

**Karina Pryt**

**Polish-German film relations in the process of building German cultural hegemony in Europe 1933-1939**

The article presents Polish-German film relations in the framework of Nazis cultural diplomacy between 1933 and 1939. The Nazi effort to create a cultural hegemony through the unification of the European film market under German leadership serves as an important point of reference. On the example of the Polish-German relationship, the article analyses the Nazi “soft power” in terms of both its strength and limits. Describing the broader geopolitical context, the article proposes a new trail in the research on both the film milieus and the cinema culture in Poland in the 1930s. In mythological terms, it belongs to cultural diplomacy and adds simultaneously to film history and New Cinema History.

**Keywords:**

Cultural diplomacy, soft power, film history, Polish-German relations, Jews.

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## **Polish-German film relations in the process of building German cultural hegemony in Europe 1933-1939**

On 7 January 1938, at Warsaw's *Studio* cinema at 23/25 Nowy Świat Street, an unusual premiere took place, the significance of which went far beyond the boundaries of an ordinary event in the capitals cinema culture. As reported by the Polish film journal "Wiadomości Filmowe", the German film *The Traitor* (*Verräter*, dir. Karl Ritter, 1936), which had already received an award at the international film exhibition in Venice, was screened at this cinema. Its Warsaw premiere was honoured by the presence of high-ranking representatives of the Polish government and the German embassy. Present were representatives of the city of Warsaw, the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces, the Main War School and the Headquarters and the State Police. *Traitor*, which dealt with the snooping of British spies into the secrets of the German aerospace industry, received enthusiastic reviews in the Warsaw press, and the „Wiadomości Filmowe” emphasised its outstanding social and artistic value.<sup>1</sup> As we learn from diplomatic correspondence (and not from the press), the gala premiere of the anti-British propaganda film served as the inauguration of the Polish-German film agreement of 22 December 1937. This agreement was signed to replace the film agreement of 20 February 1937, which had been broken by the Polish side.<sup>2</sup>

The re-signing of the film agreement, and especially the circumstances of its inauguration, raise a number of questions: Why did the inauguration take place three weeks after the signing of the agreement in the presence of politicians and military officers? Why was a German propaganda film with an anti-British slant chosen, which had previously been awarded in fascist Italy? Why was its inauguration held without representatives of the Polish film industry present, and why in a cinema with only 500 seats and not in one of the larger and more representative cinemas, such as the Atlantic or Colosseum, for example?

### **Methodological assumptions and state of the research**

Aimed at finding answers to these questions, this article describes the genesis of the signing of bilateral film agreements against the background of Nazi Germany's foreign

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<sup>1</sup> *Uroczysta premiera antyszpiegowskiego filmu "Zdrajca" w kinie "STUDIO" w Warszawie*, „Wiadomości Filmowe” 15.01.1938.

<sup>2</sup> PA (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Political Archive of the Foreign Office), Warschau 197, Deutsche Botschaft Warschau an AA (Auswärtiges Amt, Foreign Office) 7.1.1938; Deutsche Botschaft Warschau an AA 21.1.1938.

cultural policy between 1933 and 1939. It methodically fits into the research on foreign cultural policy (cultural diplomacy). By illuminating the broader geopolitical context in which the Polish film industry and its cinematic culture found themselves in the 1930s, it also makes a contribution to film history and cinema history, especially New Cinema History.

The article builds on earlier works describing Polish-German film relations in the interwar period.<sup>3</sup> The authors of some of the more recent publications referred to the turn in German eastern policy initiated by Adolf Hitler, which was sealed by the signing of the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression, also known as the German-Polish non-aggression pact, on 26 January 1934.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, these researchers emphasised that Berlin's efforts to win Warsaw as a vassal ally, or junior partner of the Reich in the envisaged armed conflict with the Soviet Union, resonated in German film production. As a result, anti-Polish films were stopped from being screened and produced in Germany. By contrast, films such as *Abschiedswalzer (Chopin's Last Waltz, dir. Géza von Bolváry, 1934)* and *Ritt in die Freiheit (Ritt Ride to Freedom, dir. Karl Hartl, 1937)*, which portrayed Poles in a positive light, were incorporated into the Third Reich's anti-Soviet propaganda.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> W. Jewsiewicki, *Przemysł filmowy w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym (1919-1939)*, Łódź 1951; T. Kłys, *Od Mabuszego do Goebbelsa*, Łódź 2013; U. Biel, *Śląskie kina między wojnami, czyli, Przyjemność upolityczniona*, Śląsk, Katowice 2002; U. Biel, *Kino w obszarze szczególnej troski: filmy niemieckie na ekranach województwa śląskiego w latach 1932-1939*, [w:] *W drodze do sąsiada. Polsko-niemieckie spotkania filmowe*, red. A. Dębski, A. Gwóźdź, Wrocław 2013; U. Biel, *Polsko-niemiecka wymiana filmowa w latach 1933-1939*, [w:] *Polska i Niemcy: Filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, red. K. Klejsa, Wrocław 2012, pp. 31–50; E. C. Król, *Nierówne partnerstwo.: Polsko-niemieckie kontakty filmowe w latach trzydziestych XX wieku*, [w:] *Kino niemieckie w dialogu pokoleń i kultur: Studia i szkice*, red. A. Gwóźdź, Kraków 2004, pp. 63–82; A. Dębski, *Polskie wątki filmowe w prasie wrocławskiej w okresie polsko-niemieckiego zbliżenia 1934/1939*, w: A. Dębski, A. Gwóźdź (red.), *W drodze do sąsiada. Polsko-niemieckie spotkania filmowe*, Wrocław 2013; E. C. Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech: 1919 - 1945*, Warszawa 2006; C. Roschke, *Der umworbene "Urfeind": Polen in der nationalsozialistischen Propaganda 1934 - 1939*, Marburg 2000; B. Drewniak, *Teatr i film Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Gdańsk 1972; B. Drewniak, *Polsko-niemieckie zbliżenia w kręgu kultury 1919 - 1939: Studia, szkice, sylwetki*, Gdańsk 2005; K. Pryt, *Befohlene Freundschaft: Die deutsch-polnischen Kulturbeziehungen 1934-1939*, Osnabrück 2010; K. Pryt, *Polsko-Niemieckie koprodukcje August Mocny i Dyplomatyczna Żona w służbie nazistowskiej polityki wschodniej w latach 1934-1939*, [w:] *Polska i Niemcy: Filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, red. K. Klejsa, Wrocław 2012, pp. 69–84; M. Gerken, *Stilisierung und Stigma: patriotischen Helden zum Untermenschen. Polenbilder im deutschen Spielfilm der dreißiger und frühen vierziger Jahre*, w: H. Feindt (red.), *Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Polenbildes 1848-1939*, Wiesbaden 1995, pp. 213–225.

<sup>4</sup> S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie: 1938 - 1939*, Poznań 1998; M. Kornat, *Polityka równowagi 1934 - 1939: Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem*, Kraków 2007.

<sup>5</sup> E.C. Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech. 1919 - 1945*, Wyd. 1, Warszawa, Collegium Civitas Press; Oficyna Wydawn. Rytm 2006; E. Cezary Król, *Nierówne partnerstwo. Polsko-niemieckie kontakty filmowe w latach trzydziestych XX wieku*, w: A. Gwóźdź (red.), *Kino niemieckie w dialogu pokoleń i kultur. Studia i szkice*, Wyd. 1, Kraków, Rabid 2004, pp. 63–82; K. Pryt, *Befohlene Freundschaft. Die deutsch-polnischen Kulturbeziehungen 1934-1939*, t. 22, Osnabrück, Fibre Verl 2010; K. Pryt, *Polsko-Niemieckie koprodukcje August Mocny i Dyplomatyczna Żona w służbie nazistowskiej polityki wschodniej w latach 1934-1939*, w: K. Klejsa (red.), *Polska i Niemcy. Filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, Wrocław, Oficyna Wydawn. ATUT 2012, pp. 69–84; C. Roschke, *Der umworbene "Urfeind". Polen in der nationalsozialistischen Propaganda 1934 - 1939*, Zugl.: Gießen, Univ., Diss., 2000, Marburg, Tectum-Verl. 2000; M. Gerken, *Stilisierung und Stigma: patriotischen Helden zum Untermenschen. Polenbilder im deutschen*

In my publications, I have extended this point of view by describing the attempts of the German side to establish a film production and distribution centre in Warsaw, which was dependent on Berlin. Taking control of the Polish film market was intended to facilitate Nazi Germany's ideological and political infiltration of its eastern neighbour. As a result, Poland, which lay in the path of German expansion, was to be isolated internationally and supposedly peacefully subordinated to the Reich.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I develop this thesis based on the findings of the American historian Benjamin G. Martin, who analysed the National Socialists' broader plan to build German cultural hegemony in Europe. Implemented mainly on the basis of fascist Italy, the project was called by B. G. Martin the "soft power" of Nazi and fascist imperialism. "Soft power" is understood as the ability of a given state (or coalition of states) to achieve success in the international arena by non-economic and non-military factors, through the sheer attractiveness of its own achievements in the field of culture, politics or ideology.<sup>7</sup> As B. G. Martin's findings show, the National Socialists were able to dominate this cultural coalition in the field of film exchange, among others, aiming to create a European Hollywood in Berlin.

In this article, film relations between Warsaw and Berlin will be presented as one of the cogs in the fusion of the European film market under German leadership. Using this example, it will be explained what the appeal of Nazi "soft power" was and where the limits of its effectiveness lay. Thus, a new perspective will be offered in which further research on film environments and cinematic culture in Poland can be undertaken.

**The source base** consists of archival material, mainly diplomatic correspondence stored in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw and the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin. In addition, Polish and German dailies and film magazines were consulted.

## **1. The Foreign Cultural Policy of Adolf Hitler's Government 1933-1939**

The National Socialists, who had come to power on slogans that were nationalistic, xenophobic and challenging of the post-Versailles political order in Europe, realised quite quickly that forceful solutions were not enough to consolidate power and pave the way for

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*Spielfilm der dreißiger und frühen vierziger Jahre*, w: H. Feindt (red.), *Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Polenbildes 1848-1939*, Wiesbaden 1995, pp. 213–225.

<sup>6</sup> Pryt 2010, Pryt 2012.

<sup>7</sup> J. Nye, *Soft Power*, [in] *Foreign Policy* (80) 1990, pp. 153-171, J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, New York 2004.

German hegemony and eastward expansion. The outrage of international public opinion, the boycott of German exports in many countries, and the deepening international isolation caused by the withdrawal from the League of Nations in October 1933 probably prompted Berlin to use soft measures in foreign policy as well. In order to prevent the formation of anti-German coalitions and to establish a new political and economic order on the continent under German leadership, Berlin had already started in 1934 to reorganise European cooperation in the cultural field. Based on Fascist Italy, the National Socialists set about creating an international cultural coalition by creating a series of multilateral networks and giving them organisational form. Under the supervision of Berlin, the Union of National Writers and the Permanent Council for International Cooperation among Composers were founded in 1934. Seven years later, the European Union of Writers was also established. Wanting to gain control over the transnational flow of films as well, the Ministry of Propaganda organised the International Film Congress in April 1935. The establishment of the International Film Chamber a few months later was another success for Berlin in the process of assuming leadership in the film market.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Berlin concluded bilateral agreements on cultural cooperation (*Kulturabkommen*) with the Allied states, i.e. Hungary in 1936, Japan and Italy in 1938 and Spain in 1939. During the war, bilateral agreements on cultural cooperation were also concluded with Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> Warsaw, which, as we know, consistently rejected Berlin's repeated proposal to conclude a bilateral political-military alliance, did not sign such a comprehensive cultural cooperation agreement. Because of public opinion at home and because of its alliance policy with France, the Polish government did not want to be seen as a close ally of Germany and avoided, as much as possible, legal approval of cultural cooperation with Berlin. Nevertheless, single bilateral agreements were signed. The first of these was a press agreement concluded in February 1934, containing elements of the comprehensive cultural cooperation agreements mentioned earlier. The efforts made at the turn of 1932/1933 to regulate bilateral film trade culminated first in the semi-official film agreement of 25 May 1934.<sup>10</sup> This was followed by the above-mentioned film agreements of February and December 1937. In addition, Poland was represented at the International Film Congress in Berlin and joined the International Film Chamber. Poland thus came under the

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<sup>8</sup> Martin 2016.

<sup>9</sup> J.-P. Barbian, "*Kulturwerte im Zweikampf*". *Die Kulturabkommen des "Dritten Reiches" als Instrumente der nationalsozialistischen Politik*, Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 1992, pp. 415–460.

<sup>10</sup> Pryt 2010, p.148.

influence of Nazi “soft power” quite early on and became one of its elements at the same time.

## 2. Poland in the pull of Nazi “soft power” 1934-1935

At the outset, it should be stressed that the effectiveness of Nazi “soft power” was due to the fact that it was built in the early years on pacifist rhetoric. The National Socialists, who had also gained power on anti-Polish slogans, skilfully integrated Adolf Hitler’s policy of rapprochement with Warsaw into this rhetoric. The signing of the non-aggression pact in January 1934 was spectacularly and effectively presented in the media, already controlled by the Ministry of Propaganda, as Adolf Hitler’s great work to preserve peace in Europe.

The aforementioned reset of German film policy towards Warsaw, or more precisely the stopping of the production of anti-Polish films that were still in the pipeline in 1933, and the commencement of films such as *Abschiedswalzer* broadened the possibilities for demonstrating supposedly peaceful intentions. A quickly-made film about the Polish composer F. Chopin was intended to demonstrate how seriously Germany was taking the agreement with Poland. The film was released in the autumn of 1934 in Germany and was also very popular in many European countries.<sup>11</sup>

In Poland, the distribution of this film was hampered by a strong boycott of German films, which had been conducted since the spring of 1933 by various organisations and with the support of the Polish government as a sign of protest against the policies of Nazi Germany. After the signing of the non-aggression pact, the Polish government, some representatives of the Polish film industry, as well as the Polish *Western Union* (Polski Związek Zachodni) and the *Silesian Insurgents’ Union* (Związek Powstańców Śląskich) abandoned this form of protest. However, the boycott was still maintained by Jewish youth organisations, the so-called anti-Hitler committees, which influenced cinema owners and audiences mainly in the central and eastern regions of the country. As a result, German films were for the first years only released in western Poland, where the percentage of the Jewish population was much lower. It was not until the spring of 1936 that German productions appeared in cinemas in the capital, and then - as will be discussed later - in other cities and towns in central and eastern Poland.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Roschke 2000, p. 318; Pryt 2010, p. 348.

<sup>12</sup> Pryt 2010, pp. 387-396.

Nazi “soft power” proved effective in this process of breaking down resistance, not least because it was based largely on escapism. For example, the German film industry produced relatively few propaganda films under the watchful eye of Joseph Goebbels. Most were entertainment films (often made in collaboration with foreign artists), which were intended to distract audiences at home and abroad from the ideological assumptions of National Socialism that were actually being realised.<sup>13</sup>

A special role was played by so-called singing films, which were realised on the already established practice of producing films in multiple language versions for the European market. Here, the Minister of Propaganda was quite quick to recognise the value of the Polish tenor Jan Kiepura, who, among other things, gained worldwide fame thanks to his role in the German-British co-production *Die singende Stadt* (*The Singing City*, dir. Carmine Gallone, 1930). Kiepura, who as a Pole had been the subject of attacks by the National Socialists during the Weimar Republic and in the first months after their seizure of power, was used as early as 15 April 1933 to create a positive image for the Third Reich.<sup>14</sup> On that day, Kiepura accepted an invitation to Berlin’s Gloria Palast for the premiere of the film *Ein Lied für dich* (*A Song for You*, dir. Joe May, 1933). The Ministry of Propaganda turned a blind eye to the fact that the Polish tenor’s mother was Jewish. A prior celebratory March screening of the banned film starring the lead performer was one of the first signals addressed to world opinion to calm emotions and weaken the boycott of German films. Over the next two years, Kiepura’s popularity was capitalised on in the films *Mein Herz ruft nach Dir* (*My Heart Calls You, Dir*, dir. Carmine Gallone, 1934), *Ich liebe alle Frauen* (*I Love All Women*, dir. Carl Lamač, 1935), which, realised also in other language versions, conquered the European market for the German film industry and paved the way for German cultural hegemony.

The acquisition of the world-renowned Polish artist Pola Negri, who returned to Germany in 1935 to play the leading role in *Mazurka* (*Mazurka*, dir. Willi Forst, 1935), had a similar effect. Aware of her value in the film market, the Minister of Propaganda included Negri in his circle of foreign protégés. Adolf Hitler’s favourite actress was, by her own account at the time, treated as a valuable commodity.<sup>15</sup> In order to protect her from criticism from hardliner dogmatists in the Nazi ranks, the press debunked rumours already circulating

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<sup>13</sup> P. Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus*, 2. Aufl., München, Wien, Hanser 1992.

<sup>14</sup> PA, Warschau 196, IKC 20.4.1933.

<sup>15</sup> P. Negri, *Memoirs of a Star*, New York 1970.

since the 1920s about her alleged Jewish origins.<sup>16</sup> As one component of the Nazi “soft power”, Negri starred in five more films.

The effectiveness of Nazi “soft power” was also due to the attractiveness of the strong German film market to foreign producers and officials responsible for the foreign cultural policy of other countries. Access to German screens for Germany’s own film productions was also an object of desire for Allied states such as Italy, Hungary and Japan. The Polish government and Polish film producers also sought to have their own products shown in German cinemas. The assumption was that whoever was successful in Germany could also count on success in other countries. The Ministry of Propaganda managed the needs of neighbouring countries using the carrot and stick method. In fact, access to foreign films on the German market was restricted, citing the allegedly poor quality of these productions and their incompatibility with German censorship. At the same time, partners were promised opportunities to change this position in the future in order to force concessions on the screening of German films.<sup>17</sup>

However, the screening of Polish films in Germany was not only a bargaining chip for the place of German films on Polish screens. The German side was able to turn into its own success the fulfilment of obligations under the relevant agreements with Warsaw. The financial benefits, about which Władysław Jewsiewicki wrote,<sup>18</sup> played a subordinate role. More important were the opportunity to integrate the screening of Polish films into the general campaign to preserve peace in Europe and the prospect of taking control of the worldwide distribution of films produced in Warsaw.

Polish films appeared on German screens in only two phases, more precisely between the spring and autumn of 1935 and for a short time in early 1938 during the phase of the annexation of Austria. The first phase, on the other hand, had to do with the reinstatement of military service on 16 March 1935, which marked the rejection of the restriction on the expansion of the German armed forces imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. In order to calm fears about this step, Berlin brought *Wyrok życia* (*Life Sentence*, dir. Julius Gardan, 1933) to the screens in February 1935 and then in the summer, *Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?* (*Is Lucyna a Girl?*, dir. Julius Gardan, 1934). In autumn entered in turn *Śluby Ułańskie* (*The Lancer's Vows*, dir. Mieczysław Krawicz, 1934) and *Młody las* (*Young Forest*, dir. Józef Lejtes, 1934). The

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<sup>16</sup> *Pola Negri ist arisch!* LBB 2.2.1935.

<sup>17</sup> PA, Warschau 197, Protokoll über die Filmverhandlungen 13. bis 16. Dezember 1937.

<sup>18</sup> W. Jewsiewicki, *Filmy niemieckie na ekranach polskich kin w okresie międzywojennym*, Przegląd zachodni: Polska, Niemcy, Europa (5) 1967, p. 19–48.



latter film was withdrawn from cinemas after a short period of time, which will be discussed later.

In order to achieve the desired effect, the Minister of Propaganda not only introduced Polish films to cinemas but also made every effort to let the whole world know about this fact. To this end, the first screenings of Polish films are organised with propagandistic flair. In the case of the premieres of *Wyrok życia* and *Śluby Ułańskie*, the makers of these films were invited and banquets were organised in their honour in the presence of representatives of the Polish embassy and high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Propaganda. The first screening was honoured with the presence of vice-chairman of the State Film Chamber (Reichsfilmkammer, RFK) Arnold Raether; at the screening of *Śluby Ułańskie* the president of the Chamber himself, Oswald Lehnich, was present.<sup>19</sup>

Until the autumn of 1935, the German press obligingly paid tribute to the achievements of Polish filmmaking while adhering to the main guidelines of National Socialism. The dailies praised, for example, the abilities of the actresses Jadwiga Andrzejewska and Irena Eichlerówna, who played the leading roles in *Wyrok Życia* and were guests at the banquet in question. By contrast, the same articles were silent about the fact that the director of this film was Juliusz Gardan, who was not invited to the Berlin premiere of his work due to his Jewish origin. From the perspective of the Ministry of Propaganda, it was less of a problem to organise the premiere of *Śluby Ułańskie*, to which the performer of the main role, Franciszek Brodniewicz, and the director Mieczysław Krawicz, were invited. Krawicz was one of the few Polish directors whose “Aryan” background was not doubted by anti-Semites.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the Minister of Propaganda tried, as was already mentioned, to integrate the distribution and screening of Polish films into the plan to build a European Hollywood in Berlin. The German film periodical *Licht Bild Bühne* (LBB) announced in June 1935, with fractious sincerity, that Berlin had just become the world headquarters for the distribution of Polish films.<sup>21</sup> This, as we know, did not happen, but the National Socialists nevertheless made great strides at this time in the process of taking control of the European film market.

They were also helped by advanced film technology, which they demonstrated at the International Film Congress on 25 April 1935 in Berlin. Prepared for a year and realised based on the practice of the first international film congress in Paris in 1926, the Berlin

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<sup>19</sup> Pryt 2010, p. 384.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Weltvertrieb aller Polen-Filme über Berlin. Polnischer Spitzenfilm kommt zu uns*, LBB 7.6.1935.

congress would attract no less than 2,000 delegates from all over the world, including 60 from Poland. In front of such a large crowd of professionals, the hosts addressed the concerns of film entrepreneurs across the continent about the flood of American productions. At the same time, they presented their own film industry as the only one that could stand up to the superiority of Hollywood. In order to garner widespread support, they underpinned the call for a united „film Europe” under German leadership with pacifist rhetoric. The film was demonstrated as an instrument of consensus, and Hitler’s Berlin was to be associated by participants not as a threat to peace, but as a vital centre of international cooperation. The hosts avoided racist and anti-Semitic formulations for this reason.<sup>22</sup>

By organising the congress, the National Socialists began to emerge from international film isolation and strengthen the network of contacts intended to take control of the transnational flow of films. Building on this, they established the International Film Chamber at the Venice Biennale on 22 August. Its establishment, as B. G. Martin argues, was a colossal success, and marked a watershed moment in Berlin’s strategy to build cultural hegemony in Europe. The National Socialists succeeded in using the Italian event as an international stage to further their own aims. Previous hostility towards the Nazi regime was overcome, the possibility of forming a hostile coalition averted. More than that, ten countries decided to join this multilateral organisation, controlled mainly by Berlin and to a lesser extent by Rome. Ryszard Ordyński, as president of the Film Industry Council of Poland, was among the signatories, alongside his colleagues from France, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden.<sup>23</sup>

The wider public was told that the aim of the International Film Chamber was to raise the artistic, ethical and technical level of film in general.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the vice-president of the State Film Chamber made a different statement in the pages of the multilingual magazine *Intercine*, published in Rome. In this forum, Arnold Raether wrote about the need to restructure the European film market while already openly promoting the ideology of National Socialism. The author argued that individual countries should adopt the German model of state support and proceed to build national film industries, i.e. industries without communists, Jews or other unwelcome elements.<sup>25</sup>

During this time, as B. G. Martin argues, the National Socialists managed to redefine the ideological foundation of cultural cooperation in Europe. Referring in the 1920s to liberal,

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<sup>22</sup> B. G. Martin 2016, pp. 60-644.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>24</sup> *Międzynarodowa Izba Filmowa*, „Wiadomości Filmowe”, 01.09.1935, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> A. Raether, *Die Situation des deutschen Films*, *Intercine*, no. 8-9, September 1935, [in:] B.G. Martin, p. 69.

cosmopolitan and pacifist values, cooperation was transformed into a nationalist and anti-Semitic vision of a Europe based on a purely national tradition. The effectiveness of Nazi “soft power” was, at the end of the day, also due to the fact that the proposed model appealed to the fears and phobias of many conservative intellectuals and, as such, found numerous supporters across the continent.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. New National Socialist strategy towards Poland: Autumn 1935 - Spring 1939

Strengthened by their successes, officials at the Ministry of Propaganda also changed tactics in their relations with Warsaw. One of the first harbingers of the new strategy was a marked cooling of the tone of press reviews. Introduced in February, *Wyrok życia* still received enthusiastic criticism in the press without exception, while *Śluby ulańskie*, screened in September, received few critical comments. Film periodicals claimed that the Germans had greater expertise in depicting patriotism, while at the same time suggesting the backwardness of the Polish film industry.<sup>27</sup> On top of this, the Polish side was accused of an alleged lack of reciprocity in film exchanges, creating a contrast between the premieres of Polish productions in Germany, organised with great pomp, and the boycott of German films in Poland. LBB stated with renewed fractious frankness that if it were not for the alleged lack of goodwill on the Polish side, the Germans “would already be much further ahead, and the Polish market would have been at least partially won for (them) in a peaceful manner”.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after the publication of these articles, the peaceful conquest of the Polish market entered a new phase. *Młody las*, announced in June as the best Polish film to date,<sup>29</sup> was suddenly withdrawn from cinemas. The announced screening of three further films was also stopped in October.<sup>30</sup> This was the Ministry of Propaganda’s response to complaints from the Warsaw Cinematographic Company, which was a subsidiary of the German film company Ufa and was unable to sell its films in central and eastern Poland due to the continuing boycott. Therefore, it had been calling for increased pressure on the Polish government for some time.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, a denunciation of the director of *The Young Forest* reached the Reich

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<sup>26</sup> B. G. Martin 2016.

<sup>27</sup> AAN (Archiwum Akt Nowych, Archive of New Records), MSZ (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 8357, p. 5, Nota prasowa MSZ do Naczelnej Rady Przemysłu Filmowego w Polsce 23.10.1935, quotations from *Berliner Zeitung* 28.9.1935 and *12-Uhr Blatt* 28.9.1935.

<sup>28</sup> *Polnischer Auftrieb. Wo bleibt die Gegenseitigkeit?* LBB 23.09.1935.

<sup>29</sup> LBB 1.6.1935.

<sup>30</sup> AAN, MSZ 8366, p. 56, MPiH (Ministry of Industry and Trade) do MSZ 28.10.1935.

<sup>31</sup> PA, Warschau 197, Auslandsabteilung der Ufa an die Deutsche Botschaft 12.6.1935.

Chancellery.<sup>32</sup> Adolf Hitler, who was thus made aware that Jozef Lejtes was a Pole of Mosaic faith, ordered that his film be personally banned from further screening under this pretext.

This step, of course, also had to do with the so-called Nuremberg Laws passed at the NSDAP congress in Nuremberg on 15 September 1935, which sanctioned anti-Semitism by law. From then on, Nazi “soft power” was already based more explicitly on anti-Semitism. Racial issues were among the key arguments of the German side in restricting or blocking access to foreign films in German cinemas. Berlin gained an instrument with which to urge other countries to produce films suitable for export to Germany: that is, without Jewish filmmakers. The strategy succeeded in Hungary, where a 1938 law removed Jewish filmmakers from the country’s film industry.<sup>33</sup>

In Poland, where anti-Semitism was gaining considerable ground after the death of Jozef Pilsudski, the implementation of the propaganda ministry’s plans did not go that far. At Berlin’s behest, the Polish government proceeded from mid-1935 to liquidate anti-Hitler committees of Jewish youth. A distribution network with German capital represented by Tobis Polski and Filmwog was also permitted. From the spring of 1936, German productions such as *Abschiedswalzer* and films starring Pola Negri and Jan Kiepura paved the way to hitherto inaccessible cinemas in central and eastern Poland.<sup>34</sup>

The ultimate goal was to gain control of the Polish film market, or more precisely to gain the dominant position that German film had enjoyed on Polish soil during the First World War. The National Socialists hoped that their subsidised and technically superior film industry would blow the small, private and mainly Jewish-run production centres in Poland out of the water. In their place was to be a new, technically well-equipped company, which would be dependent on Berlin and would pave the way for the imperial and anti-Semitic eastern policy of the National Socialists. However, the proposal made in November 1936 by RFA president Oswald Lehnich to establish a technically well-equipped Aryan film industry in Warsaw was rejected in Warsaw. Disappointed, Lehnich concluded that the Polish side only cared about exporting its own films to Germany, while “the penetration of the German spirit is considered highly undesirable and threatening to the government”.<sup>35</sup>

The infiltration and permeation of National Socialist ideology into and through film met with more resistance in Poland than in Hungary for several reasons. It is likely that

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<sup>32</sup> BArch (Bundesarchiv), R 43 II 390a, Leiter der Filmabteilung im Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda an die Reichskanzlei 19.8.1935.

<sup>33</sup> G. Gergely, *Hungarian Film 1929-1947. National Identity, Anti-semitism and Popular Cinema*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Pryt 2010, p. 395f.

<sup>35</sup> PA, Warschau 197, Der Präsident der Reichsfilmkammer an die Deutsche Botschaft in Warschau 21.12.1936.

Jewish entrepreneurs and filmmakers were more strongly represented in the Polish film industry than in the Hungarian one. Therefore, there was no room for anti-Semitism in the Polish professional environment.<sup>36</sup> There was also a strong, historically grounded anti-German prejudice in Poland. Fear of Adolf Hitler's growing and expanding state was felt more in Poland, too, than in farther away Hungary. The blocking of access of Polish films to German cinemas as an increasing number of German films on the Polish market simultaneously began to appear confirmed this resentment.<sup>37</sup> Professional journals, which until autumn 1935 had described Berlin's film policy activities favourably, became more critical of the German side's intentions after the stoppage of Polish film screenings. They began to speculate that the German film industry was following the former *Drang nach Osten* and posed such a threat to the security of the Polish state.<sup>38</sup>

The refusal of reciprocity in film exchanges, historical prejudices and fear of an arming neighbour set a limit to the influence of Nazi "soft power" in Poland. It was only the country's deteriorating position internationally and the fear of a breakdown in relations with Berlin that prompted Warsaw to make concessions in the form of a film agreement on 20 February 1937. As the German side did not screen any Polish films, Warsaw, under pressure from domestic circles, broke off the agreement in October 1937. Towards the end of the year, the spectre of the Pact of Four, an agreement between Italy, Germany, France and the United Kingdom introducing the possibility of preserving peace in Europe at the expense of the countries to the east of Germany, once again hung over Poland. In order to prevent this and confirm cooperation with Berlin, Warsaw agreed to sign a new film agreement against national interests and against the wishes of representatives of the national film industry. The intergovernmental agreement thus constituted a form of capitulation by the Polish side to German cultural and political demands. Characteristically, it was signed on 22 December 1937, i.e. just before the Christmas break, through a secret exchange of verbal notes and without any information being given to the press. This action was intended to prevent protests that might have led to the agreement being broken before it came into force on 1 January 1938. The agreement established an exchange key of 50 German films for 5-6 Polish productions. In doing so, the German side once again made a verbal, i.e. informal, promise not to apply the Aryan paragraph to Polish films.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> N. Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce*, Wyd. 1, Kraków, Rabid 2002; K. Czajka, *Kina żydowskie w Warszawie w dwudziestolecu międzywojennym*, Kwartalnik Historii Żydów (3 (247)) 2013, pp. 561–570.

<sup>37</sup> AAN, Amb. Berlin 2466, p. 71, Kurier Warszawski 12.4.1937.

<sup>38</sup> *Der Filmdrang nach Osten* Nowa Rzeczpospolita 18.8.1938, more: Pryt 2010, pp. 445–455.

<sup>39</sup> PA, Warschau 197, Deutsche Botschaft Warschau Aufzeichnung 8.2.1938.

The National Socialists, who were still blazing trails in central and eastern Poland in the spring of 1936 with escapist films such as *I Love All the Women* with Jan Kiepura, were already able to dictate terms in 1938. Not only did they force the Polish government to conclude an unfavourable film agreement, but they also enforced its ceremonial inauguration with the premiere of the film *The Traitor*. The previously mentioned medium-sized *Studio* cinema was chosen as the venue for the ceremony because it had previously been leased by Tobis Poland in order to break the boycott of German films. Acquiring more representative cinemas instead, such as the nearby Colosseum or the Atlantic, which hosted premieres of Polish films attended by politicians, may have been impossible due to the critical attitude of representatives of the Polish film industry.

The latter was probably not invited to the inauguration of the film agreement. In contrast, representatives of the Polish government and military circles, who had hitherto avoided demonstrating Polish-German friendship, were obliged to attend the ceremony. Their presence and the selection of a German propaganda film that had previously been awarded in fascist Italy gave the impression of celebrating the inauguration of a trilateral film-political-military coalition with an anti-British edge. However, the film *Traitor* was not suitable for promoting friendship or a possible future brotherhood of arms between Poland and Germany. Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) Jan Szembek admitted in a conversation with German Embassy staff that, as a Pole, he instinctively perceived the final scene of the film, in which the strength of the German Wehrmacht was shown, as a threat.<sup>40</sup>

If Józef Beck's close confidant and one of the few supporters of his policy of co-operation with Berlin associated the visualisation of German military power with a danger to Poland, similar (or even stronger) reactions were to be expected among opponents of this policy. Criticism of the film did not appear in the press, however, as newspaper editors were obliged by the government to give positive coverage of the premiere and idolise film reviews. Due to growing fears of the Germans, however, it was not possible to suppress criticism in the press for long. Already by mid-February, newspapers were criticising the government for making concessions, and criticising the presence of German productions on Polish screens. Nazi "soft power" was not effective here, as these films were perceived as carrying political ideologies that threatened Polish security interests. The lack of reciprocity in film exchanges and the repeated breaking of promises made by Berlin confirmed many fears. To keep up appearances, the Germans did purchase two films at the beginning of 1938 in order to reassure Warsaw of its neutral stance towards the planned annexation of Austria. Nonetheless,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

only *Black Pearl* (dir. Michał Waszyński, 1934) was released on German screens, but the halls were probably glowing with emptiness, as the film was only screened in the original language version in regions where Polish minorities did not reside. Despite the fact that from April, i.e. after the annexation of Austria, no more Polish films were shown in Germany, Warsaw delayed the termination of the agreement. It was only after Adolf Hitler's April rupture of the non-aggression pact that the Association of Polish Light Theatres enacted the cancellation of the film agreement with Germany on 16 May 1939.<sup>41</sup>

## **Biographical note and sources of funding**

### **Biographical note:**

Dr Karina Pryt studied German literature and modern history at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg (Germany). There she completed her doctorate in history on the German-Polish cultural exchange between 1934 and 1939 (Befohlene Freundschaft. Die deutsch-polnische Kulturbeziehungen 1934-1939). She is currently a researcher at Goethe University in Frankfurt in the Department of Film Studies, on a grant from the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). She researches cinema culture in Warsaw 1895/6-1939 from a transnational perspective. Her project is affiliated with the international network of cinema historians HoMER (Cinema Culture in Warsaw, 1895/6-1939: A Transnational Perspective <http://homernetwork.org/dhp-markers/cinema-culture-in-warsaw/>).

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<sup>41</sup> Pryt 2010, pp. 403-405.