

Dominions, Great Britain and Questions Related to Imperial Foreign Policy Implementation and Direction in the 1920s and at the Beginning of the 1930s

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The study focuses on the problems of British-Dominion relations with a special regard to the share of the Dominions in formation, execution and direction of the imperial foreign policy in the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s. In the post war period, it was expected that recognition of a formal independence and a new international status of the British Dominions would be take place. Concurrently with a wider conception of the Dominion autonomy, a more intensive cooperation was realised within the Empire, which gradually led to a bigger interest of the overseas autonomous units in the decision-making process concerning the direction of the imperial foreign policy. The observed problems concentrated on two main fronts, it means the measure of consultations among the mother country and the Dominions and individual foreign policy questions, crisis, incidents and events that, in reality, contributed to a discussion concerning the share of overseas autonomous units in the formation and execution of the Imperial foreign policy from the side of the British Foreign Office. Balfour Declaration adoption, increasing the importance of the Dominions, began the period that was significant with pacification of debates concerning execution of the imperial foreign policy and during which it was necessary to wait for next few years for this status legislative approval till the adoption of the Statute of Westminster in December 1931.

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The First World War,¹ without this being obvious for the first view, constituted an important milestone in perceiving the Dominions posi-

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tion from the viewpoint of their mother country. Introducing the principle of permanent cabinet consultations via the Imperial War Cabinet and the vision of the empire federalisation final rejection led to the efforts to modify constitutional relationships among individual autonomous countries of the Commonwealth of that time. Newly, there should come about a full recognition of Dominions as self-governing nations of the imperial community. Participation of Dominions in the Paris Peace Conference, membership in a new international organisation – the League of Nations – and countersigning the Treaty of Versailles caused euphoria with overseas representatives that the moment arrived when their formal independence and new international status would be recognized. Despite everything, the First World War generally strengthened the idea that it is not possible to view the Dominions only as ordinary subordinate “colonies” or dependent territories and that they head towards a wider concept of autonomy and towards more intensive cooperation within the Empire. A joint responsibility for the imperial foreign policy was created among the mother country and Dominions during the war. Nations “originated” from Dominions, accentuating nationalism, and which gradually began to strive for so that they would obtain confirmation of a new constitutional position *de iure*, it means on the share rate in decision-making on the foreign policy of the British Empire heading.

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In the year of 1921, the question of what the rate of Dominions in decision-making on the imperial foreign policy heading in connection with the question of British-Japanese treaty renewal rose for the first time in a more considerable way.² The Great War verified alliance with the Japanese which provided a certain degree of the security feeling to the Pacific Dominions,³ but the after-war naval weakness of the British Empire in the Far East and in the Pacific⁴ led to the situation over-estimation and intensive cooperation initiation with the

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² C. D. ALLIN, “Recent Developments in the Constitutional and International States of the British Dominions”, in: *Minnesota Law Review*, 10, 1925/1926, pp. 104–110.

³ H. N. CASSON, “The Significance of the Imperial Conference”, in: *Barron's*, 1, 10, 11th July, 1921, p. 5.

⁴ The British Admiralty, with respect to the naval force resolution, had to decide if it

United States of America in the Pacific issues.⁵ Dominion statesmen were fully aware of the fact, that the question of alliance with the Japanese means a very important foreign policy decision, which not only the form of relations with the United States of America will unfold from, but also the position of the British Empire in the Far East and in the Pacific, and therefore this issue was intensively discussed at the Empire conference in London during the summer months of 1921.⁶ With respect to the fact that it was not possible to reach an agreement due to overseas politicians' divergent approaches, the decision on the form of future relations with Japan and other controversial issues had been left for the dealings in Washington.

The Naval Conference or Disarmament Conference, which took place in Washington at the turn of years 1921–1922, established a new resolution of naval forces, preclusive renewal of the British-Japanese alliance.⁷ The Washington dealings represented the first great opportunity during which the Dominions took a considerable part in creating an imperial foreign political line what meant that it would have influenced the heading of the British foreign policy.⁸ Especially the

was going to maintain the two naval bases in the Pacific – Singapore and Hong-Kong. Due to strategic and financial reasons and with respect to Australia and New Zealand attitudes, they finally chose Singapore as the main base. Cf. "Britain's Navy", in: *Evening Post*, Vol. 101, Is. 48, 25th February, 1921, p. 2; The National Archive London, Kew (further only TNA), Cabinet Office (further only CAB) 34/1, S. S. – 2, A. J. Balfour, Committee of Imperial Defence: Standing Sub-Committee: Naval and Military Situation in the Far East, 3rd May, 1921, ff. [1]–5 [7–11]; TNA, CAB 34/1, S. S. – 6, Committee of Imperial Defence: Standing Sub-Committee: Empire Naval Policy and Cooperation: Summary of Admiralty Recommendations in Regard to Dominions Naval Policy, 26th May, 1921, ff. [21–22].

⁵ TNA, CAB 1/4, 122–C, Committee of Imperial Defence: Anglo-Japanese Alliance: Effect of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance upon Foreign Relations, 28th February, 1920, ff. 4–5 [245].

⁶ "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance", in: *Spectator*, Vol. 125, No. 4802, 10th July, 1920, p. 39; Cmd. 1474, Conference of the Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India, Held in June, July, and August 1921: Summary of Proceedings and Documents, London 1921, p. 13; M. PRANG, "N. W. Rowell and Canada's External Policy, 1917–1921", in: *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 39, 1, 1960, p. 101.

⁷ J. A. WILLIAMSON, *A Short History of British Expansion: The Modern Empire and Commonwealth*, London 1947, pp. 349–350.

⁸ J. B. BREBNER, "Canada, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Washington Conference", in: *Political Science Quarterly*, 40, 1, 1935, p. 57.

Canadian representatives legitimately assumed that their resolute attitudes contributed to their foreign political priorities enforcement.⁹ In this respect, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George declared: “There was a time when Downing Street controlled the Empire; today the Empire gives orders to Downing Street.”¹⁰

After finishing the disarmament conference at the beginning of 1922, the position of Dominions in the international relationships still remained unsolved.¹¹ The problem with the Dominions international position had appeared sooner but it regained its topicality within the Chanak Crisis, sometimes also called the Chanak Incident, in September 1922, when not too “fast” response by the Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had shown that some Dominions had different opinions on the imperial foreign policy management. Ottawa representatives perceived the British-Canadian divergences that accompanied the Chanak Crisis and subsequent treaties from Lausanne as a confirmation of the fact that the existing direction trying to determine itself against obligations of “automatic acceptance” that the mother country arranged “on their behalf”, is the correct one. Therefore, they came to a conclusion that it is inevitable to strive for so that they would be able to make independent decisions on some foreign political affairs which they regarded as their sovereign Canadian interests. Mackenzie King understood the presence of dominion representatives next to the British representatives at the Paris peace negotiations as a precedent which a new international position should have been unfolded from and which, from his view point, had not been observed during the conference in Lausanne. The prime Minister repeated the argument spoken several times in the past, that the reason for rejection to undersign “automatically” the submitted treaty had been rooted in the fact that his country neither had been represented in the negotiations with Turkey, nor consulted in a sufficient way.¹²

⁹ R. L. BORDEN, *Canada in the Commonwealth: From Conflict to Co-operation*, Oxford 1929, p. 118.

¹⁰ G. GLASGOW, “The British View”, in: H. D. CROLY, *Roads to Peace: A Hand-book to the Washington Conference*, New York 1921, pp. 30–31.

¹¹ N. MANSERGH, *The Commonwealth Experience: From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*, Vol. 2, London 1982, p. 3.

¹² A. G. DEWEY, *The Dominion and Diplomacy: The Canadian Contribution*, Vol. 2, London 1929, pp. 147–166.

Similar disappointment was also visible with the Australian representatives. The Australian Prime Minister William Morris “Billy” Hughes had tried to improve the rate of imperial foreign matters consultations with the help of the imperial communication system change proposal. He was not successful in his effort because the then Secretary of State for Colonies, Sir Winston Churchill, did not want to change the used communication processes. At the same time, the Australian politicians represented “true-blue” followers of unite imperial foreign policy line. Hughes remarked that during the Chanak Crisis the Australians had been prepared to go to war beside the mother country not because of the fact they had undersigned the Treaty of Sèvres, but due to the fact they belong to the countries of the British Empire. Hughes felt himself very disappointed: “*Plain speaking between friends and blood relations is the best. [...] In foreign affairs the Empire must speak in one voice [...]*.”¹³ Hughes also critically viewed on non-conceptual imperial foreign policy which he compared to “*the footballs of British political parties*”.¹⁴ The Australian politicians continually held the opinion that “*a true Empire foreign policy [is] acceptable to all the Dominions*”.¹⁵

In the time of Chanak Crisis “*Australia was prepared to go to war – not because the Treaty of Sèvres had been signed by her, but because it was part of the Empire. [...] Although the decision] had not previously been consulted [...]*”.¹⁶ The question of timely consultations and the possibility to take part in decision making on imperial and foreign issues was an important factor that influenced Australian approach in September 1922. “Vague” idea of joint imperial foreign policy proved itself as inapplicable in practice. Everything was underlined by Hughes’ declaration: “*If [the Empire] is only another name for Britain, and the Dominions are to be told that things are done after they have been done, and that Britain has decided upon war, [...] the Dominions] have in fact no other alternative,*

¹³ TNA, Colonial Office (further only CO) 886/10/1, 54553/S, Commonwealth of Australia: The Governor-General to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2nd November, 1922, Doc. No. 359, ff. 259–260.

¹⁴ TNA, CAB 24/139/98, C. P. 4298, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia to the Secretary of State for Colonies, 2nd November, 1922, f. 682.

¹⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, No. 30, 24th July, 1923, p. 1183.

¹⁶ TNA, CO 886/10/1, 54323/S, Commonwealth of Australia: The Governor-General to the Secretary of State, 2nd November, 1922, Doc. No. 359, ff. 259–260.

then [...] all talk about the Dominions having a real share in deciding foreign and Imperial policy is empty air."¹⁷

The Australian policy accepted imperial level of the international policy due to specific – economic and political – interests in different area. At that time Hughes' government hesitated whether to carry out independent policy, or to cooperate with other Dominions and to formulate unified approaches. After assigning a "Liaison Officer" in London, Major Richard Gardiner Casey in 1924, the Australian government received confidential information concerning especially imperial foreign policy, without intermediators. This step contributed to the fact that the Australians, as compared with the previous times, began to coordinate their political steps with the mother country.¹⁸ Unlike them, Mackenzie King came to a different opinion. Canada did not strive for a joint responsibility while carrying out the imperial policy but for the fact, so that the foreign policy, realised by individual Dominions, could be divided from a unified Empire line. The Canadians did not require equality in order to decide on general direction of the imperial foreign policy, but to be able to carry out their own one.¹⁹

Circumstances accompanying the Chanak Crisis and treaties conclusion in Lausanne, had confirmed the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King that it was necessary to rid themselves of the obligations which resulted from the common policies and to enforce independent or, at least, autonomous form of Ottawa's foreign policy.²⁰ In 1923, due to this reason, he utilized completion of negotiations of so called the Halibut Treaty to show Canada's diplomatic independence.²¹ Mackenzie King estimated that British counter signature had been redundant, because the Canadians had concluded the treaty as

¹⁷ TNA, CO 886/10/1, 46974/S, Commonwealth of Australia: The Governor-General to the Secretary of State, 20th September, 1922, Doc. No. 318, ff. 238–239.

¹⁸ P. M. SALES, "W. M. Hughes and the Chanak Crisis of 1922", in: *Australian Journal of History and Politics*, 17, 3, 1971, p. 401; TNA, CO 886/10/4, D. 54369, Commonwealth of Australia: The Governor-General to the Secretary of State, 20th November, 1924, Doc. No. 113, f. 75.

¹⁹ R. M. DAWSON, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography: 1874–1923*, Vol. 1, London 1958, pp. 407–416; G. P. de T. GLAZEBROOK, *A History of Canadian External Relations*, London 1959, pp. 358–359; P. WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth: British-Canadian Relations, 1917–1926*, Cambridge 1977, p. 166.

²⁰ H. D. HALL, *Commonwealth: A History of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, London 1971, p. 500.

²¹ WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, p. 173.

for its contents on their own and therefore he let the treaty heading rewrite form "Great Britain" to "the Dominion of Canada".²² Despite the Foreign Office and the British Embassy employees strong disagreement he enforced that the concluded American-Canadian treaty would be undersigned by the Canadian Minister of Marine and Fisheries Ernest Lapointe himself, because it was dealt with a completely Canadian-American matter. In case it would not happen in this way he threatened with appointing a fully independent Canadian diplomatic representative in Washington.²³ Therefore the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs chose "minor evils". They agreed that the Canadian minister would confirm the treaty on his own as an authorised British representative without the presence of the Ambassador in Washington.²⁴ On the date of 2nd March 1923 Ernest Lapointe solemnly signed the Halibut Treaty with the American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes.²⁵

With hindsight, the Canadian diplomatic success of March 1923 proves as a significant impulse to further independent steps of Canada. Almost immediately it proved only in formal and intensive conclusions of treaties in the relationship among the Dominions and the mother country.²⁶ The necessity of reevaluating the policy towards the Dominions arose. The British Foreign Office regarded the affairs ac-

²² "From His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington to the Governor-General, Washington, 12th February, 1923", in: R. M. DAWSON (ed.), *The Development of Dominion Status, 1900-1936*, London 1965, p. 254; TNA, CO 886/10/2, 4825, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 24th January, 1923, Encl. to Doc. No. 440, f. 303.

²³ The question of the Canadian representation in Washington had already been solved in 1920. The Canadians obtained a permanent member in the British Embassy, but due to unclear status the post occupation was not realised. TNA, CO 886/10/2, 9411, Canada: The Governor-General to the Secretary of State, 21st February, 1923, Doc. No. 447, f. 306; P. WIGLEY, "Whitehall and the 1923 Imperial Conference", in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1, 2, 1973, p. 225.

²⁴ Cf. TNA, CO 886/10/2, 11044, Foreign Office to Sir A. Geddes (Washington), 1st March, 1923, Doc. No. 450, f. 308; CO 886/10/2, Foreign Office to Sir A. Geddes (Washington), 1st March, 1923, Doc. No. 452, f. 308; CO 886/10/2, 12272, Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to Foreign Office, 2nd March, 1923, Doc. No. 454, f. 309.

²⁵ "Convention between the United States of America and Great Britain, Signed at Washington, 2nd March, 1923", in: *United States Department of State Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923*, Vol. 1, Washington 1938, pp. 468-470.

²⁶ J. A. STEVENSON, "Canada's Halibut Treaty", in: *New Statesman*, 21, 524, 28th April, 1923, p. 73; P. W. WILSON, "The Imperial Conference", in: *North American Review*, 213, 1921, p. 730.

companying the conclusion of purely Canadian-American commercial treaty as a significant threat for the joint Empire diplomacy, because at one moment Lapointe had a geographically unlimited mandate at his disposal, representing not only the autonomous parts of the British Empire, but also the metropolis itself. There opened an opportunity for the Dominions to solve the foreign policy matters on their own and to rid of the role of the Foreign Office “sleeping” partner.²⁷

With respect to the circumstances accompanying the Chanak Crisis and negotiations in Lausanne, Mackenzie King came to the Imperial Conference in London in 1923 with the fundamental vision that the Dominions would have the right to execute their own foreign policy in order to avoid undesirable joint obligations. Simultaneously he assumed the diplomatic independency can be only proved when the Dominions obtain the possibility to conclude treaties with foreign states individually.²⁸ On 5th October 1923 there was a meeting held among the London and overseas representatives where the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs George Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Marquis Curzon of Kedleston, analysed in detail the development of the imperial policy in the last years and especially appealed on the sustenance of unified empire direction in the affairs that were of the Dominions and mother country joint interest.²⁹ In case of the joint imperial foreign policy he held the opinion that externally it is executed by the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, because the British represent the whole Empire.³⁰

Then, the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King remarked an extract from the speech of December 1921, where the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George said that “*the Dominions had been given equal rights with Great Britain in the control of the foreign policy of the Empire, that the instrument of this policy was, and must remain, the British*

²⁷ Cf. TNA, CO 886/10/2, 15576, House of Commons: Fishery Treaty, Canada and United States, 28th March, 1923, Encl. in Doc. No. 458, f. 311; A. L. LOWELL, “The Treaty Making Power of Canada”, in: *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review*, 2, 1/4, 1923/1924, p. 20; WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, pp. 178–179; G. M. WRONG, “The Evolution of the Foreign Relations of Canada”, in: *The Canadian Historical Review*, 5, 3, 1925, p. 14.

²⁸ WIGLEY, “Whitehall and the 1923 Imperial Conference”, p. 225.

²⁹ TNA, CAB 32/9, Imperial Conference, 1923: Stenographic Notes of the Third Meeting, Downing Street, 5th October, 1923, ff. 2–30 [25–40].

³⁰ DAWSON, *William Lyon Mackenzie King*, p. 458.

Foreign Office, and that the advantage to Britain was that such joint control involved joint responsibility".³¹ Mackenzie King subsequently criticized frequently used phrase of "foreign policy of the British Empire", where he pointed out the fact that "it may be that in using phrases such as 'foreign policy' there are different things in the minds of each of us" and each Dominion only takes care of the affairs which interest them. He also admitted the willingness to accept the fact that "the policy of Great Britain is the policy of the British Empire, but we want to know is how far the obligations arising out of that policy are material and how far they extend in reference to ourselves". He became aware of the fact that unified foreign policy in all spheres of interest of the Dominions and mother country is needful, but in practice he regarded it as unenforceable.³²

The Canadian Prime Minister, in a whole, represented nationalistic attitude and therefore he preferred complete autonomy of the Dominions.³³ Hence he held the opinion that self-governing overseas units have the right to solve home and geographically close foreign affairs which directly concern them, even though it would be dealt with a part of targeted Empire policy, and that the Dominion parliaments have the decisive executive power in these issues. He presumed that "if it is not possible or desirable that Great Britain or other Dominions should control these foreign affairs which are distinctly of primary concern to one Dominion, so it is equally impossible and undesirable for the Dominions to seek to control foreign affairs which primarily affect Great Britain".³⁴

The British, with respect to controversies from the past years, expected critical reactions by the Dominion representatives to the ways and frequency of consultancies from the mother country side, and therefore, in June 1923, they tried to prevent it by explaining all the binding processes that were valid with small modifications even at

³¹ Cf. TNA, CAB 32/9, Imperial Conference, 1923: Stenographic Notes of the Fourth Meeting, Downing Street, 8th October, 1923, ff. 11–12 [46–47].

³² "Foreign Relations: Statement by the Prime Minister [Mackenzie King], 8th October, 1923", in: L. C. CLARK (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations: 1919–1925*, Vol. 3, Ottawa 1970, Doc. No. 234, pp. 240–243; TNA, CAB 32/9, Imperial Conference, 1923: Stenographic Notes of the Fourth Meeting, Downing Street, 8th October, 1923, ff. 12–15 [47–48].

³³ H. D. HALL, "The Genesis of the Balfour Declaration of 1926", in: *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 1, 3, 1962, p. 192.

³⁴ TNA, CAB 32/9, Imperial Conference, 1923: Stenographic Notes of the Fourth Meeting, Downing Street, 8th October, 1923, ff. 14–15 [48].

the beginning of the 1930s. Due to the reasons of clearness they divided the communication concerning foreign affairs with the dominion governments into five areas: (1) Imperial Conferences; (2) international conferences; (3) the League of Nations; (4) general questions concerning international relationships; and (5) commercial treaties. Foreign Office stated that overseas Prime Ministers receive copies of all important telegrams and news of the British ambassadors and other foreign representatives daily during the Imperial Conferences holding. At the time when there were not any negotiations held within the Imperial Conference, the Foreign Office held the opinion, that it is enough to send the common news only once a week and information on important events, such as was the conference in Lausanne, provide regularly.³⁵

According to the British Foreign Office, that from the very beginning the essential role in the matter of international conferences had played the fact if the Dominions took part in them individually or the British represented them. In case the overseas autonomous units took part in these negotiations, the British and Dominion members of the British Empire Delegation should have cooperated during the meetings and in the joint secretariat; the treaties should have been signed separately on behalf of the Dominions. At the time, when the overseas was represented only by the mother country, it usually continuously informed the Dominions on the development in negotiations and consulted directly with them only the final documents which were signed separately by the Dominion representatives or only by the British negotiators. As for the question of international conventions, which at least one Dominion was especially interested in, the process of ratification should have consequently been consulted with it. Consultations with the Dominions concerning the matters falling within the competence of the League of Nations should have been held continuously according to their relevance and during the General Assembly sessions by means of regular meetings among the British and overseas delegates. The British promised to inform the Dominions on the general international matters on a regular basis. As for the commercial treaties, the Foreign Office employees did not set the precision pro-

³⁵ TNA, CO 886/10/2, 31326, Note on Present Procedure as Regards Communication with the Governments of the Self-Governing Dominions on Foreign Affairs, 22nd June, 1923, Doc. No. 122, f. 77 [239].

cess and due to the problems extensiveness, they left the decision to be made by the Imperial Conference participants.³⁶

On 10th October 1923 Lord President of Council James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquis of Salisbury, submitted to the British government members a memorandum that analysed the discussion on foreign relationships at the Imperial Conference and where he came to the conclusion that it would not be easy to balance different attitudes of the Dominions. According to Salisbury, it was dealt with two opposite conceptions which he characterised by the words as follows: "*Australia is trying to find how much common action is possible, and Canada tries to learn how much common action is desirable [...]*".³⁷ During the debates, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Curzon gradually rejected the idea that it is suitable to define precisely the principals of the imperial foreign policy formation, because he was afraid of the fact this could limit him in execution of used British policy.³⁸ The discussions on foreign policy did not come to any revolutionary conclusions, but on the other hand they escalated personal animosities among the participants.³⁹

Thus, the final accepted resolution aimed at the general evaluation of actual European and world affairs, such as the Ruhr Crisis, relationship to the United States of America and Japan, the League of Nations activities and so on. It completely neglected the ratifications of Lausanne treaties. Only in the last part there appeared an indirect answer to requirements that were mentioned by the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King: "*This Conference is a conference of representatives of the several Governments of the Empire; its views and conclusions on Foreign Policy [...] are necessarily subject to the action of the Governments and Parliaments of the various portions of the Empire, and it trusts that the results of its deliberations will meet their approval.*"⁴⁰ Therefore the conferring did not find any necessity to decentralize the foreign policy functioning.⁴¹

³⁶ Ibidem, f. 78 [240].

³⁷ TNA, CAB 24/162/8, C. P. 408 (23), Cabinet: The Discussion on Foreign Relations in the Imperial Conference, 8th October, 1923, ff. 1–5 [69–73].

³⁸ WIGLEY, "Whitehall and the 1923 Imperial Conference", p. 232.

³⁹ HALL, *Commonwealth*, p. 533.

⁴⁰ TNA, CAB 32/9, Imperial Conference, 1923: Stenographic Notes of the Sixteenth Meeting, Downing Street, 8th November, 1923, ff. 6–8 [204].

⁴¹ "Summary of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference and the Imperial Economic Conference", in: *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 14,

The conference participants also approved a binding process for negotiating, signing and ratification of international treaties which were undersigned by the authorised representatives and which were subject to the final approval. The Dominion representatives were able to negotiate conventions, but they were not allowed to omit any possible impacts on other autonomous governments or the Empire as a unit. Before the negotiations on conventions initialization they should have made sure that other Dominions are not interested in being informed on the proceedings in order to decide if they took part in the negotiations or not. In case of contractual arrangement negotiation at the international conferences by means of the British Empire Delegation, every participating party should have received information continuously. Bilateral agreements, which the obligations resulted from only for one Dominion, could have also been undersigned by a local authorized negotiator. At the moment, when the contractual stipulation bound more Dominions, these should have been undersigned by the appropriate number of delegates form the overseas autonomous units involved. The process of ratification should have been carried out in the same way.⁴²

The accepted resolution on the treaties conclusion, formally admitting different precedents from the past years, allowed resolving one of the problem points of imperial foreign policy execution and it contributed to the fact that the Dominions were partially acknowledged as individual states whose foreign policy is executed by the mother country which have to joint obligations to the Crown.⁴³ The British definitely waived from the control over the treaties conclusion which impinged on aspirations and constitutional attitudes of the Dominions on a long-term basis and which gained the right to negotiate and sign the treaties individually. Although they acknowledged superior position of the British Empire Delegation at the same time of the international conferences holding, the representatives of Dominions did not

53, 1923, p. 209.

⁴² TNA, CAB 32/22, E (T. C), Imperial Conference 1923: Committee on the Position of the Dominions and India in Relation to the Signature of Treaties and the Question of Territorial Waters: Conclusions of a Meeting of the above Committee, Foreign Office, 16th October, 1923, ff. i-iii.

⁴³ "Afterthoughts on the Imperial Conference", in: *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 14, 54, 1924, pp. 228-229; M. BELOFF, *Imperial Sunset: Dream of Commonwealth*, Vol. 2, London 1989, p. 85.

receives any guarantees that they will be adequately represented at them. There were specific discussions on the topic how to differentiate the obligations of one dominion resulting from bilateral contractual arrangements from the obligations of other Empire parts.⁴⁴

In the year of 1923, the basic difficulties of imperial foreign policy were rooted in the question what should be its form and who should execute it. When the Imperial Conference was finished, it was not possible to unify the opinions on the role of Dominion and British representative. The different attitudes lasted in the viewpoint of the Imperial Conferences role and of the dominion autonomy scope related to the imperial affairs where considerable responsibility and obligations resulted from. The discussion on imperial foreign policy showed that the Dominion Prime Ministers, especially of Canada and Australia, disagree in the view of the fact if the British Empire should be decentralized due to nationalistic tendencies or to keep a traditional centralised role of London.⁴⁵

In the first half of year 1924, the Dominion and British representatives negotiated on the draft of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, based on the Covenant of the League of Nations solving security guarantees, respectively naval and military sanctions.⁴⁶ The overseas politicians perceived the proposed vision of collective safety as the Empire endangering and therefore MacDonald's government finally refused it in September 1924.⁴⁷ From the beginning of October 1924 to March 1925, the Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes (also called the Geneva Protocol) was discussed in a similar way. The negotiations on the Protocol represented another test of Empire unity in the field of international policy and that is why no wonder that the Australian Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce appealed to the fact so that in "difficult and delicate matter the Empire should have single policy and speak with single voice".⁴⁸

⁴⁴ DEWEY, pp. 171–174; Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The British Empire: A Report on Its Structure and Problems*, London 1939, p. 217.

⁴⁵ WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, p. 199.

⁴⁶ W. H. MOORE, "The Dominions of the British Commonwealth in the League of Nations", in: *International Affairs*, 10, 3, 1931, p. 383.

⁴⁷ L. NOVOTNÝ, "Postoj britských dominií k Locarnskému paktu", in: *Acta Fakulty filozofické Západočeské univerzity v Plzni*, 3, 2, 2011, pp. 20–21; P. J. YEARWOOD, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914–1925*, Oxford 2009, pp. 282–303.

⁴⁸ The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governors-General of Canada, the Com-

With respect to the course of Chanak Crisis, circumstances accompanying the Halibut Treaty and negotiations in Lausanne it might appear at first glance that the Geneva Protocol finished an era when the British had to face inconsistent opinions of the Dominion representatives and Leopold Amery's entrance in the position of the Secretary of State for Colonies started the era of "harmonic" relationships among the mother country and self-governing parts of the Commonwealth. But the opposite was true. The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Austin Chamberlain began, with the declaration of a new British principal of collective security, the way leading to Locarno treaties conclusion, which shocked the unified imperial foreign policy in its basis.⁴⁹

Already at the beginning of April 1925 there appeared "warning signals", indicating that the Dominions do not completely agree with the ongoing negotiations on the European Safety Protocol and that there is a threat of refusal from their side.⁵⁰ Austin Chamberlain did not feel the need to organize a meeting of the Dominion representatives in London and he did not admit any discussions on the foreign policy direction finding. According to his opinion, the British Islands defence should have been of the same Empire importance as the protection of Australian coast or guarding of Canadian borders had against invasions.⁵¹ The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs presumed that "if the Dominions would admit that Britain's defence was an imperial interest, then they must also understand that the first line of that defence was now on the Rhine".⁵² The Dominions expected that this would be consulted with them but this was not realised in practice.⁵³

monwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and the Governor of Newfoundland, 15th January, 1925, in: Cmd. 2458, Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes: Correspondence Relating to the Position of the Dominions, London 1925, [Doc.] No. 4, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁹ WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, p. 240.

⁵⁰ University of Cambridge: Churchill College: Churchill Archives Centre (further only CAC), Amery Papers (further only AP), AMEL 2/1/10, Lambert to L. S. Amery, 2nd April, 1925, [s. f.].

⁵¹ TNA, Foreign Office (further only FO) 800/257, A. Chamberlain to Kerr, 6th April, 1925, ff. [497–498].

⁵² WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, p. 243.

⁵³ G. GLASGOW, *From Dawes to Locarno: Being a Critical Record of an Important Achievement in European Diplomacy 1924–1925*, London 1926, p. 11.

Austin Chamberlain declared that “the Dominions will have the opportunity to decide freely whether they undersign the document or not”.⁵⁴ He held the opinion that the Dominions should be left completely free in approving.⁵⁵ At the same time this step meant breach of the existing doctrine of the united imperial policy and therefore, in this respect, the Foreign Office came to the conclusion there is no obligation of the Dominions according to the International, British or local Laws to help the mother country in case of war; just a moral obligation.⁵⁶

When the Locarno conference finished, it was decided that the Locarno treaties ceremonial signing would be held on 1st December 1925 in London.⁵⁷ Canadian advisor on external relations Oscar Skelton and his ancestor Loring Christie viewed on the Locarno protocol with a relentless “nationalistic logic”. The question of continental security guarantees always had represented a burning problem for the traditional joint imperial diplomacy. Skelton and Christie held the opinion that Britain disturbed the imperial unity by accepting long-term strategic obligations what, according to their opinion, should justify Canadian effort to obtain the possibility of executing independent foreign policy which would be sometimes determined against some steps made by the mother country.⁵⁸

The fear of the Dominion reactions was well-founded. On 12th October 1925, *The Times* published South African General Jan Christian (Christiaan) Smuts’ opinions which criticised the Locarno Pact and concluding it he considered as a big foreign political mistake; according to his opinion the imperial foreign policy should not be automatically shifted for the policy of Great Britain. He warned the British politician forcefully that “there can come a day when the Dominions feel they have nearly nothing in common with similar policy and will start their

⁵⁴ L. NOVOTNÝ – R. KODET, *Velká Británie a konference v Locarnu: Příspěvek ke studiu kolektivní bezpečnosti ve 20. letech 20. století*, Plzeň 2013, pp. 201–202.

⁵⁵ CAC, AP, AMEL 2/1/10, A. Chamberlain to L. S. Amery, 6th August, 1925, [s. f.].

⁵⁶ R. F. HOLLAND, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance, 1918–1939*, London 1981, p. 48.

⁵⁷ E. MAISEL, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919–1926*, London 1994, p. 181.

⁵⁸ N. HILLMER, “The Anglo-Canadian Neurosis: The Case of O. D. Skelton”, in: P. LYON (ed.), *Britain and Canada: Survey of a Changing Relationship*, London 1976, p. 76; C. P. STACEY, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies, 1921–1948, The Mackenzie King Era*, Vol. 2, Toronto 1981, p. 79; WIGLEY, *Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth*, pp. 246–247.

own foreign policy in their own interest".⁵⁹ At the same time he expressed his opinion that the Dominions will most likely avoid security protocol and an unpleasant situation can occur and they will consider it as a precedent that can result in an indifference to Great Britain foreign policy in the future.⁶⁰

Although the British Parliament finally approved the he Rhineland Pact discussions related to European obligations acceptance confirmed a long-term trend from the Dominion side which had been started by the Chanak Crisis in 1922, it means that the Dominion and British politicians do not often agree in the matter that should be the subject of a joint interest. Due to this reason the united imperial foreign policy was not executed and enforced successfully. Therefore, the British politicians placed their hopes in the Imperial Conference convocation in 1926 and they expected it will help to renew the Empire unity that was shaken by a number of crisis and disagreements in the years of 1922–1925.

On 19th October 1926 the British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin inaugurated the Imperial Conference with a speech where he summarized successes of past meeting of the London and overseas politicians on one hand, and indicated the future direction of the Empire on the hand.⁶¹ The conference took place at the time when the imperial foreign policy "visibly found" its limits when most of the Dominions refused to accept the Treaty of Locarno⁶² due to lack of consul-tancies and way of communication among the British and overseas politicians. The British Empire found itself in a situation when it was

⁵⁹ NOVOTNÝ – KODET, p. 204.

⁶⁰ Cf. CAC, AP, AMEL 2/2/24, Smuts to L. S. Amery, Irene, 21st October, 1925, f. [s. p.]; CAC, AP, AMEL 2/2/24, Smuts to A. Chamberlain, Irene, 21st October, 1925, ff. [1]–3; TNA, FO 800/258, Smuts to A. Chamberlain, Irene, 21st October, 1925, ff. [588–589].

⁶¹ Cmd. 2769, Imperial Conference, 1926: Appendices to the Summary of Proceedings, London 1927, pp. 5–14; TNA, CAB 32/46, E. (1926), Imperial Conference, 1926: Stenographic Notes of the First Meeting, Downing Street, 19th October, 1926, ff. [2–6].

⁶² To the question concerning the way of the communication and consultations system among Great Britain and the Dominions see TNA, FO 372/2197, P. A. Koppel, Memorandum on Consultation with and Communication to the British Dominions on Foreign Policy, 16th January, 1926, ff. [1]–12; TNA, FO 372/2197, Memorandum on the Existing Arrangements for Communication of Information Regarding Foreign Affairs to the Governments of the Dominions, 8th February, 1926, ff. [42–47].

nearly impossible for one country to control exclusively the imperial foreign policy.⁶³

The key document originating during the conference negotiations was Balfour declaration on the status of autonomous overseas units and the relations among the Dominions and the mother country which were defined as follows: "*They are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.*" The equal status of Great Britain and the Dominions was emphasized by the fact the mother country ranked among the seven "autonomous communities"⁶⁴ which were the part of the Empire. The Dominions, next to Great Britain as the seventh self-governing unit, obtained full internal and external autonomy due to and under specific conditions enabling abandonment of the Commonwealth.⁶⁵

In the end of October 1926, the imperial foreign policy and Locarno Pact were discussed at the meeting of the Imperial Conference. There was held a discussion if they should strictly adhere to the joint foreign policy or if it was more suitable to introduce a principle of local external relations as another aspect of the imperial foreign policy. Though the Australians and New Zealanders finally decided to approve the Locarno Treaties, the South Africans, Irish and Canadians still remained adamant.⁶⁶ The fact, that had often been emphasized during the post-war period that especially the Union of South Africa and Canada never more wished to be included in the British policy on the European continent, was proved again and therefore they preferred political isolationism, but on the other hand the Pacific Dominions expressed their willingness to support the mother country in its policy and to accept the guarantees and obligations resulting from the

⁶³ TNA, FO 372/2197, Percy A. Koppel, Memorandum on Consultation with and Communication of Information to the British Dominions on Foreign Policy, [16th January, 1926, f. 1].

⁶⁴ TNA, CAB 32/46, E. (1926), Imperial Conference, 1926: Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations: Minutes of the First Meeting of the Committee, 27th October, 1926, f. 2 [8].

⁶⁵ J. DARWIN, "Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars", in: *The Historical Journal*, 23, 3, 1980, p. 661.

⁶⁶ TNA, CAB 32/46, E. (1926), Imperial Conference, 1926: Stenographic Notes of the Eights Meeting, Downing Street, 25th October, 1926, ff. [84–97].

Rhineland Pact.⁶⁷ Despite all of this the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Amery presumed that the Conference contributed to Empire unity and equality of its members strengthening.⁶⁸ In the years of 1926–1939 the Dominion representatives gradually admitted that the part of the imperial foreign policy was also the British foreign political line towards Europe.⁶⁹

With respect to the wording of Balfour declaration some partial modifications were also carried out in the process of treaties conclusion. Even though the appropriate resolution remained still valid from the conference in 1923, The Dominion status now defined and confirmed that negotiations, signing and ratification of treaties were executed exclusively on behalf of the whole British Empire which Dominions are united under a special relation to the Crown. The Dominion negotiators authorised by their governments disposed of the power of attorney to sign the negotiated international treaties.⁷⁰ Two articles of the final report were devoted to the questions of communication and the way of consultations in the framework of the Empire and their titles were the “System of Communication and Consultation” and “Position of Governors-General”. The Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations members evaluated the situation and they came to a conclusion that “*the Governor-General is no longer the representative of His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain; there is no one therefore in the Dominion capitals in a position to represent with authority the views of His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain*”.⁷¹ It was dealt with a wider consensual conception which the Dominion politicians agreed with.⁷²

⁶⁷ S. R. ASHTON – S. E. STOCKWELL (eds.), *British Documents on the End of Empire Series: Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925–45, Serie A, Vol. 1*, London 1997, p. xxxiii; CAC, AP, AMEL 5/39, The Times: Cooperation in the Empire: Mr. Bruce on Future Problems, 22nd December, 1926, f. [51].

⁶⁸ CAC, AP, AMEL 5/39, The Times: Results of the Imperial Conference: Unity Strengthened, 20th November, 1926, f. [29]; CAC, AP, AMEL 5/39, Canada: Equality and Unity, 4th December, 1926, f. [35].

⁶⁹ N. MANSERGH, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy 1931–1939*, London 1952, p. 67.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ TNA, CAB 32/56, Doc. E 129, Imperial Conference, 1926: Inter-Imperial Relations Committee: Report, 18th November, 1926, f. 10.

⁷² BORDEN, *Canada in the Commonwealth*, pp. 125–126; R. L. BORDEN, “The Imperial Conference”, in: *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 6, 4, 1927, pp. 204–205; CAC, AP, AMEL 2/4/2, Bruce to L. S. Amery, 11th November, 1926, ff. [1]–4;

The originated compact system of communication and the way of consultations by means of High Commissioners in the period between the Imperial Conferences represented a new challenge not only for the Dominions, but for the mother country as well. The Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations, preparing the conference agendas, admitted in June 1926 that it is desirable to develop closer personal contacts with the Dominion representatives in the way which they had been established in case of Australian "Liaison Officer" Major Casey in 1924.⁷³ The idea of High Commissioners scheme from the year of 1926 consisted of the fact that each Dominion would have one British High Commissioner in the Capital who would fulfil quasi diplomatic task and consult actual tasks on a bilateral level.⁷⁴ The system of communication by means of the High Commissioners who represented their government began to be fully developed in the end of 1920s and it was expected to be more effective than the previous information transmission by means of Governor-Generals.⁷⁵ As for the questions of organisation and frequency of the Empire conference sessions they did not come to a full agreement because the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Leopold Amery required so that there would be held a "smaller session" of the British and Dominion representatives in parallel to the League of Nations negotiations each year in October, and once a three years enlarged for the Prime Ministers, while the fixed date did not suit to the Dominion Prime Ministers due to frequent complex home affairs.⁷⁶

CAC, AP, AMEL 2/4/2, Bruce to L. S. Amery, 23rd November, 1926, ff. [1]–4; CAC, AP, AMEL 2/4/7, Athlone to L. S. Amery, Pretoria, 9th November, 1926, ff. 3–4; R. M. DAWSON, *The Government of Canada*, 5th Ed., Toronto 1970, pp. 144–145; TNA, CO 886/10/4, D. 53845, New Zealand: House of Representatives: Dominions' Status in Foreign Policy of Empire, 1st September, 1925, Doc. No. 128, f. 92 [465]; TNA, CO 886/10/4, D. 430/27, Extracts from a Speech Made by the Right Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King, 13th December, 1926, Doc. No. 140, ff. 113–117 [475–477].

⁷³ CAC, AP, AMEL 2/4/6, [L. S. Amery] to Coates, 10th March, 1926, f. 4; TNA, CAB 24/180/77, E (B) 13, Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1926: Report No. 3 of Committee on Questions Affecting Inter-Imperial Relations, 22nd June, 1926, ff. 1–4 [461–462].

⁷⁴ BELOFF, p. 95; HALL, *Commonwealth*, pp. 589–590, 596–597; H. G. SKILLING, *Canadian Representation Abroad*, Toronto 1945, pp. 115–116.

⁷⁵ See N. HILLMER, "A British High Commissioner for Canada, 1927–1928", in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1, 3, 1973, pp. 339–356.

⁷⁶ TNA, CAB 24/180/77, C. P. 276 (26), Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1926 (Documents) Committee: Second Report, 20th July, 1926, ff. 3–4 [456–457]; TNA, CAB

Especially Dominion politicians held the opinion that the Balfour Declaration of 1926 consists of the fact there should be balance between the principals of joint imperial foreign policy and cooperation in the framework of the Empire on one hand and between the equal status and autonomy on another hand. Despite all these circumstances the Dominion representatives were of different opinions concerning the closer connections and solution of constitutional anomalies. The South Africans and Irish rather preferred equality to self-government, while especially the Australians insisted on the importance of keeping the Empire unity.⁷⁷ In spite of everything Arthur Balfour and Leopold Amery held the opinion that they were successful in bringing more unity in the relations among the mother country and Dominions.⁷⁸ After the year of 1926 the question of Empire doctrine *inter se* was plentifully discussed and its basis consisted of the fact that the relations among the Commonwealth members were not of an ordinary character because they were not observed from the view point of international law as of foreign countries. Therefore, the mutual misunderstandings or even disputes were not of the international incidents or crisis character, but they were solved in the intentions of internal rules, or jurisdiction. This special relation together with the joint obligations to the Crown helped to maintain the diplomatic unity of the British Commonwealth of Nations. From another point of view, the *inter se* doctrine endangered recognition of Dominions as independent countries by the international community because of the specific relations the members of the Commonwealth they hardly could be sovereign states. In the course of time the doctrine became the basis for the Imperial preference tariffs, because it was not dealt with commercial relation with foreign countries.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, ambiguities in the *inter se* doctrine application persisted on the level of multilateral treaties even at the beginning of the 1930s.⁸⁰

24/180/77, E (B) 13, Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1926: Report No. 3 of Committee on Questions Affecting Inter-Imperial Relations, 22nd June, 1926, ff. 1–4 [461–462].

⁷⁷ See HALL, *Commonwealth*, p. 696; HOLLAND, pp. 116–117; M. OLLIVIER (ed.), *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences from 1887 to 1937*, Vol. 3, Ottawa 1954, p. 295.

⁷⁸ DARWIN, p. 661.

⁷⁹ See J. E. S. FAWCETT, *The Inter se Doctrine of Commonwealth Relations*, London 1958, pp. 5–48; L. LLOYD, “Loosening the Apron Strings: The Dominions and Britain in the Interwar Years”, in: *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 92, 369, 2003, pp. 282–285.

At the beginning of January 1930, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Sidney James Webb, 1st Baron Passfield, suggested with respect to the planned special Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa (1932) so that imperial economic matters would be also discussed during the meeting of London and overseas representatives in 1930 so that it would not be necessary to organize the Imperial Economic Conference in the same way as this was in 1923. It was dealt with the first and, at the same time, last meeting where the Dominion and British representatives did not broadly discussed the direction of the Imperial foreign and defensive policy or constitutional questions and where most of the time was spent by debates about economic questions and steps that should be done for the Commonwealth economic recovery due to the Great Depression outbreak.⁸¹ Considering the fact that they were not successful to reach any conclusions in the economic sphere, especially concerning the Imperial Preferences, nor closed imperial economic union, it was regarded as less successful.⁸² After a long period, this was the first meeting of the British and overseas politicians in this new form because, for nearly all Prime Ministers, this was the first meeting in their new positions at; restrain concerning some questions was thus on the spot.

As for the question of the communication system and consultations concerning the imperial foreign policy, the previous Imperial Conference in 1926 defined a lot of recommendations especially in the field of the information communication and coordination of steps within the treaty negotiations and execution of the foreign political line. The conferring pointed out the necessity of continuing in existing recommendations and in deepening mutual awareness at government level within the negotiations of issues that would another autonomous part of the British Empire be interested in. Simultaneously, the British and Dominion politicians pointed out the efficient system

⁸⁰ TNA, 32/83, E. (B) (30) 2, Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1930: G. Mounsey, First Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations: Encl. No. 2, 4th June, 1930, ff. [17]–20.

⁸¹ TNA, CAB 24/209/9, C. P. 9 (30), Cabinet: Imperial Conference and Economic Conference: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs, 9th January, 1930, ff. [1]–3 [45–46].

⁸² Cf. CAC, AMEL 1/5/3, L. S. AMERY, "Imperial Conference Ends in Failure: Socialist Rebuff to the Dominions", in: *Home and Empire*, December 1930, f. 5; CAC, AMEL 1/5/3, Hints for Speakers, 11th December, 1930, ff. 19–20.

of appointing His Majesty's diplomatic representatives who represent the interests of the British Commonwealth countries.⁸³ Likewise, the evaluated functioning and development of the communication in the framework of the Empire concerning the questions relating not only to foreign policy, but to common agenda as well, by means of the High Commissioners in London together with a traditional enlargement of personal contacts among the British Cabinet representatives and Dominion governments.⁸⁴ Despite the fact they were able to meet each other in person during the meetings of ministers and officers at the Imperial Conferences, or special meetings, to develop contacts within the visits with the High Commissioners in London, diplomatic representatives from other parts of the Empire in foreign cities and with the representatives in Geneva and at international conferences, from the view point of the British government nothing of this could fully substitute the system of official communication among the governments.⁸⁵

The participants of the Imperial Conference commented on the ways of communication among the Dominion and foreign governments. Especially the Irish delegation stated critical position to a lot of practical communication steps.⁸⁶ Even though the circumstances and rules of the third countries Dominion envoy accreditations had already been defined by the resolution from 1926, it was again improved; especially in the areas where the autonomous government had their specific interests and did not disturb the general imperial line.⁸⁷ The British Government had to be informed on everything and

⁸³ Cmd. 3717, Imperial Conference, 1930: Summary of Proceedings, London 1930, pp. 27–29.

⁸⁴ TNA, CAB 32/88, Imperial Conference, 1930: Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations: Conclusions of the 7th Meeting of the Committee, House of Lords, 20th October, 1930, f. 6.

⁸⁵ TNA, 32/83, E. (B) (30) 13, Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1930: G. Mounsey, The System of Communication and Consultation between His Majesty's Governments: Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations, 17th July, 1930, f. 3.

⁸⁶ TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: Certain Questions Raised by the Irish Free State, 12th September, 1930, ff. [1]–2.

⁸⁷ Cmd. 3717, pp. 29–30; TNA, CAB 32/88, Imperial Conference, 1930: Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations: Conclusions of the Fourth Meeting of the Committee, House of Lords, 14th October, 1930, f. 6.

to obtain a copy of negotiated documents.⁸⁸ There was a statement that commercial treaties negotiations with foreign countries, social telegram problems (congratulations, letters of condolence, etc.), presence in non-political conferences and other matters of civilian character are within the scope of the Dominion activities.⁸⁹

As for the High Commissioners status in London, the British Government, with respect to the importance and exclusivity or uniqueness of the Dominion representatives position in Great Britain, came to a conclusion that their position should have been emphasized in a number of cases by providing them the status of importance right after the Secretaries of State and before the Cabinet Ministers. Only in case of the Dominion Minister visit it was admitted that he was of higher status than the High Commissioners.⁹⁰ The High Commissioners, as well as the representatives of the British Commonwealth, were privileged to the envoys and foreign countries ambassadors, as the Dominions wished.⁹¹

At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s the imperial foreign policy concentrated on the four main problems: (1) To definitely solve political, financial and other problems related to the Great War and subsequent peaceful settlement; (2) to settle disputes among the nations on the basis of security, mutual assistance, the League of Nations covenant and other tools enabling the prevention of a war outbreak; (3) to support efforts of decreasing and limiting armament; and (4) to protect British interests abroad and develop friendly and fruitful relations with foreign countries. From the view point of the British diplomacy, less successful was the activity in the field of customs barrier decreasing be-

⁸⁸ TNA, CAB 32/88, Imperial Conference, 1930: Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations: Conclusions of the 7th Meeting of the Committee, House of Lords, 20th October, 1930, f. 2.

⁸⁹ TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: Status of High Commissioners: Memorandum prepared by His Majesty's Government in the Union of South Africa, Pretoria, 14th July, 1930, f. [1].

⁹⁰ Cmd. 3717, pp. 29–31; TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: Status of Dominion High Commissioners: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Dominions Office, 15th October, 1930, ff. [1]–2; TNA, 32/83, E. (B) (30) 21, Cabinet: Imperial Conference, 1930: Status of Dominion High Commissioners, Dominions Office, August, 1930, ff. [1]–4.

⁹¹ TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: The Channel of Communication between Dominion Governments and Foreign Governments: J[ames] H[enry] T[homas], Note by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 13th October, 1930, ff. [1]–2.

cause most European countries and the United States of America insisted upon the strict protectionist policy. At the same time, the representatives of the British Foreign Office submitted an important memorandum at the Conference, where they warned about the fact that the countries of the British Commonwealth were, together with the general obligations as the member of the League of Nations, bound with other regional obligations resulting from the special relations with Egypt, Sudan, Iraq and mandate territories, from the post-war treaties of 1919–1923, the Locarno Pact and the Four-Power Treaty in Washington, in 1921, concerning the island territories in the Pacific.⁹² In many respects, these were older treaty obligations which total number was twenty-one.⁹³

Foreign Office was still responsible for the imperial foreign policy execution even though the Dominions took important part in decision-making process of its direction. Nevertheless, all the Dominion Prime Ministers fully identified themselves with the formulations concerning the foreign policy line in Balfour declaration, and that is why there were quite often different explanations on the measure of joint liability among the “autonomous communities” for execution of the imperial foreign policy and a real version of their independent status.⁹⁴ For example, General James Barry Munnik Hertzog generally regarded the accepted constitutional declaration as the confirmation of a sovereign international status, *de facto* independence, of the South Africans in the

⁹² TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: The Foreign Policy of His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom Together with a List of Commitments Arising out of the Policy or the Foreign Policy of Other Nations, Foreign Office, 22nd September, 1930, ff. 3–5.

⁹³ HALL, *Commonwealth*, p. 693.

⁹⁴ TNA, CO 886/10/4, D. 12913/26/S, Stamfordham to Hankey, 29th November, 1926, Encl. in Doc. No. 149, f. 147 [492]; TNA, CO 886/10/4, Mr. L. S. Amery (Dominions Office) to Sir Sidney Low, 29th November, 1926, Doc. No. 150, f. 148 [493]; TNA, CO 886/10/4, D. 13330/26, Sir Sidney Low to Mr. L. S. Amery (Dominions Office), 4th December, 1926, Doc. No. 152, f. 150 [494]; TNA, CO 886/10/4, Mr. L. S. Amery (Dominions Office) to Sir Sidney Low, 15th December, 1926, Doc. No. 154, ff. 151–152 [494–495]; TNA, CO 886/10/4, Sir Sidney Low to Mr. L. S. Amery (Dominions Office), 17th December, 1926, Doc. No. 155, ff. 152–153 [495]; K. YOUNG, *Arthur James Balfour: The Happy Life of the Politician Prime Minister, Statesman and Philosopher 1848–1930*, London 1963, pp. 450–451; K. C. WHEARE, *The Statute of Westminster and Dominion Status*, 4th Ed., Oxford 1949, p. 28.

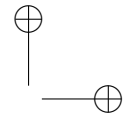
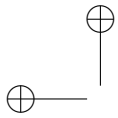
framework of the Empire.⁹⁵ This brought him to the fact that he accentuated the meaning of Balfour Declaration in many of his speeches on this aspect that under special circumstances it allows the South African Union to declare neutrality in case of a war conflict, it means to avoid joint obligations in the area of the imperial foreign policy.⁹⁶ For a change, the Australian representatives criticized incompatibility of equal status principles for the members of the British Commonwealth with the principle of joint loyalty.⁹⁷

Compared to the period before the year of 1926, the crisis situations or even mutual disputes in the area of the imperial foreign policy at the end of the 1920s and at the very beginning of the 1930s were as if they disappeared. Concerning the international relations, there was not more important crisis or events where the different opinions of the mother country and Dominions appeared in respect of practical execution or general direction of the imperial foreign policy. As if this dealt with different steps of the League of Nations, establishment of the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament, holding the Geneva Naval Conference in the summer months of 1927, British-French compromise negotiations or the course of the London Naval Conference in 1930. Partially this was due to the fact the overseas politicians accentuated the progress of constitutional relations within the Empire. This process was supported, and from a specific viewpoint preferred,

⁹⁵ Cf. University of Cambridge: Cambridge University Library (further only CUL), Smuts Papers (further only SP) Add MS 7917, Vol. 3, Smuts to Mr. and Mrs. Gillet, Irene, 30th November, 1926, Doc. No. 472, f. 386; CUL, SP, Add MS 7917, Smuts to Mr. and Mrs. Gillet, Irene, 13th December, 1926, Doc. No. 475, f. 388.

⁹⁶ See H. M. CLOKIE, "International Affairs: The British Dominions and Neutrality", in: *The American Political Science Review*, 34, 4, 1940, pp. 737–749; W. K. HANCOCK, *Smuts: The Fields of Force, 1919–1950*, Vol. 2, London 1968, pp. 205–206; TNA, DO 114/22, D. 3177/28, Union of South Africa: Speech by the Prime Minister (General J. B. Hertzog) in the House of Assembly, 8th March, 1928, Doc. No. 429, ff. 323–330; TNA, DO 114/22, Union of South Africa: Speech by the General J. C. Smuts in the House of Assembly, 8th and 15th March, 1928, Doc. No. 430, ff. 331–338; TNA, DO 114/22, D. 3492/28, Union of South Africa: Speech by the Minister of Defence (Mr. F. H. P. Creswell) in the House of Assembly, 15th March, 1928, Doc. No. 431, ff. 338–341; TNA, DO 114/22, D. 3909/28, Union of South Africa: Speech by Prime Minister (General J. B. Hertzog) in the House of Assembly, 19th and 26th March, 1928, Doc. No. 432, ff. 341–352.

⁹⁷ TNA, 32/81, Imperial Conference, 1930: Committee on Certain Aspects of Inter-Imperial Relations: Memorandum Prepared by His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia, 24th October, 1930, f. [1].



because it “damped” a natural interest of the Dominion representatives in the imperial foreign policy, as they had to a newly negotiated “independence” defend with the British quite often, or to explain it in front of the local electors.

* * *

The problems of margin of choice concerning formation and direction and share in the execution of the imperial foreign policy represented two main key fronts in the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930, it means the consultancy rate among the mother country and overseas autonomous units and individual foreign policy questions, crisis and events which, in practice, proved the dominion share in the imperial foreign policy execution. Since the Balfour Declaration acceptance at the Imperial Conference in autumn 1926, it was necessary to wait for other five years when the process of legislation, agreed later on at the Imperial Conference in 1930, reached the successful end in the form of the Statute of Westminster. A new front of the British-Dominion relations form reflected in a modified position of the autonomous overseas units and in a bigger interest in the margin of co-decision-making concerning the formation, direction and execution of the imperial foreign policy.

