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## In Poland World War I Ended in 1923

Kazimierz Robak  
*University of South Florida*

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In Poland World War I Ended in 1923

by

Kazimierz Robak

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Graydon A. Tunstall Jr., Ph.D.  
Kathleen Paul, Ph.D.  
Giovanna Benadusi, Ph.D.

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## Dedication

To my wife Grażyna Walczak, my best friend, companion and love  
and to Olga, a wonderful daughter

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## In Poland World War I Ended in 1923

Kazimierz Robak

### ABSTRACT

Poland was erased from European political maps in 1795 and fought in vain for freedom for the next century, until World War I provided another chance for independence. On November 11, 1918, the creation of the Polish Republic was proclaimed, but in an atmosphere of uncertainty, particularly relative to frontiers.

The border with Germany was established in 1920-21 after plebiscites. While peaceful in Masuria, Ermland and Pomerania, there were three violent uprisings of the ethnic Poles in Upper Silesia. The status of Gdansk as a Free City was confirmed at Versailles in 1919. The Southern border with Czechoslovakia was settled in 1920.

The Eastern borders were established after a war with Ukraine and a conflict with Lithuania. The last and most exhausting war with Soviet Russia was ended by 1921's Riga Peace Treaty. Poland's boundaries were finally recognized by the Conference of Ambassadors in March 1923.

## Introduction

World War I rearranged the borders of Europe. Restoring the independence of Poland was postulated in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, planned during the Paris Peace Conference and declared by the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919. In Warsaw, the Regency Council proclaimed independence on October 7, 1918, but Poland doesn't celebrate its Independence Day until November 11, to commemorate the nomination of Józef Piłsudski as the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army by the 1918 Regency Council (coincidentally, on the same day as the signing of the armistice in Compiègne).

November 11, 1918, with its symbolic meaning is a perfect date for the official celebrations and textbooks. The date of the proclamation of independence, however, usually indicates only the beginning of the last stage of the creation of Poland. To commence its own existence, a newborn state needs external peace and international recognition, so logically a second date should be taken into consideration. The date which closed the process of the formation of Poland was March 15, 1923, when the Conference of Ambassadors finally recognized the last border of Poland.

In November 1918 peace in Poland was distant and uncertain. As the borders of the new republic were not defined, its existence was unstable and fragile. In practice, establishing borders meant military struggle in which Poland, placed between two hostile powers, could lose her independence again. Both neighbor states, Germany and Soviet Russia, were openly hostile toward the reestablishment of the Polish state, arguing that



this was imposed by the Allies at the territorial expense of both collapsed empires as part of post-war revenge.

Despite Germany's bitter resentment against the freshly signed treaty, the country was controlled by the Allies and had to fulfill the requirements of the Treaty of Versailles, at least in the beginning. Soviet Russia, to the contrary, could disregard any international opinion as she was excluded from the debates in Paris and Versailles.

For Poland, the struggle over borders with Germany was of less importance than the war with Soviet Russia. In the plebiscites Poland could only lose some land but the confrontation with Soviet Russia became a matter of life and death: defeat could mean incorporation into the Soviet empire. Both conflicts, however, caused a constant state of war. Only a few weeks after the victorious peace treaty with the Soviets was signed in 1921, the third Upper Silesian uprising commenced – the most bloody and violent of conflicts in this region. Not until the last Polish border was recognized by the Conference of Ambassadors in 1923 could the independent life of the reestablished state begin.

I intend to examine primary and secondary sources to support the hypothesis that the statement “Poland was created in 1918” oversimplifies the entire complexity of the matter. The birth, and even the recreation of a state, does not happen immediately. A single date is understandable because of the need for symbols and precise facts. Historically, however, this is imprecise. On the basis of available sources a picture of the creation and rebuilding of the state not as a single act, but as a long-term and strenuous process will be presented.

Part One sketches the brief historical background and events in Poland after 1918. The most clear and simple method of organization is chronology. Chapter One presents

the demise of the political existence by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the eighteenth century. Chapter Two briefly explains Poland's attempts at regaining independence during the nineteenth century, focusing on the shift of the main efforts from strict military operations to political and ideological activities. Chapter Three delineates the intensification of political endeavors in the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapter Four describes the Great War from the point of view of Polish politicians and leaders. The collapse of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary by 1918 gave Poland the real chance for independence. The Paris Peace Conference provided the legal base to obtain it.

Part Two discusses Poland's struggle to establish her borders between 1918 and 1923. The chapters successively examine the East, West, North, and South frontiers with Soviet Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania, respectively. The efforts and the uncertainty of results are described.

Summarizing: if independent Poland was created with the end of the World War I then World War I in Poland ended in 1923.

Establishing borders by military struggle practically always brings long-range repercussions. The first effects on Poland came with the beginning of World War II, others can be perceived even today. By denoting these consequences, the complications involved in the issues of balance and international stability and the persistence of resentments kept in the collective memory of the nations is emphasized.

## Part One

### The Historical Background

#### 1.1. The Eighteenth Century – The Downfall

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was formally a federation of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Established in 1569, it was one of the most democratic and tolerant states of its time. The prime example of its standards is the Bill of 1573, known as the Warsaw Confederation, which guaranteed absolute religious freedom to all citizens and protected the Commonwealth from religious wars<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, the federation was not able to develop an effective safety mechanism which would preserve the state in case of corruption or activities contrary to the common interest. With the beginning of the eighteenth century the process of disintegration and foreign influence developed rapidly. Thus, the carving up of Poland by the three neighboring states – Russia, Prussia and Austria – was inevitable.

The first partition occurred in 1772 – Russia, Prussia and Austria took circa twenty-eight percent of the Commonwealth. The second stage, agreed between Russia and Prussia in 1793, left the Polish-Lithuanian state with one third of its original territory. The third and final partition was signed by Russia, Prussia and Austria on October 24, 1795.<sup>2</sup> All three partitions occurred after Russian units broke the military resistance of patriotic forces. Austria and Prussia presented no opposition. Two partitions were

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<sup>1</sup> Wilczek, Piotr. "Catholics and Heretics. Some Aspects of Religious Debates in the Old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth," *The Sarmatian Review*, vol. XIX, no. 2, April 1999, p.626

<sup>2</sup> Lukowski, Jerzy. *The partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795*. Longman, London/New York, 1999.

formally accepted by the corrupt Commonwealth's parliament. "There was no Polish authority with whom the Third Partition might have been negotiated. In any case there was no point in seeking Polish approval for an act which was to abolish the Polish state completely."<sup>3</sup>

The Commonwealth ceased to exist as an independent state for 123 years. Poland and Lithuania regained independence as a result of the changes in political geography after World War I.

## 1.2. The Nineteenth Century – The Age of Uprisings

For Polish territories the nineteenth century was a period of constant struggle against the occupying powers. Polish units provided strong support to the Napoleonic army. Poles made up one quarter of the *Grande Armée* of 600,000 men which crossed the Russian border in June 1812. The tiny Duchy of Warsaw (Polish: Księstwo Warszawskie), established by Napoleon in 1807 as a rump state with 4.3 million inhabitants, raised an army of 100,000 men.<sup>4</sup>

The November Insurrection of 1830-31, activating an army of 60,000, unsuccessfully tried to liberate territories occupied by the Russians. Engaging Russian forces saved the revolutions in Western Europe<sup>5</sup>, but instigated the tsar's revenge and consequent repressions of Poland causing a large wave of emigration.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Davies, Norman. God's Playground. A History of Poland. v. I. The Origins to 1795, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 541.

<sup>4</sup> Wandycz, Piotr Stefan. The Price of Freedom: A History of East Central Europe From the Middle Ages to the Present (eBook). Taylor & Francis, London, New York, 2001, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons of the November Insurrection outbreak was Tsar Nicholas I declaration that the Russian army, strengthened by Polish units, would assist the Dutch king against the revolt in Belgium.

<sup>6</sup> Wandycz. The Price, p. 152.

The later Cracow insurrection of 1846 was both brief and unsuccessful, but provided the Austrian and Russian forces a pretext to liquidate the free city status held by Cracow and to incorporate the town into Austria.<sup>7</sup> The insurrection of 1846 in the Grand Duchy of Posen (Polish: Poznań), assigned to Prussia by the Congress of Vienna, took the same course and had the same result as Cracow.

The peasant rebellion of 1846 in Galicia<sup>8</sup> was, on the one hand, the aftermath of the Cracow uprising and a provocation from the Austrian secret police on the other. Polish peasants, deceived by Austrian agents, burned or destroyed more than 500 manors between Cracow and Tarnow and killed more than 200 landowners and 1000 local gentry. This was a heavy loss for the economy and cultural life of the region. The Austrian army delayed intervention, as long as the peasants attacked the main target: the Polish gentry. The rebellion was crushed by Austrian forces within a few days after the devastation of Polish properties.

The Springtime of Nations (1848-49) caused insurrections in Polish territories under Austrian and Prussian domination. Numerous Polish volunteers also participated in the German and Austrian revolutions and in the Hungarian war for independence. This resulted in severe repression from the occupiers.

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<sup>7</sup> Davies. *God's Playground*. v. II. pp. 334-339.

<sup>8</sup> Galicia, the province between Poland and Ukraine, has nothing in common with the region of Spain, and the homonymy is accidental. The Polish province was named after one of its towns, Halicz, pronounced in German as "Galitz". Lodomeria derived from the Latinized name of the town of Włodzimierz (Vladimir). The medieval neighboring Principalities of Halicz and Vladimir lost their separate identity as the part of the Commonwealth. Austrians, to legitimize the first partition of Poland, claimed that they incorporated the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, in fact existing only in the Middle Ages as a part of Hungary.

The Great-Polish (Polish: Wielkopolska<sup>9</sup>) Insurrection of 1848 against the Prussian authorities brought bloody clashes between Polish and German inhabitants of the region. This caused repressive Prussian politics toward the Polish minority.

The ill prepared January Insurrection against Russia (1863-64) was quelled by ruthless Russian military action and brought Russian revenge. It caused material, economic and human losses on an unprecedented scale.<sup>10</sup>

The centenary period after the Congress of Vienna in the states of Western Europe was characterized by accumulating capital, building strong economies, consolidating and centralizing previously dispersed territories, increasing military power, and expanding colonies. These were the decisive factors of the rapid and extensive European progress and development. Until the mid 1860s Polish territories were impoverished by constant wars, pacification and requisition actions, devastations and plundering as well as by economic, political and national repression. The economy was weak, as a result of the multiple military defeats. Most of the upper classes were decimated, and those who survived were severely persecuted.

The disastrous January 1863 Insurrection was the last Polish military effort in the nineteenth century. The economic collapse, mass executions, confiscations of estates, deportations and severe Russianization program became an everyday reality, as civil law was suspended in favor of martial law. In the territory occupied by Russia, the national disaster caused by the January uprising practically made any military struggle impossible.

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<sup>9</sup> Great-Poland (also Greater Poland; Polish: Wielkopolska, German: Grosspolen, Latin: Polonia Maior) – Polish historical region located in western-central Poland. Great-Poland was the core of the early medieval Polish state, often called the cradle of Poland. Major cities and towns: Poznań, Kalisz, Konin, Gniezno. The name of the region can be understood as Old Poland as opposed to New Poland (Lesser Poland, Polish: Małopolska, a region in south-eastern Poland with Cracow as its capital).

<sup>10</sup> Wandycz, Piotr Stefan. The lands of partitioned Poland, 1795-1918, Part II – The Age of Insurrections. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1974, pp. 105-192.

The idea of armed insurrection was gradually abandoned in favor of building economic power. The abolishment of serfdom accelerated an industrialization process.

The freedom fighters, conservative landowners and middle class nobles were dominated by the new generation of political activists. They realized that the center of gravity for a future independence could no longer be idealistic dreams of freedom and romantic solitary fighting. Only a modern industrialized society with strong political and military alliances could establish the independent state and gain international recognition.

### 1.3. The Twentieth Century – The Age of Revolution

The twentieth century for Poland was marked by a new factor: social revolts in the cities. The increasing number of workers initiated several political parties and social movements. Thus the fight for national freedom became inseparably connected with social demands. The most violent movements erupted in 1905-07, in the wake of the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese war and resultant revolution in Russia. In Poland the most important outcome of this unsuccessful uprising was the participation of the entire nation: workers and clerks, students and teachers, peasants and intelligentsia.

This led to the division of Polish society into large factions: opponents and supporters of socialism, those content with autonomy and those who believed in fighting for independence. The socialists were led by the Polish Socialist Party (Polish: Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS) established in 1892, and its leader Józef Piłsudski. The nationalists of the National Democratic Party (Polish: Narodowa Demokracja, ND), established under this name in 1897 but active since 1887, were led by Roman Dmowski. The third important political organization, the Polish Peasant Party (Polish: Polskie

Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) was formed in Galicia, but its influence was not significant, as most peasants supported Piłsudski and the PPS.

The Polish socialists soon split. The first branch still known as PPS and led by Piłsudski decided for a military struggle for an independent state. In 1910, the PPS approved the creation of the paramilitary Riflemen Association (Polish: Związek Strzelecki). The association was legal in Austria-Hungary and clandestine in Russia and Germany. The Riflemen later became the core of the World War I Polish Legions (Polish: Legiony Polskie). The legions were created in Austria-Hungary after the beginning of the war when Piłsudski, always treating Russia as Poland's most dangerous enemy, officially proclaimed the PPS's support for the Central Powers.

The other socialist branch adopted a Marxist and internationalist program. It claimed that independence could only be reached by an anti-tsarist revolution led by the Russian proletariat. They later became the Communist Party of Poland (Polish: Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP), which, after the Bolshevik revolution, became an instrument of Soviet intelligence and was banned in independent Poland in 1919.

Polish nationalists connected the future of Polish independence with tsarist Russia. They tried to obtain it legally, first by gaining autonomy within the Russian Empire. They abandoned anti-tsarist activities and began collaboration, for example entering the Russian state assembly – the *Duma*. Their program included pan-Slavism, the concept of the unification of all Slavic nations under Russian domination, and open hostility toward Jews and the Germans. Dmowski didn't alter his policy even when the tsar began to revoke the minimal concessions granted to the Poles after the 1905-07 events. This decreased the number of the ND's supporters, who now would rather support



Piłsudski's side. They created legal semi-military organizations in Galicia – Polish Rifleman Squads (Polish: Polskie Drużyny Strzeleckie), later co-participants in the Polish Legions.

#### 1.4 The Great War.

In World War I approximately 3.5 million Poles were drafted to fight for both sides. They were mostly organized into separate units, but many Poles were incorporated into regular armies, often fighting – or refusing to fight – against themselves, mostly on the Eastern front.

Immediately after the assassination in Sarajevo, on the Russian occupied territories, Piłsudski established the covert Polish Military Organization (Polish: Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, POW) as a part of the Austro-Hungarian army. He also informed Austro-Hungarian authorities in Cracow that a National Government of Poland was created in Warsaw with him as the Commander-in-Chief of the future Polish army. This information and documentation was falsified. Nevertheless, before Austro-Hungarian intelligence could verify it, Piłsudski with his units formed in Galicia crossed the Russian border on August 6, 1914, entering Kielce, to fight for Polish independence. His action, however, did not initiate an insurrection. It received no support from Austria-Hungary who distrusted Piłsudski. Polish units, however, were not dispersed and two additional Polish Legions were established in 1914 as support units for the regular Austro-Hungarian army. They were commanded by Polish officers from the Austro-Hungarian army and consisted of three brigades. Piłsudski, deprived of its overall command, was in charge of the First Brigade, but staff and soldiers considered him the moral leader of the

Legions. Thanks to his efforts, the Polish units maintained their national character and autonomy. The Legions fought on the Eastern front and both Austro-Hungarian and German staffs valued them as reliable and outstanding units.

On November 5, 1916, the German and Austro-Hungarian Emperors proclaimed the Two Emperors' Manifesto, announcing the near creation of an independent Polish Kingdom. The day before, Emperor Franz Josef I of Austria-Hungary declared that the Polish-inhabited territories of Austria-Hungary would soon be granted autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. These proclamations were received with envy by other Habsburg minorities, especially by the Czechs. "It was therefore likely that Vienna and Berlin would settle on the 'Austria solution' for Poland – the merging of Russian Poland and Galicia and the creation of a triallistic Austro-Hungarian-Polish state."<sup>11</sup>

From the Polish viewpoint things were not so optimistic. Part of the Polish Legions were incorporated into the army of the new state as the Polish Military Force (German: Polnische Wehrmacht), which never reached more than 5,000 men. Piłsudski and most of his officers and soldiers refused to take an oath of loyalty to either of the Emperors, Franz Josef and Wilhelm II. Piłsudski was imprisoned in the Magdeburg castle in Germany, some soldiers were interned, and others incorporated into Austro-Hungarian units.

The tsarist regime was aware of the strong anti-Russian attitudes among oppressed nations and evaluated the issue of national army units very carefully. The Russian army drafted millions from the occupied Polish lands, but established only a few strictly Polish units. The Pulawy Legion (Polish: Legion Puławski) which was

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<sup>11</sup> Rees, H. Louis. The Czechs During World War I. The Path to Independence. Columbia University Press, New York 1992, p. 24.

formed in 1914 at the initiative of the Polish nationalist party, never had more than a thousand men.

In the meantime, the leader of the nationalists, Roman Dmowski, altered his program. A visit to Petrograd and subsequent meetings with state authorities convinced him that as far as the Polish issue was concerned, the Russians would oppose any change and concession. At the end of 1915 Dmowski left Russia for Paris, where he tried to convince the British and French governments of the strategic importance of an independent Poland.

Polish units were created within French military forces only in 1917, by decree of President Poincaré. The Polish Army in France, known as the Blue Army because of the color of its uniforms, had some 100,000 men divided into six infantry divisions. The army was recruited from Polish immigrants living in France and Belgium, Polish POWs from the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, and Polish soldiers from the Russian army.

The significant part of the French Polish Army was the Polish-American Army – a unit created in Ontario, Canada in 1917 by about 25,000 Polish-American volunteers helping the Entente. In Europe, the Polish-Americans fought in the last campaigns on the Western front. Then, with other units of Blue Army, they participated in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1921 and later returned to America.<sup>12</sup>

The Polish freedom activists greeted World War I as the chance to obtain independence. All sides recognized it, so Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian policies toward the Poles assumed basically the same pattern. In 1914, Prince Nicholas

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<sup>12</sup> See: Drozdowski, Marian Marek, ed. Polonia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1910-1918, wybór dokumentów [Polish Americans in the USA 1910-1918, selected documents]. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1989, p. 362.

Nikolayevich, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, addressed a proclamation to the Poles, full of hazy and vague promises of unification under the tsar's scepter. Similar proclamations were issued by other armies. In the meantime, the three competing armies plundered Polish territories, bombarded Polish towns, and drafted recruits.

Tsar Nicholas II's answer to the Central Powers' November 5 proclamation came on December 25: he declared Poland's freedom in confederation with Russia. The declaration was influenced by his Western allies: the Entente did not want the Kingdom of Poland unified with Germany because it would militarily strengthen the German Empire.

With the revolution in Russia during March 1917, the proclamation of the Polish right for independence was announced in Petrograd but again in words only. On November 15, 1917, the Bolsheviks issued the Declaration of the Nations of Russia, confirming their right to self-determination until they regained full sovereignty and formed independent states. This act, forced by circumstances, was totally inconsistent with the official Bolshevik program of world revolution, abolishing all states and national frontiers. This was soon confirmed: Leon Trotsky opposed the presence of the Polish delegation at the Brest-Litovsk treaty negotiations, and Soviet Russia did not recognize the independence of the Ukraine proclaimed in 1918.

On January 5, 1918, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George admitted the necessity of creating an independent Poland. Three days later, United States President Woodrow Wilson delivered his Fourteen Points in a joint session of Congress. Point 13 stated: "An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free

and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.”<sup>13</sup>

The Central Powers, negotiating the 1918 Brest-Litovsk Treaty, demanded from Russia the exclusive rights to decide the future of Poland, the Ukraine, and Belarus<sup>14</sup>, the Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Finland as these states had to form the German zone in a *Mitteleuropa* plan (never established). Russia finally signed the treaty. This decision met with universal violent Polish reaction, because it appeared to create a fourth partition of Poland. Polish units in the Austro-Hungarian army mutinied: the major part of the Polish Auxiliary Corps left the front lines and withdrew to the independent Ukraine. Officers and soldiers were disarmed and some fled to France, as did General Józef Haller who became the commander of the Polish Blue Army. In the meantime Piłsudski, as stated, was interned by the Germans in Magdeburg.

In Russia, the Bolsheviks and Polish communists openly opposed an independent Poland. Polish organizations were dissolved and many Poles arrested. In the meantime the Germans demanded Russian annulment of the eighteenth century partition treaties and the surrender of all Russian rights to Polish territories. Lenin, attempting to save the Bolshevik revolution at any price, issued the necessary decree on August 29, 1918 and his propaganda emphasized Russia’s peaceful intentions toward Poland without mentioning a word about the conditions set by the Central Powers. After the German

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<sup>13</sup> Woodrow Wilson. Fourteen Points (Delivered in Joint Session, January 8, 1918).  
<<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918/14points.html>>

<sup>14</sup> “Belarus signifies the patriotic view of the country as the inheritor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rus. Byelorussia/Belorussia signifies the Russian concept of the area as part of a Great Russian nation.” (see: Snyder, Timothy. The reconstruction of nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999. Yale University Press, New Haven CT 2003, p. 309.)

army's withdrawal at the end of the World War, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was nullified by the Soviets on November 13, 1918.

In Warsaw, the Regency Council proclaimed the independence of Poland on October 7, 1918, and took control over the *Polnische Wehrmacht*. On November 10, Józef Piłsudski, released from Magdeburg, traveled to Warsaw. The next day the Regency Council nominated him to be the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. On November 14, the Council ceded full civil authority to Piłsudski and dissolved itself. Poland reappeared on the political map of Europe.

## Part Two.

### Struggle for the Borders after the War

#### 2.1. In Paris 1919

The Treaty of Versailles, which changed the political shape of Europe and the world, was based on a weak foundation. At the conference – for whatever reason – the delegates of the two most powerful European nations, Germany and Russia, were not present. It was not difficult to presume that the Paris resolutions signed in Versailles would apply only as long as the two absentees remained weak.

There was also the danger of a rebirth of the Habsburg Empire in its Austrian and Hungarian editions. France was particularly distrustful of them, as this could undermine the paragraph of the peace treaty forbidding Austria to merge with Germany. That partially explains the creation of the Little Entente in 1920-1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, as a mutual defense arrangement with French support. “The members joined forces to block Hungarian attempts at territorial revision of the peace treaties of 1919-20 and to prevent the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty.”<sup>15</sup> The French concern was short-lived: in 1938, when the *Anschluss* or incorporation of Austria into Greater Germany, France and Great Britain opted for an appeasement policy and the US a nonalignment policy.

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<sup>15</sup> Ádám, Magda. The Versailles system and Central Europe. Ashgate Publishing Co. (Variorum Collected Studies), Burlington VT, 2004, p. 193.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Versailles could only endure as long as Russia and Germany remained feeble. The 1815 Congress of Vienna established the *status quo* and relative European peace for one hundred years. Austrian Foreign Minister Prince Klemens von Metternich, by inviting French Foreign Minister Talleyrand to Vienna, was incomparably more farsighted than Georges Clemenceau, overwhelmed by the desire of revenge over Germany. To satisfy his future voters, David Lloyd George publicly shared the popular British clamor that ‘the German lemon should be squeezed until the pips squeak.’ To revive British trade and post-war economy he also thought of bringing Germany back into the European state system but he couldn’t openly oppose instructions from the Parliament to ‘present the bill in full to the Germans.’ Woodrow Wilson’s practical idealism (“we can receive what we demand only if we can do it without crushing Germany for thirty-five years”<sup>16</sup>) did not help either.

The only thing which could stop a future war was the old European balance of power impossible without Germany, Russia and – in broader perspective – the USA. That is why the Versailles resolutions did not even last three years. The first breach was kept hidden: in 1922 Germany and Soviet Russia signed the Treaty of Rapallo, with a secret annex allowing Germany to produce weapons forbidden in the Versailles Treaty, and to train German military units in Russia. In 1935 the violations were uncovered: Hitler brought the *Wehrmacht* into being, and in 1936 started to remilitarize the Rhineland.

But in 1919 the Allied Powers had dictated the peace conditions to Europe and the world. However, they cannot be blamed for not establishing Polish borders. In the Polish case it was possible only on the German and Czechoslovak frontiers, regarding these

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<sup>16</sup> Link, Arthur L., ed. The deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24-June 28, 1919) notes of the official interpreter, Paul Mantoux. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1992; vol. I, p. 20.



territories as – at least theoretically – stable. The contested questions had to be settled through plebiscites, which was the usual peaceful way of resolving cases of this type.

To establish the eastern Polish border in the Treaty of Versailles was impossible. Russia was convulsed by a civil war between the Bolsheviks and the supporters of the ancient regime. After the Great War not only Poland but also Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine emerged as independent states and they did not have any officially accepted borders either. Both Russias - White and Red – fiercely opposed the independence of the former parts of the Russian Empire. In 1919 nobody could anticipate what kind of states and in what shape they would emerge from this chaos. The same situation, although on a lesser scale, occurred in Hungary, so the Allied Powers decided to wait until the political situation cleared up.<sup>17</sup>

At the Paris Peace Conference, Poland was represented by Roman Dmowski, the leader of Polish nationalists now loyal to the West, and Ignacy Paderewski, the world famous pianist and composer, now Polish Prime and Foreign Minister.

The Polish political parties remained adamant that the partitions of Poland were against international law. Thus, they demanded the restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth borders of 1772. Besides historical reasons there also existed economic and strategic ones as well: President Wilson used more than just ethnic grounds for forming a new Poland. He mentioned “a free and secure access to the sea,” and “political and economic independence.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> When communist forces were defeated, the Hungarian Soviet Republic created by Bela Kun was toppled, and the Rumanian army withdrawn, Admiral Horthy was elected Regent. Then the Treaty of Trianon was signed (June 1, 1920) and Hungary's borders were established.

<sup>18</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 14 Points.

These aspirations were not satisfied. One of the opponents to the Polish demands was British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. “There can be few countries in which Lloyd George was more heartily vilified than Poland” – wrote a British historian. Concerned about the continental balance of power he was trying to balance France and the Soviet Union and opted for the strengthening of Germany at Polish expense.

His actions at the Peace Conference were deplored; his supposed opinions about the Poles being ‘children who gave trouble,’ his confession that he had never heard of Cieszyn, the *lèse-majesté* of his remarks about Paderewski, were widely reported in Poland, where, it is no exaggeration to say, Lloyd George was in 1919-20 usually regarded as a public enemy. A number of his advisers held the country in no high regard, and talk among British ministers on the subject of Poland was often antipathetic.<sup>19</sup>

The justification for the British position can be found in Margaret MacMillan’s recent study of the Peace Conference:

The British [...] feared, with some reason, that Poland could become a liability. Who would defend it if its neighbors, Germany and Russia in particular, attacked? Moreover the British did not particularly care for either Polish faction. Piłsudski had fought against them and was a dangerous radical. Dmowski and the Polish National Committee were too right-wing. ‘In fact the prevailing opinion,’ said a British diplomat in Warsaw, ‘which to a great extent influenced me at the time seemed to be that to do anything the Polish Committee asked for would be to fasten upon Poland a regime of wicked landlords who spent most of their time in riotous living, and

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, Norman. “Lloyd George and Poland, 1919-20.” The Journal of Contemporary History 1971, 6(3), Sage Publications, Ltd., p. 132.

establish there a Chauvinist Government whose object was to acquire territories inhabited by non-Polish populations.’<sup>20</sup>

MacMillan also explained other Allies’ attitudes toward the Polish delegation and its demands:

The French, by contrast, were not only great supporters of Dmowski; they took a profound interest in Poland. [...] French policy toward Poland was a mixture of the practical and the romantic. France no longer had Russia to counterbalance Germany, but strong Poland, allied perhaps to Czechoslovakia and Romania, could fill that role. [...] The United States lay somewhere in between. [...] Wilson gradually came around to supporting an independent Poland, but he was noncommittal on its borders. ‘I saw M. Dmowski and M. Paderewski in Washington,’ he told his fellow pacemakers in Paris, ‘and I asked them to define Poland for me, as they understood it, and they presented me with a map in which they claimed a large part of the earth.’<sup>21</sup>

Finally, of the various disputed territories only most of Great-Poland and Eastern Pomerania (the famous ‘corridor’) were incorporated into Poland. Other frontier areas with Germany had to be established after plebiscites were organized in Upper Silesia, Masuria (Polish: Mazury), Ermland (Polish: Warmia) and the district of Lower Vistula (Polish: Powiśle). Gdańsk became a Free City (German: Freiestadt Danzig, Polish: Wolne Miasto Gdańsk). The Polish-Czechoslovakian border (in a state of war since January 1919) and the eastern border with Soviet Russia were not settled. Article 87 of the Peace Treaty of Versailles stated: “The boundaries of Poland not laid down in the

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<sup>20</sup> MacMillan, Margaret. Paris 1919: Six Months that changed the world. New York: Random House, 2002, pp. 211-212.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 212-213.

present Treaty will be subsequently determined by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers.”<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2. Eastern Border

The situation on the eastern border of Poland was complicated. Ethnically the territories on the East were inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. Before the last partition in 1795, Poland and Lithuania were united in a common state: the Commonwealth, where Belarusians and Ukrainians were the ethnic minorities.

Before World War I the eastern territories of the late Commonwealth belonged to the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. There, Poles and Lithuanians were ethnic minorities with Belarusians and Ukrainians.

Settling Poland’s borders in the east, where anarchists, Bolsheviks, White Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and Baltic Germans were jostling for power was even more difficult. The peacemakers did not know how many countries they would be dealing with, or which governments. The Commission on Polish Affairs was instructed to go ahead anyway and duly worked out a border that brought all the clearly Polish territories into Poland. [...] The Polish government did not have the slightest intention of accepting this. While the peacemakers had been busy with their maps, Polish forces had been equally busy on the ground.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.2.1. The Eastern Border: Ukraine

A brief outline of Ukrainian history is necessary here. It commenced from the mid seventeenth century, when the Cossacks, led by Bohdan Chmielnicki, started a civil war,

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<sup>22</sup> Peace Treaty of Versailles, section VIII, art. 87 <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/versa/versa2.html> >

<sup>23</sup> MacMillan. Paris 1919, p. 221.

demanding equal rights in the Commonwealth, as the third party of the federation. In 1654, Polish and Lithuanian nobility officially opposed the demands and Chmielnicki agreed to subordinate the Ukraine to Russia. Part of the Cossacks disagreed, preferring the Commonwealth even under unequal legal conditions. Finally, the Andruszów Peace Treaty of 1667 divided the Ukraine: the lands on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River with Kiev (later called the Left-bank or Eastern Ukraine) became Russian. The Right-bank (Western) Ukraine stayed with the Commonwealth.

After 1795, the Right-bank Ukraine was divided between Russia and Austria. In Russia, the Ukrainians were deprived of any form of autonomy. Russia supported Russophile movements in the Ukraine, consistently refused to grant Ukrainians any rights to national distinction and increased repression against Ukrainian activists.

In Austria<sup>24</sup> the Ukrainian issue was considered to be an internal Polish matter, nevertheless the Ukrainians in the Austrian (and later the Austro-Hungarian) Monarchy had far better conditions for cultural and national developments than those on the Russian side.

In 1918-1920 from the historic Ukrainian territories (the Eastern and Western Ukraine, as in the seventeenth century) three Ukrainian states were created. In January 1918, the Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed in Kiev, spreading, more or less, over the former Left-bank Ukraine. On February 8, 1918, the Bolsheviks attacked the state, shortly seizing Kiev. Between 1918 and 1920 the Ukrainian capital remained mostly in Ukrainian hands.

In October 1918, the Galician Ukrainians created the Western Ukrainian People's Republic with its capital in Lvov. In January 1919 this state merged with the Ukrainian People's Republic, but this proved of no practical importance, as Polish military forces

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<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian province in Austria was Galicia. See footnote no. 8.

already occupied most of its territories. In April 1920 Poland signed a treaty with the Ukrainian People's Republic: after the incorporation of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic and the exchange for Galicia, Poland recognized the Ukrainian People's Republic and both states started a common war with Soviet Russia. Polish units entered Kiev in April 1920 and drove the Bolsheviks from the Ukrainian capital.

In the meantime, on January 6, 1919, the Bolsheviks created the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, with its capital in Kharkov. This puppet state, totally subordinated to Moscow, was governed by the Bolsheviks, as were all later Soviet satellite states and republics. However, the Bolsheviks attempted to keep up the appearances of the Soviet Ukraine independence as they hoped to profit from it in the near future.

The latter part of the chapter will detail the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Soviet wars. However, it should be noted that the 1921 Peace Treaty of Riga, while ending the war with the Bolsheviks, shattered Ukrainian hopes for independence. Poland did not oppose that one of the negotiating parties was the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Officially, it was a recognition of the Soviet Ukraine as the sole representative of the Ukrainian people. Poland breached the treaty with the Ukrainian People's Republic and destroyed the chances for creating the independent, democratic Ukrainian state. The later excuse that it was done under Entente pressure is very weak.

### 2.2.2 The Polish-Ukrainian war

The vast territories east of the Bug River, from Latvia and Lithuania in the north to the Ukraine and Crimea in the south are called the Borderland (Polish: Kresy). The Bolsheviks wanted the Borderland because it was on the road to Europe where the

Marxist-Leninist revolution had to be ignited. Poland claimed the Borderland as a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in its historical frontiers before 1772. Polish nationalists opted for incorporation and their leader Dmowski openly rejected any special treatment for ethnic minorities. Józef Piłsudski and the Polish Socialist Party advocated a democratic federation of the sovereign Borderland states freely allied against Russia. In 1919, the nationalists held the majority in the Parliament, while Piłsudski, as Commander-in-Chief, controlled the army.

The conflict on the Polish eastern border started before the capitulation of the Central Powers. On January 1, 1918, in the former Russian Ukraine, the Ukrainian People's Republic was established with its capital in Kiev. On February 9, its government signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the Central Powers agreed to attach the territories on the left bank of the Bug River to Ukraine. Although this portion of the Brest-Litovsk treaty never came into effect, Polish opinion was extremely hostile, treating the disputed area as distinctly Polish.

On October 19, 1918, in the eastern part of Austrian Galicia, the Ukrainians proclaimed the independent Western Ukrainian People's Republic. These territories were inhabited mostly by Ukrainians, Poles dominating only Lvov (German: Lemberg). As the largest town of the region and the previous capital of Galicia, Lvov became the capital of the Western Ukraine.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See: Ajnenkiel, Andrzej. "Polityka Polski w stosunku do Ukraińców w okresie międzywojennym. Wybrane problemy" [Poland's policy toward Ukrainians in the interwar period. Selected problems]. In: Polska – Ukraina: trudne pytania. 1-2. Materiały II międzynarodowego seminarium historycznego "Stosunki polsko-ukraińskie w latach 1918-1947." [Poland – Ukraine: difficult questions. Vol. 1-2. Polish-Ukrainian relations 1918-1947, Second Seminar Files of Polish and Ukrainian Historians] Karta, Warszawa 1998, p. 13-16.

Heavy fighting between Western Ukrainians and Poles started in Lvov. The struggle ended with the intervention of the Polish army on November 22, 1918. From the beginning of 1919, Polish forces fought on two Ukrainian fronts. In May Poland launched a massive offensive and defeated Western Ukrainian forces within two months. The Polish military success in Western Ukraine was achieved because Bolsheviks forces attacked the Ukraine from the north. The two Ukrainian states (the Ukrainian People's Republic and Western Ukrainian People's Republic) merged in January 1919, but their situation was desperate. After Poland incorporated Eastern Galicia into her fold, the Red Army entered Kiev.

In the meantime, the Bolsheviks attacked Belarus and Lithuania incorporating them into Russia as Soviet Republics in January 1919.

From February 1919, fighting between the Bolsheviks and the Poles spread along a wide front. The Poles pushed deep into Russian territory, taking much of Byelorussia in the north. Secret talks for a temporary truce in the summer of 1919 went nowhere when the Poles tried to insist on an independent Ukraine.<sup>26</sup>

The northern wing of the Polish army counterattacked and entered Vilna on April 21, 1919. Piłsudski's idea of a future federation between Poland and Lithuania was immediately rejected by the Lithuanians. The Paris Conference's Supreme Council accepted the *status quo* of this region, deciding to draw the frontiers based on ethnicity, and left Vilna, with a Polish majority on the Polish side.

The central group of the Polish army attacked the Bolsheviks in Belarus and entered its capital, Minsk. Thus Poland found herself at war with Russia on three fronts: Lithuania (in the northeast), Belarus (in the east) and the Ukraine (in the southeast).

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<sup>26</sup> MacMillan. Paris 1919, p. 227.



By the summer of 1919 Piłsudski halted the Polish offensive. To Piłsudski both Russian faces, White and Red, were dangerous to Poland. By defeating the Reds Piłsudski did not want to help the reestablishment of the Russian Empire, especially when one of the White commanders, General Denikin, openly rejected any possibility of creating an independent Poland in the future. Piłsudski also realized that White Russia would have much stronger Allied support at the cost of Poland. His harsh conclusion was not without reason.

In October 1919 Paderewski sent [Churchill] a long list of Poland's military requirements, but a meeting of the War Cabinet on October 16 established the principle that 'help for the Polish Army rested with the Allies generally and only to a very minor degree with Great Britain.' A further meeting [...] specified that the French ought to take main responsibility for arming Poland in view of British help for Denikin. [...] Churchill's attempts in this direction exposed his ignorance of East European affairs, for the chances of co-operation between Piłsudski and Denikin, who did not recognize the independence of Poland, were nil.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.2.3 The Polish-Ukrainian Diplomacy and Cooperation

In the spring of 1920, the Bolsheviks were winning the Civil War in Russia and started preparations to wipe out the creation of independent and democratic ("bourgeois" in the language of the Soviet propaganda) republics, Belarus and the Ukraine and to spread the revolution through Poland to Germany and the rest of Europe.

Unlike all the other post-war squabbles with which it is frequently equated, the Polish-Soviet War raised wider issues – the clash of ideologies, the export of revolution, the future of Europe itself. For this reason, it aroused greater passions among contemporaries, and deserves the deeper curiosity of historians. [...] The dramatic action of 1920 is part

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<sup>27</sup> Davies, Lloyd George... pp. 136, 137.

of an unbroken sequence of events which began in obscurity at Bereza Kartuska in Byelorussia on 14 February 1919.<sup>28</sup>

Within five months the Red Army had increased its armed forces from four to twenty divisions, however, the Bolshevik idea of world revolution was not based on a military conquest of Europe, which proved impossible in the Great War, the Germans defeated 150 tsarist divisions. The Red Army formed only thirty-six divisions. Lenin and Trotsky believed, however, that after the first victory of the Soviet forces the oppressed proletariat of the world would rise and start the final and victorious battle with capitalism and imperialism. Four month old Poland was to be the first and easiest victim.

Both Soviet leaders, after the incorporation of Belarus and Ukraine into Russia, wished to turn Poland into a Soviet republic or a satellite state.

At this time, Soviet Russia viewed Poland as a neighboring state whose territory should first experience the expanding revolution. [...] The destruction of the Polish state was less an aim in itself than an important stage in the expected Red march into Europe, to the cradle of Marxism – Germany. This was expressed in the unambiguous, often cited phrase from Mikhail Tukhachevsky's order of July 2, 1920, to the armies of the Soviet western front [...]: 'Over the dead body of White Poland lies the shining path to worldwide conflagration.'<sup>29</sup>

In April 1920 in Warsaw, Piłsudski signed an alliance treaty with the Ukrainian military commander, Ataman Symon Petlura. Poland thus recognized an independent

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<sup>28</sup> Davies. White Eagle, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Wojciech Materski. "The Second Polish Republic in Soviet Foreign Policy (1918-1939)". The Polish Review, 2000, XLV (3), pp. 333-334.

Ukrainian People's Republic. Petlura denounced any rights to Eastern Galicia, which in practice gave the lands of the former Western Ukrainian Republic to Poland. The Western Ukrainians considered this to be treason from both sides. For Petlura the alliance with Poland was the last chance of keeping at least part of his country independent. Meanwhile, Piłsudski considered a triple federation consisting of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine in an anti-Soviet Alliance.

Polish and Ukrainian forces launched a joint offensive in the south on April 25, 1920. Two weeks later, the Polish army entered Kiev where it remained until June 10.

Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Poland's head of state, recognized the historical unique opportunity to destroy the Russian empire and guarantee real self determination and independence for all the captive nations. For this reason the main goal of Polish foreign policy was not only to preserve Polish independence, but also to support the struggle for independence of its eastern neighbors. The Polish offensive into Ukraine in April 1920 was such an attempt. An Independent Ukraine could be the best buffer between Poland and Soviet Russia. Accusations regarding Poland's imperial ambitions and desires to annex 'Russian territories' lack justification.<sup>30</sup>

The Ukrainian issue became for Poland of secondary importance, as on June 10, 1920, the Bolshevik counteroffensive commenced, which placed the existence of the entire Polish state in jeopardy.

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<sup>30</sup> Winid, Bogusław W. "After the Colby Note: The Wilson Administration and the Polish Bolshevik War." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 1996, 26 (4 Fall), p. 1165.

### 2.3. Eastern Border: Soviet Russia and Soviet Propaganda

The Soviet army, under General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, launched a rapid and effective attack forcing a Polish retreat. The Red Army recaptured its lost regions and pushed all the way to Warsaw. On Polish territories, once again under Russian occupation, the communists established revolutionary committees (Russian: Revkom), to be the core of future Soviet administration. The Committees ruled with terror and rapidly exterminated Polish inhabitants. “Their task was to found communist cells in each of the occupied villages, estates, and factories. [...] It was directed by Russians, who assumed that Russian and Yiddish ought to be the official languages of revolutionary Poland. [...] The revkoms attracted the most opportunist elements [...].”<sup>31</sup>

Long before Soviet Russia invaded Poland, the Central Executive Committee of the Communist International began laying the groundwork for an ideological offensive against Poland. The Bolsheviks attempted to discredit Poland in the eyes of the working classes of the world. Their propaganda charged that the Allies, especially France, determined to recoup her financial losses in Russia, and thus was using Poland as a pawn for implementing imperialistic designs in Eastern Europe and overthrowing the worker and peasant government of Soviet Russia. The workers of Poland and Europe were urged to resist war-like activities of their governments that aided Polish aggression.

This campaign succeeded somewhat. The Polish communists who lived close to Russia were heavily influenced by Soviet indoctrination and intelligence. They supported the Bolshevik war against Poland and hoped the Red Army would enter Poland and complete the Communist revolution. “The position of the Polish Workers Communist Party on the Russo-Polish war, meaning the fact that since the beginning of the war the Party

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<sup>31</sup> Davies, White Eagle, p. 152.

opted for the Soviet side, raises constant emotions and brings much misunderstanding.”<sup>32</sup>

The cited article was a typical mixture of Soviet indoctrination and local censorship.

Although the author tries to explain her position using obviously false statements, she cannot deny the basic fact that in 1920 Polish communists supported the invader, which in Poland was commonly considered high treason.

The workers in Berlin, stevedores in Danzig and railway men in Brno refused to load and unload shipments to delay supplies destined for Poland under the slogan “Hands off Russia.” In Britain this campaign started in February 1920. In August 1920 British Labour Party leaders threatened a political strike to prevent Britain from becoming involved in a war with Soviet Russia over Poland. The Labour Party’s action not only mobilized public opinion but later influenced the government to pressure the Poles to accept Russian peace terms. It was probably orchestrated, because it is hard to believe that the Labour Party leaders did not know that a direct British intervention in Eastern Europe was out of the question.

French communists sympathized with the Bolsheviks as well. In August 1920, one of the prominent activists and the founder of the French Communist party, Marcel Cachin, returned from Russia. After meeting Cachin, the Polish diplomat Franciszek Sokal penned a note for the Polish Foreign Propaganda Bureau.

[Cachin] spoke of the Soviet government with esteem. [...] French left wing does not care about Poland. The confidence in the Soviet honesty and frankness is absolute, and there is no confidence in the Polish government. [...] Cachin told me that the Polish army should be

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<sup>32</sup> Trembicka, Krystyna. *Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski wobec wojny polsko-radzieckiej w latach 1919-1920* [The Polish Workers Communist Party in the face of the Polish-Soviet war in 1919-1920]. *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Lublin – Polonia*. Vol. XLI/XLII, 8. 1986/1987, p. 169.

destroyed. [...] The French Socialist Party agreed with the English Labour Party on a joint anti-war action”<sup>33</sup>

### 2.3.1. The Spa Meeting

On December 8, 1919, the Allied Supreme Council in Paris designated the Polish eastern border on the Bug River. Named the Curzon Line, after the British Foreign Minister, it was unfavorable to Poland and favorable to Russia<sup>34</sup>. Poland was officially informed of this decision in July 1920 in Spa, where the Polish delegation applied for assistance in an extremely difficult moment for the entire nation and state. With the Bolshevik army *ante portas*, on July 10, 1920, the Polish delegates had to accept humiliating conditions: to receive the Curzon Line, to submit to the League of Nations’ decision settling the border with Lithuania (this signified leaving Vilna to Lithuania), in East Galicia and Cieszyn Silesia and to accept a limitation of Polish rights in Gdańsk. As a reward Poland received assistance: some munitions and a group of advisers called the Allied Mission. The Spa Agreement provoked mass protests in Poland and on July 24, 1920 the Polish government had to resign.

In July 1920 Poland was in an unfavorable military situation as the Soviet army launched a massive offensive. Polish southern frontlines were crossed by the Cavalry Army of Semyon Budyonny. In the east Tukhachevsky’s four armies advanced toward Warsaw.

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<sup>33</sup> Jabłonowski, Marek et al, ed. Raporty i informacje Biura Propagandy Zagranicznej Prezydium Rady Ministrów 1920-21 [Reports and information of the Polish Foreign Propaganda Bureau of the Council of Ministers 1920-21]. Warszawa – Pułusk: 2002, document No. 3, 5, 7, pp. 22, 27, 29.

<sup>34</sup> The Curzon Line had come a long way. Soviet propaganda caught on to the idea first: after the Peace Treaty of Riga all the territories west of the Curzon Line (extending approx. 200 miles) were proclaimed by the Soviets as occupied by Poland. The longest part of the Curzon Line was the border between the Third Reich and the USSR, after they annihilated Poland in September 1939. In February 1945, F.D. Roosevelt and W. Churchill at Yalta traded allied Poland and other countries of Central Europe to Stalin for the Soviet front with Germany and Japan and for the sake of peace in Western Europe after the war, agreed that the eastern border of Poland would be on the Curzon Line as it has remained.

The Soviets treated the text of the Spa agreement as a weakness of the Great Powers. The Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin replied to the telegram in an insulting tone attacking the Allied powers and the League of Nations. On July 17, the Soviets announced their peace conditions: reducing the Polish Army to 50,000 troops and handing over all Polish military equipment to Russia. The Allies maintained a stunned silence, while Poland rejected this proposal as unacceptable.

### 2.3.2. The Colby Note

On August 10, 1920, American Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby sent a note to Italian Ambassador Romano Avezana explaining his Government's attitudes toward Soviet Russia. A Polish diplomat accredited in Washington "summarized Wilsonian diplomacy toward Russia as a strange mixture of anti-Bolshevism and russophilism."<sup>35</sup> He clearly explained the American concept of the Russian issue: "With the exception of 'ethnic' Poland and Finland, self determination was somehow to halt at the border of the tsarist empire, because Wilson believed that the preservation of Russian territorial integrity was in the best interest of the United States."<sup>36</sup> In other words, Colby presented the Wilson administration's recognition of the Curzon line, which was treated in Poland as a temporary and artificially created demarcation line. Polish diplomats in Washington immediately signaled that the note could mean the end of American military supplies for Poland.

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<sup>35</sup> Winid, *After the Colby Note*, p. 1168.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p. 1165.

### 2.3.3. The Breakthrough

In August 1920 the Bolsheviks signed a treaty with Lithuania which allowed the Red Army to advance to Poland and surround Warsaw from its eastern side. On August 12, newspapers all over Europe declared the capitulation of Warsaw and Poland. The communists in Berlin prepared for revolution.

Unexpectedly, Marshal Piłsudski regrouped the Polish armies, creating three fronts from the existing two. The undertaking was daring and difficult, especially the transfer of the frontlines before the enemy lines, but it was performed successfully and at record speed. The Battle of Warsaw commenced on August 13 and was initially fought on the Northern and Central fronts along the line of the Vistula River. On August 16, Piłsudski again changed his plans: advancing the action by one day, he therefore launched a daring counteroffensive from his right flank, sixty miles south of Warsaw, from the base of the Wieprz River. This strike cut the Soviet communication lines, reinforced Polish armies on the Central and Northern Fronts and captured Soviet artillery and supplies. During the night of August 18, Marshal Tukhachevsky's forces began to withdraw. The frontlines retreated north and eastward away from Warsaw. The Soviet invasion was repelled.

The Battle of Warsaw, August 13-25, was almost immediately dubbed “The Miracle of the Vistula,” and was simultaneously the most severe defeat the Red Army suffered in its history.<sup>37</sup> Sir Edgar Vincent (Viscount D’Abernon), the diplomatic chief of

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<sup>37</sup> Ironically, some responsibility for this defeat falls to Josef Stalin, then the Red Army commissar on the Southwestern front. Disregarding an order, he refused to send his armies to help protect Tukhachevsky's forces from Piłsudski's attack. (see: Thomas C. Fiddick. Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: From Permanent Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. Chapter 12, pp. 218-250.) Although Tukhachevsky never mentioned Stalin's insubordination, this event could have played an important role in 1937 when Stalin decided to execute Tukhachevsky as a German spy.



the Anglo-French Mission to Poland and an eyewitness to the battle and further events, wrote in his diary:

The Battle of Tours saved our ancestors of Britain and our neighbours of Gaul from the yoke of the Koran; it is probable that the Battle of Warsaw preserved Central and parts of Western Europe from a more subversive danger – the fanatical tyranny of the Soviets.<sup>38</sup>

Not everybody shared this enthusiasm. The Polish victory in the Battle of Warsaw:

compelled the Russian ambassador to Washington [...] to intervene at the State Department in order to prevent a further Polish military offensive. Despite the ambassador's strong and fundamental criticism of Bolshevism, he zealously defended Russian territorial integrity no matter who was governing in Moscow. [...]

Colby sent his second note directly to Warsaw on August 21, [...] he demanded that Poland halt offensive at the Curzon line, and that the Poles agree to an immediate cease-fire, which would prevent further military advance toward Russian territories.<sup>39</sup>

Piłsudski then acted against advice from the West. The Polish forces counterattacked, while Tukhachevsky's armies were in retreat. Between 15 and 25 September, 1920, the Polish Army defeated the Bolshevik forces near Grodno in the second largest battle of the war known as the Battle of the Niemen River. Budyonny's Cavalry Army was halted at the Battle of Zadwórze (August 17, 1920), and later

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<sup>38</sup> D'Abernon, Edgar Vincent, 1st Viscount. The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920. Westport, 1977 [reprint of the 1931 ed. published by Hodder and Stoughton, London], p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Winid. "After the Colby Note," p. 1166.

encircled and defeated at the Battle of Komarów (August 31, 1920)<sup>40</sup> and the Battle of Hrubieszów (September 5, 1920).

The Russian Army in Poland was destroyed. Circa 120,000<sup>41</sup> Russians were captured and the rest fled to Prussia and through Lithuania to Russia. The Polish army was exhausted. Lenin sued for peace and the Allies pressured Piłsudski to halt.

#### 2.3.4 The Riga Peace Treaty

“The signing of peace [with Poland] is now essential for us... we will win time and use it to strengthen our army” – wrote Lenin<sup>42</sup>. The armistice was signed on October 12, 1920. Nine days later the peace conference began.

The Treaty of Riga, signed on March 18, 1921, gave Poland a border in the east well beyond what the pacemakers had recommended and added even more minorities to its population: 4 million Ukrainians, 2 million Jews and a million Byelorussians.<sup>43</sup>

The Soviets never reconciled themselves to the Riga Treaty. Their propaganda portrayed the Treaty as an enforced dictate and a result of treacherous bourgeois policy towards the socialist state mentioning neither the lost war nor its aggressive character. For Soviet Russia the only legal border with Poland was the Curzon Line, and all the territories extending approximately 200 miles east of it were proclaimed by the Soviets as

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<sup>40</sup> The battle of Komarów is known – at least in Polish historiography – as the greatest cavalry battle since the Battle of Leipzig in 1813 and one of the last cavalry battles ever.

<sup>41</sup> Polish and Russian historians still argue over the number of Russian POWs, especially because of the very high mortality rate. The number of deaths in Polish prisoner of war camps varies from 18,000 according to Polish sources to 60,000 as some Russian publications claim. However, the latest research on both sides indicates that Polish sources are more accurate (see the corresponding articles in the bibliography).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted from: Wojciech Materski. “The Second Polish Republic in Soviet Foreign Policy (1918-1939).” *The Polish Review*, 2000, XLV (3), p. 334.

<sup>43</sup> MacMillan. *Paris 1919*, p. 228.

being occupied by Poland. “Soviet foreign policy [...] at first aimed at expanding the scale of revolution and then, after this ended in failure, at the best possible preparation for a future world war, viewed by Moscow as inevitable.”<sup>44</sup>

In Soviet historiography and propaganda Poland was always portrayed as a part of anti-Bolshevik foreign intervention, organized and orchestrated by the Entente. It was Stalin who first coined the phrase Third Campaign of the Entente (Russian: Tretiy Pokhod Antanty) in his article in *Pravda* on May 25, 1920, where he mentioned Kolchak, Denikin and Piłsudski as the executors of the joint campaign. Since then the Polish-Soviet war still is referred in the same way and Piłsudski was described as one of the mercenaries of the British, French and American imperialists and capitalists.

In fact, the relations between Poland and the Entente in 1919 and 1920 were much more complicated and strenuous, as the Allies decided that Poland would not receive support in her Soviet war the way that White leaders Kolchak and Denikin were supported.

The Third Campaign of the Entente, however, became the official Soviet version. In 1958 N. F. Kuzmin wrote:

The imperialists of the United States, England, France and Japan [...] had organized in 1920 a new, the third in a row, military campaign against the Soviet State. This time the Entente decided to use the bourgeois and landowners’ Poland as the main striking force. ‘The Versailles’ Peace made out of Poland – indicated V. I. Lenin – a buffer state separating Germany from the Soviet communism, which is treated by the Entente as the weapon against the Bolsheviks.’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Materski. “The Second Polish Republic,” p. 331.

<sup>45</sup> Kuzmin, N. F. “К истории разгрома третьего похода Антанты” [Of the routing of the Third Campaign of the Entente]. *Istoria SSSR*, vol. 2, 1958, p. 13.

Thereby the defeat in the Polish war could be portrayed as part of the victorious campaign against the Whites. The Riga Peace Treaty could be presented as a remnant of bourgeois and imperialist injustice. And thus the peaceable Soviet Republic was the righteous one, honestly maintaining the signed conditions.

Along the same lines Soviet historians used to interpret any treaty or alliance signed by Poland during the interwar period as a hostile act towards the USSR and proof of Polish political adventurism. In 1991, A. Manusevich, in his study of the Polish-Soviet war, termed the Polish campaign “the righteous and defensive war of the young Soviet Republic” and concluded that “for the Soviet side the Peace Treaty of Riga was unjust.”<sup>46</sup>

This formula was inherited by Russian historians after 1991. In 1992, in a Russian review article about the British and American publications on the Polish-Soviet war, the author disputes any publication which casts a shadow on the idealized picture of the Soviet side. He emphasized that everything written on this subject in Great Britain and the USA was biased, favoring the Polish side.<sup>47</sup>

This helps understand why the majority of Russian historians justify the Nazi-Soviet agreement and the secret paragraphs of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (August 23, 1939) and vindicate the partition of Poland between the Third *Reich* and the USSR in September 1939.

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<sup>46</sup> Manusevich, A. Ya. “Трудный путь к рижскому мирному договору 1921 г.” [A difficult road toward the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921]. *Novaya i Noveysha Istorija* [Russia], vol. 1, 1991, Izdatelstvo Nauka, Moscow, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> See: Ostapenko, A. I. “Англо-американская историография советско-польской войны 1919-1920 гг.” (The British and American historiography on the Soviet-Polish war 1919-1920). *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*, vol. 3, seria 8, 1992, Moskva, 79-88.

## 2.4. Eastern Border: Lithuania. The Historical Background

As mentioned the union between Poland and Lithuania, signed in 1569 in Lublin, was the last stage of the nearly 200 years of integration of these two states. Incorporating territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the end of the eighteenth century, Russia launched a long-term campaign of supplanting and erasing Polish traces. This meant that the Tsarist Empire had to reverse and annihilate 400 years of the natural process of diffusion. By the end of the eighteenth century, Polish culture dominated Lithuania and Polish was widely and commonly spoken. This cultural infiltration was natural without any state or church orchestration. Such influence was made impossible, as the Commonwealth's law allowed only Lithuanians to hold office in the Grand Duchy.

Lithuanian separatism, if it existed, was never directed against the Polish language and culture, which was accepted, and popularized by the Lithuanian aristocracy, middle class, nobility and townspeople. "The last Lithuanian grand duke who even knew the Lithuanian language died in the year Columbus discovered America."<sup>48</sup> The Lithuanian language survived among the lowest levels of the Lithuanian peasants.

The Polonization process in these times spread regardless of religion, even reaching Russia – in the seventeenth century at the Moscow court the Polish language was fashionable and connected with high and refined culture. However, nationalism in its contemporary meaning did not exist then.

After the failure of the 1863 January Uprising, "Russian authorities generally regarded Polish elites as the enemy of consequence, the Lithuanian national movement as the way to weaken that enemy, and Belarusian peasants as part of the Russian nation."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Snyder. The reconstruction of nations, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Eradication of the Polish influence and the erasing of traces of the Commonwealth were performed by the Russian government in a twofold manner. The first was to displace and physically eliminate Polish speaking people, especially from the upper classes. Countless death penalty verdicts, exile of thousands to Siberia and police persecution were accompanied by restrictive fiscal policy and the deprivation of political and civil rights.

The second method was based on the Roman proverb *divide et impera*: divide and rule. As there was no anti-Polish opposition in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania – it had to be created. The Tsarist government developed a number of institutions aimed at falsifying history. The Polish-Lithuanian union was presented as a brutal conquest and forced Polonization of Lithuania. After 1863 the Polish language was strictly banned from official and public use in the Russian Empire, while Lithuanian (which then had to be printed in Cyrillic characters) was added to the curriculum. The government created scholarships for Lithuanian speaking students at the level of elementary and secondary education. For further education the Lithuanians were directed to the colleges in Central Russia where they were Russianized and formed against Poles and the former Poland.

The new Lithuanian elite were inculcated with the belief of Polish hostility, the distinction between Poles and Lithuanians, and of the centuries-old Polish oppression of Lithuania – inspiring extreme nationalism and chauvinism. The same methods, if they had been implemented in the United States after the Civil War, would have made the Southerners and Northerners mortal enemies forever.

Russia's real intentions were apparent. To Russians, the Lithuanians were no danger and without any risk, their national consciousness could be awoken, only to

detach them from Poland. In the future, after resolving the Polish issue, Russia expected to absorb the Lithuanian streamlet without a problem.

#### 2.4.1. Eastern Border: Lithuania and Poland 1918-1920.

The rebirth of Lithuania ran according to Russia's bidding, mostly under the banner of hatred toward Poland and erasing the Polish inheritance from Lithuanian culture. This explains why Józef Piłsudski's idea of a post-war federation had no chance in the influential circles of the new independent Lithuanian Republic. Piłsudski was born in Lithuania to a family settled there for hundreds of years. He considered himself both Lithuanian and Polish. However Piłsudski's arguments were rejected *a priori* by the new Lithuania. At the same time the idea of a federation was opposed with equal virulence by Polish National Democrats, who treated Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian lands as anything but Polish territories.

The Lithuanian nationalists, holding local offices even during tsarist times showed themselves to be rabid persecutors of the Polish people. After its declaration of independence in 1918, Lithuania was governed by nationalist and Christian-democrats (excluding the brief period of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic created by Bolsheviks after the Red Army took Vilna in January 1919<sup>50</sup>). They not only blocked any reforms but also opposed establishing equal rights for ethnic minorities and forging good relations with Poland on an equal basis.

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<sup>50</sup> For the Bolsheviks the Lithuania's independence was always only temporary. In 1940 Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Empire as the "socialist republic," an act which was confirmed in 1945. Independence, which came with the collapse of the USSR in 1990, brought with it Lithuania's membership in NATO and the European Union. Recently (March 2005), Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus rejected Russia's invitation to the ceremonies of the 60th anniversary of the victory over the Nazi Germany. For Lithuania and other Baltic states incorporated into the Soviet Union, 1945 doesn't represent victory but occupation and new suppression.

In 1920, the Lithuanian government signed the anti-Polish treaty with Soviet Russia. Piłsudski, realizing that his idea of a federation had no chance, arranged the creation of the puppet state of Central Lithuania by “mutinied” army units – the only way to take under Polish jurisdiction the lands where only about four percent of the population was ethnically Lithuanian.

Pursuing Red Army survivors, Polish troops entered disputed Lithuanian territories. Though born in Vilna, Piłsudski could not openly counter the Allies decision to leave his hometown on the Lithuanian side. However, as a man of action in war and diplomacy, Piłsudski gave a special order to General Lucjan Żeligowski, another Polish Lithuanian, to arrange a mutiny in his Division. On October 12, 1920, “the rebels” seized Vilna with its surrounding regions, inhabited by the Polish majority and proclaimed “the independent” Republic of Central Lithuania (Polish: Litwa Środkowa), altogether about 10,000 square miles, less than half of the prewar Vilna province. The protests of an infuriated Lithuania were in vain. “Officially, Warsaw treated Middle Lithuania as a sovereign state and sent a diplomatic representative to Wilno.”<sup>51</sup> In 1922, the parliament of the new puppet state unanimously voted to incorporate Central Lithuania into Poland.<sup>52</sup> The merger was accepted by the League of Nations in 1923. However Lithuania rejected all attempts at settlement and remained in a state of war with Poland until 1938.

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<sup>51</sup> M. K. Dziewanowski. Joseph Piłsudski: a European Federalist, 1918-1922. Stanford, CA, [1969], p. 319. This author translates “*Litwa Środkowa*” as Middle Lithuania, and uses the Polish name of its capital – Wilno.

<sup>52</sup> “With the covert support of President Madison, American adventurers staged a bloodless revolt in Spanish West Florida between Louisiana and the Pearl River. They raised the American flag and declared their independence. This ‘republic’ was quickly recognized by the U.S. government and annexed as a part of Louisiana in 1811.” [Goldfield, David and others. The American Journey. Vol. I. Upper Saddle River, N.J., Pearson 2004, p. 272]. Piłsudski probably did not know this episode from American history, however, the similarity of these two cases is striking. No coincidence: in certain situations some solutions are obvious.



## 2.5. Eastern Border: Belarus

On the land inhabited by the Belarusians, the tsarist regime suppressed any signs of Belarusian independence, beginning with the language (then written in the Latin alphabet) through the confiscation of properties from Belarusian nobility. The Belarusians took part in the Polish insurrections in 1830 and 1863. Belarusian political leaders opted for the Polish-Lithuanian federation with autonomous Belarus as part of it. Russian police persecuted and punished them even with capital punishment. “After the 1863 uprising, Belarusians could not publish in Belarusian in the Russian empire. Before 1905, the rest of the Belarusian national revival had to take place in faraway Cracow, Posen, and Vienna.”<sup>53</sup> On the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth century the Belarusian intellectual elite was ready to create an independent Belarusian state.

The Bolsheviks, after their victory in Belarus in November 1917, introduced the Soviet system. On February 21, 1918, German units entered Minsk and established the new front on the Dnieper River one hundred miles east. The Belarusian historian Oleg Łatyszonek relates that Bolshevik forces were ousted by the Belarusian and Polish units on February 19/20, before German forces appeared. He terms it “the liberation of Minsk.”<sup>54</sup>

On March 25, 1918, Belarus declared its independence for the first time – with Germany’s assistance the democratic Belarusian People’s Republic was formed.

After the German army’s withdrawal, the Bolsheviks nullified the Brest-Litovsk Treaty (November 13, 1918) and on January 1, 1919, created the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic – formally independent, the state was subordinated to Soviet Russia. On February 27, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party created the Soviet

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<sup>53</sup> Snyder. The reconstruction of nations, p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Łatyszonek, Oleg. Białoruskie formacje wojskowe 1917-1923 [The Belarusian military formations 1917-1923]. Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, Białystok 1995, p. 70-73.

Socialist Republic of Lithuania and Byelorussia called *Litbyel*. On August 8, 1919, Minsk was seized by the Polish Army. A year later, in July and August 1920, the Red Army marched through Belarus twice: during its advance toward Poland then with its retreat. Soon after, the Polish army entered Belarus.

In the Polish-Soviet war many Belarusian units fought on the Polish side, but they were unable to regain independence. The 1921 Peace Treaty of Riga established the Polish border in this region. The eastern part of Belarus, with Minsk, was left on the Soviet side, while the western part was given to Poland.<sup>55</sup>

In the peace negotiations which produced the Riga Peace Treaty, Russia formally represented the theoretically independent Socialist Soviet Byelorussia. Officially, the Peace Treaty recognized the independent republics of Byelorussia<sup>56</sup> and Ukraine. The document was labeled “The Treaty of Peace between Poland and Russia and Ukraine” and its preamble stated: “the Government of the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic on behalf of itself and authorized by the Government of the Byelorussian Socialist Soviet Republic and the Government of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.”<sup>57</sup> By signing the document, the Polish delegation, predominantly consisting of National Democrats, sanctioned Poland’s formal recognition of the two Soviet puppet states. The delegation deliberately resigned from keeping vast Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, with cities of Minsk and Kamieniec Podolski, on the Polish side to prevent the future creation of an independent Belarus and Ukraine, thus forever halting Piłsudski’s idea of a federation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Głogowska, Helena. *Białoruś 1914-1929. Kultura pod presją polityki* [Belarus 1914-1929: Culture under pressure of politics]. Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, Białystok 1996, p. 32-36.

<sup>56</sup> Byelorussia/Belarus - see: footnote #13

<sup>57</sup> The Peace Treaty of Riga, *Przymierze*, 1921, XIV-XV, pp. 3-4.

<sup>58</sup> Hauser, Przemysław. “Federacyjna wizja Rzeczypospolitej w poglądach Józefa Piłsudskiego i próba jej urzeczywistnienia w latach 1918-1921” [The federal vision of the Polish Republic in Piłsudski’s opinion and the attempt of its realization in 1918-1921]. In: Karpus, Zbigniew et al, ed. *Polska i Ukraina. Sojusz*

The Polish Parliament dominated by National Democrats, political adversaries of Piłsudski,<sup>59</sup> ratified the Treaty.<sup>60</sup> This was one of the reasons for Piłsudski's retiring from politics. "Sickened by the wrangling of the parties, by the continued attacks of the National Democrats [...] he refused to run as a candidate in the presidential election of 1922, and resigned his office as Commander-in-Chief."<sup>61</sup>

Allied recognition of the Riga treaty ceded Ukraine and Belarus to the Bolshevik regime.

## 2.6 Eastern Border: Ukraine Again

"I apologize to you, gentlemen. I really do." Piłsudski's words to the Ukrainian officers and soldiers<sup>62</sup> were honest and sincere but could not compensate for the Ukrainian lost chance for independence and democracy. In April 1920 a military-political alliance between Poland and the Ukraine was signed in Warsaw. Its military part stipulated that joint combat actions would be instituted against Soviet Russia, Ukrainian forces fought with the Polish army against the Bolsheviks in the Battle of Warsaw, Niemen River and at Komarów.<sup>63</sup>

The Peace Treaty of Riga was negotiated under the vigilant eyes of the Allied Powers, who attempted to keep the future borders as close to the Curzon Line as possible. Thus, as stated with fully cooperation of the Polish delegates, a vast portion of the Ukraine

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1920 i jego następstwa [Poland and Ukraine. The 1920 alliance and its aftermath]. Uniwersytet M. Kopernika, Toruń, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> see. Chapter 2.2.1, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> See: Ajnenkiel. "Polityka Polski," p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Davies. White Eagle, p. 270.

<sup>62</sup> Ajnenkiel, Andrzej. "Polska i Ukraina. Antagonizmy i współpraca." [Poland and Ukraine. The hostility and the cooperation]. In: Karpus. Polska i Ukraina, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> See: Udovichenko, O.I. Україна у війні за державність. Історія організації і бойових дій Українських Збройних Сил 1917-1921, [Ukraine in the war for independence. The history of the organization and military efforts of the Ukrainian Army 1917-1921], Kiev 1995

was ceded to Russia. For Ukrainians it signified that their country was divided between Poland and Soviet Russia.

The armistice and the later peace treaty in Riga between Poland and Soviet Russia was, in fact, a unilateral breach of the Warsaw Agreement between Poland and the democratic Ukrainian People's Republic.<sup>64</sup> The Ukrainian military forces continued their fight against the Bolsheviks. Defeated on November 20, 1920, Ukrainian units crossed the Polish border and were interned. About 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers and civilians were exiled in Poland.<sup>65</sup> Later some of these soldiers emigrated to Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. The Bolshevik authorities persecuted those who illegally returned to the Soviet Ukraine. The head of the Ukrainian People's Republic, Symon Petlura emigrated to Paris, where he was assassinated in 1926.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.7 Western Border: Germany.

In 1919 in Paris, the five members of the German foreign office were received by Georges Clemenceau with harsh words: "The time has now come for a heavy reckoning of the accounts. You have asked for peace. We are prepared to offer you a peace." The leader of the German delegation, count Ulrich Brockdorf-Rantzau answered in a similar spirit:

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<sup>64</sup> See: Łytwin, Mykoła. "Польско-український військово-політичний діалог 1918-1920 років" [Polish and Ukrainian military-political dialogue in 1918-1920]. In: Karpus. *Polska i Ukraina*, p. 256.

<sup>65</sup> See: Wiszka, Emilian. *Prasa emigracji ukraińskiej w Polsce 1920-1939* [Press of the Ukrainian emigration to Poland 1920-1939], Wyd. Uniwersytetu M. Kopernika. Toruń, 2001

<sup>66</sup> Petlura was gunned down on May 25, 1926, on rue Racine when leaving the restaurant "Chartier," by the watchmaker Sholom Schwartzbard. See: Rezmer, Waldemar. „Symon Petlura (22.V.1879-25.V.1926). Szkic biograficzny” [S. Petlura. A biographic study]. In: Karpus. *Polska i Ukraina*, pp. 131-159.

Schwartzbard was accused by Ukrainian emigrants of being a Soviet spy. According to Ukrainian historian Michael Palij, Schwartzbard began stalking Petlura after meeting a GPU (Soviet secret police) agent. After an eight day trial, Schwartzbard, who had fifteen family members killed in pogroms, was acquitted as the French jury decided that the crime was committed to avenge the Jews killed in the Ukraine in the pogroms. His connections with the GPU were never proved. Schwartzbard died in 1938 in South Africa. In 1967 an Israeli committee organized the exhumation and the remains were reburied in the Soldier's Cemetery in Israel. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schwartzbard>

“We are under no illusions as to the extent of our defeat and the degree of our powerlessness. We know that the strength of the German arm is broken. We know the intensity of the hatred which meets us, and we have heard the victors’ passionate demand that as the vanquished we shall be made to pay, and as the guilty we shall be punished.” Germany, however, never fully accepted the final verdict of the Allies. Brockdorf-Rantzau’s continued: “The demand is made that we shall acknowledge that we alone are guilty of having caused the war. Such a confession in my mouth would be a lie.”<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, considering that Germany lost World War I, she lost only 13.5 percent of her territory. South Germany lost nothing, and in the north only a small strip of Schleswig (to Denmark). In the west: the Rhineland, although demilitarized and occupied, remained German; two small districts had to be transferred to Belgium; Alsace-Lorraine had to be returned to France; the coal-mines of the Saar also went to France, but the Saarland was administered by the League of Nations for 15 years, then a plebiscite had to decide whether the inhabitants would be German, French or independent<sup>68</sup>.

Germany sustained much greater loses in the east. The port city of Memel (Lithuanian: Klaipeda) founded by Germans in the thirteenth century, with a vast German majority and the surrounding region with the population of 140,000, was occupied by the French and granted to Lithuania. Danzig (Polish: Gdańsk) became a Free City under the sovereignty of the League of Nations. The future of the territories over the Vistula River, the borderlands between East Prussia and Poland and Upper Silesia had to be determined after plebiscites.

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<sup>67</sup> Luckau, Alma Maria. The German delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. H. Fertig, New York 1971, p. 223 (document 30), p. 220 (document 29).

<sup>68</sup> In the 1935, ninety percent of the voters, attracted by the Hitler’s new Germany, decided to join the Third Reich.

Above all, the famous corridor, splitting East Prussia from the rest of Germany and consisting of portions of Posen and West Prussia, was ceded to Poland to give it access to the Baltic Sea. This was one of the most difficult decisions of the conference and one particularly resented by Germany, but it was probably the least bad solution to an impossible problem, for a clear majority of the inhabitants of the Polish Corridor were Polish, despite prewar German colonization.<sup>69</sup>

#### 2.7.1 Insurrection in Great-Poland<sup>70</sup>

There is no doubt that the fate of Great-Poland region would have been different without its insurrection on December 27, 1918. The Poles mobilized a 70,000-strong army led by General Józef Dowbór-Muśnicki. The fighting with the voluntarily nationalistic units of German *Grenzschutz* and *Heimatschutz* was ferocious and violent. The Germans lost control over this territory. In February 1919, Germany had to sign an armistice under Allied pressure. The will of the Polish inhabitants was expressed clearly enough to avoid a plebiscite. This was the first and last Polish insurrection that ended successfully.

#### 2.8 The Plebiscites

Theoretically, the plebiscite is a way to determine true ethnic borders, assuming that people vote according to their nationality. Practice, however, can show something different. Plebiscites were held to legalize incorporations of territory. During the 1919 plebiscite in Voralberg, held on the basis of the Saint-Germain Peace Treaty with Austria,

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<sup>69</sup> Marks, Sally. The illusion of peace: international relations in Europe, 1918-1933. St. Martin's Press, New York 1976, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> See: footnote # 9.

the indisputably German population voted for Switzerland to avoid the consequences of losing the war. Realizing this, the Swiss Government refused to incorporate the region.

In the case of Germany the Treaty of Versailles ordered plebiscites on ethnically mixed areas: Germany's frontier with Denmark (Schleswig), France (the Saar) and Poland (Allenstein, Marienwerder<sup>71</sup> and Upper Silesia). On the territories disputed by Poland and Germany, after more than 100 years of Germanization, the results of the plebiscites could only favor of the latter. At the same time "the German request for a plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine had been rejected by the Allies, on the grounds that these were evacuated territories reintegrated to France."<sup>72</sup>

The right of vote was given to people "born within the area where the vote will take place"<sup>73</sup> whether residents or not. "This arrangement resulted [...] from a request by the Polish delegation to the conference, who reportedly planned to bring Polish émigrés not only from industrial Westphalia and other parts of Germany, but from the United States as well."<sup>74</sup> The Germans initially protested, considering this proposal favoring the Polish side.

## 2.9 Northern Border: Germany – Plebiscites in Masuria and Ermland

The first plebiscite took place on the Northern border of Poland in the German province of East Prussia on July 11, 1920. The Commission of Polish Affairs in Paris accepted the Polish claims and reasons for the incorporation of the disputed territories into Poland, however, "the Supreme Council, under the pressure of the British delegation,

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<sup>71</sup> Names from the final text of the Treaty of Versailles. Masuria, Ermland, and Lower Vistula Region were also in use, as well as Polish: Mazury, Warmia, and Powiśle.

<sup>72</sup> Beigbeder, Yves. International monitoring of plebiscites, referenda and national elections : self-determination and transition to democracy. Martinus Nijhoff Publishing, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1994, p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> Peace Treaty of Versailles, section IX, art. 95b.

<sup>74</sup> Tooley, T. Hunt. National identity and Weimar Germany: Upper Silesia and the eastern border, 1918-1922. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1997, p. 40.

decided to hold a plebiscite there.”<sup>75</sup> David Lloyd George objected by saying that “those territories are German in fact, and I have never understood the necessity of organizing any plebiscite there.”<sup>76</sup> In spite of these objections, international forces were sent to the region, but were outnumbered by German paramilitary units: in the Olsztyn region (German: Regierungsbezirk Allenstein) the allied unit had 800 men while *Sicherpolizei*, *Grenzschutz* and *Buergewehr* had 3,800 troops armed with light and heavy weapons, including mortars and machine guns. The international forces did not intervene when the Germans terrorized the Polish inhabitants and voters, although the envoys saw the situation clearly and reported it to their headquarters. Edward Renne, a British envoy and the Chairman of the International Commission, saw the presence of the international forces as the need of “peaceful occupation,” when he wrote: “we have to do anything to accentuate our presence here but our any move can scatter the already scanty occupying force.”<sup>77</sup>

The German side made the most of the Polish delegation’s idea of granting voting rights to nonresidents. The *Deutscher Schutzbund* was responsible for finding and transporting people born in the plebiscite area, but not living there. Most of the applications were not signed – the Germans convinced the Commission in Paris that “written application” is not the same as “personal and individual application,” and the signature as well as the ID during voting was not needed. The International Commission in the Olsztyn region examined the voting lists three days before the plebiscite and found

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<sup>75</sup> Gilas, Janusz and Janusz Symonides. “Plebiscyt na Powiślu oraz na Warmii i Mazurach jako zagadnienie prawa międzynarodowego” [Plebiscite in the district of Lower Vistula, Ermland and Masuria as a problem of international law]; *Komunikaty mazursko-warmińskie*, vol. 94, 1966, p. 551.

<sup>76</sup> Woodward, E.L. and R. Butler, ed. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, First Series, 1919*, vol. 2 p. 947. London 1947; cited in: Gilas and Symonides. *Plebiscyt...*

<sup>77</sup> Gilas and Symonides. *Plebiscyt*, p. 733.



that at least one third of the candidates did not write or sign the paper personally.<sup>78</sup> In Olsztyn the Germans counted 157,740 emigrants on their lists – the Polish side protested at least half of them, but without any effects.

The Polish government could not give support to the Polish voters and activists due to the Polish-Soviet war. In the days preceding the plebiscite, the Red Army was approaching Warsaw and German propaganda was warning that the temporary emotions should not obscure the fact that Poland would soon cease to exist, and the Bolsheviks would take her provinces. The results were unfavorable for Poland, who gained only a few villages: 92 percent of the voters in Ermland and 98 percent in Masuria voted for Germany.

## 2.10 The Free City of Gdańsk

The Baltic port city of Gdańsk (German: Danzig) was Pomerania's biggest town. Originally Slavic and Polish, it was seized by the Teutonic Knights in 1308, returned to Poland in the fifteenth century and to Prussia again in 1772, along with the entire region. In 1918, the struggle over Pomerania between Germany and the newly independent Poland broke out immediately. The Treaty of Versailles ended German domination of Pomerania, giving Poland 62 percent of the West Prussian territories, while proclaiming Gdańsk a free city governed by the League of Nations.

The compromise proved unworkable. The Polish population was about 12 percent of all inhabitants of the Free City. Poles were harassed and their rights were gradually hindered. When the Nazis came to power, Germany denounced most of the agreements and the question of a corridor broke out. This issue was the main pretext for Hitler's

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<sup>78</sup> Wambaugh, Sarah. Plebiscites since the World War. With a Collection of Official Documents. Washington: 1933. p. 81. Cited in: Gilas and Symonides. Plebiscyt.

aggression against Poland and the first shells in World War II fell on the Polish depot of Westerplatte in the harbor area within the Free City of Gdańsk.

### 2.11 Southern Border: Germany – Upper Silesia

Upper Silesia was, and still is, the richest and most industrialized area in this part of Europe. Its main product is coal as well as zinc, iron, steel. The disputed region had 2 million inhabitants and its area was approximately 4,130 square miles (comparatively, that is almost 75 percent of Connecticut).

The award of this region to Poland would give her a desperately needed industrial base and thus the means to withstand German economic domination; by the same token, an award to Germany would not only restore her entire prewar industrial potential – already the greatest in Europe in 1914 – but would also lead to her economic domination of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. [...] Both the Germans and the Poles claimed Upper Silesia on ethnic grounds.<sup>79</sup>

Historically, in 1335 the Polish king Casimir III the Great formally dropped his claims to Silesia and, in exchange, Bohemian king John the Blind of Luxemburg dropped his claims to the Polish crown. In 1355 Silesia became part of a Holy Roman Empire when king Charles IV was crowned emperor. In 1437 the House of Luxemburg died out and Bohemia was then governed by the successors from the Habsburg dynasty.

In the eighteenth century Silesia was taken by Prussia, and became part of the German Empire after Germany's unification in 1871. Thus, Germany claimed Silesia also on historic grounds.

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<sup>79</sup> Cienciala and Komarnicki. From Versailles to Locarno, p. 41.

T. Hunt Tooley, in his study of the Polish-German Ethnic dispute in Upper Silesia, presents the ethnic proportions of this region.

The Poles [...] formed the bottom of the rural social scale, the middle and top consisting of German farmers with medium holdings and the magnates who owned vast estates. [...] Industry appeared likewise [...]: the unskilled and low-paid jobs mostly belonged to the Poles, better positions and management tasks to the Germans. Hence, although there existed a Polish middle class of shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers and journalists – that is, the social level most closely associated with national awareness, especially in the nineteenth century – numerically that class remained fairly modest before the war.<sup>80</sup>

Initially, the Commission on Polish Affairs decided to incorporate most of Upper Silesia into Poland, based on a survey of sixty-five percent of Polish-speaking inhabitants. Enraged Germany protested firmly and vigorously.

The Silesian mines were responsible for almost a quarter of Germany's annual output of coal, 81 percent of its zinc and 34 percent of its lead. The German Government argued that [...] the people of Upper Silesia were German and Czech and the local Poles, whose dialect was heavily influenced by German, had never demonstrated the slightest interest in the Polish cause. Upper Silesia had been separated from Poland for centuries; its prosperity owed everything to German industry and German capital. Poland already has enough coal; Germany, particularly with the loss of the Saar, did not. 'Germany cannot spare Upper Silesia; Poland does not need it.' If Germany lost Upper Silesia, the German note concluded, it would not be able to fulfill its other obligations under the treaty.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Tooley, T. Hunt. "The Polish-German Ethnic Dispute and the 1921 Upper Silesian Plebiscite." Canadian review of studies in nationalism. *Revue canadienne des études de nationalisme*. 1997, 24 (1-2), p. 14, 102.

<sup>81</sup> MacMillan. Paris 1919, p. 219.

Under the pressure of the British delegation the Council of Four agreed that the future of Upper Silesia should be decided by a plebiscite.

In an acrimonious meeting on June 3, Clemenceau categorically opposed a plebiscite. Although Poles were in majority, they could not possibly vote freely when the local administration was still German. Wilson agreed. His experts told him that the big landowners and capitalists were all Germans. Well then, said Lloyd George, the Allies would have to bring in troops to supervise the voting. It would be a small price to pay if it avoided trouble with Germany over the treaty. 'It is better to send an American or English division to Upper Silesia than an army to Berlin.'<sup>82</sup>

Finally, the Treaty of Versailles assigned Poland only a small part of Silesia (art. 87) and provided for a plebiscite in Upper Silesia (art. 88). Polish inhabitants were disappointed, since it was expected that the entire Upper Silesia and half of Middle Silesia would be Polish. The 1921 plebiscite was preceded by a campaign that produced intense controversy and violent confrontations, particularly by ethnic Poles seeking to preempt the plebiscite and force Polish annexation.

#### 2.11.1 The First and Second Uprising

On June 11, 1919, General Henri-Louis-Edouard Le Rond, adjutant to Marshal Foch and later the head of the Inter-Allied Commission in Upper Silesia, reported the situation in the region to the Council of Four:

Since the Armistice, the Germans have done everything possible to keep Polish opinion in check. The Polish press has been suppressed.

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Polish priests have been sent to other dioceses. The Germans of Upper Silesia have been organized into a kind of militia [...] at present the inhabitants are unable to express their feelings freely. Besides, everything is being done to persuade them that separation from Germany would be a disaster for them [...] if Upper Silesia should become Polish, the money in savings banks would be lost.<sup>83</sup>

In these circumstances it should be no surprise that three violent uprisings broke out in Upper Silesia. The first started on the night of August 16-17, 1919.

[...] the first of three so-called Polish uprisings broke out on the occasion of the general strike in the industrial area. The insurrection was quickly successful in the two southeastern counties of Rybnik and Pless [Polish: Pszczyna], which were the Polish strongholds; but as the Polish forces massed for a push northward into the industrial area they met strong German resistance. The German Commissioner for Upper Silesia [...] Otto Hörsing [...] proclaiming martial law and a state of siege, he ordered German troops against the insurrectionists and succeeded in reestablishing his authority over the entire area within a week. Naturally each side accused the other of precipitating the conflict and resorting to inhuman measures.<sup>84</sup>

In the meantime – to attract voters – the Polish Diet decided that Silesia, once incorporated into Poland, would have broad autonomy, extensive local government and a separate Parliament.

After the Treaty of Versailles finally took effect on January 10, 1920, the interallied plebiscite commission assumed control of Upper

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<sup>83</sup> Link. The deliberations of the Council of Four, vol. II, pp. 389-390

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, F. Gregory. "The Struggle for Upper Silesia, 1919-1922." Journal of Contemporary History Sep. 1970 42 (3), p. 362.

Silesia in early February. [...] The occupational forces were overwhelmingly French, as were the administrative personnel of the commission. The French sent 11,000 troops, the Italians 2,000, and the British none; of the twenty one district controllers, eleven were French, five Italian and five British.<sup>85</sup>

In August 1920, the next armed combat broke out. In Polish historiography it is called the Second Silesian Uprising,<sup>86</sup> and lasted from August 19-20 till August 25, 1920. At the same time in Central Poland the Bolshevik Red Army was surrounding Warsaw and Marshal Tukhachevsky, the Soviet Commander-in-Chief was ready to enter the city.

On 15 August, the editor of the local German newspaper in Gleiwitz (Gliwice) decided to anticipate the fall of Warsaw without waiting for confirmation. On 16 August, a German mob appeared on the streets hailing the Soviet victory and bearing aloft images of Lenin and Trotsky. The next day a similar demonstration was organized in Kattowitz (Katowice), where the French garrison was besieged in its barracks. For forty-eight hours the German terror raged unchecked. A violent response was unavoidable. [...] At dawn on 19 August, the bands of the Silesian POW<sup>87</sup> moved through the province and occupied the plebiscite area. [...] during the exact period when the Polish Army was fighting to save Warsaw from the Soviets, the Poles of Silesia fought to save their homes from the Germans.<sup>88</sup>

“The main object of Polish efforts was the disbandment of the German security police since it was largely through that body that Germans continued to exercise

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>86</sup> See for example: *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna* [The New Popular Encyclopedia]. Vol. 5, Warszawa, PWN 1996, p. 286.

<sup>87</sup> Here, “POW” comes from Polska Organizacja Wojskowa (Polish Military Organization).

<sup>88</sup> Davies. *White Eagle*, pp. 184-185.

influence in the area”<sup>89</sup> – writes F. Gregory Campbell. As the result of these clashes the Interallied Commission replaced the German security police with mixed Polish-German plebiscite gendarmerie. After this, Germany openly declared that without Upper Silesia the repayment of the war reparations would be impossible.

### 2.11.2 Plebiscite in Upper Silesia

The Allies fixed the plebiscite for March 20, 1921. According to the Peace Treaty of Versailles:

[...] the right to vote shall be given to all persons without distinction of sex who: [...] were born in the plebiscite area or have been domiciled there since a date to be determined by the Commission, which shall not be subsequent to January 1, 1919, or who have been expelled by the German authorities and have not retained their domicile there.<sup>90</sup>

The provision of granting voting rights to nonresidents requested by Polish delegates for the plebiscite in Allenstein and Marienwerder was also inserted – with French support – into the final rules for the Upper Silesian referendum. The Germans, who initially protested, learned very soon that this arrangement could be beneficial if only they would provide the transportation and accommodation to their voters. “The well-organized and -executed outvoter program proved to be the most successful German effort in terms both of propaganda value and of delivering votes, literally, for the German

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<sup>89</sup> Campbell, “The Struggle for Upper Silesia,” p. 365.

<sup>90</sup> Peace Treaty of Versailles. Section VIII, art. 88, 4b [concerning Upper Silesia]

cause.”<sup>91</sup> The *Deutscher Schutzbund* arranged and paid for trips to Upper Silesia for more than 150,000 German-oriented outvoters. The Polish side managed to bring only 50,000.

The plebiscite “took place in a surprisingly peaceful atmosphere. Both Warsaw and Berlin had accused each other of making military preparations in order to disrupt the voting, but neither side was yet willing to resort openly to force.”<sup>92</sup>

The week before 20 March [...] saw several violent incidents: a Polish woman and a little girl were killed in a political altercation in Gleiwitz; some outvoter barracks were blown up, some outvoters beaten. But the French were able to report to Paris four days before the referendum that ‘all external political activity is suspended as Upper Silesia awaits its plebiscite.’ [...] Most observers still recognized that violent confrontation was possible at any moment. Therefore, when Sunday, 20 March, came and went without the outbreak of violence, the peaceful balloting evoked general astonishment. Indeed, Colonel Henry Percival marveled that ‘the 20th of March must be recorded as one of the quietest days experienced in Upper Silesia since August 1920.’<sup>93</sup>

The Germans won by approximately 60 to 40 percent. Surprisingly, only about seventy percent of the ethnic Poles voted for Poland.<sup>94</sup>

Even if counted without the 150,000 outvoters – non-resident native Upper Silesians [...] some 54% of the remaining voters opted for Germany; all this under a phenomenally high voter participation figure of 97.5%. [...] Those who favoured Poland immediately charged the Germans with intimidation, citing *Freikorps*-type violence and other

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<sup>91</sup> Tooley. *National identity*, p. 235.

<sup>92</sup> Campbell, “The Struggle for Upper Silesia,” p. 372.

<sup>93</sup> Tooley. *National identity*, p. 234, 236.

<sup>94</sup> See Tooley. “The Polish-German Ethnic Dispute,” pp. 13-20.



factors adverse to the Poles. Yet neither the contemporary documentary evidence from the German and Polish sides nor the records of the Interallied Commission, nor voting behaviour in the plebiscite itself, supports this contention.<sup>95</sup>

There could be several other reasons for this choice. The identification with Germany was a result of long and successful business activities and the association with Protestant religion. The German propaganda warned workers, that in Poland they would lose pensions and jobs. German employers out of Silesia refused to give free days to Silesian born Poles during the plebiscite period – in the Ruhr region alone roughly ten thousand Polish Silesians were halted under threat of losing their jobs.

However, the question why so many ethnic Poles participated in the third Silesian uprising which broke out after the plebiscite remains. One of the reasons was uncertainty.

On one hand there were voting results, on the other hand was the decision of the Allies. After the plebiscite, Berlin began to claim the entire Silesia region and gossip about the possible agreement to this demand by the Allies spread in the area.

[The British and the Italians'] solution would have given Poland only 23 percent of the population and 25 percent of the communes, whereas 40 percent of the votes and 42 percent of the communes had gone for Poland in the plebiscite. Even worse for the Poles, all the developed industrial area would have stay with Germany.

On May 1 a newspaper article entitled 'The Diplomats Have Spoken' appeared the false report that the interallied commission had

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<sup>95</sup> Tooley. "The Polish-German Ethnic Dispute," p. 14.

decided in favor of the British-Italian boundary proposal. It served as a cue for the third and largest Polish uprising.<sup>96</sup>

### 2.11.3. The Third Upper Silesian Uprising

The third uprising started at night on May 2-3, 1921. This event is still discussed by historians. Those favoring Poland say the ethnic Polish Silesians wanted to unify with the motherland. However, even the most biased of commentators cannot deny that the uprising was ignited to object the legal, peaceful and democratic voting in which the Polish side was outvoted. Also, the core of the Polish Silesian insurgents consisted of regular military units sent secretly from the Polish side, as Poland officially condemned the Uprising and could not openly act against the Allies, against the Treaty and the plebiscite results.

On the German side were the paramilitary units, calling themselves the “self-protection forces.” Their leader, General Karl Höfer quickly transformed these voluntary units, consisting of war veterans, into assault troops. Their counterattacks produced heavy fights with Polish insurgents. The biggest battle of St. Anne Mountain was lost by the insurgents, however, the Polish Silesian leaders won politically. Under their influence the Allies set up the neutral zone between both forces.

Top officials of the British Foreign Office were apprehensive about a possible clash between the German forces and the French plebiscite troops. There was deep fear in London that the French would seize such an opportunity to invade the Ruhr area. [...] Nor was it in German interests in Upper Silesia itself to press the military campaign, for Korfanty’s forces repeated their threat to destroy the mines and factories of the industrial area before being driven out of the province. [...] By early

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<sup>96</sup> Campbell. “The Struggle for Upper Silesia,” p. 376.

June the main activity of the plebiscite commission consisted in trying to establish a neutral zone between the Polish insurgents and the German paramilitary forces. [...] After successfully establishing the neutral zone, they then brought about the simultaneous withdrawal from Upper Silesia of the German and the Polish forces during the first week of July; the plebiscite commission thus managed to regain some of its lost prestige. The Germans and the Poles had matched force with force and had fought to a standstill. The fate of Upper Silesia still hung in the balance.<sup>97</sup>

The dispute concerning Upper Silesia at the meeting of the Supreme Council brought serious disagreements between David Lloyd George and the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand.

Briand and Lloyd George fought each other town by town and commune by commune. [...] Lloyd George won Briand's quick agreement to turn the matter over to the League. [...] The Upper Silesian situation afforded, for the first time, an opportunity for the League of Nations to demonstrate its ability to settle a key issue among the great powers.<sup>98</sup>

The case was decided by the representatives of four nonpartisan nations – Belgium, China, Spain and Brazil. On October 12, 1921, the League of Nations recommended that Poland would have one third of the contested area (1,255 out of 4,130 square miles) containing the most industrial installations. Also, Poland obtained almost half of the 2 million inhabitants (965,000). The Conference of Ambassadors accepted the plan seven days later.

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 382.

The German cabinet was shocked, and at least one member claimed that Germany had been cheated. [...] The difficulty was resolved by having the decision of the powers ‘communicated’ to the Polish and German governments, while the official ‘notification’ was postponed until the convention had been concluded. [...] The Upper Silesian or Geneva Convention of May 1922 [...] created a special regime for the region for a period of fifteen years.<sup>99</sup>

It was a hard task for the Great Powers to both weaken and satisfy Germany at the same time. For the Germans the loss of Upper Silesia was as outraging and insulting as the deprivation of the rights to Danzig and the corridor.

## 2.12. Czechoslovakia

With the beginning of World War I, anti-Habsburg sentiments among Czechs were common. In general, the Czechs publicly opposed war with the Slavic nations of Russia and Serbia. Both the civilian authorities from Vienna and military commanders in the Czech territories responded with tough repressions for the slightest disobedience, which alienated a vast part of the society and left a belief that Vienna should no longer master the Czech nation.

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s tenth point stated that “the peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.”<sup>100</sup> This provided a new

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<sup>99</sup> Cienciala and Komarnicki. *From Versailles to Locarno*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>100</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 14 Points.

hope for the liberation of Czechs although it was “far from a call for the dismemberment of the empire and the creation of an independent Czech or Czechoslovak state.”<sup>101</sup>

On the Soviet question, Czechoslovakia was not a neighbor of Soviet Russia “and therefore had no territorial disagreements with it. Also, the ‘Bolshevik threat’ was not next door [...] moreover, industrial Czechoslovakia was far more interested in establishing commercial relations with Soviet Russia than were agrarian [states].”<sup>102</sup> With a long common border with Soviet Russia, agrarian Poland had the “Bolshevik threat next door” and, perhaps most importantly, long Russian domination influenced her very contrary conviction.

The Polish-Ukrainian Kiev campaign produced in strong resentments from Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovak literature it is still presented as a Polish invasion, but in fact, it was conducted with the Ukrainian army to liberate the Ukrainian capital from Bolshevik occupation. “In reality, Piłsudski’s attack on Kiev was no more an act of aggression against Soviet Russia than the Allied landings in Normandy in 1944 could be construed as an act of aggression against Nazi Germany.”<sup>103</sup> The Polish-Czech relations were also overshadowed by the common and disputable borderlands.

### 2.12.1 The Czechoslovakian Border with Poland

Independent Czechoslovakia and Poland were reestablished in October and November 1918, respectively. On November 5, 1918, the rich industrial area of Cieszyn

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<sup>101</sup> Rees. *The Czechs During World War I*, p. 92.

<sup>102</sup> Adam, Magda. *The Versailles system and Central Europe*. Ashgate Publishing Co. (Variorum Collected Studies), Burlington VT, 2004, p. 212-213.

<sup>103</sup> Davies, Norman. “The Missing Revolutionary War.” *Soviet Studies* Apr. 1975, 27 (2), p 183.

(German: Teschen, Czech: Těšín) Silesia was divided along ethnic lines between Poland and Czechoslovakia.

From the beginning there was some tension in the Czech attitude towards Poland. The bone of contention was Cieszyn Silesia (roughly 350 square miles), rich in coal mines and industry and containing a dense railroad network. Aside from the industrial advantages, the dispute also had ambitious overtones. In his memories the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic Thomas Masaryk wrote:

Now and again a voice from Poland is heard to proclaim that the Polish nation will be the leader of the Slav peoples since, next to Russia, it is the greatest among them, and possesses the needful groundwork of Western civilization. We must wait and see whether Poland can play this part. I myself doubt if she is sufficiently qualified for it. Others again [...] have often extolled Prague as the capital of the Slav world. If they mean Prague as a centre of Slav culture, I may agree with them. Geographically, Prague is easily accessible to those of the Slavs who look westward. In culture, we possess the right foundation and might take the lead, especially as we have gone ahead of the other Slavs, thanks, chiefly, to our Reformation.<sup>104</sup>

Such ambitions augmented by Czech economic considerations and the desire for territorial expansion, led to an invasion of the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia and occupation of the city of Cieszyn.

The role of President Masaryk in this event is unclear. To illustrate this vagueness two opinions can be quoted. “The Czechoslovak government, pressed by its military men, decided to secure Těšín by force and present the Peace Conference with a *fait accompli*.

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<sup>104</sup> Masaryk, Thomas Garrigue. The making of a state: memories and observations, 1914-1918. An English version, arr. and prepared with an introd. by Henry Wickham Steed. H. Fertig, New York 1969, p. 384.

President Masaryk had qualms about using force, but his objections were overruled”<sup>105</sup> says Victor S. Mamatey in the history of the Czechoslovak Republic. However the monograph about Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party states: “at the cabinet meeting of 17 January 1919, Švehla [the Prime Minister] reported that the Czechoslovak army was ready to move into the Polish area. President Masaryk was present (a relatively rare occurrence) and stated [...]: ‘I agree with the occupation... if reports that there is complete anarchy there are true.’”<sup>106</sup>

The report of the “complete anarchy” in Cieszyn Silesia was not true. On the contrary – Polish officials organized the election to the Polish Parliament, but this didn’t make a difference to the Czech’s side. “‘The occupation will give us coal and order,’ noted Švehla. [...] Let us wait until Dr. Kramař reaches Paris in order to cover our behinds.”<sup>107</sup>

On January 23, 1919, when Polish troops fought in Lvov,<sup>108</sup> the Czechoslovak army entered the Polish part of the Cieszyn Silesia. 1,300 Poles could not immediately stop the 15,000 well equipped and armed Czech troops. However, the battle of Skoczów (January 28-30, 1919), the largest but last in this skirmish was a Polish victory. The Czechs asked for an armistice: “the Czechs, by all means, wanted to prevent the election to the Polish parliament on the territories controlled by Poland. The results would be, beyond all doubt, favorable for the Polish side and would sanction Polish rights to this region.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Mamatey, Victor S., ed. Luza, Radomír, ed. A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1973, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Miller, Daniel Edward. Forging political compromise: Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party, 1918-1933. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 1999, p. 48.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>108</sup> Kamiński, Marek Kazimierz. “Początki polsko-czeskiego konfliktu po pierwszej wojnie światowej” [The origins of the Polish-Czech conflict after World War I]. Kwartalnik Historyczny 2000 107(1), p. 63.

<sup>109</sup> Matuszak, Jacek. “Geneza i przebieg wydarzeń na Śląsku Cieszyńskim w styczniu 1919 roku” [The origins of issues on Cieszyn Silesia in January 1919]. Expanded text of the speech held on the seminar of professor Andrzej Garlicki (University of Warsaw), December 1998, p. 16.

“Before the Peace conference brought both sides into negotiation agenda, the Czechs exploited Poland’s military engagement on other more vital borders and took the part of Těšín city occupied by the Poles by force. This left bitter resentment on the Polish side,”<sup>110</sup> admit Czech historians although the word “occupied” used to describe the ethnic majority is questionable.

The Czechoslovak government referred the matter to the Great Powers, having earlier tricked France into a political agreement which obliged it to support Czech territorial claims. Sporadic Polish-Czech military activities and international negotiations led to an agreement, signed February 1, 1919, by the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, which was advantageous to the Czechs. However the Entente powers prompted the Czechs to negotiate with Poland.

On May 17, 1919, during a conversation between members of the Council of Four, Woodrow Wilson stated:

Yesterday I received a visit from MM. Kramář and Beneš, who came to talk to me about the question of Teschen. M. Beneš gave an excellent explanation and presented the arguments of the Czechoslovaks with great clarity and moderation. He remarks that the importance of Teschen for Bohemia comes, not only from its coal mines, but also from the fact that communication between Bohemia and Slovakia can only be assured by a line across this territory. Furthermore, the Teschen district is included within the historical borders of the Kingdom of Bohemia. The difficulty, from the Polish side, is that the question of Teschen is a party question, and it has become almost impossible for M. Paderewski to accept the compromise.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Krejčí, Jaroslav and Pavel Machonin. Czechoslovakia, 1918-92: a laboratory for social change. St. Martin's Press, Oxford, St. Antony's College, New York 1996, p. 36.

<sup>111</sup> Link. The deliberations of the Council of Four, vol. II, p. 88.



An armed invasion backed by the above explanation followed. The Polish-Czech talks were held between July 21-29, 1919, but failed. While the Poles presented concrete and wide-ranging political and economic proposals, the Czechs were only intent on maintaining the appearance of negotiations and rejected all proposals.<sup>112</sup> In the meantime the Czechoslovak government issued a statement condemning Piłsudski's hazardous policy toward Soviet Russia and refusing any aid to Poland, whether it be direct or indirect, in her war with the Bolsheviks.

#### 2.12.2. Cancelled Plebiscites and Unsolved Problems

On September 27, 1919, the Supreme Council decided to hold a plebiscite in Cieszyn Silesia. The next year in Spa the Polish delegation agreed to comply with the League of Nations' verdict instead of the plebiscite. On July 28, 1920, the Conference of Ambassadors representing the Supreme Council awarded to Czechoslovakia the entire disputed territory, even though the area was predominantly Polish-speaking. "About 184,000 Poles [...] were thereby deprived of the right to Polish citizenship unless they opted for moving away from their homesteads."<sup>113</sup> The Czechoslovak government announced its neutrality in the Polish-Soviet conflict and starting at the end of May, Czech railroad workers blocked all military supplies for Poland.

The creation of the northern border of the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia also produced friction with Poland. The vast part of three Slovakian-speaking regions – Spish (Slovak: Spiš, Polish: Spisz), Orava, and Chadtse (Slovak: Čadce, Polish: Czadce) – was

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<sup>112</sup> See: Kamiński, Marek Kazimierz. Konflikt polsko-czeski 1918-1921 [The Polish-Czech conflict 1918-1921]. Wyd. Neriton. Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2003, pp. 170-179.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

awarded to Poland based on economic and political grounds. This was considered a defeat by the Slovaks. “In Orava, abandoning the plebiscite raised mass protests and accusations that the Czech government in Prague and Minister Beneš traded Orava for Cieszyn Silesia.”<sup>114</sup>

The Polish officials regarded the Supreme Council’s decision as a dictate negatively affecting vital Polish interests. Polish authorities did everything to revise the existing resolution, while the military liberation of the annexed areas was out of the question. “The unfavorable atmosphere [...] was compounded by the anti-Polish policy of the Czech authorities in the annexed areas.”<sup>115</sup>

These events resulted in poor relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia during the following years.

### 2.13. Southern border: Romania

Southeast Poland (Polish: Pokucie), bordered with Romania in the sub-Carpathian region along the upper Pruth and Czeremosz rivers, came, at first, under Romanian domination and during middle 1919, was occupied by the Romanian army. Thanks to military cooperation of the Romanian and Polish armies, motivated by a desire to minimize the communist threat from Soviet Russia, diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in June 1919 and a settlement was reached. Romania handed the territory to Poland and the border was established along a historical line in the Bukovina region. This was a rare example of constructive politics in post-World War I Europe.

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<sup>114</sup> Melníková, Marta and Eva Vrabcová. “Utváranie severných hraníc Slovenska v 20. storočí” [Creation of the northern borders of Slovakia in the Twentieth century]. *Slovenská Archivistika* [Slovakia] 1996 31(2), p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> Kamiński. *Konflikt polsko-czeski*, p. 453.

### 3. Conclusions

#### 3.1 International Recognition

In 1918, the newborn Poland was confronted with tremendous difficulties. The country suffered greatly during the Great War. The material losses were astronomical (some sources estimated them at \$2 billion gold). Poland received no reparations and had to pay part of Austria's debts. The country was already economically backward; there was no common law, currency or financial resources. The state was divided ethnically, religiously and linguistically – one third of the population consisted of minorities. Piłsudski's idea of a federation proved unattainable. Despite overwhelming difficulties, the fight for freedom consolidated the Polish nation, increased the feeling of national identity, and mobilized the people to seemingly impossible efforts, as in the battles of Warsaw.<sup>116</sup>

From 1918 the eastern Polish border was constantly in fire. A civil war raged in Russia. The retreat of the Central Powers armies from the Mitteleuropa at the end of 1918, left political vacuum. With Poland also Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine emerged as independent states and they did not have any borders either.

The detachment of the former provinces of the Russian Empire and their possible independence met Moscow's violent reaction. In 1919, the Bolsheviks consecutively invaded the Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Poland. After two years of the exhausting

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<sup>116</sup> See chapter 2.3.3.

warfare the Bolsheviks got their prey: Belarus and Ukraine were taken over by Soviet Russia and became Soviet Socialist Republics.<sup>117</sup>

As soon as Poland's boundaries were recognized by the Conference of Ambassadors on March 15, 1923, the country managed its internal matters. Other achievements followed: one of the most spectacular examples was the rapid transformation of the small village Gdynia<sup>118</sup> into the most modern Baltic port at that time. The existence of this modern and efficient port signified Poland's new advantage of an outlet to the sea. It also raised the nation's self-confidence.

### 3.2 Instant Consequences and Results

Despite the eventual international recognition, Polish borders presented problems until the outbreak of World War II when by German and Soviet forces united to destroy Poland. For nearly twenty years Poland experienced open hostility from all bordering states except Romania. The geographical position of Poland between two European superpowers, Germany and Russia, was extremely dangerous, except when both states were weak. Germany never agreed to its eastern territorial losses, and it could be expected that sooner or later she would reclaim them. Clemenceau was right when he told Woodrow Wilson: "Do not believe they will ever forgive us; they only seek opportunity

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<sup>117</sup> The Baltic states, the remnants of Ukraine and Belarus and Poland itself remained out of the Bolshevik hands until World War II.

<sup>118</sup> Gdynia was a Pomeranian fishing village on the Gulf of Gdańsk, 30 miles northwest of Free City of Gdańsk. The decision to build a major seaport at Gdynia was made by the Polish government in winter 1920, because of the hostile attitude of German authorities of Gdansk and the seaport workers towards Allied military supplies to Poland during the Polish-Soviet War. In 1938 Gdynia was the most modern and the biggest seaport on the Baltic Sea, and the tenth biggest in Europe. Today, with the spa town of Sopot, the city of Gdańsk and suburban communities, Gdynia forms a large urban agglomeration called the Tri-City (Polish: Trójmiasto) with a population of over a million people.

for revenge. Nothing will extinguish the rage of those who wanted to establish their domination over the world and who believed themselves so close to succeeding.”<sup>119</sup>

On the other hand Soviet Russia described the Treaty of Riga and the Polish-Soviet War as a “temporary” and “tactical move.” After the war, the Soviet – and more recently Russian – approach has been unambiguous: anything opposing Russia’s needs, desires and demands was considered negative. Thus the opinion of the contemporary Russian historian Manusevich is not surprising when he quotes “the Polish bourgeois politician” Dmowski’s opinion – taken out of context – that the Polish people could not regain independence alone and needed powerful assistance. He concluded that “such aid, even against Dmowski’s opinion, was provided to the Polish nation by the Soviet State, against which the revived Poland immediately began armed combat.”<sup>120</sup> Subsequently, Manusevich argued how the “ungrateful Poland” regularly rejected benefits offered by the Soviets in the 1920s.<sup>121</sup>

Animosity between Poland and Czechoslovakia over the Cieszyn Silesia issue increased. In Poland it became a national obsession, almost hysteria, with terrible results. Immediately following the September 1938 Munich agreement, Polish troops entered Cieszyn Silesia after Poland demanded and obtained agreement for this occupation from the Czechs. “At that time it was Czechoslovakia that could not defend herself because other much more important issues were at stake. [...] It was, however, a short lived

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<sup>119</sup> Link. The deliberations of the Council of Four, vol. I, p. 63.

<sup>120</sup> Manusevich, A. Ya. “Трудный путь,” p. 19.

<sup>121</sup> The same attitude, far from reality, was expressed in the commentary published on February 12, 2005 on the website of the Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information and Press Department. According to the Russian officials, Poland must be grateful for the Yalta Treaty, because: “as a result of the Yalta-Potsdam arrangement Poland received a substantial increase of its territory on the north and on the west. [...] Over the postwar decades none other than the Soviet Union was the chief stimulator of the final establishment of the Polish border [...]. So our Polish partners commit a sin complaining about Yalta.” See: [http://www.ln.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4](http://www.ln.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4)

success for the Poles. Overrun by the German army one year later, the Polish state ceased to exist only half a year later after the demise of Czechoslovakia. Germany took everything.<sup>122</sup>

Lithuania remained indignant about the Central Lithuania and Vilna issue, remaining formally at war with Poland until 1938. In Poland, the National Democrats triumphed in foreign and domestic policy of tough nationalism and denunciation of equal rights for ethnic minorities. To oppose the idea of a Polish federation they deliberately left several important cities (Mińsk, Kamieniec Podolski, Berdyczów) within Soviet hands, then surrounding territories and hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens (deported later by the Soviets to its Asiatic provinces). It has been argued, that with Polish borders stretched far to the east, was done because, with Polish borders stretching so far east, the party would never have won the election. This policy affected minority relations.

Belarusian activists regarded the Riga settlement as treason and tragedy. Although other blows would follow, after Riga it was hard to see Warsaw as an ally of Belarusian aspirations. [...] Polish policy remained repressive throughout the 1920s and 1930s [and] never allowed for the creation of a Belarusian national society. Stalin's Soviet Union, on the other hand, destroyed during the 1930s the Soviet Belarusian society that had arisen in the 1920s.<sup>123</sup>

The Ukraine never gave up its aspirations for independence. To Ukrainians the Riga Peace Treaty legalized the partition of their lands between Poland and Soviet Russia. This resentment and open hostility toward Poland manifested itself during World War II: among four nations fighting on the Ukrainian lands, Germans, Russians and

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<sup>122</sup> Krejčí. *Czechoslovakia, 1918-92*, p. 36.

<sup>123</sup> Snyder. *The reconstruction of nations*, pp. 65-66.

Ukrainians agreed in one issue: annihilation of Polish ethnic groups, resulting in genocide. The Ukraine denies responsibility for the slaughter of Polish inhabitants in the former Galicia during World War II, but remembers the battle of Lvov, the Ukrainian campaign of 1919, and the partition signed in Riga. Accusation about the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Katyn forest massacre and Stalin's terror, are answered by questions about the number of Russian POWs who perished after the Polish-Soviet war.

The problem of defining the borders of a country such as Poland involved many issues, but almost always the peace of a region is at stake. The lack of internationally recognized borders is the primary basis for the hypothesis that in Poland World War I ended in 1923. As demonstrated, in Poland this was a very sensitive problem for many years.

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