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## ANGLO-GERMAN CONVERSATIONS ON COLONIAL APPEASEMENT, AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE BELGIAN CONGO (OCTOBER 1937-MARCH 1938)<sup>1</sup>

The Anglo-German talks on colonial appeasement, culminating in the November 1937 visit of Lord Halifax to Germany and in Henderson's March 1938 proposals to Hitler, have received scant attention from diplomatic historians. This lack of scholarship can be attributed to a variety of reasons.

Colonial appeasement was just a small part of the much broader policy of political appeasement in the 1930s. As far as Chamberlain's appeasement policy is concerned, most studies have focussed on Munich or have tried to explain its failure. Economic and colonial appeasement have hardly been studied.

The potential embarrassment resulting from the actual content of the British proposals to Hitler may explain the near total lack of scholarship. Britain was willing to surrender parts of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola in order to buy-off Hitler's goodwill with regard to Central and East Europe.

From the war years on, the British propositions resembled the offering of Danegeld to Hitler in exchange for peace. Consequently, Great Britain tried to conceal the facts. In July 1943, Sir John Gater, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office wrote Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office about the potential embarrassment that would occur if all the documents were published<sup>2</sup>.

Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden announced in March 1944 the publication of «the most important documents in the Foreign Office archives between 1919 and 1939»<sup>3</sup>. However, he ordered the documents on

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1 This contribution is based on a thesis presented to the Department of History of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (Minneapolis/USA) in order to obtain the degree of Master of Arts. With special thanks to professor David Owen Kieft, a wonderful teacher of European diplomatic history.

2 Roger KEYES, *Outrageous Fortune: The Tragedy of Leopold III of the Belgians, 1901-1941*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1984, p. 82.

3 *Ibid.*

colonial appeasement to be published at the end of a long series of volumes. It lasted till 1982 before the materials relating to the colonial appeasement policy were available in print.<sup>4</sup>

More, premature publication of the contents of the negotiations might have had negative consequences for Britain's Africa policy, as was observed by Sir John Gater in his letter to Sir Alexander Cadogan. «Out of fear of Germany, we were prepared to hand over large tracts of colonial empire to Germany without consulting the wishes of the inhabitants (...) playing straight into the hands of those sections of colonies that wish to throw off Downing Street control»<sup>5</sup>.

The relevant French documents were published in 1972-1973<sup>6</sup>, the British materials in 1982, and the German archives in 1949 (regarding the March 1938 proposals) and 1983 (relative to the November 1937 talks)<sup>7</sup>. The documents of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were published in 1965-1966 but do not contain information or documents on the colonial question<sup>8</sup>.

Without doubt, there was an effort to conceal the facts. Andrew J. Crozier wrote in his book on colonial appeasement<sup>9</sup> that «several files in the Colonial Office records remained closed», while others «appeared to have been lost and were listed as missing at the time of transfer»<sup>10</sup>.

Politicians, diplomats, and statesmen who were involved in, or at least knew of the negotiations, have paid little or no attention to the subject in their memoirs. The memoirs of Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Prime-Minister Neville Chamberlain, Sir Robert Vansittart<sup>11</sup>, and Jacques Davignon, Belgian ambassador in Berlin from 1936 to 1940, contain no information at all.

4 W.N. MEDLICOTT, Douglas DAKIN and Gillian BENNETT eds *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Second Series, vol. XIX, European Affairs, July 1, 1937 - August 4, 1938*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982, 1160 p.

5 Quoted in Andrew J. CROZIER, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 3-4.

6 MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES, COMMISSION DE PUBLICATION DES DOCUMENTS RELATIFS AUX ORIGINES DE LA GUERRE 1939-1945, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1932-1939, vol. II and VIII, September 1937-March 1938*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1972-1973.

7 *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C (1933-1937): The Third Reich: First Phase, vol. VI, November 1, 1936-November 14, 1937*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983, 1140 p., and Series D (1937-1945), vol. I, *From Neurath to Ribbentrop, September 1937-September 1938*, Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1949, 1120 p.

8 Ch. DE VISSCHER & F. VANLANGENHOVE eds *Documents Diplomatiques Belges, 1920-1940, vol. IV and V, La politique de sécurité extérieure, 1936-1940*, Brussels, Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1965-1966.

9 See footnote 5.

10 Andrew J. CROZIER, *op.cit.*, p. 274-275.

11 Sir Robert Vansittart: Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, 1930-1937; and Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the British Government, 1938-1941.

Lord Halifax's *Fulness of Days*<sup>12</sup>, first published in 1957, gives an account of the 1937 talks with Hitler, without mentioning the Belgian or Portuguese involvement. The memoirs contain no record of the March 1938 conversation between Sir Nevile Henderson and Hitler.

Sir Nevile's *Failure of a Mission*<sup>13</sup>, published in 1940, talks about the November 1937 and March 1938 conversations without revealing the actual proposals. The diaries of Oliver Harvey<sup>14</sup> and of Sir Alexander Cadogan<sup>15</sup> contain useful but rather superficial information. The same remark applies to the memoirs of Dr. Paul Schmidt, Hitler's chief interpreter<sup>16</sup>.

So, little has been published on the subject of colonial appeasement. And even less casts a light on the involvement of the Belgian and Portuguese colonies in the Anglo-German conversations. Crozier goes rather quickly over the Halifax and Henderson episodes, focussing almost entirely on the colonial question up to 1937. Gerhard L. Weinberg<sup>17</sup> has not much more to add.

#### THE COLONIAL QUESTION UP TO THE END OF WORLD WAR ONE (TREATY OF VERSAILLES)

Prior to March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1938, when Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin, tried to buy-off Hitler's goodwill by offering him parts of the Belgian and Portuguese colonial empires in Africa, Anglo-German negotiations had already dealt with the possible dismantlement of these countries's overseas empires<sup>18</sup>.

12 Lord Edward Halifax: Viceroy of India, 1926-1931; Lord Privy Seal, 1935-1937; Lord President, 1937-1938; Foreign Secretary, 1938-1940; and Ambassador in Washington, 1941-1946 (EARL OF HALIFAX, *Fulness of Days* London, Collins, 1957, 319 p.).

13 Sir Nevile Henderson: Minister at Belgrade, 1929-1935; at Buenos Aires, 1935-1937; and Ambassador in Berlin, 1937-1939 (NEVILLE HENDERSON, *Failure of a Mission, Berlin 1937-1939*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940, 334 p.).

14 Oliver Harvey: Private secretary to Eden and Halifax, 1936-1939. He ended his career as Ambassador in Paris, 1948-1954 (JOHN HARVEY ed., *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940*, London, Collins, 1970, 448 p.).

15 Sir Alexander Cadogan: Minister at Peking, 1935, later Ambassador, 1935-1936. Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 1936-1937; Permanent Under-Secretary, 1938-1946 (DAVID DILKS ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan O.M., 1938-1945*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972, 881 p.).

16 Paul Schmidt: Chief interpreter of the German Foreign Office between 1923 and 1945 (PAUL SCHMIDT, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne. Eindrücke des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas*, Bonn, Athenäum Verlag, 1949, 604 p.).

17 Gerhard L. WEINBERG, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, Starting World War II, 1937-1939*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 728 p.

18 See Fritz FISCHER, *War of Illusions. German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1975, p. 259-271 and p. 310-319. Andrew J. CROZIER, op.cit., p. 1-20. For a detailed study of the German policy vis-à-vis the Belgian Congo, see Jacques

Until the Great War, the Germans had always been pursuing a German dominated *Mittelafrika*, a colonial parallel to the concept of a *Mitteleuropa* under German aegis. This ambitious goal could only be achieved at the expense of the already established colonial powers, Belgium und Portugal.

By 1911, Central Africa had become Germany's number one colonial goal, a policy that was advocated by the governmental imperialists. The German chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg said on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1912: «We could form a great colonial empire (Portuguese colonies, Belgian Congo, Dutch colonies) and drive a wedge into the Triple Entente»<sup>19</sup>. And in February 1912, admiral von Müller made the following remark on Emperor William II: «He [Emperor] saw himself as controlling the policy of the United States of Europe and envisaged for Germany a colonial empire right across central Africa»<sup>20</sup>.

The Portuguese colonies eventually became a give and take asset during the Anglo-German negotiations prior to the first World War. The talks were part of Bethmann Hollweg's policy of rapprochement with Great Britain. Germany would slow down her naval expansion programme in exchange for London's help in the acquisition of *Mittelafrika* by Germany. Von Kühlman, counsellor at the German embassy in London, thought «that the acquisition [of the Congo basin] is desirable; it is the richest piece of Central Africa»<sup>21</sup>. The idea even surfaced that perhaps Portugal could be persuaded to sell her African possessions in order to pay off her huge international debts. Anglo-German negotiations on the partition of the Portuguese colonies lasted from April 1912 to June 1914, but ended in failure.

Simultaneously, Germany was also cherishing plans for the partition of the Belgian Congo between herself, Great Britain, and France. Katanga and northeastern Congo would go to Great Britain. France would acquire the region north of the Congo River. Germany would receive what was left. In doing so, Germany tried to link her east and west African possessions: Tanganyika and Southwest Africa. Parts of Portuguese Angola would make the territorial link complete. However, negotiations came to a dead end by the spring of 1914.

Since negotiations had failed, Germany tried to realize a German *Mittelafrika* by force. All through World War I the establishment of a German *Mittelafrika* remained one of the primary war goals of Berlin. The Belgian Congo, Portuguese Angola and part of Portuguese Mozambique, and extensive parts of France's holdings in Central Africa would assure Germany of an absolute hegemony in Central Africa. As late as the spring

WILLEQUET, *Le Congo Belge et la Weltpolitik (1894-1914)* (UNIVERSITE LIBRE DE BRUXELLES, FACULTE DE PHILOSOPHIE ET LETTRES, XII), Brussels, Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1962, 499 p.

19 Quoted in Fritz FISCHER, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

20 *Id.*, p. 260.

21 *Id.*, p. 311.



of 1917, and even more so after the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), Germany was still treasuring dreams of an extensive colonial empire in Central Africa <sup>22</sup>.

But just as negotiations had failed, arms did so too. The armistice of November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918 shattered all African dreams. Instead of acquiring more overseas territories, Germany lost all the territories she had held prior to 1914. Articles 119, 120, and 122 of the Treaty of Versailles stripped Germany of all her African and Pacific holdings, and all German material possessions in them were confiscated.

The League of Nations handed out the various former German territories as mandates to the other colonial powers. Togoland and the Cameroons went largely to France. Tanganyika became a mandate of Great Britain. The Union of South Africa got Southwest Africa. Belgium was offered the small territory of Ruanda-Urundi. Germany's Pacific holdings were distributed among Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Berlin also lost its possessions and privileges in China.

Even before the formal signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June of 1919 nothing was left of Germany's overseas empire. The Germans never fully accepted this loss. Colonial organizations (such as the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*) continued their work as if nothing had happened. Colonial literature was still published. Now and then demands for restitution were heard in the *Reichstag*. And all of Germany's political parties, with the exception of the Communists, favoured colonial restoration.

## FROM VERSAILLES TO LORD HALIFAX'S VISIT TO GERMANY IN NOVEMBER 1937<sup>23</sup>

There was not much controversy on the fate of the former German colonies during the 1920s. German public opinion and government generally accepted the loss of their African and Asian territories. Demands for colonial restitution remained moderate during the Weimar Republic.

In Great Britain however, not everyone was entirely pleased with the colonial settlement offered by the Treaty of Versailles. Some, though very few, argued that Germany had been treated unjustly after the war and had literally been robbed of its colonies. Paris and London however remained deaf to calls for colonial restitution.

22 See Fritz FISCHER, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1967, in various chapters.

23 Andrew J. CROZIER, *op.cit.*, from p. 20 on, and Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1914-1945*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1964, p. 1-87.

The docile attitude of Berlin started to change after Hitler's accession to power in January 1933. Hitler walked out of the Geneva disarmament conference and Germany even left the League of Nations in October 1933. Germany's more assertive foreign policy forced Great Britain into playing a more active role in continental European affairs. During 1933 and 1934 the Foreign Office focussed most of its attention on getting Germany back into the League of Nations. That was Britain's foreign policy goal number one. Colonies, and colonial restitution were not mentioned by London in those years.

Alfred Hugenberg, the German minister of economics, advocated the restitution of Germany's former colonies during the World Economic Conference held in London in June 1933. In a statement to the press he emphasised the need for a colonial empire in Africa as a means to pay off Germany's foreign debt and restore Germany's solvency. The German foreign office characterised Hugenberg's statement as merely an expression of his own personal opinions.<sup>24</sup>

Colonial restitution was not Hitler's highest foreign policy priority, but his attitude *vis-à-vis* the colonial question was a rather ambiguous one. On page one of *Mein Kampf* Hitler writes: «*Gleiches Blut gehört in ein gemeinsames Reich. Das deutsche Volk besitzt solange kein moralisches Recht zu kolonialpolitischer Tätigkeit, solange es nicht einmal seine eigenen Söhne in einen gemeinsamen Staat zu fassen vermag. Erst wenn des Reiches Grenze auch den letzten Deutschen umschließt (...) erst steht aus der Not des eigenen Volkes das moralische Recht zur Erwerbung fremden Grund und Bodens*»<sup>25</sup>.

But in a February 11<sup>th</sup> 1933 interview with the British *Sunday Express* he says: «As far as our overseas colonies are concerned, we have by no means given up our colonial desires; this problem, too, will have to be solved justly. There are a great many things which Germany must import from the colonies and we need colonies just as much as other nations»<sup>26</sup>.

But Hitler also stressed that he would not resort to force to get the former German colonies back. In an August 1934 interview with the *Daily Mail*, Hitler said: «I would not sacrifice the life of a single German to get any colony in the world. We know that former German colonies are costly luxuries, even for England»<sup>27</sup>.

The German settlers who still lived in the former German colonies in Africa however, seemed to have put all their hopes on Hitler and the Nazi party to fulfill their ambitions of returning the now British, French, or South African mandates to Germany. German irredentism was on the rise in

24 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

25 Adolf HITLER, *Mein Kampf*, München, Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934, p. 1.

26 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

27 Quoted in Martin GILBERT & Richard GOTT, *The Appeasers*, Boston, The Riverside Press, 1963, p. 85.

Southwest Africa and Tanganyika from 1933 on. German immigration into these areas increased as did German capital investment. Local members of the NSDAP held meetings in Tanganyika. But in all, their impact was rather limited. Besides, German irredentist movements did not receive the support from Berlin they had hoped for. Berlin probably thought that any active help might hamper the efforts to bring about a real understanding between Germany and Great Britain.

The year 1935 gave birth to a clear willingness of the European leaders to appease Hitler — and perhaps get Germany even back into the League of Nations — by reacting to Germany's nascent colonial aspirations.

The then Belgian prime minister Paul Van Zeeland even elaborated on this idea. In a conversation with Hitler's foreign policy adviser, and later foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Van Zeeland said that Belgium «would create no difficulties at a comprehensive adjustment of all questions (...) this attitude also applied to the colonial question». The statement strongly implies a willingness on Belgium's part to use Ruanda-Urundi, her share of the colonial spoils of World War I, to pay for peace with Germany.<sup>28</sup>

From 1936 on, Germany and Great Britain started to mention the possibility of a colonial restitution more loudly. An ever more assertive German foreign policy coerced London into being more accommodating to Germany's demands.

Germany reoccupied and remilitarised the demilitarised leftbank of the Rhine on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1936. This resulted in the collapse of the Treaty of Locarno of 1925. Great Britain once again began to negotiate with the Locarno powers (herself, Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium) in an effort to renew the Western Pact. By early 1937 however, it must have been clear to the British government that efforts to revive the Pact had failed. Other means were needed to assure security for Europe. Armaments reductions and colonial appeasement in exchange for security in central and eastern Europe became more and more the focal point of discussion.

There were quite a few prominent Britons who pleaded for colonial restitution. Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail* (Hitler's favourite British paper); Lord Lothian; Lord Londonderry («a Nazi Englishman»)<sup>29</sup>, and historian Arnold Toynbee, the president of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, were the most prominent members of this group. Lothian and Londonderry had both visited Germany, and saw colonial appeasement as one way to bring London and Berlin closer together. Lord Londonderry argued in his *Ourselves and Germany* (London, 1938) that Germany's loss of colonies had offended her prestige and dignity.

28 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

29 Klaus HILDEBRAND, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP und koloniale Frage 1919-1945*, München, Wilhem Fink Verlag, 1969, p. 547.

The various British parliamentary factions were divided on the issue. At its meeting of October 1936 the Conservative party favoured a policy of *status quo*. Colonial restitution was out of the question. Winston Churchill was one of the prominent Conservative advocates of adhering to the colonial settlement as decided by the Treaty of Versailles. The Liberals and Labour supported an open door trade policy in the colonies, and the transformation of all colonies into mandates (as had happened to the German colonies after the Great War). The Conservatives however carried the day since prime minister Stanley Baldwin was one of them.

As far as the public opinion was concerned, «the overwhelming majority of informed opinion in Britain was hostile to any idea of colonial transfer to Germany»<sup>30</sup>.

In Germany too, the general mood was changing considerably. Colonial restitution was openly being talked about. In March 1936 the German government stated officially that she hoped for colonial equality of rights.

In the summer of 1936 Hjalmar Schacht, the German economics minister, had a talk with François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin. During the conversation Schacht expressed his fears that Hitler would eventually undertake action against Czechoslovakia. This aggression however could be contained by a colonial concession. About the form of such a concession, the economics minister continued: «It was not a question of giving Germany full title to colonial property. But without infringing upon established sovereignty, could not Britain, France and Belgium concede to the Reich a territory in Central Africa, a territory which might be exploited by a German tenant company»<sup>31</sup>.

And the congress of the Nazi party on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1936 laid much emphasis on the colonial question. Hitler held a speech in which he stated that «Germany cannot waive her claim that justice should be done to her colonial demands»<sup>32</sup>.

Newspapers and the German ministry of propaganda continued to remind the public opinion of the injustice done to Germany's overseas empire in 1919.

Specific actions to deal with the colonial issue began to be taken by both countries. In May 1936 Hitler united all of Germany's colonial associations into the *Reichskolonialbund*, increasing its propaganda.

The economic reasons for colonial restitution were being stressed more and more by Berlin. Colonies could help Germany with her supplies of raw materials and food. And Hitler himself no longer remained silent nor

30 Andrew J. CROZIER, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

31 Quoted in Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

32 *Ibid.*



answered evasively on the issue of the former German colonies. He too stressed the country's need for colonies as producers of raw materials. «Germany has never demanded colonies for military purposes, but exclusively for economic purposes»<sup>33</sup>. Hitler's interest in colonies seemed to have been predominantly commercial.

The claim for restitution on economic grounds came on shaky grounds after the publication on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1937 of a report on raw materials by the League of Nations. The report concluded that there was no economic basis for German colonial claims. Colonies produced only 3 percent of the world's commercially important raw materials, although they accounted for 12.5 percent of its population. Colonies were clearly not important to world trade<sup>34</sup>.

After September 1937 Germany's claims were no longer founded on economic reasons alone, but now also on demographical (*Lebensraum*) and moral grounds («we should be given back what has been stolen from us»). Hitler's speeches from September 1937 onwards clearly reflect this shift.

In March 1936, the British Committee of Imperial Defence created a subcommittee. It was headed by Lord Plymouth, and its goal was to look into the colonial question. The Plymouth report was published in June of 1936. It stated that colonial appeasement needed be part of a general settlement. Strategic considerations and the wishes and privileges of the native population should be taken into account. Tanganyika should not be returned as it was of too great strategic importance. The reports also aired its doubts about the raw materials argument the Germans were making. There were hardly any commodities in their former colonies they could profit from. The report concluded however, that a restitution would give the Germans a psychological satisfaction.

The existence of the Plymouth Commission, questions in the House of Commons, and various newspaper articles did of course not go unnoticed abroad. In April 1936 the Portuguese and Belgian governments aired their dissatisfaction with the British statements. Talks of a potential cession of parts of Portuguese Angola to Germany made foreign minister Anthony Eden remark «that this sounded very much like a statement that the British empire was inviolable, but that the same did not apply to the Portuguese»<sup>35</sup>.

The German minister of economics and president of the *Reichsbank*, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, who favoured a restitution because of the German need for raw materials and commerce, visited France's prime minister Léon Blum in August 1936. He dropped the idea that an agreement on arms limitations could be reached in exchange for satisfying Germany's colonial

33 Speech of January 30, 1937, quoted in Norman H. BAYNES ed., *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April, 1922 - August, 1939*, vol. II, London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 1344.

34 Andrew J. CROZIER, *op.cit.*, p. 212-214.

35 *Id.*, p. 156.

demands. Blum's response to Schacht's proposal was quite positive given France's perennial fear for its German neighbour, increased even more by the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March of that year.

In September 1936 Paris informed Eden of Schacht's overtures. The reception in Britain was a rather cool one. Sir Robert Vansittart was radically opposed. Eden procrastinated by asking for clearer definitions of any proposals. The negative attitude toward the colonial question at the October 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Conservative Party put an end to this interlude. No response was given to Schacht's proposals.

It remains however very doubtful if Hitler would have been willing to reduce the military buildup of Germany in exchange for some hard to defend territories in Africa, for which he did not show very much interest. Besides, it was commonly believed that Schacht was speaking in his own name, and that therefore his proposals did not carry very much weight.

The meeting between Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, the Chief Economic Adviser of the British government, and Dr. Schacht in February 1937 was once again a failure. Schacht's political star had started to fade from the end of 1936 on.

Early in 1937 Paris still tried to accomodate the German colonial demands. Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos talked about his plans in a conversation with William Bullitt, the American ambassador in Paris. Besides a general reduction of tariffs «the second trap would be one which he would ask me to regard as most secret. He and Blum had not discussed it even with the other members of the Cabinet. They had in mind the creation of consortiums to develop sections of Africa. (...) To crown the entire proposal Germany would be given a colony, probably the Cameroons. Then all the African colonies except French North Africa and British South Africa, so to speak, be put into a common pot; British, French, Belgian, Portuguese and German colonies would all be exploited by international consortiums which would in considerable measure favor the use of German products. (...) At the same time he proposed to attempt to reach agreement with Germany on the limitation of armaments»<sup>36</sup>.

Delbos's ideas resemble quite strongly the plans Schacht developed during his talk in the summer of 1936 with the French ambassador in Berlin, François-Poncet. However, nothing came of all these plans.

In May 1937 Neville Chamberlain took over Downing Street from Stanley Baldwin. In May and June of that year an imperial conference of all the dominions's prime ministers was held in London. The colonial question received meager attention. The Union of South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia opposed giving up any territory they had acquired from Germany

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36 Quoted in Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 100-101.

after the war. The colonial issue was certainly not a priority during the first months of Chamberlain's premiership.

This was the situation of the colonial question on the eve of Lord Halifax's visit to Germany. German public opinion and government were unanimously asking for the restitution of their former colonies. They did so on the basis of economic necessity. The German demands found support in some leading British circles where the idea lived that Germany had been treated unfair after the war. Powerful forces within the ruling Conservative party however opposed any form of colonial appeasement. The imperialists did not want to give up what they had acquired after the Great War.

### LORD HALIFAX'S VISIT TO GERMANY AND ITS AFTERMATH: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1937

On October 13th 1937, Eric Parker, the editor-in-chief of the *The Field*, a British hunting magazine, sent an invitation to Lord Halifax on behalf of the German Hunting Association, asking him to visit the International Sporting Exhibition in Berlin during November of 1937<sup>37</sup>. Lord Halifax was invited as Master of the Middleton Hounds. He replied to Eric Parker on the 21<sup>st</sup>, accepting the invitation, and expressing his hopes for being in Germany from November 8<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup><sup>38</sup>.

This invitation was not a German initiative, but was arranged by certain Germanophile circles in Great Britain. François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin, wrote that the visit «is not due to a German initiative, but to an English initiative, arranged and supported by [Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin]»<sup>39</sup>. Hitler's interpreter, Paul Schmidt, who was present during the Halifax-Hitler talks, wrote in his memoirs: *Die Reise von Halifax [war] nur eine der damals von Chamberlain unternommenen Bemühungen, mit Deutschland in ein gutes oder zum mindesten erträgliches Verhältnis zu kommen*<sup>40</sup>. And how right was Corbin, the French ambassador in London, when he informed his Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos that the visit was an entirely British initiative, arranged by some Germanophile circles in Great Britain<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, Lord Halifax was a good friend of Lord Londonderry, who was described as a «Nazi Englishman».

There is little or no doubt that Sir Nevile Henderson, and other pro-German circles in Britain had a hand in the invitation. Henderson met

37 Eric Parker to Lord Halifax, October 13, 1937 (Documents on British Foreign Policy (DBFP), second series, vol. XIX, n° 246).

38 Lord Halifax to Eric Parker, October 21, 1937 (DBFP, n° 261).

39 François-Poncet to Delbos, November 19, 1937 (Documents diplomatiques français (DDF), vol. VII, n° 251).

40 Paul SCHMIDT, *op.cit.*, p. 377.

41 Corbin to Delbos, November 28, 1937 (DDF, n° 282).

Hermann Göring twice during the months preceding Halifax's visit. He talked to Göring in July and October of 1937. Nothing came out of their meetings, but the invitation to Lord Halifax may have been arranged there <sup>42</sup>.

Halifax's visit may also have been arranged during Lord Londonderry's hunting holiday with Göring early in October. Lord Londonderry was a member of the Clivenden group that hoped for better Anglo-German relations. Lord Astor and Lord Lothian were other prominent members. The group also had links with Neville Chamberlain <sup>43</sup>.

If we can believe Winston Churchill, Foreign Minister Anthony Eden was not among those who arranged the visit, he does not even seem to have been informed in advance of the German invitation to Lord Halifax. Churchill's remarks lend further support to the thesis that the German invitation was a British arrangement.

There was some kind of embarrassment in Great Britain about the forthcoming visit. «The hunting exhibition was used merely as a pretext to disguise his [Lord Halifax's] real object» <sup>44</sup>, as was written down in one of the diplomatic documents.

The Germans were not so keen about Halifax's visit either. Joachim von Ribbentrop, German ambassador in London, even undertook efforts to stop Halifax's trip to Germany. And later, when this had proven to be futile, Ribbentrop tried to convince Hitler to have him participate in the conversations, a move which was opposed by Henderson and Germany's Foreign Minister, baron von Neurath <sup>45</sup>.

Hitler was probably not overly enthusiastic either. The famous Hoßbach Memorandum, dating from November 5<sup>th</sup> 1937, in which the Chancellor developed his ideas for central and eastern Europe (*Lebensraum*) and the possibility of a war with the West, stated clearly that colonies could not satisfy Germany's needs <sup>46</sup>. Hitler may also have been afraid for a deal that could limit his options in central and eastern Europe.

How did the French react to the forthcoming visit? Sir Omre-Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, thought it necessary to «explain the situation to the French as soon as the visit is made public, so that the French press shall not jump to false conclusions» <sup>47</sup>. It was already

42 Andrew J. CROZIER, *op.cit.*, p. 220-223.

43 Lois G. SCHWOERER, «Lord Halifax's Visit to Germany: November 1937», in *The Historian*, XXXV, 3, 1970, p. 353-375.

44 *Minute by Sir Omre Sargent*, October 27, 1937 (DBFP, n° 272).

45 Gerhard L. WEINBERG, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

46 *Memorandum* (Hoßbach Memorandum), November 10, 1937 (Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP), n° 29).

47 *Minute by Sir Omre Sargent*, October 27, 1937 (DBFP, n° 272).



decided during the Foreign Affairs Committee of April 6<sup>th</sup> that the French should be taken into confidence <sup>48</sup>.

Paris was nervous about the coming visit. Eden assured his French colleague Delbos that nothing would be promised to Hitler, and that an agreement had to be worked out in the framework of a general settlement <sup>49</sup>. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, the day before Halifax's meeting with Hitler, Corbin, the French ambassador in London, had a meeting with Sir Robert Vansittart. Corbin expressed his fears for an Anglo-French alienation, but seemed to have been reassured by Vansittart's scepticism about the possible outcome of the talks <sup>50</sup>. French suspicion was profound. François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin, wondered whether Halifax's visit would have the same results as the Eden-Simon visit to Germany in May 1935 <sup>51</sup>. In May 1935, when an Anglo-German naval agreement was reached without consulting the French and contrary to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Where were the French fears based upon? Corbin had some inside information about what was going on inside the British Foreign Office. He reported back to Paris that the Foreign Office had asked the Ministry of Colonies to draft a report envisaging among other issues a possible return of parts of Togoland and the Cameroons to Germany, sacrifices which primarily would have to be made by France <sup>52</sup>.

Wild speculations in various British and German newspapers on the Halifax visit did of course not ease France's suspicions. On October 29<sup>th</sup> The Times published an article entitled *The Claim to Colonies*, in which the colonial settlement was linked to the conclusion of a general settlement. The German reactions to article in *The Times* were negative. «There is a general (...) refusal to link colonies with Spain, arms limitations, an eastern or even a western pact» <sup>53</sup>. The British *The Evening Standard* was also making wild guesses on the eve of the visit, and therefore incurring the wrath of the Germans. The German embassy in London informed Berlin on November 10<sup>th</sup> that *The Evening Standard* was sure that «no negotiations on specific issues such as the former German colonies now administered under League mandate by Britain are contemplated» <sup>54</sup>. But on November 13<sup>th</sup>, the paper revised its opinion. It was now sure that colonies would be talked about. It also stated that Germany would not ask for any colonies for a period of ten years if she received a free hand in Central Europe.

48 John HARVEY ed. *op.cit.*, p. 35.

49 *Conversation between Eden and Delbos*, November 13, 1937, (Brussels), (DDF, n° 230).

50 *Corbin to Delbos*, November 18, 1937 (DDF, n° 246).

51 *François-Poncet to Delbos*, November 15, 1937 (DDF, n° 232).

52 *Corbin to Delbos*, November 20, 1937 (DDF, n° 256).

53 *Sir Ogilvie-Forbes to Eden*, November 29, 1937 (DBFP, n° 275).

54 *Woermann, German chargé d'affaires in London to the German Foreign ministry*, November 10, 1937 (DGFP, n° 20).

The reaction of the German Nazi press was one of indignation. Some German papers even argued if it would not be better to postpone the visit for a while till the British press calmed down, and regained its «truthfulness and decency»<sup>55</sup>. The response in Great Britain to the article in *The Evening Standard* was one of anger too. Chamberlain was very upset, but was also concerned because of the criticism of Eden in the German press<sup>56</sup>.

The fear that excessive press speculations might harm the upcoming negotiations, caused the German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels to coerce the German papers not to link Halifax's visit to the colonial question and to stop their colonial campaign<sup>57</sup>. Similar steps were however not taken in England.

The article in *The Evening Standard* further contained a map showing a possible reshuffle of colonies in Africa. Press comments like these did certainly not contribute in easing French suspicions.

In the midst of this press controversy, preparations continued to be made in both Germany and Great Britain for the talks. An agenda was set for the informal meeting. Von Weizsäcker, the German secretary of State at the Foreign Ministry, indicated that armaments, Czechoslovakia, and the inviolability of the German-Dutch border could be discussed. He proposed the creation of a German-English commission, with the possible inclusion of French members, to examine Germany's colonial demands.

«From England we want colonies and freedom of action in the East, from us England wants military quiescence, particularly in the West (...). These wishes are not completely irreconcilable»<sup>58</sup>. Von Weizsäcker proved to be wrong on two essential points. England wanted more than just peace in the West. There was a genuine concern for the security in Central and Eastern Europe. And the different wishes did eventually turn out to be irreconcilable.

Halifax and Eden insisted on the importance of the Austrian and Czech problems. These issues should consequently be raised during the talks<sup>59</sup>. As to the colonial question, «Halifax further assumed that the Führer would probably discuss the colonial question (...)»<sup>60</sup>. Halifax also expressed the

55 Henderson to Eden, November 14, 1937 (DBFP, n° 321-322).

56 German embassy in London to the German Foreign ministry, November 18, 1937 (DGFP, n° 29).

57 Henderson to Foreign Office, November 13, 1937 (DBFP, n° 317) and Klaus HILDEBRAND, *op.cit.*, p. 530.

58 Memorandum submitted by State Secretary von Weizsäcker, November 10, 1937 (DGFP, n° 21).

59 Eden to Sir Eric Phipps (British ambassador in Paris), November 13, 1937 (DBFP, n° 318). Eden informs Phipps about the conversation he had with French Foreign Minister Delbos during the Brussels Conference on the Far East.

60 Von Ribbentrop to the German Foreign ministry, November 15, 1937 (DGFP, n° 24).

wish that this should be the beginning of further negotiations with Germany<sup>61</sup>.

In the weeks preceding the visit, Sir Nevile Henderson had several meetings with von Neurath to fix time, date, and place of the visit. Both Henderson and Eden stressed the need for the meeting to take place during the actual exhibition.<sup>62</sup> If Hitler would «receive Lord Halifax after the end of the exhibition [this] would lend the visit a very different aspect and would, in fact, deprive it of its main advantage to us inasmuch as he [Lord Halifax] would have been visiting Berlin on other business»<sup>63</sup>.

Furthermore, Halifax would have to travel to Berchtesgaden, as Hitler was unwilling to come to Berlin<sup>64</sup>. It was also agreed upon that the two ambassadors, Henderson and Ribbentrop, would not be present at the meeting. The British wanted to keep the visit as informal as possible<sup>65</sup>.

A statement was read in the House of Commons on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1937 emphasising that «the visit will be entirely private and unofficial»<sup>66</sup>.

Henderson honestly hoped that an Anglo-German understanding would be reached. According to him, this was possible if Great Britain did not oppose the *Anschluß* if Austria desired so; if London was willing to recognise — at least in principle — the right of Germany to own colonies; and if Downing Street would show no objections to a German economic and political predominance in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>67</sup>. Henderson clearly urged a conciliatory attitude. In the ambassador's eyes London needed to be accomodating wanted it to reach any Anglo-German understanding at all.

Everything was ready now for Halifax's conversation with Hitler which was scheduled for November 19<sup>th</sup>.

It is worthwhile to digress for a moment on the public opinion in Germany and on Hitler's own ideas of colonial restitution on the eve of his talks with Lord Halifax.

François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin, kept his superiors in Paris well informed of what was going on in Germany<sup>68</sup>. The Berlin newspapers stressed the fact that Germany was entitled to take part in the work of civilizing the coloured people. Others referred to the injustice done by

61 See footnote 60.

62 Henderson to Eden, November 8, 1937 (DBFP, n° 298) and Eden to Henderson, November 8, 1937 (DBFP, n° 299).

63 Eden to Henderson, November 8, 1937 (DBFP, n° 299).

64 Henderson to Foreign Office, November 9 and 10, 1937 (DBFP, n° 303, 306 and 307).

65 Henderson to Foreign Office, November 16, 1937 (DBFP, n° 327-328).

66 Foreign Office to Henderson, November 11, 1937 (DBFP, n° 312).

67 Note by Mr. Strang for Lord Halifax on to Henderson's Memorandum of May 10, 1937 (DBFP, n° 319).

68 François-Poncet to Delbos, October 7 and November 5, 1937 (DDF, n° 37 and 192).

the Treaty of Versailles. Furthermore, any delay of a colonial settlement would create problems for Africa, or could cause complications as the one in Abyssinia. It was also stressed that a restitution would not create any military or strategical dangers. Then it were the allies who had started the hostilities and had raised indigenous armies in the colonies during World War I. The German papers also laid their finger on the hypocrisy of the West. If Germany did not ask her colonies back, she was perceived as having laid her eyes on Central and Eastern Europe. If she did do so, she was being accused of starting a war economy. François-Poncet clearly pointed out that the German demands were based on economic and moral grounds. The Ministry of Economics stressed the need for raw materials and *Lebensraum* (Germany had 134 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> while Australia and Canada only had 2 inh/km<sup>2</sup>).

Hitler in the meantime referred to the colonial question in his October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1937 speech during the harvest celebrations on the Bückeberg. He blamed Germany's want of raw materials to the absence of colonies. In reality Germany lacked the hard currency to buy the commodities. As far as Hitler was concerned, colonies could not be the subject of a bargain. «Foreign statesmen say 'Colonies are a heavy burden'. But they are unwilling to surrender any part of this burden», the Chancellor told his audience.<sup>69</sup>

Hitler received support for his demand from Mussolini in the Duce's speech on October 28<sup>th</sup>. He stated that Germany deserved a place under the African sun. This caused François-Poncet to fear that Italy would no give moral but also diplomatic support.<sup>70</sup>

Lord Halifax arrived in Berlin on November 17<sup>th</sup>. He was met by Sir Neville Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin, who briefed him on the upcoming visit to Hitler in Berchtesgaden. Later during the day, Lord Halifax had lunch with von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, and afterwards he visited the hunting exhibition. November 18<sup>th</sup> was not much different.

Lord Halifax met the German Chancellor on the morning of November 19<sup>th</sup>. Neurath prevented Halifax, who nearly mistook Hitler for a footman, from making an enormous diplomatic blunder by whispering *Der Führer* into Halifax's ear.<sup>71</sup>

The talks, attended by Hitler, Lord Halifax, Neurath, and Hitler's interpreter Schmidt, started at once. Hitler opened the conversation by complaining about the difficulties of negotiating with democratic countries. After the League of Nations, Danzig, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, the colonial question was talked over.

69 Norman H. BAYNES, *op.cit.*, p. 1365.

70 François-Poncet to Delbos, November 5, 1937 (DDF, n° 192).

71 EARL OF HALIFAX, *op.cit.*, p. 184-190. Also see *Account by Lord Halifax of his visit to Germany*, November 17-21, 1937 (DBFP, n° 366).



Hitler said he could understand that Great Britain wanted to retain some of the former German colonies for strategical reasons. But something should be offered in substitution. He did not mention any desiderata, but he made it clear that he did not want any colonies in the Sahara, the Mediterranean, in the Far East («too dangerous»), or at strategic points which could drag him into trouble. Halifax stressed the importance of the colonial question as part of a general settlement, a statement to which Hitler did not reply. Hitler however, reassured him that Germany would not go to war over colonies. The Chancellor urged Halifax and the British Government to formulate specific and detailed proposals because he did not believe in a conference every three months that achieved nothing. After once again touching upon the League of Nations, the conversation ended in the afternoon.

Halifax impressions were quite negative. He was convinced that Hitler had time on his side. «The conclusion, I think — he wrote — is that it will be difficult to make any progress unless we are prepared to make concrete proposals in the one matter that directly arises between us: viz. the colonial issue. The suggestion that we should try to do a bargain on the line of getting him to drop the demands for colonies in return for a free hand in Europe is neither very moral nor attractive. There might be more to be said for the more difficult but sounder bargain of a colonial settlement at the price of being a good European»<sup>72</sup>.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, Göring told Lord Halifax more or less the same. Von Blomberg, the minister of War however, confided to Göring that the colonial problem was only secondary. According to von Blomberg Germany's primary goals were Central and Eastern Europe<sup>73</sup>.

This runs opposite to Halifax's impressions that the colonial question was the only outstanding problem between Germany and Great Britain. And how right was von Blomberg in his assessment of the colonial problem, keeping in mind the infamous Hoßbach Memorandum of just two weeks earlier.

During an evening party a couple of days later, Lord Halifax discussed among other things the colonial issue with Dr. Schacht, the German Minister of Economics. Schacht assured Halifax that Berlin no longer was interested in Germany's former Pacific holdings, but Schacht acknowledged that Southwest Africa and Tanganyika did indeed pose problems. This left only Togo and the Cameroons, and perhaps a chunk of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola. When Halifax inquired what Belgium and Portugal would think of such an arrangement, Schacht replied that they might be persuaded of its wisdom as part of world appeasement<sup>74</sup>.

72 EARL OF HALIFAX, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

73 See footnote 71.

74 See footnote 71.

After having met Goebbels during a luncheon party at the British embassy, also attended by the French, Italian, American, and Belgian ambassadors, Lord Halifax returned to Britain.<sup>75</sup>

According to the reports of Sir Neville Henderson, Halifax's visit seems to have been favourably received in Germany.<sup>76</sup>

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, two days after his talks with Lord Halifax, Hitler raised the colonial question again during a speech in Augsburg. «What it [the world] will not listen to now, it will have to think about in three year's time, and, in five or six, it will have to take into practical consideration»<sup>77</sup>. This was a clear hint that as far as Hitler was concerned, the colonial question was no high priority on his agenda. Europe was much more important to him. But the colonial question was good propaganda material however.

Von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, also had his reflections. On November 20<sup>th</sup> he informed Henderson that everyone thought it to be normal for America, Russia, England, France, and Japan to possess large territories. Even smaller countries such as Belgium, Portugal, and Spain had colonies. «It was only to Germany that one declared that she could in no circumstance be allowed to possess colonies»<sup>78</sup>. Von Neurath thought that it was up to England and France to make concrete proposals.

The German embassies in London, Paris, Rome, and Washington were briefed on the outcome of the talks between Lord Halifax and Hitler on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. The information that was sent hardly revealed any specifics however.<sup>79</sup>

The secrecy surrounding Halifax's visit, and the reluctance of Halifax and Henderson to talk, did little to reassure François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin. Both Englishmen responded evasively to his questions, an attitude that angered François-Poncet<sup>80</sup>. He described Henderson as a Germanophile, according to whom all fault lay with France's ties to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia<sup>81</sup>. François-Poncet did furthermore not believe that the communiqué that had been issued after the talks between Halifax and Hitler revealed the true content of the conversation<sup>82</sup>. After having been informed by Eden, François-Poncet expressed his surprise at the actual lack of content. He described it as «an exchange of two silences»<sup>83</sup>.

75 Henderson to Eden, November 23, 1937 (DBFP, n° 343).

76 Henderson to Eden, November 22, 1937 (DBFP, n° 337).

77 Norman H. BAYNES ed., *op.cit.* p. 1371.

78 Von Neurath to Henderson, November 20, 1937 (DGFP, n° 31).

79 German Foreign ministry to the German embassies in London, Rome, Paris and Washington, November 22, 1937 (DGFP, n° 33).

80 François-Poncet to Delbos, November 21, 1937 (IDDF, n° 258).

81 François-Poncet to Delbos, November 22, 1937 (IDDF, N° 260).

82 *Ibid.*

83 François-Poncet to Delbos, November 26, 1937 (IDDF, n° 272).

Colonial restitution was reason for concern in Paris. The German embassy in London was told by an informant that prior to the Hitler-Halifax talks, Paris had urged London not to include the French colonial empire in the discussions<sup>84</sup>.

The French government was fully informed of the Hitler-Halifax meeting during an Anglo-French summit in London a couple of days later. Camille Chautemps and Yvon Delbos, the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, deliberated with their English counterparts on November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

Since the British Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs had decided on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1937 that the French should be taken into confidence if the colonial question were to be discussed seriously<sup>85</sup>, and as the Treaty of Versailles had given France considerable parts of the German African colonial empire, it was hard to keep Paris uninformed. As Chamberlain and Chautemps had never met before, a getting acquainted was the official reason for the summit.

Lord Halifax gave a lengthy account of his visit to Germany and of his talks with Hitler, including his conversations on colonial appeasement. The account given by Halifax was a fairly objective one<sup>86</sup>. Neither did he fail to mention his discussion with Dr. Schacht during which the Belgian Congo and the Portuguese colonies were discussed. Asked by the French whether the Congo did also include the French Congo, Halifax answered that it did not. The French and British delegations then agreed to discuss the colonial problem among themselves in order to find out what could be offered to Berlin. The British stated that any transfer of Tanganyika was out of the question for strategical reasons. Both parties also acknowledged the difficulty of transferring coloured people from a humane regime to one of brutal economic exploitation.

Chamberlain then asked: «What would the French government think of a British approach to Belgium and Portugal with the object of meeting Germany's suggestion for a mandate in West Africa over Belgian and Portuguese territory in compensation for Tanganyika, the basis of such approach to be territorial cession or monetary compensation or both»<sup>87</sup>.

French Foreign Minister Delbos answered bluntly that he did not like the idea of a colonial deal being made at the expense of Belgium and Portugal. Colonial restitution was a very delicate problem, which had to be handled with great tact and discretion, because the smaller countries might

84 German embassy in London to German Foreign ministry, November 25, 1937 (DGFP, n° 42).

85 John HARVEY ed., *op.cit.*, p. 35.

86 *Record of Conversations between British and French Ministers held at No. 10 Downing Street on November 29 and 30, 1937* (DBFP, n° 354).

87 *Ibid.*

start to think of the larger ones as making deals with Germany at their expense.

The League of Nations, Czechoslovakia, the Far East, disarmament, Spain, the Mediterranean Question, and Danzig were also discussed. At the end of the two day conversations, on November 30<sup>th</sup>, a communiqué was issued emphasising that the colonial issue could not be considered in isolation, «and would moreover involve a number of other countries. It was agreed that the subject would require much more extended study». Finally, Paris was asked to «consider an enquiry with Belgium and Portugal for a broad African scheme»<sup>88</sup>.

The French dislike of making any deal at the expense of Belgium or Portugal, and their insistence on the involvement of other countries — id est Belgium and Portugal — led to the fact that they ceased to be informed by the British of any further developments.

The telegram, that was sent by Paris to twelve different French embassies all over Europe and in Washington, containing details on the Anglo-French conversations, did not reflect the actual mood. It said that «a perfect harmony of views exists between the two governments on the attitude to be adopted concerning the German problem, including the colonial problem»<sup>89</sup>.

And how did the Belgian government react to the Anglo-German talks? There was — as was the case with France — suspicion and fear that Berlin and London would reach a deal at the expense of other countries. François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin, was of the opinion that London wanted France, Belgium, and Portugal to contribute more to a colonial settlement than England herself<sup>90</sup>. Laroche, France's ambassador in Brussels, reported that Halifax's visit busied the minds of quite a few Belgian government officials. Baron Pierre van Zuylen, political director of the Belgian Foreign ministry, «was visibly occupied by the visit of Lord Halifax to Berlin». Van Zuylen feared that Great Britain would not be firm enough in her dealings with Germany<sup>91</sup>.

Until the end of November 1937, neither the Belgians nor the Portuguese knew of the exact content of the conversation between Lord Halifax and Hitler. Leaks to the press, and a number of newspaper articles changed all this. Ribbentrop, the German ambassador in Berlin, wrote on the occasion of the Anglo-French summit of November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> that «with respect to the question of colonial compensation (...) there are enormous possibilities for intrigue in the international press»<sup>92</sup>. The bomb exploded early December

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Delbos to several French ambassadors in various European capitals*, December 2, 1937 (DDF, n° 297).

90 *François-Poncet to Delbos*, November 26, 1937 (DDF, n° 272).

91 *Laroche, French ambassador in Brussels, to Delbos*, November 29, 1937 (DDF, n° 289).

92 *Von Ribbentrop to the German Foreign ministry*, November 30, 1937 (DGFP, n° 47).