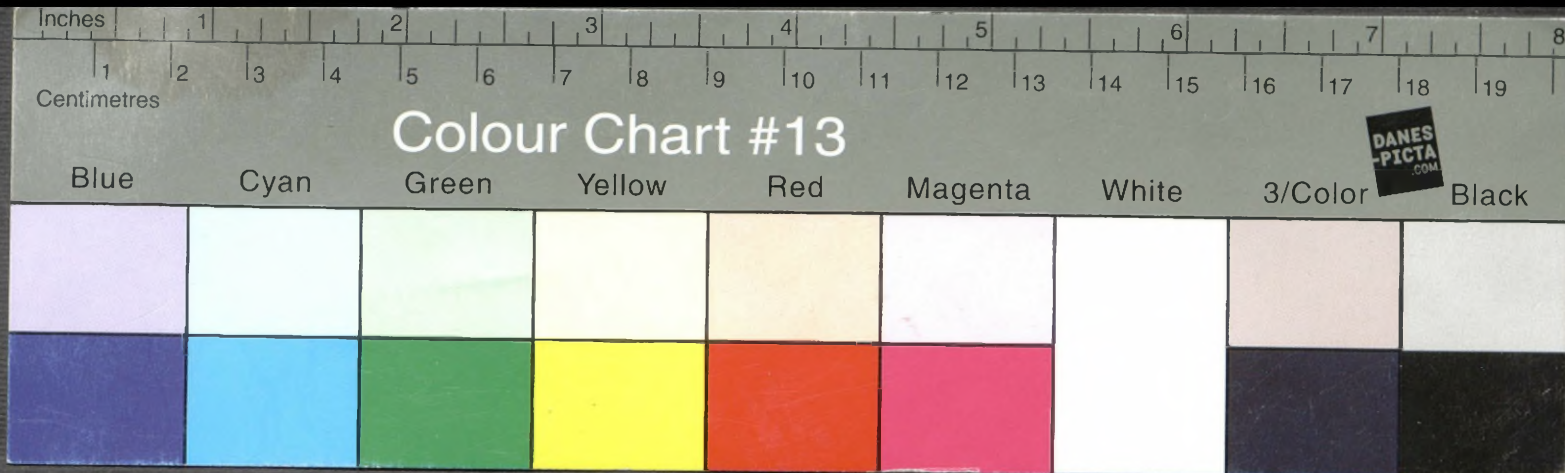




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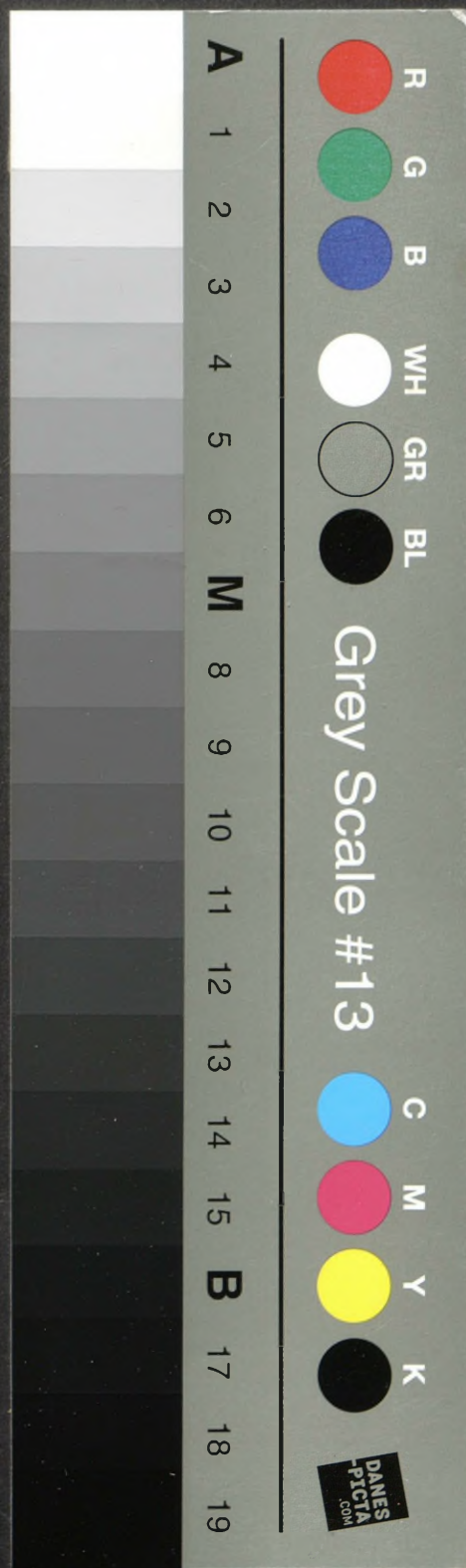
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THE PROBLEM OF DANZIG

THIRD EDITION

1132

ROMA - ISTITUTO PER L'EUROPA ORIENTALE



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The two first editions of the English translation of this pamphlet, published in 1931 are out of print, which proves that it has been a success. In response to a general demand, The Institute at Rome for Eastern Europe has decided to publish a third edition brought up to date, especially with regard to statistics.

Rome, August 1933.

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SUMMARY: 1. Danzig between Poland and Germany. 2. The solution foreshadowed by the Treaty of Versailles and subsequent agreements. 3. The proposed solution. 4. The situation which has been created. 5. The foundation of Gdynia. 6. Danzig and Gdynia as outlets for Polish traffic. 7. Conclusions. 8. Bibliography.

I

For the purpose of this study it will not be necessary to retrace the rather varied and stormy history of Danzig, from its origins till the present day. It will be sufficient to recall certain data and to remember a few periods.

Up till 1308, the City of Danzig was under the domination of the Slavonic Dukes of Pomerania and was thoroughly Slav as regards its population. In 1308 it passed into the hands of the Teutonic Order, became German and began to develop within the system of Baltic ports established by this Order. This situation lasted for 146 years, and during this period Danzig's character as a port dominated by the great waterway of the Vistula, the main river of Poland, became more and more accentuated. In 1454 with the help of Poland Dan-

zig liberated itself from the yoke of the Order, and became a Free City closely bound to Poland, for whose trade it was the great maritime outlet. A period of rapid expansion of the Free City set in, which lasted until 1772. In 1793 Prussia seized it after the second partition of Poland and after a period of economic decline of the City, which was not slow to arrive, it was definitely annexed by Prussia as a result of the Treaty of Vienna in 1814. This gave rise to an extremely difficult situation, as Danzig was deprived of its hinterland, and being under Prussian domination it became a part of the economic system of Prussia. At first Danzig became the modest capital of West Prussia, but it lost even this position when in 1826 in conformity with the exigencies of Prussian policy the provincial capital was transferred to Königsberg. A compromise was only arrived at when in 1878 East Prussia with her capital Königsberg had been separated from West Prussia and Danzig became again the capital of the latter province. But the adaptation of the City to the new economic conditions proved to be much more difficult. An attempt has been made to make up for the insufficiency of the traffic in a port deprived of its hinterland, by transforming it into an industrial city, a city of state functionaries and military garrisons (it became the headquarters of the XVII Army Corps). In other words the City lost its eminently commercial character and in any case it had to adapt itself exclu-

sively to the requirements of the German trade. While Stettin became a port of Silesia, and while for the same military reason the development and the railway communication between Königsberg and Berlin was first in favour, Danzig was only with great difficulty securing an equal treatment. Besides, even if Königsberg was able to develop considerably, it always remained in an isolated position and consequently it did not succeed in surpassing Danzig as a maritime city. This did not prevent the fact that in 1913 the traffic of the two ports was almost equal, although neither of the two could compare its own turnover with that of the big German ports like Hamburg, Bremen or Stettin. In any case after a century of efforts, Danzig was entirely incorporated into the economic and maritime system of Prussia, and, being but a secondary port, exclusively dependent on the German economic system, it did not possess the natural possibilities of development. Nevertheless it is worth while to consider one aspect of the problem: for once Prussian, Danzig was closed to Polish immigration, while at its doors in Pomerania — the famous corridor — the Poles, then Prussian subjects, lived in great numbers. This shows how jealously Danzig was guarding its German character and why the percentage of its not German population remained insignificant. When at the end of the Great War, Poland was restored as a free and independent Republic with a population

to day of about 30 millions and with a very vast territory the problem arose: whether it is possible for a great state to exist without its own outlets to the sea?

Various solutions were under consideration.

1. If Lithuania had remained united with Poland it would have been possible to consider the sea coast of Lithuania as sufficient for both countries, all the more so as Lithuania obtained the excellent German port of Memel. But the latter is a port of the Niemen, and not of the Vistula, and consequently the Lithuanian port would always remain shut off in relation to Poland. Moreover such a hypothetical solution proved to be impossible of realization because of Lithuanian determination to remain entirely independent from Poland, although such a solution would have disposed of the question of Vilno automatically.

2. Another possible solution was to leave under German domination all the territories of both Eastern and Western Prussia, while granting to Poland an access to the sea. Such a solution was suggested by Germany who would have secured the advantage of controlling the whole Polish traffic and would have acquired for Danzig and all the German ports the overseas trade of the great state of Poland. But such a solution, though very welcome to Germany, would have deprived Poland entirely of her economic independence and would have permanently threatened her political inde-

pendence, as the new state would have been at the mercy of its enemy, who has not even resigned herself to the loss of Polish Pomerania, of Posnania and of a part of Upper Silesia.

3. Furthermore, it would have been possible to annex the two Prussias, inhabited as they are by Germanised Slavs, to Poland and thus to guarantee her a secure and extended outlet to the sea. But this solution which would have been easy at any other time was not possible in 1919. Poland herself did not desire it, limiting her claims to the sovereignty over Danzig and the indispensable territory connecting the City with the territory of Poland. This did not involve the annexation of a large population of Germans as, within the limits mentioned above, the great majority of the population was Slav. But such a solution would have resulted in the separation of the territory of East Prussia from West Prussia by means of a corridor and would mean the annexation by Poland of the thoroughly German population of Danzig.

In short, the question had to be decided whether to sacrifice a nation of 30 million people and to condemn her to live without a port, or to sacrifice East Prussia and condemn her to the territorial separation from the rest of Prussia, while guaranteeing to her the free railway transit across the Polish Corridor and without interfering with her maritime traffic. Neither of these solutions has

been accepted but for reasons of expediency and political compromise the most complicated one has been adopted.

II

This is not surprising. The 13th of President Wilson's fourteen points, which became the gospel of the American arbiter during the Peace Conference, stipulated that the Polish State should to be composed of territories inhabited by an indisputably Polish population and assuring to her a « secure access to the sea ». Thus it was obvious that Wilson would not have consented to the annexation of Danzig by Poland, as its population in a great majority was German. But on the other hand it was impossible both to secure the economic independence of Poland and to leave the City to Germany. So the solution of a Free City has been adopted, which, after all, was in conformity with the ancient traditions of Danzig, which to its great advantage lived under such a regime in previous days. However, Danzig has been economically united with Poland, which also took over the diplomatic protection of the City. And as Polish Pomerania was inhabited mainly by Slavs, it has been regarded as permissible that Poland should receive a maritime outlet across a Polish territory (The Corridor) which extends as far as the sea

with a sea coast of only 72 klms. Through this solution, however, East Prussia has been cut off from Germany, but it must be remembered that her territory is only limited and her population does amount to more than 2 millions. Such a sacrifice seemed to be unavoidable. It was even expected that the territory and the population of East Prussia would have been somewhat further reduced on the side of the Polish frontiers in the districts of Allenstein and Marienwerder, where the majority of the population was Polish. I say it was expected, for those territories were not allotted to Poland outright but it was decided that they should be submitted to a plebiscite which would settle the question whether they desired to become Polish again or to remain German. The result of this popular consultation was favourable to Germany. The example is not an isolated one if one remembers that at Klagenfurth too, the plebiscite went in favour of Austria because the Slovene population declared itself against the annexation of this territory by Jugoslavia.

To the German objections against the decision adopted, the Allied and Associated Powers replied that they did not want to give Danzig to Poland, as its population was in a great majority German, but that equally they could not allow its incorporation with Germany as such a course would make it impossible to assure to Poland a secure access to the sea. There remained accordingly nothing else but

to make it autonomous. But it was necessary to give Poland a direct access, all the more so as the territory which was allotted to her was Polish as far as the sea. « Poland claims », ran the answer, to Germany, « and she has the right to claim, that the management and the development of the port which is her only outlet to the sea should remain in her hands, and that the lines of communication between this port and Poland should not be subjected to any foreign authority, so that from this point of view, — the most important one for her national existence — Poland should be placed on a footing of equality with the other states of Europe ». The Allied answer did not omit to stress the fact that such a solution was historically but a return to a situation which existed for centuries, during which Danzig enjoyed a great measure of local independence and great commercial prosperity. « It will henceforth be placed in a similar position to that in which it existed during so many centuries. The economic interests of Poland and Danzig are identical, and Danzig being the greatest port on the Vistula has a real interest in maintaining the closest relations with Poland ».

It is this conception which underlies articles 100 - 108 of the Treaty of Versailles, which were followed by the Convention of Paris (November 9 th 1920) and by subsequent Danzig - Polish agreements, of which the most important is the one of October 24 th, 1921. As the newly created

situation was rather delicate, the League of Nations was charged with the task of watching continually and incessantly over the execution of the agreements by the intermediary of a High Commissioner resident in Danzig and — as will be remembered — the League was declared competent even to supervise the adoption of a constitution, as it actually did, both with regard to the Constitution of 1922 and to the Amendment of July 4th, 1930 which modified the Constitution.

III

For the purpose of this study it will not be necessary to linger upon the examination of the whole complex of agreements already mentioned in the preceding paragraph, all the more so as it would be impossible to do so without dwelling also on a very detailed examination of the many controversies to which the application of these treaties gave rise at every step, necessitating the intervention of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations, or even of the League of Nations itself.

It will suffice to point out the objects which the said agreements had in view. The difficulty of the problem lay in the fact that Danzig was excluded from the economic system of Germany, of which it formed a part for a century, in order to be reincorporated into the economic system of

Poland. This change involved the transition from one form of economic equilibrium, obtained as we have seen by artificial means, into another, new form. Politically the Free City became self-governing with its own finances and its own economy, but it resumed its functions of an outlet of the territory dominated by the Vistula — that is, it was in process of becoming again the sole maritime outlet of the restored Polish Republic. The special regime of the port with its own administration and the special advantages guaranteed to Poland, including the control of the foreign affairs of the Free City — were compensated for by the fact that Danzig resumed its former functions as the port of its vast natural hinterland. But the Free City did not choose to follow this direction assuming, that the position in which it was placed was only temporary and therefore precarious. The Free City wanted to preserve its traditional structure of a German City which, however, it lost owing to the absence of numerous officials, of a military garrison, and of industries arising from the German system. Moreover, the Free City has drawn from Berlin the inspiration for its legal system, its regulations and its policy. It is enough to recall that Dr. Sahn, after having administered the City for many years and — after his term of office as president of the Danzig Senate came to an end — went to Berlin to become the Lord Mayor of the German capital, just as if he were a German offi-

cial who returned after having accomplished some special mission. But on the other hand, Danzig wanted to draw all the advantages which the new situation offered to it. It has organised a vast and costly bureaucratic apparatus. It has carried out a full programme of reconstruction, and established a luxurious sea resort, Zoppot — a place of amusement for the Poles. Further it has introduced a monetary system of its own and administered its finances in a careless and irresponsible spirit. On the other hand, again out of fear that its new position and its new functions should not lead to a considerable immigration of Poles, it wanted to protect the homogeneity of its German population by taking steps to control, with a view to preventing any influx of Poles and of Polish enterprise. What is worse, it did not require its traders, who were acquainted with the German market only to study how best to satisfy the requirements and the many openings of the Polish market.

Such a situation is certainly anachronistic, perfectly inconsistent, and even a little absurd. In fact Danzig did not adapt itself in all good faith to the new economic system into which it had been incorporated. It tried only passively to profit by the increase of its traffic accruing from the new hinterland, without taking any proper and effective action on its own part.



Danzig went so far as to excite the anxieties of the Poles who have not been slow to understand that the only access to the sea which they had at their disposal, was inadequate to meet the demands of Polish economic life, although they have spent and are still spending considerable sums on the improvement of the port and of its entrance. It has happened several times that at critical moments, for instance, during the coal crisis in England which caused an unforeseen increase of Polish coal exports, the Poles have been obliged to have recourse to German ports to safeguard the transportation of their coal. At still another critical moment, during her defence against the Bolshevik invasion, Poland saw herself prevented from importing the munition necessary for the preservation of her existence. And last but not least, Poland saw no possibility of obtaining a secure harbour for her projected navy, indispensable to defend, and to protect her merchant marine, which must be assured of a steady and continuous development if Poland does not want to remain for ever dependent upon the merchant fleets of other countries.

Thus we may come to the conclusion that although all the arrangements were made on the assumption of a willing and cordial collaboration between the Free City and Poland, each within the framework of its own political autonomy, they failed because in their execution they lacked not

only good faith but also a spirit of cordial collaboration. Even the great healer, Time, proved impotent to better this state of affairs. Fourteen years have passed since the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, but the situation has not changed essentially even under the pressure of the daily contacts and the increasing community of interests (1).

IV

Because of the consequent injury to her interests, Poland was compelled to look for another outlet to the sea within the seventy-two kilometres of her barren coast, so ill-suited it seems for a port on the Baltic, which formed the northern boundary of the corridor. The only point that was likely to

(1) Following the assumption of power by Hitler's adherents in the Free City and the official visit to Warsaw of Mr. Raushning (July 1933) a change in the tendencies of Dantzig policy appears to be outlined. In the course of conversations which took place in the Polish capital possibilities of voluntary collaboration between Poland and the Free City have been considered on the following bases:

a) To revise the regime of competition which has been set up between the ports of Danzig and Gdynia.

b) In exchange for the above to facilitate the full disposal of the Port of Danzig to Poland and to assure more efficacious protection to Polish minorities dwelling within the boundaries of the Free City, in order to allow them to live and develop peacefully.

attract the attention of the engineers was a modest little fishing-port with a rather poor looking village surrounded by a barren, unattractive territory, by its very nature unpropitious for a port. Everything had to be created artificially, as in Holland, where they do not mind ungrateful Nature. In this way, by sheer magic as it were, was inaugurated the port of Gdynia twenty-one kilometres off Danzig, according to a plan carefully elaborated in 1921, energetically taken in hand in 1924, and ever since methodically carried out with tenacity and ability. In the span of a few years Gdynia has become a city of about 40.000 inhabitants with a commercial and naval port entirely up-to-date — all created almost out of nothing. Little by little, as soon as a part of the port is constructed it is put into actual operation, joined up by rail and equipped up-to-date according to the latest requirements of port construction technique. Both the city and the port are progressing side by side and together they form an immense workshop and one can foresee already the time when the port will be completely finished, when the well planned city will look down upon a pleasant bay, and when a flourishing watering place, offering leisure and repose to the weary, will compete with its German neighbour - Zoppot. The turnover of the port is increasing from day to day with an almost dazzling rapidity as we shall see below. The second lung of Poland on the sea is functioning and Poland can breathe all the more

easier as, when the port of Gdynia is fully completed, it will be able to handle an annual turnover of twelve million tons of goods, a figure of some importance in the case of some unexpected growth of Polish trade or of possible disturbances in the port of Danzig which for a time would compel Poland to rely on the port of Gdynia (for instance in the case of strikes or political disorders in Danzig).

V

The port of Gdynia is also a naval port. The small Polish navy find there a convenient shelter quite sufficient for its future development; moreover such a port as Gdynia is essentially intended for the transport of passengers and principally for the export of goods. Owing to its direct connection with Upper Silesia, coal has become its main article of export. The imports increased from 631 tons in 1924 to 346.690 tons in 1932 and on the other hand exports have increased from 9.086 tons in 1924 to 4.547.169 tons with a total traffic of nearly 5 millions, in spite of the increase in the world-wide depression (1).

The growth of the traffic of Gdynia did not prevent the growth of the traffic of Danzig, which

(1) In 1930 — 3.275.242 and in 1931 — 5.080.049 tons.

in 1913 — the last year of peace — amounted to 1.233.630 tons in imports and 878.471 tons in exports, or to a total of 2.112.101 tons. In 1919 — the first year after the war — when traffic was resumed, it started with only 174 thousand tons of imports and 72.235 tons of exports, to reach 345.073 tons of imports and 5.121.691 tons of exports with a total turnover of 5.466.764 tons in 1932 (2). Which makes Danzig one of the most important port of the Baltic. The times have gone for ever when Danzig was but a third-rate Prussian port on the Baltic and when, as in 1912, it could not compete but with Königsberg and Cuxhaven, which it surpassed only a little by the volume of its traffic. According to the indisputable evidence of facts and figures we may draw the conclusion that Gdynia has not up till now hindered the development of Danzig and that the new Polish port attracted only the traffic which before its construction went through German ports. There is no reason why the development of Danzig should cease, considering that to-day both ports absorb only 65 per cent of Poland's trade with foreign

(2) In spite of the universal economic crisis in 1929-31 which has touched almost all the greatest ports of the world and has considerably decreased their merchandise traffic, the port of Danzig has during this period maintained its traffic on a higher level: in 1930 — 8.285.900 tons and 1931 — 8.001.608 tons. The important decrease in her traffic owing to the general crisis began in 1932.

countries. Moreover it must be noted that the intensity of Danzig traffic has really increased. It is a fact that a very large proportion of ships using the port are of medium size tonnage, representing at least 25 countries, some of which have never visited Danzig before. The number of ships entering and leaving the port was more than doubled between 1913 and 1930. This fact however does not prevent Danzig from being anxious and dissatisfied with the situation created by the construction of Gdynia although — as we have seen — it was Danzig itself which really provoked Poland to look for another maritime outlet on her own territory. And not only has the Free City destroyed all the advantages accruing to it from the Treaty of Versailles, (in reality Danzig pretends to have been deprived of the promised advantages) but it even alleged that Poland had no right to construct another port, and that in compensation for the Constitution which has been imposed upon it, Danzig received the monopoly of Polish overseas trade. In other words, according to the order established by the Treaty of Versailles, Poland's overseas trade had to pass through Danzig and Danzig only. If we consider this matter from this point of view,

(1) The author considered it unnecessary to dwell on all the details concerning the traffic of Danzig. The reader can consult the works quoted in the bibliographical note appended. The figures given in the text are all quoted from the said works after having been checked with the data taken from various sources.

it would be necessary to consider equally illegal the traffic of Polish goods through the German ports, which, as was said before, went on on a large scale for several years; and it must be noted that Germany herself, although she did not renounce her designs concerning Danzig, nevertheless did her utmost to take the Polish traffic away from Danzig for the benefit of these German ports. She does this by means of special transit tariffs which she applies to hundreds of commodities (Seehafendurchfuhrtarife) by financing the middlement dealing with imports and exports, and also through her clever commercial organisation. In 1928 imports into Poland through the four specially favoured German ports: Königsberg, Stettin, Hamburg and Bremen, reached 306.134 tons while exports from Poland amounted to 721.209 tons, of which Königsberg alone took 350.965 tons. In the preceding years the respective figures were considerably higher. Yet Danzig did not, and does not protest against this traffic; it protests only against that of Gdynia, which is surely in an entirely different category (1). As will be remembered the protest of the Senate of Danzig (of May 9 th 1930) to which the Commissioner General of Po-

(1) The argument of the Senate of Danzig may be briefly summarised as follows: before the world war the port of Danzig had a perfectly balanced commercial exchange. To-day it has become a port for the shipment of raw materials of great bulk but little value. The extension of the port did not conduce to the

land in Danzig replied (July 19 th, 1930) in a detailed Memorandum, has been submitted to the League of Nations, which appointed a Committee of three lawyers to examine the question. The three legal experts did not agree on the interpretation of the international engagements which Poland contracted vis-à-vis Danzig. I do not know what will be the result of the dispute, but I should like to repeat here what I have already said with regard to the Constitution of Danzig. A legal or economic question cannot be solved solely by means of legal or economic criteria, if the given legal or economic question exists only as an addendum to a political question.

The political question dominates all the aspects of the problem, and is much too serious for the existence of Poland and for the preservation of European peace to be reduced to the dimensions of a merely legal question.

Danzig represents a point of direct conflict between Germany and Poland. By itself, however,

prosperity of the City, which was promised to it at the time of its establishment as a Free City. The disadvantages of such a situation are taking a disastrous turn, because Poland develops neither the railway lines and the waterways leading to Danzig nor the equipment of the port, and even because in the vicinity of Danzig Poland constructed the port of Gdynia, to which she diverts the traffic which ought to go to Danzig, and Danzig only, as the latter should to have the monopoly of Polish imports and exports and of the merchandise and passenger traffic of Poland.

Danzig as a Free City influences only in the smallest degree the solution of the problem. The policy which Danzig pursued during the whole of the fourteen years of its autonomy demonstrated sufficiently well that this policy is determined entirely by Germany's expectations of Treaty revision. In such a revision the Corridor and Danzig would constitute the first target of the German offensive, which thus attempts to demonstrate the absurdity of the separation of East Prussia from the German Reich.

Should the question some day be opened again the problem will arise in exactly the same form as it did in 1919: either to reunite the German territories by taking away from Poland the Corridor and all access to the sea, both direct (Gdynia) and through the Free City of Danzig, and in this way to frustrate all the achievements which Poland has accomplished since 1919 in the development of the two ports, or to maintain the present situation and for the sake of European peace to sacrifice to the needs of a great nation of more than 32 million of a rapidly growing population, the needs of the little territory of East Prussia which, however, thanks to the guarantees and the facilities both for railway and maritime traffic, is in a position to satisfy its needs in times of peace.

In fact, the problem can emerge into real importance only in times of war and even then only in a relative sense. In the case of war, that is to say,

two things may happen, either Poland will occupy East Prussia or Germany will occupy the Corridor. The turn which the war will take — at least in its initial stage — will depend upon the way in which one of the two alternatives will be accomplished. But in reality it is not here that we ought to look for that feature of the question which today is not unique, either in or outside Europe, and therefore it may perhaps not be useful to enter into it too deeply.

What will the decisive criterion be? In 1919 it was the second solution which prevailed although it was neither simple nor practical. Should the problem arise again it would be impossible to say in advance which solution would carry the day. But if the other solution should prevail, one cannot honestly ignore the fact — I shall not say of an impending fourth partition of Poland — but certainly that the economic independence of Poland would be destroyed. Poland would then remain the greatest country in the world without an access to the sea; she would be obliged to go hat in hand to her neighbours in order to beg for the facilities of transit for her own trade of every kind; she would be reduced to a hard international servitude from which she could not be delivered by any guarantee for the freedom of transit even were that freedom provided for and guaranteed in a considerably more serious manner than by the Statute of Barcelona.

Considering the complexity of the problem it seems obvious to me that it was worth while to present in its essential aspects, so as to demonstrate in all its gravity, the drama which is unfolding on the Baltic by means of the intensity of traffic between two rival ports and in the great and little struggles, sometimes only the slight skirmishes which serve to maintain the agitation, which take place round Danzig between Poland and Danzig, and between Poland and Germany.

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The problem of Danzig is so important that it has produced a large number of writings on the subject, in all countries and languages. It is not possible to indicate them all in a short bibliography. Among Italian publications consult: E Migliorini: *The Geographical Aspects and Political Elements of the Struggle between Danzig and Gdynia*.

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Wyższej Szkoły Politycznej - Wych.

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been elected to the office of President of the United States since 1789. The names are given in the order in which they were elected, and the year of election is given in parentheses. The names are given in the order in which they were elected, and the year of election is given in parentheses.

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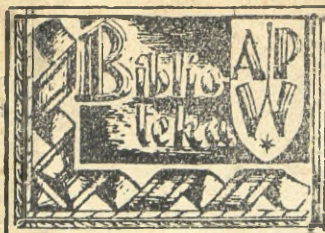
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