

The doctoral thesis on “The Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 1939–1945” is a multidisciplinary one, bringing together the fields of political science, history, and administrative history. Central government offices are the backbone of an efficient state. Their tasks during the war were extremely important and difficult to fulfil. Poland may have lost its territory but it still had its other attributes as a state, looked after by officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; these attributes were Polish nationals scattered across the world; sovereign government residing in Romania, France, and eventually in the United Kingdom; criminal justice and administrative structures; and the ability to pursue international relations. The exercise of political power under extraordinary circumstances caused by a war is an interesting research issue. The operation of central government institutions in that utterly tragic situation calls for a study.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs braced for the time of armed conflict: a radio communication network was built, a new statute of the Ministry was drafted, and the staff were trained and released from military service to safeguard continuity of work. The German blitzkrieg forced ministries out of the capital; their work continued until the Soviet aggression. With Poland defeated in military terms, the authorities left its territory; due to a lack of determined diplomatic response, they were interned in Romania. It was at that difficult moment that the political and organisational potential of the foreign service manifested itself for the first time. The Ministry headquarters were instantly reconstructed in Allied France (and then back in the United Kingdom), staffed mostly by officials employed earlier in Warsaw. In spite of the immense pressure to remove from power everyone deemed “responsible” for failing to prevent the September defeat, diplomacy had to be put in the hands of professionals. The Minister of Foreign Affairs successfully defended the foreign service corps from an intervention into the work of the headquarters and a majority of Polish missions throughout the world. The foreign service was the only sector of the state’s administration that operated continuously in line with its pre-war procedures, including with regard to the open and secret correspondence protocols. Consequently, the Ministry was dealing with harsher criticism than any other Polish governmental department in exile. Reproached were mostly the officials claimed to continue in their political work along the lines plotted by Minister Józef Beck. The effective network of worldwide communication regularly fuelled enormous envy, causing the most acute conflict between Foreign Minister August Zaleski and the Prime Minister, General Władysław Sikorski. It was because of the principles of foreign policy and the PM’s intention to carry on with that policy without engaging the foreign service that the head of the Foreign Ministry was eventually changed.

The rough-and-tumble of Polish émigrés did not distort the work of the MFA headquarters in London. The officials were acting in the best interest of Poland and the Polish people, and they were also making plans for the post-war period. Independence could not be ensured due to Poland's frail standing on the international arena. After 5 July 1945, the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw constituted the entity in charge of the country's foreign policy.

However, some of the members of the foreign service carried on with their work in London, either in official structures (Interim Treasury Committee for Polish Questions) or as part of the unofficial ones (the MFA headed by Minister Adam Tarnowski).

Between 1939 and 1945, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the grade. The officials with their work ethics were the key to that success. The foreign service corps consisted of highly educated and experienced professionals, which prevented a rush to reshuffle its ranks. Owing to the merits of its personnel, such as knowledge of languages and the world, or political literacy, the Ministry safely navigated its way through the five turbulent years of its operations in France and the United Kingdom.