

The 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences (IHS), Jinan, China, 23rd-29th August, 2015,

Proceedings

Joint Session 5/*Session jointe 5*

Reflections on the First World War: Global, Imperial, and Trans-national Perspectives

2 PM-5:15 PM/14 h-17 h 15

Zaozhuang Hall, Shandong Hotel

Organizers: Xu Lan (Capital Normal University, Peking)

Jay Winter (Yale University)

With the support of the Australian Historical Association and the Association of Chinese Historians

Discussant: Jay Winter (Yale University)

- Xu Guoqi (Hong Kong University):
The Great War and Asia's great transformation
- Santanu Das (King's College, London):
Beyond nation and the Great War: Indian and trans-national intellectual responses to violence, 1914-1922
- Erez Manela (Harvard University):
Empires at War: The Great War as global conflict
- John Horne (Trinity College, Dublin):
Empires and occupations: the global dynamics of the illiberal wartime state
- Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (University of Konstanz):
National liberation at the imperial peripheries – concepts and conflicts on post-war order: The case of Poland in transnational perspective
- María, Inés Tato (University of Buenos Aires):
The Great War in the confines of the world: Its impact on Argentine society
- Emilia Salvanou (University of Peloponnese):
Beyond rational choice and national historiographies: World War I, minorities and the un-mixing of populations
- Peter Gatrell (University of Manchester):

JS5

Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, University of Konstanz, Germany

**National Liberation at the Imperial Peripheries – Concepts and Conflicts on Post-War Order:
the Case of Poland in Transnational Perspective**

My subject is the formation of national states following the First World War and the collapse of three empires: the German, Habsburg and Russian Empires. In terms of territory, my focus is on the peripheries of these empires in central Europe, which were multiethnic and multicultural in character and in some cases looked back on periods with a distinct identity as a state. Poland was both typical and exceptional. It was typical in the sense that national resistance and the struggle for liberation were linked with attempts to influence the constitutional form of the imperial peripheries. The political structures and power strategies in these areas were not constant during the long 19th century, but varied depending on national resistance. The goal of imperial rule was to achieve stability and at least a certain degree of integration, partly through the state power apparatus and its disciplinary authority, and partly through various forms of political participation.

Poland was exceptional in the sense that it was divided among the three empires. The Polish national movement thus faced two equally difficult challenges: First, it had to develop a socio-cultural and political profile in accordance with conditions in each of the empires and exercise influence where it saw opportunities; second, to achieve the long-term goal of founding a national state, it was necessary to have a coherent national movement that spanned all three partitioned areas and appealed to the different exiled Polish populations. Historians have clearly described the dramatic situation prior to the First World War. The Polish territories belonging to Germany, Russia and Austria had developed in very different directions, both structurally and culturally. Through modernization and incorporation into their respective empires, they had acquired specific characteristics

and their populations had become estranged from one another. Contemporary rhetorical questions like “Where is Poland?” and “What should Poland be?” thus touched on issues that were very sensitive for nationalism.

Theories of the nation have shown us that the *consciousness* in a large social group of *wanting* to be a nation is a constitutive element. A nation is an imagined order that is rooted in people’s minds, in which the underlying criteria such as space, language, religion or history can vary or differ in importance. The nation is accorded greater significance than other factors that unite social groups, such as class or religious affiliation. Ernest Gellner and others have shown how the invention of the nation is connected with modernization, the development of industrial society and the associated trends towards centralization through which the barriers between local social units are overcome and an overarching, standardized culture supported by modern communication media comes into being.

Following a distinction by Ernest Renan, one can identify two principles of this mental construct. The first points to the past and creates a community through the inventing of tradition, as described by Eric Hobsbawm. This is not just an imaginative process, but also a process of rediscovering and reviving old traditions. The second principle is based in the present and refers to a consensus about wanting a certain way of life. In this connection the concept of the “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) is particularly useful; such a community is understood by a national movement to be socially homogeneous, territorially separate and politically sovereign. This imaginative process is supported by words and images, and it relies heavily on cultural practices that create a feeling of community. Examples in the context of partitioned Poland are celebrations of historical events to which great national importance is attached. The circumstances surrounding such celebrations, such as the anniversary of the Polish constitution of 3rd May 1791, also indicate the degree of imperial integration in each case and, on the other hand, the potential for national Polish resistance. These and other examples demonstrate how national myths can promote an idea of unity when a broad social

foundation exists. For all national movements the starting point is a myth of national origins.

In 19th-century Poland it was possible to invent a tradition based on the memory of the old nation of nobles, the republic as a form of government and an extensive, multi-ethnic territory: conditions which had ceased to exist after the partitions of Poland in the late 18th century. Thus the national myth had three sources of radiance: the original myth of Poland as part of Western culture, supported by the myth of the Noble Republic with its exclusive freedom and equality, and additionally the myth of Poland as a victim. This latter myth was bound up with the lost nation and its tragic heroes. Coming from all social strata and thus anticipating the modern nation, they had risen up in bloody insurrections against the policy of partition and the ambitions of Poland's imperial neighbours. Polish literature and art made substantial contributions to shaping and disseminating this national myth. For example, in his poetic drama *Forefathers' Eve* (1832), written after the suppression of the great November Rising of 1830, the poet Adam Mickiewicz glorified Poland as the Christ of the peoples. Thus he became a founder of political messianism. The metaphor included not only martyrdom, but also a vision of freedom: The resurrection of crucified Poland would guarantee the freedom of all other nations as well. Polish history painters created magnificent scenes from the past, linked martyrdom with heroism and prophesied the nation's freedom.

Another factor that bridged the divisions caused by partition and political emigration was Catholicism; the Polish Catholic Church became an integral part of the resistance against foreign domination and supplied proof of its credibility through its priests who committed themselves to martyrdom. Thus the Church played a major part in giving the nation a sacred character and making religion a national matter. The image of Matka-Polka – the Polish nation as woman and mother – reflected the cult of the Virgin Mary. Thus a specific culture of remembrance created a bond that united Polish people everywhere in the name of a lost nation and a new, imagined one.

However, the power of myth was not sufficient to produce a consensus on the new boundaries of the Second Republic. Moreover, the individual currents of the national movement had different notions about the definition of a nation. With the increasing diversity of political movements in Poland at the turn of the century and the early 20th century, the disputes became more heated. They were focused on problems of time and space: where and when to draw the nation's boundaries. The differences of opinion depended on party orientation, but also on the political socialization of the protagonists. At the turn of the century the conservative elites, including in particular the landed nobility, had come to terms with the partitioning powers through a "threefold loyalty". The *Inteligencja* was originally made up of impoverished nobles who took up professions during the 19th century and became the nucleus of a modern middle class. In all three territories occupied by the partitioning powers, they were able to introduce specific notions of national identity into society. The members of the *Inteligencja*, including those in exile, derived their distinctive identity from their self-image as the nation's elite and as successors of the Polish nobility on which the state was once founded. In the course of the 19th century they placed increasing emphasis on education and various methods of popular schooling in order to cultivate Poland's language and culture and include people from all social strata in the nation-building process. In the late 19th century Polish nationalism received a new impetus from political movements that would later develop a mass appeal: the socialist left wing and the new right wing in the form of the National Democratic Party.

In the late 19th century two influential antagonistic concepts crystallized. On the one side was the world view of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and its occasional leader, Józef Piłsudski. On the other were the diametrically opposite views of the National Democratic movement, led by Roman Dmowski.

Both leaders were representatives of the Polish *Inteligencja* and its traditions, but in very different ways. The differences had much to do with their regional origins and were thus typical of the area's multi-ethnic character. Józef Piłsudski, born in Lithuania as the son of an impoverished nobleman, stood fully in the political tradition of the

Republic of Poland–Lithuania and its elite. Since the 1890s, he had played a significant role in giving the PPS a distinct profile. In his view, social equality and democracy in the form of a republic would not be possible until *national* independence had been achieved through armed struggle; in other words, freedom had priority over social justice. In this sense, he and his socialist intellectual predecessors (such as Bolesław Limanowski) were proponents of a national socialism. This was rooted in a patriotism that united Polish society but at the same time was allied with general solidarity and independence movements in Europe. The main antagonist among the partitioning powers was the Tsarist Empire, which was seen as the most reactionary regime and the one that was most distant from European culture. At the same time, Piłsudski and the PPS stood for a new federative order in eastern central Europe. In what was called the Jagiellonian Concept they based their thinking on the borders before 1772, that is, before the partitions, and used the Jagiellons and their Polish–Lithuanian commonwealth as their historically based orientation. At the same time, they took the modern nation-building processes among the Lithuanians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians into account as the basis of a future multinational federation that would be separate from the Russian Empire.

Roman Dmowski and his followers were Piłsudski's strongest opponents. Dmowski came from Poland's petty gentry in the vicinity of Warsaw. His family had already become part of Warsaw's petty bourgeoisie, which found itself in increasing competition with the Jewish and German petty bourgeoisie during the industrialization of Russian Poland. At the Russified University of Warsaw he studied biology and zoology, subjects that brought him into close contact with social Darwinism. During this time he also joined secret patriotic organizations and soon played a leading role in them. As an influential publicist and theoretician of the new right wing, he rejected the Polish–Lithuanian Noble Republic and the tradition of insurrections because they were harmful to the people and weakened it, preferring instead a concept of nation based on race. His ideas on the nation and the state became an important part of the programme of the National Democratic Party, which he led since it was founded in 1897. Dmowski and other theoreticians (such as Zygmunt Balicki)

advocated the principle of survival of the fittest, which they said should also govern relations between nations and determine their boundaries. Their ideal was a strong national state with a vigorous policy of assimilating its ethnic minorities; Jews, however, were excluded as a foreign element that corrupted the nation. By contrast with the Jagiellonian realm, Dmowski evoked the memory of the first Polish political system under the medieval Piast dynasty. His geographical perspective was from central Poland to the west, where he saw the Prussian partition as the core of Piast Poland. Thus the German Empire became his primary foreign enemy. However, the National Democrats' so-called Piast Concept also called for including the eastern areas of the old Noble Republic in a new Poland insofar as the population there could be assimilated.

The versions of nationalism espoused by the Polish Socialists and National Democrats can be classified according to the typology proposed by Peter Alter (based on Carlton J. Hayes) and other scholars. The socialist concept contained elements of liberal Risorgimento nationalism, which strove for liberation from political and social oppression and constituted a protest movement against political systems that were in opposition to autonomous national development. In the tradition of the Italian freedom fighter Giuseppe Mazzini, the champions of liberal nationalism emphasized the right of each nation and individual to develop independently. This integrative vision pictured a Young Europe that would be part of a humane and peaceful global order based on a plurality of nations.

In contrast, the National Democrats under Dmowski advocated a concept of integral nationalism (as represented at that time in France, for example, by Charles Maurras and his *Ligue d'Action française*). This concept placed the nation above everything else, and social Darwinism provided the intellectual ammunition for justifying the struggle between nations as a process of natural selection and for promoting the right of the fittest.

When the First World War broke out, there was no uniform Polish national movement. However, organizations had arisen in various places that claimed to be the germ of a future Polish national

government. Józef Piłsudski and the PPS had already created organizational structures in preparation for a struggle for independence. On 6 August 1914, the day when the Habsburg monarchy declared war against Russia, the Polish Legion under the command of Józef Piłsudski entered it on the side of the Central Powers even before their regular troops saw action, but this was mainly a symbolic act. It put the Polish question back into international politics. In none of the partitioned areas was there a movement to march along and stage a new mass uprising. Piłsudski's Polish Legion gradually attracted more and more volunteers, however. He had not expected a Polish uprising, because he knew that the majority of Polish subjects in the Russian Empire were loyal to the Tsar in the war against Germany, as advocated by Roman Dmowski, the Polish deputy to the Russian Duma. Piłsudski's tactic at the outset of the war was to conquer the partitioned territory held by Russia and unite it with the Austrian-Hungarian territory under a single crown. In 1915, the Tsar's army was pushed far back to the east by the Central Powers and two new administrative regions were created under the German and Austrian occupation. The population experienced this period as one of economic exploitation and material hardship and thus generally had little sympathy for the Central Powers and Piłsudski's Legions.

After being promoted to major general, Piłsudski tried to expand the Legions and use their deployment, which was welcomed by the Central Powers, as a means of gaining political concessions. In 1916, when this tactic failed, he resigned from his military post. In December 1915, he had already played a major part in the establishment of a Central National Committee that had the support of the left-wing parties and strove to win Poland's independence from the Central Powers. The secret Polish Military Organization (POW), which had existed since 1914 and was committed to Piłsudski as a leader, also included this political goal in its statutes.

During this time the Central Powers took the best possible advantage of the "Polish question" in the pursuit of their military objectives. Part of this involved making certain concessions to the Polish population (for example, Polonization of the school system and administration) in

the German and Austrian administrative regions that were created. On 5th November 1916, the German and Austrian emperors proclaimed the “Kingdom of Poland”, a hereditary monarchy with a constitution but no clear boundaries, and established a provisional Council of State. This project of setting up a Polish satellite state had the near-term goal of making it possible to recruit large numbers of Polish soldiers for the Central Powers.

Whatever their calculations might have been, through their attempts to win the political support of the Poles in the occupied zones the Central Powers took the first step towards founding a Polish state. The consequence was to deliver an electrifying stimulus to all those inside and outside Poland who were weary of war, economic deprivation and control by occupiers. They became involved in nationalist associations and, by embarking on the project of a new Poland, placed their hopes in the establishment of a sovereign state that would bring their ideas to fruition.

Added to this was the dynamic international impact of the Two Emperors’ Proclamation of 5th November. The other belligerents put the rebirth of the Polish state on their agenda as well. The Tsar reiterated an offer to unite the three partitioned areas and establish Polish self-administration. After the February Revolution, Russia’s political leaders acknowledged the right of the Poles to an independent state; this goal was also included in Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points (Jan. 8, 1918) and became a key element of the USA’s new blueprint for peace. At the same time, Polish emigrants went into action and substituted “salon diplomacy”, such as practised by the famous pianist Ignacy Paderewski with America’s president, with effective forms of “paradiplomacy” (Janusz Sibora). Roman Dmowski, who as leader of the National Democrats had played a prominent role since 1914 by promoting a number of ideas in the organized independence movement, in 1917 was one of the founders of the Polish National Committee, which established its headquarters in Paris. He then became its chief representative and cooperated closely with the Allies.

All of these activities at the international level helped to bolster the political self-confidence of the nationalist activists in occupied Poland. When Piłsudski was asked to swear the military oath of allegiance to the German emperor, he and a number of his soldiers refused. As a consequence he was imprisoned in Magdeburg Castle. This crisis allowed him to distance himself convincingly from the Central Powers and thus enhance his reputation by acquiring the aura of a martyr.

In the course of the war the Central Powers pursued a varying course in relation to Poland, with the aim of containment. In the second half of 1917, a Regency Council was established in the kingdom and state authority was transferred to Polish hands, albeit only partially and slowly. On the other hand, the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk, signed in February and March 1918, provoked the wrath of Poles from all parts of the political spectrum because the German Empire, with Austrian approval, drew boundaries in eastern central Europe that favoured the new countries of Lithuania and the Ukrainian People's Republic at the expense of Polish territorial interests.

When, at almost the same time, the two monarchies collapsed, a variety of national initiatives arose, supported by Polish structures that had already been created through Polonization. For a short time there were rival political centres in Warsaw, Lublin, Krakow, Posen and Paris which differed in their orientation but not with respect to the goal of national independence. As soon as Piłsudski arrived in Warsaw after being released from prison, the Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland transferred power to him and the other centres of power placed themselves under his authority. Owing to his reputation he was considered able to bring the disparate political forces together. On 22nd November 1918 he became the "Provisional Chief of State" of an independent Poland.

Researchers agree that there would have been no political restructuring of eastern central Europe and no independent Poland without the First World War and the collapse of the three empires. The Polish historian Wł. Borodziej has clearly shown how these events gave a common meaning to the strategies and activities of the

Poles, as diverse as they were, and allowed them to coalesce into a national movement that achieved its goal, the republic, in the very same month the German and Habsburg Empires capitulated. Thus the war and the collapse of imperial supremacy can be seen as the catalyst of the Polish drive for national independence.

However, the contradictions among the main political forces were covered up by the widespread jubilation only for a brief historical moment. In the construction of the nation there was general agreement that the republic should be founded on a constitution, but opinions differed on whether Poland should become a political or an ethnic nation. The problem of territoriality and Poland's role in Europe gave rise to a wide range of extremely intense disputes. Notions of space and visions of how the nation should become a state were directly affected by the political and military conflicts that arose in connection with the establishment of Poland's territory from 1918 to 1922. The military advances and victories of Polish troops in the east and north generated a rapidly growing, unprecedented interest in myths of space, concepts of civilization and ideas about Europe.

At the same time, domestic and foreign policy became linked in complicated ways. Chief of State Piłsudski had to gain the cooperation of the Polish National Committee in Paris and of Dmowski, his strongest opponent, in order to be able to negotiate from a position of strength with the Allies at the Versailles Peace Conference, which began in January 1919. Another problem for Piłsudski was that right-wing forces won a majority of seats in the first elections to the Sejm in January 1919. As Chief of State, Piłsudski had to work even harder to achieve a political balance.

With this goal in mind, he chose Dmowski to lead the Polish delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference. Thus a dilemma arose for Polish foreign policy in the sense that two antagonistic concepts of space and the state – a federalist concept and an incorporative concept – were blended into a political compromise during the period when Poland had to define its frontiers. With their majorities in the Polish National Committee and the Sejm, the united right-wing parties succeeded in pushing the boundary of the new Polish state far to the

west. The historical “Piaśt” arguments and corresponding national visions championed by Dmowski were very much in tune with France’s security considerations, which likewise wanted a weakening of Germany. Great Britain and the USA, on the other hand, advocated political moderation in order to ward off instability in eastern central Europe. These two powers tried to promote the principle of national self-determination. The peace agreement that was finally reached with the Allies in Versailles provoked a bitter reaction from the National Democrats when territories they considered to be part of Poland fell to Germany. From then on, their goal was Polish infiltration of these territories, and they threatened the German minority in Poland with assimilation. Thus their animosity towards Germany took on a new quality.

Having failed to achieve the goals they set for themselves in the west, they placed even greater importance on establishing satisfactory boundaries in the east. The conditions for this could not have been worse, because the withdrawal of German troops from the former Tsarist western provinces had left a power vacuum between the Bug and Dniepr. Military units from Soviet Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine were now fighting for control of the territories of the former Polish–Lithuanian Republic, and behind the façade of revolutionary slogans the Bolsheviks had set out to take possession of their Tsarist heritage.

For all of Poland’s political parties, the boundaries of these eastern territories were a fundamental concern, and they were aware of the importance of this issue for Europe itself. The borders of Poland–Lithuania before 1772, that is, before the partitions, were a common assumption. Piłsudski’s position in favour of a federation initially coincided with that of the nationalist left-wing parties, which wanted to establish a decentralized federal state that would be based on national self-determination and include the young national states in the eastern part of the former Noble Republic. Switzerland was one of their models. These parties were part of the liberal nationalist Risorgimento movement. However, even within the socialist movement ideas were popular that were inconsistent with the ideal of equality and laid the groundwork for a hegemonic policy. This

included the notion of a civilizing mission. The socialist Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, for example, spoke of Poland's natural leadership role in reshaping Europe's boundaries. His ideas seemed to be inspired by political messianism: This role fell to Poland, he said, owing to its history of partitions and its tradition of uprisings.

Piłsudski too, who hoped to win the allegiance of the young national governments of the neighbouring nations in the east, thought in terms of cultural superiority and dominance based on the nation's history. This included a role as protector, which Poland offered to play as defence against the Bolsheviks. His argument had three components: 1. Poland's status as a leader of the imagined federation, 2. the existence of Polish and Polonized elites in the eastern areas of the former First Republic and their interest in retaining their leadership role, and 3. Poland's function as a protector owing to its relatively strong military potential. Piłsudski's inclusive integration concept was defined in opposition to the image of Russia as a power that was notorious for its expansionism, which was clothed in various forms of government and ideologies. Accordingly, his goal was to push back Russia's territory as far back as possible and thus exclude it from the new post-war Europe: in taking up this idea he came under the sway of the centuries-old myth of Poland as *antemurale christianitatis* and harnessed historical memory for his political objectives.

Piłsudski and his inner circle viewed their policy towards the east as being rooted in the tradition of European liberation movements, and they rejected the charge from other countries of cultivating imperialist ambitions. Indeed, the federalists saw Poland as part of a free, self-determined new European order. Their discourse invariably called for the exclusion of Soviet Russia from eastern central Europe and for participatory forms of transnational integration. The eastern European federal state envisioned by Piłsudski was to be secured by means of alliances with the other peoples on the borders of the former Russian Empire: the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Crimean Tatars and Caucasus peoples. Thus his concept extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The priorities set by Roman Dmowski for the National Democrats were diametrically opposed to this. Dmowski had presented his plan already at the Versailles Peace Conference in a note dated 3rd March

1919. His purpose was not to re-establish the borders before the First Partition in 1772, but to claim only the territories with Lithuanian, Ukrainian or Byelorussian populations that could be assimilated into the planned Polish state. This applied to almost the entire territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the north and east (including Minsk), with the exception of purely Latvian or Byelorussian areas, and large parts of Volhynia and Podolia in the south-east.

A broader examination of the public discourse in Poland would reveal many more examples of concepts of space and mental mapping. Here we can only sketch the various ways in which the idea of a civilizing mission was expressed. The conservative publicist Stanisław Cat-Markiewicz envisioned a collective movement of Slavic peoples under Polish hegemony, and he speculated that Poland might even inherit the Russian colonies in Asia. The archbishop of Lviv advocated another kind of messianism: The new Poland was to assume the role of a divine apostle and carry the light of the true Christian faith to her sister peoples in the east. He thus seemed to be suggesting missionizing to Orthodox Christians. Support for the “Jagiellonian Idea” spread across the whole political spectrum when, in 1919, Polish troops began to advance eastward. Even the National Democrats were unable to resist the power of the traditional notion that Poland had a special mission in the East.

Poland’s political objective of gaining the friendship of its eastern neighbours failed miserably because it implemented its policy from the start by armed force. This continued even while Piłsudski spoke of future self-determination. But worst of all, the eastern neighbours were immediately offended by the National Democrats’ talk of incorporation.

In late 1918 and early 1919, national governments were formed in Lithuania and Ukraine and then quickly transformed into Soviet republics by the advancing Bolshevik troops. Piłsudski felt he was justified by history to prevent Russian expansion of any kind. As supreme commander, he had gathered up the Polish army units scattered by the First World War and moulded them into a powerful military force. By mid-1919, Polish troops had conquered most of the

so-called Lithuanian-Byelorussian Soviet Republic. Against the wishes of the Supreme Council of the Entente¹ and its policy of promoting ethnic homogeneity in national states, Poland continued to expand eastward. In April 1920, it launched a preventive attack against Soviet Russia and occupied Kiev. In August 1920, Piłsudski succeeded in repelling a large-scale offensive by the Red Army towards Warsaw at the Vistula, and then he went on the offensive.

The Treaty of Riga of March 1921 between the Soviet Union and Poland moved Poland's border to the east but still left it far west of the border of 1772. Thus there was no territorial basis for the plans of Piłsudski and others to create a federation. But what was lacking most of all was a political basis, because Poland had created the ostensibly independent Republic of Central Lithuania, which encompassed the area around Vilnius and thus robbed Lithuania of its capital. In addition, Poland annexed Eastern Galicia. The offer of autonomy as a voivodeship, which was accepted by the Conference of Ambassadors of the Allied Powers and thus amounted to the establishment of a frontier, failed to appease the Ukrainians. On 15th March 1923, Poland's borders were fixed.

To sum up, Poland's search for national meaning and coherence after the foundation of the state was reflected in wide-ranging debates about the territory of the Second Polish Republic, in integrative, normative interpretations of history aimed at legitimizing contemporary policy, and in the tensions between the political and ethnic concepts of a nation.

The discursive construction of national identity during the early phase of the resurrected republic encountered severe difficulties owing to its traditions, its multi-ethnic character and the dynamism of the nation-forming process on the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Republic. In the dinner speech of 20th April 1922 which Piłsudski held in Vilnius on the occasion of the third anniversary of the city's conquest by Polish troops, he said the following:

¹ consisting of the heads of government of France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and Belgium

“Gentlemen! I will speak to you as the Chief of the Polish state and at the same time as a Vilnian. For me, these two functions are so inseparable that I cannot rise to speak here in any other way.”²

Thus Piłsudski, a representative of the Polish state standing on conquered Lithuanian territory, called himself a Lithuanian in order to promote the unity of the Polish and Lithuanian people. But this profession of identity only confirmed the fierce resentment of the Lithuanian national movement, which regarded the Lithuanian, Polonized elites as traitors to the people and the Polish state as a hegemonic power.

The vision of Poland as a revitalized major power in eastern central Europe, derived from history by leading Polish politicians, turned out to be only an illusion. Internal tensions created by problems with minorities had an erosive effect in the long run. This also applied to the policies of the neighbouring states, which were guided by revisionism and saw their respective minority issues as welcome opportunities for interference. Historical myths of the nation and its space led to a precarious relationship between the political vision and the pragmatic requirements of internal and external integration. Over the long term, what prevailed was not the civilizing mission of the Poles in relation to the annexed territories, but nationalistic revanchism on the part of the neighbouring countries, which destroyed the Polish state.

Translated into English by Mark Seidel, Tübingen, Germany

² Josef Piłsudski, Speech in Vilnius, 20 April 1922, in: idem, *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*. Persönlich autorisierte Gesamtausgabe. 4 Vols., Essen 1935-1936, p. 82-89, here p. 82.