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## In the Hallways of Versailles. “White” Russia and Poland during the Paris Peace Conference\*<sup>1</sup>

**Zarys treści:** Kontakty, jakie Polacy i „Biali” Rosjanie nawiązali w 1918 r. wskazywały, że znalezienie porozumienia opartego na ich wspólnej niechęci do bolszewików byłoby bardzo trudne. Podstawowym warunkiem, podkreślanego przez Rosjan kompromisu, było porozumienie z Polską co do przyszłej granicy oddzielającej oba państwa. Linia graniczna Królestwa Polskiego, które przed I wojną światową wchodziło w skład Imperium Rosyjskiego, nie wchodziła w grę. Dla odrodzonego państwa polskiego polityczne i militarne wspieranie „Białej” Rosji było sprzeczne z polską racją stanu. W przypadku zwycięstwa „Białej” Rosji przyszłość polskiej granicy byłaby przesądzona, gdyż mocarstwa Ententy, prawdopodobnie, poparłyby swojego byłego sojusznika i zgodziły się na wschodnią granicę dawnego Królestwa Polskiego.

**Content outline:** The contacts that Poles and “White” Russians established in 1918 indicated that finding an agreement based on their common dislike of the Bolsheviks would be very difficult. The basic condition of the compromise emphasised by the Russians was the Polish agreement to setting the future border separating their countries in accordance with the eastern border of the Kingdom of Poland, which, before the First World War, was part of the Russian Empire. For Poland, politically and militarily supporting “White” Russia stood against the Polish *raison d’état*. In the case of a “White” Russian victory the future of the Polish border would be sealed, as the Entente powers would likely support their former ally and agree to demarcating the eastern border of the former Kingdom of Poland.

**Słowa kluczowe:** stosunki międzynarodowe 1918–1939, paryska konferencja pokojowa, stosunki polsko-rosyjskie

**Keywords:** International Relations 1918–1939; Paris Peace Conference; Polish–Russian Relations

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Relations between Poland and “White” Russia during the first half of 1919, when the Paris Peace Conference was taking place, had already been studied by historians. However, it was Polish rather than Russian scholars who expressed interest in this subject. In publications of Russian scholars that have appeared in recent years, relations between the renascent Polish state and various “White” Russian centres of power while the peace conference was in session are usually relegated to the margins of broader issues (e.g. by Nina Bystrova, Sergey Listikov, Aleksandr Puchenkov, Evgey Sergeev, Viktor Zubachevski, Pavel Zyryanov).<sup>1</sup> Some background information on the topic can be found in the work of American scholars, including such eminent Sovietologists as Adam Ulam, Richard Pipes and Laura Engelstein. As for the contacts of the restored Republic of Poland with “White” Russians in that period, more attention has been paid to it by Polish researchers. Already in the 1960s, Andrzej Kamiński published the declarations of the Omsk government related to Poland. The results of research conducted by such historians as Piotr Łossowski<sup>2</sup> and Romuald Wojna<sup>3</sup> are also worth mentioning. The turning point, however, was the monograph of Adolf Juzwenko published in 1973, in which the author meticulously analyses the attitude of Poland towards “White” Russia between November 1918 and April 1920.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Juzwenko was at that time unable to reach important sources located abroad. Nevertheless, large portions of his monograph are still relevant today. An in-depth study of the eastern policy of Józef Piłsudski before April 1920, written on the basis of a very large corpus of international sources, was published by Andrzej Nowak,<sup>5</sup> who also devoted considerable space to the relationship between Poles and “White” Russians in the first half of 1919. Selected aspects of the issues to be discussed in this article have also recently been studied by other Polish researchers, among them Krzysztof Kloc, Jan Wiśniewski and Mariusz Wołos.

My modest objective in writing this article has been to offer a tentative answer to the question of whether an alliance, or at least a rapprochement, between Poland and “White” Russia after the end of the First World War was in any way possible in view of the common enemy (i.e. the Bolsheviks), and during the Paris Peace Conference in particular. Over the course of my research carried out in Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, I have found a large body of previously unknown documents that could cast some new light on the topic.

<sup>1</sup> A detailed list of publications can be found at the end of the article.

<sup>2</sup> P. Łossowski, “Kwestia narodowa w rewolucji i wojnie domowej w Rosji,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1976, no. 3, pp. 569–596.

<sup>3</sup> R. Wojna, *W ogniu rosyjskiej wojny wewnętrznej 1918–1920*, Warszawa, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> A. Juzwenko, *Polska a “biała” Rosja (od XI 1918 do IV 1920)*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> A. Nowak, *Polska i trzy Rosje. Studium polityki wschodniej Józefa Piłsudskiego (do kwietnia 1920 roku)*, 3rd ed., Kraków, 2015 (especially the chapter “‘Biała’ Rosja i ‘małe’ narody,” pp. 114–142).

## Russia's outlook on the border with Poland

On 26 June 1918 in Kiev, a meeting took place between a delegation of "White" Russia and the political emissaries of the Piłsudski camp, specifically of the Convent of Organisation "A" – Michał Sokolnicki (known also by his codename "Leszek") and Andrzej Strug ("Borsza")<sup>6</sup> – who came in the company of Bogusław Miedziński ("Świtek"), acting on behalf of the Third Supreme Command of the Polish Military Organisation. The Russian delegates included former prominent members of the Provisional Government and deputies to the Russian Duma, dominated by members of the Constitutional Democratic Party (the so-called "Kadets"), who evinced liberal leanings: the former head of diplomacy and eminent historian Pavel Milukov,<sup>7</sup> head of the Kiev branch of the All-Russian National Centre Igor Demidov,<sup>8</sup> possibly also member of the Council for the State Unification of Russia and All-Russian National Centre Fyodor Rodichev,<sup>9</sup> and – although this is less likely if we examine the sources in a comprehensive manner – the diplomat and former envoy to Serbia, Prince Grigory Trubetskoy.<sup>10</sup> The Polish report on the meeting also mentions a certain Ertel among the participants. Perhaps this was the engineer and archaeologist Aleksandr Ertel, who was involved in the Kiev monarchist movement and affiliated with the South Russian Youth Association.<sup>11</sup> The meeting was arranged by Karol Wędziagolski, who had good contacts among Russia's progressive political circles.<sup>12</sup> It appears that for both parties to the meeting

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the account of Michał Sokolnicki's eastern mission has been preserved incomplete, covering the period until the beginning of July 1918; see the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America Archive, New York [hereinafter: JPIAA/NY], Archiwum ambasadora Michała Sokolnickiego, call no. 68, M. Sokolnicki, *Podróż ze Strugiem do Moskwy czerwiec – sierpień 1918*, ff. 189–206. See also K. Kloc, *Michał Sokolnicki (1880–1967). Piłsudczyk – historyk – dyplomata*, Kraków, 2018, p. 391.

<sup>7</sup> For a wider treatment of Milukov's activity, see Г. Чернявский, Л. Дубова, *Милюков*, Москва, 2015; Н.Г. Думова, *Либерал в России: трагедия несовместимости. Исторический портрет П.Н. Милюкова*, Москва, 1993; К.В. Поздняков, *Исторические и политические взгляды П.Н. Милюкова (1876–1943)*, Иркутск, 1998; П.Н. Милюков: *историк, политик, дипломат: Материалы международной научной конференции, Москва, 26–27 мая 1999 г.*, Москва, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> М.Е. Голостенов, "Демидов Игорь Платонович," in: *Политические партии России, конец XIX — первая треть XX века: Энциклопедия*, Москва, 1996, p. 181; А.Б. Николаев, "Демидов Игорь Платонович," in: *Государственная Дума Российской империи 1906–1917. Энциклопедия*, ed. В. В. Шелухаев, Москва, 2008, pp. 158–159.

<sup>9</sup> Е.А. Антохина, Н.И. Канищева, А.Б. Николаев, "Родичев Федор Измайлович," in: *Государственная Дума Российской империи...*, pp. 526–528.

<sup>10</sup> Г.Н. Трубецкой, *Годы смут и надежд, 1917–1919*, Монреаль, 1981, pp. 93–130. In his memoirs, Prince Trubetskoi wrote that he reached Kiev most probably on 19 July 1918, which makes it unlikely that he would have taken part in the talks with the Polish delegates.

<sup>11</sup> Л.Д. Федорова, "Олександр Ертель як археолог і пам'яткоохоронець," *Київська старовина*, 2011, no. 2, pp. 106–122.

<sup>12</sup> K. Wędziagolski, *Pamiętniki. Wojna i rewolucja. Kontrrewolucja. Bolszewicki przewrót. Warszawski epilog*, ed. G. Eberhardt, Warszawa, 2007, pp. 282–284.

the basic objective of the talks was to sound out the interlocutors and attempt to find common ground for potential cooperation. There is, however, no surviving information on the instructions that might have been passed to Sokolnicki and Strug prior to their meeting with Milukov.

The conversation was marked by a courteous mood. On the Russian side, the bulk of the talking was done by Milukov as the most experienced politician. He did not conceal that even after the Brest-Litovsk Peace signed by the Bolsheviks with the Central Powers on 3 March 1918, it was still possible to topple the regime of Vladimir Lenin and his commissars and to restore the Empire infested by the “Reds.” He saw this could be accomplished through a German military offensive, which would put the Polish question in jeopardy. This view, however, reveals a certain naivety on the part of the Russians, even if they staked their hopes on Berlin and Vienna drawing solely on the principle of anti-communist ideology. The “Whites” would have enjoyed a particularly fortunate coincidence had the Germans, having signed the peace treaty in Brest, resumed their campaign against the Bolsheviks and then allowed the restoration of the Russian Empire with which they went to war in 1914. Such designs ran contrary to the German plans of subjugating Eastern Europe to their political and economic clout. Milukov, who asserted that “it has been the first time that I have talked to Poles on behalf of a weak Russia, and, therefore, without suspicions or obstacles,” made it clear that Polish military formations that remained within the borders of the former Russian Empire should be relocated to France or perhaps somewhere on the Don. This position was bound to undermine the prospects of collaboration between Poland and Russia. From the viewpoint of the “White” delegates, such collaboration would be possible only after their return to power, with the principles stated in the relevant official declarations of the Russian authorities issued between 1914 and 1917 as a probable point of departure. While Milukov strongly denied that non-Bolshevik Russia could find common ground with Germany, especially at the expense of Poland, the import of his words and the mode of argumentation indicated otherwise. The Russian delegation responded to the railway strike in Austria-Hungary envisaged by Poles with extraordinary caution, as it could lead to a revolution that would topple the established order, which would have tremendous consequences for other Central and Eastern European states. This was probably a result of the Russian hopes of obtaining support from the Central Powers against the Bolsheviks. At this stage of the war, weakening Germany and Austria-Hungary was against the interest of the “Whites.” The meeting taught Piłsudski’s representatives a notable lesson, as they were told by Milukov that “the brotherhood of the Slavs against the Germans is necessary but inopportune at this moment.”<sup>13</sup> This statement aptly

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<sup>13</sup> JPİAA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/5, report from the meeting beginning with the words “Rozmowa z Miliukowem,” ff. 12–13 (source of quotes); cf. A. Nowak, op. cit., pp. 71–73; M. Wołos, “W straży przedniej”. Żołnierska droga Andrzeja Struga, do niepodległej

summarises the meeting and demonstrates that in political terms the "White" Russians and Poles had totally divergent outlooks on the future.

We do not have any information regarding whether or not the Piłsudski circle continued talks with the Kadets in the summer of 1918. What we do know, however, are the guidelines Milukov followed to set the goals which "White" Russia was supposed to achieve at that time. He revealed them in a letter of 11 August 1918 addressed to a wide range of anti-Bolshevik Russian and Ukrainian political activists. According to him, the main task was to restore the statehood of and unify Russia. This would be immediately followed by the establishment of a national government, possibly with a monarchical bent. The government would then enter into talks with the Germans to revise the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The starting point for those negotiations was clearly spelt out by Milukov: the entire territory of Russia was to be retained, except for Finland and Poland.<sup>14</sup> His idea of the territory of the future Polish state was quite explicit: "within the boundaries of the former Kingdom of Poland without the Chełm region and with the ethnicity-based exchange of the northern part of the Augustów Governorate for parts of Sokółka and Bielsk counties."<sup>15</sup> In other words, Milukov not only wanted to incorporate into Russia the Chełm region and southern Podlachia, detached from the Kingdom of Poland in 1912, but also strip off areas located to the north of Augustów (most probably Mariampol County), allowing Poland to receive in return some vaguely defined territory around the towns of Sokółka and Bielsk. When making this reference, the former head of Russian diplomacy perhaps had in mind the extremely volatile line separating the Orthodox and Catholic populations in Sokółka and Bielsk counties. The document does not even mention ceding Białystok, then located outside the Kingdom of Poland.

A slightly different view on the future Polish–Russian border was held by the government appointed by Admiral Alexander Kolchak in Omsk. Having topped the Directorate and established himself as a *de facto* dictator, he ordered guidelines concerning the western border to be drawn up with the proviso that Belarus, Lithuania and Subcarpathian Rus should remain within Russia. The general direction was therefore clear. In December 1918 and January 1919, a special committee appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Omsk (i.e. "Siberian") Government to draft a set of guidelines for the Peace Conference examined the issue of the future Polish border in a remarkably detailed manner. The overriding concern was that if the principle of national self-determination were to lead to the establishment of separate nation-states, then "Russia would be reduced to nothing." Therefore, it was proposed that the implementation of that

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Polski," in: *Andrzej Strug. Dzieło i czasy. Materiały z konferencji naukowej w Warszawie 6–7 grudnia 2012 roku*, ed. A. Kargol, Warszawa, 2014, p. 92; A. Kargol, *Strug. Miarą wszystkiego jest człowiek. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa–Kraków, 2016, pp. 136–137.

<sup>14</sup> Г. Чернявский, Л. Дубова, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

<sup>15</sup> Г.Н. Трубецкой, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

principle should be contingent on “decisions taken by Russia,” whose interests were to be safeguarded. The members of the committee questioned the rights of Poland to Eastern Galicia when proposing the border’s demarcation and noted that the statistics found in Austrian and Polish sources overestimated the numbers of Poles living in areas with a mixed Polish and Ukrainian (Ruthenian) population. One member of the committee even proposed the Chełm region to be ceded to Poland in return for Eastern Galicia, which may indicate that the officials of the Omsk foreign ministry were determined to annex a territory that only a short while before had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The design to seize Subcarpathian Rus, claimed by Czechoslovakia, was not seen by “White” Russians as an obstacle in pursuing the idea of a common border with the “Czech state” in order to cut Poland off from a route to the Black Sea. The relationship with Czechoslovakia was also regarded as an effective tool for exerting economic, and hence political, pressure on Poland. Plebiscites were firmly rejected as a method of solving ethnic problems, as they divested the states of their say in these matters.<sup>16</sup> The Omsk committee ultimately produced a document entitled *General Rules of Participation of the Russian Delegation in the Peace Conference*, which stated that:

In determining the borders between Poland and Russia, both strategic, as well as economic and ethnographic considerations are to be taken into account [...]. (a) Lithuania and White Ruthenia [...] cannot be attached to Poland. (b) The Chełm region should remain within the borders of Russia. (c) Halych Rus [or Eastern Galicia – MW] and Ugor Rus [or Subcarpathian Ruthenia – MW] and Bukovina should be incorporated into Russia. [...] The western border of Halych Rus should border on the Slovak lands.<sup>17</sup>

One can hardly avoid the impression that the quoted document was proof of unwavering imperial ambitions of Russia, even in its most trying times, when the delegates of the “White” government established by Kolchak were relegated to the very fringes of the former empire.

As regards the future of Eastern Galicia, there is another telling example of Russian imperialism, dating already from the time when the Paris Peace Conference was in progress. Undoubtedly one of the most active “White” Russians in the back rooms of the Conference was Vasily Maklakov, leader of the Kadet party and former ambassador of the Provisional Government to France, still residing in the Russian diplomatic mission at rue Grenelle in the heart of Paris. Already in early February 1919, in a report sent to the Russian government in Omsk, he warned that the Poles were planning a federation with Lithuania, parts of Belarus inhabited

<sup>16</sup> В.А. Зубачевский, *Политика России в Центрально-Восточной Европе (первая треть XX века): геополитический аспект*, Москва, 2019, pp. 109–110 (used for quotations in this paragraph).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

by Catholics, and Eastern Galicia as a whole.<sup>18</sup> As regards Eastern Galicia, his position amounted to conceding no more than "an unspoken *désintéressement* of Russia, but not complete renunciation." As for other territorial issues, he favoured precise delimitation of the areas that were to form parts of Poland and Russia. This probably would be tantamount to drafting a list of undisputed areas. The so-called mixed (i.e. disputed) areas were to be recognised as forming a "zone of disputes" whose future would depend on negotiations with Russia, plebiscites, or "objective statistics."<sup>19</sup> We must bear in mind that Maklakov was a spokesman of the liberal and progressive circles of "White" Russian *émigrés*, who were more disposed to grant concessions to Poland than the right-wingers, let alone the monarchists.

The words of Maklakov serve as evidence that, in spite of being in exile, the downfall of the Russian Empire, the collapse of state structures, anarchy, civil war, and the actual exit of Bolshevik Russia from the Entente, "White" politicians and diplomats residing in Paris during the Peace Conference did not unequivocally abandon their designs to incorporate Eastern Galicia into restored Russia. In this matter, they counted on the support of their allies (i.e. the victorious powers). Thus, they clearly continued the policy of Tsarist Governor General Georgiy Bobrinsky in the areas of Eastern Galicia that were occupied by Russian troops in 1914–1915. The general, while meeting a delegation of Poles on 23 September 1914 in Lviv, stated his position clearly and firmly, saying that Eastern Galicia

has been a core territory of one great Russia for centuries. The native population of these lands has always been Russian and should be governed according to Russian principles. I shall be introducing here the Russian language, Russian law and Russian political system.<sup>20</sup>

He did as he said, focusing on Russification, currying favour for Great Russia among the Uniate population, building up an appetite for Lemkovyna, suppressing Polishness and firmly opposing Jews, who remained loyal towards the Habsburg monarchy. Eastern Galicia attracted the interest of Tsar Nicholas II himself, who toured the region in the spring of 1915, paying a visit to Lviv among other cities.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> С.В. Листиков, "Белые дипломаты о 'русской политике' западных держав," in: *Версальско-Вашингтонская международно-правовая система: зарождение, развитие, кризис, 1919–1939 гг.*, ed. Е.Ю. Сергеев, Москва, 2011, p. 159; Н.Е. Быстрова, «Русский вопрос» в 1917 – начале 1920 г.: *Советская Россия и великие державы*, Москва–Санкт-Петербург, 2016, pp. 234–235.

<sup>19</sup> "403 – 26 maja, szyfrogram wiceministra spraw zagranicznych (z Paryża) do MSZ o poglądach przedstawicieli Białej Rosji na temat stosunków z Polską," in: *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1919 styczeń – maj*, ed. by S. Dębski, Warszawa, 2016 [hereinafter: *PDD 1919 styczeń – maj*], pp. 845–846 (source of quotes).

<sup>20</sup> Cited from О.Р. Айрапетов, *Участие Российской империи в Первой мировой войне. 1914*, Москва, 2014, p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228–231; *id.*, *Участие Российской империи в Первой мировой войне. 1915*, Москва, 2014, pp. 64–65, 97–105; M. Rauchensteiner, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie*, Wien–Köln–Weimar, 2013, p. 838 (the author mistakenly refers to Bobrinsky as "a Polish count").

## The Russian Political Conference in Paris

Delegates of “White” Russia sincerely counted on being invited to the Paris Peace Conference with the full rights granted to the victorious powers. These hopes were ultimately dashed, although in late 1918 and early 1919 the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, probed other members of the Entente on whether all Russian political factions might agree to at least a temporary ceasefire to select a single delegation for the Peace Conference. These factions included both the Bolsheviks, which Lloyd George did not exclude by default, various “White” groups, and members of independent state structures established by various nationalities inhabiting areas within the former Russian Empire. The French opposed this solution, spurred by their marked animosity towards the Bolsheviks, who had recently nationalised enterprises, financial institutions, factories and other “bourgeois” property owned by French nationals, which inevitably deprived many investors of stable income. The idea likewise found no support among the decision-makers of other powers. However, the party that most decried the participation of the Bolsheviks in the “all-Russian” delegation were the “Whites.” Soon, it turned out that Lloyd George’s initiative was politically naive. As a result, no all-Russian delegation was established and no Russian political factions or groups were invited to participate in the Peace Conference on an equal footing with the victorious powers.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say, however, that “White” Russians had no opportunity to present their arguments and proposals in Paris, but they had to do so on a semi-official basis. Their erstwhile allies still felt sympathy and understanding for them,<sup>23</sup> and their opinions were listened to. It was a substitute of sorts for the geopolitical disaster that the disappearance of the Russian ally had been, primarily for France, but also for other members of the Entente.<sup>24</sup>

In late 1918, shortly before the Peace Paris Conference sessions commenced, the Russian Political Conference in Paris was formed (Russian: Русское политическое совещание в Париже; French: Conférence politique russe de Paris; in some Polish publications it is called “Rosyjska Rada Polityczna w Paryżu”). This body was so devised as to grant representation to various “White” Russian political faction, including liberals and the non-Bolshevik left. Such composition was a response to “the mood prevailing in Europe’s political circles” and was based on the presumption

<sup>22</sup> I discussed the attitude of Soviet diplomacy towards the Paris Peace Conference and the idea of calling a conference at Prince Islands (Adalar near Istanbul) that would gather delegates of various Russian political groups, including the Bolsheviks, in my article “Dyplomacja sowiecka a paryska konferencja pokojowa (zarys problematyki),” in: *Polska przywrócona – z perspektywy zagranicy 1918–1921. (W setną rocznicę Traktatu Wersalskiego)*, ed. P. Kołakowski, T. Katafiasz (in press).

<sup>23</sup> Е.Ю. Сергеев, *Большевики и Англичане. Советско-британские отношения, 1918–1924 гг: от интервенции к признанию*, Санкт-Петербург, 2019, pp. 210–212.

<sup>24</sup> I cite here the words of Georges-Henri Soutou, who wrote about “la catastrophe géopolitique que représentait pour Paris la disparition de l’alliée russe”: G.-H. Soutou, *La grande illusion. Quand la France perdait la paix 1914–1920*, Paris, 2015, pp. 265–266.

that there would be no major differences in foreign policy matters between the "Whites" representing a wide spectrum of political groupings.<sup>25</sup> The body was actually granted a measure of support from the representatives of the Entente powers present at the Paris Peace Conference, particularly from the French delegates. The Russian Political Conference was headed by Prince Georgy Lvov, the former prime minister of the Provisional Government. Internally, the Conference was composed of the Diplomatic, Financial–Economic and Army and Navy Committees. For our considerations, the most important of these was the Diplomatic Committee led by the former minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Empire, Sergei Sazonov, and consisting of Russian diplomatic representatives to Entente nations. An important role within the committee was played by the former ambassador of the Provisional Government to the United States and an eminent specialist in hydrodynamics, Boris Bachmetev,<sup>26</sup> who headed the Political Division (which in turn consisted of the Political and Legal Committee and Press Department) subordinated to the Diplomatic Committee.<sup>27</sup> The main task of the Conference was to coordinate the policies of the various representations of "White" Russia and, in particular, support all anti-Bolshevik movements and troops fighting the Red Army on various fronts. In parallel, attempts were being made to obtain as much political, military, and economic support as possible from the Entente powers. Admiral Kolchak, acting as the Supreme Ruler of Russia (верховный правитель России, as he styled himself), additionally established the Russian Political Delegation. Initially, it was composed of four members: Lvov, Sazonov, Milukov and Nikolai Tchaikovsky, who was linked to the Narodniks and later to the Socialist–Revolutionaries, and presided over the so-called Archangelsk Government (also called the Government of the Northern Region).<sup>28</sup> At a later date, Boris Savinkov was added as a fifth member. The Russian Political Delegation was the de facto executive authority of the Russian Political Conference.<sup>29</sup> It was dissolved in the summer of 1919, once the Paris Peace Conference had been brought to a close and the Treaty of Versailles was signed. Its role as the representation of various factions of "White" Russia, called into life specifically for the time in which key decisions

<sup>25</sup> *Чему свидетели мы были... Переписка бывших царских дипломатов 1934–1940. Сборник документов в двух книгах*, vol. 2: 1938–1940, Москва, 1998; 24 December 1918, cable of V. Maklakov to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kolchak government in Omsk – Annex II, Document 15, p. 393.

<sup>26</sup> *Русское зарубежье. Золотая книга эмиграции. Первая треть XX века. Энциклопедический биографический словарь*, Москва, 1997, pp. 70–71; *Политическая история русской эмиграции 1920–1940 гг. Документы и материалы*, ed. А.Ф. Киселев, Москва, 1999, p. 727.

<sup>27</sup> *Чему свидетели мы были...*, 2 March 1919, circular letter of S. Sazonov – Annex II, Document 16, pp. 394–396 (showing the detailed organisational scheme of the Conference together with the staff).

<sup>28</sup> *Политическая история русской эмиграции...*, p. 767.

<sup>29</sup> В.Ж. Цветков, *Белое дело в России. 1919 г. (Формирование и эволюция политических структур Белого движения в России)*, Москва, 2009, pp. 364–455, 636.

on the shape of post-war Europe and the world were being made, had simply come to an end.

One has to agree with the comment of Laura Engelstein that the Russian Political Conference was not only on hostile terms with the Bolshevik authorities, but also – regardless of the ideological and political differences between the members – that its activities ran against the grain of the aspirations of nations living on the territory of the former Russian Empire.<sup>30</sup> It should be added that even the progressive Russian intelligentsia, who sympathised with the Poles and were willing to allow for the establishment of an independent Polish state, still clung to the idea of keeping Poland within the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>31</sup> Members of the Russian Political Conference held meetings with Polish delegates to the Peace Conference, who represented both the National Polish Committee and the Belvedere camp centred around Józef Piłsudski. The dilemmas faced by the victorious Entente were aptly summarised by Roman Dmowski, who wrote:

A serious doubt first arose as to whether the peace conference can set down the border between Poland and Russia in the latter's absence. Russia was not a defeated state; on the contrary, it was part and parcel of the countries who opposed the Central Powers. In the course of the war, it was excluded from among the combatants by the ongoing revolution that prevented it from taking part in the conference. The Entente countries did not recognise revolutionary Russia, and a post-revolutionary Russia was nowhere to be seen either. The best they could do, then, was to wait and abstain from resolving the issue of vital importance to Russia; namely, the fate of its pre-war territory.<sup>32</sup>

In mid-January 1919, Stefan Hubicki, an adherent of Piłsudski's camp with contacts in Russian circles, soberly stated in a note drafted on request of Michał Sokolnicki that the attitude of the Entente to the Polish Question is inversely proportional to its interest in the Russian Question. In other words, when Russia's stocks and shares waxed, Poland's waned, and vice versa. Hubicki was convinced that the man behind the scenes of the Russian Political Conference was not Prince Lvov but Alexander Izvolsky, former head of Tsarist diplomacy and former ambassador of the Russian Empire to France, whose attitude to the Polish Question was greatly reserved.<sup>33</sup> In April 1919, Hubicki characterised the Conference in the following unequivocal terms: "an institution that was dead as a doornail when it came to being creative, but vigorously involved in scheming, specifically against

<sup>30</sup> L. Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War 1914–1921*, Oxford, 2018, p. 493.

<sup>31</sup> А.С. Пученков, *Национальная политика генерала Деникина (весна 1918 – весна 1920 г.)*, Москва, 2016, pp. 54–55.

<sup>32</sup> R. Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, vol. 2, ed. T. Wituch, Warszawa, 1988, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> JPIAA/NY, *Adiutantura Generalna Naczelnego Wodza [hereinafter AGNW]*, vol. 701/2/54, raport S. Hubickiego o stosunku Ententy do Polski, 15 January 1919, f. 24.

Poland.<sup>34</sup> In this case, the diagnosis was not entirely accurate, as a short while before that the Warsaw authorities had announced that "White" Russians published in Paris a number of writings concerning their efforts to reinvent Russia that were "in stark contradiction to Poland's political programme,"<sup>35</sup> which demonstrates that some degree of creativity was indeed within their reach.

## Russian–Polish talks in Paris

With the Peace Conference in progress, Maklakov, Bachmetev and others – including the diplomat Nikolai Basyli, who also resided at rue Grenelle – made it clear during conversations with Polish representatives that the future of the nations that inhabited the former Russian Empire could be decided only by a Russian constitutional assembly to be convened once the revolutionary chaos had come to an end. A concession was made to the Poles, but their territory was not to exceed the boundaries of the former Kingdom of Poland.<sup>36</sup> Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz learned as much from his conversations with members of the Russian Political Conference,<sup>37</sup> who did not limit themselves to backroom diplomatic talks with delegates of other nations present in Paris. Members of the Russian Political Delegation – Lvov, Sazonov, Milukov and Tchaikovsky – occasionally reminded Entente leaders that all matters related to the territory of the Russian Empire within its borders as of 1914, as well as to the future status of nations living within those borders, could not be resolved without the knowledge and consent of the Russian nation. A missive on the topic was sent to Georges Clemenceau on 9 March 1919.<sup>38</sup> Another memorandum on this issue was sent to the representatives of the victorious powers on 24 May (i.e. a month before the Peace Conference closed). In it, the only exception conceded was to "Poland in its ethnic borders," understood as the lands of the former Kingdom of Poland (although that name was not mentioned in the aforementioned documents). It is worth quoting the following passages:

[...] the issue of the future political status of the ethnicities inhabiting areas within the boundaries [of the former Russian Empire – MW] cannot be resolved without the participation and consent of the Russian people. No final decision on the issue can be made until the Russian people are in a condition to freely ascertain their own will and take part in

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., vol. 701/2/56, Raport. Streszczenie rozmowy dr. Hubickiego z gen. Gołowinem szefem sztabu gen. Szczerbaczowa w Paryżu, 18 April 1919, f. 109.

<sup>35</sup> JPIAA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/4, Raport dzienny nr 15, 26 March 1919, f. 234.

<sup>36</sup> Н.Е. Быстрова, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>37</sup> "249 – [marzec], sprawozdanie byłego szefa Sekcji Politycznej MSZ z podróży do Paryża," in: *PDD 1919 styczeń – maj*, p. 576.

<sup>38</sup> *Considérations sur les frontières orientales de la Pologne et la paix en Europe*, Paris, 1919; В.А. Зубачевский, op. cit., p. 111.

settling these questions. [...] In anticipation for a final settlement of the provisional state of affairs that will respond to the current needs of the interested populations, particularly in their economic, financial and military aspects, we acknowledge the *de facto* authority of the institutions constituted by these populations.<sup>39</sup>

Later, they added:

Russia, reborn after the [February – MW] Revolution, freed from the centralist tendencies of the old Tsarist regime, intends to broadly satisfy the legitimate desires of the nationalities to organise a national life of their own. However [...] it is self-evident that problems in political structuring of the nationalities cannot be resolved without the consent of the Russian people. Nor is it possible to disregard the multitude of interlocking interests concerning the matters of national defence, economy and finance that bind the lives of the Russian people to the nationalities inhabiting the Russian territories.<sup>40</sup>

It cannot be ruled out that the Russian efforts – at least as regards their May memorandum to the Entente powers – were prompted by the intensification of Poland's eastern policy, and specifically by the Vilnius operation of April 1919, which communicated to the world that Warsaw would not remain passive in deciding the shape of Poland's eastern border.<sup>41</sup> By annexing Vilnius and its surroundings, Piłsudski stepped beyond the former borders of the Kingdom of Poland, actively moving into the so-called Taken Lands that were claimed not only by the Lithuanians, Belarussians and Bolsheviks, but also by the "White" Russians. The letter quoted above was pervaded with the idea that the various national authorities established on the ruins of the Russian Empire were temporary. It was a thinly veiled suggestion that, once the "Whites" won the civil war and set up a non-Bolshevik government in Russia, this "temporary status" would be revised and terminated, obviously in line with Russian expectations in this regard. The provisions of the memorandum provided for an opportunity to detach the Chelm region and parts of Podlachia from Poland and incorporate them into a post-revolutionary Russia. In this matter, the expectations concerning the delineation of the Polish–Russian border that had been stated in Milukov's letter of August 1918 and in the "General Rules of Participation of the Russian Delegation in the Peace Conference" drafted a few months later in Omsk, were considered still valid. The Entente powers could not simply ignore that position.

In early 1920, Erazm Piltz, a member of the National Polish Committee, adviser to the Polish delegation to the Peace Conference and representative of the Polish government to the French, who had a vast knowledge of Russian affairs, reminded a group of Polish diplomats about the attitude of the delegates of the Russian

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<sup>39</sup> JP/IAA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/1, Letter signed by G. Lvov, S. Sazonov, N. Tchaikovsky and V. Maklakov, 24 May 1919, ff. 149–151 (translated from French).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> A. Nowak, *op. cit.*, pp. 274–304.

Political Conference and the Russian Political Delegation. He stated, among other things, that:

they [the Russians] stood by the principle of 'one and indivisible Russia,' abandoning their claims to Eastern Galicia, but demanding the Chełm region. The issue of the eastern borderlands was not discussed, because they made no statement. They demanded a border identical with that of Congress Poland without the Chełm region. As for Ukraine, it was not recognised, and Ukrainian passports were not accepted for visa applications. The Ukrainians did not attend any of the meetings.<sup>42</sup>

However, the lack of demands to incorporate Eastern Galicia into a rebuilt non-Bolshevik Russia did not mean that the leading politicians of the Russian *émigré* circles did not consider such a course of events in the possible near future, as has already been mentioned above with regard to Maklakov's statement.

Perhaps the most apposite comment summarising the position of "White" Russians in Paris was made by Leon Wasilewski, one of Piłsudski's closest associates, former head of diplomacy of the reborn Poland and his envoy for the Peace Conference. In a report sent to Piłsudski's office in the Belvedere Palace, Wasilewski wrote:

[...] recognising the weakness of today's Russia, they ["White" Russians] demand that "their" former borderland peoples should not resolve either their borders with Russia or the future political standing of their states in relation to Russia in a final manner. The loss of Poland (in its ethnic borders) they could condone, to the loss of Finland they would perhaps agree with a heavy heart, considering this a severe defeat, and as for Estonia and Latvia, they would grant them autonomy, and they would be ready to make certain further concessions to Lithuania, taking particular care of the Lithuanians whom they regard as an accessory against Poland. They do not recognise Belarus and they fervently oppose a separate Ukraine. In our talks, they recognise the need for good neighbourly relations between Poland and Russia; they (Bachmetev [*sic* – MW]) would even be willing to mitigate the rigid principles of ethnicity when delimiting their border with Poland and consider some geographical, strategic and economic 'adjustments.' And they require of us, too, that we refrain from determining our borders with Russia in a final manner before the Bolsheviks have been wiped out of Russia. From a practical point of view, they consider it desirable to coordinate the operations of our military forces with theirs in fighting the Bolsheviks. To summarise, aware of their present weakness, they wish to postpone the settlement of all questions until they have regained their former might. To me, the conclusion is clear: we and other borderland peoples must make haste to settle our border and other issues.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Archive of the Władysław Sikorski Polish Institute and Museum in London [hereinafter: SPIM], Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, call no. A.11.18/1, Zjazd polskich posłów Europy Środkowej w Wiedniu 15–19 marca 1920, p. 22 (statement of E. Piltz of 17 March 1920).

<sup>43</sup> "255 – 3 kwietnia, raport członka delegacji warszawskiej dla Naczelnika Państwa o opiniach przedstawicieli narodów byłego Imperium Rosyjskiego," in: *PDD 1919 styczeń – maj*, pp. 585–586.

In late April 1919, a group of Polish diplomats forming part of the Congress Office in Paris began their talks with the delegates of the Russian Political Conference. The negotiations, coordinated by Władysław Grabski, were handled by representatives of both the National Polish Committee (Stanisław Kozicki and Józef Wielowieyski) and of the Chief of State (Michał Sokolnicki and Leon Wasilewski). Interestingly, as an entry in Professor Eugeniusz Romer's diary demonstrates, Grabski was convinced that the Russians had no claims to either Eastern Galicia or even the Chelm region, but it remained possible to wrangle with them over Belarus and Lithuania.<sup>44</sup> If this account is accurate, this would demonstrate considerable naivety on the part of the Polish politician. The Russian delegates to the talks with the Poles were Lvov, Maklakov, Mikhail Stakhovich (former Governor General of Finland and the Provincial Government's ambassador to Spain)<sup>45</sup> and Vasily Vyrubov (the general secretary of the Russian Political Conference). The latter, a banker and freemason, was a trusted man of Prince Lvov, formerly acting as his secretary in the Provisional Government and handling the financial affairs of the Conference in Paris.<sup>46</sup> The background and cause for these meetings was the aforesaid intensification of Poland's policy concerning the borderlands, notably in the Vilnius region, and the advances made by the Polish Army against Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia. In a report from the negotiations, Grabski concluded that it would be possible to work out a *modus vivendi* with the "White" Russians, but it would need to remain provisional. The Russians intimated that they would not regard Poland's appetite to take over the city of Lviv as a *casus belli*, but made it absolutely clear that they would not tolerate an independent Ukraine. This unambiguously signalled that the support of Warsaw for the Ukrainians in their fight for independence would considerably sour relations between Poland and Russia. The representatives of the Russian Political Conference also suggested that they would be willing to designate Russia's unofficial envoy to Warsaw; in addition, they would welcome the appointment of two Polish delegates to continue the talks.<sup>47</sup>

As an aside, it should be added that the representative of "White" Russia, in the person of Georgy Kutepov, arrived in Warsaw as late as 25 September 1919.<sup>48</sup> A confidential note on the mission he headed states that adherents of Denikin and Kolchak coalesced around him, whereas the democratic circles of Russian *émigrés*

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<sup>44</sup> E. Romer, *Pamiętnik paryski (1918–1919)*, ed. A. Garlicki, R. Świętek, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź, 1989, p. 292.

<sup>45</sup> А.Б. Гуларян, "М.А. Стахович: политические взгляды и общественная деятельность," *Российская история*, 2012, no. 2, pp. 184–192; А.С. Минаков, "Общественно-политическая деятельность М.А. Стаховича," in: *Научное наследие А. Г. Кузьмина и отечественная история. Материалы Всероссийской научной конференции*, Рязань, 2009, pp. 231–243.

<sup>46</sup> *Чему свидетели мы были...*, vol. 2, p. 33 (footnote 3), 395.

<sup>47</sup> "312 – 26 kwietnia, protokół sesji Biura Kongresowego," in: *PDD 1919 styczeń – maj*, p. 699 (also footnote 82); A. Juzwenko, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>48</sup> A. Juzwenko, op. cit., p. 185.

in Poland opposed him, seeing in him a representative of the "Black Hundred" movement. The activities of Kutepov were viewed negatively by Polish authorities. This should not be surprising, as the envoy demanded that the library of the University of Warsaw, most of whose staff and collections had been evacuated to Rostov on the Don in 1915, should be transferred to that city's university. He also strongly opposed the plans to demolish the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Plac Saski, which was viewed by Poles as a potent symbol of Russian rule, and questioned the decisions taken by the Polish authorities to confiscate the majorates [i.e. the Polish estates previously confiscated by the Tsardom and granted to Russian owners – translators' note] and donations.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, Sokolnicki held talks with Savinkov, who led the Press Department of the Russian Political Conference and had been trying to establish contacts among Piłsudski's delegates since at least January/February 1919.<sup>50</sup> As Andrzej Nowak rightly conjectures, the potential collaboration between "White" Russia and the German monarchists mentioned by Savinkov was an attempt to pressure the Poles, which bordered on blackmail, so as to enhance the bargaining position of the Russian Political Conference.<sup>51</sup> The words and phrases used by the Russians on that occasion resembled those that Sokolnicki had heard from Milukov in Kiev in June 1918. These talks with Savinkov, although at a much later date, brought the Russian diplomat into close cooperation with Piłsudski and his camp; however, they also resulted in Savinkov being marginalised by the wider circles of Russian political *émigrés*.<sup>52</sup> Sokolnicki was also challenged by Bazyli, the aforementioned diplomat and close associate of Maklakov, who tried to sound out whether Poland would be willing to collaborate with Russia not only politically but also in combat against the Bolsheviks. To discuss this matter, in early April 1919, Hubicki was sent to General Nikolai Golovin, who was then serving as the chief of staff of General Dmitry Shcherbachev, the head of the Army and Navy Committee of the Russian Political Conference. The Polish envoy did not find the talks particularly propitious, as he became convinced that the Russian

<sup>49</sup> SPIM, Ambasada RP w Londynie, call no. A.12.P.1/2, Stosunki wśród ugrupowań i osobistości rosyjskich na terenie Warszawy, ff. 91–92.

<sup>50</sup> JPIAA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/2, Protokół posiedzenia delegacji warszawskiej, 2 February 1919, f. 36. We find there evidence that Savinkov requested Captain Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski for a meeting. His contacts with the captain continued for some time. In August 1921, perhaps only out of courtesy, he wrote him a letter, thanking him for his support for the political initiatives of the democratic factions of Russian *émigrés* in Poland: "I am convinced of your sincere and deep dedication to the question that you have greatly aided and that would have perished long ago without your favourable disposition and your powerful support"; ГАРФ, ф. 5866: Русский Эвакуационный Комитет (РЭК). Варшава, оп. 1, д. 25, letter of B. Savinkov to B. Wieniawa-Długoszowski, 13 August 1921, ff. 35–36.

<sup>51</sup> A. Nowak, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 445–486.

military commanders residing in Paris had been out of touch with the “White” armies engaged in combat against the Bolsheviks. The Polish side was interested in intelligence collaboration with a view to obtaining information on the Red Army from the “Whites,” while the Russians entertained hopes of forming their own military units on Polish territory. Golovin clearly stated that he saw no possibility of establishing a joint Polish–Russian initiative against the Bolsheviks, even if it were to be formed under the aegis of the Entente powers.<sup>53</sup>

The position of “White” Russians waxed and waned depending on the fortunes of their armies fighting the Bolsheviks. In mid-May 1919, a letter sent to Piłsudski, probably written by Leon Wasilewski, reported:

The local Muscovites whip up their activities, exploiting in every way possible and energetically promoting the efforts of Kolchak, demanding that the Entente recognise the Kolchak government. A few days ago, they unexpectedly received an invitation from the Council of Four to state their position on the eastern borders of Poland. They worked to present their case for an entire day and left the meeting looking very pleased, as reported by those who saw them in that moment. The general feeling is that the idea of Great Russia is coming back to life.<sup>54</sup>

It seems reasonable to presume that the concept in question was never entirely discarded by the “Whites,” and that the phrase mentioning ‘the general feeling’ refers to the attitudes of the Entente delegates. The Russian *émigrés* in Paris could rely on the support of French politicians, diplomats and the military, and were favoured by a considerable number of French newspapers. Piłsudski’s confidant, Captain Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, reported in a letter sent to him on 31 May 1919:

The idea of Great Russia is supported by the entire [French] Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Pichon. The press urges the establishment of a Great Russia, and there are even projects of conceding Constantinople to Russia. Among the military, opinions are varied; there is much uncertainty as to the chances for establishing Great Russia, but most of them look favourably on the idea. The Czechs clearly support Russia against our interests.<sup>55</sup>

Almost a month later, Władysław Baranowski, another representative of the Belvedere camp, reported from Paris that, notwithstanding the debacle of Kolchak’s army, the allies had not given up on the idea of re-establishing a “Great Russia.”

<sup>53</sup> JPIAA/NY, AGNW, vol. 701/2/56, Raport. Streszczenie rozmowy dr. Hubickiego z gen. Gołowinem szefem sztabu gen. Szczerbaczowa w Paryżu, 18 April 1919, f. 109.

<sup>54</sup> JPIAA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/4, pismo L. Wasilewskiego (?) do J. Piłsudskiego, 16 May 1919, f. 49.

<sup>55</sup> “17 – 31 maja, Z listu B. Wieniawy-Długoszowskiego do Naczelnego Dowództwa Wojska Polskiego w sprawie uznania rządu Kołczaka przez państwa Ententy,” in: *Tajne rokowania polsko-radzieckie w 1919 r. Materiały archiwalne i dokumenty*, ed. W. Gostyńska, Warszawa, 1986, p. 47.

As for its implementation, it was the British who were most actively involved, while the French provided "White" Russians with "inspiration" and "theoretical background."<sup>56</sup>

The talks with the "Whites" continued. Contrary to the suggestions found in the memoirs of Kazimierz Dłuski, the surviving documents provide no evidence that the burden of Polish–Russian negotiations was carried by Dmowski and Wielowieyski, who allegedly "had breakfasts and lunches with the Muscovites."<sup>57</sup> Incidentally, the "Moscophilia of Dmowski, Piltz, Potocki and the like" was reported to Piłsudski by Leon Wasilewski.<sup>58</sup> In late May 1919, Maklakov conversed in Paris with Władysław Skrzyński, deputy minister of foreign affairs, and proposed that with a view to establishing amicable relations between the two countries, the extent of the undisputedly Polish and Russian territories should be immediately delineated. According to research carried out by Adolf Juzwenko, the National Democracy delegates to the National Polish Committee were in favour of this proposal and wished to meet the Russian expectations. They argued that this was necessary to avoid the impression that Poland was intent on taking advantage of Russia's plight, insisting that Poland should simply seek benefit from the favourable but certainly temporary turn of events in a Russia mired in revolution and torn apart by civil war. For instance, Wielowieyski reminded Skrzyński of the "deep-seated hatred" that was on the rise with regard to Poland's relationship with the "White" Russians, as well as of the possibility that these favourable circumstances would come to an end once the Bolsheviks had been defeated: this would force Poland to negotiate not with political exiles or contenders, but with representatives of a member state of the Entente supported by other victorious powers. Even Piłsudski considered the possibility of entering into talks with the Russians on the conditions proposed by Maklakov, but decided to defer doing so due to the rapidly changing circumstances. The matter lost its relevance when Maklakov's position was snubbed by the highly influential delegates of "White" Russia, including by General Anton Denikin,<sup>59</sup> who was evidently of the opinion that Poland's eastern border should run along the boundary of Congress Poland. I concur with the statement of Andrzej Nowak, who argues that Piłsudski did not want to compromise with "White, neo-imperialist Russia" and become subservient to its dictates instead of imposing his own.<sup>60</sup> That the "White" Russia did not envisage resignation from determining the future Polish–Russian border is

<sup>56</sup> JP/AA/NY, Archiwum Michała Mościckiego, call no. 75/4, W. Baranowski, Notatki zagraniczne, 25 June 1919, f. 143.

<sup>57</sup> K. Dłuski, *Wspomnienia z Paryża od 4 I do 10 VII 1919 roku*, Warszawa, 1920, p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> "33 – pismo L. Wasilewskiego do J. Piłsudskiego, 12 czerwca, list członka Delegacji Polskiej na Konferencję Pokojową do Naczelnika Państwa [?] o przebiegu obrad," in: *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1919 czerwiec – grudzień*, ed. S. Dębski, Warszawa, 2019, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> A. Juzwenko, op. cit., pp. 168–169.

<sup>60</sup> A. Nowak, op. cit., pp. 288–289.

evident from the events that took place in the final stage of the Peace Conference. On 26 May 1919, the Supreme Council of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers sent a missive to Admiral Kolchak, stating that his government would be recognised only once the indicated conditions, including the acknowledgement of Poland's right to independence, had been fulfilled.<sup>61</sup> In a reply given on 4 June, the Russian Supreme Ruler acquiesced to the establishment of an independent and united Polish state "as a natural and just consequence of the Great War." In doing so, he referred to the respective decree of the Provisional Government issued in March 1917 and sustained its declarations on the matter. At the same time, however, Kolchak expressly stated that the demarcation of the Polish–Russian border should be postponed until a legislative assembly had been convened.<sup>62</sup> This position was in line with the earlier declarations of the Russian Political Council, although the reply of the Russian admiral made no explicit reference to the territory of Congress Poland, nor did it mention "ethnic Poland." The attitude of Russia's Supreme Ruler could not fail to influence the wording of the final version of the peace treaty signed just three and a half weeks later in Versailles. Kolchak was not going to grant any territorial concessions to Poland, even if the Polish military would aid the "Whites" against the Red Army.<sup>63</sup>

Yet another relevant issue deserves mention. Piłsudski's envoys to Paris firmly protested against the idea of sending to Poland about 100,000 Russian prisoners of war detained in the territories of the Central Powers so as to deploy them in combat against the Red Army. Captain Wieniawa-Długoszowski, who stayed in Paris in May 1919, reported on this to Piłsudski:

As regards the Russian prisoners of war, there are, in fact, two issues: the first is the intention to send back to Russia 500,000 POWs who are still detained in Germany. The Mission Interalliée in Berlin intended to transit some of them through Poland. This idea was opposed by General [Paul] Henrys, who believed these men would directly swell the ranks of the Bolshevik army. At any rate, he protested against moving them through Poland and the Polish–Bolshevik front. The other issue is the volunteer army composed of about 100,000 Russian prisoners of war to be used against the Bolsheviks on the Polish front. In all of my conversations with individuals competent in these matters, I firmly protested against this idea, arguing that those soldiers, having a volatile sense of loyalty, would behave like the Czechs drafted into the Austrian army if they were to be sent against the Bolsheviks. At the same time, I have been trying to determine the authenticity of the other issue, considering that in spite of the fact that I heard of it from two

<sup>61</sup> "16 – 26 maja, depesza Rady Najwyższej Konferencji Pokojowej w Paryżu do admirała A. Kołaczaka w sprawie warunków uznania jego rządu," in: *Tajne rokowania polsko-radzieckie...*, pp. 44–47.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47–50; П. Зырянов, *Адмирал Колчак верховный правитель России*, Москва, 2009, pp. 466–467 (source of quotes); В.А. Зубачевский, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>63</sup> For more on this, see "Polska w świetle postanowień rządu omskiego," ed. A. Kamiński, in: *Studia z Najnowszych Dziejów Powszechnych*, 3, 1963, pp. 211–228.

sources, it may be a mere fraudulent explanation of the first issue (i.e. the re-evacuation of the prisoners).<sup>64</sup>

It is debatable whether the much-exaggerated argument about the behaviour of Czech soldiers convinced the Entente representatives, in particular the French, who supported Czechoslovakia. This is even less likely if we consider that the Entente leaders were well aware of the involvement of the Czech Legion in Russia. The idea of forming anti-Bolshevik troops by drafting Russian POWs was eventually discarded, which was to Piłsudski's advantage, as it prevented the unwanted situation whereby Russian troops, whose intentions were not necessarily aligned with Poland's interest, would traverse Polish territories, presumably without his supervision.

As for the threats that the restoration of Russia posed to the nascent post-war order, there survives a study on the subject, written in Paris the day after the Treaty of Versailles was signed and dealing specifically with the objectives of Polish diplomacy in this new international context. The authors of the document considered three scenarios for the restoration of non-Bolshevik Russia: (a) a socialist Russia (i.e. the vision pursued by the radicals under the leadership of the prime minister of the former Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky); (b) a democratic Russia (i.e. the presumable objective of the Kolchak government and the Russian Political Conference); and (c) a federative and decentralised Russia, granting a fair degree of autonomy to the provinces inhabited by non-Russian populations. The prospect of a socialist Russia was considered inexorably disadvantageous, as it would "lean towards Bolshevik ideology, without its atrocity, but pursuing its social programme in full. Having a border with socialist Russia would always be dangerous, as it would be like the hotbed of an infectious disease." A similar position was taken towards the vision of a democratic Russia that would most probably be ruled by the constitutional democrats, the best organised political party. Their leadership, however, would presumably strive to "establish a progressive and liberal Russia but heavily centralised, having little regard for the needs and aspirations of other nations." The document illustrated those inconsiderate attitudes by pointing out that after the February Revolution the Kadets were disinclined to concede independence to Finland, but looked with favour on the idea of having Constantinople incorporated into Russia. As a consequence, the federative variant presented the only tolerable prospect of neighbouring with a non-Bolshevik Russia. Despite the tangle of disputed issues, the document emphasised the necessity of maintaining good relationships between reborn Poland and a non-Bolshevik Russia. There were at least two reasons for this. First, there were concerns about an anti-Polish

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<sup>64</sup> Российский государственный военный архив, Москва, ф. 483к: Политические организации Польши периода первой мировой войны/Polskie organizacje polityczne z okresu I wojny światowej 1914–1918, ф. 483к, оп. 6, д. 5, pismo B. Wieniawy-Długoszowskiego do J. Piłsudskiego, 12 May 1919, f. 15.

alliance between the two large neighbours, Russia and Germany, as “battles with them will continue even in peacetime.” Second, there were Poland’s aspirations that could be satisfied only in the eastern borderlands, where the Poles had played an important role as the “colonising force” prior to the Great War. Proof of this still vividly remembered activity of the Poles as “cultural colonists” of the Russian Empire was their considerable position in administration, transport, industry and trade that proved difficult to topple in spite of the repressive policies that were aimed against them. The conclusion stated:

Despite all these necessities, needs and advantages, the task of Polish diplomacy in Russia will be very difficult, because it is hard to imagine that the character of the Russian nation and of their state, whose greatness depended on conquering and oppressing other nations, could drastically change and that the ingrained instinctive rapaciousness that we know from history could be gone forever. Therefore, extreme caution in dealing with Russia is highly recommended.<sup>65</sup>

These statements did not match the conclusions formulated by an unnamed associate of the Omsk government who wrote a classified note on the political trends in Western Europe. With reference to the Peace Conference, he bitterly complained:

Russia has no friends abroad on whose magnanimous support she could rely in crisis. Everyone, friend and foe alike, sees our fatherland as an opportunity to increase their wealth. Our orientation and politics should be purely Russian.<sup>66</sup>

Notably, the Polish document cited above entirely refrained from considering the prospects of Polish–Soviet relations or the tasks of Polish diplomacy in a Russia permanently dominated by the Bolsheviks. This is very telling, because it confirms the conviction, shared by many Polish but also European political elites, that the rule of Lenin and his commissars would be short-lived and that the Bolsheviks would soon be defeated by the “Whites” and their allies. Few, if any, in Paris and Warsaw realised that the dealings of Polish diplomacy with Bolshevik Russia would be not at all easier, but much more difficult compared to the scenarios outlined in the document. The menace posed by communist ideology in its Bolshevik guise was not yet understood. Konstantin Nabokov, a representative of the Omsk Government in London and the scion of an eminent Russian family, was certainly right when drafting a note, a month before signing the Treaty of Versailles, concerning the causes of the naive attitude of the Entente leaders, particularly of the US president Woodrow Wilson, towards the Bolsheviks:

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<sup>65</sup> SPIM, Ambasada RP w Londynie, call no. A.12.48/1, *Kilka myśli na temat o zadaniach dyplomacji polskiej*, 29 June 1919, ff. 1–15 (used for quotations in the entire paragraph).

<sup>66</sup> Cited from С.В. Листиков, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

Whether this policy is dictated by the dumb doctrinaires who cannot tell Bolshevism from the principles of 'original democracy' espoused by Wilson, or whether this is the under-cover work of the financial elites, who are ill-disposed to the restoration of a strong Russia and teem around Wilson, I dare not speculate.<sup>67</sup>

During the early months of Poland's independence, the scale of the danger posed by Bolshevik Russia, not only for Russia itself but also for the other countries exhausted by the war, was by and large ignored. A very interesting study entitled "Bolshevism and the Polish Question" received by the General Aide-Corps of the Commander-in-Chief in February 1919 complained about the fairly widespread misapprehension of the issue that was usually written off as "the work of a group of Jewish thugs." The document's author (or authors) firmly advised against such attitudes and pointed out not only the allure of the communist ideals but also the expansionist character of the Bolsheviks. The conclusion stated:

Bolshevism is a movement of prime importance and, for this reason, poses extreme danger to the Polish question. Were this a gang of thugs, a Jewish clique, we could manage them on their own, or even, prior to that, Russia itself would have stopped them in their tracks. But this is not the case, which shows the gravity of the situation. [...]

The present moment and our present situation is contingent on two equally important issues: the social balance of power in Poland and the political position of our country, the question of its borders, the relations with its neighbours and with the victorious allies. Connected to these issues is a third one, which touches upon the very essence of our independence; namely, whether we will be in control of our own life or yield to external circumstances.<sup>68</sup>

The awareness of the Bolshevik threat was to emerge only gradually in later months, especially in response to the turning points of the Polish-Bolshevik war, dawning upon the increasingly wider social circles in Poland, though not necessarily in Paris, London and Washington.

<sup>67</sup> "21 maja, Z pisma przedstawiciela rządu omskiego w Londynie K. Nabokowa do admirała A. Kołczaka w sprawie stanowiska państw Ententy do jego rządu," in: *Tajne rokowania polsko-radzieckie...*, pp. 42–43 (source of the quote). For more on this, see. К.Д. Набоков, Испытания дипломата, Стокгольм, 1921, pp. 249–279.

<sup>68</sup> JPIAA/NY, AGNW, vol. 701/2/15, Bolszewizm a sprawa polska, między 15 stycznia a 1 lutego 1919, ff. 105–116. On the essence of Bolshevik ideology, see A. Ulam, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks: the intellectual and political history of the triumph of communism in Russia*, London, 1975; id., *The Bolsheviks: the intellectual and political history of the triumph of communism in Russia*, Cambridge Mass.–London, 1998; R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899–1919*, London, 1990; id., *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919–1924*, New York, 1995.

## Conclusions

In the first half of 1919, a Polish–Russian *entente cordiale* was not possible.<sup>69</sup> The common Bolshevik enemy, whose capabilities were largely underestimated at the time, was not enough to hold it together. The tangle of the more and less recent historical factors, the difference in political ideas and, particularly, the territorial disputes proved to be intractable. A succinct, apposite (but slightly exaggerated) comment on the issue was made by Jerzy Giedroyc, who wrote in a letter to Waław Lednicki almost thirty years after the Peace Conference ended:

I am afraid that those good-natured Great Russian imperialists will not learn from anything or anyone. Nevertheless, we must overcome the methods of the National Democrats on the one hand and of the Kadets on the other to sweet talk one another when in plain sight and slyly tout the ideas of Poland extending to the Urals, or of Russia to Berlin.<sup>70</sup>

The letter makes it evident that over the decades that followed the Paris Peace Conference none of these “methods” was entirely abandoned: living in exile and fully aware of the horrors produced by Bolshevik ideology that became even more appalling under Stalin, Polish–Russian relations continued to be a struggle.

As a matter of fact, as regards their territorial claims and the demarcation of the Polish–Russian border, the “White” Russians stuck to the principles established in the final years of the Tsardom, when attempts were being made to resolve the issue of Poland’s autonomy.<sup>71</sup> The aforementioned proposal of Maklakov, even considering its explicitly declared temporary character, was the odd one out: other “White” Russian power centres shared roughly the same attitude to the delineation of the prospective Polish–Russian border, which they insisted should run along the eastern border of the former Kingdom of Poland with only minor deviations.<sup>72</sup> The Russians also considered incorporating Eastern Galicia and Subcarpathian Rus into their unified, post-revolutionary state. This had far-reaching consequences and was not without influence on the final wording of the peace treaty. Article 87 of the treaty includes the following clause concerning the eastern fringes of the Polish state:

<sup>69</sup> I refer to the title of Waław Lednicki’s article, “Rosyjsko-polska entente cordiale. (Jej początki i fundamenty 1903–1905),” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 10, 1966, pp. 7–142.

<sup>70</sup> “7 stycznia 1948, list J. Giedroycia do W. Lednickiego,” in: *Mam na Pana nowy zamach...*. *Wybór korespondencji Jerzego Giedroycia z historykami i świadkami historii 1946–2000*, vol. 2, ed. S.M. Nowinowski, R. Stobiecki et al., Łódź–Paryż, 2019, p. 300.

<sup>71</sup> M. Wołos, “Rosja wobec Aktu 5 listopada 1916 roku,” in: *Akt 5 listopada 1916 roku i jego konsekwencje dla Polski i Europy*, ed. J. Kłaczek, K. Kania, Z. Girzyński, Toruń, 2016, pp. 365–382.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wiśniewski, “Kwestia białoruska i wschodnia granica Polski w polityce rządu syberyjskiego admirała Aleksandra Kołczaka w latach 1918–1920,” *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, 40, 2013, pp. 109–132.

The boundaries of Poland not laid down in the present Treaty will be subsequently determined by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers.<sup>73</sup>

This provision can be regarded as testimony to the unflinching hopes of the political elites of the victorious powers that a non-Bolshevik Russia could be restored; specifically, it referred to the proposals that had many times been advanced by the "Whites." It can also be viewed in still another way (i.e. as a result of the efforts carried out by representatives of the political and diplomatic circles of both the Tsarist regime and of the Provisional Government of post-revolutionary Russia). It should be added that Maklakov and others, even though they represented a de facto non-existent state, maintained their influence and continued to be officially received by high-ranking representatives of the Entente as Russia's diplomatic envoys.<sup>74</sup> General Denikin wrote, not without reason, that solving the issue of Poland's eastern border during the Paris Peace Conference without the participation of Russia would present "an insurmountable difficulty."<sup>75</sup> Obviously, the difficulty affected primarily the victorious powers. That particular element of the post-war European order was settled only with the Treaty of Riga signed in March 1921 by Poland on the one hand, and Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine on the other.<sup>76</sup> This course of events was not, however, to the liking of both "White" Russians and the Western powers who delayed recognising Poland's eastern borders for two more years, until March 1923, when the belief that a non-Bolshevik Russia could be restored became a sign of delusional rather than fact-based thinking.<sup>77</sup>

One might consider yet another issue, although this one can certainly be taken as alternative history: what would Poland's eastern border look like had the delegates of the Russian Empire or of Russia's democratic Provisional Government been admitted to the negotiating table of the Peace Conference as representatives of a victorious power, on par with other members of the Entente? There can be no doubt that the powers would draw the border according to Russia's wishes, given that the views of an ally whose blood was spilt in the war against the Central Powers could not be ignored. In other words, the border would be identical or

<sup>73</sup> "28 czerwca 1919, Wersal, Traktat pokojowy z Niemcami (tzw. wersalski), ważniejsze postanowienia – dok. 29," in: S. Sierpowski, *Źródła do historii powszechnej okresu międzywojennego*, vol. 1: 1917–1926, Poznań, 1989, p. 111.

<sup>74</sup> For example: *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1921*, vol. 1: (16 janvier – 30 juin), Bruxelles–Bern–Berlin–Frankfurt am Main–New York–Oxford–Wien, 2004, 9 March, cable of E. Peretti de la Rocca to Ph. Berthelot, pp. 297–298.

<sup>75</sup> A. Деникин, *Путь русского офицера*, Москва, 2012, p. 604.

<sup>76</sup> J. Borzęcki J., *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe*, New Haven–London, 2008; *Traktat ryski 1921 roku po 75 latach*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń, 1998; *Zapomniany pokój. Traktat ryski. Interpretacje i kontrowersje 90 lat później*, ed. S. Dębski, Warszawa, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> P. Wandycz, *Aleksander Skrzyński minister spraw zagranicznych II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa, 2006, pp. 71–81.

almost identical to the border of the former Kingdom of Poland, perhaps with adjustments in the Mariampol, Sokółka and Bielsk counties, as once proposed by Milukov. The Chełm region would remain with Russia, and Eastern Galicia would hang in the balance for a short while only, ultimately falling to allied Russia. This is tellingly confirmed by the famous so-called Curzon Line that was proposed in the resolution of 8 December 1919, signed by Clemenceau as the chairman of the Peace Conference, later modified on the orders of the British prime minister Lloyd George and sent to Moscow on 11 July 1920 by the British foreign secretary, Lord George Nathaniel Curzon. In that document, the line that was later (and not without reason) named after the British diplomat was extended southwards – without notifying the Poles or even the French – and ran west of Rawa Ruska, east of Przemyśl, and further south towards the Carpathians. As a result, Lviv and the whole of Eastern Galicia was carelessly abandoned to be taken over by the Bolsheviks.<sup>78</sup> It remains doubtful whether a Poland limited to the Curzon Line in the east and to the border with Germany as established in the Treaty of Versailles in the west would have been capable of retaining its say in international affairs or even its independence.

## Abstract

The contacts that Poles and “White” Russians established in 1918 indicated that finding an agreement based on their common dislike of the Bolsheviks would be very difficult. The basic condition of the compromise emphasised by the Russians was the Polish agreement setting the future border separating their countries in accordance with the eastern border of the Kingdom of Poland, which, before the First World War, was part of the Russian Empire. The Russian side eventually agreed to slight deviations from this line. “White” Russia’s politicians and diplomats were interested in incorporating Eastern Galicia (together with Lviv) into their country, which they treated as “perennial Russian” land. Thus, many Poles living in Vilnius, Lviv and Eastern Galicia, as well as in the region around Białystok, would have had to remain outside of Poland if the Polish delegates had yielded to their “White” Russian colleagues, with whom they also had political differences. Until the end of World War I, “White” Russians had counted on the help of the Central Powers in overthrowing the Bolshevik regime. At the time, the Poles fought against Germany and Austria-Hungary, regardless of whether they were supporters of Józef Piłsudski or Roman Dmowski. During the Paris Peace Conference, the Polish delegation talked primarily to the representatives of the Russian Political Conference in Paris (in Russian: Русское политическое совещание в Париже), which brought together representatives of various anti-Bolshevik forces. The Russians were interested in forming “White” Russian troops in Poland to fight against the Red Army, which Poles treated with great caution, because they were afraid Warsaw would not have control over these troops. The Polish side was strongly opposed to the formation in Poland of units composed of former Russian prisoners of war in the Central Powers, fearing that they would move to the Bolshevik side. In general, politically and militarily supporting “White” Russia was not in line with the Polish

<sup>78</sup> A. Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 – zapomniany appeasement*, Kraków, 2015, pp. 144–158; *Советско-польские отношения в 1918–1945 гг. Сборник документов в четырех томах*, vol. 1: 1918–1926, ed. М.М. Наринский, А.В. Мальгин, Москва, 2017, pp. 90–151.

raison d'état. In the case of a "White" Russian victory over the Bolsheviks, the future of the Polish border would be sealed, as the Entente powers would have likely supported their former ally and agreed to the eastern border of the former Kingdom of Poland. After all, the infamous Curzon Line was determined in December 1919 and extended in the south to the Carpathians without the knowledge and consent of the Poles in July 1920. It remains doubtful whether a Poland limited to the Curzon Line in the east and to the pre-war western border would have been able to remain a real political subject or to consolidate its existence altogether.

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