WAR CABINET

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, A. Eden, “Proposed Anglo-Soviet Agreement regarding the Conclusion of Treaties with the Lesser European Allies and Its Bearing upon Relations between the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Poland”, dated 28 September 1943.

I discussed with my colleagues on the 28th June and the 5th July the proposed visit of President Benes[[1]](#footnote-1) to Moscow to conclude a Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty[[2]](#footnote-2). They then approved my proposal that I should remind M. Molotov of our agreement with the Soviet Government in 1942 that both Governments should refrain from concluding treaties covering the post-war period with minor Allies but that, if the Soviet Government still insisted on a treaty, we might agree that the proposed Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty should be concluded in the form of a instalment of a Three-Power Treaty which could included Poland at a later date; we should, however, say that we hoped that there would be no further exceptions to the self-denying ordinance[[3]](#footnote-3) (W.C. Conclusions 89 (43) of the 28th June, item 5, and 93 (43) of the 5th July, item 5).

2. Before this action could be taken, it was learned from Dr. Benes that in view of our misgivings the Soviet Government had suggested postponing the conclusion of a treaty and Dr. Benes’s Moscow visit.

3. I have since been in consultation with the Soviet Government with a view to clearing up certain misunderstandings about the “self-denying ordinance.” In accordance with their proposal I am now communicating to them a draft, the text of which will be found at Annex I[[4]](#footnote-4), with the suggestion that the question should be placed on the agenda of my forthcoming conversations with the Soviet and United States representatives. The text of a statement I made in the House of Commons on the 22nd September is attached as Annex 2[[5]](#footnote-5).

4. Apart from the question of “self-denying ordinance” and the importance of avoiding open competition between His Majesty’s Government and the Soviet Government for the friendship of our minor European allies, my main objection to the proposed Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement is that it would be regarded as directed against Poland, and would make any satisfactory solution of Eastern European problems more difficult.

5. There remains the possibility of meeting this difficulty by stating any bilateral Soviet-Czechoslovak arrangements were open to subsequent accession by Poland (see paragraph 1 above). This would not, however, dispose of the matter, since (a) the Polish Government could not accede until the Soviet Government condescended to enter into diplomatic relations with them, and (b) the Soviet-Czechoslovak arrangements would deal with Czechoslovak interests and consequently offer no benefits to Poland.

6. Therefore, there seem to be two alternative courses of action: -

(1) To reach an agreement with the Soviet Government on the text of the “self-denying ordinance” at Annex 1 and to refuse to agree to any exceptions. (This would, of course, bar us from making any similar bilateral arrangements, e.g. with Greece, Norway, Holland or Belgium.)

(2) To inform the Soviet Government that, if at any time the way seemed open for the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia to reach a tripartite agreement dealing with the common interests of the three states, we would do all we can to bring about such an outstanding contribution to the post-war settlement in Eastern Europe. It is for consideration whether, in such an event, we should not also offer to participate ourselves in such an arrangement and thus make it quadrilateral.

7. There are certain obvious advantages to making a constructive proposal on the lines of paragraph 6 (2). Progress on these lines will, however, be impossible without the restoration of Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations, which depends upon some prior agreement regarding the future Polish-Soviet frontiers. This question is discussed in a paper I am submitting separately to my colleagues[[6]](#footnote-6). I need only mention here the obvious difficulty for any Government in exile to agree to give up any of its pre-war territory.

8. There remain the question of our own participation. Unless we participate in some way, there is little chance of reaching a stable and satisfactory solution of this Eastern European question. We are still bound by our alliance with Poland, and although we refused a request from the Polish Government[[7]](#footnote-7) in June 1942 to negotiate a new Anglo-Polish treaty to replace that of August 1939, we then informed the Polish Government that “we should, of course, enter into consultation with them in good time before August 1944” (when the 1939 treaty can be terminated by either party), “so that the two Governments might consider how best to maintain and prolong its effects.” We added that we should prefer this consultation to take place “when the future was clearer and when the two Governments could consider, inter alia, how best Anglo-Polish relations could be fitted into a regional or general system of security.” We also informed the Polish Government in April 1942 that we intended to “uphold the interests of our Polish ally, as of our other allies, to the fullest extent to which we were capable, and that for this purpose we would accept our full share of responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of peace in Europe after the war.” Our existing agreement with Poland could thus be merged in a new Four-Power Treaty.

9. I do not think it necessary to reach any final decision regarding British participation at this stage. I would like, however, to have my colleagues’ approval of the following line at the Conference:

(a) I should endeavour to secure Soviet agreement to the proposed “self-denying ordinance.”

(b) I should not myself take the initiative in proposing any exception to the “self-denying ordinance” and should oppose the early conclusion of any bilateral Soviet-Czechoslovak arrangement.

(c) If other discussions at the Conference on matters affecting Soviet-Polish relations suggest that the atmosphere is favourable, I would inform the Soviet Government that His Majesty’s Government, while maintaining their objection to a Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement would be prepared to collaborate in trying to arrange the conclusion of a tripartite agreement between the U.S.S.R, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

A.E.

[TNA, PREM 3/355/6]

Keywords: Poland

1. Beneš, Edvard (1884 – 1948) – Czechoslovakian statesman and politician, President of Czechoslovakia (1935 – 1938, 1945 – 1948), President of the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile (1939 – 1945). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the 28 June meeting, Eden pointed to the undesirability of the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty being concluded, "in view of the present relations between Russian and Poland”. At the 5 July meeting held after Eden’s talks with Benes and May, the Minister suggested a compromise: to conclude the agreement between the USSR and Czechoslovakia as a preliminary step towards a tripartite agreement (with Poland). In both cases, the Cabinet endorsed Eden’s position. See: W.M. (43) 89th Conclusions, 28/06/1943 // TNA, CAB 65/34; W.M. (43) 93rd Conclusions, 05/07/1943 // TNA, CAB 65/34. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The term ‘self-denying ordinance’ refers to the Parliamentary bill of 1644-1645. It prohibited members of the Parliament holding command positions in the army and navy during the English Revolution (Cannon J. Oxford. Dictionary of British History. Oxford, 2009. p. 583-584). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It stipulated the British proposal that there should be no negotiations with European countries on post-war settlement while the war was going on. This was communicated to the Soviet side on 1 October 1943. Published in: Moscow conference. p. 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See: Hansard. Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons). Vol. 392. Col. 174-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the memorandum entitled ‘Western Frontiers of the USSR’, sent to members of the Cabinet on 5 October, Eden stressed that the border issue is "the core of the problem” in relations between the USSR and Poland, and suggested to accept the Soviet demand for "Curzon line", as the basis for future Soviet-Polish border, but "to make every effort to secure a modification whereby the city of Lvov would be included in Poland”. See: W.P. (43) 438, Memo by Eden, 05/10/1943 // TNA, CAB 66/41. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Polish Government-in-exile was formed in Paris after the destruction of the independent Polish state in September 1939. After the fall of France in June 1940, the Government relocated to London. From that point on, Britain became the main ally and patron of the Government-in-exile and the Polish Army in exile. From October 1939 until 1943, the government was led by General Wladyslaw Sikorski. See Anita Prazmowska, *Britain and Poland, 1939-1943* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)