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Journey Through the Borderlands: General Lucjan Żeligowski and His Quest for Home and Identity

Abstract:

General Lucjan Żeligowski's dilemmas regarding his national identity reflect the difficult choices faced by millions of people living in the borderlands between Russia and various East-Central European nations over the past several centuries. Born and raised in a Polish-patriotic family in 1865 in the heart of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was controlled by Tsarist Russia, he joined the Russian Army out of poverty and became almost entirely Russified. Seeking a compromise between his Polish and Russian identities, he became interested in Slavophile ideology. By the end of World War I, his Polish identity had prevailed over his Lithuanian and Russian sentiments, and he contributed to the rebirth of Poland. However, he noticed a distinction between Poles from central Poland and himself, a "Polish" or "Slavic Lithuanian". He was very critical of Warsaw's policies towards the regions of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and endeavoured to preserve their separate character. In 1939, he escaped from Poland and joined the Polish émigré authorities. In the West, he returned to Pan-Slavic ideology, hoping it would help bridge the Polish-Soviet chasm.

Also, his political views shifted. In interwar Poland, he became an agrarian, but he was moving to the left, dreaming of a "People's Poland". This allowed him to stay connected with the Soviets during World War II and later to decide on his return to communist-controlled Poland. He had never found peace of mind and paid a steep price for his numerous identity crises. He was not alone; millions traversed similar mental paths, impacting the entire history of Eastern and East Central Europe.

Keywords: Lucjan Żeligowski, Poland, Lithuania, identity crisis, world wars

For over 500 years, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, first as a separate state and then as a partner of Poland within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was one of the largest powers in Europe. Built by many ethnic groups, the Grand Duchy developed a versatile, fascinating and colourful culture and became a nation of many languages, religions and alphabets – a multicultural borderland between the West and the East. Unfortunately, by the end of the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned – and Russia occupied the territories of the Grand Duchy.

The Grand Duchy did not disappear completely, however. The state no longer existed, but its cultural and political heritage remained alive and attractive. Numerous peoples of different languages and religions continued to consider themselves Lithuanians. They understood this term differently, but most believed that the large territory between the Dnieper and the Bug Rivers, the Baltic Sea and the Pripet Marshes was their homeland. The idea of the Grand Duchy or a large *Litwa, Lietuva* or *Lite* was still alive. Periodically, attempts were made to reconstruct this pillar of international order in the south-eastern Baltic Sea littoral. As late as the 1920s, political leaders of different worldviews argued that creating a large Lithuanian state would contribute best to international stability.

However, in the last decades of the 19th century, some politicians and intellectuals reckoned that the future Lithuanian state should not be a large multiethnic territory, most likely culturally dominated by the Polish-speaking gentry. Rather, they advocated the idea of a smaller country populated by Lithuanian-speaking intelligentsia, petty nobility and peasantry. By the end of World War I, the advocates of Lithuanian independence were supported by the Germans, who had ejected the Russians from the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but at the same time did not intend to rebuild a mighty Lithuania. Berlin developed *divide et impera* policies in Eastern Europe and attempted to build Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian puppet states fully controlled by the Reich. In 1918, Germany lost the war and evacuated Eastern Europe, but certain elements of their designed international order survived. One of those elements was the independent Republic of Lithuania. Practically, it was limited mostly to only one historical region of the Grand Duchy – Samogitia (*Żmudź* or *Żemajtija*), with a small region of Suwałki (*Suvalkija*) and north-eastern Auksztota (*Aukštatija*). Polish attempts to reverse this development and rebuild the old Commonwealth contributed to a bitter Polish-Lithuanian conflict and international destabilisation in the region.

By the early 1920s, it was obvious that a chance to re-establish the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had disappeared. The inhabitants of the former Duchy, now divided between several states, had to decide on their new identity and state allegiance.

Frequently, these decisions had already been made in the 19th century. However, many people from the former Duchy did not possess a clear and easily definable national consciousness and were compelled to commit only after World War I, when a new international order and new borders emerged. These were difficult decisions, especially for the largely rural and uneducated population and the members of the upper classes of the former Duchy.

Consequently, families were frequently divided between two or even three different nations. Usually, the Lithuanian-speaking people faced no dilemma: they quickly learned to consider themselves Lithuanian and felt loyalty towards the independent Lithuanian Republic. Most Belarusians were forced to accept historical changes. The Jews had a very limited choice and were often uncertain about whether they would like to belong to Lithuania, Poland or a democratic Russia (after an anticipated fall of the Bolsheviks). Most of the Polish-speaking population of the former Grand Duchy was in a better situation. A Polish state reappeared, incorporated most territories of historical Lithuania and offered the Polish-speaking people the status of first-class citizens.

However, many Poles found themselves within the borders of the Lithuanian Republic and were underprivileged there. Those who landed in Poland realised, if they had not known this already, that they differed from the Poles in the Warsaw or Kraków regions. They spoke a different Polish dialect, went through different historical experiences and belonged to a slightly different culture. After World War I, their fatherland, as many of them understood it, was divided between Kaunas, Moscow and Warsaw. "Historical Lithuanians" living in Poland were even uncertain about their country's name. To them, the Republic of Lithuania was a hostile state on the other side of the border. How should they refer to their fatherland now? Some of them, especially those of mixed Polish-Lithuanian or Polish-Belarusian origin, began a long process of soul searching as they endeavoured to find a new identity.

To use his own words, one of the most interesting "Slavic Lithuanians" was General Lucjan Żeligowski, referred to by some historians as "the last citizen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania".[1] He did not belong to the most outstanding political and military leaders of 20th-century Poland. We cannot compare him to such Polish Lithuanians as Gabriel Narutowicz or Józef Piłsudski. Nevertheless, Żeligowski's interesting biography is worth studying. During his long life, he was an active and frequently important participant in the most significant events of Polish history. He participated in the Russo-Japanese War, the Revolution of 1905, World War I, the civil war in Russia and the reconstruction of the independent Polish state. He distinguished himself during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921 and the conflict with Lithuania over the border with Poland. His activities were crucial to Piłsudski's successful *coup d'état* of 1926. Żeligowski retired from the Army in 1927 and became

[1] "Ostatni obywatel Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Ze Stanisławem Swianiewiczem rozmawia Marek J. Karp," *Respublika*, no. 6 (1987): 33.

a Member of Parliament in 1935. He survived the tragedy of 1939, escaped from Poland and joined the Polish authorities in exile. He did not accept communism, although he tried to find a compromise with the Soviets, and in 1946, he decided to return to Poland. In the final moments before his return, he died in London in January 1947. Describing this long and rich life in a short text is difficult. This article concentrates on Żeligowski's identity dilemmas.

Żeligowski did a lot for Poland and is considered a passionate Polish patriot. However, he was one of those "Polish Lithuanians" who were not quite certain about their identity and to which national or ethnic group they owed allegiance. He modified this identity several times as he searched for a formula that would suitably reconcile elements of Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and general Slavic consciousness. Throughout his life, Żeligowski strongly believed that he was simultaneously Polish and Lithuanian. Like Adam Mickiewicz, Józef Piłsudski, Gabriel Narutowicz and many others, Żeligowski considered Lithuania his "nearest" or "direct fatherland".[2] Many of his Lithuanian-speaking countrymen hated him. Polish chauvinists would not have liked him either if they had read his private notes on the Polish administration in the North-Eastern Borderlands before 1939. Finally, most Poles strongly disagreed with his ideas and actions by the end of his life. Who was General Żeligowski then, and why is his "case" so interesting and instructive?

Most likely, Lucjan Mieczysław Rafał Żeligowski was born in October 1865 near the town of Oszmiana in the middle of the historic Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[3] His parents, Władysława (née Tracewska) and Gustaw Żeligowski of the *Belina* coat of

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[2] Barbara Gumowska, *Opowieść o generale broni Lucjanie Żeligowskim*, Part 1, *Lata 1865-1920* (Bydgoszcz: Biblioteka Wileńskich Rozmaitości i Towarzystwa Miłośników Wilna i Ziemi Wileńskiej w Bydgoszczy, 1994), 8. Neither the author of this book nor its publisher are professional historians. However, Gumowska, a close friend of Gen. Żeligowski's son, Tadeusz, studied family documents and listened to family stories for several years at the Żeligowski home in Warsaw. Large parts of Gumowska's book are just exact copies of the General's private notes. Many of her opinions must be taken with a grain of salt.

[3] The exact date and place of his birth are not certain. According to Edward Puacz, *General Lucjan Żeligowski* (London: Biblioteka Wolnej Polski, 1945), 5, it was October 17, 1865, in Oszmiana. Piotr Stawecki in his "Z notatek gen. Lucjana Żeligowskiego," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, no. 2 (1969): 387, gives 1865 and Nieśwież. Karol Merpert, ed., *Działacze Polski "Współcześni"* (Warszawa: Odrodzenie Polski, 1925), 214, gives October 2, 1865, in Nieśwież. Gumowska, *Opowieść*, 10, gives October 19, 1865, and Oszmiana. The most extensive review of hypotheses on Żeligowski's birth date and location was offered by Dariusz Fabisz, *Generał Lucjan Żeligowski, 1865-1947. Działalność wojskowa i polityczna* (Warszawa: DiG, 2007), 21; however, Fabisz modified his theory in his next book: *Pamiętniki generała broni Lucjana Żeligowskiego*, ed. Dariusz Fabisz (Warszawa: DiG, 2014), 7. Tadeusz Żeligowski, a son of the General, was not certain whether his father was born in Oszmiana or the nearby village of Żuprany, where the General's aunt Katarzyna lived (information given to me during the interview with Tadeusz Żeligowski on June 17, 1985; he died in 1990 in Warsaw). In the Żeligowski family house in Warsaw's district of Żoliborz, I have researched a large collection of family documents quoted further as the Żeligowski Family Archive.

arms, belonged to the gentry and had resided for many generations in the Oszmiana region.[4] The Żeligowskis descended from one of the oldest Lithuanian noble families. In 1623, the Lithuanian Register (*Metryka Litewska*) – an official record book of the Lithuanian chancery – mentioned a certain Jakub Żeligowski.[5] The Russian authorities economically ruined the family after the Kościuszko Uprising and the 1830-1831 Uprising. From that time, the Żeligowskis administered or rented small land estates.[6] Shortly before the January Uprising of 1863, Gustaw Żeligowski married Władysława Tracewska. According to family tradition, which is not confirmed by other sources, Gustaw joined the uprising with his two brothers, who were deported to Siberia after the fall of the insurrection. Gustaw managed to return home and, soon after, during the era of the worst anti-Polish post-insurrection persecutions, his son Lucjan and two younger daughters were born. The post-uprising mourning lasted many years in the Żeligowski family and deeply influenced the children.[7]

The story of Żeligowski's childhood, described by the General in his numerous notes[8] and retold by him at his family's house, includes many questionable episodes and much contradictory information. His parents died early, but it remains unclear when and under what circumstances. Lucjan and his sisters, Ernestyna and Maria, spent most of their childhood alternating between the house of their mother's sister, Katarzyna Mikosz, in Żuprany near Oszmiana, and their father's brother, who rented the small estates of Kasuta, Krasnoluki and others. Aunt Kasia taught Lucjan how to read and write. The uncle, a retired Russian army officer and an admirer of Napoleon, told his nephew everything he knew about the Napoleonic Wars. Żuprany and the estates rented by the uncle were in the middle of the Belarusian-speaking countryside. Lucjan played Napoleonic Wars with Belarusian boys and taught them how to read and write in Polish, serving as a makeshift teacher. A local Russian policeman ordered Żeligowski to stop this activity and threatened him with deportation to Siberia.[9]

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[4] Fabisz, *Generał*, 21; Merpert, *Działacze Polski*, 214; Interview with Tadeusz Żeligowski, June 17, 1985; Gumowska, *Opowieść*, 10.

[5] Fabisz gives several quotes from the Lithuanian Registry in his *Generał*, 22. Wiesław Marczyk, "Życie i działalność Lucjana Żeligowskiego, 1865-1947" [master's thesis, University of Poznań], Poznań, 1976, no pages; Wiesław Marczyk, "Generał broni Lucjan Żeligowski", *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, no. 4 (1987): 44.

[6] Fabisz, *Generał*, 23; Merpert, *Działacze Polski*, 214; Interview with Tadeusz Żeligowski, June 17, 1985; Marczyk, "Życie".

[7] In the papers of Żeligowski, there are several versions of his family's history during the January Uprising era. Marczyk, "Życie".

[8] A large collection of the General's unpublished private notes and documents has been split between Warsaw's Archiwum Akt Nowych (The Archives of the Contemporary Documents, Warsaw, further: AAN) and the Żeligowski Family Archive.

[9] Żeligowski Family Archive, Lucjan Żeligowski, *Wspomnienia z lat dziecinnych*, a manuscript, 1-2.

Economic factors determined the future of little Lucjan, just as they did for other petty gentry families in Lithuania. We do not know anything certain about his early education. According to some sources, he graduated from a parish school in Żuprany and a high school (*gimnazjum*) in Vilna, where he probably studied in absentia. His uncle was an alcoholic, and the estate did not bring any profit. Young Żeligowski worked as a construction worker and helped another uncle with his farm. Eventually, despite the family's patriotic tradition and the indignation of family members, Żeligowski decided to volunteer for the Russian army. After several months of ordinary service, he was selected for a *Junker* school in Riga. Many years later, the General recalled his youth as a bitter period of misery and humiliation. His first years in the army were hard. Categorised by the authorities as a Pole (because he was a Catholic), Żeligowski was treated worse than his Russian and Baltic German colleagues and worked harder to gain promotions and good grades.[10]

In the army, Żeligowski met Russian officers of Polish nationality. Some were friendly and cultured, but many were not. If they wanted to pursue a career in the army, they had to conceal their Polish background and prove their loyalty to the Tsar and Russia. Frequently, they became opportunistic careerists, worse than their Russian colleagues. Before 1914, approximately 20,000 Poles served in the Russian army. Most came from Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine and were usually motivated by poverty, even though they all had to document their noble status. Frequently, they served in the army corps garrisoned in Brest-Litovsk, Polock and Kyiv. The local Polish gentry petitioned to form these units and supported them financially. Many had succumbed to Russification; they were not allowed to speak Polish for many years, converted to Orthodox Christianity (a *conditio sine qua non* for a successful career), married Russian women, attended Orthodox Mass and spoke Russian at home and with their friends.[11]

In 1888, Żeligowski graduated from the *Junker* school as the top student, received his first officer rank of *praporshchik* (second lieutenant) and was sent to the 136th regiment in Yekaterinoslav, Ukraine.[12] He served in this unit until the 1904 Russo-Japanese War. However, as soon as he arrived in this regiment, Żeligowski revealed certain personal habits that were considered strange and suspicious by Russian officers and which delayed his career. Throughout his entire life, influenced by his experiences with his alcoholic uncle, Żeligowski completely abstained from

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[10] Fabisz, *Generał*, 27-29; Interviews with Tadeusz Żeligowski, June 17 and 27, 1985; Gumowska, 15-17; Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Wspomnienia*, 3-4.

[11] Fabisz, *Generał*, 37-38; Wiesław Caban, "Polak czy Rosjanin. Wpływ służby Polaków w carskim korpusie oficerskim w XIX w. na ich świadomość narodową," *Przegląd Historyczny* 112, no. 3 (2021): 603-612.

[12] Fabisz, *Generał*, 30. Some sources say the 136th regiment was stationed in Novocherkask on the Don; Gumowska, 21; Andrzej Wojtaszek, "Generał broni Lucjan Żeligowski (1865-1947). Przyczynek do biografii," *Polish Biographical Studies*, no. 7 (2019): 74.

alcohol. When he arrived in his first regiment, the officers had a party and invited Żeligowski to join them. When he refused to drink, they proposed a toast to the Tsar. When he refused again, the angry regiment commander ordered an interrogation. It established that Żeligowski was an unmanageable Pole with no respect for the Tsar, which was partially true. Żeligowski was critical of the Russian Army – which he viewed as isolated from society, culture and education, promoting alcoholism and thoughtlessness.[13]

Negative opinion followed Żeligowski for most of his career in the Russian army. Because of the unwelcome episode, Żeligowski was sent with his company to a remote Ukrainian village, where they lived in peasant huts. This experience became, for Żeligowski, a lesson in Ukrainian language and ethnography. Life in a provincial regiment was monotonous and hardly intellectual. Żeligowski was disgusted by the widespread alcoholism and barbarity and did not participate in the regimental social life. He killed time and depression with his Ukrainian studies and began to admire the way of life and the resilience of the Ukrainian peasantry. During vacations, he travelled across southern Ukraine and Crimea and further indulged his interest in studying Ukrainian culture. It appears that his fascination with Slavic ethnography and inclinations towards Panslavic ideology started in the late 1880s in a remote corner of the Yekaterinoslav gubernia.[14]

As a Pole, Żeligowski was not allowed to continue his military studies and could not be promoted to a staff position. His credentials again suffered during the 1904 Russo-Japanese War when, on the front in Manchuria, he refused to sign a loyalty declaration supporting reactionary policies directed against changes in Russia. When several units rebelled in Manchuria, Żeligowski was nearly considered one of the rebellion's leaders. Consequently, the Manchurian units were declared unreliable and demoralised and were sent back to European Russia as late as January 1906.[15]

In 1907, Żeligowski married Tatyana Petrova, a Russian from the Smolensk region. Some members of his family claimed that Petrova was of Polish origin and that her father's name was Eugeniusz Łopatto, a lawyer from Smolensk. It is not certain; however, it seems the family "Polonised" Petrova after World War I. She had never learned Polish and wrote letters to her son in Russian. In 1908, the couple's twins, Tadeusz and Janina, were born in St. Petersburg, where the Żeligowskis lived briefly. The children were baptised in a Catholic church. The family spoke Russian at home, and Żeligowski lost his Polish almost completely. The children first had learned Polish by the end of World War I, when the family's fate became tied to independent

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[13] Fabisz, *Generał*, 32-33; Puacz, 5; Merpert, 214; Stawecki, 387.

[14] Fabisz, *Generał*, 34-35; Puacz, 5; Merpert, 214; Peter Kenez, "Russian Officer Corps Before the Revolution: The Military Mind," *The Russian Review* 31, no. 3 (1972): 226; Gumowska, 22-23.

[15] John Bushnell, "The Revolution of 1905-06 in the Army: The Incidence and Impact of Mutiny," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 12, no. 1 (1985): 76-77; Fabisz, *Generał*, 36-37.

Poland.[16] Until the middle of the war, Żeligowski used Russian, even when he wrote his most private notes and memoirs. By 1916, he started writing in Polish, but sometimes he wrote Polish using the Cyrillic alphabet. His Polish language skills remained weak until the early post-war years. When he met Piłsudski for the first time in May 1919, Żeligowski's Polish was so poor that Piłsudski believed it was Belarusian – yet, the two men understood each other perfectly well. They cracked jokes from Vilna and laughed. It was a true reunion of countrymen.[17]

In 1914, the Żeligowskis lived in Rostov-on-Don. Mrs. Żeligowski taught mathematics in one of the local high schools, and the future General served in the local garrison. His military career returned to normal. When the Tsar visited Rostov in 1914, Żeligowski commanded a large parade before the monarch.[18] After the outbreak of World War I, Żeligowski, like most Russians, was certain of a Russian military victory and believed that the war would end after three or four months. Unlike the Russo-Japanese War, the conflict against Germany and Austria was very popular among the Polish officers in the Russian army. They expected the Polish issue to resurface, and they accepted with satisfaction the manifesto issued by the Commander-in-Chief, Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich, on 14 August 1914. The manifesto promised "the resurrection of the Polish nation" and stated: "Under this sceptre [of the Russian Emperor], Poland will come together, free in faith, in language and self-government."[19] The Poles in Russia would have preferred that the Tsar had signed such a document, hoping this would follow on the heels of the Grand Duke's manifesto. Żeligowski and his Polish colleagues believed that a bidding had started: whoever gave more to the Poles would gain their support. They felt the war had begun auspiciously and would bring something to Poland.[20]

It does not mean, however, that Żeligowski had no doubts about his service on the Russian side. He described one of his most emotional war experiences in numerous private notes. In 1914, the Tsarist army defeated the Austrians in Galicia. It seemed that the Russians could cross the Carpathian Mountains and occupy Hungary. Żeligowski and his soldiers chased the Austrians in the Carpathians, moving southwest and encountering little resistance. One day, they reached the strategically crucial pass of Kirli-Baba and found themselves close to the Hungarian slopes of the mountains. Suddenly, they met a new and tough enemy. Heavy fighting started; the Russians were pushed back and almost surrounded. Żeligowski was curious about this unexpected change on the enemy side. Eventually, his Cossacks brought

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[16] Interview with Tadeusz Żeligowski, June 17 and 27, 1985.

[17] AAN, fond 105 (Akta generała Lucjana Żeligowskiego, further: Żeligowski Collection), file 68 (Notatnik 20 VIII 1937), 4.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Stephan Horak, ed., *Poland's International Affairs, 1919-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1964), 212-213.

[20] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 8 (Wspomnienia i materiały dotyczące lat 1914-1919), 2.

several prisoners to Żeligowski's command post. He glanced over and tensed. The prisoners had Polish eagles on their caps. These were Polish Legionaries from the Second Brigade of Józef Piłsudski fighting on the Austrian side. Although the Russian situation was becoming critical, Żeligowski had no time to command. In the middle of the deadly battle, he began discussing with the Legionaries, in Polish, on which side of the front the Poles should fight. Żeligowski even planned to write a letter to a Legionnaire commanding officer to explain to him that it was treason to support the Germans. The imprisoned Legionnaires did not want to help with the letter. To them, Żeligowski was a traitor.[21]

Shortly before he went to the front, Żeligowski had brought his wife and two children to the Miergorod Pension in Yalta in the Crimea, where he intended for them to spend those anticipated three or four months of the war. But the war dragged on, and Tatyana Żeligowski could no longer stay in the Pension. First, the family moved to the nearby village of Alubka, and then, as the situation worsened, she rented a small room in the Saray suburb of Yalta. There, the family lived through the revolutions of 1917. Their material situation was becoming desperate. Żeligowski visited them only once at the beginning of the war. In 1917, after the Bolshevik revolution, he lost contact with his family and could not help them financially. His wife produced and sold clogs to survive, and the children collected dry twigs for sale. In Crimea, the children learned their second language: Tatar.[22]

Żeligowski started the war as a colonel. Initially, he commanded a battalion and, soon after, the 264th Infantry Regiment. Despite the Manchurian episode, he had an excellent reputation in the army and received several prestigious honours.[23] He was aware, therefore, that especially during a war, he would be promoted to general and commander of a brigade or a division. Yet, in the autumn of 1915, when the Polish Sharpshooters Brigade (*Polska Brygada Strzelecka*) was established within the Russian army, Żeligowski deliberately delayed his military career and requested a transfer to the Polish unit. In January 1916, he was sent to the Brigade to organise and command its 2nd Battalion – a position usually occupied by a major. Żeligowski did his best to give the battalion a Polish character, which was difficult because most officers were Russified Poles. In late 1916, the Russian command ordered Żeligowski to return to the Russian units. He did so, but after the February Revolution of 1917, he returned to the Polish unit. In January 1917, the Brigade had developed into the 1st Polish Sharpshooter Division. Żeligowski commanded its 1st Regiment and soon became the acting commander of the entire Division. It fought in Eastern Galicia in the region of Husiatyń, defended the bridgeheads on the Zbrucz River and was

[21] Gumowska, 30-31; Fabisz, *Generał*, 42-43.

[22] Interviews with Tadeusz Żeligowski, June 17 and 27, 1985; Fabisz, *Generał*, 39.

[23] Fabisz, *Generał*, 41.

among the last Russian troops to leave their positions in the prewar Austrian territories in July 1917.[24]

In June 1917, a Congress of the Polish Men-of-Arms in Petrograd decided to form the 1st Polish Corps in Russia, with its main centre in Bobruysk in Belarus, and elected the Main Polish Military Committee (*Naczpol*). Żeligowski was elected a member of this body but soon left it and returned to his 1st Division, which became a pillar of the Corps. When the Germans disarmed it in July 1918, Żeligowski and a group of its officers escaped to the Kuban region. There, he formed a new Polish division and, through Crimea, Odessa, Bessarabia and Bukovina, fighting with Ukrainians and Bolsheviks, returned with his units to Eastern Galicia in June 1919, where he participated in the Polish military operations against the West Ukrainian People's Republic. In November 1919, Żeligowski became the Commander-in-Chief of an army group near Minsk on the front against the Red Army and distinguished himself during the retreat of the Polish forces in July 1920. He believed evacuating Vilna without a fight was the most serious mistake of the Polish-Soviet war, both from strategic and political points of view. The Polish population of the Vilna region was deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to Poland. Later, Żeligowski's division played a crucial role in the defence of Warsaw in August 1920.[25]

The most famous episode of Żeligowski's life was his 1920 "rebellion" and capture of Vilna. In the 19th century, Vilna was one of the leading centres of Polish culture and the national movement. At the same time, Lithuanians considered it their historical capital. The city belonged to the Lithuanian puppet state created by the Germans in 1917. After the evacuation of the German army from Vilna in late 1918, Polish irregular self-defence units established new authorities there. Meanwhile, the authorities of independent Lithuania also formed their first military units in Vilna. Soon, in the first days of January 1919, the Red Army entered the city and attempted to establish Vilna as the capital of a newly proclaimed Lithuanian Soviet Republic. On 19 April 1919, the Polish Army, led by Piłsudski, took the city and its region.

On 22 April, Piłsudski issued his famous manifesto "To the Inhabitants of the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania". It was one of the finest demonstrations of Piłsudski's federation programme. It also represented a way of thinking typical of a "son of this unhappy country", as Piłsudski referred to himself in the manifesto's text. He wrote:

> The Polish troops that I have led here to drive out tyranny and expel the authorities governing the country against its wish will bring you liberty for all.
>
> I desire to offer the means of solving all international, national and religious questions according to your inclinations without oppression of any sort from Poland.

[24] *Ibid.*, 45-51.

[25] *Ibid.*, 87.

> This is why – although the cannon still roars in your country and blood flows in the rivers – I establish a government, not military but civil, and I summon the country's inhabitants to this government.[26]

Both the Polish *Sejm* and the Lithuanian government rejected the manifesto. They wanted Vilna and the surrounding region within their borders as a regular part of their states, and both considered the federation programme a risky and, in fact, a treacherous idea. The Polish Parliament, dominated by the National Democrats and their peasant allies, supported the so-called "incorporation programme" and called for the integration of the Vilna region into the rest of Poland. In the territories of the former Grand Duchy, most Polish civilian and military leaders, as well as wealthy landowners, shared this attitude and killed the federation programme.

In July 1920, the Red Army entered Vilna again and, several weeks later, approached Warsaw. Poland's situation was desperate. The Polish Prime Minister, Władysław Grabski, asked the Western powers for help. They promised to provide Poland with substantial military assistance and to stop the Soviets. In exchange, the Poles had to accept the Curzon Line, which would eventually give Vilna to Lithuania. The Bolsheviks, however, did not intend to halt the world revolution and ignored Western attempts to mediate. In addition, the Western powers – leaving aside France – did not deliver substantial material support. Almost miraculously, Poland was saved by her efforts. In mid-August 1920, the Polish Army managed to stop the Soviets on the Vistula River and successfully pushed them back.

In the meantime, on 12 July 1920, Moscow and Kaunas signed an agreement that promised the Vilna region to Lithuania in exchange for her "disinterest" in the Polish-Soviet war. In late August, as the Red Army left the Polish territories, it gave the region of Vilna to the Lithuanian Republic. The government of the Republic invited representatives of France and Great Britain to Vilna, initiated a propaganda campaign that portrayed the region as an integral part of the Lithuanian state and rejected Polish demands to return to the 1919 Polish-Lithuanian demarcation line, which left Vilna on the Polish side. The Poles, pressured by international public opinion and by the Western great powers and still involved in a war against Soviet Russia, signed an agreement with the Lithuanians in Suwałki on 1 October 1920.

Piłsudski, however, did not accept this solution. His sense of national identity was very similar to Żeligowski's. The region in question was Piłsudski's native country, mostly populated by Poles and Belarusians. In Vilna, the Lithuanians constituted less than 5% of the population. The region was crucial to his federation programme. Piłsudski did not want to start an open war against Lithuania for many reasons. Instead, as early as August 1920, Piłsudski laid the groundwork for a most unusual operation. He moved the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division (*Dywizja*

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[26] *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 12 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 195-196.

Litewsko-Białoruska) and several smaller units recruited mostly in the territories controlled by the Lithuanians (although all these formations included many soldiers from central Poland) towards the Lithuanian lines. On 1 October 1920, in a private conversation on a train in Białystok, Piłsudski asked Żeligowski to organise a "rebellion" of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division and regain Vilna. Both of them came from the same region, spoke the same Polish dialect and represented the same opinions and ideas.[27] The next day, Piłsudski delivered a speech to the trusted officers of the "rebellion": "You are from that region; you have arms; go to your homes. There are young people in Vilna. They understand the situation. They will help."[28]

During this conversation, Piłsudski and Żeligowski prepared a scenario to cover up their conspiracy. It was never fully implemented. Today, it seems cynical, but it illustrates how these two Polish-Lithuanians reconciled Polish and Lithuanian identities. The General was supposed to write a letter to the Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, asking him what his government planned to do about the occupation of Vilna by the "Samogitians" (in Polish: *przez* "*Żmudzinów*"). Żeligowski was to complain in this letter that his soldiers, the citizens of Lithuania, could not return to their fatherland, occupied by Samogitia. Piłsudski promised to answer Żeligowski's letter that, as a Lithuanian, he sympathised with Żeligowski and his soldiers but, as the Chief of the Polish state, he could not do anything and that Żeligowski's Lithuanians should solve the problem themselves. In response, Żeligowski was to issue a manifesto to the population of the Vilna region and start an anti-Samogitian uprising supported by the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division.[29]

The next day, Żeligowski participated in conferences with the officers of his division in the town of Lida and with the newly created Governing Committee (*Komisja Rządząca*) of Lithuania in Grodno. The Committee consisted of several prominent politicians from Vilna who supported the federation programme and belonged to a loose political group known as *krajowcy* (locals).[30] Also, some Belarusian politicians joined the Committee.[31] The military preparations were difficult because most officers were not informed about the conspiracy, and some did not want to participate in a "rebellion". British and French observers appeared in Żeligowski's units to enquire about the anticipated goal of the military preparations. Eventually, the operation started on 8 October. With the massive assistance of the local Polish population, in two days, the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division ejected the "Samogitians" from

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[27] Zenon Krajewski, "'Bunt' Generała Żeligowskiego i zajęcie Wilna," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* 41, no. 1 (1996): 56-62; Fabisz, *Generał*, 107.

[28] Fabisz, *Generał*, 111.

[29] Krajewski, 62-63.

[30] Żeligowski did not know too much about *krajowcy*. When they were most active at the turn of the 19th century, he lived far away from Poland and did not follow politics in the Vilna region. In addition, *krajowcy* had never run mass activities and did not have a party apparatus. In Żeligowski's numerous notes, *krajowcy* do not appear at all.

[31] Fabisz, *Generał*, 120.

the region of Vilna. The Lithuanian soldiers, taken as POWs, were disarmed and informed that this was not a Polish-Lithuanian war but simply the Polish units returning home.[32] At the beginning of the operation, Żeligowski wrote a letter to the Polish Army command. He informed them that he had resigned from his previous position in the Polish Army because he could not accept the agreement between Warsaw and Kaunas and had decided to liberate his fatherland on his own.

Later, when Żeligowski recalled these events, he wrote: "On the eve of our march on Vilna, in Woronowo [a temporary location of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division], we were not only Poles – we were Lithuanians. It was our right and obligation. I aimed for the restoration of Grand Lithuania. Nobody could forbid us to do so, and we needed neither to rebel nor to ask anyone about his opinion on this…"[33] The General was angry at Piłsudski for never explaining the origins of the so-called "Żeligowski rebellion".

Żeligowski indeed tried to recreate the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He believed that a Lithuanian state, consisting only of Lithuanian-speaking territories, would constitute a failure and a product of an anti-Slavic, "German-Samogitian" conspiracy. He understood all the injustices done by the Polish or Polish-speaking magnates to the Lithuanian peasants and considered Poles from Western Poland little different from foreigners. Nevertheless, in his opinion, "Samogitians" were only a part of the Lithuanian nation. During the preparations before the Vilna operation, there was joy and enthusiasm among the soldiers and officers from the North-Eastern territories who shared Żeligowski's views. The Poles from the former Congress Kingdom of Poland and Prussian- or Austrian-controlled Poland, a minority in Żeligowski's forces, were lukewarm and did not want to fight for Vilna. Some, including those from the Eastern Borderlands, refused to do so or even considered switching to the Lithuanian side. To many, Żeligowski's (and Piłsudski's) multiple identity was too complicated: they believed you were either a Pole or a Lithuanian.[34]

The territories taken by the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division were not incorporated into Poland. On 12 October 1920, Żeligowski proclaimed the Central Lithuanian Republic. This small semi-state (13,000 square kilometres and about 500,000 inhabitants), fully dependent on Poland, constituted a part of the federation programme. Its coat of arms resembled the official coat of arms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Piłsudski and Żeligowski hoped that Central Lithuania would be a bridge between "Western Lithuania" – the independent Republic of Lithuania – and "Eastern Lithuania" – the regions of Grodno, Nowogródek, Minsk and Brest-Litovsk incorporated directly into Poland. They imagined a tri-canton organisation of a Grand Lithuania federated with Poland, with the cantons' capitals in Kaunas,

[32] Fabisz, *Generał*, 121.

[33] Krajewski, 67.

[34] Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Zajęcie Wilna w roku 1920*, 6-7; "Ostatni obywatel", 34-35.

Vilna and Belarusian Minsk. In their plans, Vilna would again be the capital of a big state and an important cultural centre.

Yet, all these plans were unrealistic in the context of the international and internal Polish situation in the 1920s. Żeligowski's "rebellion" proved to be the last attempt to rebuild a multinational Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the end of the federation idea. On 30 November 1921, Żeligowski, the Head of the Central Lithuanian Republic and the Commander-in-Chief of its army, who was extremely popular in his homeland, issued a decree about elections to the Parliament of Central Lithuania. Only the Polish population participated in the elections on 9 January 1922. On 20 February 1922, the Parliament of Central Lithuania merged its state with the Polish Republic. There was no other option, believed Żeligowski, since the mini-state could not achieve internal stability and safety. The Polish government in Warsaw promised to support Central Lithuania financially, but failed to meet its obligations. There was no money to defend the Polish prisoners tried in Kaunas. Żeligowski regretted that he could not take Kaunas. He believed it was necessary to eliminate the German influences there. Neither the Lithuanians, the Bolsheviks, nor the Germans gave up on Vilna, and a new war could start soon, the General wrote in the spring of 1922.[35]

Żeligowski returned to the Polish Army, where he became the Army Inspector of the Warsaw-Łódź military district. He did so reluctantly. His plans had failed; he was tired and believed he deserved to retire. Warsaw felt somewhat foreign to him.[36] Yet, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, the Minister of Military Affairs, convinced him that he should continue his service and that his resignation after the disappearance of Central Lithuania would be interpreted as a political gesture.[37] On 27 November 1925, Żeligowski was appointed minister of military affairs in the coalition government of Aleksander Skrzyński. The cabinet fell on 5 May 1926, but before that, Żeligowski had sent several regiments to the exercise grounds near Warsaw. These regiments, commanded by supporters of Piłsudski, determined the outcome of the 1926 *coup d'état*.

After the coup, Żeligowski continued his service in the army. He did not, however, like the changes that were taking place there. The former Legionaries became a dominant force and eliminated their competitors from other Polish World

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[35] Wacław Jędrzejewicz, "Litwa Środkowa i jej życie wewnętrzne, 1920-1922," *Niepodległość* 16 (1983): 22-51; Fabisz, *Generał*, 113; "Ostatni obywatel", 34; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 16 (Akta polityczne i wojskowe z okresu Litwy Środkowej), 19-20; file 21 (Wspomnienia dotyczące okresu Litwy Środkowej), 56; file 48 (Notatki o charakterze dziennikowym), 1-2; file 22 (Rozważania i projekty obrony Wileńszczyzny), 7-11; AAN, fond 322 (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych. Departament Polityczno-Ekonomiczny), file 4.4/6103 (Litwa. Stosunki polityczne z Polską – głównie spór o Wileńszczyznę, 1921-1923), 13-15.

[36] Fabisz, ed. *Pamiętniki generała*, 41.

[37] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 32 (Rękopis (notatki) pracy *Od Litwy Środkowej do maja 1926*, względnie *Czy można było uniknąć przewrotu majowego*), 2.

War I military units from the Russian, Austrian and Prussian armies. Żeligowski, a veteran of the Russian army, opposed this development. He had his vision of army reforms, but the Marshal countered any changes. As a professional officer, the General was unhappy that his name was again associated with a conspiracy. He wanted Piłsudski to explain his role in the coup of 1926, but the Marshal never did. Żeligowski also felt that the Marshal mistrusted him since Piłsudski had not told him about his coup plans before May 1926. Eventually, due to all these doubts and despite the regrets of Piłsudski, on 31 August 1927, Żeligowski retired.[38]

He settled in Andrzejówka, a small and dilapidated land estate near Vilna given to him by the city in appreciation for his 1920 "rebellion". Żeligowski decided to start a new agricultural career. He took it seriously, joined several local agricultural organisations and was elected to Vilna's Agricultural Chamber (*Izba Rolnicza*). The region of Vilna was poor, and Żeligowski's activities were unsuccessful. His neighbours and friends were struggling too. Żeligowski concluded that the misery of local agriculture should not be exclusively blamed on poor soil and backwardness. He came to believe that the Polish government did not understand the local problems and had failed to offer creative solutions. Gradually, Żeligowski developed a negative opinion of the Polish administration in the North-East territories and the Polish government in general. Later, during the Great Depression, he claimed it was only a part of the Polish problem; Polish economic policy was more disastrous.[39]

In the early 1930s, Żeligowski saw only one solution: the development of local self-government and a return to the policies of the authorities of the Central Lithuanian Republic. He hoped that the Agricultural Chamber would serve as a springboard to do so and would revive the efforts of the 1919-1920 period. He gained the support of numerous local land estate owners and wealthy Polish-speaking farmers. Some were army veterans who had served in the units commanded by Żeligowski. They perceived him as their natural leader, sought his help and advice and formed several veteran organisations that supported him.[40] The incorporation of Vilna into Poland proved to be bad for the city and its region, wrote Żeligowski in 1933. "Local people are gradually being removed and replaced with Austrians and *Koroniarze* (people from the former Kingdom of Poland); Vilna is losing its character."[41]

Slowly, Żeligowski, the military figure, was transformed into Żeligowski, the politician. He had had political ambitions before. In 1918 and 1919, he had been enthusiastic about the newly regained independence and democracy and hoped that he

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[38] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 67 (Notatnik 28 VIII-16 IX 1937), 21; file 68, 20.

[39] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 80 (Działalność w wileńskiej Izbie Rolniczej, 1933-1936), 7, 10, 56; file 67 (Notatnik 28 VIII-16 IX 1937), 21; Fabisz, *Generał*, 231; Lucjan Żeligowski, *Myśli żołnierza-rolnika o naszem gospodarstwie* (Wilno: Skład Główny u Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1932), 4.

[40] *Głos Kaniowczyków i Żeligowczyków* 1, no. 1 (1933): 2-3; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 71 (Prośby o pracę i poparcie, 1921-1934), 7.

[41] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 55 (Notatki 15 XII 1933), 8.

would one day be a member of the *Sejm*. However, he lost his favourable disposition towards Parliament. During his time as Minister of Military Affairs, he could follow Warsaw's parliamentary life closely. He became even more disillusioned with politics after 1926. He was increasingly critical of Piłsudski. In 1927, after the General's retirement, some politicians from the *Kresy* suggested that he should seek a seat in the *Sejm*. He rejected this idea at that time, and in 1931, when MPs Tadeusz Hołówko and Władysław Raczkiewicz asked him to put forth his candidacy, Żeligowski had an aversion to the Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (*Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem – BBWR*) and did not want to participate in it, as Hołówko and Raczkiewicz had suggested.[42]

In September 1935, after the death of Piłsudski, Żeligowski ran for Parliament and was elected to the *Sejm* as a deputy for the Vilna region. He defeated General Stanisław Skwarczyński, later the Chief of the authoritarian Camp of National Unity (*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego – OZN*). Żeligowski opposed the *Sanacja* regime and claimed, as many did, that it had no programme. Furthermore, OZN was, for him, an unfortunate imitation of "Hitlerism" and the leader's cult.[43] Poland had a great idea – independence. After its realisation, Poland should have concentrated on the concept of social justice, he wrote in 1936.[44]

He particularly detested the last two Prime Ministers of inter-war Poland, Marian Zyndram-Kościałkowski and Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski. Żeligowski was also in a personal conflict with the governor (*wojewoda*) of the Vilna province, Ludwik Bociański, who was especially tough on ethnic Lithuanians in Poland and wanted to seal the Polish-Lithuanian border completely.[45] Żeligowski dubbed Edward Rydz-Śmigły "our Hitler" and found him grotesque in his new role as Poland's leader. The general held that "the masses" ought to play a greater role in politics and government. In the late 1930s, in his private notes, Żeligowski began to write about social justice and Poland's special role in establishing it. In 1937, again in his private notes, the name People's Poland (*Polska Ludowa*) appeared for the first time as a name for a future Polish state, which, according to Żeligowski, should be a "peasant state". Poland had always been ruled by the elites, and "popular masses" (*masy ludowe*) were pushed to the margins. "The contemporary civilisation barely touched our village," wrote the General in 1936.[46]

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[42] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 55, 14; file 81 (Działalność poselska 1935-1937), 9; file 71, 7; file 66 (Notatnik 4-10 III 1937), 53-54.

[43] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 66, 1-2.

[44] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 64 (Notatnik 14 IX-22 XI 1936), 11.

[45] Piotr Łossowski, *Po tej i tamtej stronie Niemna. Stosunki polsko-litewskie 1883-1939* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1985), 270; Fabisz, *Generał*, 233; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 67, 19.

[46] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 62 (Notatnik 3 VI-9 VII 1936, 9-16 IX 1937), 17.

It was so after 1926 as well – the General continued – Poland was ruled by "Colonels, Kikes and landlords" (*pułkownicy, żydki i ziemianie*).[47] As early as 1932, he wrote about the end of the capitalist system and criticised Poland for its blind imitation of Western European political and economic systems. Consequently, he believed Poland was in catastrophic economic shape.[48] A phrase appears throughout his 1930s notes: "The idea of capitalism is crumbling. Step by step, the world's nations liberate themselves from this gigantic falsehood, which ruled the world so egotistically."[49] To change the unfortunate situation in Poland, Żeligowski organised and headed the Agrarian Caucus in the *Sejm*, believing that Poland could succeed only as a peasant state, and tried to start a Polish agrarian movement, but he was sceptical about his efforts. The Caucus had 72 members, but there were no true peasants among them, claimed Żeligowski, who complained about the government's lack of strategy related to Polish agriculture, which badly needed land reform. He blamed Piłsudski for leaning on the landowners after 1926.[50]

In the late 1930s, Żeligowski concluded that Poland had wasted her chance to integrate and develop the North-Eastern Territories. He believed such a chance existed in 1919 and 1920 when many people in the Borderlands, especially the Belarusians, had a positive attitude towards Poland. Unfortunately, the General believed the Poles did not understand the problems of the region, did not work hard enough and failed to convince even those who had little or no national consciousness and who often considered themselves "local people" (*tutejsi*) that there was value in becoming Polish. We have wasted 17 years in the Vilna region, wrote Żeligowski; there was no creative work in agriculture and the countryside. Only bureaucracy was growing; local people from Vilna were eliminated and replaced by Poles, and the Polonisation of Vilna advanced. He believed that local self-government should develop a new strategy and – if necessary – resist central government policies towards the North-Eastern Territories. In the *Sejm* and in his publications and interviews, he returned to the Panslavic idea. Poland could be great only if it were based on this idea. Without it, Poland would be a small state, encompassing only the ethnic Polish territories.[51]

He combined these ideas with a negative attitude towards Jews and believed that, eventually, they would have to leave Poland. It had two historical missions, Żeligowski wrote in 1937: "1) to make social justice a reality; 2) to unite Slavs." "None of this can be done as long as Poland is not free of Jews because both are unnecessary

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[47] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 67, 17.

[48] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 58 (Notatnik 17 I 1934), 15.

[49] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 58, 15.

[50] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 58, 15; file 59 (Notatki 1935), 14; file 63 (Notatnik 27 IX 1936-25 II 1937), 61; file 67, 8-64; file 81, 4-9; file 82 (Notatnik dotyczący działalności poselskiej 8 XII 1935-11 XII 1936), 4; Żeligowski, *Myśli*.

[51] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 55, 8; file 64, 10; file 66, 1-36; Lucjan Żeligowski, "O gospodarce samorządowej Gromad i Gmin powiatu wileńsko-trockiego," *Kurier Wileński* 2 (1937).

and harmful to Jews." Hostile antisemitic comments appeared in Żeligowski's notes particularly frequently in the late 1930s. Later, in London, he concluded that the formation of a Jewish army and a Jewish state would be the only solution to the "Jewish question".[52]

In 1939, Żeligowski was 74 years old. Nevertheless, he volunteered for the Polish Army to fight against the Germans, but the Polish command rejected him. In early September 1939, he left Warsaw and stopped in Lviv, where he proposed seeking an agreement with Moscow. He hoped that the Soviet Union would stand at the forefront of the Slavic nations as a new great Slavic power, which sooner or later would turn against Germany, leading to the emergence of a new Slavic Poland. During the first days after the Soviet aggression of 17 September, he believed that the Red Army acted in a friendly manner. He even contemplated going to the Soviets to discuss a Soviet protectorate over Poland. Eventually, on 19 September, he left Poland for Romania, bitter and disappointed, convinced that the Piłsudski regime had led Poland to catastrophe.[53]

In Romania, Żeligowski still considered returning to occupied Poland and negotiating with the Soviets. He was shocked that Slavic Russia was cooperating with Germany against other Slavic nations.[54] On 15 October 1939, he left for Paris. On his way, he contemplated his priorities in the West: 1) to issue an appeal to the Poles, concluding with the phrase "Long live Slavic People's Poland"; 2) to build a Slavic Institute; 3) to unite Polish and Czech military units into a Slavic army.[55]

In Paris, Żeligowski was offered the position of Minister without portfolio in the Government-in-Exile, the chairmanship of a Military Vetting Committee (*Trybunał Orzekający*) and reinstatement in active military service. He refused as he felt uncomfortable among the émigré politicians and wanted to concentrate on his Slavic plans. He started writing a brochure on the Slavic idea and established contacts with Russian emigrants. In January 1940, the President of Poland appointed Żeligowski to the National Council (*Rada Narodowa*) – a Polish semi-parliament-in-exile. This time, the General agreed. He was among the émigrés who had postulated its formation. He joined several Council committees, delivered numerous speeches and was hyperactive. After the fall of France, he escaped to London and continued his activities.[56]

Żeligowski also devoted much time to studies on Panslavic ideology. He believed that the solidarity of the Slavic nations would help establish new stability in Eastern Europe and that the lost war of 1939 would push Poland towards this scenario.[57] The

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[52] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 67, 8-9, 49-55; Fabisz, *Generał*, 319.

[53] Fabisz, *Generał*, 265-273; Fabisz, ed. *Pamiętniki generała*, 225-229.

[54] Fabisz, *Generał*, 274-280; Fabisz, ed. *Pamiętniki generała*, 234.

[55] Fabisz, ed. *Pamiętniki generała*, 249.

[56] Fabisz, *Generał*, 292-309.

[57] *Ibid.*, 269.

General met the Slavophiles in the 19th century during his service in the Russian Army and followed their discussions with the so-called "Westerners" (*Zapadniki*). He agreed with the Slavophiles, began to study Medieval Russian and Slavic history and read Russian primary sources and Polish historians, such as Lelewel and Szajnocha. In 1910, Żeligowski published his first Slavophile article in a Yelizavetgrad newspaper, *Golos Yuga*. The article opposed the simple Russification of Slavic nations, supported the idea of a new common Slavic culture and referred to the Russian masses, absorbing smaller nations, as a swamp. This comparison had consequences: Żeligowski was forbidden to publish anything further.[58]

The General eagerly pursued his Slavic studies throughout the interwar period and contributed articles on his favourite subject to *Słowo Wileńskie* (Vilna's Word) and *Dziennik Wileński* (The Vilna Daily). He also propagated pro-Slavic slogans in the *Sejm*. However, the ruling Piłsudskiite elite did not share his interests. Józef Beck, the Foreign Minister, told Żeligowski several times: "The Marshal never used the name *Slavic people.*" Żeligowski also claimed that the deputy minister, Jan Szembek, was openly hostile towards the Czechs. Żeligowski had mixed thoughts about Poland's participation in the partition of Czechoslovakia and the incorporation of the Cieszyn region in October 1938. He was happy that the region "returned" to Poland. However, it was done in a "non-knightly and non-Slavic way", and the Poles helped the Germans against other Slavs, Żeligowski wrote with horror.[59]

In September 1939, Żeligowski proposed that the Slavs unite in solidarity against the Teutonic invasion. Although the Polish government rejected the idea, Żeligowski was not discouraged. When he reached Paris, he continued his Panslavic activities. He regarded it as a tragic consequence of German cunning policies that Poles, Russians and Czechs fought against each other. He added that Poland also did not have a policy toward Belarus, and the Lithuanians had sworn revenge and were waiting.[60] He believed that it was the perfect moment for Poland to assume the role of leader of the Slavic nations and that soon it might be too late. The General organised several public presentations on this subject and tried to gain the support of Władysław Sikorski, Kazimierz Sosnkowski and other important Polish politicians in exile. Most of them disregarded Żeligowski's ideas. Some were irritated by or laughed at Żeligowski and suggested that his advanced age was responsible for his Slavic theories.[61]

In 1940, the General wrote a small book entitled *Idea Słowiańska* (The Slavic Idea) and published it in 1941. A year later, he issued another book, *Zapomniane prawdy* (Forgotten Truths), promoting the Panslavic vision. In March 1940, together

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[58] Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Moje etapy myśli słowiańskiej*, an unpublished essay, 1944, *passim*.

[59] Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Moje etapy*, *passim*; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 84 (Rozważania i notatki 1936-1938), 1.

[60] AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 84, 1-4.

[61] Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Moje etapy*, *passim*; Fabisz, *Generał*, 310.

with Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz and Tytus Filipowicz, he officially applied to the Government-in-Exile to organise a Slavic Institute. The concept of a Slavic Institute had already appeared in his mind while in Romania, even though the General planned to establish it in Paris. He also supported a plan to create a Polish chair at one of the top British universities.[62] In 1940, the Polish authorities in exile considered negotiating with a Lithuanian representation in exile. The General opposed the idea of an agreement with the Kaunas Lithuanians and argued it would be treason towards Vilna and Polish Lithuania. Poland should ally not with the Republic of Lithuania but with a Jagiellonian Slavic Lithuania, emphasised Żeligowski.[63]

In July 1941, he reacted very positively to the signing of the Polish-Soviet treaty. He believed the agreement with Moscow was more important than that with London. We have a clear attitude towards the West, but our views on the East are vague, he argued.[64] In February 1941, the Government-in-Exile granted Żeligowski a subsidy of 600 GBP to support his "Slavic action" but simultaneously requested that he pursue this initiative in secret.[65] In 1943, after the Soviet Union discontinued diplomatic relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile, the Soviet ambassador, Alexander Bogomolov, started looking for contacts with Polish politicians in London. He knew about Żeligowski's Slavic *idée fixe*.

The General became one of the liaisons between Moscow and the Poles and demanded the re-establishment of Polish-Soviet relations, even at the cost of losing the Eastern Borderlands. Moscow used his statements to organise its Slav Committee, the British press published hostile articles about the General, and the American secret services began watching him.[66]

In 1943, when Polish Soviet-controlled military and political organisations were formed in the Soviet Union, Żeligowski demanded to establish contacts with their leaders. In March 1944, he issued an appeal to the people in Poland to welcome and support the Red Army. When the General contacted the Polish pro-Soviet groups in England, the secret services of the Government-in-Exile intensified operations against him, and some members of the National Council demanded that he be removed from this body. In May 1944, Żeligowski sent a congratulatory letter to General Zygmunt Berling, the Commander of the Polish Army in the Soviet Union, and

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[62] Żeligowski Family Archive, Żeligowski, *Letters to the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army of March 4 and 8, 1940*; Fabisz, *Generał*, 285, 310.

[63] *Ibid.*; Sikorski Institute, London, Rada Narodowa (National Council) Collection, A. 5, 1/9 (Session of April 2, 1940), 59.

[64] Fabisz, *Generał*, 320.

[65] Marian Zgórniak, ed. *Protokoły z posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, vol. 2 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo "Secesja", 1995), 265.

[66] Fabisz, *Generał*, 324; The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, MR103 Sec. 1 (Personnel Records – July – November 1944), Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch R & A, 2199 (General Zeligowski, A Polish Advocate of Pan-Slavism, August 4, 1944), 1-9.

soon received a response, followed by a letter from the Soviet Ambassador in London. Polish Communists and their Soviet supervisors hoped that the General would help them legitimise their power and developed contacts with him. Żeligowski also cultivated relationships with the Czechs and met Edvard Beneš.[67]

In 1945, Żeligowski called upon the Polish soldiers in the West to return to Poland. In 1946, he decided to return to Soviet-controlled Poland and asked Polish people to vote for the Communists and their allies during the 1947 sham elections. The Polish communist authorities hastily rebuilt the Żeligowski family villa in Warsaw's Żoliborz, hoping the General would be a useful political asset. The plan did not work. On 9 July 1947, the General died in London.[68]

Lucjan Żeligowski had two fatherlands: Lithuania and Poland. Lithuania was his "closer" fatherland; the Germans would call it *Heimat*. Poland was his larger fatherland; in German vocabulary, *Vaterland*. He used the term "*ściślejsza ojczyzna Litwa*" (closer fatherland Litwa).[69] In the 20th century, Lithuania and Poland underwent dramatic changes. Frequently, Żeligowski's loyalties to Poland and Lithuania were no longer compatible. Lithuania had changed completely. Poland was unable to rebuild ties with it, did not manage to integrate the North-Eastern Borderlands successfully and was devastated by Germany and the Soviet Union. Facing all these changes, Żeligowski searched for a solution to place his native Lithuania and Poland in a new, safe context, a solution that would make his loyalties to both his fatherlands compatible again. Millions of Polish Lithuanians shared his predicament and lost their sense of belonging.

Eventually, Żeligowski realised that reestablishing anything resembling the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was impossible. He lost his *Heimat* and desperately sought a new identity. The Slavic idea was meant to cure his identity crisis. Poland had a chance, he believed, to be in the avant-garde of the Slavic nations. Instead, it chose to be at the tail of the West. He combined his semi-racist and bizarre geopolitical opinions with a search for social justice. Millions of Poles had similar identity problems and sought a new worldview.

Żeligowski had enormous stamina and tried to achieve his goals in many ways. Yet, like many of his fellow Poles from the East, he failed – overwhelmed by historical events. The East European Atlantis (or Polish *Kresy* or Borderlands) disappeared forever.

[67] Fabisz, *Generał*, 326-32; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 96 (Korespondencja z lat 1944-1947), 1-5.

[68] Tadeusz Kryska-Karski and Stanisław Żurakowski, *Generałowie Polski niepodległej* (Warszawa: Editions Spotkania, 1991), 27; AAN, Żeligowski Collection, file 96, 2-8; Fabisz, *Generał*, 332-36.

[69] Fabisz, ed. *Pamiętniki generała*, 40.

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