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The Upper Silesian plebiscite 20th March 1921. Origin – preparations – results – evaluation¹

Plebiscyt górnośląski 20 marca 1921 roku. Geneza – przygotowania – rezultaty – ocena

Die oberschlesische Volksabstimmung am 20. März 1921. Entstehung – Vorbereitung – Ergebnisse – Bewertung

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the socio-political situation in Prussian Upper Silesia (district Opole/plebiscite area) in the autumn of 1918 until June 1922. The region was one of the typical regions of Central and Eastern Europe, with a mixed national and religious population, sometimes weakened by ethnic diversity. Before the war, although statistically dominated by a Slavic-Polish population, the political majority was held by the German Catholic Centre Party. The Upper

¹ The article was originally presented as a paper under the same title during the conference entitled: “Nie tylko plebiscyt. Rok 1920 na Warmii i Mazurach, w Polsce i Europie”, Olsztyn 22–23 October 2020. At the same time, it refers to and extends some of the themes presented in the author’s two texts: B. Linek, *Horní Slezsko ve Versailles*, in: *Hlučínsko 1920–2020. Sborník příspěvků z konference ke 100. Výročí vzniku Hlučínska*, J. Nemiňář (ed.), Hlučín, 2020, p. 6–18; idem, *Ein schlechtes Puzzlestück? Oberschlesische Abstimmung (20. März 1921) als Teil der Versailles-Ordnung*. In C. Fräss-Ehrfeld (Hg.), *Volksabstimmungen und andere Grenzlösungen nach dem ersten Weltkrieg*, Klagenfurt 2020, p. 177–206. Most of the issues discussed here are treated more extensively in the author’s dozen or so articles included in: *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, M. Fic, R. Kaczmarek (eds.) vol. 1–3, Katowice 2019–2021.

Silesian Industrial Region was one of the largest centers of heavy industry in Europe. A referendum under the Treaty of Versailles to decide on citizenship was held on 20 March 1921. It brought practically no decision (almost 55% of the municipalities) voted to remain in Germany, the rest to join Poland). After the Third Silesian Uprising, by decision of the Council of Ambassadors (20 X 1921) the plebiscite area was in June 1922 divided according to national principle. Poland received the vast majority of industry, and with Germany remained the largest part of the disputed territory and the population.

STRESZCZENIE

Analiza sytuacji społeczno-politycznej na pruskim Górnym Śląsku (administracyjnie rejencja opolska/obszar plebiscytowy) w okresie jesień 1918 r. – czerwiec 1922 r. Typowy region Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej z mieszaną narodowościowo i religijnie ludnością, ulegającą czasami różnym wpływom etnicznym. Statystycznie dominowała w nim polskojęzyczna ludność słowiańska, politycznie przeważała przed wojną niemiecka Katolicka Partia Centrum. Górnośląski Okręg Przemysłowy stanowił jedno z największych centrów przemysłu ciężkiego w Europie. Ustalony pokojem wersalskim plebiscyt odbył się tu 20 marca 1921 r. Praktycznie nie przyniósł on rozstrzygnięcia (blisko 55% gmin głosowało za pozostaniem w Niemczech, reszta za przyłączeniem do Polski). Po III powstaniu śląskim, decyzją Rady Ambasadorów (20 X 1921) obszar plebiscytowy został w czerwcu 1922 r. podzielony na zasadzie narodowej. Polska otrzymała zdecydowaną większość przemysłu, a przy Niemczech pozostawiono większość spornego obszaru i ludności.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel analysiert die sozio-politische Situation in Preußisch-Oberschlesien (Regierungsbezirk Oppeln/Abstimmungsgebiet) im Herbst 1918 bis Juni 1922. Die Region war eine der typischen Regionen Mittel- und Osteuropas mit einer gemischten nationalen und religiösen Bevölkerung, die manchmal geschwächt durch ethnische Einrichtungsgegenstände war. Obwohl sie statistisch gesehen von einer slawisch-polnischen Bevölkerung dominiert wird, wurde sie vor dem Krieg politisch von der katholischen Zentrumspartei Deutschlands dominiert. Der Oberschlesische Industriebezirk war eines der größten Zentren der Schwerindustrie in Europa. Am 20. März 1921 fand im Rahmen des Versailler Vertrags eine Volksabstimmung über die Staatsbürgerschaft statt. Sie brachte praktisch keine Entscheidung (fast 55 % der Gemeinden) stimmte für den Verbleib in Deutschland, der Rest für den Anschluss an Polen). Nach dem dritten Schlesischen Aufstand wurde Abstimmungsgebiet im Juni 1922, durch Beschluss des Botschafferrates (20 X 1921), nach nationalem Prinzip geteilt. Polen erhielt die überwiegende Mehrheit der Industrie, und Deutschland übernahm den größten Teil des umstrittenen Gebiets und der Bevölkerung.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The First World War, and above all its results in the defeat of trans-national empires, set political, cultural and social systems in motion. Issues that existed on the outskirts of society before and during the war have now surfaced and started to form a new, incoherent order, which has been called Versailles' from the place of its codification. When around 1923 the post-war dust fell (however briefly), the populations of Central Europe found themselves in entirely new countries, a new socio-political framework, sometimes with new neighbours².

² See: W. Borodziej, M. Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1–2, Warszawa 2018; R. Gerwath, *Pokonani. Dlaczego pierwsza wojna światowa się nie zakończyła (1917–1923)*, trans. J. Szkudliński, Poznań 2017.

In this context, the situation in Upper Silesia, by which we will understand the pre-war Opole regency here, did not stand out. Like almost all areas of the Eastern European empires, it had a linguistically, religiously and nationally diverse population, which organized itself around all these principles and had already been divided before the war. The characteristic aspect of the region was also the fact that loyalties were often running counter to ethnic features, drawing on older cultural systems or consolidating themselves around other values. Although it was statistically dominated by the Slavic/Polish-speaking population, the German catholic centrist party was politically predominant here before the war. It was distinctive for its economic potential as the Upper Silesian Industrial Region (Górnośląski Okręg Przemysłowy, hereinafter: GOP), located in the eastern part, was one of the largest centers of heavy industry in Europe³.

The powers that be of the world at the time quickly realized that it could be the engine of the post-war economy. But whose economy? The region's fitting into the post-war puzzle took place between 5th October 1918, when Germany applied for a truce, and the summer of 1922, when it was finally divided between them and Poland. The twists and turns followed Versailles' decisions (28th June 1919), the assumption of power over the plebiscite area by the Inter-Allied Commission (11th February 1920), the area itself, and a long struggle (military and diplomatic) for its division.

NATIONS NOW!

Nations and their derivatives (national or ethnic groups) are not ancient. In their political and cultural diversity, they are usually born with a scream and live their lives full of downfalls and joy. In their modern formula, they began to make political claims in Europe around the mid-19th century.

So they did not emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of the war (as some would like to see them) or were not born as an illegitimate bastard (as for others) of cultural collapse at the turn of 1918 and 1919. In Central and Eastern Europe, it was already during the Great War that Germany began to rebuild it on a national basis according to the Naumann principle of Mitteleurope: to create a network of politically and economically dependent nation states surrounding the German state. This concept was sneaked into the Reichstag's 'peaceful' resolution of 19th July 1917. It only condemned 'forced territorial acquisitions', which therefore did not

³ Summary of findings of earlier literature on the subject discussed here: *Encyklopedia powstań śląskich*, F. Hawranek (et al., ed.), Opole 1982. The latest publications worth mentioning: R. Kaczmarek, *Powstania śląskie. 1919–1920–1921. Nieznana wojna polsko-niemiecka*, Kraków 2019; *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, M. Fic, R. Kaczmarek (eds.), vol. 1: *I powstanie śląskie. Sierpień 1919*, Katowice 2019; *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, M. Fic, R. Kaczmarek (eds.), vol. 2: *II powstanie śląskie. Sierpień 1920*, Katowice 2020; *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, M. Fic, R. Kaczmarek (ed.), vol. 3: *III powstanie śląskie. Maj–lipiec 1921*, Katowice 2021.

exclude 'unforced', i.e. the self-determination of peoples in Central and Eastern Europe under the German umbrella. Shortly after its passing, strict conditions were imposed on the defeated in the east (Russia and Romania) and forced to recognize this situation. It seemed that such a definition of 'just peace' was within reach⁴.

However, as early as the summer of 1918, after the defeat of the last German offensive in the west, it was clear that the war was lost by the central states and the new order would be determined by the others. Germany, wanting to maintain at least partial influence on further developments, decided to request a ceasefire, on the basis of the American proposals formulated in the famous 8th January speech by US President Thomas Woodrow Wilson. By formulating 14 conditions for ending the war and a just peace, he carried out a Copernican scale reform of the classification of the subjects of international law, finally granting sovereignty to the nations (the proposal to create a League of Nations [LN] and not a League of States), around which other systems, above all the states, were now to be regulated⁵.

Granting nations the right to have their own statehoods has caused an avalanche of declarations of independence from autumn 1918. In the political reality, there was one conclusion from the idea of self-determination, which was relatively open (from autonomy through the federation to independence); It was the creation of a network of nation states, to which all groups with more or less imagined links to the territory have now aspired. It was also not uncommon that two or three groups aspired to the same area⁶.

Wilson's conditions for Germany (evacuation of Belgium and France and handing over Alsace and Lorraine to the French, cancellation of the Treaties of Brest and Bucharest) were tough, but acceptable. The hardest to swallow was the creation of an independent Polish state in areas undoubtedly inhabited by Polish people with free access to the sea (point 13). They were consoling themselves that it only meant Greater Poland and some rights in Gdańsk.

As early as the truce in Compiègne, which was stricter than Wilson's terms, the conditions were already harsher. On 8th October 1918, Roman Dmowski, the leader of the Polish right-wing and recognized in the West as representing Poland in the Polish National Committee, was in Washington DC. In a memorandum to Wilson, he outlined Polish territorial claims, which in the West also included the Opole regency. Some days later (25th October), German public opinion

⁴ T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, Bd. 2, *Machtstaat vor der Demokratie*, München 1998, p. 823–876; H.A. Winkler, *Długa droga na Zachód. Dzieje Niemiec*, vol. 1: 1806–1933, Wrocław 2007, p. 327–353.

⁵ For an analysis of the significance of this revolution, see: O. Kimminich, *Der Selbstbestimmungsgedanke am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges – Theorie und Verwirklichung*, in: *Deutschland und das Recht auf Selbstbestimmung nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Probleme der Volksabstimmungen im Osten (1918–1922)*, R. Breyer (Hrsg.), Bonn 1985, p. 11–39.

⁶ For the consequences, including Silesian ones, of this decision see: T. Weger, *Großschlesisch? Großfriesisch? Großdeutsch! Ethnonationalismus in Schlesien und Friesland, 1918–1945*, Oldenburg 2017.

was shocked by Wojciech Korfanty, the first Polish Member of Parliament from Upper Silesia to join the Polish circle (1903), who, on behalf of his faction, spoke of the Polish demands in a parliamentary speech quoting *Fourteen Points*. This list included not only Greater Poland and its region, but some districts of Lower Silesia, Royal Prussia (and partly Ducal Prussia) and even Gdańsk⁷.

Reichstag and Germany have been raging with disbelief. At that time, however, revolutionary Germany was already losing political subjectivity in peace negotiations. Upper Silesia was granted to them as early as December 1918, when the French, in the extension of the truce, attempted to include a demarcation line for German troops, which overlapped with Dmowski's line.

PARIS CONFERS

Before the Paris Peace Conference on 18th January 1919, German-Polish relations had undergone a profound evolution from a formal alliance, through the severance of diplomatic relations, to armed conflicts in Greater Poland. Initially with Polish victories. It was for that reason that Upper Silesia was on the truce agenda in February in Trier. During the negotiations Ferdinand Foch, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, returned to the idea of a demarcation line in eastern Germany. In Greater Poland it was to run along the war front, and in Upper Silesia – to run approximately along the Oder River, i.e. in practice, it was to match the Polish demands.

Matthias Erzberger, Minister of Government and politician of the Catholic Centre Party, who led the truce negotiations on behalf of Germany, refused to sign such conditions. After a brief discussion and talks with Berlin, the parties agreed on a new demarcation line, which remained unchanged in Greater Poland but no longer applied to Upper Silesia. Following these changes, a truce was signed on 16th February. Its extension no longer required additional negotiations⁸.

For the Germans, this was still in line with the anticipated war losses and the guidelines for the peace conference still adopted by the Council of the People's Deputies (revolutionary German government) in January 1919, which still took Wilson's speech and the October exchange of notes as their basis⁹.

However, it was a temporary success. The Germans absent in Paris, strangled by the ongoing economic blockade and haggled by internal social outbursts, had less and less room for maneuver, and the offensive of Polish diplomacy in Paris

⁷ E. Abrahamczik, *Die oberschlesische Frage in Versailles. Geschichte des Artikels* 88, Düsseldorf 1937, p. 19–24.

⁸ *Sprawy polskie na konferencji pokojowej w Paryżu w 1919 r. Dokumenty i materiały*, vol. 1, R. Bierzanek, J. Kukulka (eds.), Warszawa 1965. Bilingual text of the ceasefire and its subsequent extensions: <http://www.versailles-vertrag.de/Waffenstillstand.htm> (accessed: 11.07.2020).

⁹ P. Hauser, *Niemcy wobec sprawy polskiej. X 1918 – VI 1919*, Poznań 1994, p. 49.

continued. The issue of Germany's eastern border and the status of Gdańsk has become one of the most debated items at the Paris conference. The Poles were represented by R. Dmowski, and later joined by Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski, a world-famous pianist, who, however, due to his duties, came to Paris for a short time¹⁰.

The most important political decisions were first taken at the Council of Ten, and then the so-called Council of Four. This first body was an assembly of the leaders and foreign ministers of the winning powers: France, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom and Italy. As Japan only attended the discussions of direct interest to it, it was actually the Council of Eight. The most important decisions were taken by the Council of Four: Georges Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France), T.W. Wilson (President of the USA), David Lloyd George (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (Prime Minister of Italy). Since the latter linked its interests and speeches to possible territorial acquisitions for Italy in Dalmatia, and since the President of the United States idealistically considered it a priority to create a League of Nations to ensure world peace, a debate on the order of the Old Continent took place between the British Prime Minister and the French Prime Minister.

Great Britain accomplished its war goals in a cease-fire when Germany effectively agreed to the loss of colonies and the dismantling of most of its fleet. That is why Lloyd George quickly returned to the old tracks of British politics and was mainly concerned about the balance of political power on the continent, i.e. about keeping Germany relatively strong. He also feared that the excessive pressure on them would lead to the destabilization of the entire continent similar to that of the situation in Russia. The Clemenceau not only sought to recover the land lost in 1871, but also to weaken Germany by means of further annexation, fragmentation or the imposition of reparations that would prevent its economic development. Consequently, he also wanted to rebuild the reality of 1917 with a strong and anti-German Russia or its substitute by creating a chain of states east of Germany that could replace the Tsarist Russia as a French ally. That is why he wanted to ensure the strongest possible Poland. These strategies influenced the policy of the powers towards Upper Silesia¹¹.

¹⁰ More on Polish demands and the functioning of the delegation: R. Wapiński, *Roman Dmowski*, Lublin 1988, p. 265–288.

¹¹ Brief overview of the main areas of the conference debate and its limitations and possibilities: J. Leonhardt, *Erwartung und Überforderung. Die Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919*. "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 2019, no. 15, p. 3–13 (<https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/288794/pariser-friedensordnung>; accessed: 5.04.2019). Allied initial positions: K. Eichner, *Briten, Franzosen und Italiener in Oberschlesien 1920–1922. Die Interalliierte Regierungs- und Plebiszitkommission im Spiegel der britischen Akten*, St. Katharinen 2002, p. 16–18; *Dokumente zur italienischen Politik in der oberschlesischen Frage 1919–1921*, A. Kiesewetter (Hrsg.), Würzburg 2001, p. 8–12.

On 29th January 1919, Dmowski spoke before the Tenth Council on behalf of the Polish State. In his long speech, he presented Polish border demands, which he derived from historical and national rights. In short, he postulated that the pre-partition borders of 1772 should be the starting point for defining the borders of the reborn Poland. In the west, this meant the return of Greater Poland and Gdańsk Pomerania with the city of Gdańsk. He did not overlook Upper Silesia. In the same speech, he suggested the need for certain revisions in other areas for political and economic reasons¹². Already then, in Paris, the Polish delegation distributed a map of future Poland, which in the west, within its borders, included not only Gdańsk and Poznań, but Upper Silesia to Opole and the Duchy of Cieszyn¹³.

The matters concerning the determination of the Polish borders were referred to a special committee chaired by Jules Cambon, former French ambassador to Berlin¹⁴. On behalf of the Polish delegation, Dmowski addressed it in subsequent notes. He skillfully aligned Polish border postulates with the Wilson rules, stressing the abandonment of numerous areas in the east in favor of Ukraine. On the other hand, in the south and west, he demanded, for national reasons, that territories which were not part of Poland's pre-partition borders. These included Cieszyn Silesia, right-bank Upper Silesia (except for the districts of Nysa, Grodno and partly Niemodlin and Prudnik), Spisz and Orawa as well as the districts of Namysłów and Syców from the Wrocław regency. From the Opole regency, the Polish list included an area of 12 thousand square kilometers, with a population of 2.1 million.

In its conclusions which were included in the peace draft estimates, the Cambon's Commission has, in spite of the British protests, endorsed them by setting ethnic, religious and economic considerations as the basis for its decision.

On 7th May, a draft treaty was presented to the German delegation headed by Foreign Minister Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau. It was a shock for them and for the Germans. Germany was given 14 days to present its commentary on the treaty, which in Germany has already been called a dictate¹⁵.

The German reply, sent on 29th May, focused on the presentation of the reasoning that would justify keeping the whole of the Opole regency within the German borders¹⁶. It was emphasized that the proposed treaty violated the Wilson promises and drew a border for military and economic reasons, leaving aside ethnographic, moral and historical considerations. The latter, in the case of Upper

¹² The text of the speech: *Sprawy polskie na konferencji...*, p. 45–56. Further Polish notes also there.

¹³ "Katolik" (hereinafter: "K"), no. 17, 8 II 1919.

¹⁴ "Hindenburg Anzeiger" (hereinafter: "HA"), no. 55, 7 III 1919.

¹⁵ "HA", no. 73, 28 III 1919. The word 'dictate' was also attributed to Erzberger, who commented on how the treaty was prepared without the German delegation. Constantin Fahrenbach (Centre Party), President of the National Assembly, said the same thing before the German delegation left for Paris. See: "HA", no. 96, 26 IV 1919.

¹⁶ K. Hofer, *Oberschlesien in der Aufstandszeit. 1918–1921. Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, Berlin 1938, p. 61–64.

Silesia, was to consist of factors which Poles used in the east. Here, too, there was a centuries-old historical link between the region and the Reich.

The Upper Silesian issue was back on the agenda of the Council of Four in a few days' time during the debate on the response to the German delegation. It was already clear at that time that the people of the region would have their say, as Lloyd George pressed hard on this, ruthlessly attacking the Polish Prime Minister, who attended the meeting. Paderewski predicted that due to the influence of Catholic priests, Germany would win in western agricultural districts. In the industrial East, he predicted a Polish victory.

The decision was included in the reply given to the German side on 16th June. It stressed the conviction that Upper Silesia was primarily inhabited by the Polish population, and this concession was made following German demands. It was also immediately pointed out it would mean the occupation and the rule of the independent commission that was to conduct the plebiscite. It was already indicated here that part of the Racibórz district and the Głubczyce district would be excluded from the plebiscite. The former (Hlučín Region) was to be given to Czechoslovakia after the treaty came into effect and the latter, depending on the results of the plebiscite. It also highlighted an aspect that perhaps both sides did not see then – After the poll, the Inter-Allied Commission was to propose a borderline that would take into account not only the will of the population, but also the geographical location and economic importance of the individual areas. This implied that a decision to split the plebiscite area was already included in the treaty¹⁷.

In the face of Polish troops coming under the command of the Marshall Foch, the rumors of Polish-Czech alliance and, most of all, the possibility of allied forces' military intervention in the west, the German authorities had no choice but to agree to the ultimatum presented by Clemenceau. On 28th June 1919, after these relatively minor adjustments, the German delegation signed the Treaty.

The issue of the Upper Silesian plebiscite was regulated by Article 88 with an extensive appendix. Recent changes have been worked out by a new expert committee on the eastern German border, formed from the experts of the Council of Four (once again, the French general Henri Le Rond, already active in the Cambon's Committee, had a substantial say). Although the article itself was ambiguous about the intended division (it referred to the demarcation line and required German consent for a cession to Poland), in accordance with an earlier declaration, the roadmap of the operation was presented in detail in an extensive addendum. It defined

¹⁷ It is surprising, however, that the German side did not acknowledge this after the division of the plebiscite area. The aforementioned Abrahamczik (op. cit., p. 56) cites merely Article 88, without emphasising that it also refers to the division of the region, and omits the appendix, which refers to the principles of that division. This misjudgement is mentioned by General Karl Hofer, op. cit., p. 35.

the area of the plebiscite (apart from the territory mentioned several times, part of the Namysłów county from the Wrocław regency was also included), the need for the army and some German authorities to withdraw from it, the disbanding of military organizations (including all revolutionary councils), the transfer of the occupying power in this area to an allied commission consisting of representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy and the United States. The Inter-Allied Commission could appoint police force and technical advisors from the local population in the plebiscite area¹⁸.

The addendum specified the categories of people who could vote in the plebiscite (born and resident in the area no later than 1st January 1919), instructed the committee to carry it out and to propose to the major powers the division of the disputed region according to the three criteria referred to previously.

The Upper Silesian plebiscite was the fourth of five plebiscites that were held on the basis of the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28th June 1919. All referred to the principle of national self-determination, which was the basis of the Versailles order. They were preceded by plebiscites in Schleswig, the Eupen-Malmedy district and in Warmia, Masuria and Powiśle. The last Versailles territorial referendum, which took place in the Saarland, had to wait another dozen years. One more act of direct democracy was agreed at the Paris Conference, which was to concern the Slovenian-Austrian borderland and the area around Klagenfurt. In July 1920, this method was abandoned for nearby Těšín Silesia, Spiš and Orava and the Polish-Czechoslovak dispute. Numerous other requests and demands to appeal to the will of the people were rejected by the Allied Powers.

Although the general principle was the same, these plebiscites differed significantly in detail. On the one hand, the Upper Silesian plebiscite, if only because of the population covered and the economic importance of the plebiscite area, was the most important and fraught with far-reaching consequences both for the internal politics of the participating states and that of Europe. On the other hand, its power was relatively weak, as the significance of the will of the population was conditional. And even so, the final decision on the course of the future border was left to the Supreme Council.

The Commission for the Eastern German Border, hastily established on a parity basis, prepared the rules for the conduct of this vote, referring largely to the rules already worked out for earlier plebiscites, albeit with some important exceptions. The rules for the two plebiscites were worked out by the so-called Belgian Commission, which was still in session in February and March 1919, considering the question of two districts (Eupen and Malmedy, about 60,000 inhabitants)

¹⁸ *Powstania śląskie i plebiscyt w dokumentach i pamiątkach. Wybór tekstów*, F. Hawranek (ed.), Opole 1980, p. 40.

claimed by Belgium. It is difficult to fully consider these votes in terms of an international plebiscite. The relevant articles of the Treaty of Versailles (Articles 34–35) first prescribed that they be ceded to Belgium and only later that a referendum be held. The Belgian government was entrusted with this task, which put it in a privileged position. The results of the referendum were to be notified to the LN, which would make the final decision taking into account the will of the population.

The unequivocal Belgian victory was not surprising, although – as the German government emphasized in its protest of September 1920 – the area had not previously been associated with the country, and the political movement for its inclusion in Belgium before 1914 did not exist. The demand for the annulment of the plebiscite was accompanied by 70 letters and testimonies indicating that the desired result had been achieved by police methods, but the LN did not heed this protest.

The Schleswig plebiscite (Articles 109–114) was prepared under the dictates of the Danish government, and German counter-proposals were rejected. The most important difference from other plebiscites was the unequivocal formulation that the nationality of the disputed area would be decided by the will of the population, without additional conditions. The plebiscite territory was divided into two districts. In the first, the northern one, where voting was to take place a minimum of five weeks in advance, the total number of votes cast was the deciding factor. In the second district, with the capital Flensburg, the winners were to be determined at the level of municipalities. The Germans wanted counting by municipalities and simultaneous voting over the entire plebiscite area. The roadmap for conducting the plebiscite stipulated that 10 days after the treaty came into force, the voting area would be vacated by German officials down to the level of the Schultheiss (village governor), the workers' and soldiers' councils would also be dissolved, and those coming from outside would be removed. The voting was to be taken care of by the Allied Commission, which made its decisions by majority vote. In addition to the 3 representatives of the powers, it included representatives from Sweden and Norway. The commission replaced the removed powers and was to be supported in its actions by technical advisors, one German and one Dane each. Persons of both sexes who were at least 20 years of age on the date the treaty came into force, had been born in the plebiscite area or had lived there before 1st January 1900 were eligible to vote. A special group were persons removed by the German authorities, who could also take part in the plebiscite. They were to vote at their place of residence or place of origin.

The campaign was short and heated, but without violence. Both sides paid much attention to the mobilization of expatriates. On 10th February 1920, a vote

was held in the first zone. Out of about 100,000 voters, 75 per cent voted in favor of annexation to Denmark, with as many as 90 per cent of voters in the north and a more even situation in the south. All German requests for a border adjustment in this area were rejected. On 14th March, those eligible in the second zone went to the polls. The Danes were quietly hoping for a victory in the border town of Flensburg or in any of the municipalities. However, out of almost 64,000 voters, as many as 80 per cent opted to remain in Germany. The Danes did not win in any municipality. The French and the Danish right pressed for more territorial demands, at least as far as Flensburg was concerned, but the left-wing government in Copenhagen confined itself to the first zone, where the Danish advantage was clear.

A decision on another plebiscite in the German borderland was taken as early as April 1919. It concerned the districts of Masuria, Warmia and Powiśle (Art. 94–97). The principles of this plebiscite probably served as a model for the Upper Silesian vote. The plebiscite was to be conducted by a five-member Allied Commission, which assumed general administrative authority, especially in matters directly concerning the plebiscite. Its decisions were to be taken by majority vote and, if necessary, enforced by entente troops (British, French and Japanese troops had arrived). As in Schleswig, people were entitled to vote if they had reached the age of 20 on 20th January 1920, had been born in the area subject to the dissolution or had lived there before 1 January 1905. Here, too, one was to vote at the place of residence or birth. However, the weight of the democratic decision was much weaker. Not only were the results to be counted by borough, but above all the final decision on the demarcation of the border was left to the Supreme Council, which, in addition to the will of the people, was to take into account the economic importance and geographical location of the borough. The vote took place on 11th July 1920, at the worst time for Poland, when the Red Army was already approaching Warsaw and few were betting on the continued existence of the Polish state. Apart from Poland's tragic political situation, the Protestant denomination of the Mazurians, which linked them to Prussia (this option, not Germany, was also on the ballot paper) and the demonstrative arrival of some 100,000 emigrants, who were welcomed at the triumphal gates, worked against it. Poland in the north suffered a defeat. Overall, only 2% of the population voted in favor of joining the Republic of Poland, and the highest number, several percent, in the Olsztyn district.

WAITING FOR THE INTER-ALLIED COMMISSION

Regarding Upper Silesia, it is somewhat peculiar to note that, during the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, both sides claiming Upper Silesia focused rather on

emotional aspects. The focus of attention for the Germans was on blaming them for the outbreak of war and ordering the surrender of war criminals. President Friedrich Ebert signed it on 7th July, after a heated parliamentary and social debate, finally ratifying it¹⁹. While speaking in the Sejm on 30th July, Prime Minister Paderewski merely mentioned the plebiscite with a clear hope of winning it and incorporating the entire plebiscite area, focusing on imposing on Poland the disgraceful Little Treaty of Versailles, which protected national minorities²⁰. Both documents were finally accepted and on 11th September Józef Piłsudski, the Chief of State, signed the Treaty.

It looked much different in Upper Silesia. The region, like the whole of Prussia, was ruled by the socialists who, from November 1918, tried on the one hand to limit the social self-organization of Poles in the people's councils and, on the other hand, fought against the communists who were dominating the workers' council. This was done by legal methods (through a policy of siege, which hampered assemblies and rallies and allowed censorship) and on the fringes of the law (numerous arrests and militant methods of Grenzschutz/Reichswehr). Both anti-state factions took advantage of the increasingly difficult economic situation, which resulted in violently repressed strikes and demonstrations and growing social aspirations of the end of the war. Similarly to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, these forces were organizing military conspiracies.

The conservative forces and political Catholicism still played an important role on the political chess board. The former, backed by the heavy industry, bureaucracy and German intelligentsia (teachers, press) were in an alliance with the socialists and supported the possibility of unifying the country. Similarly to the Catholics in all of Prussia, fearing the approach of socialist *Kulturkampf* and in relation to its ideological fundamentals, The Upper Silesian centrists (Katholische Volkspartei), supported the idea of the highest possible autonomy of the region – in a form of a *land* or an independent state, but with guaranteed bilingualism and a leading role of Catholics²¹.

Such promises were made by the socialists as early as 30th December 1918 in Wrocław, signed by Otto Landsberg (member of the Council of the People's Deputies) and Paul Hirsch (soon to be Prime Minister of Prussia). Their implementation, however, was varied. Joseph Bitta, a bilingual Catholic politician, became the president of Province of Upper Silesia in early 1919, but the region was ruled

¹⁹ On the consequences of this approach in German politics: S. Brandt, "Schmach" und "Schande". *Parlamentsdebatten zum Versailler Vertrags*. "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 2019, no. 15, p. 40–45.

²⁰ *Sprawy polskie na konferencji...*, p. 244–251.

²¹ About the first post-war period see: B. Linek, *Początek rozpadu. Sytuacja społeczno-polityczna na Górnym Śląsku w pierwszych miesiącach po zakończeniu I wojny światowej (listopad 1918 r. – sierpień 1919 r.)*, "Studia Śląskie" 2019, vol. 85, p. 39–60.

by the pre-war SPD leader Otto Hörsing as a special commissioner of Prussia and Reich. A bill on bilingualism was passed, but the teachers boycotted it²².

Directly after the ratification of Versailles, these conflicts were pushed into the background. In August, first the communists staged a general strike in the District, hoping for the ultimate dominance in the production facilities, then the secret Polish Military Organization, dissatisfied with the Versailles' arrangements, taking advantage of the confusion and the example of Greater Poland, made an attempt to occupy the area by armed means of the so-called First Silesian Uprising²³.

Hörsing, who was nicknamed the Upper Silesian Noske, forcefully suppressed both of the outbursts. German-Polish government talks in Berlin on a peaceful resolution saved the insurgents from massacre. Having been finalized in October 1919 they showed that it was still possible. They not only agreed on an amnesty for criminal acts committed during the war and up to the date of signing the agreement (this concerned not only the two uprisings, but also the Haller Army formed in France, recruited largely from German prisoners of war), but also signed a barter trade agreement on pre-war principles: Polish food for Upper Silesian coal. However, it was already then that the areas of later conflict emerged. The Germans demanded far-reaching autonomy for their minority, and the Poles wanted consent to abolish German property. Meanwhile, both parties suspended talks pending the implementation of the Treaty²⁴.

Despite German obstruction and diplomatic games to tear the Entente apart, it was clear that it would come into force after ratification by the three powers. The Poles waited impatiently for the Inter-Allied Commission to arrive. All that Germany had left were the last few months to improve its ratings among the population.

First, under pressure from the Centre Party which co-ruled in Reich (Erzberger was now the Minister of Finance) and local Catholics, the issue of the region's independence re-emerged. The Prussian socialists (Hirsch) have already presented their hard line demands in September: the consent to the creation of a province with a broad autonomy, thanks to which the Centre Party (it convincingly won the January elections to the National and Prussian Congregations) would be able to define the school, church and wider social policies through the *landtag* and the office of *Oberpräsident*. At the same time, Catholic politicians made a declaration that they would not seek to federalize the whole of Prussia²⁵.

²² On the relations between the various groups at the time: E. Klein, *Rada Ludowa we Wrocławiu. Centralna Rada dla Prowincji Śląskiej*, Wrocław 1976.

²³ Biased: W. Schumann, *Oberschlesien 1918/19. Vom gemeinsamen Kampf deutscher und polnischer Arbeiter*, Berlin 1961.

²⁴ On the interwar relations: J. Krasuski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w latach 1919–1932*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 1981, no. 1/2, p. 85–91.

²⁵ On the last months of 1919: E. Klein, *Wybory komunalne na Górnym Śląsku 9 listopada 1919 r. a sprawa polska*, "Studia Śląskie" 1962, vol. 5, p. 7–76. Prussian Debate: P. Nitsche, *Der Reichstag und die Festlegung der deutsch-polnischen Grenze nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, „Historische Zeitschrift" 1973, Bd. 216, H. 1, p. 345; more about the Upper

The Prussian law was passed on 12th October 1919 and did not come into force until a month later, despite the pressure from German Catholics. This was due to the fact that simultaneously the municipal election campaign was under way, and the polls were finally scheduled for 9th November. The delayed elections (it was to be held in March) were ordered by Hörsing, who, both for doctrinal reasons (the municipalities were the only entity originating from the curial elections) and political reasons (the workers appeased after the successive concessions and the Poles who were broken up after the uprising) counted on the success of his party.

However, the elections had a plebiscite character and evaluated the first year of the new Germany and the Weimar coalition²⁶. They brought enormous success to the Polish anti-state lists of candidates, which won between two thirds and three quarters of the seats in the east, and a relative success to the anti-Weimar *Deutschnationale* lists, which gained more votes in comparison with January. The Conservative People's Party was also relatively successful, as it could now rule in the west and became the largest German party in the east. It was a disaster for the socialists, who failed to win a seat in the workers' municipalities.

After several days, Hörsing resigned, and the system of councils collapsed. Power was taken over by the Conservative People's Party, which offered the Poles joint political responsibility for the region within the Advisory Committee (Beirat) of *Oberpräsident* Bitta. It was rejected by them by demanding an unrealistic two-thirds of the seats. The Polish side was still awaiting the arrival of the Inter-Allied Commission. At the same time, grassroots actions have been taken to implement the political programme: the expansion of Polish language teaching in schools and in extracurricular venues, the strengthening of Polish organizations, and the Polonisation of the cultural landscape.

It was already then that the Polish side focused on fueling the conflict. The German *Sicherheitspolizei* (SiPo), which was being introduced since the summer, officially intended to combat riots and support other police forces, became a focus of the dispute. In fact, motorized and heavily equipped, and above all recruiting former NCOs and army officers, it was a form of escape from the rigors of Versailles. As early as the autumn of 1919, its formation and the creation of similar paramilitary units was protested by the High Council. When about three and a half thousand of them were put into service in the District, they became a regular object of criticism for Polish councilors.

The turn of the year brought a Pyrrhic German victory. The US, due to an internal conflict over the ratification of the LN points, which the Republican majority

Silesian province itself: G. Webersinn, *Die Provinz Oberschlesien. Ihre Entstehung und der Aufbau der Selbstverwaltung*, „Jahrbuch der Schlesischen Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität zu Breslau” 1969, Bd. 14.

²⁶ On the political situation in Prussia see: H.-P. Ehni, *Zum Parteiverhältnis in Preußen 1918–1932. Ein Beitrag zu Funktion und Arbeitsweise der Weimarer Koalitionsparteien*, „Archiv für Sozialgeschichte” 1971, vol. 11, p. 241–288.

considered a threat to their assumed role of the global gendarmerie, withdrew from the High Council. Its representatives did not take part in the formal ceremony of handing over the documents of ratification and signing the relevant protocols in Paris on 10th January 1920. The plebiscite clock started the countdown...

“SAFETY AND PEACE”, BUT HOW?

In the proclamation announced on 11th February 1920, Inter-Allied Commission, headed by General Le Rond (with Colonel Harold Percival from United Kingdom and Colonel Alberto de Marinis from Italy as his deputies) promised social peace and equal treatment for all inhabitants of the plebiscite area. From the outset, however, the enforcement of such a declaration was doubtful. Not only was there no US representative in the Commission, but there were no US troops in the District. Britain sent its military contingent in March 1921, a few days before the plebiscite. Officially, the 15 000 strong military contingent initially consisted mainly of French troops (12 000–13 000), the rest were sent by Italy²⁷.

It was therefore half the number of the withdrawn Reichswehr, which, although concentrated in the east, had previously struggled with smuggling and social unrest. Now there were three borders, and although the Poles welcomed the Allies enthusiastically, the Germans were definitely hostile from the beginning. The next outbreak of civil unrest was only a matter of time.

A much more important political issue was the mandate of the Inter-Allied Commission. Was it a strictly occupational one, as the Germans would have wished, and therefore the legislation and other links to Germany continued to apply? Or was it a quasi-state mandate, as Le Rond and the Poles would like, meaning the Commission could issue new laws and take action to loosen links with Prussia and the Reich?²⁸

Initially, the Commission took symbolic and economic steps, which were the realization of this premise. Various gestures have been made, such as the issuing of their own postal stamps or the order to display Allied flags on its institutions, combined with a ban on displaying other national symbols. Economic measures were more serious, such as the decision on the order of export of Upper Silesian coal, which Germany pushed to bottom of the agenda, or the creation of new rules for the provision of the plebiscite area, which allowed food from Poland; the fact that the Polish propaganda skillfully exploited.

²⁷ Selection of documents from this period (including the report of the German delegate to the Inter-Allied Commission, Fr. Hermann von Hatzefeld): *Źródła do dziejów powstań śląskich*, Popiołek K. (ed.), vol. 2: *Styczeń – grudzień 1920*, T. Jędruszczak i Z. Kolankowski (eds.), Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970.

²⁸ International legal issues in a broader perspective: A. Brożek, *Miejsce ziem śląskich w polityce środkowoeuropejskiej po I wojnie światowej (1918–1921)*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 1970, no. 1, p. 97–138.

Formal legal measures have also been taken to separate the area from German statehood in the form of passports and visas for people outside the area and establishing a judicial system. The latter decision triggered a protest by German judges and legal associations in April, and when it was implemented in June, it sparked a strike of German officials. In the summer of 1920, such steps by the Commission were halted²⁹.

One of the last issues that it managed to solve in its attempt to build a new para-state structure was the dismantling of the SiPo and the creation of a bi-national police force of the plebiscite area. In fact, everyone expected it to be withdrawn from Upper Silesia in February. The Commission, however, after subordinating it to allied officers, carried out far-reaching disarmament in March, depriving it of heavy equipment and leaving only one rifle for five military policemen. The SiPo lost its military character and did not threaten the Allies. The Commission, on the other hand, gained police forces capable of supervising demonstrations and suppressing riots.

SiPo remained a permanent object of Polish attacks. It was only in July that the plans for its reconstruction were made specific. The new police force was to consist of 3000 people and be directly subordinated to the Military Department of the Inter-Allied Commission and the French command. Only 1800 were to come from SiPo, all bilingual Upper Silesian locals. This is when the Polish side started recruiting potential candidates.

The Polish plebiscite apparatus was centralized and subordinated to the plebiscite commissioner, a post which Wojciech Korfanty took up as early as January. It had strong organizational and financial support from Warsaw and support in Polish people's councils, transformed into district commissions and municipal councils. It was also in control of reorganized and increasingly better equipped secret Polish Military Organization, which was officially supposed to take care of the protection of Polish meetings and institutions³⁰.

Since spring, the Poles have been taking a political offensive on these very foundations. At the end of April, thousands of Polish rallies were organized in cities, demanding the dismantling of the SiPo, the removal of German officials and the appointment of Polish ones. These demands were repeated in the demonstrations on 2nd May (on the eve of the Polish national holiday) and strengthened by the 48-hour political strike (11th–12th May). At the end of the month, a school strike was organized under the slogan of full Polonisation of education.

The German side built a decentralized plebiscite structure, lacking a clear leader. Old Bitta, who had to leave Opole in early February anyway, was not suitable. It couldn't have been Fr. Carl Ulitzka, leader of the Conservative People's Party,

²⁹ Grassroots view of the situation in the plebiscite area at that time: B. Linek, *Powiat Zabrze/Hindenburg podczas II powstania śląskiego*, in: *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, vol. 2..., p. 274–285.

³⁰ On Korfanty: J.F. Lewandowski, *Wojciech Korfanty*, Chorzów 2009.

who held numerous functions in Berlin and, above all, was a priest. His collaborator Hans Lukaschek began to emerge as the leader of the German side. Until then the mayor of Rybnik and the revolutionary Landrat there, he moved to Wrocław in December 1919 and became the head of the officially cross-party Silesian Committee (*Schlesisches Ausschuss*), which was to coordinate relations with the Inter-Allied Commission and German plebiscite preparations on behalf of the German authorities. Most importantly, he had state propaganda funds at his disposal, which he mainly allocated to Weimar publications and associations³¹.

He also reluctantly supported the *Vereinigte Verbände Heimattreue Oberschlesier*, which was established in Wrocław in the autumn, and which brought together old elites and was politically linked to the *deutschnationale*. The group not only sought to monopolize German propaganda, but also expressed its claims to the preparation of the German plebiscite apparatus, especially facilitating the arrival of voters from the Reich. In this situation, the leaders of the Conservative People's Party decided in April to copy the Polish structure and establish a German Plebiscite Commission headed by Kurt Urbanek, until now the chief of Rozbark. His powers were much less than those of Korfanty and he was effectively limited to managing issues directly related to the plebiscite³².

In the summer, for various reasons, the situation in the plebiscite area settled down and European politics moved to the Belgian Spa. It was there, for the first time, that the Allies and the Germans sat at the same table to discuss the post-war order, above all the German reparations. Everybody from Upper Silesia showed up: Le Rond, on behalf of the Commission, Korfanty with the *White Book* of alleged German crimes and representatives of the independence faction (*Bund der Oberschlesier/Union of Upper Silesians*), who, for the last time, submitted a memorandum on the need to create a new state under LN's auspices.

They had good reason for this; at the time the Red Army was on the outskirts of Warsaw and it seemed that the collapse of Poland was a matter of weeks, if not days. Given the situation, Polish Prime Minister Władysław Grabski also came to Spa. He agreed to the eastern border demarcation for the promise of arms supplies and brokering the truce and handed over the issue of the division of Cieszyn Silesia, where the plebiscite was also to take place. Later that month, the Conference of Ambassadors decided to divide it up unfavorably for Poland³³.

When at the end of July Korfanty and Le Rond returned to Upper Silesia, they found the Poles on the defensive. The German left returned to the political game.

³¹ R. Vogel, *Deutsche Presse und Propaganda des Abstimmungskampfes in Oberschlesien*, Leipzig 1931.

³² With a repetition of the VV's arguments: M. Laubert, *Die oberschlesische Volksbewegung. Beiträge zur Tätigkeit der Vereinigung Heimattreuer Oberschlesier 1918–1921*, Breslau 1938.

³³ On these negotiations and German politics at the time: B. Linek *Niemcy wobec Górnego Śląska*, in: *Słownik Powstań Śląskich*, vol. 2..., p. 89–111.

In the face of the worsening of the provisions, it had organized economic strikes, which had already taken on a political character in August. Due to Germany's declaration of neutrality in the Polish-Bolshevik conflict, the left-wing trade unions demanded a similar step in the plebiscite area. And most of all, they demanded stopping of supplies of any raw materials.

On 17th August 1920, during a demonstration in Katowice, organized by them under the slogan "War to war", a Polish doctor and activist Andrzej Mielecki, who rescued the wounded in the riots, was murdered. Korfanty treated this crime as a direct impulse to give the next day's order to the Polish Military Organization for the outbreak of the Second Silesian Uprising. The official aim of this military demonstration was to dismantle the SiPo and remove German officials. Unofficially, the idea was to prevent any German support for the Red Army and to assume political initiative³⁴.

The uprising took over the District quickly, without entering the cities to avoid the arriving Commission's troops. The SiPo was being disarmed and liquidated throughout the region and German officials and elites (teachers) were being driven out. All this was done without any reaction and sometimes with the silent support of the French. On the insistence of the Inter-Allied Commission, talks took place in Bytom (Korfanty personally met with Fr. Ulitzka), where an agreement was quickly reached on 28th August; it was later also signed by political organizations and trade unions from both sides. The SiPo was to be abolished (in fact, the relevant order was already issued by the Commission on 24th August), and the new police was to be bi-national, composed of bilingual Upper-Silesians and controlled by the Commission. It was also decided to surrender the weapons, stop the violence and expel all individuals from outside the plebiscite area. None of these declarations have been complied with³⁵.

THE DECISIVE PLEBISCITE?

If there was previously a shroud of mutual trust on both sides of the conflict, towards the Commission and within itself, there was even less of it left after September 1920. The Poles reorganized the Polish Military Organization, which was increasingly led by officers of the Polish Army, especially those associated with intelligence. In Wrocław, the Reichswehr command was looking more and more

³⁴ Military issues of the years 1919–1921 in more detail: R. Kaczmarek, op. cit., passim. The perspective of the occupying forces, primarily the French: "Aby utrzymać porządek". *Raporty wojsk francuskich z okresu II powstania śląskiego (lipiec-wrzesień 1920)*, G. Bębniak, S. Rosenbaum (eds.), Katowice–Warszawa 2020 (parallel text in French).

³⁵ On Fr. Ulitzka and the situation in the region at the time: G. Hitze, *Carl Ulitzka (1873–1953) oder Oberschlesien zwischen den Weltkriegen*, Düsseldorf 2002, p. 165–441.

favorably at attempts to organize a German armed underground, which were also started to be taken into account in planning the next conflict. Following the end of the uprising, the first conflict in the Inter-Allied Commission occurred, and representatives of Italy and the United Kingdom accused Le Rond of semi-clandestine support for the Poles.

In September and October, the plebiscite police (*Abstimmungspolizei*) was hurriedly organized on a parity basis in accordance with the results of the municipal elections. Meanwhile, Polish advisers were introduced to the district authorities, who could intervene on matters concerning the Polish population³⁶.

All this was now happening in an accelerating and increasingly fierce propaganda campaign. Historical and national arguments were referred to and political promises were made (On 15th July, the Sejm passed a law on the autonomy of the future Silesian Voivodeship, in which it outbid the Prussian province with a declaration of the creation of the Silesian Treasury, which would retain the majority of the income; in reaction, the Germans made a promise to return to the idea of the *Land*); above all, reaching for negative national stereotypes was also taking place. All this during increasing press circulation and its hostile takeovers, poster warfare and the use of modern propaganda methods (film)³⁷.

Since the autumn, German reports have slowly been dominated by the belief that they would emerge victorious. Although these were premonitions, they probably accurately reflect another change in social moods. They were affected by several events. On the one hand, it was the brutality of the uprising, particularly the publicized burning down of the Protestant village of Anhalt in Pszczyna County, which was not changed by Korfanty's prompt arrival and the promise of financial compensation. The murder of Teofil Kupka (20th November) by a member of Polish Military Organization left an even worse impression. Before the Second Uprising, Kupka was Korfanty's close associate. Their paths separated when he began to criticize Polish plebiscite actions, especially the increasing role of newcomers. After leaving Korfanty, he moved to the independence camp and started to publish (with German funding) the bilingual "Wola Ludu", in which he warned his compatriots against falling into the yoke of "Polish masters". We should also raise the issue of the political cost of co-ruling in numerous municipalities, which did not result in a fundamental improvement of the population's life³⁸.

³⁶ On this forgotten part of the history of that period: M. Wehowski, *Institution des Ausgleichs in einer umkämpften Region? Die Kreisbeiräte in Oberschlesien: September 1920–Mai 1921*, "Studia Śląskie" 2019, vol. 84, p. 17–28.

³⁷ W. Grosch, *Deutsche und polnische Propaganda während der Volksabstimmung in Oberschlesien 1919–1921*, Dortmund 2003.

³⁸ This is one of the key themes of Upper Silesian national mythology. From this perspective, on this period: D. Jerczyński, *Historia narodu śląskiego, prawdziwe dzieje ziem śląskich od średniowiecza do progu trzeciego tysiąclecia*, Zabrze 2003, p. 87–128.

On the Polish side, even before the treaty came into force, there were voices in the political debate that the outcome of the vote could be affected primarily by emigrants. From the spring of 1920 onwards, ways were sought to minimize this threat. Internationally, the Polish government posed the issue in a note to the Council of Ambassadors on 21st September 1920, stressing that the admission of 200,000 people who had nothing to do with the area could weigh on its fate. Since the Inter-Allied Commission, probably under British influence, took the view that the vote should be held in accordance with the treaty provisions, French diplomacy stepped in. Under its influence, on 10th November the Council of Ambassadors sent an enquiry to interested parties about the group's vote, highlighting concerns that the one-off arrival of 300,000 people would lead to riots and street fighting. This issue was grasped by Polish diplomacy, which did most to keep the debate alive. Then, from various sides of the diplomatic table vague proposals to arrange a vote in the west of Germany, e.g. in Cologne appeared, or to vote on a separate date. Either of these could have brought additional problems for the Polish side. For example, with a vote in the west, leaving aside the question of organizing the vote by municipalities, it was easier for the Germans to organize the arrival of those entitled to vote. Separate deadlines (it was the same with the zones) could have led to a snowball effect in favor of Germany if the emigrants or the western zone voted earlier. Above all, however, these ideas were not part of the treaty and would not have been agreed by all parties. In the end, at the end of November, the Polish government took the treaty position that emigrants should vote on the same day as other groups and in their place of birth. It was not until this month that more extensive efforts were made to organize the arrival of Polish 'emigrants'.³⁹

At the beginning of 1921, preparations for the plebiscite were finally launched. On 5th January, a document detailing those eligible and the rules of voting was issued, in which, despite Polish insistence, the Versailles' rules were adopted, making it possible to vote for people born but not living in the plebiscite area.

Eventually, the date of the vote was set for 20th March.

The vote covered 1510 municipalities (some were merged), of which 834 (55.3%) voted for Germany and 674 (44.7%) for Poland. There was a tie in two municipalities. However, these official figures were punctured in the press by aggregate data, which reported that of the 1.22 million eligible voters, 1.19 million, or 97.5%, participated. Of these, 707,000 (59.7%) voted for Germany and 479,000 (40.3%) for Poland.

The imposition of this result on public opinion was a success for German propaganda, on which the narrative of the necessity of leaving the entire plebiscite

³⁹ From Polish point of view: B. Malec-Masnyk, *Plebiscyt na Górnym Śląsku (geneza i charakter)*, Opole 1989; M. Lis, *Plebiscyt górnośląski 20 III 1921*, in: *Encyklopedia Powstań Śląskich...*, p. 397–400.

area to Germany was expanded. The Poles succumbed to this narrative, concentrating at length on proving that the result was influenced by the votes of emigrants, whose number was put at 192,000, of whom reportedly 182,000 voted for Germany. While this is likely, it is not clear where these figures came from. They probably first appeared in May 1921 in a publication signed by engineer Karol Firich and published by the Central Plebiscite Committee (actually a state body) entitled “Polskość Górnego Śląska, według urzędowych źródeł pruskich a wynik plebiscytu” (The Polishness of Upper Silesia, according to official Prussian sources and the result of the plebiscite).

This, in turn, appears to be a Polish propaganda effort, as the distribution of votes in this group is not known (the results were given by commune and only the numbers that fell for each country, not the distribution of votes in the voting groups), nor is it known exactly how many expatriates voted in each commune. A less important issue, but also noteworthy, is the attempt to answer the question, who did not vote on 20 March? Taking a common-sense view, it would seem that ‘emigrants’ predominated among these 30,000.

The overall statistics do not reflect the complexity of the problem. If the Germans definitely won in the west, the Poles won in the south-east. In the districts, Germany won slightly, but only because the big cities clearly voted for them. The rural areas voted for Poland. Therefore another Gordian knot was created⁴⁰.

FIGHTING FOR TERRITORIAL ALLOCATION

Both sides’ competition for a favorable territorial allocation began almost immediately after the vote. From the beginning and contrary to the treaty, Germany fought for the entire plebiscite area. This can already be seen in the post-plebiscite speech by K. Urbanek, who speaks of preserving one undivided Upper Silesia within the German borders. German Government’s note to the Commission (4th April) showed a similar approach; it demanded that the territory remain with Germany as a whole, motivated by its economic unity.

The Poles were more modest, as Korfanty limited the demands to the Oder River line, with derogations in favor of Germany in the south, even though such a border granted most of the disputed territory and population to Poland. The Commission was divided on the matter. The Italians and the British were in favor of granting Poland primarily two south-eastern districts. Le Rond was closer to Korfanty’s idea, planning of giving the Upper Silesian Industrial Region to Poland.

⁴⁰ On the plebiscite see also: H. Neubach, *Die Abstimmung in Oberschlesien am 20 März 1921*, in: *Deutschland und das Recht auf...*, p. 92–130.

At the beginning of May, the Council of Nations was due to meet again and a decision was expected. Under these circumstances, Korfanty, with the consent of the Polish Government and probably with the knowledge of Le Rond (who, at this critical moment, left for Paris), after several weeks of military preparations, decided to repeat the maneuver of the Second Uprising and carry out a military demonstration, which was to end with a truce on Polish terms.

First, a rumor was published in the Polish-held German press that the German owners were planning to destroy the mines and foundries. The workers were then called on to go on general strike in their defense. Finally, on the night of 2nd/3rd May, Korfanty gave the order to the insurgents to occupy the area stretching to the Oder River, which was done efficiently in a few days.

As early as in the first half of May (after the return of General Le Rond) Korfanty started to seek a truce that would secure the recognition of the demarcation line overlapping with the occupied area. Such an agreement was probably made on 9th May and announced the following day by the Polish Government. However, it met with violent German protests. Only in Opole 30,000 people protested. German diplomacy threatened to withdraw from the reparation negotiations that took place in London. The Commission denied the existence of the agreement, and Lloyd George, once again, violently attacked Poland in the House of Commons on 13th May, accusing it of violating the Treaty of Versailles.

From that moment on, the Polish side found itself on the political defensive, having been able to count on the support of France only, and soon on the military defensive, after the larger German *Selbstschutz* units entered the fight. In addition to the limited German self-defense forces, German actions were hampered by threats from the allies to withdraw from the cities of the industrial district, which would lead to their capture by the uprising.

Since General K. Hoefler, who commanded self-defense, was also constrained by the German Government, which was in turn pressured by the French Government, negotiations to end the fighting and withdraw the troops from the plebiscite area began in the last ten days of May.

Subsequently, on 26th June, the opposing sides concluded a separate agreement with the Inter-Allied Commission, under which the troops were to be disarmed and gradually withdrawn from the plebiscite area under allied control, and the Commission's troops were to form a demarcation line. Since, at the same time, the Commission allowed the creation of municipal guards recruited on a national basis on both sides, this was the beginning of the division of the region. On 5th July, the uprising officially ended⁴¹.

⁴¹ There is a vast number of memoirs on the fighting itself. In German, above all, previously mentioned Hoefler. In Polish see e.g. J. Wyglenda, *Plebiscyt i powstania śląskie*, Opole 1966.

The issue of division has returned to diplomats. As it was not possible to reach agreement within the Council in the summer, the decision was handed over to LN, whose proposal was approved on 20th October 1921 the Council of Ambassadors. This meant granting Poland a minority of the area (only 33%), but the majority of the Upper Silesian Industrial Region. Germany gained not only the majority of the disputed area, but also the majority of the population⁴².

A FAKE PUZZLE? (INSTEAD OF A SUMMARY)

The two governments acknowledged it later that month, with Germany protesting strongly. It was not recognized that it brought both states and peoples an opportunity for peace and a new arrangement of relations. The prevailing German sentiment is evidenced by Fr. Ulitzka's statement at a special meeting of the Reichstag on 26th October, where he called the decision a terrible breach of the law, especially of the right to self-determination⁴³. From the very beginning, talks about the Geneva dictate began, as in the case of the Versailles dictate, and the search for an internal enemy: Poles, socialists, Catholics... This was followed by the mythology of the 'crucified country' and the 'burning border', a description of a morbid state that needed to be rectified, not memorized and confined.

Also, the Polish side used these events for a dubious consolidation of the society. They served to create the myth of the Silesian uprisings as the end of the history of the region and its inhabitants, meaning a return to the motherland paid for with their blood. It was thus forgotten that these actions undermined the order of Versailles, one of the foundations of the Second Polish Republic. Although it was a narrative aimed at internal purposes, it fit in well with the European-wide veteran myth of the combatant who put the former military personnel on the pedestal and assigned them special social rights. Ever since the 1920s, they have been taking power in Europe. The effect on its later history is well known.

⁴² For the final months before the split, see: B. Linek, *W cieniu podziału Górnego Śląska (marzec - lipiec 1922 r.). W świetle "Der oberschlesische Kurier" i "Katolika"*, "Punkt. Rocznik Centrum Badań Mniejszości Niemieckiej" 2021, vol. 1 (in print).

⁴³ Neubach, op. cit., p. 120.

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