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THE FEDERAL IDEA IN POLAND IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD: IDEALISM OR PRAGMATISM?

ABSTRACT

The final months of World War I were marked by the concept of national self-determination. At that time Józef Piłsudski and his followers were putting into practice the so-called federal idea, which aimed at the maintaining of Polish influence in the territories of the pre-partition Poland. However, attempts to put this concept into practice faced national aspirations of Lithuanians and Ukrainians. These two nations intended to build their own states. Despite spectacular victory of the Polish army over the Red Army at Warsaw, the federal idea failed. The final end to the project came in 1921. The article presents a wider historical and political context for the foreign policy visions of Piłsudski and his aspiration to create a federal structure within the Polish borders.

Key words: Józef Piłsudski, federal idea, the Second Republic of Poland

The First World War, which began in August 1914, seemed to be a fulfilment of the prayers of Adam Mickiewicz for 'a great universal war for the freedom of peoples'. Generations of Poles had waited for it. The armed pan-European conflict destroyed multinational empires. From then on nations had the right to 'self-determination'.¹ At the

¹ M. Czerwiński, "Była Jugosławia – topografia pamięci zbiorowej", *Herito*, no. 13 (2013), pp. 49-50. The principle of self-determination is one of the most famous norms of international law. Its roots originated in the seventeenth century, but its legal nature was established in the twentieth century. The right to the 'self-determination' as a political rule appeared at the end of the First World War. The creation of national states after disintegration of Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire was supported by the principle of self-determination in the UN Charter of 1945. Cf. W. Czapliński, A. Wyrozumski, *Prawo międzynarodowe publiczne*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 140-143; L. Dembiński, *Samostanowienie w prawie i praktyce ONZ*, Warszawa 1969; M. Perkowski, *Samostanowienie narodów w prawie międzynarodowym*, Warszawa 2001.

same time, the international system faltered. As a result, Poland regained its independence. The struggle for freedom of five generations was finally successful.² Central and Eastern Europe found itself in a unique situation, especially after the Treaty of Brest (3 March 1918), when many previously unknown actors had appeared. One could describe the situation as *bellum omnium contra omnes*.³

Even before the October Revolution the Bolsheviks were in favour of the 'idea of self-determination'. To this end, on 7 November 1917, the Second Congress of Soviets gave *all the nations inhabiting Russia a real right to self-determination*.⁴ It was stipulated that economic interdependence would prevent the separation of lands in the long run. The rights of the proletariat were placed above the right to 'national self-determination'.⁵

The cease-fire in November 1918 gave the Bolsheviks the opportunity to apply a 'two-tracked policy' towards Central and Eastern Europe which was in a socio-economic crisis. On the one hand, the nations which lived in Tsarist Russia were granted the right to self-determination. At the same time, armed forces were dispatched to overthrow the national authorities.

Józef Piłsudski closely observed the changes taking place in the East. Leon Wasilewski stated that: *the Commander assessed the outbreak of the revolution in Russia as an extraordinary moment and a turning point in our entire policy. Russia, the most imposing force in our political calculations, our greatest enemy – was removed from the battlefield for an extended period of time. During this period Russia posed no immediate threat and all energy had to be directed against the two other occupants*.⁶

THE PRINCIPLES AND GOALS OF THE TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Western, northern and southern borders of the Second Republic of Poland were to be determined as a result of the decisions of the victorious powers. In the east doors *open and close and it depends who forces them open and to what extent*.⁷ The area beyond the

² Cf. J. Pajewski, *Budowa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918-1926*, Kraków 1995, p. 20.

³ See R. Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, transl. by W. Jeżewski, Warszawa 2005, pp. 54-175.

⁴ Quotation from: M. Tanty, *Revolucja rosyjska a sprawa polska 1917-1918*, Warszawa 1987, p. 161.

⁵ For more on the formation of the Bolsheviks' ethnic policy, see R. Wraga, *Sowiecka doktryna w sprawach narodowościowych*, Londyn 1949, pp. 1-20.

⁶ L. Wasilewski, *Józef Piłsudski jakim Go znałem*, Warszawa 1935, pp. 148-149.

⁷ Józef Piłsudski repeatedly stated that Poland's task is in the East. It is only there that the Polish Republic can become an influential factor. Cf. K. Świtalski, *Diariusz 1919-1935*, A. Garlicki, R. Świętek (eds.), Warszawa 1992, p. 608 (record from 29 April 1931).

rivers Bug and San was enveloped in revolutionary turmoil and the Polish Army was to play an important role in shaping its future.⁸

Apart from Poles, the disputed lands between Poland and Russia were inhabited by Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, shaping their identity at that time.⁹ For many years Polishness had considerable assimilation possibilities, to which the upper classes of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine succumbed. This factor was also thought to be the reason for the reconciliation of the broad masses inhabiting these lands. As a result, two schools of thought were born before the First World War.¹⁰

The first school, represented by the National Democracy, assumed that Polish security in the East ought to be based on correct, if not friendly, relations with Russia, built at the expense of countries and nations located between the Polish Republic and the Russian state. A realistic program without ambitions to change the current balance of power in the world was formulated based on this paradigm. The main impulse behind this form of foreign policy was national egoism.¹¹

The second school of thought was created in the circles of Józef Piłsudski's collaborators (such as Leon Wasilewski and Tadeusz Hołowko). Its advocates, considered part of the Romantic-Jagiellonian ideological current,¹² were in favour of basing the security of the state on relations with Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. They sought to provide support for the independence aspirations of the nations inhabiting the territories of the

⁸ In 1923 Piłsudski stated that the reason behind his failure to reconstruct Eastern Europe was the attitude of the Western powers: *the whole world was of the opinion that all of Poland's claims to the lands beyond the river Bug were a form of aggression, that these lands were claimed for Russian purposes. The 100 years of slavery we have endured have left their mark not only on us, but also on the masters of the whole world.* Quotation from: A. Nowak, *Ofiary, imperia i historycy. Studium przypadków (od XVIII do XXI wieku)*, Kraków 2009, p. 104.

⁹ The biggest difficulty was how to define ethnographic borders of the west peripheries of the Russian Empire. A population census (1897) showed that five Belarusian districts (Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, Vilnius, Vitebsk) were inhabited by almost 6.5 million people of which 62.7% were Belarusians, 14%, were Jewish, 12.9% were Polish, 4.4% were Ukrainians, 3.5% were Russians and 2.5% other nations. The census results should be treated very carefully. It is especially difficult to define the ethnic composition of the Ukrainian territory which partly belonged to Russia and partly to Austro-Hungary. Ukrainians represented 72.2% among 23.4 million of inhabitants on the Ukrainian territory under the Russian rule, 10.7% were Russian, 8.1% were Jewish and 3.1% were Polish. Along the lines Przemyśl-Lviv-Tarnopol dominated ethnically mixed areas. Poles were outnumbering in towns, including Lviv while ethnic Ukrainians inhabited mostly rural areas. Cf. P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami. Przemiany narodowościowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 148-154.

¹⁰ J. Pajewski, *Budowa...*, p. 22.

¹¹ K. Kawalec, *Roman Dmowski 1864-1939*, Wrocław 2002, p. 168.

¹² It is generally believed that interest in the East is related to the founding of the Jagiellonian dynasty (hence the 'Jagiellonian idea'). The monumental event was the marriage between Jadwiga of Anjou and Władysław Jagiełło on 18 February 1386. An equally important event was the signing of the act of the Union of Lublin on 1 July 1569 by the representatives of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The newly created political entity under the name of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth entered the political scene, attempting to secure hegemony in Eastern Europe. Polish interest in the East dates back to this period, the 15th-16th centuries. P. Jasienica, *Polska Piastów*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 275-276.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as the areas farther to the east, such as the Caucasus region. This paradigm referred directly to the concept of a noble nation and the sense of mission which guides it.¹³

In the ideology inspired by the concepts of Piłsudski the vision of the First Polish Republic occupied an important place. Referring back to this fragment of history corresponded with its main objective, which was to reorganise Central and Eastern Europe into a block of federated states occupying the area between the powerful and imposing states of Germany and Russia.¹⁴ The first attempts to achieve these goals date back to the war between Russia and Japan, the Polish Socialist Party, one of whose leading activists was Piłsudski, tried to raise awareness of the Polish issue in Japan.¹⁵ When talks began with representatives of Japanese intelligence and diplomacy, the socialists already had a nationalistic program with regard to Tsarist Russia. In the opinion of Michał Sokolnicki references to old ideals of the Republic of Poland can be found in this idea.¹⁶

From 1921 onwards the Promethean idea, understood as support for centrifugal movements in the Soviet state, began to function as part of the Jagiellonian-Romantic ideological current.¹⁷ Józef Piłsudski saw the opportunity to *break the former Tsarist Empire into its constituent parts, to push Russia further to the east and separate it with the chain of countries connected to Poland with federal ties or close alliances*. In contrast, his adversary – Roman Dmowski – sought to limit Russia to an extent that would ensure the preservation of the *one and undivided Russia* as an ally against Germany.¹⁸

¹³ M.J. Calka, "Polska polityka wschodnia w latach 1989-1997. Próba oceny, nowe wyzwania i perspektywy", *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* (1998), p. 36; F. Memches, "Postkolonialny rasizm naszych elit", *Pressje*, vol. 20-22 (2010), p. 87.

¹⁴ O. Grott, *Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych i Komisja Naukowych Badań Ziem Wschodnich w planowaniu polityki II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na Kresach Wschodnich*, Kraków 2013, pp. 18-19. For more on the similarities of the federation program to the situation in the First Polish Republic, see J. Starzewski, "Piłsudski w Polsce niepodległej", *Niepodległość*, vol. 7 (1962), p. 174.

¹⁵ As a member of the Polish Socialist Party, Piłsudski expressed in article written in 1893 readiness to cooperate with Tsarist opponents under condition that they recognize independence of Poland as well as the leading role of the Polish Socialist Party on the territory where it operated. This was to legitimize the Polish right to Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian territories. The Polish Socialist Party stood for the principle of self-determination on the area of the Tsarist Empire during the First World War. Wacław Mejbaum claimed: *many of us supported the federal idea between Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. It is possible that such a goal was too optimistic*. See E. Koko, *W nadziei na zgodę. Polski ruch socjalistyczny wobec kwestii narodowościowej w Polsce (1918-1939)*, Gdańsk 1995, pp. 17-40.

¹⁶ M. Sokolnicki, "Józef Piłsudski a zagadnienie Rosji", *Niepodległość*, vol. 2 (1950), p. 58.

¹⁷ The federal idea and the the Promethean idea were explained by Piłsudski in his letter to Leon Wasilewski in November 1899. He recommended that his adherer should focus attention only on those nations, which could be the closest allies of Poland: the Balts, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Finns. It was evident for Piłsudski that *the initiation of the awaking movement of nations in the Russian Empire was a role for Poles*. Cf. L. Wasilewski, *Józef Piłsudski...*, pp. 38-39, 44-45; M. Sokolnicki, "Józef Piłsudski...", p. 57.

¹⁸ J. Krasuski, *Tragiczna niepodległość. Polityka zagraniczna Polski w latach 1919-1945*, Poznań 2000, pp. 39-40.

At the basis of Piłsudski's federalist concept was the conviction that the dominance of only one nation leads to a state of insoluble crisis. He considered federalism and democracy a solution to this problem.¹⁹ It should be emphasised that in his concept Poland was to become only a factor stabilising this part of Europe. To Piłsudski the federal program was a means of ensuring security towards the east not only for Poland, but also Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine – this was the most dangerous direction since Russia – no matter if 'white' or 'red' – was a threat to all of these countries. In this respect Piłsudski's concept was similar to the plans of Dmowski. Both of them wanted to push Russia as far as possible to the east (to ethnic areas) in order to weaken the country as much as possible.²⁰

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLE OR THE REASON OF STATE

Józef Piłsudski believed that Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine would seek support from Poland. One of his closest collaborators, Leon Wasilewski, a few months before taking over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (November 1918), published his program regarding the establishment of eastern borders in an article entitled "Granice państwa polskiego na wschodzie"²¹ (Borders of the Polish State in the East).

In this article he confronted the programs of rebuilding the state with the political reality at the time. He believed it necessary to introduce programs which would take in to account the ethnographic principle. The implementation of a strict border in accordance with this principle was not a possibility due to the degree of national blending, especially between the Polish and Belarusian areas. This is why it was necessary to fight for such borders which would correspond to the vital interests – national, economic and political, with the inclusion of a small number of national minorities, in order not to destabilise the state. According to Leon Wasilewski relations with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine were crucial for the creation of a common front to fight against Russia.²²

In view of such circumstances, a federal coalition between the independent states of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus seemed the most advantageous solution. Such relations

¹⁹ L. Moczulski, *Geopolityka. Potęga w czasie i przestrzeni*, Warszawa 1999, p. 561.

²⁰ P. Bartosiewicz, "Polskie koncepcje geopolityczne w XX wieku", in W. Paruch, K. Trembicka (eds.), *Świat wokół Rzeczypospolitej. Problematyka zagraniczna w polskiej myśli politycznej w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Lublin 2007, p. 40.

²¹ A month before he became minister (on October 4), a memorandum edited by the Party of Polish Democratic Politics (Stronnictwo Polskiej Polityki Demokratycznej), which supported Piłsudski, was published. This document was the first comprehensive act in this case. Polish authorities should claim the Eastern territories by use of *fait accompli*. The purpose of the peace conference was only to confirm this state of affairs. It was recommended to normalise relations with Germany and to promote the separation of subjugated nations from Russia. The optimal solution would be to *rebuild the old historical Poland on the basis of modern federalism*. Cf. W. Materski, *Na widzenie. II Rzeczpospolita wobec Sowietów 1918-1943*, Warszawa 2005, p. 26.

²² L. Wasilewski, "Granice państwa polskiego na wschodzie", *Kultura Polski*, no. 6 (1918) [repr. in: idem, *Drugi porozumienia. Wybór pism*, B. Stoczewska (ed.), Kraków 2001, pp. 83-86].

would result in the opportunity to apply the principle of less rigorous ethnographic separation. This liberal rule could not be applied in the case of complete separation between Poland and Lithuania. In such a situation it would be necessary to demand the unconditional separation of Vilnius and mixed border areas from the Lithuanian state.²³ Similarly, in the case of Belarus, areas in which the population claimed to be Polish, strived to be part of this culture and demanded Polish schools would have to be joined with Poland.²⁴ If this were to happen Wasilewski believed that the border should run *along the line where the Catholic element meets the Orthodox Church, from the Polish Inflanty to the Pinsk area*.²⁵ In order to ensure the permanence of the union it would perhaps be necessary to leave a part of the Polish population outside the borders of the Polish Republic.

A PRAGMATIC EASTERN POLICY

Piłsudski and his subordinates began to dominate Polish Eastern policy and set its goals in the period between 1918 and 1921. The Chief of State seemed the right person for this task. He was a well-known, though controversial, figure in renascent Poland. His life experience predestined him to act as a banner and become the symbol of Polish statehood.²⁶ Especially since Piłsudski came from the eastern borderland and was sensitive to issues of nationality.²⁷

As a result, the creator of the Legions paid particular attention to the Bolshevik threat, more dangerous to him than Tsarist Russia. Józef Piłsudski justified this view by stating that the Bolsheviks offer poverty instead of prosperity and terror instead of peace, and, at the same time, can seek justification for their failures in their accusations aimed at external enemies, thereby unloading internal tensions and directing the hos-

²³ B. Stoczeńska, *Litwa, Białoruś, Ukraina w myśli politycznej Leona Wasilewskiego*, Kraków 2009, pp. 127, 212.

²⁴ At the end of 1918 the Polish army entered Belarusian territory. In opinion of British diplomats Poles were applying a double standard. On the one hand they supported the creation of independent Belarus, on the other hand, they wanted the Vilnius Region and the Grodno Region to be part of reborn Poland. The Polish army and administration were responsible for the loss of support among Belarusians. E. Mironowicz, *Białoruś*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 53-54.

²⁵ L. Wasilewski, "Granice...", p. 86. Due to the absence of support the idea could not be realised, especially after the "Declaration of Independence" issued by the Belarusian People's Republic on 25 January 1918. The creation of a Lithuanian-Belarusian state with close ties to the independent Courland was postulated in this document. There was no mention of a federation with Poland. B. Stoczeńska, *Litwa, Białoruś, Ukraina...*, p. 212.

²⁶ J. Faryś, "Rola Józefa Piłsudskiego w II Rzeczypospolitej", in J. Faryś, T. Sikorski (eds.), *Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935). Polityk – wódz – mąż stanu*, Szczecin 2006, p. 7.

²⁷ J. Cisek, "Piłsudski's Federalism, 1918-1921", in J.S. Micgiel (ed.), *Wilsonian East Central Europe. Current Perspectives*, New York 1995, p. 42.

tility within society against other countries.²⁸ Such were the foundations of the federal concept, clearly referring back to the ideals of the First Polish Republic.

The first time the Chief of State attempted to put his plans into practice was after the entry of the Polish army into Vilnius in 1919.²⁹ This was the time of undeclared war between Poland and Russia, the symbolic beginning of which was the meeting of Polish and Bolshevik troops at Bereza Kartuska in Polesie, on 14 February 1919.³⁰ Three days after the liberation of Vilnius (on 22 April) Piłsudski issued an appeal to the citizens of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania (“Odezwa do mieszkańców byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego”³¹), promising the inhabitants of these lands the freedom to decide their fate.³² The appeal was a deliberate political action. It was based around the then-influential notion of ‘self-determination of nations’. However, the response of the local population to the appeal was less than enthusiastic.

In letter to Leon Wasilewski from 8 April 1919 Józef Piłsudski justifies his actions in the following manner: *I do not intend to be an imperialist or a federalist until, he emphasises, I can comment on such issues with some degree of seriousness – and a revolver in my pocket.* The revolver was an army ready to strike and since, he concludes, *God’s world appears to be overcome with talk of American doctrines and the brotherhood of people and nations, it is with great pleasure that I lean towards the federalists’ side.*³³

²⁸ See P. Waingertner, “‘Czerwona Rosja’ w oczach Józefa Piłsudskiego. Z polskich interpretacji rosyjskiego komunizmu”, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 154 (2005), p. 211.

²⁹ Sergiusz Mikulicz suggests that upon entering Vilnius in 1919, let alone for the second time (‘Żeligowski’s mutiny’), Józef Piłsudski was aware of the failure of his federal plans in the context of Lithuania. According to the Chief of State, he took this city for sentimental reasons or because of the conviction that Lithuania would not agree to the federation. In the second case, the differences between Piłsudski and the Endecja (National Democracy movement) were only external. Cf. S. Mikulicz, *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 37–38.

³⁰ C. Brzoza, *Polska w czasach niepodległości i II wojny światowej (1918–1945)*, Kraków 2001, p. 27.

³¹ For the full text of the appeal, see A. Garlicki, *Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej początki*, Wrocław 1998, pp. 213–214.

³² See P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja ‘międzymorza’ w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918–1926*, Poznań 2001, pp. 34–38. It is worth mentioning that in the years 1918–1921 Piłsudski believed that *for many reasons Lithuania is a continuation of Poland*. By this he meant that *a large percentage of Poles, Polish spoken in its cities, a great influence of Polish culture*. Being an insightful observer, Piłsudski took notice of the awakening national movement. In a journal entry from 13 July 1904 he recognises the Lithuanians as a nation unprepared for complete independence in their own sovereign state. At the end of 1918, Piłsudski’s approach to the matter had changed. On 18 December 1918, he declared to the delegation of Lithuanians residing in Poland which had arrived in Belvedere that he was ‘a friend to the Lithuanians’. His support was dependent on *Lithuania limiting its claims to ethnographic Lithuania, because historical Lithuania is in possession of undisputably Polish territories*. He believed that it was in the interest of Lithuania to seek a settlement by way of a peaceful agreement with Poland. See J. Piłsudski, “Odpowiedź dana delegacji Litwinów zamieszkałych w Polsce”, 18 December 1918, in idem, *Pisma zbiorowe. Wydanie prac dotyczących drukiem ogłoszonych*, vol. 5, Warszawa 1937, p. 42; T. Katelbach, “Rola Piłsudskiego w sprawie polsko-litewskiej”, *Niepodległość*, vol. 1 (1948), pp. 103–104.

³³ Quotation from: J. Piłsudski, *Pisma zbiorowe...*, vol. 5, p. 286. A review of historians’ assessments of the postulates and consequences of Piłsudski’s federal policy in: A. Nowak, *Od imperium do imperium*.

Janusz Cisek compares the Chief of State to the American president. Both supported the ongoing process of national self-determination, but the methods they used were different. Woodrow Wilson was in favour of a mandate system overseen by the League of Nations, whereas Józef Piłsudski preferred the temporary protection of the Polish state. Unlike the American president, the Chief of State had the military capabilities to support his views and did not believe in the effectiveness of Western protection.³⁴ Piłsudski's pragmatism is also visible in the fact that, being aware of the serious obstacles on the way to the realisation of the federalist concept, he was ready to accept the incorporation concept *unless other possibilities emerge*.³⁵

As stated by Andrzej Garlicki: *As a result of his belief in the strength of national centrifugal movements in the Soviet state the Polish leader perceived them as potential and natural allies of Poland*.³⁶ The pragmatic choice of means of action and the flexibility of Piłsudski's strategy had a fundamental goal, already established in 1918, to *as far away as possible from places where new life was forged, overthrow all attempts to once again impose on us a life externally-governed, a life over which we do not ourselves rule*.³⁷

The essence of the geopolitical 'revolution' which was carried out is best reflected in the vision of 'Imperium Wschodnie – Polskie Imperium Dominiów' (The Eastern Empire – the Polish Empire of Dominions). This is how Michał Romer presented Piłsudski's project in *Dziennik: wiosna 1919* (the Journal: spring 1919). An empire joining the lands of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus – in the form of a federation, a close alliance or other close strategic union – was to become an alternative to Russian domination over Eastern Europe.³⁸ It was an attempt to create a new constellation in the east of Europe in response to the weakened position of Russia. The Marshal rightly stated that the 'time of troubles' in the country would not be a long-term problem and the Russian state would consolidate internally. He was also certain the 'red' Russia would win, which would mark a return to traditional imperialism. He expected that in such a situation the cooperation of nations within Tsarist Russia, and aspiring to create their own statehood, would be a natural occurrence.³⁹

Spojrzenia na historię Europy Wschodniej, Kraków 2004, pp. 230-240.

³⁴ J. Cisek, "Piłsudski's Federalism...", p. 51.

³⁵ W. Baranowski, *Rozmowy z Piłsudskim 1916-1931*, Warszawa 1938, p. 124. See also K. Świtalski, *Dziennik...*, pp. 40-41 (record from the end of December 1919).

³⁶ A. Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski 1867-1935*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 212-214.

³⁷ J. Piłsudski, "Rok 1920", in idem, *Pisma zbiorowe...*, vol. 7, Warszawa 1937, p. 147.

³⁸ A. Nowak, "Geopolityczne koncepcje Józefa Piłsudskiego", in J. Kłockowski (ed.), *Przekłute miejsce Europy? Dylematy polskiej geopolityki*, Kraków 2009, p. 150.

³⁹ Z. Zaporowski, "Federalizm Józefa Piłsudskiego 1918-1922", in W. Paruch, K. Trembicka (eds.), *Świat wokół Rzeczypospolitej...*, p. 179.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF NATIONS

Unfortunately, there were numerous difficulties. The people of the area between the Baltic and the Black Sea, the vast majority of whom lived in the countryside, did not show an interest in politics.⁴⁰ For the above reasons, it was difficult to find serious allies among the nations living in the Polish-Russian borderlands. This problem was intensified by quarrels and disputes of an economic nature.

Some interesting paradoxes took place. Poles were dominated by the Germans in Upper Silesia and yet ruled the Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia. The Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time, Lloyd George, whose attitude towards Poland was not favourable, pointed out these inconsistencies.⁴¹ Why does Poland demand Silesia and Galicia using mutually exclusive arguments? In the first case there was talk of suppression of independence tendencies by the Germans and in the latter of the dominant position of Poles in the economy of the region.⁴² Although the Greek Catholic bishopric of Lviv owned the greatest amount of land in Galicia, the prevailing economic system at the time did indeed give the Polish side an advantage.⁴³ The issue of Polish landowners also influenced relations with Latvia. The country's authorities were afraid that the Polish government would intercede in favour of its own countrymen affected by agricultural reforms.⁴⁴

The only player who decided to take part in the alliance, although he did this under the pressure of events, was Symon Petlura – the leader of the UNR (Ukrainian National Republic). Cooperation between the two nations was only institutionalised in April 1920, when the appropriate documents were signed.

The lack of acceptance of Ukrainians from the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR) for Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was particularly destructive. The case of

⁴⁰ See J. Borzęcki, *Pokój ryski 1921 roku i kształtowanie się międzywojennej Europy Wschodniej*, transl. by idem, Warszawa 2012, pp. 64-65.

⁴¹ The views of the ruling circles of the United Kingdom on the topic of the eastern border of the reborn Polish Republic have been depicted in: A. Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 – zapomniany ap-
peasement*, Kraków 2015, pp. 209-429.

⁴² Ibid., p. 256.

⁴³ H. Batowski, *Rozpad Austro-Węgier 1914-1918. Sprawy narodowościowe i działania dyplomatyczne*, Kraków 1982, p. 42.

⁴⁴ The reason for these fears can be found in the fact that *the average Latvian believed that every Polish citizen was a gentleman-nobleman, that Poland was a republic of nobility, ruled by landowners and for landowners*. The entire Polish community in Latvia was around 60,000 people and, contrary to the stereotype, it was mostly comprised of small farmers and workers. Nevertheless, the Latvian authorities tried to limit Polish education on the border with Poland. There were also disputes connected with the church. The nationalistic policy was intensified in the 1930s. The Polish community, with its negligent attitude towards Latvian statehood, was much to blame. Cf. J. Osica, "Walka o granice II Rzeczypospolitej", in A. Garlicki (ed.), *Z dziejów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1986, p. 70; P. Łossowski, "Stosunki polsko-łotewskie w latach 1919-1939", in H. Bułhak, T. Cieślak, J. Żarnowski (eds.), *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1919-1939*, Wrocław 1977, pp. 89-90.

Eastern Galicia disappeared from the agenda in June 1919.⁴⁵ Warsaw was expecting an alliance. The existence of ZUNR made this impossible. Hence, since the Galician Ukrainians had a strong position in relation to the Directorate of the UNR, attempts to reach an agreement made in 1919 were not successful.⁴⁶

The Entente's approach to the western borderlands of the former Russian Empire was characterised by a colonial outlook. The Western powers officially authorised the Second Polish Republic to take Galicia in order to protect its population, thus wanting to protect as much of the area as possible from the Bolsheviks.⁴⁷ Economic issues, including the deposits of the Borysław oil basin, influenced the position of the allies. Financial circles argued that the Ukrainian administration lacked the resources to support the development of this sector. The industrialists were extremely insistent because considerable sums of money were at stake. The French invested 44 million francs, while the British invested 10 million pounds.⁴⁸

The people of the area between the Baltic and the Black Sea remembered experiencing the power of Russia (and Germany) but not that of the ally-less Polish state. The Polish Republic began its existence in 1918 from the same level as the other young states in the region.⁴⁹ As a result the attitudes of neighbouring nations, particularly Lithuania,

⁴⁵ At the end of 1918 Piłsudski described his position with regard to Galicia stating that in the event of a lack of agreement, the military occupation of this region would become the objective. He noted, however, that *this does not rule out political activity*, which should be understood as activity towards reaching a settlement. Only the socialists were prepared to give Galicia to Ukraine. At the same time, most activists of the Polish Socialist Party were in favour of the division of the province. Out of Piłsudski's collaborators only Wasilewski agreed with this idea. He did not specify the demarcation line between Poland and Ukraine, but he did support the division of Eastern Galicia while leaving Lviv and the oil basin on the Polish side. Cf. J. Pisuliński, *Nie tylko Petlura. Kwestia ukraińska w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918-1923*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 70-71, 78, 83.

⁴⁶ Wojciech Materski even puts forward the hypothesis that the federal idea was buried by the Galician conflict. Cf. W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy. Stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918-1939*, Warszawa 1994, p. 20.

⁴⁷ In the years 1917-1919 the Entente lent money to the Ukrainian Central Council and Directorate. At first it was expected that the Ukrainians along with the 'white' generals would defeat the Bolsheviks. However, anti-Bolshevik Russia did not guarantee the recognition of the independence aspirations of other nations. Hence the Ukrainians reluctance to cooperate. And when the 'whites' lost the Entente states withdrew their support. See W. Serczyk, *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław 2001, pp. 261, 271. According to other opinions, British diplomats were fully unaware of the political, geographical, demographic and historical issues in relation to the dispute over the Polish-Russian border. Smaller nations – such as Belarus and Ukraine – were not taken into account. According to the British these people were simply Russians. This is also the reason for the so-called 'Curzon Line' project – a proposed demarcation line for Polish and Bolshevik troops, described in a note from 11 July 1920 addressed to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin. The note is incorrectly attributed to the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Lord George L. Curzon. For more on this subject, see A. Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada...*, pp. 144-158, 229-265, 311-355, 377-428.

⁴⁸ Cf. M. Kozłowski, *Między Sanem a Zbruczem. Walki o Lwów i Galicję Wschodnią 1918-1919*, Kraków 1990, p. 286. As a result of the activities of the oil lobby the Entente countries sent two military missions to Galicia. The result of their actions was the so-called Barthelémy's line. It left most of the East-Galician lands on the Ukrainian side. Poland, however, managed to retain Lviv and Borysław. See W. Serczyk, *Historia Ukrainy*, p. 285.

⁴⁹ Cf. A. Nowak, "Geopolityczne koncepcje...", pp. 135-151.

differed from Polish expectations. Poland was perceived as a new and uncertain country. Articles often appeared in the press of the Baltic countries which accused Warsaw of imperial aspirations.⁵⁰ This is confirmed by the opinion of Lithuanian prime minister Augustinas Voldemaras who stated that: *if Lithuania had not maintained its status as an independent state and was to be again governed by either Poland or Russia, then Russian rule would be better since it at least has the advantage of being known abroad.*⁵¹

The alliance between Poland and the UNR was the last chance to create an independent Ukraine which would be friendly towards the Polish Republic. At the same time, it should be remembered that the political cost of this alliance was borne by the Ukrainian side. In exchange for Polish aid the Directorate relinquished its claims to Eastern Galicia and western Volyn, exposing itself to accusations of treason on part of Galician Ukrainians. The agreement gave Symon Petlura the prolong his political existence. However, Poland considered the independent Ukrainian state a part of the 'Intermarium' concept,⁵² the southern cornerstone of the entire structure.⁵³ Five days after the signing of the military convention, on 26 April 1920, both armies began an offensive against the Bolsheviks. Kiev was captured at the beginning of May 1920.⁵⁴ Since this was the fifteenth time that the governing body on the Dnieper had changed

⁵⁰ A. Źulys, "Konflikt polsko-litewski a idea Związku Bałtyckiego w latach 1919-1925", in M. Kornat, M. Satory (eds.), *Ład wersalsko-ryski w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Studia z polityki międzynarodowej*, Kraków 2013, p. 129.

⁵¹ Pro-Russian views among Lithuanians disappeared only as a result of the Soviet occupation in 1940-1941, the attitude towards Poland and Poles was also affected. Former Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona *during the war always spoke with appreciation* about Poland. He even expressed the possibility of *returning [...] to the idea of a union or sui generis a Polish-Lithuanian federation*. Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego, fond PRM.K.2: Posiedzenie u Prezydenta R.P. w sprawie polityki zagranicznej, Sprawozdanie z rozmów z Litwinami w Lizbonie (15 February 1941), c. 2; M. Wiśniewska, L. Wyszczelski, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe Polski w latach 1918-1939. Teoria i praktyka*, Toruń 2009, pp. 18-19.

⁵² The origins of the concept of 'Intermarium' goes back to the twelfth century and its popularity grew under the Jagiellonian dynasty. Territorially, 'Intermarium' comprises of states between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea (from Finland to Greece with a crucial role of Poland). The idea refers to the same territory as the German term *Mitteleuropa*. 'Intermarium' was a popular conception in Polish political thought in the twentieth century. The main reason for its implementation was a disadvantaged location of Poland between Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union. However, the main obstacle was the lack of unity in Central and Eastern Europe. Poles competed with Lithuanians over the Vilnius Region and with Czechoslovakia over hegemony in Central Europe. In Poland the concept of 'Intermarium' was supported by the followers of Piłsudski and the representatives of National Democracy and was a supplement of Eastern policy.

⁵³ See P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja 'międzymorza'...*, pp. 65, 387-388.

⁵⁴ The fall of Kiev rekindled national feelings. General Aleksei Brusilov, who appealed to the tsar's officers, was chosen for this purpose. He urged that, regardless of the promises made by the Poles, they *remember that the goal of their aggression is annexation*. He also warned that future generations may curse the current generation for following ideological differences which led to the *destruction of our Mother Russia*. Cf. P.S. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921*, Cambridge, Mass. 1969, p. 201.

within the last three years, the enthusiasm of the inhabitants of the 'Great Ukraine' was negligible.⁵⁵

The first half of 1920 was the apogee of the federal idea. It began with the capture of Dyneburg and it was crowned by the entry into the main city of Ukraine on May 8. At that time three key cities were in the hands of the Polish Republic: Vilnius, Minsk and Kiev.⁵⁶ The victory turned out to be questionable. Especially since the Bolsheviks carried out a counter-attack in June and managed to reach the outskirts of Warsaw.

The degree of readiness of other countries left much to be desired. When assessing the Kiev expedition, Jan Jacek Bruski stated that the Ukrainians on the Dnieper were not prepared for independence. The Polish historian quotes the opinion of Wasilewski, who in 1911 stated that Russian Ukrainians are still ethnographic material rather than a nation. In contrast to Galicia, it was much easier for the 'Great Ukraine' to lose its not yet fully formed identity. This was facilitated by the similarity of languages as well as the dominant religion – Orthodoxy.⁵⁷ And so Piłsudski's federal idea had one basic mistake in its assumptions. Poland overestimated the state of preparations for independence and the amount of Ukrainian support for Symon Petlura.⁵⁸ Piotr Stefan Wandycz saw the Kiev expedition in an entirely different light. He writes that the risk was justified and whether Poland was strong enough to implement Piłsudski's concept is an entirely different matter.⁵⁹

Poland's victory in the Battle of Warsaw meant that the balance of power was once again disrupted. Not only was Poland's independence saved, but so was Europe, weakened by the global conflict and economic difficulties. However, the Polish Republic lacked the strength to establish an independent Ukraine, even in a limited form.⁶⁰

Other than Lithuania, Ukraine was the key element in Józef Piłsudski's federal idea. The lack of acceptance on part of the Lithuanian population proved insurmountable and the fate of Ukraine was sealed. Poland modified its plans and the role of Romania

⁵⁵ See R. Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, p. 190.

⁵⁶ See "Listy Józefa Piłsudskiego", *Niepodległość*, vol. 7 (1962), pp. 87-117. However, it was difficult to expect that these three cities would mark the border of the renascent Polish Republic. Nevertheless, the Poles were still a formidable force to the east of Zbrucz. The actions of the tsarist administration against Polish land ownership resulted in mediocre results. Polish landowners, who in 1863 owned approximately 80% of the private estates in Right-bank Ukraine, still owned nearly half of this land in 1914. At that time the conflict between the Ukrainian peasantry and Polish landowners, which began with the abolition of serfdom in 1861, had intensified. This was reflected in numerous peasant rebellions, the majority of which took place in Dnieper Ukraine in the years 1904-1906 and 1917-1921. D. Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914*, transl. by K. Rutkowski, Lublin 2005, pp. 577, 582, 725-726; A. Nowak, *Polacy, Rosjanie i biesy. Studia i szkice historyczne z XIX i XX wieku*, Kraków 1998, p. 40.

⁵⁷ J.J. Bruski, *Petlurowcy. Centrum Państwowe Ukraińskiej Republiki Ludowej na wychodźstwie (1919-1924)*, Kraków 2004, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁸ J. Krasuski, *Tragiczna niepodległość...*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ P.S. Wandycz, "Znakomita książka", *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 139 (2002), p. 229.

⁶⁰ See L. Wyszczelski, *Kijów 1920*, Warszawa 1999; idem, *Warszawa 1920*, Warszawa 1997.

grew in the system of alliances.⁶¹ Bucharest acted as a substitute ally, even though military circles and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs believed its combat value to be poor. Finally, however, a political-military convention was signed on 3 March 1921 in the form of the Konwencja o przymierzu odpornym⁶² (Convention on Defensive Alliance).

CENTRAL LITHUANIA – THE LAST STAGE OF THE FEDERAL IDEA

After the victory over the Red Army, Piłsudski returned to his federation plans in reference to historical Lithuania. The victory of the Polish army and the recapturing of Minsk gave rise to the resumption of the plan addressed to the Poles, Lithuanians and Belarusians living in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The issue, however, was more complicated.

During the Polish-Bolshevik war, in a treaty from 12 July 1920, Soviet Russia handed over Vilnius and the Suwałki Region to Lithuania. The Polish army, moving north-east after the retreating Red Army, came across the Lithuanian army in the Suwałki Region, thereby removing it from that area. This manoeuvre could not be repeated in relation to Vilnius because Foreign Minister Eustachy Sapieha had turned to the League of Nations beforehand asking it to force the Lithuanians out of the city. This caused the internationalisation of the issue.⁶³

In response to the new situation, the Polish side conducted a political-military operation known as ‘Żeligowski’s mutiny’ from October 8 to October 9. The ‘Lithuanian-Belarusian’ Division, commanded by General Lucjan Żeligowski, acting on the advice of Piłsudski, took Vilnius in spite of official orders. Several days before this operation (on October 1) a meeting took place between General Żeligowski and the Chief of State.

In his memoirs, the leader of the ‘mutiny’ recalls Piłsudski’s argumentation as follows: *neither the countries of the coalition, nor the League of Nations, nor the Government and the Polish society understand the Lithuanian issue. Everyone wants peace and nobody cares about Lithuania or Vilnius. [...] we must make an effort to rebuild historical Lithuania. Only the people can do this with the help of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Division. [...] An uprising must be organised.*⁶⁴ The concept of a ‘mutiny’ fits into this way of thinking. It is worth noting that the ‘Lithuanian-Belarusian’ Division did so on behalf of the people of the Vilnius region, demanding a plebiscite for the disputed areas that would decide the fate of the country.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja ‘międzymorza’...*, pp. 65, 387-388.

⁶² See H. Walczak, *Sojusz z Rumunią w polskiej polityce zagranicznej 1918-1931*, Szczecin 2008.

⁶³ Cf. Z. Zaporowski, “Federalizm...”, p. 186.

⁶⁴ L. Żeligowski, *Zapomniane prawdy*, Londyn 1943, pp. 34, 36.

⁶⁵ T. Katelbach, “Rola Piłsudskiego...”, pp. 107-108.

It is a real curiosity that, as noticed by Józef Piłsudski, there was not a single Lithuanian and not a single Belarusian in the 'Lithuanian-Belarusian' Division, only poorly speaking Poles. The name of the unit may have caused misunderstandings in that it was formed in order to conquer Lithuania or Belarus.⁶⁶ These words contradict the opinion, popular in the literature on the subject, that most of the soldiers in the division were of Lithuanian descent.

Though without much finesse, the desired effect was achieved. Three days after occupying the disputed area representatives of France and Great Britain submitted a joint *demarche* during an audience with the Chief of State. In response Piłsudski remarked that if the Allies were to return Vilnius to Lithuania without hearing out the will of the people, then he would lay down his dignities in Poland and fulfil his duty as a citizen of the Vilnius Region.⁶⁷ Arguments referring to the 'self-determination of nations' clearly achieved the desired result.

On 28 October 1920 the Council of the League of Nations decided to conduct a plebiscite in the Vilnius Region.⁶⁸ The events of October 1920 meant that the initiative now lay in the hands of Lithuania. However, the country was not willing to co-operate with Poland, in favour of its own, fully independent state, covering more than just ethnic areas. If a federation consisting of three nations were to be created, Poland would automatically find itself in a privileged position due to its economic, political and cultural role. Lithuania's reluctance towards any kind of alliance with Warsaw was based on real, existing fears. The determination of the Chief of State was such that he did not refrain from using highly unconventional methods; for instance, by supporting the coup of pro-Polish Lithuanians at the beginning of 1920.⁶⁹

In spite of this, Piłsudski sought to reach an agreement with Lithuania in 1922. The Council of the League of Nations changed its decision regarding the plebiscite in the Vilnius Region and decided to conduct direct negotiations led by Paul Hymans. The Belgian minister wanted to transform Lithuania into two cantons: the Vilnius canton and the Kaunas canton with a federal government in Vilnius. This proposal was rejected by Lithuania. Direct talks between Warsaw and Kaunas proved fruitless. Recognising that further mediation was futile the League of Nations stood down.

The Marshal did not give up on his plans. Attempts to secure the autonomous status of the north-eastern provinces of the Polish Republic marked a return to his federal

⁶⁶ "Naczelne Dowództwo WP. Oddział III, Instrukcja dla 2 Armii, 29 sierpnia 1920", in M. Tarczyński (ed.), *Bitwa niemieńska 29 VIII – 18 X 1920. Dokumenty operacyjne*, part 1: (29 VIII – 19 IX), Warszawa 1999, p. 25.

⁶⁷ J. Piłsudski, "Odpowiedź na demarche w sprawie Wilna przedstawicieli Francji i Anglii", 12 October 1920, in idem, *Pisma zbiorowe...*, vol. 5, p. 173.

⁶⁸ Z. Zaporowski, "Federalizm...", p. 186.

⁶⁹ Andrzej Nowak observes that this event marked *a significant transition in the political imagination of Piłsudski*, who had at that point realised that Lithuania could not be enticed by the vision of republican citizenship. Most of Piłsudski's biographers focus on the moment of Gabriel Narutowicz's assassination or the Battle of Warsaw. See A. Nowak, *Historie politycznych tradycji. Piłsudski, Putin i inni*, Kraków 2007, p. 208.

plans. Elections to the *Sejm* of Central Lithuania took place on 8 January 1922. The turnout amounted to just over 60% of those entitled to vote. The elections were completely boycotted by the Lithuanian population and partially by that of Belarus. Jews in smaller centres voted for Polish lists, but they did not go to the polls in Vilnius.⁷⁰

The newly elected *Sejm* of Central Lithuania held a meeting in Vilnius on 3 February 1922. The Poles, holding the dominant position, in the resolution of 20 February decided by vote that: *the Vilnius Region, without any conditions or objections, constitutes an inseparable part of the Republic of Poland*.⁷¹ At the beginning of March a delegation of twenty envoys appointed by the *Sejm* of Central Lithuania arrived in Warsaw. Forgoing unnecessary negotiations, the delegation signed the act of incorporation of the Vilnius Region which was then ratified by the Legislative *Sejm* on 24 March 1922.⁷²

It is worth noting that three names were strongly associated with General Żeligowski's operation, Central Lithuania with Vilnius inhabited mainly by Poles, Eastern Lithuania with its capital in Minsk dominated by the Belarusian element and Western Lithuania with Kaunas inhabited mainly by Lithuanians.⁷³

In this context it is worth mentioning the possibility of pulling Belarus into the sphere of Polish influence. To the federalists, the Belarusian issue was connected with the Lithuanian issue. The final stage of this policy was connected with the figure of General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz and his Slutsk brigade.⁷⁴ This observation was highlighted in the notes of Lieutenant Stanisław Lis-Błoński. He noticed that General Bałachowicz could merge with Central Lithuania, controlled by General Żeligowski.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, at the beginning of November 1920, one of Żeligowski's associates proposed an attack on Kaunas. The objective of the operation was to occupy another political centre in addition to Vilnius and Minsk.⁷⁶

After putting all of this information together one must agree with the Belarusian historian Oleg Łatyszonek who states that *the case of Bałachowicz had to appear connected with the federal plans of Piłsudski and Żeligowski's mutiny*. Unfortunately, the operation could only take place if the Red Army was defeated by Pyotr Wrangel, which did not happen.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ The elections ended with the success of the supporters of incorporation. They had one 69 of 106 seats. Cf. B. Kolarz, *Ustrój Litwy Środkowej w latach 1920-1922*, Gdańsk 2004, pp. 64-67; A. Srebrakowski, *Sejm wileński 1922 roku. Idea i jej realizacja*, Wrocław 1993, pp. 77-79.

⁷¹ J. Pajewski, *Budowa...*, p. 116.

⁷² T. Katelbach, "Rola Piłsudskiego...", p. 109.

⁷³ Z. Zaporowski, "Federalizm...", pp. 179-180.

⁷⁴ J. Pajewski, *Budowa...*, p. 90. For more information on Gen. S. Bułak-Bałachowicz, see M. Cabanowski, *Zapomniany bohater. Generał Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz*, Grodzisk Mazowiecki 2000.

⁷⁵ S. Lis-Błoński, "Bałachowcy. Notatki oficera łącznikowego przy Ochotniczej Armii Sprzymierzonej z frontu wojny polsko-bolszewickiej 1920 roku", in G.J. Pelica, *'Bałachowcy' Stanisława Lisa-Błońskiego jako przestrzeń refleksji i historyczny dokument*, Lublin 2011, p. 139.

⁷⁶ P. Łossowski, *Po tej i tamtej stronie Niemna. Stosunki polsko-litewskie 1883-1939*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 185-186.

⁷⁷ O. Łatyszonek, "Generał Bułak-Bałachowicz w wojnie 1919-1920", *Sybirak*, no. 5 (1990), p. 11.

Until the very end Józef Piłsudski hoped that Central Lithuania would be one of three cantons⁷⁸ joined to Poland as part of the federation.⁷⁹ After the failure of this concept,⁸⁰ the Chief of State pushed for autonomy of the Vilnius Region. This project was the last opportunity to return to the abandoned idea of forming a federation. However, this solution was not a realistic one and Polish patriotism turned out to be the greatest obstacle in its path. This is confirmed by the opinion of Michał Romer:⁸¹ *a Lithuania divided into three parts was pure fiction, born only in the mind of a person who completely ignored the real Lithuania. If external circumstances allowed this plan to become fact, then this alone was not enough. The combination of Antanas Smetona, Żeligowski and Bałachowicz was outright caricature.*⁸²

CONCLUSION

The process of shaping modern nations in Central Europe at the turn of the twentieth century was slow, especially among Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. The right to the self-determination dominated in the past months of the First World War. Victory of the Polish army against the Red Army in the Battle of Warsaw saved independence of Poland. However, the country lacked the strength to establish a chain of independent states that would separate Poland from Bolshevik Russia. Furthermore, the attitude of neighbouring countries made it impossible to reach an agreement on geopolitical issues. Poland was accused of having imperial goals which were threatening the existence of smaller states in the region. The final attempt to implement the federal idea took place during the Polish-Soviet War. The Treaty of Riga signed on 18 March 1921 put an end to the federalists' activities. Peace negotiations between Poland and

⁷⁸ The idea of creating cantons had existed beforehand. A journal entry from 11 January 1917, describes Ignacy Paderewski's expectations for the rebirth of the Polish Republic in the form of the 'United States of Poland'. Witold Kamieniecki, on the other hand, promoted the concept of three cantons: Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian. Cf. R. Wapiński, "Stosunki między Ignacym Paderewskim a Józefem Piłsudskim w roku 1919 i ich następstwa", in C. Bloch (ed.), *Władysław Sikorski – Ignacy Paderewski*, Lublin 1988, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁹ T. Snyder, *Rekonstrukcja narodów. Polska, Ukraina, Litwa i Białoruś 1569-1999*, transl. by M. Pietrzak-Merta, Sejny 1999, p. 79.

⁸⁰ On 25 October 1920 S. Bałachowicz announced the struggle for the liberation of Belarus and, at the head of an army of eleven thousand, conducted an attack on Mazyr. Although his efforts had initially been successful, the operation ended in failure. Most of his soldiers had crossed the Polish border and they were interned. Cf. O. Łatyszonek, *Białoruskie formacje wojskowe 1917-1923*, Białystok 1995, pp. 163-164; J. Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, "W kręgu koncepcji 'krajowych'. Białorusini i Żydzi na Litwie Środkowej wobec konfliktu polsko-litewskiego", in K. Ślusarek (ed.), *Europa unii i federacji. Idea jedności narodów i państw od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych*, Kraków 2004, pp. 297-298.

⁸¹ For more information on Michał Romer, see Z. Solak, *Między Polską a Litwą. Życie i działalność Michała Römera (1880-1920)*, Kraków 2004.

⁸² J. Cisek, "Piłsudski's Federalism...", pp. 48-49.

Bolshevik Russia revealed that the Republic of Poland, once again autonomous after years of captivity, would be based on different notions, those of Roman Dmowski.⁸³

The border established by the Riga Treaty disunited territories of Belarus and Ukraine. They emerged as Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Bolsheviks pursued *korenizatsiya* policy⁸⁴ in the 1920s. The Russian researcher Gennady Matveyev notes that: *millions of Ukrainians and Belarusians within Polish borders did not want to undergo ethnic or state assimilation, which significantly weakened the internal unity and stability of the Polish Republic.*⁸⁵ On the other hand, Ukrainians and Belarusians in the Second Republic of Poland avoided starvation, collectivization and political terror, which their compatriots in the Soviet Union had to face in the 1930s.

The Treaty of Riga was a personal disaster for the Chief of State. He won the war but lost the peace, he won Poland but lost Ukraine.⁸⁶ He did not ensure the security of the Polish Republic. He admitted this in person during a conversation with the leader of the Crimean Tatars, Cafer Seydahmet Kirimer, stating that: *All that has been done is just paving the way to independence [...]. Poland cannot be truly independent in-between the two colossi [...]. So long as numerous nations remain in the hands of the Russian state we cannot look at the future with calmness.*⁸⁷

The opinion of Janusz Pajewski is accurate. He states that: *Poland [...] entered into the period of the Second Polish Republic as a country too great in terms of its traditions of a great cultural and political past, too large in terms of its territory to acknowledge its role as a small country. At the same time it was too weak economically and socially, too torn by internal contradictions to gain the position of a world power.*⁸⁸ The following words spoken by Paweł Kowal after 1989, addressed to Poland and making reference to the Second Polish Republic, correspond to the above opinion: the 'Jagiellonian policy', understood as the employment of active measures on the eastern vector, can only be car-

⁸³ See P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja 'międzymorza'...* Juliusz Mieroszewski was right when, on the pages of *Kultura* in 1967, he wrote that the Treaty of Riga was an agreement forced by the circumstances at the time, an agreement that allowed for the non-existence of Ukraine, and which was the 'tombstone' to an independent eastern policy. J. Mieroszewski, "Tytuł pozostaje ten sam", *Kultura*, no. 242 (1967), p. 36.

⁸⁴ *Korenizatsiya* means 'nativization'. The main goal was to promote representatives of titular nations of Soviet republics and penetration of local ethnics group by the Communist Party. According to Andrzej Fourier, the aim of *korenizatsiya* was to rise support for the Communist authority among local intelligentsia through educational and cultural policies. Cf. A. Furier, *Droga Gruzji do niepodległości*, Poznań 2000, p. 119.

⁸⁵ G. Matwiejew, "Początki", in A.D. Rotfeld, A.W. Torkunow (eds.), *Białe plamy – czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich 1918-2008*, Warszawa 2010, p. 77.

⁸⁶ R. Potocki, *Idea restytucji Ukraińskiej Republiki Ludowej (1920-1939)*, Lublin 1999, p. 130.

⁸⁷ C.S. Kirimer, "Moje wspomnienia z rozmowy z marszałkiem Józefem Piłsudskim", *Niepodległość*, vol. 2 (1950), p. 47.

⁸⁸ J. Pajewski, *Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1914-1918*, Warszawa 1985, p. 343.

ried out when one governs a prosperous country, the country that Casimir the Great left behind.⁸⁹

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