

# At the Fringes of the New Order, Spain and Poland, 1939–1940

**Wayne H. Bowen**

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7828-1514  
University of Central Florida

## Abstract

In Continental Europe, Spain and Poland were at the geographic extremes of the ambitions of the Third Reich in 1939 and 1940. To Germany, the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 with the Nazi-supported victory of the regime of General Francisco Franco brought with it expectations of trade and military collaboration against the Western powers, even if Hitler would later be frustrated in both these areas. In the East, Poland was the most consistent opponent of German diplomatic and military expansionism, even though the Western Allies and the Soviet Union were all eager to make deals with Hitler to avoid war. Despite these differences, Spain and Poland did share a number of common elements, including Catholicism, rising disenchantment with the Western powers, and a deep mistrust of Soviet Communism, the latter belief held across multiple parties and sectors, even including Spanish Republicans opposed to Franco. Using primarily Spanish records, this paper will examine the reaction of Spanish and Polish leaders to the outbreak of the Second World War, and also their attempts at identifying and developing common ground between Spain and Poland – even if for Spain an expression of sympathy for the plight of the Poles could have jeopardized relations with Germany.

In Continental Europe, Spain and Poland were at the geographic extremes of the ambitions of the Third Reich in 1939 and 1940. To the West, 1939 saw the end of the Spanish Civil War, and the Nazi-supported victory of the regime of General Francisco Franco. This triumph, made possible by German and Italian aid, brought with it expectations of trade and military collaboration against the Western powers, even if Hitler would later be frustrated in both areas. Many Spanish leaders encouraged Franco to join the Axis, a possibility Franco seriously considered at several points during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> In the East, Poland was the most consistent opponent of German diplomatic and military expansionism, despite the eagerness of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union to make deals with Hitler to avoid war.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these differences, Spain and Poland shared some common elements. Both were Catholic states at the frontiers of the faith. While Spain faced Islam to the south, Poland confronted Protestantism to its West and Orthodoxy to the East – as well as Soviet-style atheism. Spain and Poland also shared rising disenchantment with the Western powers, both having felt exploited, disregarded, or ignored by France and the United Kingdom. Even more strongly, Poland and Spain felt a deep mistrust of Soviet Communism, the latter belief held across multiple parties and sectors, even among Spanish Republicans opposed to Franco.

Despite the physical distance and extant differences, prior to and during the Second World War there were attempts to develop common ground between Spain and Poland. In the case of Franco's Spain, these efforts even jeopardized relations with Germany, increasingly angry at Spain's expressed sympathies for the plight of the Poles.

The Spanish government was not a belligerent during the Second World War, and, given the devastation of its own Civil War (1936–1939) and its difficult economic and diplomatic situation, Spain was not in a position to play a major role.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the Spanish government was very aware of the results of the conflict as it related to Poland and that nation's Jewish population. Driven by pro-Polish sentiments, individual Spaniards protested and worked in small ways to hinder Hitler's vision of anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish persecution. While not enough to have a significant impact on the course of the Second World War or the Holocaust, these efforts stand out as exemplars of how nations and individuals might have acted, and in so doing could have changed much of the history of this dark period.

---

1 On Spain's diplomatic relationship with Nazi Germany, see: Bowen, 2006; Payne, 2008.

2 On Poland and the coming of the war, see: Moorhouse, 2020; Kočański, 2012; Forczyk, 2019.

3 On Spanish foreign relations during the 1930s and 1940s, see: Andreu, 2016.

Spanish diplomats made every effort to inform their government of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis in Eastern Europe and gave implicit and indispensable support to the activities of the Polish government-in-exile. Spanish soldiers in the German Army witnessed ghettoization and forced labor in Warsaw, Vilnius and Grodno, and worked to protect Jewish workers from liquidation. While not able to halt or impede the Holocaust, these efforts demonstrate that Spain, despite its ideological sympathies for Nazi Germany and willingness to conform to some Nazi demands to isolate Poles and Poland, did not endorse Hitler's vision for Catholic Poland and its Jewish citizens. At the margins of Hispano-German relations, Spain even acted in direct defiance of the expressed desires of Germany, risking Nazi displeasure as an act of solidarity with the representatives and citizens of a fellow Catholic nation.

### Interwar Hispano-Polish Relations

As mostly Catholic nations seeing themselves as at the frontiers of Europe, Spain and Poland had maintained amicable but distant diplomatic relations since the Polish state regained independence in 1919. With little trade between the two nations, and little common culture or shared national interests beyond a shared faith, neither was very relevant to the other. With the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, this distant irrelevance changed a little. Along with nearly every nation in Europe, Poland signed the Non-Intervention Agreement in 1936, promising not to send or sell military equipment to either side in the conflict. Clearly, however, Polish sympathies were with General Francisco Franco and the Nationalists, a coalition of military officers, Catholics, monarchists, Falangists, and conservatives, in their efforts to transform the Civil War into a religious crusade against anticlericals, atheistic Communism, and church-burning anarchists. So enthused was one Polish writer about the Nationalist effort that he sent two specially dedicated copies of his book, *The Political Program of World Jewry*, to Franco and General José Moscardó (Letter from Juan Serrat, Representative of the Nationalist Government to Poland, to Foreign Minister, 10 March 1938, 1938).

During the conflict, many Spanish Catholic and monarchist refugees found sanctuary in Polish diplomatic stations, or stayed in Poland until the end of the war, protected by the Warsaw government from deportation to the Republican zone and likely imprisonment or execution. The Polish government and Red Cross also gave all assistance possible to these Spanish exiles, sixty-five of whom used the aid to return home in May 1939, when conditions once again became safe after the Nationalist victory (Letter from Luis de Pedroso, Spanish Minister in Warsaw, to Spanish Foreign Minister, 30 May 1939, 1939). Supportive Poles even organized a special committee of prominent citizens to send medical aid and

funds to the Nationalists, and chapters of the Polish Red Cross contributed to this effort (Letter from Luis de Pedroso, Spanish Minister in Warsaw, to Spanish Foreign Minister, 12 July 1939, 1939).

Poland agreed to recognize the Nationalists as the legitimate government of Spain in October 1938, five months before the final defeat of the Spanish Republic (Letter from Spanish Foreign Minister Jordana to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister Plenipotentiary, 22 October 1938, 1938). In early 1939, the Polish press was filled with praise for Franco and his defeat of the pro-Soviet Spanish Republic (Letter and press clippings from the Count San Esteban de Cañongo, Spanish Minister Plenipotentiary and Chargé d’Affaires in Poland, to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, 29 March 1939, 1939). While some Polish papers complained about Spanish coverage of the Polish Corridor and conflict over Danzig/Gdańsk, there does seem to have been genuinely warm feeling in the Hispano-Polish relationship (Letter from Luis de Pedroso, Spanish Minister in Warsaw, to Spanish Foreign Minister, 30 May 1939, 1939). In early September 1939, after the blitzkrieg of Poland had begun, the Spanish government expressed formal regret at the German invasion. Despite widespread pro-German sentiments in the Falange and Franco regime, Falangist newspapers covered the one-sided conflict with remarkable objectivity (Letter from Spanish Foreign Minister Beigbeder to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister Plenipotentiary, regretfully acknowledging receipt of Polish announcement of belligerency, 4 September 1939, 1939; Verbal Note Polish Minister to Spanish Foreign Minister, 18 September 1939, 1939).

### **Diplomacy and the Polish Legation in Spain During the Second World War**

From 1939 to 1942, Spain’s sympathy for fellow Catholic Poland continued to be more than just symbolic. In early February 1940, the Spanish government reaffirmed its rapport with and friendship for Poland by allowing its Legation in Madrid to remain open, with full diplomatic rights and recognition, as a center for Polish exiles and anti-German organization (Letter from Foreign Minister Beigbeder to Polish Minister Szumlakowski, 1 February 1940, 1940). As late as New Year’s Eve of 1941, Foreign Minister Ramón Serrano Suñer sent a warm holiday greeting to Marian Szumlakowski, representative in Spain of the Polish government-in-exile (Telegram from Serrano to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister, 1 January 1941, 1941).

The German government protested, insisting that since Poland no longer existed as a country it was wrong for Spain to allow its offices to remain open. The first petitions of 1940, verbal notes from the German Ambassador Eberhard von Stohrer to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, were cordial and friendly. In 1940, the Third Reich was still expecting Spain to

enter the war on the side of the Axis, and did not want to engage in any activity that might jeopardize pro-Nazi sentiments in Catholic Spain. By 1941, however, Spain was no closer to entering the war, Franco having rejected Hitler's overtures and enticements. Consequently, the Nazi regime added pressure to its insistence that Spain derecognize the Polish mission, providing evidence that the Poles were engaging in espionage, smuggling and illegal radio broadcasts under the protection of their diplomatic station (Verbal Note from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, referring to a previous note of 16 December 1940 with the same message, 27 January 1941, 1941; Letter from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, with more details of Polish activities, 6 October 1941, 1941). After more than a year of hearing German protests over Spanish toleration of the Poles, the Franco regime finally relented in January 1942, ordering the closing of all Polish diplomatic posts, along with those of Belgium and Norway, similarly occupied.

But the official justification provided to the Poles was not that preferred by the Germans, namely that Poland no longer existed as an independent nation; instead, it was stated that these missions were allegedly being used for issuing false passports to Polish nationals, a practice illegal under international law for a state that no longer existed, and other activities incompatible with normal diplomatic behavior. The extent of German coercion, finally successful, was indicated by a scribbled note on the archived copy of the letter sent to the Poles: "The German Embassy indicated many times the convenience of *liquidating* the Legation of Poland in Spain." (emphasis in the original) This scribble, in the hand of Foreign Minister Serrano Suñer, also Franco's brother-in-law, seems to indicate that Spain was not taking this move completely of its own volition (Verbal Note from Spanish Foreign Ministry Polish Legation in Madrid, 21 January 1942, 1942). While the Spanish Foreign Ministry was hardly enthusiastic about lifting its recognition of the Poles, Spain's secret police was convinced that Nazi accusations had been correct: the Polish mission was a center for espionage and for Communists working with the Soviet Union and Great Britain (Three reports, Dirección General de Seguridad, 24 January and 6 February 1942, to Spanish Foreign Ministry, on Polish espionage and collaboration with Great Britain and known communists, 1942).

The Polish Minister in Spain protested vehemently against the charges and the actions of the Spanish government. He promised that he and his staff would respond to any specific accusations of espionage, and that he could not understand the grounds for this harsh decision. Had not Poland and Spain been friendly nations for five centuries? Along with sharing strong Catholicism, he asserted that Poland had been an enthusiastic supporter of Franco's cause, had recognized the Nationalist government before the major powers (aside from Germany and Italy), and had given sanctuary in its Legation to numerous military officers threatened with execution in the Spanish Civil War. Poland also expressed despair

that its exiles and internees, who had escaped from France to Spain, would be left at the mercy of the Germans (Verbal Note from the Polish Legation in Madrid to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, 28 February and 3 April 1942, 1942). The British government, the most important supporter of the Polish government-in-exile, also protested strongly against the Spanish action, with Foreign Minister Anthony Eden expressing his opinion “that the action taken by the Spanish Government is particularly difficult to explain in view of the friendly relations which have always existed between these two Catholic countries” (Letter from Spanish Ambassador in the UK, the Duke of Alba, to Spanish Foreign Ministry, on a conversation with Anthony Eden. (Note from Eden, dated 25 March 1942, attached), 26 March 1942, 1942).

Despite the Spanish government’s official closure of the Polish Legation, there was little change in the ability of the Poles to operate in Spain. The Spanish Foreign Ministry appeared willing to tolerate indefinite delays in the actual implementation of the expulsion. Almost one year after the order to close their doors, the Polish Legation still occupied its compound in Madrid, flying its flag and displaying its official national crest, much to the annoyance of the German Ambassador, expressed in protests to the Spanish government (Verbal notes from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, 20 November 1942 and 7 January 1943, 1942, 1943). In addition to tolerating the continued presence of the Poles in Madrid, Spanish diplomats throughout Europe provided passports and other diplomatic protection to thousands of Jews. These efforts, combined with the blind eye many border officials turned toward the smuggling of refugees into Spain, enabled over 40,000 Jews to escape Nazi Europe through the Iberian Peninsula (Ysart, 1973; Avni, 1982).

### Spaniards in Poland and on the Eastern Front

Spain did make its contribution to the Nazi war effort, but at least in one case this rebounded in ways that contradicted Hitler’s policies. During the fall of 1941, the Blue Division, a unit of over 15,000 Spanish soldiers enlisted as volunteers in the Germany Army, marched over one thousand kilometers through Poland and the zone of Army Group North on their way to battle positions near Novgorod. In Grodno and other cities, they witnessed, and protested against, the ghettoization and persecution of Jewish communities. Against orders, they fraternized with the local population all along their route and shared their rations with Jewish and non-Jewish civilians. Once on the front lines, the division established unit hospitals in Riga and Vilnius, where the hospital staff used Jewish and non-Jewish local medical staff, protecting as much as they could these men and women from the worst of Nazi behavior, at least until the withdrawal of the Spanish unit and its hospitals in early 1944 (Bowen, 1998).

The Nazis established the Warsaw Ghetto in November 1940, and its average population measured around 400,000 until large-scale deportation to Auschwitz and other extermination centers began in late July 1942. Despite the potential for collaboration which existed, based on mutual antipathy toward the Nazis, very little contact existed between the ghettos Jewish Council, headed by Adam Czerniaków, and the gentile leadership of the Polish resistance or the government-in-exile, based in London but well-connected to events in Poland (Hilberg, 1993, pp. 56, 90, 142, 183).

There was also little contact between Poland and Spain during the war. In Warsaw, the Spanish government did not have an Embassy, having closed its offices after the German occupation and evacuated the head of its Legation, Luis de Pedroso, the Count of San Esteban de Cañongo, who had been in Poland only since March 1939. Spain did, however, name a diplomat to protect the remaining Spanish colony and interests in Poland. This representative, the Duke of Parcent, who had lived in Poland since 1939, was accredited in February 1942 by the German government at the request of the Spanish Embassy in Berlin, which secured for Parcent an appointment as Minister and Chargé d’Affaires in Warsaw. He remained in Warsaw, sending back detailed reports to Madrid about worsening conditions for the Jews of the General Government, until he was forced to leave in the summer of 1944, by his own account “on the last train from Warsaw” before the Red Army arrived (Various documents..., 1939–1942).

When the Duke of Parcent left Warsaw, his departure ended the official Spanish presence in occupied Poland. During the preceding war years, the Spaniard had documented the accelerating oppression of the Poles by the Nazi regime, including the deliberate spread of hunger, executions of members of the Polish cultural and political elite, destruction of property and, most horrifying, the extermination of millions of Polish and other Jews in death camps, ghettos and killing fields. The Duke of Parcent’s reports to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs had carefully told the story of the destruction of Poland’s Jews, as well as of the suffering of the nation’s general population, in often heart-wrenching detail.

After a brief trip to Berlin in the summer of 1944, the Duke of Parcent returned to Warsaw on 22 July 1944 to find a city in panic at the expected arrival of Soviet troops. The German population had been ordered to evacuate, and massive caravans clogged the roads and highways to Germany, with mob scenes and violence at the train station, assaults on trains, and no respect for women, children, or the elderly. As the Soviet armies approached, bureaus of the Nazi occupation burned their records and files, to the satisfaction of the Poles. All businesses and offices closed, and the city was quickly dissolving into chaos. While delighted at the impending departure of the Nazis, many Poles were also concerned, especially at the news of granting of full powers by Moscow to the Polish Liberation Committee, a pro-Soviet group, and the de facto unwillingness

of the Soviets to have anything to do with the government-in-exile in London. The Polish population continued to be loyal to the London government, and vehemently anti-Communist in their sentiments. The Spanish diplomat initially hoped to stay in Warsaw, but because his remaining there would seem to be an endorsement of the Polish Liberation Committee, on 28 July, after a fourteen-hour delay, he caught the last train from Warsaw to Kraków, then still under tenuous Nazi occupation. Because of space restrictions, he was only able to carry one suitcase with him, and Polish partisans shot at the train on several occasions (Letter from Duke of Parcent to Ambassador Vidal, 20 July 1944, 1944).

Passing through the Polish countryside, the Duke of Parcent saw the same scenes of chaos as in Warsaw. Partisans, causing many victims, derailed the train that followed his. Once in Kraków, he went to the office of the Nazi *Generalgouvernement* and met with the representative of the German Foreign Ministry, who indicated that he could not be of any help to the Spanish diplomat, as the few civilian German officials still in the city were scheduled to evacuate within hours. The rest of the Nazi civil authorities had abandoned the city, leaving only the police, Gestapo and German military still functioning. The ss mobilized the entire population, between 15 and 60 years old, to dig defensive trenches around the city. After a brief trip to Zakopane, a town in what he thought would be a more tranquil sector near the Romanian border, the Duke of Parcent returned to Kraków. Having seen the front lines move very quickly, and not wanting to fall into the hands of the Soviet Army, he resolved to wait out the end of the war in Kraków, where the Germans showed signs of preparing for an extended defense. By 30 July, the panic had subsided in the city, although the Germans continued to detain Polish civilians as conscript labor, shooting or deporting to concentrations camps those who demonstrated the slightest resistance (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August 1944, 1944).

At this time, the Duke of Parcent heard the news that the Polish resistance had decided to rise up in Warsaw, in expectation of the imminent arrival of the Red Army, which was then approaching the eastern bank of the Vistula, in striking distance of the capital. On 1 August, a mass revolt broke out against the Nazi forces remaining in the capital. Without artillery, armor or aviation, the Poles tried bravely to fight the Germans, who cut them to pieces with their heavy weapons and tanks. Entire neighborhoods were burned, along with the National Museum, Red Cross Hospital, and other public buildings occupied by the Polish fighters. The Poles managed to temporarily hold certain areas of the city, despite suffering extreme privations, living in the sewers and basements of the city, without water, gas, or electricity, and with almost no food. In his dispatches, the Duke of Parcent compared the resistance favorably to those Spaniards who rose up against Napoleon and to the Nationalist defenders of

the Alcazar of Toledo in the Spanish Civil War. Inexplicably, the Soviet Army had stopped its offensive before reaching Warsaw, dooming the Polish uprising to failure, despite the efforts of the British and Americans to airdrop supplies (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August 1944, 1944; Karski, 1985, pp. 527–528).

The Polish resistance was not organized enough to mount an uprising in Kraków, however, where the Duke of Parcent remained. While there, he saw many trains full of Poles being shipped to concentration camps, including to Auschwitz. Reflecting on the destruction of Poland brought about by the Nazi occupation, he noted that the prewar population of over thirty million had been reduced to fifteen million, through starvation, expulsions, loss of territory to the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, and mass murder. He noted with particular dismay the executions of “many thousands, intellectuals, businessmen or those belonging to the liberal professions – many of whom (he) knew – who were shot in 1939 in reprisals.” He did not spare the Soviet Union from its share of responsibility for the destruction of Poland, however, noting the massacre at Katyn, the deportation of 200,000 Poles to the interior of the USSR, and the thousands of executions and atrocities which had been committed against the thirteen million Polish citizens caught in the Soviet zone of occupation in the years 1939–1941 (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August 1944, 1944; cf. Karski, 1985, pp. 392–394).

The Duke estimated that the Nazis had murdered, through mass shootings, the use of gas chambers, ghettoization, forced labor, or starvation 2–3 million Polish Jews: a number very close to the actual total. He had seen, in Otwock, on the outskirts of Warsaw, a mass shooting of two thousand Jews, in addition to dozens of other killings of Jews he had witnessed in the streets of Warsaw, shot or hung by German police or members of the SS, often for trivial violations of Nazi rules. He could attest to the deaths of three hundred friends or acquaintances in the Polish capital since the onset of the German occupation, and knew from reliable sources that the story was the same in other Polish cities, towns and villages: mass murder motivated by Nazi racial policies. As a well-informed and connected diplomat, the Spaniard was aware of what was happening at Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka – also on a personal level, as his Polish friends had been sent to those horrible places, never to return (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August 1944, 1944; cf. Bauer, 1982, pp. 304, 334–335).

During his five years in Poland, he had tried to carry out humanitarian activity, in the name of the Spanish government, to save lives. He met with mixed success, saving some lives but failing to intervene in time to save others. Because Spain was a neutral, and his own position, as the repre-

sentative to a government that did not exist, was tenuous, he had to behave with complete impartiality and above political considerations. His fear was that his actions would raise suspicions among the Germans that he sympathized with the defeated nation. As he noted about his efforts:

It gave me great happiness to have saved so many lives, through meals I was able to serve and with an abundance of alcohol. All of this effort cost me a great deal of money and was very difficult on my nerves, but I considered my activity as a fundamental duty and obligation, and with it, the good name of our Fatherland gained considerably (Letters from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August and 31 October 1944, 1944).

At the time of his own evacuation, the Spanish community in Warsaw had been reduced to two old women, Sofia Casanova and Josefa Lopez, married into local families, who refused to leave their Polish relatives.

Even from Prague, to where he had evacuated to avoid being caught in the battle for Poland, in late October the Duke of Parcent was able to receive reports from Warsaw and Polish battlefields. According to him, “Warsaw... (was) a completely dead city.” He suspected that the former Spanish Legation and Consulate had been destroyed during the Nazi attacks on the uprising. All of his informants agreed that Germans had leveled the Polish capital with artillery and air attacks, which Parcent viewed as demolition motivated not by military necessity, but revenge, “pure and simple.” The ss, Cossack and Kalmuck units which had descended on Warsaw had acted “without mercy” to destroy the civilian population of the Polish city (Kulski, 1979, pp. 221–222):

The scenes which have developed there are simply Dantesque, and according to the general opinion of the survivors, it is enough to have seen and lived through these conditions to gain a clear picture about how far human bestiality, with all of its terror, can easily descend... The Kalmucks and Cossacks, with the blessings of the Germans, have been able to dedicate themselves with full liberty to sack as many buildings and homes as they are able, killing in cold blood any people who offer, in the opinion of the plunderers, the slightest resistance. Those who are able to escape this danger were systematically stripped of any objects of value they still had – from diamonds and dollars to watches and writing pens – and had hoped to save as a solitary treasure from entire households which had been destroyed. (There have been) cases of the looters ripping earrings from lobes and cutting off fingers to

get at valuable rings which would not come off easily (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 31 October 1944, 1944).

This violence was not limited to the destruction and theft of property, however. The Eastern European auxiliaries employed by the Germans also engaged in mass rape throughout Poland. In some parts of Warsaw, the Cossacks, under the approving eye of the German Army, converted wrecked trams into brothels, stuffing them with couches and beds stolen from the surrounding homes and apartments. Roaring drunk and singing folk songs, Cossack soldiers and Ukrainian ss sexually assaulted hundreds of Polish women and girls. Once the plunder of the city was complete, and the Germans considered the Poles sufficiently punished for having risen against the occupation, they used deception to deprive the Cossacks and Kalmucks of their looted valuables, and summarily sent them on to other fronts. The Duke viewed the terror inflicted on Warsaw as a larger scale version of the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, which he had witnessed and deplored in 1942 and 1943 (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 31 October 1944, 1944; cf. Kulski, 1979, pp. 246, 252). His hope was that the perpetrators of these atrocities would one day be punished.

All of these cruelties are widely known in the world, although perhaps not the extent and details. But when someday the Civilized World – if such a thing still exists – can hear about all of the horrible means of torture employed in the concentration camps and the unending suffering imposed on the poor creatures interned there, then it will recoil in horror! Sooner or later, these acts must receive their deserved punishment (Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 31 October 1944, 1944).

In November 1944, the Duke of Parcent left Nazi-controlled Europe via Switzerland, returning to Spain a broken and dispirited man. At Nuremberg and subsequent war crimes trials, some of those who perpetrated these horrors did receive their due, but certainly not in the full measure the Spaniard would have preferred.

Neither the Spanish government's toleration of Polish diplomats in Madrid, in the face of Nazi protests, nor the reports of the Duke of Parcent about German atrocities in Poland had much impact on the course of the war or the survival of Jews and others targeted for extermination. In the end, the Polish government-in-exile, which fought so hard to maintain its diplomatic privileges in Spain, was made irrelevant by Soviet occupation in 1944 and 1945, an occupation which guaranteed that Poland would

be Communist. Parcent's accounts of extermination camp operations at Auschwitz, mass shootings throughout Poland, and the destruction of Warsaw did not end the war any sooner, or play any role in the bringing to justice of the Nazi perpetrators responsible for these inhumanities.

## Conclusion

What these efforts did accomplish was to demonstrate that even states as pro-German as Franco's Spain could object, with some temporary success, to the excesses of the Third Reich. The Franco regime, which in 1940 seriously considered entering the war on the side of the Axis and contributed a division of soldiers to fight against the Soviet Union, also allowed over 40,000 Jews to escape Nazi-occupied Europe through Spain and expressed sympathy for Poland's victimization. Although unknown until now, one Spanish diplomat also recorded Nazi atrocities in Poland, expressing the hope that justice would one day be served. While these actions hardly turned the tide, they do now revise, in some ways, our understanding of Spain as a collaborationist state whose sentiments were with the Third Reich and the Tripartite Pact.

Franco's Spain did not offer assistance to Poland, nor could it have done so in a serious way even if it would have been willing to stand up to Nazi Germany, its chief supporter during the Spanish Civil War. Even so, the ambivalent position of Spain in relation to the Third Reich's invasion of Poland, a fellow Catholic state, perhaps weakened enthusiasm for entering the Second World War on the Nazi side. While there is no evidence in Spain's diplomatic archive or official press of the time that Spanish officials, most importantly dictator Francisco Franco, viewed the unprovoked German war on Poland as a reason to hesitate, there was certainly enough expressions of sympathy for the Poles in their victimization by the Soviet Union to indicate at least some reflection on the potential for a small and weak Catholic nation to be overwhelmed by catastrophe in the midst of unplanned war. In the end, Spain did not enter the Second World War on the side of Nazi Germany. If the suffering of Poland contributed to this eventual outcome even in a small way, perhaps there was some understanding at Spain's highest political levels that Germany was not to be trusted with Spanish security.

## Bibliography

### Archival sources:

Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Spain (Archivo de Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores – AMAE)  
Letter and press clippings from the Count San Esteban de Cañongo, Spanish Minister  
Plenipotentiary and Chargé d'Affaires in Poland, to the Spanish Foreign Ministry,  
29 March 1939. (1939). AMAE, ref. LegR1058, Exp4.

- Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August 1944. (1944). AMAE, ref. LegR2299, Exp3.
- Letter from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 31 October 1944. (1944). AMAE, ref. LegR2299, Exp3.
- Letter from Foreign Minister Beigbeder to Polish Minister Szumlakowski, 1 February 1940. (1940). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Letter from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, with more details of Polish activities, 6 October 1941. (1941). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Letter from Juan Serrat, Representative of the Nationalist Government to Poland, to Foreign Minister, Burgos, Spain, 10 March 1938. (1938). AMAE, ref. LegR1058, Exp4.
- Letter from Luis de Pedroso, Spanish Minister in Warsaw, to Spanish Foreign Minister, 30 May 1939. (1939). AMAE, ref. LegR1058, Exp5.
- Letter from Luis de Pedroso, Spanish Minister in Warsaw, to Spanish Foreign Minister, 12 July 1939. (1939). AMAE, ref. LegR1058, Exp5.
- Letter from Spanish Ambassador in the UK, the Duke of Alba, to Spanish Foreign Ministry, on a conversation with Anthony Eden. (Note from Eden, dated 25 March 1942, attached), 26 March 1942. (1942). AMAE, ref. LegR2221 Ex.18.
- Letter from Spanish Foreign Minister Beigbeder to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister Plenipotentiary, regretfully acknowledging receipt of Polish announcement of belligerency, 4 September 1939. (1939). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Letter from Spanish Foreign Minister Jordana to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister Plenipotentiary, 22 October 1938. (1938). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Letters from Duke of Parcent, Minister to Poland (from Prague), to Spanish Ambassador Vidal, in Berlin, 28 August and 31 October 1944. (1944). AMAE, ref. LegR2299, Exp3.
- Telegram from Serrano to Marian Szumlakowski, Polish Minister, 1 January 1941. (1941). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Various documents, 1939–1942. (1939–1942). AMAE, ref. LegR2303, Exp3.
- Verbal Note from Spanish Foreign Ministry Polish Legation in Madrid, 21 January 1942. (1942). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Verbal Note from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, referring to a previous note of 16 December 1940 with the same message, 27 January 1941. (1941). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Verbal Note from the Polish Legation in Madrid to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, 28 February and 3 April 1942. (1942). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Verbal Note Polish Minister to Spanish Foreign Minister, 18 September 1939. (1939). AMAE, ref. LegR1058, Exp5.
- Verbal notes from the German Ambassador to the Spanish Foreign Ministry, 20 November 1942 and 7 January 1943. (1942, 1943). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.
- Letter from Duke of Parcent to Ambassador Vidal, 20 July 1944. (1944). AMAE, ref. LegR2303, Exp3.
- Three reports, Dirección General de Seguridad, 24 January and 6 February 1942, to Spanish Foreign Ministry, on Polish espionage and collaboration with Great Britain and known communists. (1942). AMAE, ref. LegR2221, Exp20.

#### Publications:

- Andreu, J. M. T. (ed.) (2016). *Estados Unidos, Alemania, Gran Bretaña, Japón y sus relaciones con España entre la Guerra y la Postguerra*. Comillas: Universidad Pontificia Comillas.
- Avni, H. (1982). *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Bauer, Y. (1982). *A History of the Holocaust*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Bowen, W. H. (1998). "A Great Moral Victory": Spanish Protection of Jews on the Eastern Front, 1941–1944. In: R. Rohrlch (ed.), *Resisting the Holocaust* (pp. 195–211). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Bowen, W. H. (2006). *Spain during World War II*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Forczyk, R. (2019). *Case White: The Invasion of Poland 1939*. Oxford: Osprey.
- Hilberg, R. (1993). *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Karski, J. (1985). *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919–1945*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- Kochanski, H. (2012). *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Kulski, J. E. (1979). *Dying, We Live: The Personal Chronicle of a Young Freedom Fighter in Warsaw, 1939–1945*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Moorhouse, R. (2020). *Poland 1939: The outbreak of World War II*. New York: Basic Books.
- Payne, S. (2008). *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ysart, F. (1973). *España y los judíos en la Segunda Guerra Mundial*. Barcelona: DOPESA.