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THE FIRST TREACHERY OF THE WEST. ON THE BOOK BY ANDRZEJ NOWAK*

Abstract: The Polish-Soviet War (1919–20) is one of the key events in the process of implementation of the Versailles order in Eastern Europe. Having saved the Versailles deal, the war gave the nations of Central and Eastern Europe an extremely valuable opportunity, for twenty years, to decide about themselves and build their own nation states on the remnants of three empires, which disintegrated in the aftermath of the geopolitical revolution brought by the Great War (1914–18). From the very beginning, the West did not understand the geopolitical significance of the Polish-Soviet War, seen as a local conflict of two countries, triggered by ‘Polish imperialism’.

Keywords: Versailles deal, Polish-Soviet War 1919–20, Great Britain, appeasement.

Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 — zapomniany appeasement [The First Treachery of the West. 1920 — the Forgotten Appeasement] by Andrzej Nowak is undoubtedly a summary of the author’s longstanding investigation into the significance of the Polish-Soviet War to Poland, Europe and the world.¹ The resulting work is important in research terms. The fact that it prompts reflection and poses numerous questions make it a model monograph, with a narrative which attempts to resolve an important research problem on the basis of new sources, in spite of the existing ample historiography of the topic.

The source materials come principally from British archives. The author thoroughly examined records of the Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office, held in the National Archives in Kew, and the Lloyd George Papers available in the Parliamentary Archives in London. He visited Churchill College, Cambridge to study the Winston Churchill Papers (in 1920, Winston Churchill held the post

* Andrzej Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 — zapomniany appeasement*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2015, 603 pp.

¹ The author discusses the genesis of the Polish-Soviet War in the monograph *Polska i trzy Rosje. Studium polityki wschodniej Józefa Piłsudskiego (do kwietnia 1920 roku)*, Cracow, 2001.

of Minister of War and Air), and the papers of Maurice Hankey. He browsed through the documents of Sir Horace Rumbold (the first British Minister in Warsaw) at the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library, and visited the National Archives of Scotland, where the Papers of Philip Kerr, the Prime Minister's Secretary and the architect of the Curzon Line project, are held.

The author's search for American sources yielded the papers of Bainbridge Colby, Secretary of State, available in the Library of Congress Library, and Bachmetev papers, part of the collection of manuscripts in the Columbia University Libraries in New York. Sources of Polish origin include documents held at the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, and papers of General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, available in Wrocław's Ossolineum.² Russian records have been retrieved from the Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) in Moscow. The correspondence of Victor Kopp with Vladimir Lenin is especially valuable among the sources of Russian origin.

I daresay that, for completeness of a definitive monograph on the topic, which Nowak's work undoubtedly is, it might have been useful to consult French sources as well, namely the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in La Courneuve, France, and in particular — the series Y Internationale, Europe 1918–40: 'Russie soviétique/URSS', and — obviously — 'Pologne'. French policy is presented by drawing on *Documents diplomatiques français* for 1920, published almost ten years ago on the basis of a strict selection, in which many important records were excluded from the publication.³

The author discounted the Polish diplomatic records for 1920, held in the archives of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (the Polish Embassy in London) and the Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN) in Warsaw, possibly on the assumption that the book examines the policy of the Western world powers towards Poland rather than the Polish foreign policy as such.

In spite of the word 'West' in the title, the author centres his deliberations on Great Britain. Although 80 per cent of the narrative focuses on the British policy, other world powers, such as France or the United States, are not passed over in silence. The chapter entitled 'Bezsilność' [Helplessness] deals with the policy of the United States (pp. 94–111). Such a construction of the narrative is justified to a certain extent, since in the summer of 1920 the future of Poland was in the hands of Great Britain. Great Britain was responsible for an attempt, taken in Spa, to impose on Poland arbitrary solutions, which would make it a prey for the Soviets. The French Prime Minister Alexandre Millerand failed to defend Poland, and even had a moment of doubt, when the Soviet army approached Warsaw.

² Handed over to the Ossolineum by General's wife after his death (1969).

³ *Documents diplomatiques français (3 septembre — 31 décembre 1939)*, ed. André Kaspi, Brussels, Bern and Berlin, 2002. My review notes — see Marek Kornat, 'Francuskie dokumenty dyplomatyczne (3 września 1939 — 31 grudnia 1939 r.)', *DN*, 36, 2004, 4, pp. 231–44.

Great Britain was the architect of the appeasement operation for the benefit of the Soviets in 1920, and France did not dare thwart it. Having three options: (1) to attempt an agreement with Russia's new leaders; (2) to fight for restitution of White Russia; or (3) to look for a 'substitute ally', France chose the second one. However, in the aftermath of the Polish victory in the Battle of Warsaw (on the Vistula river) and the collapse of the Whites (as well as General Peter Wrangel), France switched to the third one.

The structure of Nowak's book is easy to summarize. It is divided into four parts. Part one, entitled 'Kłopot z polską niepodległością' [The trouble with Polish independence], reminds the reader how troublesome, in the eyes of the West, was reborn Poland, returning to the map of Europe after more than one hundred years of nonexistence. Part two, 'Polski kryzys — krótki kurs' [The Polish crisis — a brief course], summarizes the main directions of the development of the Polish-Soviet conflict. Part three, 'Jak pracuje mózg imperium?' [How does the imperial brain work?], delivers undoubtedly the most valuable, analytical insight into British foreign policy. Part four, designed as 'Polish annexes and questions', without limitation, enters into dialogue with supporters of the thesis that Józef Piłsudski saved Bolshevism in the autumn of 1919 by refusing to collaborate with the Whites. Here, we also find a defence of the Treaty of Riga of 18 March 1921.

An insight into the Polish-Soviet conflict of 1920 can be achieved by means of four main narratives:

(1) Firstly, the 'Polish imperialism' theory must be mentioned. In an analysis of the 'new Europe' after the Great War in *The Truth about the Versailles Treaty*, Lloyd George made a meaningful comment about Poland: 'No one gave more trouble than the Poles. Having once upon a time been the most formidable military Power in Central Europe — when Prussia was a starveling Duchy — there were few provinces in a vast area inhabited by a variety of races that Poland could not claim as being historically her inheritance of which she had been reft. Drunk with the new wine of liberty supplied to her by the Allies, she fancied herself once more the resistless mistress of Central Europe. Self-determination did not suit her ambitions. She coveted Galicia, the Ukraine, Lithuania and parts of White Russia. A vote of the inhabitants would have emphatically repudiated her dominion. So the right of all peoples to select their nationhood was promptly thrown over by her leaders. They claimed that these various races belonged to the Poles through the conquering arm of their ancestors. Like the old Norman baron who, when he was asked for the title to his lands, unsheathed his sword, Poland flourished the sword of her warrior kings which had rusted in their tombs for centuries'.⁴ The former British prime minister complained that Poland's *fait accompli* policy had enjoyed much success mainly owing to the fact that, being in line with the interest of France, it had not been thwarted by the leaders of the Paris Peace Conference. Poland received support

⁴ David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, London, 1938, vol. 1, pp. 308–09.

from the American delegation — a fact simplistically explained by Lloyd George as the result of personal ‘influences’ of Ignacy Paderewski in America. From this point of view, the Polish-Soviet War was instigated by the Poles and ignited by the Polish aggression against the Soviets.

(2) The thesis of the *de facto* French victory in the Battle of Warsaw and General Maxime Weygand as its main architect has been promulgated until today. The strongest advocate of the decisive role of General Weygand was the leader of the French right-wing and creator of Action Française Charles Maurras, who wrote in 1920 that the Battle of Warsaw was Weygand’s victory (*victoire de Weygand*).⁵ He might have been the first to have expressed this French viewpoint. Maurras was seemingly the first to have named the Battle of Warsaw the ‘Miracle at the Vistula’, a paraphrase of the ‘Miracle at the Marne’ (September 2014). The myth of Weygand as the ‘saviour of Poland’ was strongly ingrained in the consciousness of the French military circles.⁶ In his letter to Weygand of 30 December 1920, Marshal Ferdinand Foch called him a commander ‘who determined the complete retreat of the Bolshevik armies and saved Poland’.⁷ Paul Painlevé, French War Minister, wrote that Weygand ‘brought a strong, enlightened impulse to the operations of the Polish army, which led to the definite settlements’.⁸ Marshal Pétain claimed that ‘with his actions and advice, Weygand had decisive influence on the retreat of the common enemy’.⁹ General Weygand himself failed to undermine the myth, in spite of having admitted that it was a ‘purely Polish victory’¹⁰ — that it was a ‘magnifique victoire polonaise’ — ‘une victoire polonaise’, and he himself was not ‘le sauveur de Varsovie’.¹¹

(3) Certainly, the Polish-Soviet War is often degraded to the rank of a local cross-border conflict in post-war Europe. As such, it can be compared to the Greco-Turkish war of 1921–22, and loses its rank of an armed clash in which the shape of post-war Europe, and especially its territory east of Germany, was at stake.

(4) With reference to the lesson learnt by the West from the events of 1920, we must not forget about those who interpreted Poland’s victory at the Vistula as the rescue of Western civilization. With his book on ‘the eighteenth decisive battle in the history of the world’, the British ambassador to Berlin, Viscount D’Abernon¹² became the first advocate of this thesis. The French Prime Minis-

⁵ As cited in Piotr S. Wandycz, ‘General Weygand and the Battle of Warsaw of 1920’, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 19, 1960, 4, p. 364.

⁶ For a long time, the myth has been promulgated in the French historiography, and is still referred to in speeches at universities, for example in the speech by Colonel Pierre Le Goyet, *La Guerre polono-soviétique de 1919-1920: Colloque*, ed. Céline Gervais, Paris, 1975, p. 16–31.

⁷ ‘chef qui a entraîné la déroute complète des armées bolchévistes et a sauvé la Pologne’, as quoted in Guy Raïssac, *Un soldat dans la tourmente*, Paris, 1963, p. 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38–39 (footnote 1).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ Interview with General Weygand in *L’Information* of 21 August 1920.

¹¹ Casimir Smogorzewski, *La Pologne restaurée*, Paris, 1927, pp. 151–52.

¹² Viscount D’Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World. Warsaw, 1920*, Lon-

ter, Millerand, expressed a similar opinion on the Battle of Warsaw. In 1932, he stated again that the future of the Western civilization was being settled on the banks of the Vistula, and Poland participated in the history 'comme soldat de l'humanité'.¹³ Obviously, he paraphrased the words of Jules Michelet, who, eighty years earlier, called from the lectern at Collège de France that 'civilisation is being saved on banks of the Vistula'.

In his work, Nowak has proposed yet another interpretation of the Polish-Soviet War. He sees the war as an attempt of the West to satisfy the aspirations of the 'new' Russia at Poland's expense, thwarted by the Poles through their unexpected victory at the Vistula in August 1920.

However, the narrative focuses mainly on the policy of Great Britain rather than that of Poland. Great Britain became the driving force in the attempts to come to an agreement with the Soviet government — over the remnants of re-born Poland. Part three of Nowak's multi-layered research (pp. 207–445) constitutes, in fact, a separate study of the process of shaping British policy towards Eastern Europe in 1919–20. The author reveals the roles and political views of Lord Arthur Balfour, Lewis Namier, Secretaries of Prime Minister Lloyd George — Phillip Kerr and Maurice Hankey, the British Minister in Warsaw Horace Rumbold, as well as the Foreign Minister Lord Curzon and the Minister for War and Air Churchill — the 'helpless ministers'.

The term 'appeasement' is used mainly (or even exclusively) with reference to the policy of Western great powers towards Germany, pursued at the end of the 1930s.¹⁴ In this context, according to the discourse of historiography proposed in academic literature, it deserves condemnation. However, the policy of appeasement was pursued also towards Russia. The end of the Second World War brought a meaningful triumph of appeasement, but its first harbinger came in 1920. The Spa Conference appears as a prefiguration of Yalta. Certainly, when considering appeasement, the year 1938 comes to the mind, when the victim was Czechoslovakia. However, the mechanism remains the same. Resolutions at the Spa Conference were passed based on the same motivation as the British-French plan of 21 September 1938, which advised Czechoslovakia to allow the territorial cession of the Sudetes. The similarity lies in the concept of territorial cession by a weaker partner to an aggressor, for the sake of peace.

don, 1931. Polish translation: *Osiemnasta decydująca bitwa w dziejach świata. Pod Warszawą 1920 r.*, transl. Artur Dobiecki, introduction August Zaleski, Warsaw, 1932 (The book by the British diplomat is an extract from a journal kept by him in July and August 1920 — a fact which adds the book the quality of a source. The last four chapters were written *ex post*, as a later commentary).

¹³ Alexandre Millerand, 'Au secours de la Pologne', *Revue de France*, 12, 1932, p. 578.

¹⁴ There is common agreement as to the fact that the event which triggered the policy was Lord Halifax's meeting with Hitler in November 1937. Some historians claim that the pre-appeasement phase came in the years 1933–37, as a result of a failure to implement the Four-Power Pact.

Therefore, the use of the term 'appeasement' with reference to the events of 1920 is, in my opinion, justified.

A critical reader may protest against 'treachery' of the West. Is it not an exaggeration? Does it not make a discussion about the historical lesson of the Polish-Soviet conflict excessively political? The author has an argument in his defence. He reminds us that his thesis is based on the resolutions of the Supreme Council of the allied powers, passed in Spa in 1920. It was decided there that in return for agreeing to trim the country in the east (and some concessions concerning the western part of the country — Cieszyn/Tešín Silesia and the status of the city of Gdańsk/Danzig), Poland would receive aid from the West. This never happened. Let me add, that even the stylistic form of the agreement signed in Spa is similar to that of the resolutions drawn up in Munich eighteen years later. We must not forget either, that having been invited to the Peace Conference in Paris, Poland was included in the winning coalition and entitled to certain guarantees. However, although the West failed to fulfil its obligations undertaken towards Poland, the very presence of two allied missions in Poland (a military mission commanded by General Weygand, and a political mission led by ambassadors Jules Jusserand and Viscount D'Abernon) had a great impact on the morale of Polish soldiers in the decisive moments during the Battle of Warsaw.

Obviously, the term 'appeasement' needs to be defined here. General associations lead to a conclusion that its use is based on the infringement of obligations under the international laws. In 1938, France failed to fulfil its obligations towards Czechoslovakia. In 1920, the Western superpowers did not undertake any obligations towards Poland. However, we must not forget that Poland was invited to the Paris Peace Conference, and thus entitled to the rights resulting from membership in the winning coalition.

The year 1920 revealed the mechanism of payment to an aggressor at the cost of a third country (which, due to its geopolitical location, becomes a victim). This is the essence of appeasement — truly timeless, present in the modern times as well. The British note to the Soviet government of 10 August 1920 is an act of appeasement towards an aggressor. Cession of a part of its territory, degradation, one-sided disarmament, falling prey to Soviet Russia — this was the future arranged for Poland. According to Nowak, the term 'appeasement' was used in one of the British documents as early as in the summer of 1920 (p. 390), and had long been in the vocabulary of the British political thought.

The concept of appeasement consists in more than just managing interests of third countries for the sake of an agreement among great powers. It also includes the concept of hierarchy of countries in international relations. The logic is based on refusing the right of shaping peace to countries which do not qualify as great powers. The philosophy of appeasement uses the haughty conviction that 'it can be seen better from the West how to arrange the East' of Europe (p. 225). 'Whether a country or a political community can exist in Eastern Europe, and what frontiers it may have, is determined first and foremost in terms

of benefits for Western Europe, perceived from the point of view of the British interest' — writes Nowak (p. 223).¹⁵

Therefore, the concept of international peace in 1920, based on appeasement, was built not only on the equilibrium of powers, but first and foremost on the idea of satisfying the claims of an aggressor.

What is interesting, the barbarity of the Soviet regime was not an obstacle to implementing the appeasement policy. Being a cause for concern and reflection, it is also a timeless warning. 'Civilizing' the barbarous Soviets 'through trade' was a goal of Lloyd George (p. 352). Civilizing Russia by allowing it controlled expansion was supposed to bring permanent peace (p. 441). However, the West failed fully to understand the strength of the totalitarian ideology on which the Bolshevik regime was based. The real picture of the Soviet tyranny was not seen in 1920. History was to repeat itself sixteen and eighteen years later (in 1936 and 1938), when the West's attitude towards Hitler and his country was lacking in the same type of imagination.

In the analysis, Nowak rightly claims that the foreign policy pursued by the British Empire was the personal achievement of Lloyd George. As the Prime Minister, he shaped that policy. Foreign Minister Curzon and Minister for War and Air Churchill were helpless indeed. What is more, rather than support each other, they were involved in a dispute over the policy towards Eastern Europe (p. 338).

Considering the British politicians, it must be noted here that the Minister for War and Air, Winston Churchill, in his article entitled 'The Poison Peril from the East', printed on 28 July 1920 in London's *Evening News*, stressed that Europe needed an independent Poland and that Poland's disappearance from the map would pose a threat to the Western great powers. In the same article, the future prime minister rightly commented that peace with the Soviets was just 'another form of war'. However, Churchill's insightful view was not shared. The Labour Party became pro-Soviet, while Lloyd George arbitrarily pursued and shaped a foreign policy which aimed to reach an agreement with the new Russia.

Nowak rightly opens a discussion with the thesis promulgated in Western historiography that in pursuing his Eastern policy, Piłsudski was a tool in the hands of the French. This opinion was expressed by the well-known pro-Soviet Canadian historian, Michael Jabarra Carley (p. 92). In fact, the entire policy pursued by the Polish Chief of State was contrary to any client dependency.

In the aftermath of the Great War, international relations in Europe incorporated a new discourse of self-determination of nations as the underlying principle of the new order. However, superpowers did not have to respect it. The idea of self-determination worked for Poland, as well as against it. *Consensus omnium* was rather shaped around a concept of 'ethnographic Poland'. This vision became a key

¹⁵ 'z Zachodu widać lepiej, jak urządzić Wschód' (p. 225); 'O tym, czy w Europie Wschodniej ma prawo istnieć jakiś kraj, jakaś wspólnota polityczna, a także o tym, jakie mogą być jej granice, decyduje przede wszystkim korzyść dla Europy Zachodniej, widziana przez pryzmat interesu brytyjskiego' (p. 223).

to understanding the British plan for Poland and its role in international relations. The concept was shaped, undoubtedly, on the grounds of misunderstanding of the political geography of Central and Eastern Europe. It is worth noting here that at the key moment of the Polish-Soviet conflict, *The Times* wrote that if Poland had accepted a status 'within its ethnographic boundaries', it would have stopped being an inconvenience and regained peace and quiet. Obviously, the British policy was centred around the idea of 'ethnographic boundaries'. In other words, the Polish state was in the interest of Europe and had the right of existence, but within the limits of its 'ethnographic boundaries'.

The appeasement of 1920 was rooted in the idea of correction of the freshly created Versailles order, which was impossible to maintain in the long term.

Poland was not satisfied with the appointed role of a small, insignificant country. Poland's 'sick imperialism' logically led to a German-Russian alliance — commented Lewis Namier (p. 255), and officer at the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department. His argumentation reiterated what Lord Arthur Balfour had said in the autumn of 1916, when the British government was debating over the future order in Europe.

The reborn Poland was not in a position to determine the political priorities of the Western great powers. So it was in 1920, so it was to be in 1939.

However, should we conclude that voluntary consent to be treated instrumentally is the only available solution? The answer is no. The logics of submission never pays off. Nowak's comment on the Polish policy and diplomacy in 1920 (p. 397) does not save Prime Minister Władysław Grabski criticism for his humiliating behaviour in Spa. Grabski consented to all the demands posed by Lloyd George. The author compares Grabski's submission to that of Emil Hácha, President of Czechoslovakia, nineteen years later, in March 1939, in the face of Hitler.

Towards the end of the book Nowak analyses the novel by Józef Mackiewicz *Lewa wolna* [Left clear] (1965). Mackiewicz claims that Piłsudski failed to take the opportunity to suppress Bolshevism, coming into agreement with the Whites in the autumn of 1919. Nowak scrutinizes the theses posed by Mackiewicz. The same opinion is promulgated today by the publicist Piotr Zychowicz (in his book *Pakt Lenin-Piłsudski. Czyli Jak Polacy uratowali bolszewizm i zmarnowali szansę na budowę imperium* [The Lenin-Piłsudski pact, or how the Poles saved Bolshevism and wasted a chance to build an empire]). Zychowicz, in an extremely simplistic and naive way, creates a pseudo-historical narrative about the Peace of Riga as a 'treason', where the Poles gave away half their country, leaving 1.5 million people as prey for the Bolshevik secret police (the *Cheka*). The accusations hit Józef Piłsudski and try to undermine his reputation as a statesman.

Nowak points out disproportionate were the numbers of the armed forces. The Polish army counted 600,000 men. In their peak period, White Russian forces numbered more than 500,000 soldiers. Against them, there were more than 3.5 million soldiers of the Bolshevik army (p. 465).

It is true that, in spite of the expectations of the French, Piłsudski did not help the Whites. It is difficult to imagine or speculate what would have happened had he acted differently. We must remember the unrelenting demand of the Whites to constrain Poland within the frontiers of the Congress Kingdom. In 1936, Stanisław Grabski admitted in a conversation with Ksawery Pruszyński, that 'the frontiers we have established could have been won only from Bolshevik Russia'.¹⁶ Moreover, it remains undisputed that the restitution of White Russia would have brought disastrous consequences for Poland. It might have not ignited an immediate Polish-Russian war, as Russians would not have had enough armed forces to attack Poland. However, reborn White Russia would have become an ally of victorious France. Poland would not have found its place in the European configuration of forces. No White Russian government would have agreed to the frontiers established in the peace negotiations in Riga held by the Polish and Soviet delegations.

Nowak's review of the Treaty of Riga is calm, driven by reason, and based on the conviction that there was no alternative.

All the Polish sources of 1920 and 1921 report a unanimous agreement on the Polish side about the absolute necessity to make peace with Soviet Russia. Poland was exhausted by the continuing war, and needed to focus on negotiating the best possible solution concerning the future of Upper Silesia. It was necessary to make peace for both military and economic reasons. There was no room left for a political discussion about the East. All Poland could attain was 'fulfilment of its minimum demands' through peaceful negotiations. 'In the recent months of the war, it has become clear that the Polish state treasury can by no means withstand the continuing war without aid from the allies. Both the political families and the entire nation are looking forward to peace. Our military forces, although capable of temporary mobilization, cannot be counted on to carry out strenuous, long-range war plans. Peace is absolutely necessary to recuperate the economy, consolidate the country, form a government capable of leading the state, and — last but not least — establish government institutions and offices able to administer the country in a purposeful manner. It would be nonsense to continue the war, given that the minimum demands of the Polish nation can be met in peaceful negotiations' — wrote Foreign Minister Eustachy Sapieha in one of his instructions for the Polish diplomatic missions.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'tylko od Rosji bolszewickiej mogliśmy wywalczyć uzyskane granice', Mieczysław Pruszyński, *Tamci*, Warsaw, 1992, p. 25.

¹⁷ 'Ostatnie miesiące wojny wykazały, że skarb polski żadną miarą sam bez pomocy aliantów dalszej wojny wytrzymać nie może. Zarówno stronnictwa polityczne, jak i całe w ogóle społeczeństwo faktycznie spragnione jest pokoju. Wojsko nasze aczkolwiek zdolne do chwilowego wysiłku, nie może być uważane za armię, z którą by można prowadzić trudne i na daleką metę obliczone operacje wojenne. Konieczny potrzebny jest pokój dla ekonomicznego podniesienia się i skonsolidowania państwa, dla utworzenia rządu istotnie zdolnego do kierowania nawą państwową, wreszcie organizacji państwowej i urzędów zdolnych do celowej administracji. Dalsze prowadzenie wojny byłoby

In this defence of the Treaty of Riga, Nowak refers to his previous work and interpretations, supporting his views with the findings of Jerzy Borzęcki, whose monograph *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven, 2008, Polish edition: *Pokój ryski i kształtowanie się międzywojennej Europy Wschodniej* Warsaw, 2012) delivers the latest (so far) historiographical interpretation of this territorial regulation.

It is true that at the turn of 1920, Piłsudski was of the opinion that the resumption of the Polish-Soviet conflict was inevitable, as evidenced in Kazimierz Świtalski's *Diariusz 1919-1935*. However, he did not take into account an attack by the Poles. In February 1921, the Head of State stated that in the event of an attack by Poland, the Bolsheviks 'would lose Minsk, we would reach the Berezyna, or at least the Dniepr — we have been through all that before'.¹⁸ The advance of the Polish army eastwards seemed irrational. What is more, there was no approval of the war among Polish society — and this seems to be the key argument. There were three plausible scenarios: (1) to continue the war without the hope of victory and taking great risks; (2) to sign a compromise peace agreement; or (3) to discontinue military operations without signing a peace agreement. The last solution would have resulted in a prolonged condition of 'neither war, nor peace'. In such circumstances, there would have been no chances for stabilization or gaining allies. A country whose frontiers are not firmly established is not viewed as a reliable partner in international relations. It may be noted here that if the condition of 'neither war, nor peace' had prevailed until 1920, when Germany and the Soviet Union concluded the Treaty of Rapallo, the Soviets might have not been interested in any peace treaty with Poland. Nowak rightly finds that the defeated Russia was in crisis, but Poland's circumstances were 'not any better' (p. 466).

Nowak admits that the Treaty of Riga failed to meet the expectations of all the nations of Eastern Europe (p. 512). The rights of Ukrainians or Belarusians were ignored completely. However, as a peace treaty, it brought a unique experience from the point of view of international relations — it broke the rule that 'only great powers can shape international relations' (p. 512).¹⁹ The Treaty of Riga established a political 'partition' between Germany and Russia, denying Russia territorial access to Germany, as stated by Stalin as early as in the autumn of 1918.

Certainly, various questions around the Riga negotiations remain valid. One of them concerns disputes among members of the Polish delegation. As revealed

zatem nonsensem, jeżeli jest możliwe uzyskać pokojowo minimalne żądania narodu polskiego', *Dokumenty z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1918-1939*, ed. Tadeusz Jędruszcak and Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa, 2 vols, Warsaw, 1989-96, vol. 1: 1918-1932, p. 113.

¹⁸ Kazimierz Świtalski, *Diariusz 1919-1935*, ed. Andrzej Garlicki and Ryszard Świętek, Warsaw, 1992, p. 75. A note by Świtalski from a conversation with Piłsudski of 21 February 1921.

¹⁹ 'tylko wielkie mocarstwa mogą rozstrzygać o obliczu stosunków międzynarodowych'.

by its General Secretary, Aleksander Ładoś, the decision not to demand Minsk was taken by a vote rather than agreed. Jan Dąbski confirmed it in his memoirs.²⁰ In these circumstances, Piłsudski's team consistently claimed that in the Riga negotiations, Stanisław Grabski, who had the decisive say over the stand of the Polish delegation, driven by his political 'minimalism', supported moderate demands concerning the territories in the East, and imposed the stand on the Polish delegation. The concept can be explained with the fact that National Democrats had a vision of Poland incorporating only those national minorities, which could be Polonized in the future. The issue has had wide coverage in the relevant literature and memoirs of witnesses. It will not be discussed here, as it does not fall within the scope of this review. It should be only mentioned here that the controversy stems from the fact that two participants of the Riga negotiations, who can by no means be considered members of Piłsudski's team, suggested that negotiating a territorial solution (without resuming the war) which would have made it possible to save the 'concept of federation' with reference to Belarus was possible. One of them was Dąbski. In his memoirs, issued shortly before his death, he wrote that Soviets had been absolutely against any concessions concerning Ukraine, since 'For Russia, Ukraine is the matter of existence or non-existence', and 'Russian Bolsheviks would have been more open to concessions concerning the handing over of control over Belarus to Poland; however, attempts of resolving the matter in Riga were met with explicit objection on the part of Poland'.²¹ Ładoś applies the same reasoning, reminding us that Grabski's concept had won before the negotiations began — it had been voted through after the roundtable of the Polish delegation. Another argument presented by detractors of the line of negotiations pursued by the Polish delegation is the Soviet peace offer made in January 1920. The Soviet Russia proposed Poland a peace deal, under which both countries would approve the territorial frontiers on the basis of the *status quo*. For Poland, it meant a frontier about 150 kilometres east of that agreed later in Riga. Since the Soviets were ready to make such significant concessions even before the military confrontation, there must have been a chance to win at least as much after their defeat in the Battle of Warsaw — this was the line of reasoning pursued by detractors of the Treaty of Riga.

One of Nowak's final reflections is a salient question: 'Are only the world's great powers able to guarantee this valuable commodity of permanent peace?' (p. 513).²² Is there any room for the 'aspirations and the sense of justice' of

²⁰ Jan Dąbski, *Pokój ryski. Wspomnienia, pertraktacje, tajne układy z Joffem, listy*, Warsaw, 1931, p. 111.

²¹ 'Kwestia Ukrainy była i jest dla Rosji zagadnieniem być albo nie być'; 'Ustępiliwszymi byłoby bolszewicy rosyjscy w sprawie oddania pod wpływ polskie całej Białej Rusi, ale próby postawienia tej sprawy w Rydze natrafiały na zdecydowany opór ze strony polskiej', *ibid*.

²² 'Czy trwały pokój, to wielkie dobro, może zagwarantować tylko siła, jaką dysponują największe mocarstwa?'.

nations directly interested in peaceful coexistence? The author leaves these questions unanswered, and admits that the role of a historian is limited to gathering records which may provide the answers.

Nowak's work is well grounded and brings many insightful reflections. However, let me formulate a few comments — some of them as postulates, other as arguments in the discussion.

The discourse may have been made more comprehensive if a separate chapter had been dedicated to the stand of Italy. Obviously, opinions of Italian statesmen, such as Francesco Nitti or Carlo Sforza, on the interest of Poland, are known to the public. Italy was linked to the Triple Entente, and although it was not able to force through its plan against France or Great Britain, Nitti's views, similar to the British stand on the Polish affairs, made the implementation of Lloyd George's plan for Poland much easier.

When commenting on the fact that the American government approved of Poland's right to independence and separation of 'Congress Poland' and Finland from Russia (p. 499), it is worth adding that the American administration granted the same right to Armenia, whose affairs, due to the Turkish genocide (1915), had gained strong support among the American public.

I am not convinced that Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points assumed an end to the foreign policy of individual states, with the reservation that 'first, the smaller countries were to renounce their foreign policy' (p. 44).²³ This statement seems to be excessively far-reaching, since the system of the League of Nations, regardless, was not designed to deprive its members of national sovereignty.

The supercilious ignorance of the British statesmen and experts in their approach to Eastern European affairs remains a fact and is rightfully stressed by the author. However, it is equally worth stressing the objective challenges in the governance of this highly complex post-imperial area, both in terms of international relations and political complications. Challenges existed regardless of the views and competences of Western leaders and architects of the Treaty of Versailles.

I share the author's defensive support for the negotiators of the Treaty of Riga. However, peace negotiations conducted by a delegation of parliament members without any supervision whatsoever by Foreign Minister Eustachy Sapieha are far from normal.

It can be added here that the term 'appeasement', discredited from our point of view owing to the events in Munich (1938), then had no negative connotations in the English language or the British political tradition. It was rather considered a synonym of a highly peaceful policy, based on agreement and compromise. Therefore, when encountering the term in the records of the Foreign Office, we should not forget about the dichotomy of interpretation.

All in all, the basic conclusion is that Poland thwarted the first attempt to apply the policy of appeasement at its expense. However, Poland's victory, against

²³ 'pierwsze z niej miały zrezygnować państwa mniejsze'.

all assumptions, has been breeding resentment among Anglo-Saxon elites, and has led to ruthless criticism of the Versailles, and especially the Versailles-Riga order (p. 512). Today, the criticism is still very strong and found its expression in the recent commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 2014.

Sharing this view, I would add that, in the twentieth-century Intermarium Europe, only two nations managed to win and defend independence: the Poles in 1920, and the Finns in 1939. The question whether one nation, without the potential of a great power, is able to refute a verdict issued in absentia by foreign global powers, is answered affirmatively. However, there must be some 'additional' accompanying circumstances, and they happen rarely. Poland's accompanying circumstance was the brilliant plan of winning counter-offensive in the Battle of Warsaw. Finland took advantage of the heavily defended Mannerheim Line, the severe winter of 1939–40, and the publicly declared support of France and Great Britain, which scared Stalin.

Considering various historical moments, the author analyses possible alternatives — for example the autumn of 1919, when Piłsudski decided not to support Denikin's army. However, he stresses: 'History is not an experimental science, where various variants can be examined by repeating an experiment after a change of a selected factor' (p. 464).²⁴

In my opinion, Nowak rightly uses the phrase 'Versailles-Riga system', introduced, as it seems, by Wiesław Balcerak.²⁵ Nowak used it in many of his previous works. The Polish-Soviet treaty was of great significance. The Treaty of Riga constituted the fundamental component of peace on the European continent. It complemented the Treaty of Versailles, which left the Eastern European affairs unresolved. In March 1921, the territorial order for Eastern Europe was established, although only for a little longer than eighteen years.

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Nowak's work is an important insight into the shaping of the opinion of Western political elites on Poland, and more precisely — on Poland's role in international relations. Was Poland a flashpoint of unrest, or was it an 'inspiration to the world', as Franklin Delano Roosevelt was to comment later, in 1941? In 1920, reborn Poland made the first step in the long-term process of returning to the international scene. The process took the entire period of its independence.

Politicians in interwar Europe expressed their uncertainty about the future of the new Poland. Major doubts were raised as to Poland's ability to serve as

²⁴ 'Historia nie jest nauką eksperymentalną, w której moglibyśmy sprawdzić różne jej warianty, powtarzając jej doświadczenie przy zmianie jednego czynnika', p. 464.

²⁵ Wiesław Balcerak, 'Na drodze do wojny. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia wobec agresji niemieckiej i sowieckiej', in *Od Wersalu do Poczdamu. Sytuacja międzynarodowa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1918–1945*, ed. Andrzej Koryn, Warsaw, 1996, p. 106–16. Andrzej Nowak has expressed a similar opinion on many occasions.

a crush barrier between Germany and Russia. Poland's internal consolidation was also a source of concern. Anticipating Poland's inability effectively to separate Germany and Russia, Lord Balfour argued against its independence in his memorandum 'The Peace Settlement in Europe', written in late 1916.²⁶ Poland's capabilities for economic independence were rated very low by John Maynard Keynes, who, in general, deemed the Versailles system a strategic and costly error.²⁷ France's right-wing nationalist and well-known political publicist Jacques Bainville did not vest much hope in Poland either, claiming that Poland would never substitute Russia as an eastern ally of victorious France.²⁸ 'The barrier which Poland wants to create between Germany and Russia is a nonsense which won't last' — wrote the Italian left-wing politician Francesco Nitti.²⁹ Lord Balfour disdainfully remarked that 'nobody knows what Poland's policy is', which was later widely covered in the European press and publicly disputed by Poland's Foreign Minister Aleksander Skrzyński.³⁰ Polish frontiers seemed impossible to defend.

The 'policy of equilibrium' pursued by Józef Piłsudski and Minister Józef Beck, which was a dramatic defence of Poland's independence in extremely unfavourable external conditions, met not only with hostility in Moscow and distrust in Berlin, but first and foremost with a lack of understanding and groundless accusations in Paris and London, where Poland might have expected support rather than anything else. On many occasions, I have asked myself the question of where these attitudes stemmed from. The answer is explicit: this policy did not fit into the concept of appeasement, when the policy entered decisive phase and the Munich conference was summoned. Thus, a bad atmosphere around Poland was created when Poland was trying to defend its interests on its own, and ignoring Poland was no longer possible. It occurred both in the time of appeasement and during the Second World War. The 'policy of equilibrium' met with reluctance, because it did not fit into the concept of defending peace by way of concessions offered to Germany — a concept which proved successful in London and Paris in late 1930s.

Nevertheless, the history of the Polish nation does not know the tradition of surrender. On the contrary — there is tradition of opposition against global oppressors. The year 1939 and the Polish defence against Hitler is a meaningful example. After the Second World War, the history of Europe of the twentieth century was written without any significant contribution from the Polish researchers. Polish historiography, being under ideological pressure, had a limited role in the shaping of views of the world's historiography on the genesis

²⁶ Wiktor Sukiennicki, 'Balfour a Polska', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 17, 1970, pp. 39–55.

²⁷ John Maynard Keynes, *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London, 1919.

²⁸ Jacques Bainville, *Les conséquences politiques de la paix*, Paris, 1920, pp. 172–73.

²⁹ 'La barrière que la Pologne veut élever entre l'Allemagne et la Russie est une absurdité qui ne durera pas', Francesco Nitti, *L'Europe sans paix*, Paris, 1923, p. 335.

³⁰ Aleksander Skrzyński, *Poland and Peace*, London, 1924. See also August Zaleski, *Przemowy i deklaracje*, 2 vols, Warsaw, 1929–31, vol. 1, pp. 56–57.

and course of the Second World War. Today, it is our duty to remember that the Second World War began in Poland, that Poland's NO to Hitler's invasion contributed to the discontinuation of the policy of appeasement, and that if the Polish government had accepted Hitler's demands, the history of Europe would have taken another course. Today, Polish historians are under a moral obligation to remind those fundamental truths to the public. 'We owe this to the value of the national ideal and the sacrifice made by past generations' — wrote the Polish historian Henryk Wereszycki forty years ago.³¹

In conclusion, let me cite once again Edward Raczyński, a diplomat and witness of the twentieth century, whose words lend probably the most accurate and finest summary of the topic under analysis. Seeking support from foreign countries for the interest of one's own home country has always been, and always will be, a great task of the diplomatic service. 'However, there is one truth which the Polish nation, my generation and next generations, could have found on the basis of experience — that we cannot expect disinterested and effective foreign support in seeking a better future. We must rely on ourselves, our knowledge, our skills, our spirit and our own minds'.³²

Unfortunately, as noted years ago by Ignacy Matuszewski, the biggest challenge for Polish foreign policy lies in the fact that Poland cannot afford to renounce solidarity with Western countries, while they can easily renounce Poland.³³ They can afford it, but Poland has no alternative — it belongs to the West.

Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 — zapomniany appeasement by Andrzej Nowak may be considered too Polonocentric. However, we, Polish historians, are not obliged to adjust our views to the expectations or outlooks of our foreign colleagues.³⁴ Polish historiography should speak its mind without embarrassment, obviously always in accordance with the *audiatur et altera pars* principle.

In spite of the word 'treachery' in the title and as mentioned by the author in the introduction, the monograph is not a 'treatise on morality'. No attempt is made to judge the architects of foreign policies pursued by the world's great

³¹ 'Jesteśmy to winni wielkości ideału narodowego i wielkości ofiar złożonych przez poprzednie pokolenia', Henryk Wereszycki, *Niewygasła przeszłość. Refleksje i polemiki*, Cracow, 1987, p. 415.

³² 'Ale jedną prawdę naród nasz, a więc moje pokolenie i późniejsze pokolenia stwierdzić mogły na podstawie naszych przeżyć, że naród nasz nie może oczekiwać bezinteresownej i skutecznej pomocy z zewnątrz, która by zdecydowała o jego losie, że polegać musi przede wszystkim na własnych siłach, na swojej wiedzy, na swojej umiejętności, na swoim charakterze i swoim rozumie', speech delivered in February 1982, published in *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego na Obczyźnie*, 25, 1981/1982 [1983], p. 16.

³³ Ignacy Matuszewski, 'Pamięci Józefa Becka', in idem, *Wybór pism*, New York, 1952, p. 195.

³⁴ Adopting the Western theory of the Great War being a 'suicide of Europe' is wrong [as Andrzej Chwalba does in his book *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914-1918*, Cracow, 2014]. I have written about it recently in: "'Prakatastrofa" Europy czy "wielki przełom w dziejach ludzkości"? (Nad stuletnią rocznicą wybuchu Wielkiej Wojny)', *DN*, 46, 2014, 3, pp. 11-28.

powers, which have no obligation to serve the interest of Poland. The author merely undertakes an analysis of a phenomenon in international relations, which belongs to history, but continues to resonate throughout the world today. The Russian aggression on Ukraine is just one example.

The significance of Nowak's well grounded book, based in a large part on hitherto unknown British archive records, should be considered in three areas of the history of international relations. Firstly, it reveals an important page of the history of Europe changed by the Treaty of Versailles, introducing the concept of British appeasement towards Soviet Russia in 1920. Secondly, it presents a thorough analysis of Western elites' attitude towards reborn Poland, and in this sense constitutes a review of the twentieth-century political imagination. Thirdly, it casts new light on Poland's victory in the Battle of Warsaw. Owing to this victory, the Versailles deal was saved and strengthened by the Treaty of Riga — a fact which remains unnoticed in the historiography of Western nations.

(Translated by Paulina Dzwonnik)

Summary

The paper is a review of the new book by Andrzej Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 — zapomniany appeasement* (2015). This monograph provides a new analysis of the international aspects of the Polish-Soviet War (1919–20). The conflict has often been marginalized in the history of Europe, while being decisive for the future shape of the European continent, and first and foremost for the Versailles deal. The collapse of the Versailles deal and the Sovietization of at least Eastern and Central Europe are difficult to imagine but would have become a reality if the Polish-Soviet War had ended with a defeat for the Polish army. Nowak proposes a study of attitude of the victorious Western great powers to that conflict rather than an analytical monograph. Among the great powers, Great Britain had the decisive voice. The author perceives the British policy as a prefiguration of appeasement applied in the 1930s. In 1920, the government of the United Kingdom used every effort to facilitate a Polish-Soviet settlement, which in fact would have turned into Soviet hegemony over reborn Poland. The victory of the Polish army in the Battle of Warsaw thwarted the plan. In spite of the word 'treachery' in the title and as mentioned by the author in the introduction, the monograph is not a 'treatise on morality'. No attempt is made to judge the architects of foreign policies pursued by the world's great powers, which have no obligation to serve the interest of Poland. The author merely undertakes an analysis of a phenomenon in international relations, which does not only belong to history, but continues to resonate throughout the world today. The book may be unfairly considered too Polonocentric, yet the author shows awareness of the reality in which the British foreign policy was shaped, and always applies the *audiatur et altera pars* principle. The work is based on unknown or little exam-

ined British archive records. The author introduces the concept of appeasement towards the Soviet Russia in 1920. The book provides a thorough analysis of the attitude of Western elites to reborn Poland, and in this sense constitutes a review of the twentieth-century political imagination. It casts new light on Poland's victory in the Battle of Warsaw. Owing to this victory, the Versailles deal was saved and strengthened by the Treaty of Riga (1921) — a fact which remains unnoticed in the historiography of Western nations.

(Translated by Paulina Dzwonnik)

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