envoy came to the following conclusion after many interviews with the internees: "This trauma makes their reactions to all details of existence in Gibraltar Camp II (climate, accommodation, food, regulations, etc.) disproportionately negative, which in a collective life may trigger a kind of a mass psychosis. In addition, this group was diverse as it consisted of people who lived in different countries (mostly Germany, Italy, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal) and settled into different circles before the war; an insignificant percentage of them speaks the Polish language. The diversification in a social aspect is so substantial that it hinders their cooperation in the camp. They did not create e.g. either an internal organisation or an institution of persons of trust."⁷²

As a result of the Polish diplomatic intervention aimed at releasing the internees, the number of Jewish refugees fell; after receiving visas, the Polish Jews departed primarily for Cuba, Canada, Colombia, Mexico.⁷³ During the Polish–American negotiations, the JDC put pressure on Edward Raczyński to try and open Canada up to the Jewish refugees; however, he refused to initiate procedures for asylum for this group in Canada as he did not consider that there was any chance of success. Canada was completely closed to newcomers from Europe, especially to Jews, until 1944. A few left Jamaica and made their way to the US, including Basza

⁷¹ *Ibidem*; HI Archives, MSZ, 545, f. 15.

⁷² HI Archives, MSZ, 154, f. 32. Dębicki made many good points in his observations. In the literature on the University of West Indies, established in Mona, Jamaica, on the premises of the Gibraltar camp, it is emphasised that this place was a refuge for escapees from Europe. The voyage to exotic Jamaica saved their lives. An author specialising in research on the history of Jamaica during the World War II described the camp as a safe haven (S.F. Brown, *Mona. Past and Present. The History and Heritage of the Mona Campus*, University of the West Indies, Mona, p. 29; see also M.M. Stanton, *Escape from the Inferno of Europe*, London 1996).

⁷³ HI Archives, MSZ, 154, f. 32.

Keller, Rachel Keller, Uszer Segel, Aron Czolziński, Izaak Czolziński and Fraida Czolziński, as well as Simon Grossbaum; they departed in June and August 1942.⁷⁴

Attempts to Get Cuban and Dominican Visas for Refugees in Europe and the Far East

The first attempts to acquire visas for Polish citizens residing in threatened countries or neutral states were initiated in Cuba in May 1941 at the initiative of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sachs then received an order to acquire 200 Cuban visas for Polish refugees residing in Spain; these were intended for 'technical personnel'. He was charged with the negotiations with Cuban authorities, although these did not produce the expected result because Sachs was in too weak a position.⁷⁵ In June 1941, during the ceremony of presenting his letters of credence to Batista, Ciechanowski asked the Cuban leader to lend support to refugees from Poland and to allow them to arrive in greater numbers, but he was not optimistic about a positive response.⁷⁶

In parallel with the weak Polish representation in Cuba, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also making efforts to acquire visas at the request of the Polish ambassador in Japan, Tadeusz Romer, who at the beginning of 1941 asked the envoy of the Republic of Poland in Mexico, Mieczysław Marchlewski, for help in this matter. At that time, Romer had over 2000 refugees under his care who should have been sent to territories controlled by the Allies. In a reply of March 1941, Marchlewski informed the ambassador that as result of his efforts the government of the Dominican Republic had agreed to receive 20 families, although it stipulated that the number of Jews could not exceed 100 people. A condition was also set that the newcomers had to have sufficient means (each family had to prove it), as assessed by the government of the Dominican Republic. Marchlewski suggested that the Dominican administration wanted to accept only well-off people into their country. The next stage of verification would consist of proceedings as set out in instructions eventually sent by the Dominican government to its Consulate in Kobe in order to issue visas. Because it was not determined what would have

⁷⁴ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 14.

⁷⁵ HI Archives, MSZ, 532, f. 22.

⁷⁶ M. Kula, *Polonia na Kubie...*, p. 156.

been included in those instructions, the Polish side deemed any further exchange of letters with the Dominican Republic pointless.⁷⁷

Romer again looked in the direction of the Caribbean in the autumn of 1941, when he found himself responsible for the Jewish refugees in Shanghai. This time, he researched the possibility of acquiring Cuban visas, but again the high fees demanded prevented it.⁷⁸

The next initiatives in relation to the Caribbean were launched by the two countries of Western Europe that were experiencing the worst refugee problems: Spain, and especially Portugal.⁷⁹

On 26 January 1942, a group of 164 people departed from Lisbon to Jamaica. They were not the passengers of the ships mentioned earlier. Although the extent of Poland's role in organising this expedition is not known, the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Lisbon and the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London (which at that time decided on Jamaican matters) appear to have coordinated this action, as can be deduced from the documentation.⁸⁰

At the same time, in January 1942, the matter of transit visas was raised by the envoy of the Republic of Poland in Spain, Marian Szumlakowski, who consulted the envoy of the Republic of Poland in Portugal, Karol Dubicz-Penther. Both saw the need to send another ship to Jamaica, upon condition that Jewish organisations organised the purchase of visas. However, Dubicz-Penther emphasised, the success of this action was dependent on the position of the British government and that consultations should be conducted with them beforehand.⁸¹

The joint arrangements made by the Spanish and Portuguese legations gained the approval of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, which offered the help of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington in case there

⁷⁷ HI Archives, MSZ, 519, f. 15.

⁷⁸ HI Archives, MSZ, 518, f. 27.

⁷⁹ The refugee problem in Spain and Portugal grew after the occupation of Paris by the Third Reich in June 1940. After that moment, and especially in 1942, thousands of Jewish escapees used illegal ways to get to the West and they were received by both countries, even though technically this counted as illegal immigration. The number of Polish refugees in both countries fluctuated. Estimates indicate that there were about 8000 of them in 1941–1942 (HI Archives, MSZ, 546, f. 10; S. Schmitzek, *Na krawędzi Europy. Wspomnienia portugalskie 1939–1946*, Warsaw 1976, p. 414).

⁸⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 14.

⁸¹ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 35.

were difficulties with acquiring Cuban visas on the spot. It was necessary to send a transcript of the surnames list to the United States. Ignacy Schwartzbart was also informed about the whole operation.⁸² Unfortunately, acquiring visas in Spain was impossible, although it is difficult to determine why this was, especially since a Cuban consulate was operating in Madrid.⁸³

Nevertheless, the negotiations about sending a group of more than 200 Jews from Portugal on the *Serpa Pinto* and *St. Thomé* ships, as discussed previously, proceeded favourably. This evacuation was preceded by negotiations between the Polish side and Jewish organisations & the British government, mainly about financial issues. The Polish Ministry of Finance did not have sufficient means to cover the costs of the expedition, and indicated that the JDC did have.⁸⁴ Therefore, after the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed with the JDC, which promised in writing that it would cover the costs of the undertaking and maintain the refugees in Jamaica for a year, the Polish side and its counter-espionage service⁸⁵ entered into negotiations with the British Government. The Deputy Commissioner of the League of Nations, George Kullmann, joined the negotiations by invitation of the Polish side. The refugees were granted asylum by his guarantee.⁸⁶ After the evacuation action, the number of all refugees in Lisbon dropped to 86 on 1 February 1942, although in subsequent years the refugee problem began to grow

⁸² *Ibidem*. Ignacy Schwarzbart was one of the people most involved in rescuing Jews (see: D. Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada. Ignacy Schwarzbart – żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP (1940–1945)*, Warsaw 1995).

⁸³ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 35.

⁸⁴ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 14.

⁸⁵ Col. Rudowski was responsible for coordination with the counter-espionage service (S. Schmitzek, *Na krawędzi...*, p. 452).

⁸⁶ HI Archives, MSZ, 529, f. 14; HI Archives, MSZ, 545, f. 15; S. Schmitzek, *Na krawędzi...*, p. 452. It should be noted that in Kullmann's view, neither his own nor Poland's efforts to ensure the Portuguese group could receive the necessary documents were appreciated by the Jewish community represented by Schwarzbart. In Kullmann's opinion, Schwarzbart took all the credit, publishing an inaccurate advertisement about the expedition to the Caribbean in the press, which was regarded as a *faux pas*. In a conversation with Józef Marlewski, the head of the Refugee Department of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kullmann explicitly stated that he had helped the Poles in their efforts to get visas for Jews residing in Portugal because Poland and its government were one of the Allies, and thanks to this transfer it was possible to continue the interrupted evacuation of Poles from France. This group had special significance for the Allied arms industry. Kullmann had no sympathy for Jews for some reason. When Schwarzbart met him to discuss the evacuation of Dutch, Belgian and French citizens of Jewish origin from Lisbon, he refused to support him.

again. Information about this operation was kept secret, which is why Sachs was surprised by the appearance of the refugees in the Cuban harbour.⁸⁷

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed to evacuate further groups of Jews from Portugal. In January 1943, the Polish government sought agreement for the departure of 200 refugees, but the British deputation refused to receive them in Jamaica, explaining that it was impossible to receive more escapees on the island. Finally, at the beginning of 1943, it was possible to send a group of 140 people under an agreement between the Polish and the British government. These refugees did not know, however, that they would be held in the Gibraltar Camp.⁸⁸

In 1944, facing the end of the war, Polish diplomacy carried out one more important action aiming at confirming the validity of the Haitian passports issued by consulates of Haiti in Europe, which the Polish Jews detained in the French camp of Drancy used to prove their identities. The lives of these people were at stake because the Germans were planning to deport them to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The inspiration for a diplomatic intervention came from the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Bern, strongly motivated by Jewish communities, and was connected with the wide-ranging activities of the Polish Government-in-Exile aimed at rescuing Jews detained in other French camp in Vittel. However, this mission did not succeed, although the Haitian government confirmed the validity of the passports. Several Polish diplomats, including Ciechanowski and Dębicki, were involved.⁸⁹

Two lists of Jews who had Haitian passports remained in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs records (73 people with their families) – in total, 114 people. The lists were compiled by the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Bern in 1944 (see the attachment including names from both the lists mentioned above). Unfortunately, it could not be determined who issued these lists or when. There is no paperwork associated with these lists that could explain the circumstances of their compilation. Apart from the personal data, the lists provide the number of family members of the family heads covered by Haitian passports as well as their place of origin. The list includes Jews who resided in the Drancy camp, and

⁸⁷ S. Schmitzek, *Na krawędzi...*, pp. 453–454.

⁸⁸ HI Archives, MSZ, 545, f. 15; HI Archives, MSZ, 154, f. 40–41.

⁸⁹ HI Archives, MSZ, 614, f. 30–31.

also probably in Vittel. They mainly came from the *Zagłębie Dąbrowskie* – Będzin, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec, Zawiercie – as well as from the Netherlands (mainly Amsterdam and the Westerbork camp). The abovementioned matter awaits further in-depth study, also concerning the question of the Jewish exiles in France and the role of Polish diplomacy in rescuing them.

Summary

The Polish diplomatic and consular representations in Cuba during the World War II unexpectedly faced a great challenge from the refugee problem in the Caribbean region; approximately 2000 Jews, Polish citizens and those who had documents certifying their Polish citizenship reached the island. The problem dominated the operations of the Polish diplomatic representation in this region.

The character and scope of the aid provided by the Polish deputation on the island were determined by two factors: the development of the international situation and a growing wave of refugees from Europe. To conduct Polish policy in this territory, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to transform the diplomatic representation by changing its character from purely symbolic and economic to a comprehensive diplomatic mission, with the legation in the forefront. The Legation of the Republic of Poland in Havana also encompassed Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica in its territorial scope. This was a part of a general image of the growth, expansion and strengthening of Polish diplomacy during the war.

Even though the Polish mission in Cuba had limited financial possibilities and the personnel was composed of just a few individuals, they dutifully performed their tasks: they intervened on behalf of Polish citizens with the Cuban authorities, attempted to acquire visas, supported Polish citizens on the spot, arranged formal and bureaucratic matters, and tried to integrate refugees around Polish matters. The Polish activities were met with reluctance from the Cuban government, which was dependent on the United States, while the US was blocking the inflow of refugees at that time.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the legations of the Republic of Poland in Europe (in Spain, Portugal and Switzerland) were acting on behalf of Polish refugees who had proved their identities with documents certifying their association with the Caribbean. Hundreds of Jews were rescued thanks to

the commitment of Polish diplomacy and its cooperation with the JDC and Great Britain. The consulate and legation in Havana were the last link in the complicated and multistage evacuation of Jews from Western Europe. The aim of this wide-ranging operation was to rescue as many Jews as possible from the Old Continent.

ATTACHMENT: The list of Jews with Haitian passports compiled by the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Bern in 1944.⁹⁰

Ungar Leser, Bochnia – 1
Ungier Mojsze – 2
Gawercman Israel Berek, Będzin – 3
Frajnberger Szlama Israel, Dąbrowa Górnicza – 1
Werkselman Abram, Będzin – 4
Lewkowicz Szymon – 1
Finkielsztejn Szmul, Będzin – 1
Marder Fajga, Będzin – 1
Zajdman Dawid, Będzin – 1
Jakubson Moszek, Sosnowiec – 3
Lieberman Chil, Będzin – 3
Kupferberg Szlama, Będzin – 1
Dworski Tewel, Będzin – 2
Weinstok Maja, Będzin – 1
Muszyński Efraim, Będzin – 2
Wajssalc Lejb, Dąbrowa Górnicza – 2
Fischer Max, Będzin – 2
Bergman Frajdla, Będzin – 1
Ingster Szapsie, Sosnowiec – 3
Guttman A. [lack of full first name], Będzin – 3
Ehrenwert Jakób, Będzin – 3

⁹⁰ HI Archives, MSZ, 616, f. 25–26. The original spelling of first names and surnames was retained. Errors, mainly typing errors, were corrected. Because the original lists were compiled in German, the German names of Polish cities were Polonised here. Alphabetical order was given up and the surnames were left in the original order. The figures by the surnames indicate the number of family members of the family heads covered by Haitian passports.

Glajtman Rachela, Będzin – 1
Alembik Seweryn Israel, Zawiercie – 1
Rottner Hendel Israel, Będzin – 4
Wajnstok Zysel, Amsterdam – 1
Wajnstok Naftali Adam – 1
Wajnstok Fajwel Abram, Amsterdam – 2
Silberstein Chaim, Bochnia – 1
Werner Heinrich, Królewska Huta – 1
Fraenkel Fanny, Zawiercie – 3
Munowicz Moszek, Zawiercie – 3
Pfeifferling Fritz, Westerbork [camp, the Netherlands] – 2
Geyerhahn Fritz, Amsterdam – 2
Geyerhahn Lam, Amsterdam – 2
Kamp Josel Dr., Amsterdam – 3
Lissauer Frieda (widow), Amsterdam – 2
Stern Sigmund, Amsterdam – 4
Stern Rudolf, Westerbork – 3
Lunsky Guta, Westerbork – 1
Siesikind Lore, Westerbork – 1
Rosenthal Trude, Westerbork – 1
Zuckerandl Hermann, Będzin – 1
Geller Ajzyk, Będzin – 1
Knoop Johanna, Westerbork – 1
Knoop Rebekka, Amsterdam – 1
Silberman Sabine, Minsk – 1
Schachter-Struber Adele, Riga – 1
Simon-Hirsch Ida, Westerbork – 1
Gallel Suisa Lora, Wrocław – 1
Safirstein Paul, Neuendorf [Germany] – 1
Nierenberg Kalman, Strzemieszyce – 1
Silberstein Israel, Rome – 1
Szafir Gitla Frymeta, Będzin – 1
Sprynca Lubka Leja, Będzin – 1

Poznantier Abram Mordka, Będzin – 2
Curtelsohn Henryk, Będzin – 1
Izbicki Abram, Będzin – 1
Rosenberg Jakub, Będzin – 1
Hausdorff Hilde, Będzin – 1
Pelc Fajga, Będzin – 1
Lazega Ida, Będzin – 1
Płatkiewicz [Piątkiewicz?] Wolf, Będzin – 1
Hauppert Hilde, Będzin – 1
Hillesum Jeremie, Westerbork – 1
Starkmann Franciszka, Bochnia – 1
Wenger Baruch, Sosnowiec – 2
Rotschild Leo, Catus [France] – 1
Landau Mojżesz, Dąbrowa Górnicza – 1
Landau Wita, Amsterdam – 2
Zajdman Abram, Berlin – 1
Zajdman Bradla – 2
Zajdman Ester – 1
De Neve Else, Hertogenbosch [the Netherlands] – 1

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SUMMARY

The article describes the activities of the Polish diplomatic and consular representations in Havana regarding the issue of the Jewish refugees who found themselves in Cuba during the World War II. It also concerns the role played by this mission, together with the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Legations of the Republic of Poland in Bern, Lisbon and Madrid, among others, during the operation of acquiring/confirming Cuban and Dominican passports for Jewish refugees residing in Europe and the Far East. First, the organisational status of the Polish diplomacy in this region is presented and the groups of Jewish refugees were characterised, emphasising the attempts to activate them socially and politically by the Polish representation. This serves as an introduction to the description of the multilevel activities of the Polish mission, which in wartime conditions was primarily focused on intensifying formal and legal activities aimed at guaranteeing diplomatic protection for the Jews residing in Cuba; undertaking diplomatic interventions; clarifying the issue of direct care over Polish groups, and acquiring new passports for the Jews who were facing death in occupied territories. Hundreds of Jews were rescued thanks to the commitment of Polish diplomacy and its cooperation with the JDC and Great Britain. The consulate and legation in Havana were the last link in the complicated and multistage evacuation of Jews from occupied Western Europe. The aim of this wide-ranging operation was to rescue as many Jews from the Old Continent as possible.

KEYWORDS

Bern•Będzin•Cuba•diplomacy•Havana
the Holocaust•Jews•Poland•refugees