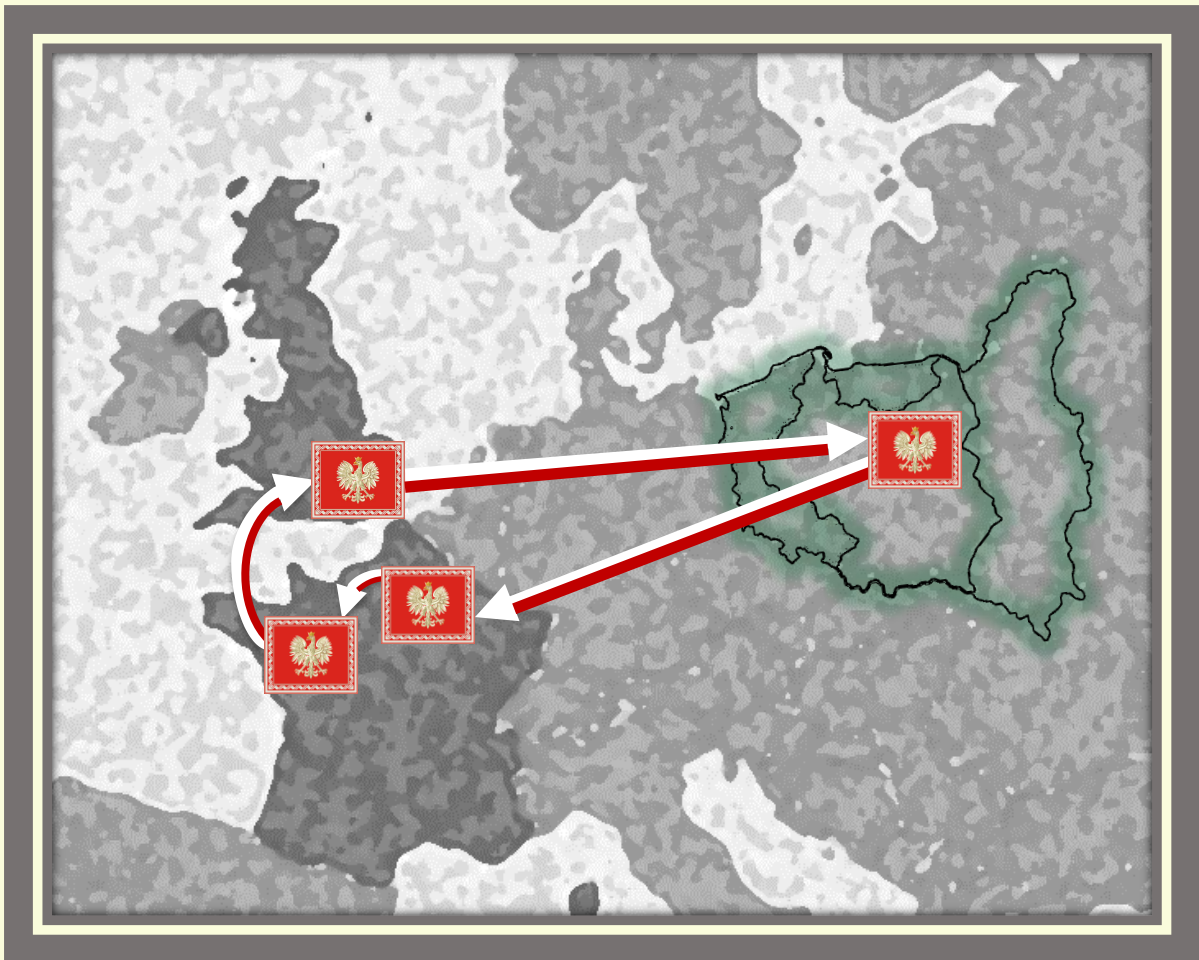




THE POLISH GOVERNMENT IN EXILE 1939–1991

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of the German and Soviet invasions of Poland



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The Polish Government was forced into exile when Poland was invaded in 1939 – by German forces on 1 September and by Soviet forces on 17 September. The Polish Government remained in exile for over 50 years.

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, dated 23 April 1935, sets out in Article 24 the legal basis on which all Presidents and the governments appointed by them continued their terms of office in exile:

- (1) In the event of war, the term of office of the President of the Republic of Poland shall be extended to three months from the date of the peace agreement; in the event of vacating his office before a peace agreement, the President of the Republic of Poland will designate his successor by a separate act announced in the government newspaper.
- (2) In the event of the successor taking office of the President of the Republic of Poland, his term of office continues until three months after the signing of the peace treaty.

In 1939 the President of Poland was Ignacy Mościcki and the Prime Minister was Felicjan Sławój Składkowski. Following the invasion of Poland by Germany and by the Soviet Union the Polish President and Government were forced to leave Poland. They transferred to France where they continued to function - initially in Paris, then in Angers.



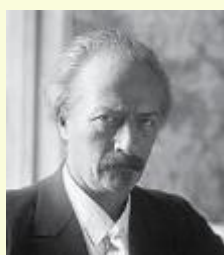
Ignacy Mościcki Felicjan Sławój Składkowski

On 30 September 1939 President Mościcki transferred the office of President of the Republic of Poland to Władysław Raczkiewicz. General Władysław Sikorski became Prime Minister.



Władysław Raczkiewicz Władysław Sikorski

On 2 November 1939 President Raczkiewicz dissolved the Sejm and the Senate – the lower and upper houses of the Polish parliament respectively.



On 9 December 1939 he established the National Council as an advisory body to the Government. In January 1940 the Council elected Ignacy Paderewski, the world-famous pianist and composer, as its Chairman.

The structure of the Polish Government, headed by the President, included the Council of Ministers and the National Council, which fully replaced the Legislative Chambers (Sejm – lower house and Senate – upper house). At the inaugural meeting of the National Council, which took place in Paris on 23 January 1940, the chairman, Ignacy Paderewski, said:

“... We fight for Poland ... the Mother of her faithful children ... To the President of the Republic of Poland, to the Prime Minister and Government I declare the will of a thirty-five million strong nation, forced to be silent by invading armies. We are separated by mountains and rivers from that nation, but our hearts and theirs beat as one. The Council today acknowledges that nation’s martyrdom ... I believe that the National Council can maintain the highest moral standards thus giving the Polish Government lasting and unwavering support...”¹

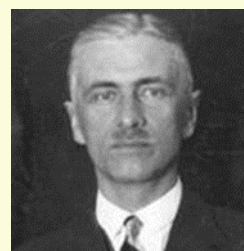
¹ „Rząd i Rada Narodowa R.P.”- Michał Kwiatkowski, London 1942

After the fall of France in June 1940, the Polish Government moved to London where it functioned for over 50 years. Throughout World War II it was involved in the expansion, arming and maintenance of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. It worked alongside allied governments, which recognised it as the political representatives of Poland. The civilian and military resistance in occupied Poland came under the jurisdiction of the Polish Government in London.

In the last years of the war, a series of conferences was held by “The Big Three” – British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin in Tehran (November – December 1943), in Yalta (February 1945) and in Potsdam (June – July 1945) decisions were made about moving Poland’s boundaries and imposing a communist regime. This was done without the participation of the constitutional Polish Government in London.

On 29 June 1945, in his address to the Polish Nation, the President of the Second Republic of Poland, Władysław Raczkiewicz, wrote:

“Today, when the Allied Nations have conquered German aggression, our country, unfortunately, has not yet regained its true freedom...



The law of the Republic imposed on me the obligation of transferring the office of President of the Republic - once peace has been achieved - to my successor who would be elected by the Nation democratically without coercion or threat. When the Nation will be able to make such a choice, I will fulfil my obligation immediately...

The citizens of the Republic, who have experienced so much suffering, have a duty to continue to preserve the great traditions of our culture, a duty not to sever our links with our historical past, a duty to maintain our love of freedom, to remain faithful to the legitimate governing authorities of the Republic and not abandon efforts to assure Poland’s rightful place among the free nations of the world.”²

In July 1945, the wartime allies withdrew their recognition of the legal Government of the Republic of Poland. The Polish Government rejected this decision. Polish émigrés scattered all over the world, unable to return to their country, supported this position. According to the Constitution, the term of office of the President of the Second Republic of Poland continued, because there was no “peace” for the Polish Nation as laid down in Article 24 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1935.

The Polish Government in Exile stayed in London. Its main purpose was the continuation of the long uninterrupted struggle for Polish freedom and independence. The Government in Exile consisted of the office of the President of the Republic of Poland, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland and the National Council of the Republic of Poland.

The National Council was active in London and most of the members were from the United Kingdom, however members from other countries were also appointed. Originally the Council had between 12 and 24 members. Over time, the number of members increased to over one hundred. In the 1980s three branches of the National Council were established in other countries (see p.7).

² Address to the Polish Nation (June 1945) President II RP Władysław Raczkiewicz. Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. London, 4 July 1945.

Successive presidents in exile spoke out about Poland's plight under communist rule. Their speeches demonstrated the steadfast commitment of the Polish émigré community to the cause of Poland's independence.

From the Address of the President of the Second Polish Republic August Zaleski on November 11, 1947:

"Poles in exile, despite the suffering caused by separation from home and family, despite hardships and frequent deprivation, enjoy to a certain extent the liberties of the Western world and have the opportunity to work for their homeland. They also have a duty to keep aloft the banner of the fight for true independence without compromise and without restrictions. They have a duty to express the true will of the Polish Nation and to reveal the evil actions of its enemies and their agents. They have a duty to maintain Polish culture, which is systematically repressed in Poland by foreign occupation.



In fulfilling these duties Polish émigrés have the support of the legal Polish Government in Exile, which previous émigré communities did not have... .. inspired by Kościuszko's³ motto, "Freedom, Unity, Independence", I strongly believe that God will lead us back to a resurrected homeland."⁴

1 September 1975 – the 36th anniversary of the German invasion of Poland – the President of the Second Polish Republic Stanisław Ostrowski wrote:

"... during the war, despite the betrayal by our allies in Tehran and Yalta, we persevered to the end, faithful to our ideals. As in our determined struggle with enemy forces then, so today our struggle and the struggle of other enslaved nations who have undisputed rights to freedom and independence, will continue until victory."⁵



In the last months of 1980, there was a wave of strikes in Poland



after the founding of Solidarity, the independent trade union which challenged the communist authorities. On 1 January 1981 the President of the Second Polish Republic Edward Raczyński, said: *"The year that starts today will be a difficult one for Poland. I trust that our countrymen in the free world will intensify their efforts in providing food aid to our country...I wish you and all my compatriots ... the fulfilment of my personal wishes, wishes which we all share - a free and independent homeland."⁶*

The President of the Second Polish Republic Kazimierz Sabbat, on taking office in 1986, declared:

"Everything we do to maintain the legal continuity of the Republic of Poland and its Government in Exile is done with our country in mind and with the conviction that in this way we serve the cause of freedom, independence and democracy in Poland."⁷



³ Tadeusz Kościuszko

⁴ President Zaleski's address on 11 November 1947, Orzeł Biały: „Polska walcząca o wolność” 22 November 1947, Year VII no.47 (281)

⁵ President Ostrowski's address on the 36th anniversary of the invasion of Poland.

Rzeczpospolita Polska – London September-October 1975. Year XVI nos. 9-10(241-42)

⁶ Rzeczpospolita Polska – London January 1981. Year XXII no. 1(306)

⁷ Rzeczpospolita Polska – London April 1986. Year XXVII no. 4(379)

In Poland the historical round table talks of 1989 led to the partially democratic parliamentary elections in June of the same year. Members of the Senate were chosen through free elections, but in the Sejm the ruling Polish United Workers Party and its then allies were guaranteed 65% of the seats. Thus only 35% were freely elected. The following year Lech Wałęsa was elected to become President of the Republic of Poland *“by the Nation in democratic elections free from any coercion and threats”*, thus meeting the criteria set out by President Raczkiewicz in 1945.

In the days that followed, the President of the Second Polish Republic, Ryszard Kaczorowski, who resided in London, sent a delegation to Warsaw. The delegation’s purpose was to prepare the procedure for the hand-over of the presidential insignia of office. The leader of this delegation was Zygmunt Szadkowski, the other members being Jerzy Morawicz, Ryszard Zakrzewski and Jerzy Zaleski.

On 22 December 1990 Lech Wałęsa was sworn in as the first President of the Third Polish Republic. On the same day the last President of the Second Polish Republic, Ryszard Kaczorowski, flew to Warsaw together with leading activists of the Polish exile community. At the Royal Castle in Warsaw President Wałęsa received the presidential insignia of office from President Kaczorowski, who said:



*“As I hand over these insignia along with the banner of the Republic, which once flew above this Castle, I see in them a golden key to a better future for our most beloved Homeland.”*⁸

President Wałęsa responded:

*“You carried proudly the banner of freedom. You fulfilled the greatest patriotic duty towards the Homeland ... The Polish Government in Exile fulfilled its historic mission with dignity and victory.”*⁸



POLAND IN 1939



POLAND AFTER WORLD WAR II

The aforementioned banner of the Polish Republic is now displayed in the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

⁸ Rzeczpospolita Polska – London December 1990 - January 1991. Year XXXI no.12(435) / (436)



The Government of the Second Republic of Poland having accomplished its mission brought its activities to a close. The last Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers was Edward Szczepanik.

The National Council of the Second Republic of Poland was still active throughout the following year. Its last sitting took place soon after the fully democratic elections to the Sejm and the Senate in Poland. This final meeting took place in London on 8 December 1991. Among the guests were: Minister Andrzej Zakrzewski, representing the President of the Republic of Poland, Tadeusz de Virion, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in London, Alicja Grześkowiak, the Speaker of the Sejm, and Professor Andrzej Stelmachowski, the President of Wspólnota Polska⁹ and former Speaker of the Senate (elected in 1989). Professor Stelmachowski said:



“As I pay homage to all those who formed the core of the most precious part of our émigré community whose mission was to regain independence for Poland, I wish to state that we have learned something extremely valuable from you - perseverance and steadfastness in the service of our Most Serene Republic.”¹⁰

Closing the meeting, the last Chairman of the National Council, Zygmunt Szadkowski, addressed the distinguished guests from Poland: *“Your presence at today's sitting - the last sitting of the National Council - shows that our service has been acknowledged.”¹⁰*



The declaration adopted by acclamation at this last session of the National Council of the Republic of Poland expressed the willingness for continued work in the service of the Homeland.



25 years after the ceremony of the hand-over of the insignia, the efforts of the Polish Government in Exile and thereby the efforts of the entire Polish exile community, were commemorated at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London. At the unveiling of the portraits of six presidents - Władysław Raczkiewicz, August Zaleski, Stanisław Ostrowski, Edward Raczyński, Kazimierz Sabbat, Ryszard Kaczorowski, the then Ambassador Mr. Witold Sobków said:

“As a result of communist propaganda, Poles in Poland did not learn about the true activity of the Polish Government in Exile. However, we know that the Government residing in London remained in contact with the anti-communist opposition in the country and its diplomatic activities had a significant impact on building support abroad for Polish aspirations to freedom and democracy. However, the most important achievement of the Government in Exile was the safeguarding of the constitutional and symbolic continuation of the sovereign power of the Republic.”¹¹

Today, the reception rooms of the Polish Embassy in London bear the names of General Władysław Sikorski, General Władysław Anders and President Ryszard Kaczorowski. The largest one is named after President Edward Raczyński.

⁹ The organization founded in Poland in 1990 to link Polish communities around the world.

¹⁰ Minutes of the National Council meeting held at POSK in London on 8 December 1991.

¹¹ Ambassador Witold Sobków's speech 18 December 2015.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE POLISH GOVERNMENT IN EXILE

PRESIDENT of the Second Republic of Poland

The President's role was defined by Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 23, 1935:

- (1) The President of the Republic is the head of State.
- (2) He is responsible for the fate of the State before God and history.
- (3) His principal obligation is to care for the welfare of the State, for defence preparedness and for his Country's position among the nations of the world.
- (4) He embodies the unitary and indivisible authority of the State.

After the end of hostilities in 1945 the Government of the Second Republic of Poland remained in London. Poland was unwillingly incorporated into the Soviet Bloc where there were no free parliamentary elections and where human rights were violated.



The President was the head of the Polish Government in Exile, which continued the struggle for Poland's freedom and independence. The Chancellery of the President of the Republic prepared all official documents and dealt with correspondence. The Office guarded the presidential seals of office from the pre-war Chancellery at the Castle in Warsaw, which were handed over by President Mościcki to his successor in Paris in 1939. The Chancellery also guarded the original, handwritten and still valid Constitution of 1935. Each president nominated his successor whose name was held in a sealed envelope at the Chancellery.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF POLAND conducted activities aimed at restoring Poland to full independence. Its main task was to keep alive the ideal of the sovereignty of the Polish State and the continuity of its constitutional power. The Government's tasks included: influencing international political opinion in matters concerning Poland, helping their countrymen in Poland and cooperating with them in the fight for freedom. It also cooperated with émigré communities of other nations subjugated by the Soviet Union. The Government upheld and developed the ideal of Polish independence and nurtured Polish culture among Poles abroad. It also endeavoured to help Poles who had been deported to the Soviet Union and who had been unable to leave.

The head of the Government of the Republic of Poland was the Prime Minister (also called the Chairman of the Council of Ministers). The Government's work was divided into ministries. Each minister was responsible for a specific section: Information, Poles' Affairs in the USSR, Education and Culture, Military Affairs, Treasury, Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, Emigration Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Domestic Affairs, Contracted Matters. It must be emphasized that all political parties were represented in the above-mentioned positions. Delegates in the following countries played a very important role: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Benelux, Brazil, Chile, France, Spain, Canada, Mexico, West Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States, Switzerland, Sweden, Venezuela and Italy. There were plenipotentiaries (official representatives) of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Japan, the Netherlands and in the Baltic States with their headquarters in Sweden.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF POLAND fully replaced the Legislative Chambers. It had the right of parliamentary control of the Government, the right to approve the budget and it assessed the activities of the Government and the National Treasury. Every year, the Prime Minister presented to the National Council the proposed work programme for discussion and approval. The Council consisted of representatives of political parties, nominees of the President of the Republic of Poland, representatives of religious denominations, cultural institutions, leading social and veteran organizations as well as elected members. In the 1980s, branches of the National Council were established in the United States (in 1981), in Canada (in 1982) and in the Federal Republic of Germany (in 1983). In countries where there were no branches, members of émigré organizations could be appointed to the Council in London. During the last term there were such members from Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. The Council dealt with the assessment of the situation in Poland and the resulting obligations and tasks. It also assessed the international situation in relation to the Polish cause. The Council monitored the situation of Poles in the East (i.e. in the Soviet Union).

The Supreme Auditing Board was independent of the Government. It exercised control over the budget, annually submitted a report to the National Council of the Republic of Poland and tabled a motion to grant a discharge to the Government. The President appointed and dismissed the Chairman and members of the Supreme Auditing Board.

The Polish National Fund

In 1945 the war-time allies withdrew their recognition of the Polish Government in London and transferred the Polish State Bank gold reserves to Poland. The Polish Government was thereby deprived of funds to continue its independence campaign. In 1949, the President of the Republic of Poland announced the establishment of the Polish National Fund to provide the Polish Government in Exile with the means with which to conduct an independent campaign aimed at regaining the independence of the Polish State. Funds were obtained through contributions, collections, fund-raising events and donations. The Fund covered the cost of numerous political and cultural events and publications as well as the maintenance of the buildings and offices used by the Government. Members of the Government in Exile did not receive remuneration, but the Fund covered their expenses. Office work performed by persons from outside the Government was remunerated according to the budget. The Main Committee of the Polish National Fund was in London with branches all over the world - in 11 European countries and also in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, South Africa, Zimbabwe, New Zealand and Australia. The contributors to the Polish National Fund elected their executive boards and through them were able to control the Fund's income. Audit commissions existed at every level.

The authors have used material from the sources identified in the footnotes, the booklet "Polish Government in Exile" (London 1989) and material from their own family archives.

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