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The Polish Match?

British diplomacy, Poland–Lithuania and the Stuart–Vasa Dynastic Alliance project

Although Samuel R. Gardiner famously argued in his monumental *History of England* that Charles I “had no European policy at all”, modern historians are of a different opinion. The fact is that in the 1630s the king was much more active in the field of foreign relations than it had once been believed. Scholars unambiguously point to the restitution of the Palatinate to the king's sister's children as the main objective of his diplomatic efforts and the reasoning that stood behind his policy towards major European powers: the Empire, Spain and France¹ It has also been recognised that this factor had a huge impact on Britain's relations with other countries, including Sweden and Poland–Lithuania².

The very fact that Charles I's diplomacy viewed the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth as a partner, both commercially and politically, should not be surprising. Poland's position in Central and Eastern Europe and its political role in the Baltic region had already been recognized in London, especially after 1603³. What may be intriguing is Charles I's serious involvement in the project that emerged in the early 1630s to build a

¹ I. Atherton, *Ambition and failure in Stuart England: the career of John, first viscount Scudemore*, Manchester 1999, 177.

² J.K. Fedorowicz, *England's Baltic trade in the early seventeenth century. A study in Anglo–Polish commercial diplomacy*, Cambridge 1981, 229.

³ *Ibidem*, s. 40–45.

dynastic alliance between the House of Stuart and the Polish Vasa line, an attempt which framed two countries' relations for more than a decade.

The plans of the match between Polish King Władysław IV (r. 1632–1648) and Charles I's niece, princess Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Frederick V and Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia, has been well known to historians. However, the project is usually presented in a rather two-dimensional way. It is usually concluded simply that either the princess declined the possibility to become the queen for she did not want to relinquish her religion⁴, or that the Polish king saw the marriage only as an instrument to secure Charles I's military and diplomatic assistance against Sweden⁵ and part of a scheme to control relations between Catholics and Protestants in the early years of his reign⁶. The only studies linking it to the British policy of the period, although very interesting, need to be revisited today⁷.

Therefore, this text aims to place this problem in a wider diplomatic context, which must be done in two steps. Firstly, the information available about British diplomacy's reactions to the plan and the following events should be summarized. Secondly, a possible explanation as to why, contrary to what has been argued, London showed ongoing interest in following the scheme even when it was quite unlikely to succeed, should be presented.

⁴ E. Godfrey, *A sister of Prince Rupert. Elizabeth Princess Palatine and Abbess of Herford*, London–New York 1909, 70–73.

⁵ A. Szelański, *Rozkład Rzeszy i Polska za panowania Władysława IV*, Kraków 1907, 55–56, 132, W. Czapliński, *Władysław IV i jego czasy*, Warszawa 1976, 175–199.

⁶ J. Dziegielewska, *O tolerancję dla zdominowanych. Polityka wyznaniowa Rzeczypospolitej w latach panowania Władysława IV*, Warszawa 1986, 98.

⁷ J.K. Fedorowicz, op.cit, T. Wasilewski, *Projekt sojuszu angielsko-polskiego i małżeństwa Władysława IV z Elżbietą siostrzenicą Karola I Stuarta*, „Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Warszawskiego”, 46 (1983), 83–85.

The beginnings of the project remain unclear. Some historians argue that the first steps were taken by the Polish side as early as in late 1632, when Władysław supposedly asked the senators during the royal election if they would consider the possibility of him marrying a Protestant princess⁸. This was mentioned in a short English description of the electoral assembly that was sent to Britain and probably reached the court soon after the election ended⁹. There is no evidence, though, that could confirm that this was in fact the first sign of interest in a possible alliance with the Stuarts. As the report's authorship is not certain one can neither argue that the whole situation was staged to attract attention of the English court, nor can this idea be completely rejected¹⁰.

It seems almost certain that the diplomatic game was well on by late in the summer of 1633. In February, the first representative of the new Polish king visited London. It was young Duke Janusz Radziwiłł, son of Krzysztof Radziwiłł, one of the new king's strongest supporters and head of the Protestant faction. He was to inform Charles I about Władysław's election, as well as confirm good relations between the two monarchs¹¹. What seems interesting is that he was accompanied by his father's confidant Aleksander Przyppkowski, who was later to play an important role in the matrimonial negotiations and was one of the few people involved directly in the project.

Just few months later, in June, another Polish diplomat, Jan Zawadzki, arrived at the British court. He approached the king in Edinburgh, where he witnessed Charles I's coronation and conducted talks

⁸ Z. Trawicka, *Projekt kalwińskiego małżeństwa Władysława IV*, „Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce”, 11 (1966), 93.

⁹ *Opis Elekcji Władysława IV*, ed. F. Kuczyński, London 1854, 20.

¹⁰ J.K. Fedorowicz, op. cit., 300.

¹¹ *Ceremonies of Charles I. The Note Books of John Finet Master of Ceremonies, 1628–1641*, ed. A. J. Loomie, S.J., New York 1987, 134.

with the king himself and the secretary of state, Sir John Coke. Their conversations dealt mainly with the possibility of Władysław mediating in Germany, economic issues and British involvement in the future peace mediation between Poland and Sweden¹².

There is no evidence that either young Radziwiłł or Zawadzki presented any marriage propositions. It should be noted, however, that as early as at the beginning of July, Venetian ambassador Vincenzo Gussoni informed his government that in London “they would be glad if that king inclined to marry young princess Palatine, his Majesty's niece”, and that Krzysztof Radziwiłł favoured the idea and declared his support for the business¹³.

A few weeks later, on his way back from Scotland, Zawadzki stopped in London, where he kept *incognito*, and contacted Sir Thomas Roe, a former British mediator and ambassador to Poland. At the beginning, the focus of their talks was on the future mediation¹⁴. It appears possible that this was not the only issue they discussed, as in mid–August Roe mentioned the Polish king's interest in princess Elizabeth to her mother. In early September, the Queen of Bohemia thanked him, as she put it, for “the news of Poland” and she also noted that during his stay in The Hague en route to Britain, Zawadzki had not mentioned the possible match (although he had tried to buy portrait of the young princess). She also informed Roe that her mother-in-law living in Berlin had been approached by a Polish diplomat who had wanted to discuss her grand-daughter's future with her, but she expressed no enthusiasm about the issue. However, she added that if her

¹² The National Archives (thereafter: TNA), SP88/8, f. 151.

¹³ *Calendar of State Papers relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice* (hereafter: CSPV 23), vol. 23, ed. Allen B. Hinds, London 1921, 123.

¹⁴ TNA: SP 88/8, f. 165.

brother took the Polish proposition seriously she was willing to give it some consideration¹⁵.

Within next few months the planned marriage became an issue widely talked about in Europe, but that did not change the Queen of Bohemia's attitude. Her letter to Roe from January of 1634 expressed serious doubts about the rationality of the plan. Additionally, she stated her belief that "old friends both tied by bond and religion are better than new, that are neither one nor the other"¹⁶. Her stance was the same in the spring, when an unofficial representative of the Polish king, Aleksander Przytkowski, who was to start the marriage negotiations on behalf of his master, arrived at The Hague and later in London. There are few details on Przytkowski's mission, but it seems that he dealt not only with the marriage, but also with Charles I's involvement in the Polish-Swedish mediation¹⁷.

In the spring of 1634 the question of the match was finally mentioned in the correspondence of the British diplomatic agent in Poland-Lithuania, Francis Gordon¹⁸. Very early on he informed his supervisors about the strong Catholic resistance to the king's matrimonial plans, particularly that coming from a number of bishops and high-ranking officials, and about their efforts aimed at stopping the negotiations and preventing the wedding, but he also stressed Władysław's determination to marry princess Palatinate. According to his reports, the king had regularly talked to him about the situation and implied that the opposition was not as strong as it was believed and that even the senators who in public protested

¹⁵ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1633-34*, ed. J. Bruce, London 1863, 195.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 398.

¹⁷ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1634-35* (hereafter: CSPD 1634-35), ed. J. Bruce, London 1864, 42.

¹⁸ TNA, SP88/8, f. 218.

against the match in private admitted that they could change their minds if they were presented with evidence that it would bring serious advantages to Poland–Lithuania¹⁹. Gordon seemed to be equally convinced that the marriage was going to take place when he had an opportunity to report the latest events to Charles I himself in July 1635²⁰. Gordon's letters also confirm that his information could have come from officials close to the Polish king and involved in the project, including the royal courtiers Andrzej Rey, Zygmunt Guldenstern and Protestant leaders Rafał Leszczyński and Krzysztof Radziwiłł²¹.

A completely different attitude towards the arrangement was adopted by Sir George Douglas, British special ambassador who arrived in Poland in early in the spring of 1635. During his stay in Prussia (where he was involved in preparations for the Swedish–Polish mediation) and at the Polish court, he discussed the match with the same people as Gordon, i.e. Radziwiłł and Leszczyński and the king himself²². Despite Władysław's efforts to win the diplomat over, he was far from enthusiastic about the planned marriage. When in March the monarch propounded the issue to the Senate, Douglas was still in Warsaw. He informed his superiors that the senators' reactions were quite positive, but at the same time, he admitted that he did nothing to advocate the match to those who were opposing it. As he stated, when they approached him trying to talk about the possible marriage he "answered them gently and sparingly, keeping myself reserved and aloof to the end that his Maty my gracious Master not appearing much interested or intente therein (...)"²³

¹⁹ Ibidem, f. 244.

²⁰ CSPV 23, 425.

²¹ TNA: SP88/8, f. 226–7, SP88/9, ff. 12, 86, 229.

²² TNA: SP 88/9, f. 12.

²³ Ibidem, f. 18.

Douglas' actions were to some extent a sharp contrast to his instructions, as Charles I had ordered him to promote the match as well as indicate to Władysław the advantages of a dynastic alliance with the Stuarts, including military support, permission for levying of English, Scottish and Irish soldiers and improvement of commercial relations, all of which could result in increasing Poland–Lithuania's position in the Baltic region. The ambassador was also to move the king to action by reminding him that it was he who had mentioned the marriage for the first time and now he should act in a honourable way²⁴.

After moving back to Prussia, where he was to take part in the peace mediation in Stumdorf, Douglas' opinion only worsened. He believed that he was not being treated in a proper way by the Poles and became suspicious about the king's real intentions. The final straw came during the ceremony of signing the truce when Polish commissioners gave precedence to the French ambassador, Count d'Avoux²⁵. This led the ambassador to openly accuse both the king and his officials of duplicity and send to London a very detailed report concerning the recent events. Regarding the wedding, he wrote that he believed the Poles "(...) fish occasions to break the match. I begin to suspect that they never meant more by it then this to serve their time." He did not mention, however, on what grounds he had formed this strong judgment, although he repeated his accusations and complains in further letters sent to London²⁶.

Douglas' attitude did not go unnoticed by the Polish monarch, who decided to complain to Charles I about the ambassador's behaviour. In the

²⁴ Ibidem, f. 3.

²⁵ J. Fowler, *The History of the Troubles of Suethland and Poland...concluding with a brief commemoration of the life and death of Sir George Douglas Knight...*, London 1656, 230.

²⁶TNA,SP 88/9, ff. 88–88v, 91–92, 94–94.

meantime, Gordon worked to ease the situation. He tried not only to mollify the Poles but also to persuade the secretary of state that he did not believe that Douglas could have behaved in such an improper way and that the whole situation was the result of a misunderstanding and machinations of the French, who were trying to sabotage the match²⁷.

Gordon's efforts, and probably also the gradual change of Douglas' actions, led to improved relations between the ambassador and the Polish king. By the end of the year, Douglas had informed his supervisors that Władysław had realized his mistake and felt ashamed for his actions, so now he treated him with respect and sympathy. Douglass even suggested that his conflict with the Poles was nothing but a result of "the tricks and machinations of the priests then the fault of the king"²⁸. There was also a change in his position on the match. Douglas was still, to say the least, sceptical about the business. He expressed serious doubts as to why Władysław, who officially declared his determination to marry Princess Elizabeth, did so little to win over his subjects' support for the plan, and reported that even the Protestants had reservations about the wedding. It should be noted that he did not repeat his previous accusations and complaints again. However, the ambassador was very critical of Gordon. He did not deny that the agent was an honest man, but in his opinion, Gordon "was more credules for these Poles than (for What that I see) He hase causa, and I'm affraid that they work upon that aptnes and facility of his to believe them for I have observed that they find and know him sufficiently"²⁹.

By then, Charles I and his secretaries of state must have known not only about Douglas' suspicions but also about the arrival at The Hague of Władysław's messenger Pstrokoński, in mid-September, who presented the

²⁷ Ibidem, f. 155f.

²⁸ Ibidem, f. 194.

²⁹ Ibidem, f. 199f.

princess with a private letter from the king and suggested that it would strengthen her chances to become queen of Poland if she decided to convert to Catholicism³⁰. Moreover, in January, another representative of the Polish monarch, Aleksander Przytkowski visited The Hague and London for the second time³¹. And although, similarly to his first mission, there is only scarce information about his actions, it seems that Przytkowski made some propositions that were not well received by Charles I and the Queen of Bohemia, as Elizabeth complained about this to Roe³².

Despite all of this, the king and his counsellors showed neither signs of anxiety nor plans to give up the project. On the contrary, it was decided that Douglas should be recalled as he was believed to be responsible for some of the problems related to the planned match and accused of trying to ruin it by prompting the Queen of Bohemia's reservations³³.

Whether the ambassador really did try to sabotage the planned marriage or not, the Queen herself was showing, at least openly, no interest in it. In March 1636, she wrote to Roe that Charles I was given a much too optimistic picture of the business and expressed regret that the king and his counsellors had been too haste in entering talks with Władysław³⁴. Some of her letters from that time show, however, that she was considering the

³⁰ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1635*, ed. J. Bruce, London 1865, 380

³¹ CSPV 23, 323, 333–4, 336).

³² *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I*, URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/> Date accessed: 27 July 2010, (hereafter: CSPDa), 283: 497–531.

³³ TNA, SP 88/9, f. 166, Hartlib Papers – Sheffield University Library; Image consulted on Early Modern Letters Online: <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/hartlib/> (<http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>, 6 October 2012), (hereafter: Hartlib Papers), 14/4/42B.

³⁴ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1635–36*, ed. J. Bruce, London 1866, 268.

possibility that her daughter might one day leave for Poland. For instance, she was planning who could possibly join Elizabeth's entourage³⁵.

It seems that in early 1636 both the king and his secretaries of state were still going on with the business. In February, Gordon received new instructions that showed the way London reacted to the recent events. The agent was to inform Władysław that Charles I agreed the princess Palatinate should move to London, as it had been suggested by the Polish king in December, but only after signing the official marriage treaty. Furthermore he was to declare, on behalf of his master, that Charles I was still determined to conclude the project and did not intent to look for any other match for his niece. Gordon was also warned to stay extremely cautious because of the general opposition to the planned alliance from Rome, the Emperor, Spain and France, as well as Jesuits and some Poles, including chancellor Jakub Zadzik³⁶.

About the same time, Douglas, who had just received his letters of revocation, departed for England. He intended to explain his actions in person but died on 25th March, just days after leaving Danzig³⁷. As a result, Gordon, who became the only British diplomat in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was now practically the only source of information for his supervisors. As usual, in almost all of the reports he described in length his meetings with Władysław, who was to declare that he would marry Princess Elizabeth. He also reported on his contacts with the king's followers (especially Andrzej Rey), averring that the more obstacles to the match emerged the more Władysław was determined to succeed³⁸.

³⁵ CSPDa, 311: 141-174.

³⁶ TNA, SP88/9, f. 184f.

³⁷ J. Fowler, op. cit., 234-236, C. Ogier, *Dziennik podróży do Polski, 1635-1636*, ed. Z. Gołaszewski, Gdańsk 2010, 214.

³⁸ TNA, SP88/9, f. 228.

There may be no doubt that Gordon's reports were welcomed at the British court with contentedness. This is confirmed by the court's reaction to the long-awaited Polish mission that reached London in early summer. It was generally expected that Polish ambassador Jan Zawadzki, the same person who probably first presented the project to the British, had orders to conclude the negotiations and even to sign the marriage treaty. Instead, he declared that although the Polish monarch kept his intentions to marry princess Palatine, the wedding could not take place unless the bride-to-be would convert to Catholicism. Zawadzki even tried to convince Charles I and Henrietta Maria that they should move Elizabeth to change her religion. The king and the court reacted immediately. The diplomat was boycotted by the courtiers and his complaints about the way he was treated were ignored³⁹. Zawadzki responded by accusing Gordon of being responsible for his troubles and demanding a written explanation from the secretary of state, but to no avail. Finally he left for France, although not without informing his hosts that he would be back within few weeks to complete the mission.

Gordon, staying at that time in London, was consulted and argued that Władysław had nothing to do with Zawadzki's requests and that the ambassador did not represent his sovereign, but the opinions of Polish senators⁴⁰. The events were similarly commented on by Sir Thomas Roe, who blamed the problems not on the king but on the diplomat, whom he even accused of treason⁴¹.

Surprisingly, within days after Zawadzki left England, Charles I decided to send Gordon back to Poland to protest the latest events, but in a way that would not hurt the continuation of the project. This was confirmed

³⁹ *Ceremonies of Charles I...*, 202, CSPV 24: 11–13, C. Ogier, op. cit., 307.

⁴⁰ TNA, SP88/9, f. 264.

⁴¹ CSPDa, 329: 65–83.

by the letter of Palatine Charles Louis to his mother. Writing about the match to his mother, the young prince mentioned that it had been decided that Gordon would be sent to Władysław to complain about Zawadzki's behaviour, but said nothing about abandoning the plan. However, he admitted that the situation was pretty confusing and he did not know how it would develop⁴². A very similar opinion was presented by Sir Thomas Roe, who also expressed his confusion and mentioned Gordon's mission, but also added that in London "wee hope well"⁴³.

According to the Venetian ambassador, Anzolo Correr, who usually knew a lot about the details of Gordon's reports and instructions, the British diplomat was to inform the Polish king on behalf of Charles I that, although his monarch was not going to persuade his niece to convert, he would not protest if she decided herself to change her confession. Correr also informed his supervisors that Secretary of State Sir Francis Windebank was not very optimistic about the final outcome of the plan; nonetheless, the British did not want to ruin their relations with Poland-Lithuania. Instead, they chose to take some time to find out what Władysław's real intentions were and, depending on what they discovered, go on with the match or try to find another way to solve the problem of the Palatinate⁴⁴.

Gordon arrived in Danzig in August and in mid-September he talked to Władysław in Vilnius. The king assured him that from the very beginning his intentions had been absolutely honest and that Zawadzki was not to have mentioned conversion, unless in a private conversation with Henrietta Maria, and then only if the queen seemed well-inclined, but he

⁴² *A collection of original royal letters... from year 1619 to 1665*, ed. Sir Charles Bromley, London 1787, 72-73.

⁴³ Hartlib Papers, 14/4/46A/B.

⁴⁴ *Calendar of State Papers relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, vol. 24, ed. Allen B. Hinds, London 1923, 11, 15.

did not give an answer to Charles I's letters. Gordon argued that, as he had learned from Krzysztof Radziwiłł, with whom he had discussed the issue, the delay was caused by the fact that the king wanted to consult some of the senators and that he was afraid that the opposition may start a rebellion. Radziwiłł also suggested that some of the senators opposed to the match had been bribed by the Spanish ambassador⁴⁵.

The agent's subsequent reports carried a very similar tone. For the next few months, he mainly wrote about his meeting with Rey, Guldenstern and other supporters of the match and their insistence that the king was desperate to marry princess Palatinate, but did not want to give the opposition an excuse to start a mutiny. He also mentioned that he was afraid for his personal safety, as many opponents of the match pointed him out as its main architect⁴⁶.

Finally, in winter, the agent started to show some signs of scepticism. In his February report he described a conversation with Władysław, who complained that the senators had demanded he chose his bride and their only requirement was her being a Catholic. Gordon also wrote that the French were pressing the king to marry princess Maria Luise Gonzaga and were eager to pay Władysław "a million livres" upon his decision⁴⁷.

It is possible that Gordon was unaware of the events crucial to the future of the plan, but they were well known to many others, including other British diplomats on the Continent. News on the talks about the marriage between the Polish king and the younger sister of the Emperor Archduchess, Cecilia Renata had probably reached London and The Hague long before Gordon reported them. It seems quite possible that the Earl of

⁴⁵ TNA, SP88/9, f. 284.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, ff. 286f, 292f.

⁴⁷ TNA, SP88/10, f. 2.

Arundel, who acted as Charles I's ambassador extraordinary at the Imperial Court, knew about it in September⁴⁸. In November, he reported to the Queen of Bohemia about the arrival of the Imperial Representative, father Magni, who was to complete the negotiation and sign the marriage treaty⁴⁹.

The final act of the arrangement was the mission of Andrzej Rey, one of the people deeply involved in the project. In the summer of 1637 he was to inform in London about Władysław's marriage to the Hapsburg princess and to explain why Władysław had abandoned his earlier plans. As could be expected, Rey was not warmly welcomed at the British court. He was denied diplomatic status and not allowed to present his letters of credence⁵⁰. Just a few weeks later, Gordon was recalled from the Polish court (he described his final audience with Władysław in a report written in early October), which in practice meant that London had decided to break diplomatic relations with Poland–Lithuania.

These developments lead us to the point where it seems necessary to ask why the project of the match between Władysław and the princess Palatinate dominated British policy towards Poland–Lithuania for so long. Moreover, what were the reasons that Charles I and his diplomats seemed so determined not to give it up until the fact that the Polish king was not going to marry the daughter of Frederic V became general knowledge?

The primary question of those above seems to be the issue of Charles I's diplomacy in Poland–Lithuania. There is no reason to believe that any of the secretaries of state, or the king himself, for a very long time had any serious doubts about the project or that they were worried by the discord between Gordon and Douglas, who presented completely different

⁴⁸ CSPDa, 331: 110–132.

⁴⁹ CSPDa, 336: 199–217.

⁵⁰ A. Kalinowska, *Misja Andrzeja Reya w Anglii w 1637 roku*, „Odrodzenie i Reformacja”, 101 (2007), 7–20.

views on its reality. Gordon's information was assumed to be reliable and the fact that for some time he had been travelling between England and Poland every few months, which could have made it difficult for him to get up-to-date news and to stay in touch with other people involved in the plan, was ignored. The only person who stressed this factor was the Queen of Bohemia, who commented that the agent "rides post in this business", so he may not be up to date either about the latest events or the Poles' intentions⁵¹.

Moreover, it should be quite clear, even without the warnings by Douglas, that Gordon was under the strong influence of Władysław and some of his courtiers. He kept regular contact with the monarch, who sent him with a semi-diplomatic mission to Denmark, and he had close ties to Rey and Guldenstern. Both relationships obviously could have compromised his judgment. It is also worth mentioning that Gordon, who in fact could have been held partly responsible for the collapse of the project, was able to keep his position and was not accused of making any serious mistake. The Queen of Bohemia even tried to excuse him by arguing that he was definitely an honest man but "the King of Poland is too hard for him. They have made a fool of the poor Man, taking advantage of his affection for me, and his extreme desire to have the match proceed"⁵².

Reservations presented by Sir George Douglas seemed to have been completely ignored, even though they were to some extent supported by the news from The Hague about Pstrokoński's visit in September 1635 and his suggestions that the princess should convert to Catholicism. This may have been due to the fact that the ambassador did not provide any clear evidence of the Poles' wrongdoing regarding the marriage proposal.

⁵¹ CSPDa, 318: 348-372.

⁵² CSPDa, 331: 110-132.

Instead, in his reports he mainly complained about the way he was being mistreated, especially about the precedence given to the French ambassador, Count d'Avoux.

One can also expect that some complications may have been caused by the strong disagreement between secretaries of state Sir Francis Windebank and Sir John Coke. Windebank, promoted to the secretaryship in mid-1632, was one of Charles I's closest ministers and was involved in the most important activities of the Caroline diplomacy, as he dealt with the Spanish diplomats during negotiations in early 1630s and, at least for some time, strongly supported the Spanish alliance. Coke, secretary from 1625 and supporter of the 'Protestant line', had been in charge of foreign correspondence at same time in 1632 and tried to keep this prerogative even after Windebank's arrival⁵³. Officially, he succeeded, but in practice he was not involved in the decision making process. Despite attempts to involve himself and increase his influence through the diplomats he was friendly with, he was often unaware of the king's diplomatic plans and strategies⁵⁴. This led to a situation in which the work of the Secretary of State could have been seriously compromised by the secretaries' competition and by problems with communication between the diplomats on the Continent, the secretaries and the king. However, Coke's position improved slightly in 1636 as he was not excluded from the diplomatic game with the Hapsburgs, especially during the Earl of Arundel's mission to Ferdinand II⁵⁵.

Concerning the match, as Coke was officially responsible for diplomats working in Catholic countries, Gordon and Douglas generally

⁵³ M. B. Young, *Servility and Service. The Life and Work of Sir John Coke*, London 1986, 210.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 230.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 241.

wrote to him. Douglas, however, also addressed some of his reports to Windebank and even to Sir Francis Cottington, Chancellor of the Exchequer, another influential royal counsellor⁵⁶. It seems possible, although it cannot be supported by any strong evidence, that this could have increased tensions at the Secretary of State and influenced the way the ambassador's behaviour was later interpreted and assessed in London.

However, this does not explain why the British seemed to be determined to go on with the match even when other signals, not only Douglas' "premonition", indicated that Władysław had decided to withdraw from the marriage negotiations. Although some historians have argued otherwise⁵⁷, it seems impossible to determine if, for Władysław, the match was from the very beginning only an instrument in his efforts to recover the Swedish throne. Whatever the Polish king's real intentions were, Charles I must have been aware of Władysław's aspirations as it was well known in Europe that the newly elected monarch was focused on dynastic ambitions. Even Gordon clearly indicated this in one of his early reports dealing with the marriage "that in this Alliance He [Władysław] hath good hopes to come to his heritable crown and kingdome of Sweden"⁵⁸. Therefore, Charles I could have (and probably did) suspect that Władysław might have been using the Stuart alliance as an element of his diplomatic game with the Swedes and the Hapsburgs. If Charles I had decided to go on with the plan, it must have been because he believed it would be to his advantage to do so. But to what ends did the king wanted to use the possible Vasa alliance?

The answer can be discovered by looking at Charles I's foreign policy from this period. As it has already been mentioned, there is no doubt

⁵⁶ TNA, SP88/9, ff. 39, 41.

⁵⁷ W. Czapliński, op.cit., 191, H. Wisner, *Władysław IV*, Wrocław–Kraków–Warszawa 1995, 94.

⁵⁸ TNA, SP88/8, f. 226f.

that in the late 1620s and through the 1630s, the king's activities concentrated on efforts to restore the Palatinate and the electoral title to his nephew. However, he tried to achieve his goals without getting involved in the military conflict on the Continent or provoking any of the main Continental powers, i.e. Spain and France. His strategy was to follow the events and to manoeuvre between Madrid, Vienna and Paris, trying to come to agreement with those who seemed to be more willing to solve the problem of Frederick V's patrimony.

In the early 1630s, Spain seemed to be a much more attractive partner. In 1631 Francis Cottington concluded the first agreement and in 1633 England and Spain signed a maritime treaty that was to regulate their relations. Further talks with Madrid dragged on and the Spaniards presented new requests; at the same time they avoided making any declarations that Charles I could find satisfactory, especially on the issue of the Palatinate. This behaviour caused some serious frustration in London. As a result, with time even the supporters of the Spanish alliance became disheartened and started to look for other options.

The obvious choice was to turn to France. It was not an easy decision as the French were trying to strengthen their position in the Netherlands. In the spring of 1635, Charles I learned about the secret treaty between Louis XIII and the Dutch, who had planned the partition of the Spanish Netherlands. They had also allied with Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, who took over the electoral title of Frederick V⁵⁹.

The situation became even more complex when in mid-1635 Saxony and the Emperor signed the Peace of Prague and the Duke of Bavaria married the sister of the Emperor, as both of these events made the restitution of the Palatinate and the electoral title even less probable. The

⁵⁹ K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, New Haven-London 1992, 509-513.

only factor that Charles I could use to Britain's advantage in this diplomatic game was his navy, financed by the ship money that had been collected the previous year, whose negotiating power increased in May, when France declared war on Spain. The king could not get Britain involved in any land military campaign (one must remember that he had not called the Parliament since 1629 and his financial resources were restricted) nor was he very eager to risk his ships without any guarantees that it would solve the problem of Palatinate once and for all. As a result, the only solution seemed to maintain neutrality and to try to use all possible means to strengthen Britain's position in Europe and continue diplomatic efforts to restore the Palatinate.

To some extent this did work as both France and Spain were afraid of Charles I approaching their opponent⁶⁰. The king decided to use this opportunity by sending three major diplomatic missions to Paris, Madrid and Vienna in the spring of 1636. His diplomats, respectively the Earl of Leicester, Lord Aston and the Earl of Arundel, were to present his propositions and demands, as well as to learn whether any of the rulers they were sent to was ready to accept any accessions⁶¹.

The turn of events indicates that London had planned to use the possible marriage between Władysław and Elizabeth, although not as a trump card, at least as one of the arguments showing that Britain's position was in fact stronger than believed by the Hapsburgs and France. Hints that this was in fact one of the factors behind the British interest in the project appeared as early as in 1634. There is no doubt that Sir Thomas Roe's vision of a great northern league formed of Poland and other neutral countries and headed by Charles I, which he had presented to some of his correspondents,

⁶⁰ L. Bienassis, *Richelieu and Britain, 1634–1642* in: *The Contending Kingdoms: France and England, 1420–1700*, ed. G. Richards, Aldreshot 2008, 136.

⁶¹ K. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 518f.

was much too optimistic; however, it shows that at least some people connected to the British court believed that closer contacts with Władysław could be useful for future diplomatic moves⁶². This can be confirmed not only by the fact that the match was to become an issue in the discussion between Charles I's agent in Vienna, John Taylor, and the Austrians⁶³, but also by Charles I's action after the Zawadzki's mission. The king, regardless of the personal feelings responsible for his initial reaction, did not decide to risk serious deterioration of relations with Władysław, probably because he still believed that even if the match was unlikely to succeed, keeping the negotiations and theoretical possibility of a wedding could be a useful diplomatic playing card.

Unfortunately for British diplomacy, early in 1636 Władysław accepted the Hapsburg proposition presented by father Magni, who was also supported by Spanish diplomats, and entered marriage negotiations with Vienna⁶⁴. Confirmation of this event by Arundel, who from June had negotiated with Ferdinand II in Linz and then moved to Ratisbon, meant that from London's perspective there was no point in trying to create the impression that the project could still be followed through. In fact, any such attempts were now completely in vain.

To conclude, it seems almost impossible to decide what Władysław's and Charles I's real intentions were concerning the match and to what extent it failed because of the Polish king's double-dealing (something he was accused of not only by Douglas, but also by historians), or just because of the changing international situation. One can only assume

⁶² CSPD 1634–35, 80, CSPDa 287: 32–51, CSPVa: 317–327, Hartlib Papers: 14/4/42A.

⁶³ *Calendar of State Papers relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, vol. 23, URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/> Date accessed: 27 July 2010, 497–508.

⁶⁴ R. Skowron, *Dyplomaci polscy w Hiszpanii w XVI i XVII wieku*, Kraków 1997, 165–168.

that the fact that British diplomacy in Poland–Lithuania was sometimes less efficient than it should have been had some impact on the project's failure.

It may be argued, however, that it was not only Władysław who was interested in continuing the negotiations and using the planned marriage to achieve his own goals, as it is beyond doubt that the project of the Vasa–Stuart dynastic alliance was generally very much in tune with Charles I's foreign policy of the period. The king aimed to recover the Palatinate by the diplomatic means and military involvement in the Thirty Years War was considered in London to be an extreme that was best to be avoided. Subsequently, any scheme that could strengthen Britain's position in its negotiations with the Hapsburgs was welcomed as potentially useful. Whether this was to be from the perspective of a tight alliance, confirmed by family ties, between Britain and the still neutral Poland–Lithuania, or only a factor that could have been used to put pressure on the adversaries in the diplomatic game, was to depend on the circumstances.