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# On Hostile Soil: Spanish Republican Diplomats in Berlin at the Onset of the Spanish Civil War

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*German intervention in the Spanish Civil War was decisive for its development and result. Traditionally scholars have focused their attention on the support given by the Third Reich to the military rebels; however, they have widely neglected the study of the relationship between Germany and the Spanish Republic during the first four months of the war, when both countries maintained diplomatic relations. This paper aims at exploring a crucial aspect of that historical period, namely the circumstances of the Spanish diplomats in Berlin during those first four months, and the strategies that the German and the Spanish governments carried out in the harsh diplomatic battle that they ended up fighting. The author explains the difficult working conditions of the Spanish diplomats who were loyal to the Republic and stayed in Berlin in July 1936, when most of their colleagues deserted. Finally, he explores how the German Foreign Affairs Department, in collaboration with the Gestapo, managed to restrain the Spanish Republic diplomatic action in Germany.*

German intervention was one of the most decisive factors in the development and outcome of the Spanish Civil War. This topic has been so extensively treated that it now seems commonplace. Researchers have rightly analysed German intervention from the perspective of the links between the Third Reich and Franco's rebel forces, as well as the significance of German intervention early on in support of the rebels. However, analysis of the relations between the German and Spanish governments from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 17 July 1936 until Germany and Italy officially recognised General Franco and broke off diplomatic relations with the Republic on 18 November 1936 has largely been consigned to the shadows.

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Only two of the classical works on German participation in the Civil War have addressed this topic: the volumes published many years ago by Manfred Merkes and Hans-Henning Abendroth.<sup>1</sup> In both cases the authors' analysis relied solely on German sources; both lacked insights into the perspective of the Republican government. More recently, Jean-François Berdah dedicated a few pages to this subject in a study of the relationship between the Spanish Republic and the Great Powers from the beginning of the Republic, in 1931, until the end of the Civil War, in 1939.<sup>2</sup> Berdah examined Spanish diplomatic sources and gave brief attention to what took place in the Spanish embassy in Berlin during the first weeks of the Civil War. However, he offered only a partial explanation of the events that took place between July and November 1936. Even studies that analyse the Civil War in its entirety and assign particular relevance to international questions have scarcely dealt with this topic.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, both classical works on the foreign policy of the Third Reich and more recent publications on this issue remain quiet on the subject.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent book chapter, I drew on German and Spanish sources to attempt a preliminary review of the relations between the governments of these two countries in the early months of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>5</sup> In this article, I build on this earlier research and analyse the work of Spanish diplomats in Berlin from July to November 1936, in the context of escalating tensions between the two countries due to Adolf Hitler's secretive intervention in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

The article has several aims. First, I analyse the politics of the Third Reich during the first weeks of the civil war by exploring the activities carried out during that time by the German embassy in Madrid; we will see how the German diplomats in Spain acted without knowing to what extent their country was becoming involved in the Spanish conflict. This exploration also reveals how tensions between Madrid

<sup>1</sup> Manfred Merkes, *Die deutsche Politik im spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936–1939*, 2nd edn, reviewed and expanded (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1969). Hans-Henning Abendroth, *Hitler in der spanischen Arena. Die deutsch-spanischen Beziehungen im Spannungsfeld der europäischen Interessenpolitik vom Ausbruch des Bürgerkrieges bis zum Ausbruch des Weltkrieges 1936–1939* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Berdah, *La democracia asesinada. La República española y las grandes potencias, 1931–1939* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> For example: Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke-London: The MacMillan Press, 1994); Walther L. Bernecker, *Krieg in Spanien 1936–1939*, 2nd edn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005); Enrique Moradiellos, *El reinado de Europa. Las dimensiones internacionales de la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Península, 2001); Glyn A. Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers, 1931–1939* (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); Carlos Collado Seidel, *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg. Geschichte eines europäischen Konflikts* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik 1933–1938* (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1968); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933–1936* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Rainer F. Schmidt, *Die Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches 1933–1939* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002); Eckart Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Francisco Morente, 'Diplomacia bajo las bombas. La Segunda República y el Tercer Reich en los inicios de la guerra civil', in Francisco Morente, ed., *España en la crisis europea de entreguerras. República, fascismo y guerra civil* (Madrid: Catarata, 2012), 35–54.

<sup>6</sup> The most comprehensive and up-to-date study about this question is Ángel Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la guerra civil. Antecedentes y consecuencias* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001).

and Berlin grew as the German government's support for the insurgents became increasingly evident. The second section is devoted to explaining the chaotic situation within the Spanish embassy in Berlin during the days that followed the military revolt. As with the Spanish embassies in other countries, the desertion of a great number of diplomats working in them left the foreign service of the Republic in a very precarious situation, making the defence of its interests extremely difficult. In both the second and third sections of the article I analyse the strategy followed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich (*Auswärtiges Amt*), in collaboration with the Spanish ex ambassador Agramonte, to render the activities of those Spanish diplomats in Berlin still faithful to the Republic practically useless. We will see that during those months legal, and even physical, coercive measures against some Spanish diplomats prevailed. In the fourth section I explain how the German government paved the way for breaking off diplomatic relations with Spain, which included physical aggression against the main Spanish representative in Berlin by members of the Spanish Falange in collaboration with German agents. Finally, in the concluding section I discuss to what extent the Spanish diplomats in Berlin could effectively defend the interests of the Republic and whether the Spanish government could have done more in that direction.

## I

The military uprising of 17 July 1936 took the German diplomats in Spain by surprise. It does not appear that even German intelligence had advance notice of the insurrection.<sup>7</sup> Hans-Hermann Völckers, the *chargé d'affaires* of the German embassy in Madrid, was on summer holiday in the northern city of San Sebastian when the rebellion began.<sup>8</sup> He was thus kept incommunicado from his embassy, which had been left in the hands of Counsellor Karl Schwendemann.<sup>9</sup> Völckers destroyed the documents in the German diplomatic office of San Sebastian for fear of it falling into the hands of the Republican authorities and proceeded to the town of Irun.<sup>10</sup> In the early weeks of the war Völckers and Schwendemann sent numerous reports to the

<sup>7</sup> Morten Heiberg and Manuel Ros Agudo, *La trama oculta de la guerra civil. Los servicios secretos de Franco 1936–1945* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 26–7. In fact, contrary to widespread opinion at the time, Nazi Germany played no part in preparing the coup; Michael Grüttner, *Das Dritte Reich 1933–1939* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2014), 212.

<sup>8</sup> There was no ambassador in Madrid from April 1936 onward; Eberhard von Sthorer had been appointed to the position but he had not yet travelled to Spain to present his credentials; Viñas, *Franco*, 287–8.

<sup>9</sup> Both Völckers and Schwendemann were career diplomats with years of experience in Spain but with a low political profile. After the breaking off of diplomatic relations between the Third Reich and the Spanish Republic Völckers went back to Germany while Schwendemann continued his diplomatic work in Franco's main headquarters in Salamanca. In 1937 he returned to Berlin to become the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' department on Spain.

<sup>10</sup> Völckers to Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff (chair of the *Auswärtiges Amt's* Political Department), 22 July 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Innere Politik, Parlaments- und Parteiwesen, file R102988, documents 257054–56.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs explaining the situation in Spain. The information that reached Berlin was fragmented, mostly rumour-based and inexact, except concerning the situation in Madrid.<sup>11</sup> Hitler, however, decided to support Franco on 25–26 July, in a meeting that extended late into the night, without very exact knowledge of the Spanish situation and contrary to the prevailing stand among officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>12</sup>

The exchange of messages between the German embassy in Madrid and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveals quite clearly that German diplomats in Spain were not informed of Hitler's decision to provide military aid to the rebels. Their proposals to Berlin were based on the assumption that Germany would support neither the Republic (for ideological reasons) nor the military uprising. Both Schwendemann in Madrid and Consul Otto Carl Köcher in Barcelona gave special relevance in their reports to the chaos and violence behind Republican lines during the early weeks of the war. Köcher constantly spoke of the 'red terror', while Schwendemann emphasised the responsibility of the Spanish government but suggested using the occasion to blame Moscow in the international press for the crimes being committed in Spain.<sup>13</sup>

None of this actually affected the decisions taken in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chancellery in Berlin. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to maintain the official line that Germany was not providing military assistance to the rebels, even as German support became difficult to conceal. German diplomats used their concern about guaranteeing the safety of German citizens and their properties to put pressure on relations with the Republican government in Spain and provide a smokescreen for Berlin's increasing involvement in the Spanish conflict. Republican loyalists, however, were convinced that the Nazis were behind the military conspiracy against the Republic. Even before Hitler decided to support Franco acts of violence had been carried out against German institutions in Barcelona. These included the ransacking of the German School (*Deutsche Schule*) and the offices of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF). The German consul claimed that these actions involved German Jewish–Communist immigrants (*jüdisch-kommunistischen Emigranten*). Compromising documents had also been confiscated and would later be used in a large-scale media campaign against Germany.<sup>14</sup>

At the onset of the Civil War German citizens were frequently arrested under suspicion of collaboration with the rebel forces. Militias searched numerous German homes and businesses, confiscating large quantities of material goods. Völckers, who

<sup>11</sup> For example, on 20 July, just three days after the military rebellion started, Schwendemann wrote to Berlin that, according to non-confirmed rumours, Franco was moving forward from Cordoba to Madrid, while in fact he was still in Morocco; PAAA, IPPP, R102987, d. 256236–37.

<sup>12</sup> Viñas, *Franco*, 380–4; Collado Seidel, *Bürgerkrieg*, 90–1; Ferran Gallego, *De Múnich a Auschwitz. Una historia del nazismo, 1919–1945* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2001), 401.

<sup>13</sup> Schwendemann to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 29 Jul. 1936, PAAA, IPPP, R102989, d. 257087–88. Köcher to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 23 Jul. 1936; PAAA, IPPP, R102987, d. not numbered (thereafter: n/n).

<sup>14</sup> Köcher to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 22 and 24 Jul. 1936, PAAA, IPPP, R102987, d. EO83327, and R102988, d. 257048–53, respectively.

had returned to Madrid on 4 August,<sup>15</sup> acted on instructions from Berlin by protesting vigorously and regularly to the Spanish Ministry of State. Völckers and Köcher blamed the ‘red militia’ for most of these incidents and suggested that German communists were also involved. In fact, German communists and anarchists were indeed found in the militias acting against German citizens and property in Madrid and Barcelona. They were accompanied by Italian anti-fascists, as was reflected in the reports sent to Rome by the Italian consul in Barcelona.<sup>16</sup> Though Germany did not protest until weeks later, the most serious incident was the murder on 23–24 July 1936 of four DAF militants by the militias. This incident in the outskirts of Barcelona led to a meeting between Consul Köcher and Lluís Companys, President of the Catalanian Autonomous Government. In Madrid Secretary of State Rafael Ureña promised Völckers a thorough investigation and due punishment of the perpetrators, but this was never actually carried out.<sup>17</sup>

Spaniards soon became aware that the Third Reich was aiding the rebels. Several serious incidents with German planes and ships pushed bilateral relations to a point of extreme tension. For a time the Spanish and German governments sought to fake normality in their relations, though the daily news indicated otherwise. The Spanish government could not ignore that German war planes were perfectly visible in the first rebel bombings of Madrid. Völckers had to ask Berlin to keep all German planes from flying over the capital, even to drop propaganda leaflets (which had already occurred), since it only fuelled popular outrage.<sup>18</sup> In spite of this, the Spanish government was slow to define a strategy for dealing with undercover German support for the rebels. During the early weeks of the conflict, the Ministry of State was quite conciliatory and attempted to address the constant stream of German complaints and requests, despite being faced with mounting proof of Nazi cooperation with the rebels. Early official protests from Spain regarding German air traffic in the Spanish protectorate of Morocco were fairly gentle, mainly expressing surprise and requesting an explanation.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the German embassy was unaware of the full extent of German involvement in Spain’s Civil War and sought instructions from Berlin.

In the following months, and against all evidence to the contrary, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly insisted that the German government had sent no planes and was adhering strictly to the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of

<sup>15</sup> Merkes, *Politik*, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Dieter Nelles et al., *Antifascistas alemanes en Barcelona (1933–1939). El Grupo DAS: sus actividades contra la red nazi y en el frente de Aragón* (Barcelona: Sintra, 2010), 111–5 and 317–26; Arnau González i Vilalta, *Cataluña bajo vigilancia. El consulado italiano y el fascio de Barcelona (1930–1943)* (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2009), 204; José Luis Martín Ramos, *La rereguarda en guerra. Catalunya, 1936–1937* (Barcelona: L’Avenç, 2012), 122–5.

<sup>17</sup> There is a lot of information on this case in PAAA, Politische Beziehungen Spaniens zu Deutschland (thereafter: PBSB), R102983, d. 251760–62, 251769–71, 251781–86.

<sup>18</sup> Völckers to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 29 Aug. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251875 and 251876–77; the second document also in *Akten der deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945* (thereafter: *ADAP*), Serie D (1937–1945), Band III *Deutschland und der Spanische Bürgerkrieg 1936–1939* (Baden-Baden, 1951), document 62.

<sup>19</sup> *ADAP*, D, III, d. 15.

other countries. German diplomats argued, however, that their government could not prohibit private commercial flights, insisting that this misunderstanding was behind Spanish complaints.<sup>20</sup> In August a series of naval incidents between Spanish warships and German merchant ships heading to ports under rebel occupation deepened the rift between the two countries.<sup>21</sup> Germany refused to recognise the Republic's restriction of access to ports in the Protectorate of Morocco, which had been declared a war zone on 23 July. Germany treated this as an intolerable limitation to freedom of navigation, issuing statements indicating that the German Navy would defend German merchant ships by all means available and would hold the Spanish government responsible for any incidents that might occur.<sup>22</sup>

On 9 August relations between the two countries reached a crisis point over a German *Junkers 52* airplane carrying war material for the rebels, which had mistakenly landed in Republican territory.<sup>23</sup> The Spanish government could no longer operate under the pretence of ignorance of German involvement. President José Giral expressed this in an interview with Völckers on 10 August.<sup>24</sup> From that point on Spain hardened its attitude and made no attempt to hide from German diplomats its unease with the Third Reich.<sup>25</sup> Meetings between Secretary of State Ureña and Völckers became harsh and disagreeable. According to Völckers, the Spanish politician once told him that he was aware of what Germany was doing. He even received veiled threats from Ureña: 'Do you think we could protect you here if diplomatic relations were broken off between us?'.<sup>26</sup> However, the Spanish government dared not move towards breaking off relations with Germany for fear of reprisals on Spanish residents in Germany. Spanish officials were also convinced that neither France nor the Soviet Union were willing to embark upon a European war to defend the Spanish Republic.<sup>27</sup>

During August the Anglo-French Agreement of Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War was supported by other European countries, leaving the Republican government diplomatically isolated.<sup>28</sup> The Spanish government was now unable to purchase arms in international markets while the rebels continued receiving abundant

<sup>20</sup> Draft of a telegram written by Dieckhoff to the Embassy in Madrid, 31 July 1936, PAAA, IPPP, R102988, d. 257064.

<sup>21</sup> Merkes, *Politik*, 166–8.

<sup>22</sup> PAAA, Unterstaatssekretär, R29914, d. 132353–54, and PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251837–38.

<sup>23</sup> Merkes, *Politik*, 169–72; Berdah, *Democracia*, 238–9.

<sup>24</sup> Völckers to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 11 Aug. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251779.

<sup>25</sup> Völckers to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 13 Aug. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251790.

<sup>26</sup> 'Glauben Sie, dass wir Sie hier noch schützen können, wenn Sie Beziehungen mit uns abbrechen?'; Völckers to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 21 Aug. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251818–19.

<sup>27</sup> This is what Völckers said to the *Auswärtiges Amt* on August 23rd; PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251828. Julián Zugazagoitia, *Guerra y vicisitudes de los españoles* (Paris: Librería Española, 1968), vol. 2, 72.

<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Whealy, *Hitler and Spain. The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 14–9; Peter Jackson, 'French Strategy and the Spanish Civil War', in Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, eds., *Spain in an International Context, 1936–1959* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 62–7; Moradiellos, *Reñidero*, 92–6; Ángel Viñas, *La soledad de la República. El abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 34–8.

provision from Germany and Italy. When, in full acceptance of the British policy, the United States also applied a 'moral embargo against the exportation of war materials to either side in Spain',<sup>29</sup> military supplies to the Republic were cut off almost entirely.<sup>30</sup>

In Germany there was no agreement about the response to the French non-intervention proposal. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been left in the dark regarding Hitler's decision to provide military aid to the rebels. Some authors consider this a radicalisation of Nazi foreign policy, in which the involvement of the Führer increased at the expense of the conservative career diplomats of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>31</sup> Neither they nor significant portions of the German military were enthusiastic about intervention in the Spanish conflict.<sup>32</sup> They favoured immediate German acceptance of the French non-intervention proposal in order to avoid escalating tension that might lead to a European war for which the Third Reich was still unprepared.<sup>33</sup>

Hitler, however, chose to delay any such decision as long as possible, using as an excuse the *Junkers 52* incident and Spain's lack of response to German demands. A new and serious incident between a Spanish warship and the German merchant ship *Kamerun* provided another reason for the German government to delay its commitment to non-intervention. French ambassadors in Madrid and Berlin attempted to soften Spanish and German positions regarding the *Junkers 52* dispute so that Germany would commit to the agreement.<sup>34</sup> In fact, German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath was desperate for Germany to sign immediately in order to avoid Germany being viewed as an aggressor. The perseverance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proved successful: on 24 August Germany officially communicated that it was joining the non-intervention agreement.<sup>35</sup> This was used as a smokescreen to continue supplying military aid to the Spanish rebels.<sup>36</sup>

## II

The Spanish Ministry of State found itself in crisis during the early weeks of the Civil War, when diplomatic action was critical to securing international support for the constitutional government. Almost the entire Spanish diplomatic corps had joined

<sup>29</sup> F. Jay Taylor, *The United States and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 58.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *United States*, 51–9; Richard P. Traina, *American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1968), 46–60; Dominic Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War. Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle that divided America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 39–48; Aurora Bosch, *Miedo a la democracia. Estados Unidos ante la Segunda República y la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2012), 126–31.

<sup>31</sup> Viñas, *Franco*, 382–3; Christian Leitz, 'Nazi Germany and Francoist Spain, 1936–1945', in Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, eds., *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999), 128.

<sup>32</sup> Berdah, *Democracia*, 239–40.

<sup>33</sup> Abendroth, *Hitler*, 51–2.

<sup>34</sup> *ADAP*, D, III, d. 42 and 46.

<sup>35</sup> *ADAP*, D, III, d. 50 and 55.

<sup>36</sup> Abendroth, *Hitler*, 53; Berdah, *Democracia*, 240.

the rebels at the outset of the war, and by the end of 1936 some 244 out of 390 active diplomats had resigned their posts or been removed by the government due to disloyalty. The trend continued throughout the war and close to 90 per cent of Spain's career diplomats eventually deserted or were removed from their posts.<sup>37</sup>

That was the situation in the main Spanish embassies. During the first ten days of war almost all the Spanish diplomatic staff in London, including the ambassador Julio López Oliván, resigned and joined the rebels.<sup>38</sup> In Paris something similar took place, with the ambassador Juan Francisco de Cárdenas and the main employees of the embassy actively collaborating with the military insurgents and sabotaging the efforts of the Republican government to obtain immediate military support from France.<sup>39</sup> In Washington the defection of the ambassador, Luis Calderón did not occur until 5 September, but the embassy was equally left ungoverned.<sup>40</sup> And the same happened in the embassy of Rome, where Ambassador Manuel Aguirre de Cárcer resigned on 28 July.<sup>41</sup> In all these embassies it was not only the ambassadors who resigned but also many other high-level officials, leaving the diplomatic representations significantly weakened during the crucial first months of the war.

The Spanish embassy in Berlin was no exception. During the decisive weeks between Hitler's unofficial decision to aid Franco and Germany's formal adherence to the non-intervention agreement, the diplomatic instruments available to the Spanish government in Berlin carried nowhere near the force of those wielded by German diplomats in Madrid. The main difference, however, between what happened in Germany and in other countries that were relevant for the interests of the Republic, such as the United Kingdom, France or the United States, was that in these latter countries it was possible to put the pieces back together within a relatively short period of time through the appointment of experienced senior politicians as ambassadors.<sup>42</sup> In Germany, however, as we will see, no such thing occurred. This situation played a crucial role in determining what the Spanish diplomats could do to defend Republican interests.

Francisco Agramonte, the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin, adopted an ambiguous attitude at the onset of the conflict. In a conversation with a high-ranking Ministry of Foreign Affairs official on 24 July he declared his loyalty to the government 'for the time being', adding that he would resign, 'as would many of his colleagues', if

<sup>37</sup> Ángel Viñas, 'Una carrera diplomática y un Ministerio de Estado desconocidos', in Ángel Viñas, dir., *Al servicio de la República. Diplomáticos en guerra civil* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), 268.

<sup>38</sup> Enrique Moradiellos, 'La embajada en Gran Bretaña durante la guerra civil', in Viñas, dir., *Al servicio de la República*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Ricardo Miralles, 'El duro forcejeo de la diplomacia republicana en París. Francia y la guerra civil española', in Viñas, dir., *Al servicio de la República*, 123–5.

<sup>40</sup> Soledad Fox, 'Misión imposible: la embajada en Washington de Fernando de los Ríos', in Viñas, dir., *Al servicio de la República*, 158.

<sup>41</sup> Marina Casanova, 'El inicio de la guerra civil y sus repercusiones en los diplomáticos españoles acreditados ante el Quirinal y el Vaticano', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Historia Contemporánea*, 4 (1991), 32–3.

<sup>42</sup> Pablo de Azcárate took over the embassy in London, Álvaro de Albornoz did the same in Paris and Fernando de los Ríos in Washington. All of them were highly prestigious political and intellectual individuals with considerable political experience.



anything akin to a communist government was formed in Madrid.<sup>43</sup> The day before his oath the Spanish Ministry of State had sent dispatches requesting a declaration of loyalty from all diplomats. This reached Agramonte on 25 July and received no immediate response. On 27 July he called a meeting of all diplomatic personnel at the embassy as well as the consuls in other German cities to attempt a common response to the Ministry's request. After a day of discussion the decision taken was not one of explicit loyalty, based on an alleged lack of trustworthy information about the programme and plans of the current Spanish government. Some rather vague statements followed, in which the Spanish diplomats indicated willingness to follow Republican government orders but not 'future orders that might be inspired in communist principles or methods'.<sup>44</sup> On the afternoon of 28 July Secretary of State Ureña spoke by phone with Agramonte, who remained unclear about his position. Finally, on 29 July the Ambassador informed Madrid that he was resigning due to differences of agreement over the government's actions since the outset of war. This was immediately followed by resignations from Embassy Secretary Vargas Machuca, Military Attaché Lieutenant Colonel Martínez and Naval Attaché Agacino. All other diplomatic personnel, including the consul in Stuttgart, telegraphed to state that they remained loyal to the Republic.<sup>45</sup>

Agramonte was immediately removed from diplomatic service and on 30 July Counsellor Luis Quer y Boule assumed responsibility for the embassy. However, Agramonte refused to abandon his living quarters in the embassy building, arguing that all hotels and apartments were full due to the Olympic Games being held in Berlin.<sup>46</sup> Agramonte remained in the embassy during the following months, creating a surreal space shared by diplomats with opposing loyalties. The German government never responded to requests from the legitimate representatives of the Spanish state that Agramonte and his staff be removed.

The Ministry of State reacted rapidly to Agramonte's decision. The same day he resigned, Augusto Barcia, Spanish Minister of State, asked German Minister of Foreign Affairs, von Neurath, to recognise Alfonso Fiscowich as *chargé d'affaires*. On 30 July Fiscowich left his post as Spanish Plenipotentiary Minister in Stockholm and was transferred to Berlin.<sup>47</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately requested information on him from the German embassy in Sweden and received a detailed report indicating that his political positions were not far removed from those of Agramonte.<sup>48</sup> His appointment reveals the degree to which the Spanish Ministry

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Woermann and Agramonte, PAAA, IPPP, R102987, d. Eo83331.

<sup>44</sup> Agramonte to Ministerio de Estado, telegram no. 51, 27 July 1936, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación (AMAEC), Ministerio de Estado-Guerra civil 1936-1939, Archivo Renovado (thereafter: AR), box R584, file 5.

<sup>45</sup> Telegrams no. 55 to 60, 29 July 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Berdah, *Democracia*, 210.

<sup>47</sup> Barcia to Neurath, 29 July 1936; and Fiscowich to Ministerio de Estado, 30 July 1936, AMAEC, Archivo de Barcelona (thereafter AB), RE158, f. 3.

<sup>48</sup> German legation in Stockholm to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 30 July 1936, PAAA, IPPP, R102989, d. D674276-78.

of State was overcome by events and incapable of discerning whom to trust or what to do. Fiscowich arrived in Berlin with no specific instructions regarding his mission,<sup>49</sup> nor would they have been helpful, since he had no intention of helping the Republican cause. After a week of routine paperwork in Berlin he resigned on 6 August due to misgivings about his orders from Madrid.<sup>50</sup> Control of the embassy again reverted to Counsellor Quer y Boule.

With the situation amongst the Spanish diplomatic delegation in Berlin quickly becoming intolerable, the government commissioned an 'extraordinary envoy', Carlos Esplá, Deputy Secretary of the Presidency. At that point the embassy was without command due to the resignations of Quer y Boule as well as Satorres, the First Secretary of the Legation.<sup>51</sup> Esplá arrived in Berlin on 10 August along with agronomic engineer Carlos Casado de la Fuente, attaché to the Paris embassy and now also the designated attaché in Berlin.<sup>52</sup> With the help of Lieutenant Colonel Riaño, who had been sent to Berlin to purchase arms for the Republican government,<sup>53</sup> they attempted to occupy Agramonte's quarters in the embassy when he stepped out for a brief time. Two participants later explained that the scene turned violent, and a supporter of Agramonte fell down the stairs.<sup>54</sup> Informed of these events, the ex-ambassador quickly returned to the embassy with, according to his testimony, several 'police agents'. He managed to regain possession, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed embassy personnel loyal to the Republic that while Germany would not intervene in Spanish internal affairs no actions would be tolerated against Agramonte, his family or his staff.<sup>55</sup> Thus, under the protection of the German authorities Agramonte and his followers continued to occupy the main area of the Spanish embassy, the bedrooms and the ambassador's office.

In the days that followed Esplá appointed embassy assistants from among Spanish residents in Berlin who had in prior weeks offered to work for the Republic. On 15 August he left the capital and returned to Spain. Although carrying a diplomatic passport that guaranteed immunity, he was detained for several hours by the police in Aachen and treated inconsiderately without explanation or excuse before being

<sup>49</sup> Fiscowich to Ministerio de Estado, 1 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Fiscowich to Ministerio de Estado, 6 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania en los primeros días del movimiento, por Jorge Tell (noviembre de 1938)*, 1, AMAEC, AB, RE98, folder (thereafter fd.) 6, f. 14. Thereafter *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania*.

<sup>52</sup> Esplá to Ministerio de Estado, 12 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 2.

<sup>53</sup> A really surprising mission and, obviously, without any positive result. Abendroth, *Hitler*, 43; Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain. The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 76; Morten Heiberg y Mogens Pelt, *Los negocios de la guerra. Armas nazis para la República española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005), 64; Viñas, *Soledad*, 79–80.

<sup>54</sup> Eugeni Xammar, *Seixanta anys d'anar pel món* (Barcelona, Pòrtic, 1974), 396–7. Xammar was the press attaché in the Spanish Embassy, and he remained loyal to the Republic; see also *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> For a narration of the events, see the report written by Agramonte on 20 Nov. 1936 titled *Sobre situación interior de la Embajada desde 18 de julio hasta la fecha*, AMAEC, AR, R596, f. 4. Thereafter *Sobre situación interior de la Embajada*. The version of the ex-ambassador is basically in line with that of Eugeni Xammar in *Seixanta*, 396–7, and with that of Jorge Tell in *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania*, 1–2.

allowed to continue his travels. The Ministry of State protested verbally to the German embassy in Madrid on 26 August.<sup>56</sup>

Esplá's urgent mission confirmed that the situation in the Berlin embassy would require more forceful and effective measures, including the appointment of a new ambassador. On 12 August Spain's Ministry of State informed Hans-Hermann Völckers, German *chargé d'affaires* in Madrid, of their proposal to name Pedro Bosch i Gimpera as Ambassador. This prestigious academic was Chancellor of the University of Barcelona and highly esteemed in Germany. Völckers was asked to inform his government and request approval.<sup>57</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs took its time to respond to the Spanish proposal. The long report on Bosch i Gimpera written by Otto Carl Köcher, Consul General of Germany in Barcelona, revealed the coalescence of the German attitude towards ex-ambassador Agramonte and the diplomatic strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Fourteen days later Germany still had not recognised the proposed ambassador and Köcher warned of serious discontent in the Spanish government. Other countries, including Italy, had acted swiftly to provide accreditation to the new diplomatic corps proposed by the Republic to replace those who had been removed. Köcher reported that the situation was much aggravated by the fact that Agramonte, in spite of the fact that he no longer represented 'revolutionary Spain', was still being treated as the official ambassador by Berlin. There was also concern in Spain that Agramonte was behind the accusations that had led to the arrest of a group of Spaniards in Germany. Köcher also wrote that Bosch i Gimpera was 'one of the greatest minds in Catalonia and completely friendly to Germany' (*absolut deutschfreundlich*). Since he had previously reported on several occasions his favourable opinion of Bosch i Gimpera, Köcher deduced that Berlin's non-approval had nothing to do with the characteristics or personality of the candidate.<sup>58</sup>

Köcher's report shows the plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to weaken Spain in a diplomatic game that became rougher throughout August 1936. A dismembered Spanish embassy served German interests and every effort was made to avoid the appointment of a new Spanish ambassador in Berlin, where the dwindling ranks of loyal Republican diplomats were being subjected to all manner of harassment. After almost two months, during which time bilateral relations seriously deteriorated, the Spanish government withdrew its request for accreditation of Bosch i Gimpera.<sup>59</sup>

Equally relevant in the Köcher report was the analysis of Agramonte, who had been serving in Berlin as unofficial ambassador for the rebels and was treated accordingly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>60</sup> General Cabanellas, President

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed report of the incident, see Esplá to Ministro de Estado, 16 Aug. 1936, and verbal note of 26 Aug., AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ministerio de Estado to German *chargé d'affaires*, 12 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Köcher to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 4 Sept. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251896-98.

<sup>59</sup> Spanish Foreign minister Álvarez del Vayo to German Foreign minister von Neurath, 8 Oct. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R158, f. 3.

<sup>60</sup> The documents in AMAEC, AR, R596, f. 4 confirm that Agramonte has been acting as an unofficial ambassador of the rebels since 31 July 1936.

of the rebel Committee of National Defence (*Junta de Defensa Nacional*), had sent a letter to Minister von Neurath via the Marquis of Portago on 1 August 1936 informing him of the Committee's creation. Portago tried in vain to obtain a written acknowledgement of receipt from Counsellor Dumont (expert in Spanish affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Dumont informed him that regardless of political sympathies Germany could only have formal contact with the legally recognised Spanish government.<sup>61</sup> On 2 August Agramonte launched his career as unofficial ambassador of the Committee of National Defence to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He presented a letter from General Cabanellas to von Neurath expressing sorrow over the death of a German in the bombing of the Spanish city of Gijón by a rebel warship. Although Agramonte did not identify himself as ambassador, he used the official stationery of the Spanish embassy on this and successive occasions.<sup>62</sup>

The ease with which Agramonte moved among German diplomats during those months contrasts with the difficulties Republican diplomats faced when seeking audience with top German officials. Taking advantage of the tension caused by the *Junkers 52* incident, the German government prohibited the new Spanish *chargé d'affaires*, Pedro Marrades, from entering the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>63</sup> This only complicated further an already problematic – and highly unusual – situation in which the German government was facilitating the partial occupation of the Spanish embassy by rebel diplomats, and a sort of bodyguard for ex-ambassador Agramonte, which Marrades considered to be composed of German police.<sup>64</sup>

Several incidents in August heightened the tension between the two countries. In addition to the *Junkers 52* affair, several other naval incidents took place (the German ship *Kamerun* being the most serious one),<sup>65</sup> as well as numerous arrests of Germans in Spain which resulted in several deaths. Searches of German houses and businesses in Spain often involved requisitions or pillaging and were usually attributed to the Red Militia (*Rote Miliz*) in official German documents.<sup>66</sup> However, the Spanish authorities also had ample cause for complaint: namely German material support to the rebel forces and arrests of Spanish citizens in Germany.<sup>67</sup> According to the Spanish *chargé*

<sup>61</sup> Note of *Legationsrat* Dumont, 1 Aug. 1936, PAAA, IPPP, R102989, d. D674280–81. Also published in *ADAP*, D, III, d. 22. Nevertheless, there is a mistake in this publication: in the document index, the editors of the volume state that the letter was from General Mola not General Cabanellas. They also claim, in a footnote, that the original letter submitted by Portago was never found. However, as Ángel Viñas pointed out at the time, the original letter signed by Cabanellas does exist and can be found in the above cited file, d. D674282; Viñas, *Franco*, 411, footnote 15.

<sup>62</sup> Agramonte to Neurath, 30 Sept. 1936, sending a message of gratitude from Franco to Hitler, PAAA, PBSD, R102983, d. 251758; and PAAA, PBSD, R102983, d. 251948.

<sup>63</sup> Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, 18 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R416, f. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch of 22 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R416, f. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Merkes, *Politik*, 167; Abendroth, *Hitler*, 50–1; Berdahl, *Democracia*, 239. The German formal complaint about the *Kamerun* incident can be found in PAAA, PBSD, R102983, d. 251837–38.

<sup>66</sup> See dozens of German formal complaints about this kind of incidents in PAAA, PBSD, R102983 and R102984.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to the above mentioned incident in which Carlos Esplá was involved, the arrest in Cologne of Major San Juan – an officer of the Spanish Army – and his companion, Mr. Cuito, while they were in an official mission for the Spanish Government was particularly important. Marrades was informed

*d'affaires*, five young students and academics serving the Spanish embassy in place of rebel diplomats who had resigned were arrested when Agramonte's assistants accused them of being communists.<sup>68</sup> They were detained for more than a week, until 24 August, in spite of fervent Spanish diplomatic efforts to arrange their release. These five individuals were interrogated by the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*) regarding their political views, the positions of other members of the embassy and their alleged participation in an attempt on Agramonte's life, which, in fact, had been fabricated by the police.<sup>69</sup>

### III

In early September the Spanish Republic formed a new government led by Largo Caballero, resulting in new desertions among Spanish diplomats in Germany.<sup>70</sup> Even Marrades resigned on 14 September, when José Rovira Armengol arrived in Berlin as the new *chargé d'affaires*.<sup>71</sup> Marrades stated that he was resigning for personal reasons and needed time to dedicate himself to private activities. In his first report Armengol praised Marrades for his loyalty to the Republic.<sup>72</sup> However, both German and Spanish diplomatic documents reveal that within a month Marrades was offering his services to the rebels.<sup>73</sup> Press attaché Eugeni Xammar also left his post, fleeing increasing persecution by the Gestapo.<sup>74</sup>

By mid-October Rovira was the only career diplomat serving in the Berlin embassy,<sup>75</sup> while Agramonte continued to live at the embassy and monitor his activities and telephone conversations.<sup>76</sup> In fact, this situation was the result of both the defection of the Spanish diplomats and the obstructionist policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Spanish Ministry of State struggled to place loyal

of the arrest on 21 Aug., and they were not set free until 5 Sept.. See a great amount of documents about this case in AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, 18 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, b. R416, f. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, telegram no. 79, 24 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5; and Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch no. 244, 24 Aug. 1936, AMAEC, AR, 566, f. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Even before that, on 1 Sept., the consul in Frankfurt/Main had resigned, as did the consul in Hamburg on 5 Sept.. Marrades to Ministerio de Estado, telegrams no. 87, 3 Sept. 1936, and no. 91, 11 Sept. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 1.

<sup>71</sup> José Rovira was a young diplomat of the 1933 class (also known as the 'class of the Republic'). He had been serving in Costa Rica until that moment, and he arrived in Berlin as a second class Embassy secretary. José Rovira Armengol's personal file, AMAEC, PG178, f. 22506. He had therefore very little professional experience and he had just served in a place of very limited diplomatic relevance. But his loyalty to the Spanish Republic was unquestionable. As Viñas has highlighted, he was one of the five members of the 'class of the Republic' (with twenty-seven members) who did not desert during the war. Viñas, 'Carrera', 271, footnote 10.

<sup>72</sup> José Rovira Armengol's personal file, 17 Sept. 1936, AMAEC, PG178, f. 22506.

<sup>73</sup> *Akten-Vermerk*, 9 Oct. 1936, PAAA, PBSB, R102983, d. 251985-86. Luis Álvarez Estrada (*chargé d'affaires* in Berlin after Franco's recognition by Germany) to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Salamanca), telegram, 10 Dec. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R596, f. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Xammar, *Seixanta*, 398-402.

<sup>75</sup> Rovira to Ministerio de Estado, telegram no. 106, 15 Oct. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R584, f. 5.

<sup>76</sup> *Sobre situación interior de la Embajada*, 4.

individuals in the Spanish consulates in those German cities which were in the hands of rebel consuls who emulated Agramonte's tactics.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensured that the new embassy staff proposed by Rovira and the Spanish Ministry of State were never given diplomatic accreditation by Germany. In a lengthy report to Madrid dated 17 October Rovira gave a chilling summary of the situation surrounding loyal Spanish diplomats in Berlin: partial occupation of the embassy by the opposing faction, constant harassment of new diplomatic personnel by German authorities and rebel consulates protected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all of which obstructed embassy work. He also complained of insufficient clarity from Madrid regarding how to proceed in Berlin.<sup>78</sup>

Rovira was not exaggerating regarding the harassment of Spanish diplomats. This was in sharp contrast to the extreme correctness with which the Spanish government treated German diplomats, even when the Republican government had proof of Third Reich military support for the rebels. The few and minor incidents involving German consular personnel in Spain were not comparable with the treatment of Spanish diplomats in Germany. No German diplomat was ever arrested in Spain, while new Republican diplomatic personnel appointed to occupy consular positions in Germany were quickly detained. Luis Gerez Maza, appointed Consul in Frankfurt am Main, and Jorge Tell Novellas, appointed Vice Consul in Hamburg, were arrested arbitrarily and their rights as bearers of diplomatic passports were disregarded.<sup>79</sup> Upon his return from the Spanish embassy in Paris, Gerez was arrested, insulted and interrogated by the police regarding the instructions he had received there. The Spanish embassy presented a complaint that was acknowledged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but no explanations were offered. Tell was also arrested on the pretext of a private disagreement with the woman who was his living companion. After the judge freed him, the Gestapo held him without cause for several days. He was eventually released after Rovira exerted pressure on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rovira decided to get Tell out of the country immediately and obtained a guarantee of safe conduct. However, as Tell flew towards Amsterdam on 27 October, the plane was rerouted to Hanover and the Gestapo again arrested him. This time, the repeated protests and demands of the Spanish embassy were ineffective in procuring his freedom.<sup>80</sup>

Spanish diplomats loyal to the Republic suffered all manner of threats, coercion, duress and humiliation during the first four months of the Civil War, when diplomatic relations between Spain and Germany were still officially in place. In late October and early November, as the Gerez and Tell cases show, German hostility turned to

<sup>77</sup> José Rovira Armengol's personal file, 17 Sept. 1936, AMAEC, PG178, f. 22506.

<sup>78</sup> Rovira to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch no. 275, 17 Oct. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R415, f. 42.

<sup>79</sup> None of them were able to take up their posts as consuls when they tried to do so on 14 Oct. 'due to the defiance' of the consuls who were in charge. Rovira to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch no. 292, 3 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Everything to do with the cases of Gerez and Tell are to be found in Rovira to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch no. 290, 3-6 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, RA, R566, f. 1. Tell explains in more details what happened to (his version being basically the same as Rovira's) in *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania*, 4-6.

outright intimidation as the Third Reich and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed how and when to break off diplomatic relations with the Republic and officially back Franco.

#### IV

There is abundant literature analysing the breaking off of diplomatic relations between the Third Reich and the Spanish Republic. Here, we will examine German actions towards the Spanish embassy in Berlin that paved the way for that rupture, something all but absent from the current literature. Since August the objective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been to cripple Spanish diplomatic functions by blocking reorganisation of the embassy and intimidating or arresting Spanish diplomats. This was facilitated by Agramonte, whom the Germans treated as ambassador, and his contingent in the embassy. Only Rovira's tenacity as *chargé d'affaires* made any diplomatic activity possible. The Germans began to increase their pressure on him in a campaign that reached its climax on 4 November, with an attack on his very person. Rovira explained in his dispatches to the Ministry of State that two individuals had assaulted him with blows to the face as he entered his house and had stolen his document bag containing new cypher codes that had just been received at the embassy. Rovira took note of the license plate of the car in which his attackers retreated and immediately informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nothing came of it, or of any supposed investigation into the incident.<sup>81</sup> Rovira immediately concluded that his attackers were connected with German intelligence. In the same dispatch he warned of the increasing activity of rebel Spaniards in Berlin and his fear of 'being the victim of another aggression'.

His fears were not unfounded: on 6 November a group of Spanish Falangists arrived at the embassy and demanded immediate control of it, threatening 'another' attack and intimating their knowledge of the prior one.<sup>82</sup> Rovira interpreted this as an attempt to make him believe that Falangists had attacked him before, and he refused to comply with their demands. He was convinced his assailants had been German government agents and that they had fled in a car belonging to the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF, the National Socialist trade union organisation).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> This information and everything that follows which is related to this incident (unless another source is indicated) can be found in Rovira to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch no. 297, 6 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Rovira doesn't specify the date in the document but it can be inferred by the context.

<sup>83</sup> Rovira [from the Spanish Embassy in Paris] to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch 000, 14 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1. Also in *Sobre situación interior de la Embajada*, 5, where Agramonte offers a slightly different version of events. The ex-Ambassador explains that the leader of the Spanish Falange in Berlin, Rogelio García Castelló, visited him on 6 Nov. to inform him 'that he had decided to demand that Rovira resign and leave Germany'. Agramonte opposed any violent action against the *chargé d'affaires* (he had promised the *Auswärtiges Amt*) but accepted that García Castelló could meet Rovira. According to Agramonte the meeting passed without any coercion of the Spanish official. But that statement about the peaceful behaviour of the Falangists in Berlin contrasts with Agramonte's other reference to them: according to the ex-Ambassador, when Esplá was in Berlin in August the

In a later dispatch from Paris Rovira indicated that on the morning of 7 November, as he made his way to the embassy, he was confidentially informed that ‘fascist elements had occupied the building’. Unable to contact Madrid, the Spanish ambassador in Paris ordered him to leave Berlin immediately. Rovira went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to request safe passage out of Germany. The Germans treated him politely and informed him they would comply with his request. As he left the building Rovira saw ‘a group of three individuals, one of whom I clearly recognised from my Tuesday aggressors [underlined in the original]’. The group was led by a fourth who, after identifying himself, ordered Rovira’s police escort to retreat. Rovira re-entered the building and managed to re-establish his escort. As he left he saw ‘that at that moment ex-ambassador Agramonte entered with former Secretary of the Embassy, Vargas Machuca’. Not trusting his assurance of safe conduct, he went to the French embassy and explained the situation to the ambassador, who committed to interceding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to guarantee Rovira’s safety. Rovira wrote in his dispatch: ‘I think I would not have got out of Germany alive without this assistance’.<sup>84</sup>

Rovira left Germany on 7 November and Agramonte then took complete control of the embassy.<sup>85</sup> With permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Agramonte raised the rebel flag over the embassy in place of the official Republican flag of Spain. The act was carried out at midday on 9 November at all Spanish consulates in Germany.<sup>86</sup> This took place nine days before the Third Reich formally backed Franco. The rebel faction retained almost the entire embassy workforce, confirming Rovira’s suspicions that few were loyal to the Republic.<sup>87</sup>

All Republican diplomats in Germany were now compromised. Jorge Tell was still being held by the Gestapo, while Antonio Chamorro Daza (Secretary Second Class at the embassy) and consuls Luis Gerez Maza, José Gascón Rodá and Ricardo Boadella were under threat. Rovira had been unable to inform them of his departure, and they

Falangists had suggested that they kill the Spanish special envoy and bury him in the Embassy’s garden. In his memoirs Agramonte changed the burial to the dissolving of the corpse in sulphuric acid [Francisco Agramonte, *El frac a veces aprieta. Anécdotas y lances de la vida diplomática* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1955), 424]. In any case, from Agramonte’s account about the November events, it can be clearly inferred that the Rovira’s assailants were Falangist (contrary to what the Spanish diplomat had thought). Agramonte also explained that the Falangists were reprimanded by the Berlin police superintendent, who recommended that they remain quiet in order to avoid going to jail.

<sup>84</sup> The whole account about what happened on 7 Nov. (quotations included) is to be found in Rovira [from the Spanish Embassy in Paris] to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch 000, 14 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R,566, f. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Berdah offers no information about this episode. He just points out the date Rovira left Germany, without any indication about the reasons for his sudden departure; Berdah, *Democracia*, 213. Neither does Merkes; he merely writes that Rovira himself took the decision to leave, but he does not explain the reason behind this unusual behaviour; Merkes, *Politik*, 188. Finally, in his book Abendroth pays no special attention to what happened in the Spanish Embassy in Berlin between July and November; in fact, he hardly refers to the issues that I address in this paper.

<sup>86</sup> Agramonte to Francisco de A. Serrat y Bonastre (Secretary of Foreign Relations), 9 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R,596, f. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Rovira [from the Spanish Embassy in Paris] to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch 000, 14 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R,566, f. 1.



were obliged to leave Germany by their own means. The Mexican *chargé d'affaires* honoured Rovira's request to look after them: Chamorro Daza and Gerez Maza arrived in Paris on 17 November, one day before Germany formally recognised the Franco government and broke off diplomatic relations with the Republic.<sup>88</sup> Boadella and Gascón had been arrested by the Gestapo, and, together with Jorge Tell, remained in German prisons until 29 March 1937. On that day the three were taken to the Alexanderplatz prison and placed in a cell with Miguel Albareda Campmany, Carlos Anernheimer, José Luis García-Obregón and journalist Sebastián Dueñas Blasco. All except Dueñas were sent to Bremen in a prison car, escorted by two German police and two agents of the Spanish Falange. They were eventually placed on a ship to La Coruña, where they were handed over to the Francoist authority. Tell spent fifteen months in the provincial jail there.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile in France, Rovira Armengol was appointed Consul in Port Vendres on 1 December 1936 and later became Consul in Marseilles on 18 April 1938.<sup>90</sup> He worked intensely to organise and direct the network of agents composing the Diplomatic Information Service on the French Mediterranean coast.<sup>91</sup>

### Conclusion

The few Spanish diplomats in Berlin who remained loyal to their legitimate and constitutional government suffered immensely and worked in extreme circumstances between August and November 1936. The Spanish Ministry of State assisted them to the extent that it was able, diligently attending to Rovira's requests for personnel and funds, even as the economic and political situation became difficult. However, the successive Ministers of State, Augusto Barcia and (after 4 September) Julio Álvarez del Vayo had more urgent matters to attend to, as did Deputy Secretary of State Rafael Ureña. They failed to define a clear strategy towards Germany, while Germany sought to break off relations. The insufficient number of loyal personnel in Berlin and their lack of diplomatic stature were primarily due to the deliberate obstruction tactics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The embassy was adrift until a young and inexperienced Rovira arrived and set to work with great tenacity. Constant hostility from the Germans forced Rovira to focus on defending his co-workers and prevented him from conducting any truly political activities. Völkers' reports to Berlin were often full of political and military analyses of Spain, while Rovira's communications

<sup>88</sup> Rovira [from the Spanish Embassy in Paris] to Ministerio de Estado, dispatch 001, 17 Nov. 1936, AMAEC, AR, R566, f. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Information about the prisoners in Germany is to be found in *Relato de lo acaecido en Alemania*, 9–10. In this text, written in Barcelona in November 1938, Tell does not explain how he managed to return to the Republican zone. In 1938 Tell was posted as a second class secretary in the Spanish Embassy in Norway [Viñas, 'Carrera', 304, table 1]. He stayed in Norway when the civil war ended, and was arrested by the German police in May 1940, after the Nazi occupation of this country. The Spanish authorities then asked the Germans to deliver him to them. AMAEC, AR, R1.343, f. 150.

<sup>90</sup> José Rovira Armengol's personal file, AMAEC, PG178, f. 22506.

<sup>91</sup> AMAEC, AB, RE98, fd. 7, f. 18.

with Madrid dealt almost exclusively with internal embassy issues. The loyal Spanish diplomats showed dedication, resolve and personal bravery. However, the result of their efforts was the only possible one in those circumstances and only delayed the inevitable: the sole and uncontested representation in Berlin of the rebel government.

In the 1960s Merkes incorrectly stated that there was no Republican diplomatic representation in Germany when the Third Reich formally recognised Franco on 18 November because the Spanish *chargé d'affaires* had left the country of his own accord on 7 November. His account was widely accepted and remained uncontested for decades. However, the archival documents show that Rovira's exit was not voluntary: he left Germany under duress. He understood that his life was in danger and fled from the carefully designed and increasing pressure tactics of the German authorities, which had begun in August and occurred in parallel with the deterioration of relations between the two countries.

Could the Republican government have done more in Berlin than it did? Its changing attitude toward Germany was more one of adaptation to circumstances than a well-defined or executed strategy. It is logical to assume that the beleaguered Ministry of State would have focused most of its effort on both the London, Paris and Washington embassies, where it attempted to mitigate the damage caused by the unalterable non-intervention policy, and the one in Moscow, where vital aid was being negotiated for the survival of the Republic. This is probably why the 'lost cause' which was Berlin received less attention.<sup>92</sup>

The embassy in Berlin might have fulfilled a more important role than it did. While the Republic could clearly not expect to find sympathy in Germany, its embassy could have attempted to influence the policies of other democracies regarding the Civil War. In the early weeks of the Civil War the Spanish government attempted to repair its relations with Germany. Once the Largo Caballero government was established in early September, the Spanish position hardened under Minister of State Álvarez del Vayo, and German diplomats immediately reflected this in their reports.<sup>93</sup> On 15 September the Spanish government sent a note of protest to the governments of Germany, Italy and Portugal regarding their support for the rebels. Meanwhile, Spain demanded that the countries involved in the Non-Intervention Committee end their arms embargo on the legitimate government. None of this proved effective for the Republican cause.<sup>94</sup>

At this point the Spanish embassy in Berlin could have sought political support from other ambassadors located in Germany. United States Ambassador William E. Dodd was openly anti-Nazi and many others clearly understood that any action to stop the advance of fascism in Europe would be best taken in Spain. However, the

<sup>92</sup> The activity of the Spanish Embassies in London, Paris and Washington have been studied by Enrique Moradiellos, Ricardo Miralles and Soledad Fox, respectively, in Ángel Viñas, dir., *Al servicio de la República*.

<sup>93</sup> See a clear example of it in a Völckers's letter to a Berliner colleague dated 23 Sept. in *ADAP*, D, III, d. 87.

<sup>94</sup> Merkes, *Politik*, 177; Viñas, *Soledad*, 259–60; Julio Álvarez del Vayo, *Give me Combat. The Memoirs of Julio Alvarez del Vayo* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 161.

US Department of State was unresponsive to Dodd's position and the similar stance of Claude Bowers, US ambassador to Spain.<sup>95</sup> Constructive links with countries participating in the Non-Intervention Committee, or countries with reason to feel threatened by aggressive German policies, could have been fostered in the epicentre of Berlin. Ambassadors in Berlin were closest to the decision-making centres of the Third Reich, had greatest access to German government activities and plans and knew what intervention in Spain represented. Despite this, the Spanish diplomats in Berlin made no great efforts to influence others. This was not for lack of competence or initiative but rather because the German government had created a thoroughly hostile environment in which self-protection became the only sustainable priority.

<sup>95</sup> Traina, *Diplomacy*, 124; Bosch, *Miedo*, *passim*; Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain. Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).