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**Marcin Kruszyński, *Ambasada RP w Moskwie 1921–1939* [‘The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Moscow, 1921–39’], Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [The Institute of National Remembrance], Warszawa; 366pp.**

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Once Poland regained independence in 1918, the Government of the Second Republic embarked on an enterprising project of building the state structures. There was a need to carry out internal regulations to ensure efficient functioning of the country. An equally essential deliverable was to secure the interests of 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic in the international arena. To this end, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started organising networks of Polish diplomatic outposts in European states. It was with a great gladness that the news on a legation established in Moscow was received, an idea that became deliverable only after the Treaty of Riga, 1921, was signed. Marcin Kruszyński’s monograph on the functioning of the Polish outpost in Moscow in 1921 to 1939 proves to be the first study in Polish historiographic literature which deals with this institution at some length. The book is a revised version of the author’s doctoral thesis which two years ago was awarded the first prize with the ‘Władysław Pobóg–Malinowski’ competition as the Best Debut-Making Book in History, 2008.

The monograph consists of five chapters plus a sizeable annex with photographs. The author starts with a discussion of the tough first moments of operation of the Polish legation in Moscow. The Bolsheviks hindered the outpost’s start-up by several times refusing to grant accreditation to the candidate-managers of the Polish legation, proposed by Warsaw. As the author explains, the Soviet leadership team were afraid of the candidates’ political views and their alleged hostility toward Moscow. Following a series of pressured bargaining, the Bolsheviks eventually accepted Tytus Filipowicz as the *chargé d’affaires*, and so he took the office on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1921. The Polish outpost’s main task was to alleviate the tensions occurring between the two states, as well as gaining information on Poland’s eastern neighbour.

The superiors of the Polish legation in Moscow had a hard and responsible job to do. Their responsibility was namely to provide adequate conditions for proper functioning of their subordinate outpost, and to distribute the tasks assignable to its

staff. This was not easy to deliver, due to the venue and facility constraints, and the budgetary restrictions (mediocre funding allocated by the Foreign Ministry).

The institution's actions set the stage for signing any treaties and agreements with the USSR, always finally resolved to be signed by the Polish Foreign Minister.

The second chapter discusses in some detail the embassy's staffing structure and the tasks its employees were allocated with, in line with their respective offices and posts. Quite frequent instances of incompetence among these employees are identifiable, with the resulting poorer quality of the tasks they delivered. The everyday life in the Soviet capital was not an easy experience. Some apparently mundane activities – say, shopping – proved extremely complicated and unpleasant in the Soviet realities. The embassy's staff did not restrain themselves to their office chores; they needed entertainment from time to time, and held parties in their leisure time. So, they would dance, listen to gramophone records, play cards, and sing to a piano accompaniment. Going to cinema or theatre was a rare event, owing to exposure to surveillance from the Soviet secret services. Kruszyński highlights the problem of alcohol abuse at the Moscow outpost. Separation from their home country and families, hard living conditions, and incessant control by the security authorities triggered a need to 'abreact', which was easiest to do with use of alcohol. A reconstruction of mutual relations, climate of the work at the embassy, was a difficult task for the author, as he himself admits – mostly due to a fragmentary state of the preserved source material.

Mr. Kruszyński focuses much on describing the methods of delivery of diplomatic mail: the entire responsibility rested with the couriers, or dispatchers, travelling the Warsaw–Moscow route with documents. The travels were mostly regular, although one had to be extremely cautious while on his/her way. The Poles elaborated a system which they efficiently used for delivery of important pieces of mail or consignments between the embassy and Poland.

Chapter 3 describes the embassy's representation-focused activities, starting with the reciprocal contacts between the embassy workers and the Soviet authorities. This point was of extreme importance, as during such meetings, Polish authorities' position relative to the Soviet government's actions was articulated. In addition, the embassy personnel were tasked with organising parties, or partaking in artistic events. As Kruszyński points out, reports and/or notes were compiled based on the meetings in which embassy employees were to participate. Sent subsequently over to Warsaw, such reports and notes became the main source of information on Poland's eastern neighbour.

The book's fourth section is devoted to the consular department and the military attaché's office in Moscow. Characterised are the main tasks the consulates were in charge of, along with their organisational structure and their official acts. The consulate's daily life was not too different from that known about the embassy. Again,

parties, alcohol, and the like entertainments served as the means of abreaction under the tough working conditions.

The office of military attaché was tasked with organising and supervising the intelligence operations within the USSR territory. The work was performed by adequately trained officers, seconded by Department no. 2 of the Polish Army's General Staff. The tasks included enlistment of collaborators and acquisition of information. There are accounts provided describing the risks involved in intelligence activities, and procedures initiated in the event of exposure. A number of details can be found in this book concerning the specificity of intelligence labour: acting under stress, the considerable risk of getting detained – everything which the spies gathering information of use for Warsaw came across as part of their usual business.

The last chapter is on Polish consulates deployed in the other USSR Republics. Assisted to this end with a rather dense network of consular outposts, the Polish Government attempted at organising a permanent and constant assistance and care for the Polish community inhabiting the USSR. Minsk, Kharkov, Leningrad, Kiev, and Tbilisi were the seats of such outposts, whose role consisted in e.g. facilitating to the Poles dwelling in the Soviet Union the entry into the territory of Poland, holding foodstuff collections, or petty financial assistance. The consulates stood up in defence of the Catholic Church and against persecutions of the Poles, which intensified in 1936–8. Soviet authorities intimidated the applicants who reported at Polish diplomatic outposts. Finally, threats and fear did their job, and the Soviet Poles were effectively discouraged from visiting these institutions.

The author offers a very critical portrait of the consular staff, identifying it, in summary, as unprepared for delivering their assigned tasks. Their stay in the Soviet Russia proved in many cases to be a means of satisfying their own excessive ambition. In addition, illegal trade and profiteering contributed to by members of the consular staff sheds a bad light on them: they multiplied their gains through illicit business.

To summarise, the author has certainly embarked on quite a complex task. To prepare such monograph, Marcin Kruszyński had to undertake an extremely meticulous archival query – as testified by the extensive annex attached, offering numerical data and biographical notes of more than sixty members of staff of the embassy's and consular missions in the USSR. Putting up together and compiling pieces of information so scattered and hard-to-obtain, sourced mostly from Russian archives, is a respectable achievement in itself. The book is moreover written in a vivid and approachable manner, which adds up to making it a really interesting and valuable reading.