

## Great Britain and the Journey to the Rhineland Pact (July–August 1925). A Contribution to the Issue of Collective Security in the 1920s.

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With the end of the First World War, when Europe had to recover from the bloodiest conflict in its history, most people longed for a sense of security and believed that anything similar would never happen again.<sup>1</sup> On account of its area and its still primary significance, Great Britain had to act as one of the guarantors of the new arrangement. Its relationship or, more precisely, its politicians' relationship to the established League of Nations (LoN) was ambivalent,<sup>2</sup> but not completely dismissive. At the end of 1919, with the USA refusing to join the new organisation, London's position changed and complicated. A hypothetical possibility of a mutual conflict because of Washington's non-membership in the LoN and the issue of dominions, with the idea of a joint imperial politics quickly vanishing after 1918, brought about reassessment of British priorities in foreign politics. In the future, Great Britain was to become involved only where its life interests required it.

This fact was closely related to the issue of collective security in Europe and attempts for its provision in the 1920s. In the early 1920s, several efforts were made to establish a collective security system under the auspices of the League of Nations (the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Geneva Protocol<sup>3</sup>), but all of them were rejected by London from different reasons. It was only willing to participate in the project of guaranteeing the

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand smaller states continued to support armaments industry after 1918. Compare for example A. SKŘIVAN, *On the Nature and Role of Arms Production in Interwar Czechoslovakia*, in: *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 630–640 or A. SKŘIVAN, *Weapons from the Heart of Europe. On Czechoslovak Arms Exports in the Interwar Period*, in: *Rivista di Storia Economica*, a. XXVII, n. 1, aprile 2011, pp. 73–91.

<sup>2</sup> While the Labourists and Liberals welcomed the idea of a new organisation, the attitude of the Conservative Party and conservative press was different. Compare L. NOVOTNÝ, *Velká Británie, Konzervativní strana a vznik Společnosti národů*, in: *Historický obzor*, Vol. 21, No. 7/8, 2010, pp. 178–188.

<sup>3</sup> Compare L. NOVOTNÝ, *Konzervativní vláda Stanleyho Baldwina a její odmítnutí Ženevského protokolu. Příspěvek k pokusům o vytvoření kolektivní bezpečnosti ve dvacátých letech 20. století*, in: „Dvacáté století“. Ročenka Semináře nejnovějších dějin Ústavu světových dějin Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2006, pp. 117–153.

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western borders of France and Belgium, which stood outside of the League of Nations.

On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1925, Germany came with a draft pact upon which powers interested in the Rhine, particularly Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany, would undertake not to wage war against signatory countries. The purpose of this study is to analyze British approach to the German proposal and its transformations within the short period of July and August 1925 when, after feverish negotiations on a potential pact between London and Paris,<sup>4</sup> governments in both cities were impatiently waiting for Berlin's reaction to the French response regarding the German memorandum of early 1925.

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On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925, Germany officially replied to the French note of mid June. Ambassadors Friedrich Sthamer and Leopold von Hoesch delivered their government's responses in London and Paris at the same hour. Berlin acknowledged the French thesis that a security pact in no case means a modification of current treaties, not excluding, however, a possibility of later amendments should the situation in Europe change.<sup>5</sup>

The second point of the German note concerned arbitration treaties. Berlin rejected the French notion of unlimited arbitration, repeating its suggestion that only some disputes be resolved by the arbitration court. It also opposed the idea of the allies having under certain circumstances (such as failure to fulfil reparation obligations or violation of the demilitarized Rhineland zone) the right to intervene immediately without waiting for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The German government also expressed its view on the issue of Germany joining the League of Nations. It did not consider it an insurmountable problem but pointed out one fact: Germany had been disarmed and its present entry in the LoN would mean that it wouldn't have the same rights as other member. In Berlin's opinion, general disarmament should therefore follow as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup>

After the German note's submission, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Austen Chamberlain telegraphed to British Ambassador in Berlin

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<sup>4</sup> In detail compare L. NOVOTNÝ, *Velká Británie a cesta k Rýnskému garančnímu paktu*, in: *Dvacáté století – The Twentieth Century*, 2011, No. 1, pp. 71–87.

<sup>5</sup> P. URBANITSCH, *Großbritannien und die Verträge von Locarno*, Diss., Wien 1968, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> A. ORDE, *Great Britain and International Security 1920–1926*, London 1978, p. 112. Compare also The National Archives, London, Kew (hereinafter TNA), FO 371/10736, C 9581/459/18, Mr. Sthamer to Mr. Austen Chamberlain (Received July 20), July 20, 1925.

D'Abernon<sup>8</sup> to inform him about this fact. According to the Secretary of State, the German government chose such a style of replying that could be called a middle way, in order to avoid being blamed later for evasiveness or, on the other hand, for accepting “*every detail of the French proposals.*”<sup>9</sup>

Having read his government's response to Chamberlain, Sthamer expressed his hope “*that the next step would not be too long delayed.*” The Secretary of State replied that he could not tell him anything definite, because a document of such significance needed to be studied in detail and discussed with French and Belgian governments. The head of the Foreign Office only expressed a vague hope that the German government initiative would certainly lead “*to the establishment of peace on a securer foundation, and to the creation of better relations between Germany and the Western Powers than any which had existed since the outbreak of war.*”<sup>10</sup>

After submission of the German note, a dispute was reignited at the Foreign Office concerning the sequence of the guarantees' implementation and decision of the Council of the League of Nations.<sup>11</sup> In its response, Berlin refused the idea adopted by France that in certain cases there would be no waiting for the Council League's verdict. Two groups stood against each other at the Foreign Office. J. C. Sterndale Bennett and Miles Lampson rejected Paris' opinion, reasoning that the proposed treaties must not be considered as oriented against Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Both men thus clearly supported the position of the younger generation at the Foreign Office, claiming that Germany would not be able to threaten peace in Europe in the short term.<sup>13</sup> Bennett even dared to ask whether Great Britain wasn't too prone to believe that it had always been Germany who acted in bad faith and that the French, on the other hand, had never acted in bad faith.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Edgar Vincent, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount D'Abernon (1857–1941), ambassador to Berlin in the years 1920–1926.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9636/459/18, Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 20, 1925. The German Ambassador told Chamberlain that it was not only the government who hoped for the success of further negotiations, but also the top representatives of the state, as well as majority of the public.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*. At the end of their conversation, Sthamer asked Chamberlain not to publish the German note sooner than in two days, explaining this by internal political reasons (these concerned a debate in the Reichstag).

<sup>11</sup> Disputes at the Foreign Office already began at the end of the first decade in July and concerned the future role of the League of Nations in the prepared pact. Compare TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9216/459/18, Minute by Lampson, July 11, 1925.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9784/459/18, Foreign Office Memorandum, July 22, 1925.

<sup>13</sup> E. MAISEL, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919–1926*, Sussex 1994, p. 179.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9784/459/18, Foreign Office Memorandum, July 22, 1925.

Chamberlain and William Tyrrell were convinced of the opposite and therefore decided to support the French position. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs defended his position on the grounds that Paris' concerns about a new war conflict had to be mitigated, while the Foreign Secretary simply refused that a situation might arise when London would not help France only because of the indecisiveness of the Council of the League of Nations.

Of course, Chamberlain's and Tyrrell's opinions eventually prevailed in this dispute, and the Foreign Office came to the conclusion that Legal Advisers Sir Cecil Hurst and Henri Fromageot should prepare such a proposal on this issue that would clearly indicate that in case of a violation of the demilitarized Rhineland or an outburst of violence, the guarantee treaties would come into effect even if the Council of the League of Nations does not reach a decision.<sup>15</sup>

Austen Chamberlain criticized one more thing about the German note; he didn't like that Berlin touched upon the issue of occupied territories. According to him, it even contradicted that what was promised by the German Foreign Minister in February 1925. At that time, Gustav Stresemann declared that the proposed security pact would not stipulate any change of conditions in the occupied territories.

A few days later, the Secretary of State talked in a more lenient tone. At a meeting in Birmingham, he expressed his regrets over the fact that another exchange of notes would now be necessary but appreciated the German initiative and willingness to continue negotiations. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin talked in a similarly positive spirit. In one of his speeches, which otherwise rarely dealt with foreign policy, he welcomed German readiness to talks on the prospective pact.<sup>16</sup>

The British public opinion on the German note was reserved but not dismissive.<sup>17</sup> General surprise prevailed that Germany, for the first time since the end of the war, chose a tone appropriate for a superpower. Satisfaction with the content was not so prevalent. Conservative press pointed out that France's and Germany's positions on many questions still differed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> Compare URBANITSCH, pp. 187–188.

<sup>17</sup> The note was only published on 22<sup>nd</sup> July; London thus probably complied with the German request. Compare note 9.

<sup>18</sup> Compare *Daily Telegraph*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1925. The liberal newspaper *Manchester Guardian* expressed a similar opinion, adding, however, that no significant progress could have been expected. Compare *Manchester Guardian*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1925. *Daily Express* was the only newspaper to perceive the German note, as evidence of Berlin does not want further

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1925, the Reichstag assembled for a foreign policy debate. However, the Foreign Minister Stresemann talked just briefly. He only mentioned the French Foreign Minister's note and the German reply. On the security issue, he just said that the advantage of the new pact for Germany is the provision of security at its western border.<sup>19</sup> *"His speech which was conciliatory in tone was well received. The house was somewhat listless owing to the extreme heat,"* the British Ambassador to Berlin complained at the end of his telegram.<sup>20</sup>

News from the French capital was also optimistic. The Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris Phipps informed Austen Chamberlain that French press mostly considered the German note a sign that left open door to further negotiations. On the other hand, Phipps said, there was a suspicion in certain circles that Berlin was attempting to change provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, thus ridding France of the advantage of its current alliance system.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, the debate on the future orientation of German foreign policy continued without any distraction in Berlin. The social democratic deputy Rudolf Breitscheid said that the government chose a correct foreign policy concept and Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD) therefore had no reason to join the no-confidence motion. Count Westarp<sup>22</sup> also had no objections to the governmental policy. Opposition was only voiced from both extreme camps of the political spectrum; right wing radicals and communists. They claimed that if Germany signed the guarantee pact, it would join the western superpowers' alliance oriented against the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup>

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negotiations. In its opinion, the British Empire was thus freed from the danger that the security pact posed for its unity. Compare *Daily Express*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1925.

<sup>19</sup> *"Das Ziel dieser Erörterungen ist der Pakt mit Deutschland, nicht aber Dreimächtepakt gegen Deutschland, sondern der von ihnen mit Deutschland zu schließende Pakt,"* he added. G. STRESEMANN, *Vermächtnis: der Nachlass in drei Bänden*, Bd. 2, Berlin 1932, p. 156.

<sup>20</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9738/459/18, Telegram from Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 22, 1925.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9729/459/18, Telegram from Mr. Phipps (Paris), July 22, 1925. Chamberlain only received the report on the next morning. Radical right-wing circles adopted a hostile position on the German note, claiming that it was an attempt to destroy the current order in Europe. At the end of his report, Phipps noted that most of the public in France was willing to negotiate with Germany but was also aware that it would not be easy.

<sup>22</sup> Kuno von Westarp (1864–1945), co-founder of the DNVP (Deutschnationale Volkspartei), its chairman in the years 1926–1928.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 9817/459/18, Telegram from Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 23, 1925.

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According to D'Abernon, it was clear that most of the Reichstag would support approving the German reply to Aristide Briand's note. The British Ambassador noted "*that terms of pact should not curtail any advantages accruing from membership of League nor absolve the other Powers from obligation to disarm*". However, in his opinion, Berlin expected some concessions, particularly concerning occupation costs, should the pact come into effect.<sup>24</sup>

On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925, the legal adviser of the French government, Fromageot, arrived in the British capital, bringing with him France's objections to the proposed pact. These mainly concerned the possibility of a state taking action without a clearly defined procedure. Paris feared two things in particular: 1) postponement of a decision by the Council of the League of Nations regarding the question of aggressor, and 2) the option that the Council will not reach any decision. France believed that this situation threatened to arise, because the Council's verdict had to be unanimous and some, particularly smaller, states could come to the conclusion that it was not German aggression.<sup>25</sup>

Some members of the Central Department at the Foreign Office thought that French requirements should be refused. However, Austen Chamberlain believed that it was suitable to accept this requirement and present it to the Parliament as something giving London freedom of action. The ministry agreed that at a meeting with Fromageot, the Foreign Office legal adviser Cecil Hurst should try to gain his consent with the part of the draft talking about the guarantor's course of action. London imagined that it would only be forced to act prior to a decision by the Council of the League of Nations if a conflict really erupted or if military forces of one of the parties undoubtedly breached the demilitarized zone.<sup>26</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1925, Austen Chamberlain informed Phipps, the Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris, about the meeting with the legal adviser of the French government Fromageot. Ambassador Aimé Joseph de Fleuriau was also present at the meeting, and Chamberlain invited Cecil Hurst as well, who briefed the Secretary of State on the course his previous meetings with Fromageot. The head of the Foreign Office was willing to accept

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem. In the end, the government clearly won the vote of confidence. 235 deputies were in favour, 158 were against, and 13 legislators abstained from voting.

<sup>25</sup> ORDE, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> Compare TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9693/459/18, Foreign Office Memorandum (Mr. Bennett), July 21, 1925; NA, FO 371/10736, C 9784/459/18, Foreign Office Memorandum, July 22, 1925.

some of France's objections, but refused adding the words "hostile action" to article two of the proposed pact.<sup>27</sup>

In the second part of his letter to Eric Phipps, Austen Chamberlain expressed his conviction that the negotiations reached a point when His Majesty's Government would be favourable to guarantee France's security in case of a sudden German attack. However, he did not forget to mention two dangers that had to be avoided, in his opinion. "*In the first place, the power of His Majesty's Government to persuade British public opinion to accept the obligations of the guarantee was dependent upon the guarantee itself being clearly limited to the real dangers against which it was intended to provide...*" The Secretary of State was afraid that France's requirements in many cases exceed the British public limits. Secondly, Chamberlain repeated the government's intention not to participate directly in any allied arrangement on German eastern border. "... *I trusted that the western pact would not be allowed to founder on these eastern rocks, for I must say plainly that it is thus came to grief there would be an end of any possibility of a British Government taking part in any pact at all*", the Secretary of State wrote at the end of his letter.<sup>28</sup>

Great Britain and France agreed that if the German note required a detailed written reply, talks with Berlin should begin as soon as possible. London suggested that the British text of early July 1925, which did not impose any obligations on anybody, became a basis for negotiations and also came with the idea of inviting the legal adviser of the German government, Friedrich Gaus. He was supposed to meet with Hurst and Fromageot and try to reach agreement; subsequently, foreign ministers were supposed to meet and make the final decision. Germany expressed fundamental disagreement with this course of action. Berlin required that the ministers meet before the final wording of the proposal. This was due to concerns that Gaus could be forced to political decisions; the fact that he had not seen the document before was also to Gaus' disadvantage.<sup>29</sup>

One day later (24<sup>th</sup> July), the Secretary of State wrote to his French colleague. According to Chamberlain, there was no fundamental disagreement between Great Britain and France. "*France desires the reduction of armaments as we desire it. We recognise, as France recognises, that the obstacle to disarmament is the sense of insecurity which prevails in Europe, and that the road to disarmament lies through security. This is*

<sup>27</sup> TNA, FO 371/10736, C 9802/459/18, Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Mr. Phipps (Paris), July 23, 1925. Chamberlain was ready to recommend to the government the acceptance of most proposals incorporated by Fromageot and Hurst in section 8 of the agreement draft.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Compare ORDE, p. 116.

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*the basis of the policy of the Mutual Pact which we are pursuing together at this moment,*” the head of the Foreign Office wrote.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Chamberlain suggested to Briand the possibility of agreeing on a joint course of action for the immediate future. In his opinion, neither London nor Paris should presently take any steps toward a new proposal regarding the security issue. Should anybody else take such steps, we should jointly depreciate the subsequent discussion until the result of the current information exchange on the pact is known and until all associated matters are closed, the Secretary of State demanded.<sup>31</sup>

However, Eric Phipps’ report from Paris at the end of July was not very encouraging. He talked about the German note with Philipp Berthelot from the French foreign ministry,<sup>32</sup> who told him that he was not very pleased with the document. Moreover, he disclosed his intention to propose a reply to the German government clearly indicating that Germany must definitely agree with regular arbitration treaties that would be different from the peculiar agreements Berlin made with Switzerland and Sweden. The mandatory arbitration institute was another important point, according to Berthelot; *conditio sine qua non* of any agreement was unconditional entry of Germany in the League of Nations, according to him.<sup>33</sup>

The Secretary of the French foreign ministry also mentioned the issue of a conference that was supposed to be attended by representatives of Germany. He said that at that moment the idea of meeting with the German party was premature; Aristide Briand was of the same opinion. “*It would be folly to consent to a conference until all the principle points had been settled beforehand between the British and French governments,*” said Berthelot.<sup>34</sup>

On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1925, the French Foreign Minister received the Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris. According to Phipps, Briand agreed with the idea of an informal discussion with Austen Chamberlain and particularly insisted on demonstrating “*a united front to the Germans by*

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<sup>30</sup> TNA, CAB 24/174, C.P. 373 (25), July 24, 1925.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*. At the end of his letter, Chamberlain noted that these steps must be taken under complete cooperation with Belgium.

<sup>32</sup> Philippe-Joseph-Louis Berthelot (1866–1934) was the Secretary at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Until his death, he was one of the influential personalities at French domestic political scene.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 9984/459/18, Telegram from Mr. Phipps (Paris), July 27, 1925.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*. Berthelot hoped that a draft of the French reply would be ready within ten days.



*reaching an absolute agreement between Great Britain and France before meeting them*" [Germans – L. N.].<sup>35</sup>

The Secretary of State returned to the assessment of the German note of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925 one more time, in his letter to Ambassador D'Abernon. Chamberlain informed Berlin that he met with the German Ambassador who told him that his impression was that the Secretary of State was not satisfied with the wording of the note. *"I am bound to admit that he had correctly diagnosed my feeling, and that subsequent examination of the note has only confirmed my first impression,"* Chamberlain wrote.<sup>36</sup>

The head of the Foreign Office decided to provide D'Abernon with a detailed analysis of the aspects of the note he disagreed with.<sup>37</sup> The minister believed that a meeting of the negotiating parties at the earliest possible date was not appropriate. Furthermore, he advised the German government to accept the French note of June 1925 as a basis for subsequent negotiations, preferably with no other comments. *"The German Government have not seen fit to accept this advice,"* Chamberlain said, adding: *"They had it in their power to write a note which would have enabled me to insist on immediate conversations. They have chosen instead to write a note which will probably render unavoidable a further reply before any effective progress can be made."*<sup>38</sup>

Germany's entry in the League of Nations was another problem. According to Chamberlain, Berlin had known from the beginning that for the Allies, this step was neither a prerequisite for commencing negotiations on the security pact, nor a requirement for its signing, but an essential issue for the pact to come into effect. *"The Allies cannot enter into a discussion of the difficulties which Germany may find in entering the League. Any discussion of that nature must be conducted between Germany and the League itself, on whose behalf the Allies have no right to speak,"* the Secretary of State wrote.<sup>39</sup>

Chamberlain was most disappointed by the passage of the German note talking about a new arrangement of the occupied territory in the

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<sup>35</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 9994/459/18, Telegram from Mr. Phipps (Paris), July 28, 1925. Phipps had a good impression from the meeting with Briand. The French Foreign Minister also suggested coming to London and talking with his British colleague.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 10034/459/18, Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 28, 1925.

<sup>37</sup> Chamberlain decided for this form of communication, because he wanted D'Abernon to discuss everything directly with Stresemann.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 10034/459/18, Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 28, 1925.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

Rhineland. The Secretary of State was offended because D'Abernon had previously assured him on behalf of the German government that Berlin would not require amendment of articles 428–432 of the Treaty of Versailles as a prerequisite for signing the pact. In this context, Chamberlain asked the Ambassador about advisability of such a position of the German government.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion of his letter, the Secretary of State contemplated the phenomenon of security, which he described as *“a state of mind rather than a physical fact.”* If there is trust, stability will follow, he thought. The German negotiation proposition of February 1925 was important, according to Chamberlain, because it brought hope of stability and trust and, eventually, security. The German note of 20<sup>th</sup> July tried to pursue another principle, on the other hand. According to the head of the Foreign Office, the German government *“no longer appear in the rôle of a far-seeing contributor to the general cause of peace, but rather in that of a somewhat unwilling participant, who acquiesces in a scheme, not because of its intrinsic merits, but merely in the hope that concert will enable him to drive a bargain in other directions. In a word, the German note raises again those doubts as to Germany’s real intentions, which had in a large measure been allayed, and which must be cleared up if a lasting settlement is to be reached.”*<sup>41</sup>

In Berlin, the situation was perceived differently. The German government asked Ambassador D'Abernon to submit the message to London that it would be very dangerous for the pact negotiations at that moment if France came with a new note without any previous consultation. According to Berlin's position, some disagreements persisted which, however, were not of such nature so as to cause failure of the agreement. However, further talks had to take place through confidential diplomatic channels, D'Abernon informed on the German position, adding: *“Apprehension is acute lest a new French note should be sent, and is still more acute lest it should be published. Such a course would gravely increase party difficulties here.”*<sup>42</sup>

Austen Chamberlain was unpleasantly surprised by this German requirement. He wrote a sharp letter to Berlin, saying: *“I am amazed at the blindness of the German government to the inevitable consequences of their own action. They had it in their power to close the exchange of notes.”* In his opinion, Berlin only considered its internal political interests

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem. Chamberlain was afraid that this German requirement could cause the entire negotiations to fail.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 9992/459/18, Telegram from Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 28, 1925.

when drawing up the document, which was why the resulting treatise resembled more of an election manifesto that was sent to the French government.<sup>43</sup>

According to Chamberlain, the German government realized the consequences of its actions after the note was disclosed and therefore turned to D'Abernon to ask him to deliver a message to his minister. In Berlin's opinion, Allies' governments should now show "*a patience, forbearance and statesmanship, not to say a courage, in face of public opinion of which in effect they avow themselves incapable.*" Chamberlain wrote to D'Abernon that he probably did not realize what problems Berlin groundlessly caused not only to itself, but also to others. The last paragraph of Chamberlain's letter was marked as confidential, indicating the possibility of the Secretary of State together with Briand attempting to save Germany from the natural consequences of its course of action, "*but I dare not count on it,*" he wrote.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of July 1925, the situation around the security pact negotiations became more complicated. In Austen Chamberlain's opinion, Germany was to blame, posing a question of its future credibility by raising further requirements in its note of 20<sup>th</sup> July. The Secretary of State believed that Berlin should have simply accepted the French note of June 1925 as a basis for subsequent negotiations. Paris was not completely satisfied either. Through one of its important officials, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that Germany enter in regular arbitration agreements with its eastern neighbours, agree with the institute of mandatory arbitration in case of a conflict and join the League of Nations as soon as possible. Berlin, on the other hand, would consider rather inappropriate if France came with a new note, which would be published.

The French Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand, was ready to meet with his German colleague Stresemann, but only under the condition that he first reaches full agreement with Great Britain. He therefore suggested to the Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris, Phipps that he would come to London to talk directly with Austen Chamberlain.<sup>45</sup>

Paris proposed changes of the British text following, in its opinion, from the talks between Hurst and Fromageot. According to the French Ambassador in London, two points were particularly important: in article 2, Paris wanted to add the phrase "*ou à des actes hostiles*" after the words

<sup>43</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 9992/459/18, Chamberlain to Lord D'Abernon (Berlin), July 30, 1925.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Compare note 34. The Secretary of State informed the government about his French colleague's intention to come to London. Compare TNA, CAB 23/50, War Cabinet and Cabinet, Conclusions, Cabinet 43 (25), August 5, 1925.

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“*après les cas d’intervention ou d’attaque*”, as a reaction to articles 42 and 43 of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>46</sup>

The French Foreign Minister believed that this amendment is very important for the overall reading of the agreement. Another thing that France wanted to add concerned the actual voting in the Council of the League of Nations and partially also a potential danger of this procedure being misused. Briand therefore proposed the formulation: “*Le présent traité [meaning the British proposal – L. N.] devra être soumis au Conseil de la Société des Nations et devra être reconnu par le Conseil comme un engagement conforme au Pacte de la Société.*”<sup>47</sup>

At the end of the first decade in August, Ambassador D’Abernon let himself be heard again after a short pause. In his report to London, he informed about Berlin’s probable positions on the main points of the discussed pact. “*The following has been obtained from a secret source but may be regarded as exceptionally reliable,*” he wrote.<sup>48</sup>

In his opinion, the German government would unreservedly accept the principle that a military intervention would only be possible after an impartial procedure, not upon a unilateral decision. Furthermore, it would not require amendment of the Treaty of Versailles, but the arbitration institute must include cases of its different interpretation, D’Abernon wrote.<sup>49</sup> However, the Ambassador thought that Berlin would deem unacceptable not only the French guarantee of German-Polish arbitration agreement, but particularly the fact that France would unilaterally decide on its coming into effect. Germany, on the other hand, softened its objections to its joining the League of Nations. “*It is generally conceded that agreement on this question is attainable consequent on agreement on other points,*” the Ambassador referred.<sup>50</sup>

In the question of France’s guaranteeing the German-Polish arbitration agreement, Germany could rely on Great Britain’s position. London claimed from the very beginning that it was not interested in the issue

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<sup>46</sup> TNA, FO 371/10737, C 10146/459/18, Note communicated by Mr. de Fleuriau, July 31, 1925.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, FO 371/10738, C 10554/459/18, Telegram from Lord D’Abernon (Berlin), August 10, 1925. At the end of July, an article appeared in the *New Statesman* that praised Gustav Stresemann and German foreign policy: “*Either Dr. Stresemann is a much abler man than any of his predecessors within recent years, or he is much more ably advised. Even the most keen-eyed and hair-splitting of the Germanophobes of the Parisian Press have found it impossible to discover any serious fault in the German reply to the French note on the proposed Security Pact.*” *New Statesman*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1925.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, FO 371/10738, C 10554/459/18, Telegram from Lord D’Abernon (Berlin), August 10, 1925.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

of guarantees of arbitration agreements between Germany and its eastern neighbours and that it did not consider this question fundamental or binding for the pact itself.

Austen Chamberlain considered important that the negotiations do not fail due to the issue of guaranteeing arbitration agreements with Germany's eastern neighbours. "*Chamberlains feste Haltung betrifft der Sanktionen und seine unverhüllte Drohung bezüglich des Ostproblems beweisen einmal mehr, daß das Foreign Office nicht gesonnen war, die französische Politik zu unterstützen, wenn sie mit den britischen Konzeptionen nicht zu vereinbaren war,*" Peter Urbanitsch wrote.<sup>51</sup>

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Great Britain or, more precisely, the Foreign Office's response to the German memorandum of early 1925 could be seen as cold, which was mainly caused by the uncertainty about Berlin's actual intentions and a threat to the existing concept of the Foreign Office, consisting in an agreement with France. However, after London's rejection of the Geneva Protocol idea in March 1925, a situation arose when the British cabinet decided that the best means of achieving European security, while maintaining the established foreign policy limits, was represented by the German proposal of January 1925. This also initiated more than half-year long marathon of negotiations, which ended by the Locarno Conference. Great Britain's position was not easy. Austen Chamberlain realized that without British participation this project was bound to fail, which is why he promoted a more active approach than before. This meant appealing to France and Germany to align their ideas or, at least, to try to alleviate their mistrust and unwillingness to cooperate and leave any contentious issues for the joint meeting of the involved parties. However, London's position on one fundamental thing did not change even at this point – the British Government refused any engagement in the area east of the Rhine.

On 20<sup>th</sup> July, Germany published its response to the French note of mid June 1925. Neither London, nor Paris accepted its content quite positively, but Austen Chamberlain appreciated the fact that Berlin expressed its willingness to continue negotiating even though this meant another exchange of notes, in his opinion. At the same time, Great Britain and France agreed on commencing serious talks with Germany as soon as possible. After the situation became more complicated at the turn of July and August 1925, because Berlin, in Austen Chamberlain's opinion, raised further requirements, the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand suggested

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<sup>51</sup> URBANITSCH, pp. 217–218. Sir William Tyrrell expressed a similar opinion. According to him, London could not allow any European country to become a hegemon in Europe.

## **Lukáš Novotný**

Great Britain and the Journey to the Rhineland Pact (July–August 1925). A Contribution to the Issue of Collective Security in the 1920s

he would come to London and speak directly with his British colleague. Afterward, he was also willing to meet with Gustav Stresemann. The situation thus reached the point when a meeting of the French and British foreign ministers was necessary, with both men talking about the text of the French response to the German note of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925. Negotiations on the Locarno Pact thus entered another, decisive stage.<sup>52</sup>

### **Abstract**

The study is primarily based on the analysis of unpublished British sources and deals with the analysis of the attitude of Great Britain towards the problem of the collective security during July-August 1925. The negotiations were not simple but in June 1925 Great Britain and France concurred with the treaty proposal that arrived in Berlin afterwards. On 20<sup>th</sup> July, Germany published its response to the French note of mid June 1925. After the situation became more complicated at the turn of July and August 1925, the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand suggested he would come to London and speak directly with his British colleague. The situation thus reached the point when a meeting of the French and British foreign ministers was necessary, with both men talking about the text of the French response to the German note of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1925.

### **Keywords**

Great Britain, France, British Foreign Policy, Collective Security, Rhineland Pact

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<sup>52</sup> For the subsequent development and negotiations of legal experts in London at the turn of August and September 1925, compare L. NOVOTNÝ, *On the Journey to the Rhineland Pact. Contribution to the Study of British Perception of the Problem of Collective Security in the 1920s*. Őt Kontinens. Az Új-és Jelenkori Egyetemes Történeti Tanszék tudományos közleményei. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2009, pp. 369–383. For the role of Great Britain at the Locarno Conference, compare L. NOVOTNÝ, *Velká Británie a konference v Locarnu 1925*. Moderní dějiny. Sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století, Vol. 18, 2010, No. 2, pp. 23–49.