Together and Alone in Allied London: Czechoslovak, Norwegian and Polish Governments-in-Exile, 1940–1945

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ABSTRACT

The vicissitudes of the Second World War generated many cases of political representation in exile. By 1942, London hosted eight governments and several ‘free movements’ that each claimed to be speaking for occupied and Axis Europe. The ‘international society’ in miniature that emerged encompassed myriad relationships, new and recast, resting upon perceptions of the self and of others. Still, research focuses on the disparate national narratives rather than international interactions among exiled policy makers. The example of Allied London shows how small power governments-in-exile struggled for credibility and agency while waging coalition warfare from ‘out of place’. Through the lens of diplomacy, one can examine the impact of physical proximity on bilateral relations and how new communication channels were employed in policy-making.

KEYWORDS

Czechoslovakia; Norway; Poland; exile; foreign policy; World War II

Introduction

On 1 January 1942, a Declaration by United Nations was signed in Washington and a global alliance in everything but a name was born. The contracting parties included four great powers, nine American republics and five dominions. Nine more countries were present whose governments were no longer in control of the territories they claimed to have the mandate to govern. These governments, all European save for the Philippine, represented Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Yugoslavia – from London. The absence of the ‘Free French’ at the ceremony illustrates that wartime governments-in-exile managed to maintain legal authority and agency.

Eight governments spent years working side-by-side. They came from geographic regions that figure in mental maps of the era: the Atlantic Rim, Central Europe and the Balkans. Sharing an enemy and a place of refuge enabled contacts that had been infrequent in European politics, such as between non-adjacent small powers. Unexpected physical proximity generated a unique opportunity for social learning and for bilateral relationships.

This article examines how Norway’s perceptions formed its attitudes towards two rather new partners, Czechoslovakia and Poland, amid a declining British power within the ‘Grand Alliance’. The war revolutionised Norway’s foreign policy making. The range of its foreign relations broadened considerably if compared to the formative pre-1940 period. While Nazi aggression led to the demise of traditional isolationist behaviour, Inter-Allied cooperation integrated Norway into
the international community. Unlike in swiftly communised Central Europe, the post-war transition saw only a generational change in Norway. Labour formed a government in 1935 and remained in power until 1965. Of the three nations discussed, only the Norwegians were able to implement lessons learned from Allied London.

The realities of exile have shaped the afterlife of wartime governments-in-exile. Their reputation today varies from country to country. So does the state of research, which often revolves around biographies. Regime change in Central Europe, an element of an international order in the making, appears to have triggered scholarly interest. After four decades of ideological blacklisting, historians from former ‘Soviet Bloc’ countries have enjoyed liberalisation of the restrictive archival protocols, which has allowed them to re-examine governments-in-exile. By contrast, comprehensive studies of less dramatic Western European cases are fewer and, sometimes, outdated. There is a tendency to study exiled governments as somewhat detached from and implicitly inferior to home resistance. Historians Peter Romijn, Martin Conway and Denis Peschanski emphasise that ‘during the early 1940s, [exiled] regimes, with the exception of De Gaulle, [were] something of an irrelevance’ and resurfaced only when liberation was imminent. To the contrary, the political scientist Ashwini Asantha Kumar points out that the exiles’ influence in the homeland is undeniable at critical moments. In highlighting the role of fidelity to the monarchy for the Norwegian resistance, the French historian Alya Aglan balances the relationship between the occupied country and its authorities abroad. Historians, in contrast to political scientists, tend to treat governments-in-exile disparately and to focus on internal squabbles, exchanges with the home resistance, and ‘special’ relationships with great powers that wield influence with the government. Such an approach confines them to what the historian Joseph Maiolo understands as ‘a single-national diplomatic perspective … without an explicit conception of international politics.’ Several edited volumes present their stories for a global audience, yet they address international interactions only in passing. Consequently, new or built-up relationships among small powers go largely unnoticed. Despite dozens of bilateral cases, only few studies are available, and none with a multilateral scope. No investigation has been done into how a small power government-in-exile approached multiple partners of comparable standing simultaneously.

The Isle of last resort

The military thrust of the Axis eastward, paralleled by Soviet moves to the west, recast the map of Europe between 1938 and 1941. Among the émigrés from countries that were occupied and in some cases even declared to have ceased to exist there were politicians and activists in Western democracies who were eager to work for the restoration of the political preference and the country they claimed to represent – including the communists, as invitations to exile in the USSR were few. The Poles, the Czechs and the Slovaks, as inter-war French allies, began organising themselves in Paris, where they could count on support of their compatriots living there. Yet, France was to fall rapidly, in June 1940, along with several small European powers like Norway. Those who wished to fight on had only one destination left – Britain. Six exile representations gathered in London, claiming or aspiring to a government status. Still others were to come.

Britain repeatedly declared to have gone to war for restoration of freedom. The entitlement of small powers to free development was a part of this and it occasionally resonated in public opinion. Following Winston Churchill’s ascent, internationalism gained momentum. A new understanding of the global community was manifested in the principles of the Atlantic Charter – which, in incorporating the right for self-determination of peoples, challenged the Central European exiles’ critical ambition to restore multi-ethnic nation-states at least in inter-war borders – and the UN Declaration cited earlier. The representatives of the London-based governments-in-exile participated in this process, for example, at the three Inter-Allied conferences at St. James Palace (1941–1942). They affirmed their determination to fight jointly against the Axis,
set out towards a framework for war crimes prosecution and, urged by the Czechoslovak and Polish governments, put pressure on the British to acknowledge this agenda. The subsequent talk of atrocities and retaliation inspired reconsideration of the principles of individual dignity that led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Allied intellectuals from many nations promoted the ideals of intellectual cooperation, culture and education as stepping-stones towards a sustainable peace. Eventually this aspiration would come to pass under the UN ‘umbrella’.

With an enemy threatening Britain, the exiles proved to be allies in many ways. Remnants of the Polish and Czechoslovak armed forces that left France in disarray, together with soldiers from other European nations, banded together and made a difference, for example, in the Battle of Britain. Norway’s principal contribution was at sea. The government had requisitioned the bulk of its merchant fleet, one of the world’s largest in terms of tonnage, in May 1940. Nortraship played a key role in transatlantic logistics and boosted the government’s revenue so that Norway enjoyed a more independent position than most governments-in-exile. Determined to fight, the exiles also responded to Churchill’s appeal to ‘set Europe ablaze’ through sabotage. In the realm of intelligence, Polish cryptologists made a critical input in breaking the Enigma code. Propaganda circulated widely, still, the chronicler of the Political Warfare Executive sighed that the task ‘was complicated by powers given to certain refugee governments’; the Norwegians were seen as particularly ‘stout’. Bush House, home to the BBC Overseas Service – established in the 1930s as a part of a ‘psychological rearmament’ – was a hub, where members of the twenty-three national branches met in corridors and exchanged information. They contributed also in the symbolic domain, with the V for victory sign. Popularised by Churchill, it originated with Victor de Laveleye of the BBC Belgian Service as an amalgam of the French/Valon ‘victoire’ and the Dutch/Flemish ‘vrijheid’/‘freedom’. Above all, the guests were conveying a psychological message of great importance to their hosts: You are not alone. The role it played in boosting morale on the home front merits further study. The mobilisation of friendly alien workforce was yet another asset to British war effort.

The British, building upon their liberal tradition, went to great lengths to accommodate approximately 150,000 aliens – by receiving them in the country and by providing them with aid. While stringent Defence Regulations defined the conditions of living, government personnel enjoyed alleviating immunities and privileges. Consequently, the exiles hoped that any subaltern affiliation with a government would mandate exemption and regularly tried to add names of their compatriots on the official list, approved by the Foreign Office. Diplomatic and jurisdictional extra-territoriality were manifestly important as legal attributes of sovereignty. ‘We have in London at present time a miniature Europe’, as the undersecretary of state for foreign affairs Richard A. Butler reminded parliamentarians in a debate over the Diplomatic Privileges (Extension) Act on 20 February 1941. ‘We wish, consequently, to adjust the law of our country in order to meet the international character of our capital.’ If the Blitz temporarily scattered exiled policy makers across rural Britain, once the danger was over they settled back in London at respectable addresses in Kensington, Marylebone, Mayfair and Westminster, close to the epicentre of political and social life. In uniform or in civilian attire, the exiles were present in the streets, hotels, cafés, as well as in and around the national ‘homes’ or ‘institutes’, a British Council Home Division joint venture with the governments-in-exile, that were established as rallying points for the exiles and as headquarters of information about Britain’s allies. Emergent public diplomacy spread throughout the country. This cosmopolitan moment shaped post-war British culture.

*Out of place?, 1939–1940*

Once they were relatively safe, governments-in-exile mobilised their resources and morale to employ them most effectively for the sake of their countries’ liberation. The exiles waited in
readiness to uphold what they considered and propagated as the ‘true’ national cause. At the same
time, they constituted an international community of their own. They socialised as
‘government-to-government’ as well as individuals. Questions of policy were closely related to
identity, as exemplified by such questions as ‘Who are we?’, ‘Who do we want to be for others?’
and ‘How do others see us?’ A government’s self-perception, combined with perceptions of for-
eign partners, conditioned its relationships within Allied international society.

As Stéphane Dufoix argues, exiles ‘aspire to “be” the true depositaries of the state authority,
the ‘true’ country’.38 Therefore, they wartime governments-in-exile invested considerable sym-
bolic capital in the construction and maintenance of credibility.

In general, the legitimacy of exiles is precarious since they operate outside the territory they
claim to represent. Thus, the international legal position of such representation counted for a
great deal in Allied London. Exiled leaders clung to it firmly and did their best to enhance it.
Consequently, they hesitated to enter into diplomatic relations with risky partners whose status
they considered more questionable than their own. The legal ground upon which a representa-
tion rested established a hierarchy among the governments-in-exile as opposed to ‘free’ move-
ments, including the numerous ‘Free French’.39

Norwegians had little to fear in this respect. Haakon VII left Norway for London, unlike
Leopold III of Belgium, who preferred occupation and house arrest to exile in the wake of mili-
tary defeat.40 The Nygaardsvold ministry moved to Britain and eventually broadened its mandate
by co-opting center-right opposition representatives. On 9 April 1940, it was the authorised by
Storting to act on Norway’s behalf as long as the government and the Storting could not reunite.
German-inspired attempts to depose the King and his council were, therefore, fended off as
unconstitutional.41

The situation of the Poles was more intricate. Marshall Józef Piłsudski and his followers gov-
erned the country in an authoritarian fashion during much of the inter-war period. They inserted
a proviso in the 1935 constitution that allowed the president to delegate his office to a person
he finds fit, should an emergency force him out of Poland. Interned in Romania, President Ignacy
Mościcki did so on 18 September 1939. In an antedated announcement, formally issued on
Polish soil, he declared the Polish ambassador to Italy, General Bolesław Wienawa-Długoszewski,
his successor. As Wienawa-Długoszewski resigned in light of French disapproval, the opposition
and moderate Piłsudskiites, convening in Paris, reached a compromise by the end of September.
Thus, a second-tier Piłsudskiite, Władysław Rackiewicz, became president and General Władysław
Sikorski was to lead the new government.42 Former oppositionists gained control, yet the gov-
ernment – together with Poland’s legal continuity – rested, ironically, on the constitution, which
its many members opposed as undemocratic. Moreover, the constitution gave the head of state
a strong set of prerogatives. The division of power between Raczkiewicz and Sikorski failed to
produce political equilibrium, and so Polish exiles had to cope with tension in the high-
est places.43

The Czechoslovak case was the most complicated one. President Edvard Beneš resigned on 5
October 1938 in the aftermath of Munich and left the country. His successor, Emil Hácha,
assumed presidency by the end of November 1938. But Czecho-Slovakia disintegrated soon.
Slovakia seceded on 14 March 1939 to become a German satellite. On the following day,
Germany invaded Bohemia and Moravia and established a protectorate there. Hácha retained his
position but was subordinated to a German official. Carpatho-Ukraine, the easternmost province
of Czecho-Slovakia, declared independence, yet succumbed to Hungary immediately.44 Once the
turmoil was over, Hácha and his cabinet still constituted a legal entity, but Beneš was a private
person. Consequently, the League of Nations Council refused to honour his protest of 13 May
1939 against a violation of Czechoslovakia’s rights.45 Contested credentials also undermined
Beneš’s authority internally and brought the Czech and Slovak exiles, whom he began to organ-
ise, into difficulties. The full recognition of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile took more than
two years. Significantly, the Soviets, not the British, were first to grant it on 18 July 1941.46

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Contacts between small powers varied greatly between the wars due to geographical distance between partners and different approaches to European politics. The so-called Oslo Group, originally established to create an information channel on tariffs during the Great Depression, provided a platform for limited political cooperation with the Benelux countries. But in Central Europe Norway had had a distant relationship with Poland and, even more so, with Czechoslovakia. By 1938, Norway and Poland were exchanging ministers-residents; the Norwegian minister to Poland was accredited to Czechoslovakia, too, and the Czechoslovak minister to Sweden was also accredited to Norway. Diplomatic representation rose in value with the outbreak of the Second World War. Governments-in-exile had a particular interest in maintaining bilateral relations so that they could reassert themselves in international affairs as often as possible.

On 2 October 1939, Minister Władisław Neuman approached the Norwegian foreign minister, Halvdan Koht, and notified him of the constitution of the Polish government-in-exile. When Neuman asked if Norway would send Nils Christian Ditleff, the long-time minister in Warsaw, to France so that he would join the Polish government there, Koht’s reaction was negative. Diplomatic relations declined to a formal minimum. Even so, Poland’s mission operated unaffected by German pressure, which peaked in December 1939 when neutral diplomatic and consular agencies on Polish territory had to close down. This favourable turn of events appears to be the work of Neuman, a Norwegian speaker serving in Oslo since 1931. By 1939, he was the dean of the corps diplomatique and allegedly on close terms with the king. In devotion to Norway, he, together with the British and the French ministers, followed the monarch to northern Norway in the spring of 1940. He eventually travelled aboard the HMS Devonshire as the Norwegians decided to fight on from abroad. Meanwhile, Polish troops were heavily engaged in the Narvik campaign; the Allies captured the port on 28 May 1940, only to evacuate it early the following month. Despite mixed outcomes, for which neither the Norwegians nor the Poles were to blame, the two nations developed an intimate bond. However, Norway appointed a standing representative to the Polish government-in-exile, chargé d’affaires Hans C. Berg, only on 15 November 1940, at the end of Koht’s tenure as Norway’s foreign minister. Berg’s rank implied that minister Ditleff, by then in Stockholm, retained his mission.

Czech and Slovak exiles wished to resume Czechoslovak–Norwegian diplomatic relations in full, banking on the absence of formal interruption. Initially, Koht was positive. However, when two Czechoslovak officials approached him in late August – early September 1940, he acted cautiously. At first, Koht surprised Hubert Ripka, a close collaborator of Beneš. He did not rule out the restoration of bilateral relations, but he added that this would not imply Norway’s readiness to withdraw recognition previously granted to Slovakia. Beneš and his associates knew nothing about Norway’s relations with the regime supported by Germany there. Being treated on a par with ‘quislings’ was alarming, too. The exiles claimed uninterrupted legal continuity of Czechoslovakia, maintaining that the Munich Agreement and its repercussions were ineffective from its inception. When Ladislav Szathmáry, a representative-designate, visited Koht on 6 September 1940, his objective was to persuade Koht that the Slovaks would hardly understand how the homeland of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, an advocate of Slovak national rights in late Austria-Hungary, could recognise a regime imposed by ‘German oppressors.’ Koht had previously endorsed Norway’s position on Slovakia by the memory of Bjørnson. Consequently, Szathmáry’s counter-manoeuvre worked and Koht promised to bypass the issue in the letters of credence that Norway was to exchange with the Czechoslovak representatives. He did so after consultations with the Poles. Warsaw had been quick to recognise Slovakia in March 1939, leaving the Polish government-in-exile to face the same question in her relations with the Czechs and the Slovaks in London. Norwegians sought advice from a third party, as they could find no internal expertise. It is unlikely that they were aware of the Polish tendency to welcome
Czecho-Slovak internal squabbles undermining the position of Beneš.\textsuperscript{60} It is unlikely that they were aware of the Polish tendency to welcome Czecho-Slovak internal squabbles undermining the position of Beneš. According to Koht, the key for the Norwegians and the Poles alike was that the Czechoslovak government was ‘provisional’, which implied that the Czecho-Slovak relationship was open for post-war negotiation.\textsuperscript{61} This standpoint indicated that it was not Czechoslovakia’s international legal personality but the representative claim of the London-based exiles that was at issue. Diplomatic relations between Norway and Czechoslovakia resumed in October 1940. Both countries exchanged chargé d’affaires ad interim – Ingvald Smith-Kielland and Ladislav Szathmáry, respectively.\textsuperscript{62}

In his study of the (dis)continuity of the Czechoslovak foreign service after the German invasion of Prague, Jan Němeček has taken Koht’s claims at face value: as of September 1940, Czechoslovak–Norwegian diplomatic relations were severed and Norway recognised Slovakia.\textsuperscript{63} Close examination does not support these conclusions. The rank chosen for appointed representatives implies the uninterrupted continuity of bilateral relations as in the Polish case. Ministers Niels Christian Ditleff of Norway and Vladimír Kučera of Czechoslovakia, both in Stockholm, retained their offices. However, there was another irregularity: In March 1939, Kučera had transferred the Czechoslovak Legation to the Germans. Because of the leniency of Swedish authorities, he was able to act on behalf of Czechoslovak refugees, although he lacked diplomatic status.\textsuperscript{64} Norwegian sources also show that the foreign ministry’s political department had long been contemplating recognition Slovakia, and that Koht had been willing to grant it. The positive decision came in early April 1940, a few days prior to the German invasion of Norway; it never took effect.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{In the beginning was the status}

The significance of the Slovak case rests elsewhere. From Koht’s perspective, it illustrated the value of adherence to norms. Once Norway had decided to grant recognition to Slovakia, only a major turn of events could cause this position to be reconsidered. In portraying the Germans as unwelcome invaders, Szathmáry, too, emphasised legality. He invoked the analogy of Norway which, supported by the memory of Bjørnson, could generate sympathy. Szathmáry drew a vivid picture of crucial Bratislava events, as though it were a first-hand account, whereas in fact he was at the Czechoslovak Legation in Berlin in March 1939. He even briefly served as Slovakia’s first and only minister in Warsaw in the same year. When Germany invaded Poland, he protested against Slovak participation and joined the Czechoslovak exiles.\textsuperscript{66} The interlude in the foreign service of a ‘quisling’ regime undermined Szathmáry’s credibility among the exiles and he looked for opportunities to reassert himself. After Koht had moderated his views on Slovakia, Szathmáry reportedly radiated self-confidence.\textsuperscript{67} Bilateral relations were to be restored, and he could see himself reinstated.

As we have seen, high-level representation was of great value in the eyes of the exiles. While there is a strong tendency to see diplomacy as an instrument for the conduct of relations between sovereign states\textsuperscript{68}, the Allied governments-in-exile inverted this relationship and used their diplomatic efforts as a tool to reaffirm sovereignty and agency. Despite strained conditions, they maintained a strong presence in international politics. The notion of status was present. Norway, albeit it could not match Czechoslovak or Polish levels in most quantitative variables, was approached for continuation of diplomatic relations rather than the other way around. The hierarchy of the three representations was apparent during the initial stage of ‘little Allies’ policy-making. The relationship with the hosts appears to have played the crucial role. King Haakon VII had a close relationship with the House of Windsor through his late wife, Queen Maud, the youngest daughter of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (future Edward VII, 1901–1910).\textsuperscript{69} The London-based Norwegian community also helped the Nygaardsvold ministry to settle in and
regularly placed its premises in Norway House off Trafalgar Square at the government’s disposal. By contrast, Polish and Czechoslovak governments had no affluent diaspora to rely upon. In February 1942, the Anglo-Norwegian Cooperation Committee was established. Neither Poland nor Czechoslovakia enjoyed such a high-level platform. The Norwegians felt at home in London. Celebrating Norwegian national day in 1941, the Lord Privy Seal, Clement Attlee, did not hesitate to allude his kinship with Britain’s Norwegian ‘brethren’. Such validations of status must have boosted Norway’s self-confidence in its dealings with foreign partners.

From the ‘little Allies’ vanguard point, status was a critical asset. Home and abroad, in legal and popular opinion, it appeared to confirm a respective government’s legitimacy. Legitimacy, in turn, could buttress one’s interests in negotiations with the great powers. Conversely, international prestige enhanced the chance of maintaining domestic legitimacy against charges of not sharing the calamities of occupation with the common people. It could also serve as a harbinger of competence needed for managing post-war challenges in a liberated homeland.

Sensitivity to status could take on many forms. In October 1944, Szathmáry, in his third year as a minister, visited the secretary-general of the Norwegian foreign ministry, Rasmus Skylstad, to question a recent article in The Norseman, a journal published by the Norwegian Information Office. Skylstad was upset because the Norwegian ambassador to Great Britain, Eric Colban, had referred to Czechoslovakia a ‘newly-created state’. This contradicted the theory of historical continuity that saw the origins of Czechoslovakia in the Kingdom of Bohemia and postulated that the state was merely restored in 1918. Skylstad replied that most East European states emerging on the map of Europe about that time might justifiably have advocated such continuity for themselves. Skylstad agreed but added that placing Poland into a different group of states – ‘old states brought to life again’ – made a confusing impression. ‘I understood’, Skylstad commented, ‘that especially this thing about Poland irritated him. He said that he, however, did not want to lodge a complaint but to call attention to the fact so that it shall not come up again.’

This episode conveys two messages. ‘New’ supposedly meant ‘second-rate’ and ‘second-rank’, making the historical continuity that Czechoslovakia rested upon seemed irrelevant. Moreover, Poland, despite growing international isolation, was still better off than Czechoslovakia. It is unclear whether Szathmáry understood that Norway was definitely an ‘old’ state. His reports on Norwegian–Swedish relations do not indicate a thorough grasp of the subject of the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway. Knowledge of nineteenth century Norwegian statehood must have been rare in Czechoslovakia, where academia studied predominantly Nordic literature, not history. The fact that Norway finally declared its independence as late as 1905, only thirteen years before Czechoslovakia, prompted expectations that the two ‘young political nations’ would easily share a mutual understanding. To this end, the memory of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson was invoked and Czechoslovak–Norwegian Day (8 December) was commemorated between 1941 and 1945.

What new Europe?, 1940–1943

To win the war was primarily the business of the great power. While the ‘little Allies’ were eager to lend a hand, their focus was on proposing post-war scenarios that would prevent that kind of international calamities that had thrown them into exile.

Many believed that the restructuring of Europe in order to reduce the German threat potential would require significant changes. Criticism of small nation-states was frequent. It seemed evident that they were far too weak to organise a reliable defence on their own and that their patriotic zeal caused conflicts – minor but many – which accelerated the erosion of the Versailles order. Still, some of these states, represented by governments-in-exile, were Britain’s only outright allies before the war became global. This was a novelty. ‘Nothing illustrates more clearly the profound difference between the two wars’, the veteran Foreign Office adviser on Eastern European affairs, Robert H. Seton-Watson, maintained, ‘than the comparison of the official
attitude of [His Majesty’s Government] to the small nations of Europe in the one and in the other.

Thus, countries that were formerly negligible quantities became Britain’s partners.

The drive for a new European order did not abate quickly. The intellectual climate favoured global perspectives and international organisation for the sake of sustainable peace. Britain, traditionally afraid of balkanisation, saw the necessity for the small nations to come to terms with each other. Many public figures proclaimed regional federalism as an option. Consequently, it appeared repeatedly on the agenda of Foreign Office-affiliated think tanks. The governments-in-exile found themselves in difficulties. Protection of sovereignty was their raison d’être, yet they had to assess the viability of supranational schemes.

Due to their exposed geographical position, Central Europeans reacted quickly to these proposals. Already on 11 November 1940, Beneš of Czechoslovakia and Sikorski of Poland announced the plan of creating a close community after the war. Well-founded fears of British sympathy for the Hapsburgs probably accelerated the Czechoslovak–Polish rapprochement. Both leaders had worked for their nations’ emancipation from multinational empires; however, early in the First World War Sikorski had yet not rejected an Austro-Polish option. Between the wars, Beneš had repeatedly expressed his preference for ‘Anschluss’ rather than Hapsburg restoration. On 23 January 1942, the two jointly confirmed their intention to establish a Czechoslovak–Polish Union, an effort that was to fail for several reasons. Bilateral relations had often been tense and included the contest for Teschen Silesia, partitioned in 1920. Not even Sikorski was prepared to return its Czechoslovak part, seised by Poland in 1938. Moreover, visions of the union oscillated between a federation and a confederation, with far-reaching implications. There is an on-going debate among historians on Beneš’s commitment to the project.

One cannot rule out the likelihood that the exiles’ main concern was to please the British. Beneš’s comparatively late statements to Soviet interlocutors need not be taken at face value; still, a Norwegian analysis spoke strongly in favour of the latter possibility. In the end, Soviet attitudes, suspicious of the revival of cordon sanitaire designs, weighed heavily. Moscow, aware of Czechoslovak willingness to comply, issued a ‘veto’ as late as 1943 against the background of ominously deteriorating Soviet-Polish relations.

Norwegians had to take a stand on federalism, too. Szathmáry communicated the core vision of Norway’s foreign relations, i.e. regional cooperation without sovereignty concessions, already in mid-January 1941. Some three weeks later Benes asked Lie about the Norwegian view of a federal system in Scandinavia. Lie expressed his scepticism of the idea because of Sweden’s position as neutral and Baltic. He confirmed that closer ties to Britain were the subject of a debate.

Whereas Norwegian presence in the Nordic federalist debate during the Second World War was ephemeral, a 1942 pamphlet on the ‘United States of Scandinavia’ by three Swedish authors resonated with some Norwegian politicians living in Sweden, especially with Martin Tranmael. An agile Labourite since 1905, he never occupied a government post or an important parliamentary position, nor was he ever party chairman. Nevertheless, he was the most influential pre-1945 party activist, prolific editor and orator, and the leading personality among Norwegians in Sweden. In some ways, Stockholm resembled London: It hosted a vivid exile community whose mostly left-wing representatives from several occupied countries engaged in discussions of future European arrangements. Although there were obvious differences between the two ‘international societies’ in terms of policy-making potential and legitimacy, the possibility of conflict existed. The Nygaardsvold ministry reacted in May 1942 and issued The Principal Features of Norway’s Foreign Policy (Hovedlinjer i norsk utenrikspolitikk), a confidential programmatic statement that had been long in preparation. It acknowledged that ‘Norway can only achieve security by concerted cooperation with other nations’ in a United Nations coalition; the idea of regional federations was dismissed. The arrangement that the Norwegians aimed at stressed Atlantic rather than European ties. It was to be multilateral in order to balance a relative
decline of British power, which Norwegian foreign policy makers in London expected to take place after the war.97

The Principal Features were also meant to address Norway’s foreign partners. Anglo-American reactions were mixed.98 In July 1942, a Swedish weekly Vecko-Journalen featured an interview with Britain’s ex-ambassador to the USSR, Sir Stafford Cripps, in which Scandinavian federalist vistas were addressed. His sympathetic stand alarmed the Norwegians in London enough to ask the Foreign Office for clarification. Anthony Eden stated that Cripps had expressed only his private viewpoints. This was the desired outcome. In order to fend off all ambiguity, a communique appeared in the press to the effect that Norway did not intend to join any federation and was looking for her own way to accommodate post-war security and economic demands.99

Moscow’s long shadow, 1942–1943

The more active role the Soviet Union played in the considerations of Lie and his advisers, the more Norwegian Atlanticism was losing its momentum in favour of East–West bridgebuilding, something supported also by Czechoslovakia and bound to rise to prominence in the early post-war period.100 This continued to cause trouble with the Poles. Encouraged by positive reactions to the federal idea and Allied cooperation in post-war policy planning, Sikorski found it opportune to go further. The Poles, the heavyweight of the ‘little Allies’, should claim their position. They tried to assert themselves as a leading party in numerous Inter-Allied initiatives. As the principal adviser to Lie, Arne Ording, noted: ‘The Czechs and the Poles are very interested in the [London] International Assembly Commission, both general meetings and committees – partly because they have many unemployed intellectuals, partly because they are interested in binding us all together tight to the European continent.’101

The Norwegians were seeking to avoid such a continental linkage. It became an issue early in 1942 when Sikorski proposed closer consultations on post-war security among the ‘little Allies’ in a declaration welcoming recent federalist moves.102 Initially, the Belgians and, to a certain extent, the Dutch were receptive.103 Not so the Norwegians, although Poland’s foreign ministry passed on information stating the opposite to the Foreign Office.104 The 1939 partition of Poland manifested the primacy of geopolitics in Central Europe, and so Sikorski was inhibited from dissociating himself from the policies of his predecessor in command of Polish foreign affairs, the widely ill-reputed Colonel Józef Beck.105 Beck’s central idea had been a neutralist bloc, situated between Hitler and the Western democracies, and he had attempted to engage Scandinavians in it.106 The Norwegians, with Ording as a foreign ministry ‘adviser in contemporary political history’, soon saw the link between Beck’s policy and the designs of Sikorski. They paid little attention to differences between the government-in-exile and the pre-war regime. To them the Polish plan had a clear anti-Soviet bias and was therefore inacceptable.107 While the Belgians thought similarly, British objections were more complex and pointed to the possibility that a small power coalition might complicate Inter-Allied relations. Józef Retinger, Sikorski’s principal adviser, feared that such speculation might bury the initiative. He claimed that he tried to forestall the failure, yet without success.108 Many Polish politicians at that time considered the idea of an anti-Russian barrier that would simultaneously deter Germany. But Sikorski was no Russophobe. His personal stature played an important part in 1941/1942, at the height of Polish–Soviet relations. He had to deal with recurrent criticism for being too friendly with the great power that had annexed Poland’s eastern provinces – traditionally an object of strong emotions – in collusion with Hitler’s Germany, and showed no sign of willingness to repeal this action.109

The Norwegians did not seem to have given Sikorski much credit. Norway resolutely avoided participation in schemes that might potentially disturb the Soviet Union. Some sensitive issues had already come up between these two countries.110 As a result, Lie was concerned about
what loose Polish formulations could do for Norway and worried about the risk of undermining ties to the great powers. The Norwegians considered the Polish drive for regional leadership overreaching. They found the continental ‘Central Zone’ to be competitive with their own Atlanticism. Lie is alleged to have said that the Czechoslovak–Polish talks on post-war cooperation ‘served him as an example’ for the idea of the North Atlantic regional arrangement. There is, however, no corroborating evidence for this. The Poles continued to push for regional integration as the key element of a new European order despite the Soviet position against it. Norwegian support of Polish attitudes would endanger the country’s strategic position.

In mid-April 1943, the Germans discovered mass graves, containing the remains of thousands of missing Polish prisoners-of-war from 1939 in the Katyń forest near Smolensk. Poland’s call for an International Red Cross investigation provoked the break-up of Soviet-Polish diplomatic relations. Sikorski’s death in a plane crash on 4 July 1943 marked a watershed. As the Red Army was pushing its enemies westward, Britain, which was not in position as a geopolitical player to balance the Soviets, switched to ‘sustainable appeasement’, according to David Carlton. The increasingly isolated Polish government-in-exile was losing agency. At the Tehran Conference (28 November – 1 December 1943), the ‘Big Three’ redefined Poland in accordance with Soviet views. Political and technical issues fuelled the so-called Polish Question for the years to come. Liberation coupled with a civil war and regime change driven from Moscow. Such developments seemed to prove the Norwegians right in their lack of enthusiasm for Sikorski’s designs. In 1942–1943, the two perspectives on the Soviet Union were incompatible.

**Learning from a small power Ally?, 1943–1945**

The question of how to deal with the Soviets prompted perceptive learning in Allied London. The Poles studied Yugoslav–Soviet relations with concern. Similarly, Norwegian reporting on Poland seems to refer to its foreign policy as an example not to be followed. Once Lie and his team had refuted the Polish approach to dealing with the potentially threatening great power, they needed a counter-example.

It was no secret for the Norwegians that the Czechoslovak foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, an overtly social and popular figure within the Allied community whom hardly any memoir does not mention with sympathy, questioned Beneš’s diplomacy. Czechoslovakia’s position differed from Poland’s. The Soviets were nourishing Beneš’s ‘Munich syndrome’ and consistently striving for a would-be intimate relationship with him. On 13 December 1943, a Czechoslovak–Soviet Alliance Treaty was concluded in Moscow, the first Second World War great power–small power alliance. It was a blatant breach of an informal British-Soviet ‘self-denying ordinance’ of 1942 that was intended to avoid competitive bargaining for the long-term support of the ‘little Allies’. In private, Lie did not conceal his doubts about Soviet intentions. While listening to Beneš at a social event after his return from Moscow, he allegedly whispered: ‘Czechoslovakia is going to be the seventeenth [republic of the USSR]. Later on: Finland!’ Still, he continued to follow Czechoslovak–Soviet exchanges closely.

No matter how much the exiles and home resistance would have wished to liberate their countries by themselves, the key role that the armies of the great powers were to play in the process was obvious. Consequently, these armies would carry out the administration of the newly-liberated areas before the reinstated governments could take over. The exiles needed to regulate civil–military relations between the liberationist foreign army and local authorities loyal to the government-in-exile. To this end, so-called civil affairs agreements were instituted. Necessity brought about a division of labour between the great powers. Delimited zones emerged where either the Soviets or the Anglo-Americans were in charge of Allied operations. Norway’s place was unclear for some time. The Nygaardsvold ministry had to come to terms
with the prospect of the Red Army operating in its homeland. A viable civil affairs agreement might have reduced strain on Norwegian sovereignty.

Civil affairs agreements became the subject of great interest. In May 1944, Lie allegedly criticised the Foreign Office because ‘the British had not been able, due to a lengthy procedure of yearlong negotiations with Norway, to arrive at the point [re: civil affairs agreement] that the Soviets and the Czechoslovaks had reached in the course of a few weeks’. Technicalities facing the government-in-exile as the guardian of sovereignty and Anglo-American exchanges over drafts of the agreement caused delays. The Norwegian agreement was intended to serve as the model for all Western European countries. The Norwegians received a copy of the Czechoslovak–Soviet treaty two days after it was concluded on 8 May 1944. On this occasion, Lie told Szathmáry that, without informing the British, he had approached the Soviet minister to the exiled governments and expressed a wish to conclude a treaty drafted on the Czechoslovak–Soviet example. The wording of the Norwegian–Soviet treaty signed on 16 May 1944 was similar to the Czechoslovak-Soviet text, although not to the ‘almost verbatim’ extent, as the Czechoslovak minister reported. Lie’s motivation for this approach is unclear. Perhaps the Norwegians saw the wording of the Czechoslovak–Soviet agreement as the limit of the possible in a relationship with the Soviets. Norway had never contemplated an eastward turn in contrast to Czechoslovakia. While the British looked toward Western European regional integration within the proposed ‘World Organization’, Norway tactically indicated that there were geopolitical alternatives one might consider.

Based on Norway’s modest experience, the quest for the right modus operandi with Moscow was challenging and growing in importance in the final stages of the war. Cultivating contacts with the London Poles was likely to have the opposite effect. While the Red Army, assisted by Norwegian troops, was fighting the Germans in the northernmost province of Finnmark from 7 October 1944 onwards, Moscow suddenly expressed interest in the Svalbard/Spitsbergen archipelago. The Norwegians, seeking a way to appease their new powerful neighbour, decided not to involve the Anglo-Americans in the matter.

The so-called Polish question evolved into a litmus test of a small power government’s chances to navigate a conflict with an allied, yet threatening great power. Whereas the Yugoslav government-in-exile arrived at a compromise – although a short-lived one – with home-based communist partisans, its Polish counterpart was unable to fend off the Soviet-sponsored alternative in the liberated areas. The so-called Lublin Committee/government became a fact in late July 1944. Backed by Moscow, its emissaries demanded a transfer of recognition from the London-based government – by that time frequently accused of taking a reactionary, even pro-Axis stand – to them, arguing that legitimacy based on the undemocratic 1935 constitution was bogus. From a small power perspective, two matters were at stake. Abandoning of a legitimate Allied government would be a blow to the spirit of Inter-Allied collaboration. Moreover, the recognition of a Soviet-imposed regime would imply that small power’s sovereignty is completely at the mercy of the regional hegemon.

On 4 January 1945, Lie invited Szathmáry to a meeting and asked him about the Czechoslovak view of the Lublin government. Since Norway and Czechoslovakia were the only ‘little Allies’ that had concluded civil affairs agreements with the Soviets, Lie, perhaps mindful of how Moscow was pushing the Svalbard/Spitzbergen issue, stated that ‘quite a lot spoke in favour of some co-ordination between Norway and Czechoslovakia in this matter’. Szathmáry reported back enthusiastically: ‘It is Lie’s opinion that, for Norway, it is no use wasting time by delaying the recognition of the provisional Lublin government, especially now when north-eastern Norway is being gradually liberated by the bravery of the Red Army.’ Having consulted with Ripka, Szathmáry reported the next day to Lie that the matter was suspended as long as the Lublin Poles would not accept the pre-Munich frontiers of Czechoslovakia, including the 1920 partition of Teschen Silesia. He added that Czechoslovakia did not feel obliged to comply with British wishes that it refrain from any action. While the Norwegians maintained a wait-and-see
policy, Lie expressed his understanding for the Czechoslovak position. Szathmáry initially stated that ‘the Norwegian government will, irrespective of how the Czechoslovak government will proceed, in short time recognise the Lublin Poles.’ Although Czechoslovakia, pressed by the Soviets, did so at the end of January 1945, the Norwegians held back. The recognition of the Lublin Poles was postponed until 5/6 July 1945 with the British in the lead. The morale was clear: Norway, despite sympathy for bridge-building, preferred western to eastern ties.

However, the Norwegians did not hesitate to give the Soviets concessions on the Polish question. The Neuman affair is illustrative. Although Minister Neuman had been transferred to Mexico in 1942, his long tenure with the Norwegians was not forgotten. When he suddenly died in late January 1945, the conservative Storting President Carl Joachim Hambro, who had frequently been on bad terms with the government, published a heartfelt obituary in Norsk Tidend. As the Soviets expressed discomfort over Hambro’s negative comments on current developments in Poland (he spoke as a resolute advocate of small powers’ right to independence), the Norwegian government issued a statement that his viewpoint did not reflect those of its own. This was an unprecedented act in Norwegian politics. Hambro at first doubted that the Soviet communication had happened. Once sure of it, he charged Norwegian diplomacy with disregard for the country’s sovereignty. In doing so, he might have stirred the internal climate of the Norwegian exile a bit. Szathmáry reported swiftly that there were suggestions to remove Hambro from the Norwegian delegation to the UN conference on international organisation to be held in San Francisco. However, Hambro, a League of Nations veteran, was probably the only Norwegian politician in the ranks of exiles who had earned an international reputation. He even served as the last President of the League of Nations Assembly and continued to work for the organisation in Princeton during its wartime exile. Although a sort of a Norwegian ‘black sheep’, he eventually played an active role at the conference.

The affair of the obituary revealed another difference among the ‘little Allies’. Although Hambro was unpopular in London among the Norwegians, the British and the Russians alike, as a prominent politician he was not prevented from getting his views published. When Szathmáry reported in March 1945 that ‘the Norwegian government allegedly starts comprehending that Moscow will never understand the Norwegian democratic principle of granting every politician … freedom of expression’, he reflected views common to many exiles and ominous for the prospects of democracy in those countries that were to harbour in the Soviet sphere. Leaders with disputed authority often satisfied the need for concerted effort and unity at the costs of plurality. In addition, most exile representations were divided internally, something those in charge preferred to cover up by keeping oppositionists out of the executive or, in the worst instance, by preventing them from being heard. In this regard, the Norwegians were probably the most liberal. A sense of party rivalry made itself evident on the part of Hambro and Koht. They both diverged on the issue of Western alignment as advocated by Lie, and disliked the extent to which the latter dominated the government. Still, there was no threat of real divisions or policymaking dissent from other quarters.

The situation looked differently with regard to the Central Europeans. In the Polish case, to get the Pilsudskites and former oppositionists together was no easy task. New frictions emerged after the Katyń revelations and the death of Sikorski. On the part of Czechoslovakia, the authority of Beneš was disputed from the beginning, most notably by the long-time ex-minister to France, Štefan Osuský, and the former prime minister, Milan Hodža, both Slovaks and men of international reputation. Thus, when the news reached Szathmáry in November 1943 that The Norseman would publish an article by Osuský, he intervened and pointed out a lack of regard for Beneš. However, the editor-in-chief, Jacob Stenersen Worm-Müller, refused to offend Osuský, his long-time League of Nations acquaintance. The disputed article did appear in the 1944 edition of The Norseman. Szathmáry’s objections validated an earlier Norwegian assessment: ‘Benes is both a strong personality and an outright democrat, but he appears to be a kind of a doctrinaire
and a formalist. The opposition against him is not as much about his principles as about his practice. He is accused of being an autocrat.\textsuperscript{139}

**Conclusions: together – and alone**

Allied London was a laboratory of exile politics.\textsuperscript{140} Despite having a common enemy, it was not easy for the assembled European nations to integrate. Their representatives attentively observed and learned far more about each other than ever before. As the Norwegian case suggests this new level of awareness, if not necessarily understanding, was a policymaking asset. Yet interests pursued by the governments-in-exile were often specific. In spite of an almost omnipresent global project, the exiles structured their actions primarily around the preservation of their own threatened statehood. At the same time, they communicated actively with foreign partners on a bilateral and multilateral basis. The Polish story shows that isolation is likely to make a small power vulnerable to external pressure, and more so under strained exile conditions. The emergent UN architecture appeared as a safety net and it prompted the governments-in-exile to participate in moulding the post-war order.

Many exchanges between governments-in-exile concerned status. Diplomacy may serve as a promotion tool to boost one’s own perceived value as a partner. Hence, governments sometimes desired to be more active in exile than they might have been at home during peacetime. From a practical point of view, an unprecedented multilateral experience provided a learning-by-doing opportunity. A volatile international environment motivated Norway’s search for an identity and a role to play\textsuperscript{141}, offering its resources to an interdependent world in the making.

The conundrum of how to establish a dialogue with Moscow that would pose as few challenges to security, sovereignty and internal affairs as possible was particularly critical for those states that were to become neighbours of the great power to the east. Here, contacts with the Poles, as well as with the Czechs and the Slovaks, informed the Norwegians about paths to take – or to avoid. In the end, Norway appeared to have found a middle ground. It did not opt for a vehemently eastern orientation, as did Czechoslovakia; but instead of staunchly escalating disputes as the Poles did, it managed to tame them and assuage the deeply-rooted Soviet insecurity as far as borderlands were concerned.\textsuperscript{142} Trygve Lie’s rise to prominence, in the capacity of the inaugural UN Secretary-General, presents itself both as a way out of a great power stalemate at the threshold of a new global conflict, and as an reward for the balancing skills that Norwegian foreign policy manifested under his leadership.\textsuperscript{143}

Norwegian attitudes towards the Central Europeans mark a new era of realpolitik in foreign policy-making especially in the final stages of the Second World War. This tendency contradicted the widely-propagated liberal renaissance, or Bo Stråth’s ‘peace utopia of “never again”’.\textsuperscript{144} In contrast to Lie, interwar Norwegian internationalists like Hambro or Worm-Müller, found it hard to cope with the advent of a bipolar era, that resonated in the subtext of communications between the governments-in-exile in Allied London.

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