

The View of French Diplomacy on the German-Polish Border Shift, 1940-1950

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INTRODUCTION

The Western territories gained back by Poland are Polish territories. Efforts to develop those territories made over the last eighteen months deserve all our attention. These regions have already lost their German character; the last remaining Germans will soon be gone. We, the French, consider the Polish borders – as established in Potsdam – to be totally legitimate, both historically speaking and from the perspective of the security of Poland and the other Slavonic nations (Roger Garreau)¹.

The demographic substitution that Poland meant to carry on along the Oder-Neisse border is baffling [...]. Modernity – as it is understood in the Western world – has receded toward the center of Europe in front of [the destitution in the ex-German territories colonized by Poland]. That may be one of the aspects of the Oder Neisse issue that is of interest not only for Germany but for the whole of occidental civilization, which is receding westward (Marc Popilet)².

1 | Statement made at the Polish news agency, on September 9, 1946 in Warsaw, by Roger Garreau, French ambassador in Poland. AMAE (*Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères*), Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *minorités polonaises en Allemagne et question des frontières*, statement of Roger Garreau, French ambassador in Poland, September 9, 1946 in Warsaw, in a report of the French Intelligence Agency of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, *l'Ouest polonais et la nouvelle frontière polono-allemande*, p. 247.

2 | Introduction and conclusion of a report regarding the Polish colonization in ex-German territories pronounced by the French 'chargé d'affaire' in Poland, Marc

Here are two conflicting examples of the way French diplomacy interpreted change in the location of the German-Polish border from 1940 to 1950.³ Might a study of the way French diplomacy perceived the territorial shift, upon which it had a limited impact notably due to its declining influence in Europe, be of possible interest? At the outset of the research project whose results are reported in this contribution, the goal was only to study a description of Germans being expelled from Poland and how they were portrayed in French diplomatic archives in order to obtain a French viewpoint of the effect of *Flucht und Vertreibung* (escape and expulsion) of 15 million Germans from Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Second World War. This research focused on the “Pologne” archives in Quai d’Orsay (the Foreign Affairs offices) and on documents issued by French diplomatic centers in Poland reporting on changes in the location of the Oder-Neisse border. These other documents are located in the Warsaw Embassy and at the consulates in Wrocław, Szczecin, and Gdańsk. Even though it would have been hard to expect any commiseration for Germans expelled out of Poland on the part of French diplomats, their disinterest for this issue was nevertheless striking. To them, it was only a small element of a bigger and much more meaningful phenomenon: the German enemy had just lost over 100,000 square kilometers of territory that had been annexed and colonized by Poland. It therefore became necessary account for two other aspects of the border shift: the diplomatic fight, led by Poland, to obtain the Allies’ full recognition of the Oder-Neisse line after Potsdam; and the Polish colonization of the *Recovered Territories* (*zemie odzyskanie*).

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on August 23, 1939, set up the conditions for the Nazi politics of extermination and exploitation from 1939 to 1944 and the Sovietization of the eastern border territories (*Kresy* in Polish) led by the USSR from September 1939 to August 1941. A total ethnic, political, and territorial transformation of the country then occurred during the post-war period (Borodziej/Lemberg 2004: 37ff.). The weakening of Polish society as a result of large-scale ethnic cleansing

Popilet on June 20, 1950. AMAE, Nantes, French Embassy in Poland, folder no 25, *Terres de l’Ouest*, November 1945 - July 1948, report by Marc Popilet to the Foreign Ministry.

3 | We studied these two examples for our MA thesis at the Institute Pierre Renouvin, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne with Professor Antoine Marès.

conducted by Moscow and Berlin and the liquidation of the Polish elite enabled Stalin to use Poland as a communist buffer state at Germany's expense. Moscow feared that the Allies would restore German industry and use it against the USSR (Soutou 2007: 121). The communist regime of Warsaw expelled about nine million Germans across the Oder-Neisse border between 1945 and 1947 and organized at the same time the settlement of 5 million Polish colonists to those territories. This ethnic and territorial displacement, held up as a compensation for the loss of the Polish boundaries annexed to the USSR, was one of the most significant in contemporary European history and was part of the larger phenomenon of displacement imposed upon 30 million Europeans between 1940 and 1970 period (Ther 2001: 44).

In the post war context, French diplomacy hardly could have any impact on such a major territorial shift. US assistance to rebuild France (Blum-Byrnes agreement, May 6, 1946) and the military alliance with Great Britain (Dunkirk treaty, March 4, 1946), and negotiations with Moscow for the disarmament of communist militias in France were the major issues for French diplomacy. In comparison, the German-Polish border shift was of little consequence. And yet, the Quai d'Orsay's view of the German-Polish border shift did touch on issues of major importance to liberated France, at least until 1947. Reinforced security against potential German aggression, access to coal reserves, and the apparently non-ideological union of Polish political parties were among these issues. French diplomacy consisted of a stream of information about the border shift, structured by the defense of French interests in Europe. Official positions were mixed with confidential analysis. This stream flowed on three levels. The first level is the French government, which made decisions regarding the official recognition of the Oder-Neisse border. The second level is the Quai d'Orsay, which prepared an alliance with Poland from 1946-47 before improving relations with what would become the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) against Soviet wishes. The third level is represented by the French diplomats in Poland who reported on the colonization of former German territories. Instructions on how to represent the French view of a potential recognition of the Oder Neisse border and how to analyze the border shift came down from the first level. French observers in Poland, in turn, made suggestions about how France should position itself in this diplomatic border conflict pitting the USSR and Poland against the USA, Britain and occupied West Germany.

The study of French diplomacy regarding the Oder-Neisse border supposes an understanding of the imagery of French diplomacy. This imagery was a product of Paris observing the border shift through a perceptual system created by its strategic and ideological view of the international scene. From the 1945 German defeat to the beginning of the Korean war in 1950, both the border shift itself and the French perceptual system were transformed, resulting in a dramatic reversal of the French position.

The following analysis proceeds in three parts. The first part contains an analysis of diplomatic opinion on the shift during the war (1940-45). In 1942, French diplomats welcomed the annexation plans by the Polish government in London exile. Later, in the last months of 1944 they tightened their relations with the communist counterpart of the Polish Government in London exile, the Polish Committee for National Liberation (Pkwn), which was being supported by the Red Army in Warsaw. In both cases, the diplomatic gestures were intended help the allies encircle Germany, expected to be defeated soon. Part two contains an analysis of how French diplomats compared the river Oder – actual border of Poland – to the river Rhine that France wanted to make its eastern border at that time. France had been excluded from Potsdam but still had ways of controlling Germany's reconstruction, notably due to the seat on the Allied Control Council it was granted in September, 1945 (Bossuat 1997: 37ff.). At that point, the Cold War seemed unavoidable to the countries that defeated Germany. France had already chosen an alliance with America at the expense of an alliance with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Part three describes the reversal of the French diplomatic position on the new border, which then had been adopted by Warsaw. From 1948 to 1950, diplomats contrasted the failures of Polish colonization on the Oder to the modernization being achieved in France through the Marshall and Schuman plans and called attention to the fate of Germans who had stayed in Poland.

FRANCE AT WAR AND THE BEGINNINGS OF POLAND'S GESTURES TO THE WEST: SYMPATHY AND CAUTION (OCTOBER 1944 – AUGUST 1945)

The *Free French* (those who had decided to carry on fighting despite of the French defeat and to follow General de Gaulle after June 1940) gathered in London under de Gaulle's command, were able to meet the soldiers

and the members of the Polish government of General Sikorski who had gone into exile. Remembering the sometimes difficult relationships with Poland during the inter-war period, the Free French viewed the first Polish projects of annexation of German territories that were presented in October 1940 suspiciously (Marès 1982). In 1941, the deadlock gradually dissolved: the common interest of Free France and the Polish government in cooperation, the commitment to the historical alliance between the two countries, and personal relationships established during the exile melted French reluctance. When in March 1942, Polish diplomats delivered a memorandum to the Foreign Office calling for the annexation of East Prussia, Upper Silesia, and Gdansk, the French were inclined to back it. In January 1942, de Gaulle gave his conditional consent. The head of the CNF (*Comité National Français*) had indeed ensured to Sikorski that France would support the Polish plan and that he was interested in reviving the historical alliance between the two countries. Besides the wish to benefit from a strong alliance within Europe, the French support fit into a wider scheme of efforts first launched by Clemenceau at the Paris Conference (January 1919- August 1920). France had then supported Polish claims on Upper Silesia, Gdansk, and Eastern Prussia against Germany, notably in the prospect of weakening this country to the advantage of a trustworthy ally.⁴ The strategic weight of the German borders in Poland had urged France to sign a treaty of alliance with Warsaw in February 1921. Yet, de Gaulle demanded that the Polish cooperate with the Soviet Union. He admitted to Sikorski that he wished to deal carefully with the Moscow alliance and that France would not interfere in a conflict over Poland's eastern boundary. Free France avoided giving any guarantee regarding Poland's eastern borders. It offered support of Poland's plan to advance its western borders at Germany's expense, which in consequence would be beneficial to Paris.

An alliance with the Soviets was interesting for French diplomats who not only wished to revive the 1892 Franco-Russian alliance to dominate Germany permanently and also to counterbalance American influence after the victory (Laforêt 1999). The will to maintain a worldwide balance of power was closely linked to the goal of opposing its allies on Germany.

4 | "Security on the Vistula complemented security on the Rhine, and the more Germany was weakened in the east, the less menace she offered on the west" (Wandycz 1962: 29).

Paris suggested at that time that Germany should be divided, that the Ruhr and Rhineland should be economically united to France and that Saarland should be annexed to France outright. The Rhineland plan elaborated by the French Committee of National Liberation was intended to strengthen France's security and guarantee access to German coal, thought to be indispensable for rebuilding Europe (Bossuat 1997: 37ff.). These plans had been refused by London and Washington as early as the Yalta conference (February 4-11, 1945) but seemed to France to be backed by the USSR. Soviet diplomacy gave some hope to Paris. At that point, Stalin did not hide his goal of permanently annexing the Polish eastern border territories, which triggered a crisis in London. To France at war, it became obvious that the Polish government in London was doomed due to the progress of the Soviets towards the West and that it was necessary to keep it at a distance (Marès 1982: 325).

Initiatives had been taken by French diplomats in Moscow as early as 1943, showing the importance of rapprochement with Poland regarding the new borders of Germany. The ambassador in Moscow, Roger Garreau, went on to play a major role in the Franco-Soviet alliance treaty in December 1944. He thought that Soviet control over Poland, as inevitable as it was, would not prevent Poland from allying with France because it would lead to the weakening of Germany and accorded with Moscow's security requirements (Bariéty 2008: 210). Having been in contact with Polish communists since the end of 1943, Garreau managed to convince de Gaulle to tacitly recognise the PKWN, a rival of the government in London, so that Stalin's condition would be met when signing the December 1944 treaty. At first, this treaty was not a way to organize a Franco-Polish rapprochement at the expense of Germany's borders. De Gaulle was very reluctant to abandon his Polish friends in London and was disappointed by Stalin's ignoring France, which was not even invited to Yalta. Besides, reports written between January and March 1945 by Christian Fouchet, French diplomat in Poland and a friend of de Gaulle, gave a clear indication to de Gaulle that Poland, occupied by the Red Army, was becoming a vassal state where communism prevailed.⁵

Paradoxically, de Gaulle's foiled hopes did not prevent French diplomats from comparing Poland's recognized territorial claims on the Oder

5 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Politique intérieure et reconstruction de l'État polonais*, pp. 129ff.

to the French claims on the Rhine. Garreau actively worked with the unofficial Polish foreign minister Zygmunt Modzelewski. In France, which was then governed by an alliance composed of socialist and communist resistance fighters as well as Christian democrats, the idea of a rapprochement with the PKWN (Laforêt 1999) – which claimed to be a national union as well – against Germany was developing. This rapprochement could have counterbalanced the creation of blocs in Europe, which would have been in keeping with de Gaulle's politics as head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic. The French ambassador in London, René Massigli's, was skeptical regarding the renewal of inter-war alliances with Central European countries now occupied by the Red Army, but the press and the parties in power subscribed to it (Soutou 1993).

The Potsdam Agreements (August 2, 1945) strengthened the rapprochement of France and Poland. France, who was not invited to the conference, learned that the "Big Three" had not accepted the division of Germany or the separation of the Rhineland. Yet, the former had confirmed to Paris it was an occupying power and had therefore the power to stop the constitution of a central administration in Germany. Thanks to its seat at the Allied Control Council and the Council of Foreign Ministers, Paris was able to stop the recovery of a democratic Germany that was ready to sign a permanent peace agreement with the Allies. This could only be a transitory situation. The PKWN worried that the British and the American had successfully insisted for recognition of the Oder-Neisse line only as a Polish *administrative border*. France was now aware of the importance of the territorial move in Eastern Germany and declared that was ready to recognize it in August 1945 under the condition that its plans for Rhineland (annexation of Saarland, internationalization of the Ruhr) would be added. As Warsaw and Paris developed relationships, France used de Gaulle's support for Polish annexations (which dated to January 1942) and related them to its claim. It does not seem that French diplomats thought thoroughly about the deportations of millions of Germans from Poland, as did their British counterpart (Frank 2007: 86ff.). France officially opposed the deportation of Germans from Central Europe to avoid a socio-economic imbalance but yet considering the same option – on a smaller scale – to secure possession of mining resources in Saarland (Soutou 1998: 170). The refusal to acknowledge the deportation of Germans from Poland that had started in June 1945 could be explained by the defense of French inter-

ests in Germany and was received by French diplomats who were enthusiastic about Polish colonization of the recovered territories.

THE RHINE/ODER COMPARISON (SEPTEMBER 1945 – NOVEMBER 1947)

From September 1945 to April 1947, France strongly disagreed with the reconstruction of a unified Germany, reclaiming at the same time its projects for Rhineland to be set up: the separation of the Ruhr and the Rhineland and the annexation of the Saarland⁶. During this period, the view French diplomacy cast on the German-Polish border shift appeared as a parallel between the rivers Rhine and Oder. In August 1945, French diplomacy declared that it agreed with the setting up of the Eastern border of Germany along the Oder-Neisse line, linking its official recognition to the French claims that the Western borders of Germany had to be modified⁷. Moreover, by renewing its alliance with Warsaw, Paris tried to escape from its isolation regarding this topic. The two countries worked on the re-launching of the 1921 treaty. The rapprochement with Poland may look surprising considering London's mistrust towards Warsaw and its allegiance to Moscow. To the French, this rapprochement did not act against the USSR security; on the contrary, it strengthened it. This presumptuous comparison between the river Rhine and the river Oder – in the eyes of the Quai d'Orsay, or at least of its people in favour of Moscow – was useful on three points: a reinforced security against Germany, the access to German coal and the rapprochement with a government supposedly of national unity, like in France. As for the German expelled out of Central Europe towards occupied areas in Germany, it was granted to Paris that out of the 6,5 million of German refugees from Central Europe that were planned to be resettled in Germany until July 1946, only 150.000 would go to and stay

6 | In fact, it became in 1946 clear to the French diplomacy that the annexation of Saarland was quite impossible. However, it kept on demanding it officially until October 1956 in order to please French public opinion and to make the US accept a custom union between France and Saarland (Defrance/Pfeil 2012).

7 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Frontière germano-polonaise et politique polonaise à l'égard de l'Allemagne, 1945-1947*, note of August 7, 1945, unknown author, to Soviet, British and American ambassadors in Paris, p.7.

in the French occupied zone (Soutou 1998: 171). The overpopulation of the US and British zones was consequently made worse but this rendered the situation easier for the French zone which was dependant on the American, notably for food. In the higher levels of French diplomacy, it was of utmost importance not to handle the issue of the deported Germans.

French diplomats in Warsaw, Szczecin, Wrocław and Gdańsk looked favourably at the Polish colonisation of recovered territories. During their diplomatic missions, diplomats lived in villas whose German owners had been dispossessed of them and did not hesitate to pilfer (*szaber* in Polish) to equip the houses⁸. In post-war Poland, the colonists and the administrators proved to be francophiles who were happy to help the French. Consequently, the opinion on Polish colonisation that can be read in the reports sent by the diplomats to Paris is clearly positive. Agreeing on the fact that 9 million Germans replaced by 5 million of Polish refugees did not make things easy, the French diplomats considered that the efforts made by the Polish would allow them to populate the former German territories and revive their economy. The French, who were happy with the work done by the administrators of the Polish Workers Party (PPR), considered the terror they had established on the East side of the river Oder as a way – brutal but suitable, according to them – to handle the instability of the area. Turning a blind eye to the political issues linked to colonisation, the French diplomats considered questions that were exclusively linked to France.

Consequently, on September 10, 1946, Garreau, since 1945 the French ambassador in Warsaw, harshly criticised what James F. Byrnes, US Secretary of state in Stuttgart said on September 6 when reminding that the Oder-Neisse line was to be a provisional border until the establishment of a global peace treaty with Germany. Garreau recognised, in the name of “the French” Poland’s new border and briefly praised the Polish colonisation, specifying that the German democratic flaws would necessitate the setting up of Paris’ plans of Rhineland⁹. Some French diplomats were

8 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Silésie et territoires de l'ouest (Silesia and Western Territories)*, report of doctor-lieutenant Pauliac, transmitted by cabinet of general de Gaulle to sous-direction Europe centrale, August 25, 1945, p. 33.

9 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Frontière germano-polonaise et politique polonaise à l'égard de l'Allemagne*, 1945-1947, pp. 236ff.

more careful, underlining that all the Polish people worked together for their nation's greatness rather than staying divided by their ideological beliefs. The appearing political pluralism that the communist administration of the recovered territories and its minister Władysław Gomułka claimed to be representative of, attracted the French diplomats whose country had been reconstructed by an alliance ranging from the Christian Democrats to the Communist Party (until March 1947). The Quai d'Orsay also thought that the Poles could in the future free themselves from the Soviet hold by using German industries and coal mines as an impulse towards reconstruction. This reminded of France being obsessed by the fear of being dependent on the US and on their loans given to reconstruct (Soutou 2007: 148).

French diplomats were indifferent to the Germans who had stayed or to the conditions of their deportations towards the occupied zones. They only mentioned those points when the British government raised them, criticising what Warsaw had done to the Germans in the Polish territories. In this Anglo-Polish argument, the French were in favour of the Poles, stating that the British remonstrance was groundless. Yet they did not check the veracity of those, not going in person to check the conditions of deportations. The accounts made by the French diplomats regarding the relationships that they had with the Germans who had stayed on the East side of the Oder river are telling in this respect. The Wrocław consul evicted 22 Germans out of the villa chosen as a consulate and would underline the arrogance of the Germans who had stayed in Breslau¹⁰. These nationalist *a priori* assumptions against the Germans were to be found in other circles. During a stay in Gdańsk in May 1945, Madeleine Pauliac, doctor-lieutenant in the French Red Cross, talked to a German lady which complained about the fate of her counterparts who had been raped in great number by Soviets and Poles. Pauliac answered back mentioning the concentration camps¹¹. In her report to de Gaulle's Cabinet, she described the situation of the Polish civilians in Gdańsk but only addressed very

10 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Silésie et territoires de l'ouest*, report of the French consul in Lower-Silesia, Charles Birckel on Wrocław city, December, 1945, pp. 67-73.

11 | AMAE, Courneuve, Europe 1944-1970, Pologne, *Silésie et territoires de l'ouest*, report of doctor-lieutenant Pauliac, transmitted by cabinet of general de Gaulle to sous-direction Europe centrale, August 25, 1945, p. 33.

briefly the lot of the deported German, evoking the French press mocking the German expelled from Alsace in 1918. This hostile indifference for the German on the part of the French diplomats and relief workers contrasts with the opinion of their British counterparts in Poland. The French position can be explained by the sufferings of the German occupation in France, and by the sympathy for the Poles. The strengthening of the Soviet and communist oppression on Poland ordered by Stalin during the Szklarska Poręba conference (September 22-27, 1947) led the French diplomats to watch powerlessly a friend-country being submitted to *sovietisation* and Stalinism.

THE SHIFT OF THE FRENCH DIPLOMATIC VIEW ON THE ODER-NEISSE LINE (NOVEMBER 1947 – JULY 1950)

The shift of the French diplomatic perception on the new German-Polish border started in the last months of 1947, characterised by the end of the four-party government in Germany and the beginning of the Cold War. Paris then realised that its attempts to make the most of the conflict between the Anglo Americans and the Soviets was starting to be too dangerous. The French government – scared by the Soviet aggressiveness – managed to rally the side of London and Washington under one condition: a custom union and the unification of Saarland to France. France also obtained 2.4 billions of dollars, out of 13 billion that had been given to Europe through the Marshall plan in June 1947. Paris had chosen its side. The USSR urged the powerful French Communist Party to counteract and in December 1947 strikes were set up and the government – boycotted by the communists since March – had to call for 80.000 reservists. Close the USA, the Quai d'Orsay was backed on parliamentary and governmental levels by the non-communist parties and their electorship who were shocked by the Prague coup in 1948 much more than by the Berlin blockade in June. In an old democratic European country, a well-structured communist party – with the help of Moscow – had taken the power in the absence of the Red Army.

A strong US military presence enabled by the Brussels treaty (March 1948) in return, Paris had to give its support to the setting up of something that it had always dreaded: the setting up of a Western German state with an important industrial potential. France had become a *cold warrior*

ready to defend the river Elbe when signing the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949. On the other side of this river, serving as a border for Europe and for Germany between West and East, Warsaw had taken the same way, but in an opposite direction. Despite strong cultural, economic and sometimes diplomatic exchanges until 1947, France and Poland stopped trying to maintain their friendship and started a *little cold war* in 1949 (Jarosz/Pasztor 2005: 120ff.). The Polish government sued French diplomats arrested in Poland, accusing them of being spies. And Paris responded by police retaliations on the Poles of France close to the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR).

Contrarily to how it stood in 1945, Polish propaganda praised the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its *good Germans* in order to oppose them to France, accused of being the slave of American imperialism. Poland's flatorous words to the GDR were rewarded by the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty signed on July 6, 1950. Through this treaty, the GDR recognised the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's Eastern border. Imposed by Moscow, this position on the part of the GDR was immediately criticised by Bonn, Washington and London which considered as a violation of the Potsdam agreement all territorial shifts impacting on Germany's sovereignty that were made without the consent of the Potsdam signatories. From 1945 to April 1947, Paris supported unofficially the Oder-Neisse line in order to defend its interests in Germany. On July 1950, France declared that it only recognized the FRG as the legitimate German state and its right to represent this country in its 1937 borders (Laurent 1974/75: 122ff.). This statement showed a modification in France's way of considering the border shift between Germany and Poland but according to us, this position can better be explained by a realist continuity of the French position rather than by an idealist break that would have benefited to German people. Between 1945 and 1947, three criteria had conditioned the creation of a parallel made by the French between the rivers Rhine and Oder: the security against Germany, the access to its coal and a projection on Poland of a political project that was wished by the French opinion. This diplomatic shift was to be found amongst the French diplomats in Poland who expressed different, although closely related reasons (the political project was in 1949 reconciliation with the Germans).

Some observers of the Polish colonisation noted that the *sovietisation* of the economy in the recovered territories created in 1947 had dreadful economic consequences. Added to this point was the critique of political

Stalinism imposed on Poland as early as 1948 with Gomułka being evicted in favour of Bolesław Bierut. Through the description of the fear of the colonists subjected to political pressures that ceaselessly grew stronger, French diplomats draw a panorama pervaded by the image of the Quai d'Orsay's close relationship with the USA. For instance, the gathering of Soviet troops in Western Poland and the weight of local politics were described as the persistence of late Prussia, which symbolised for the French the totalitarianism which was a characteristic of the Third Reich and German militarism¹². Similarly, experts at the Quai d'Orsay gave no credit to the declarations of friendship and cooperation of the GDR and Poland. Economic necessity rather than reconciliation, bloc perspective rather than spontaneity of the peoples: the French diplomats could have brought close the German-Polish cooperation on the Oder line and the Franco-German reconciliation that was beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community. But the French experts chose to oppose the colons' hatred for the Germans and the nationalist propaganda of the PZPR against the European and international opening-up of France. The freedom of movement of goods and people that was occurring in Western Europe undeniably contrasted with the situation experienced by the Germans who had stayed in Poland where they were often exploited. In 1950, Poland had extended the status of germanised Poles to almost all the Germans that had not been expelled¹³. Officially, this was to enable families who could prove that they had ties with Poland to stay, unofficially, this aimed at keeping workers and minds that were necessary to the reconstruction of the recovered territories. The French made no mistake about it, considering that these Germans played a key role against the economic failures of decolonisation. Consequently, they paid attention to their plights that they had ignored in 1945 and 1946. This new idealist empathy relied on a realist critique of the Poland's politico-economic evolution.

This new interest had a consequence on Paris's position regarding the conflict opposing the British occupying authorities and Warsaw in March 1950. Following talks between these two parties, it had been planned that

12 | AMAE, Nantes, Embassy in Warsaw, carton n° 25, *Terres de l'ouest*, report of French consul in Wrocław Guy Monge on an exhibition on the Recovered Territories in the city, June 2, 1948.

13 | Atlas Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung, Ostmitteleuropa, 1939-1959, Warsaw: Demart 2009, p. 202.

at that moment, thousands of Germans who had stayed in Poland could join their families in Western Germany. And yet Poland kept the Germans who were useful for its economy or enabled them to join the GDR and with the latter, they screened the “unproductive people” letting them move to the FRG. London and Washington immediately expressed their opposition, denouncing on the one hand the violation of the agreements and on the other the damage done to the people deported and their family. Humanitarian arguments were taken over by the French ambassador in Warsaw adding some weight to France’s view on these Anglo Saxon critiques against Poland¹⁴. These very same critiques had seemed groundless a few years ago for the French diplomats. It would be too hasty to conclude that France’s position was only fed by an idealist concern to help the refugees’ families of the FRG. The High Commission of the French Republic in Germany compared Warsaw’s attitude towards the German repatriates to the harsh recruitment by this capital city of Polish minors in the North of France to cover the German minors of Silesia¹⁵. This commitment towards the FRG in March 1950 was nurtured by French resentments against Poland due to the competition that had been on since 1946 for labour force.

CONCLUSION

The reversal in the way French diplomacy regarded the German-Polish border shift from 1940 to 1950 can largely be explained by the Cold War, which was a turning point for Europe. Its impact can be observed at the three levels. In 1945, the French government unofficially backed the Oder-Neisse line, hoping to create an alliance with Poland with the consent of the USSR. A condoned Polish alliance would have granted France reinforced security against Germany and access to coal. In 1950, the French government, absent the communists, who had left it in March

14 | AMAE, Nantes, Embassy in Warsaw, carton n° 20, *Transferts de populations*, note of Jean Baelen ambassador in Poland to Polish foreign ministry, March 9, 1950.

15 | AMAE, Nantes, Embassy in Warsaw, carton n° 28, *OTC in organisation de l'Allemagne, 1950-1952*, note of François Seydoux, chief of the direction Europe, to French embassy in Warsaw, April 4, 1950.

1947, acknowledged the 1937 German-Polish border after having signed two months earlier a treaty of alliance with the FRG. The USA as an occupying force of West Germany, guaranteed coal and security to France. In 1945, part of the Quai d'Orsay tried to revive the inter-war alliances with Central Europe to encircle Germany and stop the bloc partition in Europe. In 1950, the French Foreign ministry agreed with the FRG to guard against a potential Soviet expansion over the Elbe line. In 1945, diplomats in the recovered territories, referring to issues related to France, described in positive terms the Polish colonization, considering deportation to be but a minor detail. This way of considering the situation lasted until 1950 and represented the Oder-Neisse line as a foil to the plans of Marshall and Schuman.

In spite of that turning point, it must be underscored that the continuity characteristic of French diplomacy and its relationships with Warsaw played a key role in the reversal of its view on the Polish shift. A concurrence on immigration between Paris and Warsaw, and diplomatic relations that were actually more complex than implied by their mutual declarations of friendship, worsened the Franco-Polish friendship. Moreover, a structural weaknesses in the two countries urged them to call for help from outside Europe. Tensions between the Polish and French governments must be taken into account if one wants to understand the rift between the two countries. Yet both countries treated this new conflict as an accidental break in their historical friendship, and in 1953, after Stalin's death, they took the initiative to resume contact (Jarosz/Pasztor 2005). Finally, the reversal of French opinion on Poland's border from 1940 to 1950 can also be explained by the evolution of the concept of border within French diplomacy. In 1945, borders were used as a diplomatic tool to create new German boundaries in order to check German power. A parallel between the rivers Rhine and Oder was drawn, for instance. But by 1950, from the viewpoint of Paris, the contestation of the borders had become an obstacle to the constitution of a strong and peaceful Europe, and France had begun opening up its own borders, notably with Germany. Yet French diplomats in Poland still insisted that Poland was tightening its borders with its neighbors and with Western Europe as well as strengthening the military and police takeover of the western voivodeships. This stands in stark contrast to the opening up of France's borders within Western Europe that was then underway.

Over the long term, France was to abandon its negative view of the Oder-Neisse line and insisted that the FRG recognize it as Germany's eastern border. In March 1959, de Gaulle, who was recently back in power, required the recognition of the Oder-Neisse line by the FRG as the prerequisite for any future German reunification. Thirty years later, François Mitterrand obtained from the FRG the definite recognition of the Potsdam line as one of the preconditions for receiving French support for German reunification. France was aware of the perils linked to territorial resentment between Poland and Germany and thus worked to normalize east-west relations and to put an end to the Oder-Neisse disagreement.

Translated from French by Charlotte Faucher

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