

Dr. Michał Dworski

Civitas University

e-mail: michal.dworski@civitas.edu.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7505-9221>

Zygmunt Szkopiak – The Last Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Polish Government-in-Exile (1986–1990): Toward a Biography

ZYGMUNT SZKOPIAK – OSTATNI MINISTER SPRAW ZAGRANICZNYCH W RZĄDZIE RP NA UCHODŹSTWIE (1986–1990). W STRONĘ BIOGRAFII

Summary

Zygmunt Szkopiak (1921–2002) was a prominent figure in the post-war Polish diaspora, contributing significantly across the academic, political, and cultural spheres. This article provides a systematic account of the most notable episodes in his life, particularly emphasizing his multifaceted engagement in the political, intellectual, and civic activities of the Polish émigré community following the Second World War. It foregrounds his roles as a scholar, public intellectual, and statesman, with a specific focus on his efforts to safeguard the legacy of an independent Polish state during the Cold War. As the first scholarly endeavor to comprehensively examine Szkopiak's life and work, this study offers a foundational basis for further biographical inquiry into his enduring influence on the post-war Polish diaspora.

Keywords: Zygmunt Szkopiak; Polish Government-in-Exile; diaspora; exile; the United Kingdom

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia sylwetkę wybitnego działacza polskiej powojennej emigracji Zygmunta Szkopiaka (1921–2002), skupiając się na jego działalności naukowej, społecznej i politycznej w Wielkiej Brytanii. Celem szkicu jest usystematyzowanie najważniejszych etapów jego życia oraz ukazanie roli, jaką odegrał jako człowiek nauki, działacz społeczny, a w latach 1986–1990 minister spraw zagranicznych w rządzie RP na uchodźstwie. Artykuł koncentruje się zwłaszcza na wysiłkach Szkopiaka na rzecz ochrony dziedzictwa niepodległego państwa polskiego podczas zimnej wojny i przybliża też jego działania na rzecz polskiej diaspory po 1990 roku. Praca stanowi

pierwszą próbę zarysowania naukowej biografii tego znaczącego działacza i jest podstawą do dalszych badań biograficznych nad jego trwałym wpływem na powojenną emigrację polityczną.

Słowa kluczowe: Zygmunt Szkopiak; rząd RP na uchodźstwie; diaspora; uchodźstwo; Wielka Brytania

Introduction

Zygmunt Szkopiak (1921–2002) was a prominent figure within the post-war Polish diaspora, whose contributions to science, culture, and political activism were of considerable significance. As a scholar, public intellectual, and political activist, he played a central role in shaping the intellectual and institutional landscape of émigré life in the United Kingdom during the Cold War. His displacement from Poland occurred during the Second World War, when he was deported to Austria. Following the liberation of the labor camp by British forces, Szkopiak was granted political refugee status and subsequently emigrated to the United Kingdom. There, he embarked on an academic career, undertaking studies in metallurgy at Battersea Polytechnic. He remained affiliated with the institution for many years, steadily advancing through the academic ranks. However, Szkopiak's engagement extended far beyond the academic sphere. Over more than four decades, he was actively involved in key émigré institutions, including the Polish Social and Cultural Centre and the Polish Scientific Society Abroad, becoming one of the most vocal advocates for the preservation of Polish sovereignty and national identity in exile. Szkopiak was also deeply engaged in the political life of the émigré community, initially as a long-serving member of the National Councils of the Republic of Poland (the émigré parliament-in-exile), and later as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Polish Government-in-Exile. He held this office as the final foreign minister of that government, serving during the critical transitional period preceding the dissolution of the émigré governmental structures following the political transformations in Poland. His tenure coincided with a pivotal moment in Polish history—the decline of the communist regime and the onset of systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. During this period, Szkopiak remained firmly committed to preserving the symbolic and legal continuity of the Polish statehood in exile (*de jure* the Second Republic of Poland), while simultaneously engaging in public diplomacy and advancing Polish interests through soft power initiatives. After concluding his ministerial duties, Szkopiak continued to serve the Polish émigré community, acting as President of the Polish Unity organization in the United Kingdom (1990–1997) and as Chairman of the European Union of Polish Communities (1993–2000). In these

roles, he consolidated his position as a key facilitator of émigré unity and a representative of Polish diaspora interests within a broader European context.

Despite the historical significance of his public service and sustained involvement in émigré affairs, Szkopiak remains a relatively understudied figure in Polish historiography. This article constitutes the first comprehensive attempt to reconstruct his biography and assess his socio-political impact. Drawing on a wide range of archival sources, press materials, and institutional documents, it seeks to document the major phases of Szkopiak's career, with particular attention to his role during the final years of the Polish Government-in-Exile and his contributions to the political thought of the diaspora. In a broader analytical context, this study aims to situate Szkopiak within the tradition of émigré diplomacy and Cold War political dynamics, evaluating his role in safeguarding the legal continuity of the Polish state-in-exile, his commitment to ideas of European federalism, and his involvement in the integration of Central and Eastern European refugees. Although primarily descriptive in structure, the article also allows for interpretative reflection on Szkopiak's symbolic legacy—both within the historical trajectory of the Polish diaspora and in relation to the political transformations of post-communist Poland. In this respect, it provides both a foundational basis for future biographical research and a substantive contribution to ongoing scholarly discourse concerning the historical role of the Polish Government-in-Exile and its representatives.

1. Early Life and Socio-Cultural Engagement in Exile

Zygmunt Szkopiak was born on December 12, 1921, in Morzewiec, near Bydgoszcz, Poland, to Leon and Antonina (née Motyka). He completed his primary and secondary education in Bydgoszcz, where he resided at the outbreak of the Second World War, an event that significantly disrupted his life.¹ In 1941, Szkopiak, along with his family, was forcibly deported to Austria, where he endured forced labor in the Carinthia region until 1945.² His hardship concluded with liberation by the British Eighth Army in 1945, which granted him political refugee status.³ Subsequently, he emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he commenced his academic journey by enrolling at the Polish University College. He continued his studies at Battersea Polytechnic (now the University of Surrey), obtaining a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in metallurgy in 1955.⁴

1 *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, „Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego na Obczyźnie,” 45 (2001/2002), p. 32.

2 IWM, Szkopiak, Zygmunt Czesław (Oral history), 1996, catalogue no. 16816.

3 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

4 Z. Szkopiak, *Polacy na Uniwersytecie Surrey*, “Tydzień Polski,” February 16, 2002, p. 12.

In the years following his graduation, Szkopiak began to establish his academic career. Between 1954 and 1957, he worked as a research demonstrator and later as a lecturer assistant until 1959.⁵ By this time, he had attained the position of full lecturer, which he held with distinction. In 1964, he completed his doctoral studies, earning his doctorate and solidifying his place in the academic community.⁶ The College of Advanced Technology, where he began his career, later evolved into the University of Surrey, where Szkopiak continued to make substantial contributions to academic life.⁷

After 1945, Szkopiak made a conscious decision to pursue political emigration, following the path of thousands of his fellow countrymen during that period.⁸ Beyond his academic achievements, Szkopiak's post-war years were marked by profound engagement with the socio-political life of the Polish independence émigré communities. He embodied what Danièle Joly refers to as "Odyssean refugees," a group strongly connected to their homeland, who, despite their exile, continue to hope for a return.⁹ As Paul Tabori describes, such individuals view their life in exile as temporary, even if it may last a lifetime, and retain hope to return to their homeland when circumstances allow, though they are unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that led to their exile persist.¹⁰

Szkopiak's involvement in the political life of the Polish diaspora began in 1955 when he became an active member of the local Polish community in South London.¹¹ His leadership within this community was evident, as he served initially as a counselor, and later as secretary (1973–1976) and president (1976–1977) of the Polish Society in South London. Moreover, Szkopiak was dedicated to his role as a trustee and treasurer of the Polish Brockley-Lewisham Centre from 1960 to 1980, where he worked tirelessly to support Polish émigré life in the United Kingdom¹².

Szkopiak's academic interests and political engagement were closely intertwined, as he also played a prominent role in Polish academic circles in the UK. He served

5 Zygmunt Szkopiak, p. 33.

6 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

7 Z. Szkopiak, *Polacy na Uniwersytecie Surrey*, p. 12.

8 J.S. Pula, *Advancing Poland in Exile: World War II Intellectuals in North America*, "Polonia Inter Gentes," 4 (2023), pp. 141–143.

9 D. Joly, *Odyssean and Rubicon Refugees: Toward a Typology of Refugees in the Land of Exile*, "International Migration," 40 (2002), no. 6, pp. 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00221>.

10 P. Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study*, London 1972, pp. 26–27.

11 Zygmunt Szkopiak, pp. 33–34.

12 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438; P. Chojnacki, *Gmina. Życie powszednie na południu Polskiego Londynu (lata pięćdziesiąte-osiemdziesiąte XX wieku). Dzieje Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*, Warszawa 2023, p. 274.

as the editor-in-chief of “Technika i Nauka” (1965–1968), a significant journal that fostered intellectual and scientific exchange among the Polish diaspora. His leadership was further demonstrated when he became the president of the Polish Scientific Society Abroad from 1983 to 1997, a position that enabled him to contribute to the academic development of Poles living outside Poland.¹³ Additionally, he was a member of the Institute of Polish-Jewish Studies, where his contributions helped further the understanding of Polish history, culture, and the complex interrelations between Poles and Jews.¹⁴

His involvement with various Polish institutions in the UK continued to grow throughout the years.¹⁵ Notably, Szkopiak was actively engaged with the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK) in London, one of the most important cultural institutions for the Polish community in exile. Within POSK, he served in several key roles, including secretary (1976–1978), president of the POSK Club (1976–1979), and later as chair of the POSK Council (1979–1980).¹⁶ These positions allowed him to shape the cultural landscape of the Polish émigré community in the UK, ensuring that Polish heritage and identity were preserved and promoted in a foreign land.¹⁷ Szkopiak’s political engagement extended beyond local and cultural activities to a prominent role in the political structures of the “Polish State” in exile. From 1983 to 1991, he was a member of the VII and VIII National Council in London (the substitute for the Polish parliament), representing the Christian Democracy movement.¹⁸ This period saw his active involvement in shaping the direction of Polish politics in exile, particularly as the political climate in Eastern Europe began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His leadership in this context was integral in maintaining the visibility and influence of the Polish Government-in-Exile during its final years.¹⁹ In addition to his political and cultural contributions, Szkopiak was also a dedicated educator. In 1984, he became a professor at the Polish University in Exile, an institution that played

13 IWM, Szkopiak, Zygmunt Czesław.

14 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

15 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, „Polacy w Świecie.” *Kwartalnik biograficzny Polonii*, 4 (1996), no. 7, pp. 47–48.

16 P. Chojnacki, *Gmina. Życie powszednie na południu Polskiego Londynu*, pp. 342–344.

17 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

18 J. Rabiński, M. Dworski (eds.), *Słownik biograficzny polskiego państwa na uchodźstwie*, vol. 2: *Członkowie III i IV Rady Narodowej RP*, Lublin 2024, pp. 9–10; R. Turkowski, *Ostatnia Rada Narodowa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1989–1991*, in: *Zakończenie działalności władz RP na Uchodźstwie 1990*, eds. Z. Błażyński, R. Zakrzewski, Londyn 1995, pp. 73–144; J.F. Leich, *Great Expectations: The National Councils in Exile 1950–1960*, “The Polish Review,” 35 (1990), pp. 183–196.

19 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 46.

a crucial role in the academic development of Polish émigrés.²⁰ His commitment to education, both in terms of the Polish scientific community and the broader diaspora, was a testament to his belief in the importance of knowledge and intellectual exchange in the preservation of Polish identity in exile.²¹

2. Political Life in Exile and Diplomatic Activities

From 1986 to 1990, Zygmunt Szkopiak was a prominent member of the Polish Government-in-Exile, led by Edward Szczepanik.²² His role within this government, coupled with his leadership position as Minister of Foreign Affairs, was pivotal in shaping the direction of Polish foreign policy during the government's final years.²³ Following the dissolution of the government in exile in 1990, Szkopiak continued his involvement in the complex process of transitioning Polish political structures toward a post-communist reality.²⁴ His efforts during this period underscore his deep commitment to both Polish national interests and the broader struggle for freedom and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. In the period leading up to 1990, Szkopiak served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs under a government that had undergone significant reorganization. In 1987, the Szczepanik government decided to rename the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Central Bureau for International Affairs of Free Poles, marking a notable shift in the government's external diplomatic strategy.²⁵ This change aimed to mitigate the government's isolation by fostering a stronger identity for the Polish émigré community.²⁶ Szkopiak's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs was characterized by his efforts to expand Poland's diplomatic presence abroad, despite the constraints of operating from exile.²⁷ He coordinated a network

20 Z. Judycki, *Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie w Londynie. Słownik biograficzny pracowników naukowych*, Londyn 2008, pp. 90–91.

21 P. Chojnacki, *Gmina. Życie powszednie na południu Polskiego Londynu*, pp. 358, 360, 368.

22 Komunikat Kancelarii Cywilnej Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej o mianowaniu Rządu i Podsekretarza Stanu z 16 lipca 1986 r., tekst jednolity: Dz. U. z 1986 r. Nr 3, poz. 50.

23 K. Tarka, *Emigracyjna dyplomacja. Polityka zagraniczna Rządu RP na uchodźstwie, 1945–1990*, Łomianki 2003, pp. 270–274, 277–278.

24 M. Dworski, *Republic in Exile – Political Life of Polish Emigration in United Kingdom after Second World War*, "Torun International Studies," 2018, no. 1(10), p. 108.

25 IWM, Szkopiak, Zygmunt Czesław.

26 *Działamy dla Kraju na terenie międzynarodowym. Program prac Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych przedstawiony na posiedzeniu Rady Narodowej RP w Londynie w dniu 31 stycznia 1987*, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 2 (1987), p. 6.

27 K. Tarka, *Emigracyjna dyplomacja*, p. 260.

of foreign representatives for the Polish government, engaging with diplomats and officials in various countries. Notably, Szkopiak participated in numerous meetings and conferences aimed at maintaining and strengthening the political and diplomatic ties between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the global Polish diaspora.²⁸

One of the most significant events during his time in office was the organization of a conference for Polish government representatives from around the world. The event, held from September 5–11, 1988, at Fawley Court, a Marian Fathers' property, represented an effort to unify and strengthen the diplomatic endeavors of the Polish government abroad.²⁹ As part of his diplomatic duties, Szkopiak made a series of key appointments, such as designating Bolesław Karwat as the Polish government representative in Austria and Jan Jaworski in Italy.³⁰ He also attended various meetings and assemblies, including those in West Germany, where he interacted with Polish organizations and participated in events such as the German assembly of the Polish Christian Democracy and the annual march of the Christian Service for the Liberation of Nations in Carlsberg.³¹

Szkopiak's tenure also saw him engage in public debates on international issues, particularly those concerning Europe's changing political landscape. He maintained a notable skepticism toward the policies introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, especially the reforms of "glasnost" and "perestroika." In his speech on June 11, 1988, before the National Council of the Republic of Poland in Exile, Szkopiak argued that these reforms did not fundamentally alter the goals of Soviet foreign policy.³² He also identified Central Europe as a point of convergence between Washington and Moscow, noting that it was not a source of major disagreement between the two superpowers during the period from 1986 to 1988.³³ During this time, Szkopiak expressed cautious optimism about China's increasing role, which he viewed as a potential ally for Central and Eastern Europe in its struggle for liberation from Soviet dominance.³⁴ He also frequently addressed the issue of Germany's future, emphasizing that the Polish Government-in-Exile supported the reunification of Germany, provided it was con-

28 PISM, Government Sessions, 1988, PRM.K.103/77.

29 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 47.

30 PISM, Government Sessions, 1988.

31 *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na uchodźstwie* „Rzeczpospolita Polska,” 6 (1988), pp. 1, 11.

32 PISM, Government Sessions, 1988.

33 *Obrona sprawy polskiej na świecie. Działalność zagraniczna Rządu RP*, “Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza,” 50 (1987), pp. 2, 4.

34 *Działamy dla Kraju na terenie międzynarodowym*, p. 6.

ditional on the unconditional recognition of the Oder-Neisse border.³⁵ He warned against the rise of revisionist tendencies in Germany and predicted that the division of the country would persist for many years, even into the late 1980s.³⁶ In addition to his political engagements, Szkopiak worked to strengthen cooperation among Central European refugees. He initiated various diplomatic and cultural efforts to foster deeper ties between the Polish émigré community and other Central European exiles, particularly the Czechoslovak and Estonian diasporas.³⁷ His efforts led to the signing of special declarations between the Polish government and these communities. Furthermore, Szkopiak supported initiatives aimed at enhancing dialogue and integration between these various Central European refugee groups.³⁸ In 1987, he participated in the commemoration of Lithuania's recovery of independence, although he expressed some skepticism regarding the Lithuanian government's treatment of the Polish president in relation to the event.³⁹ By 1990, when the Lithuanian parliament proclaimed its independence, Szkopiak expressed hope that disputes between Poland and Lithuania would be resolved through diplomatic negotiations conducted in a spirit of friendship.⁴⁰ Szkopiak's diplomatic work also extended to the celebration of key cultural and historical events.⁴¹ In 1988, he participated in the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus, alongside Prime Minister E. Szczepanik and President Kazimierz Sabbat.⁴² This event marked an important moment in Polish history, and Szkopiak's participation reinforced the Polish government's commitment to preserving and promoting Polish heritage and culture.⁴³

Despite his extensive diplomatic efforts, Szkopiak's vision for Central European émigrés faced significant obstacles due to the rapidly changing political developments in the region. In March 1988, he planned to establish a secretariat for cooperation between Central European émigrés, but the political shifts in Central and Eastern

35 *Europa i mur berliński. Z Ministrem Spraw Zagranicznych Rządu RP na uchodźstwie prof. Zygmuntem Szkopiakiem rozmawia Arkadiusz Urban*, "Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza", 280 (1989), p. 3.

36 K. Tarka, *Emigracyjna dyplomacja*, pp. 277–278; *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, p. 11.

37 *Obrona sprawy polskiej na świecie*, pp. 2, 4.

38 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438; *Obrona sprawy polskiej na świecie*, p. 4.

39 *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, pp. 1, 11.

40 *Działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 2 (1990), p. 2.

41 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

42 *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, pp. 1, 11.

43 PISM, Government Sessions, 1988.

Europe made this plan difficult to implement.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Szkopiak successfully engaged with the coordinating committee of the European Freedom Campaign, which was formed in London by representatives of nations behind the Iron Curtain. His support for the integration of Central European refugees into the broader European context remained a cornerstone of his foreign policy approach.⁴⁵ Throughout his tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Szkopiak remained committed to the goal of Polish integration into a unified Europe. He consistently advocated for Poland's entry into a united Europe, viewing this as a critical step toward the future prosperity of Poland and its people.⁴⁶ He also supported initiatives for new forms of federal cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, considering this as a transitional stage toward greater integration within the European Economic Community.⁴⁷ From 1989 to 1990, Szkopiak continued to support the efforts of Central European refugee groups, participating in commemorative events and demonstrations, such as those marking the deportation of the Baltic peoples by the USSR and the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁸

In the final years of his career as a government official, Zygmunt Szkopiak played an active role in key meetings and diplomatic events. In 1989, he participated in a conference alongside Member of Parliament Anthony Coombs, discussing a meeting between Professor Janusz Zawodny and members of both houses of the British Parliament.⁴⁹ On September 25, 1989, Szkopiak attended a distinguished dinner at Simpson's-in-the-Strand, hosted by Lord Sudeley for the President of El Salvador, Alfredo Cristiani, and his inner cabinet.⁵⁰ The guest list included prominent figures such as Sir Alfred Sherman (policy advisor to Margaret Thatcher), Lord Nicholas Hervey, Antony Flew, Denis Walker, and Harvey Ward.⁵¹ Szkopiak also made significant contributions through his written work, preparing various memoranda and letters that outlined the Polish government's positions on critical issues⁵². In 1989, he authored two memoranda titled *On the Liberation of Poland from Soviet Domination* and *On the Fate of Poles in the*

44 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438; *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, pp. 1, 11.

45 PISM, Government Sessions, 1988.

46 *Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, pp. 1, 11.

47 PISM, Government Session, 20 November 1989, PRM.K.103/78.

48 PISM, Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for 1989, PRM.E/463; *Europa i mur berliński*, p. 3; *Działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, p. 2.

49 *Europa i mur berliński*, p. 3.

50 PISM, Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for 1989, PRM.E/463.

51 *Court & Social Section*, "The Times," September 26, 1989, p. 14.

52 PISM, Government Session, 20 November 1989, PRM.K.103/78.

Soviet Union, which were key documents in the Polish government's response to the evolving geopolitical situation.⁵³ In May 1990, Szkopiak drafted a strong response to an interview with Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, who had renounced Poland's claims to territories seized by the USSR in 1939.⁵⁴ On August 17, 1989, he also published a letter in *The Daily Telegraph*, asserting the continued legitimacy of the Polish Government-in-Exile and stating that it would be for the Polish government to determine the conditions under which it would cease to function⁵⁵.

It is worth emphasizing that Zygmunt Szkopiak participated in the final Cabinet Council on December 10, 1990, at the government and president's residence at Eaton Place 43. This marked the official cessation of the government's activities. Following the dissolution of the government, President Ryszard Kaczorowski appointed Szkopiak to the Commission for the Liquidation of the Polish Government-in-Exile on December 21, 1990.⁵⁶ In this capacity, Szkopiak was tasked with overseeing the closure of several key ministries and institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Poles in the USSR, and the Ministry of Emigration, Education, and Culture, as well as the government's residence, Cytadela Ltd.⁵⁷

3. Role in the Dissolution of the Polish Government-in-Exile

After the handover of the presidential insignia to Poland on December 22, 1990, and the formal dissolution of the government-in-exile on December 20, 1990, Zygmunt Szkopiak believed that the era of Polish political emigration had concluded.⁵⁸ He was convinced that the conditions which had once necessitated such a structure had now shifted, and as such, the Polish diaspora could no longer rely on former organizational frameworks. As the acting president of the Polish Unity, Szkopiak openly advocated for the development of new organizational forms for Poles living abroad. He strongly argued that the Polish Unity should be the institution representing the Polish diaspora, rather than replicating outdated structures such as the network of

53 PISM, Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for 1989, PRM.E/463.

54 PISM, Government Session, 19 February 1990, PRM.K.103/79.

55 *Letter from Zygmunt Szkopiak*, "The Daily Telegraph," August 17, 1989, p. 12.

56 PISM, Komisja Likwidacyjna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie, Protokoły posiedzeń komisji, grudzień 1990, A.69/1.

57 E. Szczepanik, *Komisja Likwidacyjna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, in: *Zakończenie działalności władz RP na Uchodźstwie 1990*, eds. Z. Błazyński, R. Zakrzewski, Londyn 1995, pp. 145–150.

58 M. Dworski, *Republic in Exile*, p. 108; M. Alberska, *Polish Government-in-Exile and the Political Transformation of the Polish State in 1989–1991*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych," 53 (2025), no. 1, p. 167, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rns2025.0015>.

government delegates, National Treasury circles, or the National Council.⁵⁹ Szkopiak considered these traditional models to be not only costly but also inefficient in the context of the rapidly changing political and social landscape.⁶⁰ His proposal sparked significant debates within the émigré community. While some activists supported his views, agreeing that a new, more streamlined organization was necessary, others strongly disagreed, favoring the continuation of the established networks that had served the community for decades. This divergence of opinion underscored the challenges that Szkopiak and others in his position faced as they sought to redefine the role of the Polish diaspora in the post-communist world.⁶¹ Despite these internal divisions, Szkopiak's efforts were not without impact. Polish Unity, though it did not fully realize the vision he had hoped for, played a pivotal role in maintaining ties between Poles abroad and their homeland, especially during the transitional period following the end of the Cold War. Following the liquidation of the government's assets, all remaining funds were entrusted to the emigration community and managed by the Polonia Aid Foundation Trust (PAFT) starting in 1991.⁶² PAFT was established with the aim of supporting both Poland and the émigré community, as well as promoting scientific, educational, and cultural endeavors. Szkopiak, understanding the importance of this initiative, became one of the first trustees of PAFT, serving in this capacity until 1997. His involvement with the foundation demonstrated his continued commitment to supporting the Polish diaspora and fostering connections between Poles living abroad and their native country.⁶³ Another significant moment in this period was the divergence of opinions within the Liquidation Commission, of which Szkopiak was a member, regarding the representativeness of the commission and the timing and method of transferring the presidential insignia to Poland.⁶⁴ This debate highlighted the complexities of the transition from the government-in-exile to the newly established post-communist Polish state. Szkopiak's stance during these discussions emphasized his dedication to preserving the integrity of Polish institutions while adapting to the new political reality.⁶⁵

59 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 47.

60 E. Szczepanik, *Komisja Likwidacyjna*, pp. 147–150.

61 E. Szczepanik na Radzie Narodowej, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 6 (1989), p. 2; M. Alberska, *Polish Government-in-Exile*, p. 167.

62 E. Szczepanik, *Komisja Likwidacyjna*, pp. 149–150.

63 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 47.

64 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

65 PISM, Komisja Likwidacyjna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie, Protokoły posiedzeń komisji, grudzień 1990, A.69/1.

In the 1990s, Zygmunt Szkopiak continued to be an influential figure within the Polish community abroad. He served as president of Polish Unity in the United Kingdom until 1997 and led the European Union of Polish Communities from 1993 to 2000.⁶⁶ His leadership during this time was instrumental in fostering greater unity among Polish emigrants across Europe and ensuring that their voices were heard in the broader European context. Academically, Szkopiak made significant contributions to his field, authoring numerous works focused on the relaxation of internal tensions and conflicts. These studies were important not only for their academic value but also for their practical implications in managing community relations and integration.⁶⁷ He was also a co-founder of the World Union of Bydgoszcz Citizens, serving as its president from 1994 to 1996, and as its honorary president thereafter. This initiative aimed to strengthen the bonds among those of Bydgoszcz origin, fostering a sense of global community.⁶⁸

Throughout his life, Szkopiak was recognized for his contributions to Poland and the Polish diaspora. In 1989, he received the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, as well as the Gold Cross of Merit, the War Medal 1939–1945, the Polish Army Medal, the Cross of Merit of the Polish Military Chaplaincy, and the Medal of Merit "Exsuli Bene de Ecclesia Merito." These honors underscored the high regard in which he was held for his enduring commitment to Polish causes.⁶⁹

On a personal note, Zygmunt Szkopiak was married to Emilia Wójcik, a woman of Polish descent whose father was a victim of the Katyń massacre. Together, they had three children: Krystyna, Andrzej, and Piotr. Zygmunt Szkopiak passed away on October 22, 2002, in London, leaving behind a lasting legacy. He was buried in the columbarium at St. Andrew Bobola Church in London, where his contributions to the Polish community and his unwavering dedication to Polish values continue to be remembered.⁷⁰

Zygmunt Szkopiak remains a relatively understudied figure in the historiography of the Polish émigré community, despite the significance of the final political office he held and the breadth of his public engagement. This article has aimed to restore him to his rightful place in the historical record through a structured, source-based reconstruction of his life and career. Beyond its biographical dimension, however, Szkopiak's trajectory

66 PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, ZSF, no. 438.

67 *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 34.

68 Z. Judycki, *Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie w Londynie*, p. 91.

69 Komunikat o nadaniu Orderu Odrodzenia Polski z 15 grudnia 1989 r., tekst jednolity: Dz. U. z 1989 r. Nr 6, poz. 97.

70 Z. Judycki, *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, p. 47.

invites broader reflection on the character of late-stage émigré politics and the symbolic role of the Polish Government-in-Exile during its final years of existence.

Szkopiak's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs coincided with the waning political relevance of émigré institutions—a time when their activity was primarily symbolic rather than instrumental. Their role rested on the principles of diasporic diplomacy, historical continuity, and the preservation of the independence ethos among Polish émigrés. Szkopiak's actions illustrate both the potential and the constraints inherent in this position. Although he possessed limited means to influence tangible political developments, he played a significant role in sustaining the legacy of the Second Polish Republic and in articulating a vision of Polish statehood that was soon to be subsumed by the emerging post-communist reality. It is likely that, in assuming his ministerial post, Szkopiak envisioned a more substantive legal and institutional succession of this tradition by the Third Republic—yet, in practice, the transfer of this legacy was largely symbolic, epitomized by the ceremonial handover of presidential insignia by Ryszard Kaczorowski.

Conclusion

Szkopiak's life and work represent a remarkable synthesis of academic accomplishment, political commitment, and cultural stewardship. His contributions to the intellectual and political life of the Polish émigré community left a lasting imprint on the Polish diaspora in the United Kingdom and beyond. Through his scholarly activity, leadership in émigré organizations, and unwavering dedication to the cause of Polish independence, Szkopiak embodied the perseverance and moral conviction that defined the twentieth-century Polish exile experience. Nonetheless, key questions concerning the durability and significance of his legacy remain unresolved. To what extent did his political vision influence post-1989 Polish policy? Were his ideas integrated into the broader narrative of émigré memory, or did they vanish with the dissolution of the Polish Government-in-exile? These questions highlight the need for further scholarly inquiry—not only into Szkopiak himself but also into the broader dynamics of continuity and rupture in the political culture of the Polish diaspora and the homeland during the transition to democracy. This article should thus be seen as both a step toward a more comprehensive biographical and analytical account of this figure and an invitation to reexamine the intellectual legacies of Polish exiles during the era of statelessness.

References

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Imperial War Museums

IWM, Szkopiak, Zygmunt Czesław (Oral history), 1996, catalogue no. 16816.

The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London

PISM, Government Sessions, 1988, PRM.K.103/77.

PISM, Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for 1989, PRM.E/463

PISM, Government Session, 20 November 1989, PRM.K.103/78.

PISM, Government Session, 19 February 1990, PRM.K.103/79.

PISM, Komisja Likwidacyjna Rządu RP na uchodźstwie, Protokoły posiedzeń komisji, grudzień 1990, A.69/1.

The Polish Library in the Polish Social and Cultural Center in London

PL PSCC, Archives of the Polish Emigration Institute, Zygmunt Szkopiak Files (ZSF), no. 438.

LEGAL ACTS

Komunikat Kancelarii Cywilnej Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej o mianowaniu Rządu i Podsekretarzy Stanu z 16 lipca 1986 r., tekst jednolity: Dz. U. z 1986 r. Nr 3, poz. 50.

Komunikat o nadaniu Orderu Odrodzenia Polski z 15 grudnia 1989 r., tekst jednolity: Dz. U. z 1989 r. Nr 6, poz. 97.

LITERATURE

Alberska M., *Polish Government-in-Exile and the Political Transformation of the Polish State in 1989–1991*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych," 53 (2025), no. 1, pp. 159–173, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rns2025.0015>.

Chojnacki P., *Gmina. Życie powszednie na południu Polskiego Londynu (lata pięćdziesiąte–osiemdziesiąte XX wieku). Dzieje Gminy Polskiej Londyn-Południe*, Warszawa 2023.

Court & Social Section, "The Times," September 26, 1989, p. 14.

Dworski M., *Republic in Exile – Political Life of Polish Emigration in United Kingdom after Second World War*, "Torun International Studies," 2018, no. 1 (10), pp. 101–110, <https://doi.org/10.12775/TSM.2017.008>.

Działalność Rządu RP na uchodźstwie, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 2 (1990), p. 2.

Działamy dla Kraju na terenie międzynarodowym. Program prac Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych przedstawiony na posiedzeniu Rady Narodowej RP w Londynie w dniu 31 stycznia 1987, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 2 (1987), p. 6.

E. Szczepanik na Radzie Narodowej, "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 6 (1989), p. 2.

Europa i mur berliński. Z Ministrem Spraw Zagranicznych Rządu RP na uchodźstwie prof. Zygmuntem Szkopiakiem rozmawia Arkadiusz Urban, "Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza," 280 (1989), p. 3.

Joly D., *Odyssean and Rubicon Refugees: Toward a Typology of Refugees in the Land of Exile*, "International Migration," 40 (2002), no. 6, pp. 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00221>.

- Judycki Z., *Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie w Londynie. Słownik biograficzny pracowników naukowych*, Londyn 2008.
- Judycki Z., *Zygmunt Szkopiak*, "Polacy w Świecie." *Kwartalnik biograficzny Polonii*, 4 (1996), no. 7, pp. 47–48.
- Leich J.F., *Great Expectations: The National Councils in Exile 1950–1960*, "The Polish Review," 35 (1990), pp. 183–196.
- Letter from Zygmunt Szkopiak*, "The Daily Telegraph," August 17, 1989, p. 12.
- Międzynarodowa działalność Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie* "Rzeczpospolita Polska," 6 (1988), pp. 1, 11.
- Obrona sprawy polskiej na świecie. Działalność zagraniczna Rządu RP*, "Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza," 50 (1987), pp. 2, 4.
- Pula J.S., *Advancing Poland in Exile: World War II Intellectuals in North America*, "Polonia Inter Gentes," 4 (2023), pp. 141–150.
- Rabiński J., Dworski M. (eds.), *Słownik biograficzny polskiego państwa na uchodźstwie*, vol. 2: *Członkowie III i IV Rady Narodowej RP*, Lublin 2024.
- Szczepanik E., *Komisja Likwidacyjna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie*, in: *Zakończenie działalności władz RP na Uchodźstwie 1990*, eds. Z. Błazyński, R. Zakrzewski, Londyn 1995, pp. 145–150.
- Szkopiak Z., *Polacy na Uniwersytecie Surrey*, "Tydzień Polski," February 16, 2002, p. 12.
- Tabori P., *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study*, London 1972.
- Tarka K., *Emigracyjna dyplomacja. Polityka zagraniczna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie, 1945–1990*, Łomianki 2003.
- Turkowski R., *Ostatnia Rada Narodowa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1989–1991*, in: *Zakończenie działalności władz RP na Uchodźstwie 1990*, eds. Z. Błazyński, R. Zakrzewski, Londyn 1995, pp. 73–144.
- Zygmunt Szkopiak*, "Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego na Obczyźnie," 45 (2001–2002), pp. 32–34.

