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**ESTABLISHING RELATIONS
BETWEEN POLAND AND SAUDI ARABIA:
COUNT RACZYŃSKI'S VISIT TO KING ABDULAZIZ IN 1930
AND PRINCE FAISAL'S VISIT TO WARSAW IN 1932**

Official contacts between Poland and rulers of the Arabian Peninsula were established in the 1920's. This development was connected with the political situation in the two locations. The First World War had brought back independence to Poland, along with several other states in Europe, and eventful transformations also in Arabia. The fall of the Ottoman Empire, which included the territories of the Arabian Peninsula, resulted in a number of local sheikdoms gaining independence. In particular, in the center of the Peninsula, in Nejd, power was established and strengthened by Abdulaziz Ibn Abd ar-Rahman (called Ibn Sa'ud by Europeans). In the west, the Kingdom of Hijaz was set up in 1916 by sheriff Hussein Ibn Ali.

The Kingdom of Hijaz was the first to make official contacts with Poland in 1923-24 but diplomatic relations were not established. In 1926 Hussein was forced to abdicate and Abdulaziz proclaimed himself the ruler of Hijaz. The kingdom of Nejd and Hijaz was created, later adopting the name of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom was recognized first by Great Britain in 1927, and then by other countries.

In June 1929, a representative of King Abdulaziz, Khalid Al-Hakim, paid a visit to Warsaw. He wanted to obtain from the Polish authorities their approval of the King as the ruler of Hijaz and Nejd and to discuss the conclusion of a trade treaty. Knowing of the influence of Great Britain in that region the Polish government decided to consult with London. The British authorities responded, that "Nejd and Hijaz are a fully independent country, with which the Government of His Majesty keeps treaty relations, and it has nothing against the Government of Poland's

granting the requests submitted by the representative of Ibn Sa'ud"¹. Therefore, when in autumn of 1929 the government of Hijaz and Nejd formally raised the question of establishing diplomatic relations, the Polish government decided to grant the request. A formal decision on this matter was taken on March 11, 1930. Shortly after, Polish Consul in Egypt informed King Abdulaziz agent in Cairo, Fouzan Al-Sabiq, that Warsaw would like to send a delegation to Jeddah. Fouzan followed that request to the King². The arrangements were made and in the end of April 1930, an official Polish delegation went to Hijaz led by Edward, Count Raczyński, Deputy Head of the Eastern Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (later an ambassador, a Minister of Foreign Affairs and a President of the Polish Government in Exile in London) and Jakub Szynekiewicz of Vilnius, Great Mufti of the Republic of Poland³. They came to Jeddah by boat from Suez and were greeted in the port by the governor of the city. After a few days Polish delegation met King Abdulaziz, twice, in Jeddah on May 3 and 4. Raczyński passed him a letter from President Ignacy Mościcki in which Poland officially recognized the Kingdom. In his address to the King, Raczyński said, *inter alia*:

Poland well knows and admires the chivalrous Arab nation, world-famous for its heroism and fondness of freedom, for years acclaimed by the greatest Polish poets. The significance of the efforts of the Arab nation towards the consolidation of the conditions for independent development is the more appreciated in our country, since Poland itself has had to fight heroically in defense of its existence, which it providentially defended thanks to the mercy of God Almighty, again becoming a powerful country, which the whole world hopes will enjoy lasting peace.

It is with the greatest pleasure in expressing the feelings of understanding and sympathy extended by the Polish nation towards the Arab nation, that I have the privilege to speak to Your Majesty, who united the powerful kingdom of Hijaz, Nejd and subordinate countries by your victorious hand through the exercise of not only exceptional wisdom and providence, but also through your personal prowess, which has been most highly valued in Poland.

Fame is spreading the name of Your Majesty wider and wider among your co-religionists, as being that of a ruler who is particularly pious and observant of the faith, and this sounds a loud echo among the Polish Muslims who settled in the far north [of Poland] centuries ago. It is welcomed by our nation in a brotherly manner, because it too learned its values in common fights struggles against the enemies of the motherland. Today, Great Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz, the eminent religious leader comes here with me on behalf of the Muslims of Poland in order to renew personal links with the founder of their religion and to greet Your Majesty as the one, who holds the eminent position of the ruler and defender of the holy places of Islam.

I have no doubts that our mission, which I have the privilege to chair, and which is the first official contact between the two countries, will consolidate our friendly relations. Let it be closer and closer, for the benefit of both nations, who can be of great service to each other. In this respect, wide possibilities open up in economics. Our country abounds in natural resources and successfully develops its industry, from which remote countries can also benefit through the exchange of products⁴.

In turn, Sheikh Jusuf Jasin delivered a speech on behalf of the King to the Polish delegation. He said (interpreted by Jakub Szynekiewicz):

¹ A letter to Prince Stanislaw Los of Monteagle, a minister of the Republic of Poland, June 28, 1929. Archives of New Acts (Archiwum Akt Nowych, further referred to as: ANA), Warsaw, the group of the Polish Embassy in London, file 333.

² *Fahd al-Samari, Polish delegation visiting King Abdulaziz in 1930, „Ar-Rijad” 2002 (May 29).*

³ ANA, documents of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (further referred to as: MRDPE), sign. 1441. *A report on the trip to Egypt, Hijaz, Syria and Palestine.*

⁴ Following the „Report on mufti Dr. Jakub Szynekiewicz to Egypt, Hijadz, Syria and Palestine in the period of February 18 to July 18 1930”, ANA, the group of MRDPE, file 1477, pp. 18-19.



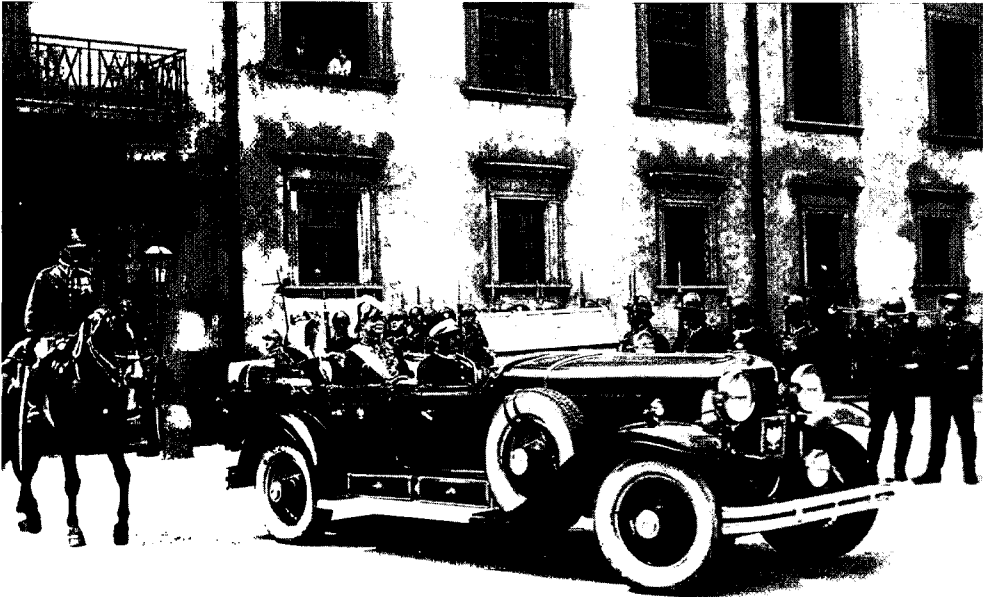
Prince Faisal with Polish officers after visiting the First Horse Artillery Unit



King Abdulaziz and Saudi officials with Count Edward Raczyński
and Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz in Jeddah



Count Edward Raczyński and Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz leaving
King Abdulaziz palace in Jeddah



Prince Faisal arriving at the Royal Palace in Warsaw



Prince Faisal with President Ignacy Mościcki and other Polish officials



Prince Faisal and Prime Minister Aleksander Prystor



Korwin-Pawłowski attending a banquet at the royal tent in Jeddah in 1934

It is with great pleasure that we receive the letter from the Honorable President of the Most Noble Republic of Poland and we are thankful for the good wishes you expressed to us on his behalf. We are also proud that, as you said, the values of our Arab nation are known in your country, which, as one can see, in many aspects resembles the Polish nation in its aspirations, courage and gallantry. It is with great esteem that the Arab nation admires that development and improvements which can be observed in the Polish State, particularly in recent times.

We were most pleased with what you said, Sirs, about the worshipers of the Prophet in Poland, illuminated with the beams of Islam. We wish them happiness from the bottom of our hearts, peaceful life and success in observing religious principles [...]. We wholeheartedly welcome the representative of the Muslims in Poland, who will find both on our part and on the part of the members of our government all possible assistance in establishing links with the Polish Muslims, whose welfare is so close to my heart.

We are sure that your praiseworthy mission will have the desired effect of establishing economic relations between our country and the country of the chivalrous Polish nation.

We ask you to convey our wishes of good health and prosperity to the Honorable Mister President of the Most Noble Republic of Poland and to its victorious Commander Marshall Józef Piłsudski. Also, please announce our wishes of happiness and power to the noble Polish Nation. We also wish good health and happiness to you, Excellency, and to your honorable Companion. We hope that in the near future our countries will conclude an act of friendship, and an economic and trade agreement⁵.

The Polish delegation presented several gifts to the king, among others a machine-gun with ammunition from Marshall Piłsudski, two tapestries from President Mościcki as well as a handwritten copy of the Koran of the 18th century and an album containing photographs of Polish mosques⁶. The delegation discussed also with the King a possibility of purchasing Arab horses in the Kingdom. Raczyński received letters from King Abdulaziz to the President of the Republic of Poland and from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hijaz to Minister August Zaleski.

After the official part of the visit, the King allowed Polish delegation to visit Mekka, a city normally closed to non-Muslims. Raczyński used this opportunity to make numerous photographs, first one made by a Pole in this special place.

Mufti Szynekiewicz stayed in Arabia for a few more weeks to make a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Three more times he had occasion to meet with the King and his family members. In his report submitted after his return to Poland he exhaustively described his stay in the kingdom. In the opinion of Szynekiewicz, "there is no doubt that the King wants to be a just monarch".

The visit of the Polish delegation, so well received by King Abdulaziz, contributed to the development of mutual relations. Most notably, Prince Faisal, a son of King Abdulaziz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia (later to be a King) paid a visit to Poland in the end of May 1932. This was the third Faisal's visit to Europe, commenced two years after he became a foreign minister. During that trip he visited also Italy, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Holland, Germany and the Soviet Union as well as four countries in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Kuwait. He was accompanied by Fouad Hamza, a Palestinian holding

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 20-21.

⁶ The Russian ambassador to Saudi Arabia reported on October 18, 1930 that these gifts were brought by the Polish ship "Kraków", which arrived at Jeddah at the same time. Polish military delegation came on that ship to discuss a possibility of selling arms to the Kingdom. According to the Russian ambassador, Raczyński managed to secure that deal. The Russian representative reported also to Moscow that Mufti Szynekiewicz used the opportunity of meeting King Abdulaziz to ask him for help to Muslims in Russia prosecuted by the Soviet authorities. A copy of the report in the King Faisal's Center in Riyadh.

a position of the Deputy Foreign Minister, and two other officials (Khalid Al-Ayyoubi and Shaher Samman)⁷.

In Warsaw, Fajsal was received by Marshall Józef Piłsudski, President Ignacy Mościcki, Prime Minister Aleksander Prystor and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck. During the conversations he raised the question of establishing diplomatic representations in both countries⁸. He also visited an aircraft plant, being interested in purchasing Polish planes. The schedule of his three days' visit also included a meeting with representatives of Muslim community in Warsaw and a visit to the Eastern Institute [Instytut Wschodni], where Fajsal listened to a presentation by Dr. O. Górka on *Islam and Poland*. Fajsal was decorated by President Ignacy Mościcki with a medal *Polonia Restituta* (first class). The remaining members of the delegation received medals of lower classes. Prince Fajsal visited also a cavalry unit (1-szy Dywizjon Artylerii Konnej) and observed the Corpus Christi celebrations in the city as well as Warsaw tennis championship. The visit was widely commented by the Polish press. "Światowid" weekly made a cover story of it on the June 4 issue while on May 26 a leading newspaper "Kurier Warszawski" published a big article – *Hijaz and the Wahhabis*.

In the meantime, economic cooperation between the two countries started to develop. Fouad Hamza paid a visit to Poland for that purpose. In its effect, already at the beginning of the thirties, a Polish state enterprise Sepewe, started to export arms and ammunition to Saudi Arabia. In July 1933, St. J.B. Philby, a notable British advisor to King Abdulaziz, came to Warsaw in order to negotiate the establishment of a Polish-Saudi company, which would regenerate arms in Hijaz, and the sending of Polish engineers of Muslim persuasion to work there⁹. In the opinion of the Polish Embassy in London this issue was of great importance. "Agreement with Mr. Philby would open a wide gate for Polish expansion on the Arabian Peninsula... The issue is much bigger than normal repair of military equipment or the provision of ammunition. Carrying the agreement into effect will enable us to install our people in Hijaz, the importance of which cannot be overestimated from the information point of view or for the propaganda of the trade with Poland"¹⁰. In the following years Poland also considered joining the projects for the development of the Hijaz railways and the establishment of airlines to fly pilgrims to the holy shrines. World War II made realizations of these projects impossible.

⁷ "Abdul-Rahman Al-Shobaily, "The effect of King Faisal's early international tours on his foreign policy", paper presented at the seminar organized at Warsaw University on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of King Faisal visit to Poland, May 22, 2002, mimeograph, p. 4.

⁸ A letter of a British Minister in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London of June 8, 1932, Penelope Tuson and Anita Burdett (ed.), *Records of Saudi Arabia, Primary Documents 1902-1960*, London 1992, vol. 4, p. 748.

⁹ ANA, the group of the Polish Embassy in London, file 333, letter from the Legacy of the Republic of Poland in London to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of June 8, 1933.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

Nonetheless, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was interested in the region. Dr. Jan Starzewski, vice-director of the Political Department of the Ministry wrote in April 1936:

In the wake of Italian attempts to take possession of Abyssinia and thus threatening of the sea route to India, England is developing its land communications in that direction through the Arab kingdoms, Iraq and Hijaz. As a result, it supports their aspirations and assists in their political consolidation and economic development.... This development suggests that we should be more involved in that region¹¹.

At the same time, however, Starzewski stated that opening a Polish diplomatic or consular agency in Hijaz which was suggested by Stanisław Korwin-Pawłowski (see below) wasn't yet necessary.

In the development of Polish-Saudi contacts in the thirties some role was played by Stanisław Korwin (Pawłowski). For centuries, Korwin's family had been connected with the Polish Tatars¹². He himself had been repatriated from Russia and he settled in Warsaw in 1921. In 1923 he created the Poland-Asia Society (converted into an Institute in 1925), the task of which was to promote economic contacts with the East. The Institute was in contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Polish intelligence. In 1930, as a result of a conflict with these institutions, Korwin withdrew from his activities in the Institute and went to Egypt. In Cairo, he started to lecture at Al-Azhar University. As a result of the contacts he made there, he joined the Pan-Muslim League delegation in 1934 attempted to mediate in the war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. On that occasion Korwin met King Abdulaziz and other Saudi politicians several times. In his memoirs, Korwin described his visits to Saudi Arabia, and particularly his conversations with the King in considerable detail. According to Korwin, Abdulaziz was interested in the foreign policy of Poland, particularly in its relations with Turkey and Iran. The King also mentioned his meetings with mufti Szynekiewicz.

Korwin was obviously fascinated with Abdulaziz. He wrote about him:

The first quarter of the 20th century brought three outstanding persons to the Muslim world: the Iranian (Persian) emperor Reza Pahlavi, the president of the Republic of Turkey Mustafa Kemal and the king of Arabia Abdulaziz Ibn Sa'ud. In my opinion, the most prominent of them was the third one. The Iranian and the Turk reorganized the existing countries, rich in administrative traditions and in various specialists. The Arab had to create everything from the very beginning, from chaos - and he made it. How greatly he predominated over his environment with intelligence and moderation!¹³

After the conclusion of the Pan-Arab mission, King Abdulaziz offered a job to Korwin, particularly a search of water in the Ha'il region in northern Nejd. Therefore, after a few months, Korwin returned to Saudi Arabia. His hydrological search, however, did not bring spectacular results. Korwin only confirmed the existence of underground ground waters in certain areas, and fertile soils under the coat of sand. Dissatisfied with the efforts of the workers assigned to him, the orga-

¹¹ Opinion P. III of April 20, 1936. ANA, the group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political and Economic Department, Eastern Division, file 5882, p. 111.

¹² S. A. Korwin, *Wspomnienia, Wyścig z życiem*, Warsaw 1966.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

nization of work and the financial resources provided, he shortened his stay and returned to Egypt¹⁴.

In the following years Korwin was an advocate of the extension of Polish-Saudi cooperation and send several memoranda to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the subject¹⁵.

The ravages of World War II, and the subsequent position of Poland within the communist block curtailed visits by Poles to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and to Saudi Arabia in particular. The only Poles who found their way to the Saudi Kingdom at that time were Polish immigrants holding also a citizenship of another country (most often British or North American), employed as specialists by companies from their new countries of settlement. Not until the 1980's did visits of Saudis to Poland re-commence. Ali Abd Turki, one of the richest businessmen of Saudi Arabia, financed a big part of the construction of a mosque in Gdańsk-Oliwa. In 1986, Polish Muslims hosted a delegation of the World Muslim League from Mecca¹⁶. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established on May 3, 1995. Korwin's project to establish Polish diplomatic representation in Saudi Arabia was finally put into effect in 1998, half century later after it was devised. The Saudi embassy in Warsaw was opened three years later. On April 25, 2000, Krzysztof Płomiński presented his credentials to King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, becoming the first Polish ambassador to the Kingdom. On October 29, 2001, Osama A. Al-Sanosi presented his credentials to President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, becoming the first Saudi ambassador to Poland. With these developments, relations between the countries finally attained the level necessary to secure long-awaited broad-range development.

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp. 124-137. Before World War Two Korwin returned to Warsaw. Arrested by the Nazis he was kept in the Auschwitz concentration camp. After the war he was employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others as a director of Eastern Division.

¹⁵ ANA, the group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political and Economic Department, Eastern Division, file 5881. Korwin's report of April 1936.

¹⁶ "Polish-Arabian Ties" (a special edition of a periodical "Poland"), Warsaw 1986, pp. 26-27.