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## THE SOCIETY'S OF THE KINGDOM OF POLAND ATTITUDE TO THE RUSSIAN ARMY AND AUTHORITIES DURING WORLD WAR I

The outbreak of the “Great War” provoked a lively discussion in the society of the Kingdom of Poland – the question of the right stance towards the warring parties and their authorities arose. At the same time, some circles started to talk about the chance, which the great international armed conflict could bring for “the Polish case” (the chance for Poland to regain its independence). In the early years of the war a large part of the public stood on the side of Russia. Such attitudes were presented by both educated people and those less politically aware,<sup>1</sup> as well as, yet having a relatively low national consciousness, peasants and workers. The reasons for the attitudes represented at the time stemmed from various premises.

Prior to 1914, inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland had plenty of opportunities to observe the Russians in different situations. They had contact with the Russian administration, teachers, gendarmes and soldiers. Some residents of the Kingdom served in the Russian army. Inhabitants of the Kingdom held discussions and shared their thoughts about the Russians. In such situations the public usually accepted the views of those who enjoyed the greatest authority within the community. Obviously, individual experiences and thoughts also had a significant impact. Formation and establishment of certain attitudes within the society, both before and during the war, were influenced by Polish political trends of that time. The strong influence of the National Democracy reflected negatively on the perception of the Germans in the Kingdom of Poland. The parties which were hostile towards Russia, but favoured the Central Powers, were less influential. During the armed conflict, social attitudes underwent transformations, which resulted from changes in the situation on the front and current observations.

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<sup>1</sup> Not always could those attitudes be described as pro-Russian. Due to the fear that the Kingdom could have been taken over by the armies of the Central Powers, it was considered preferable to remain under the Russian rule. Some hoped that the Russian state, if victorious, would create an opportunity to unite the Kingdom with other Polish lands, and gain at least partial autonomy. More on this problem see M. Przeniosło, *Chłopi Królestwa Polskiego w latach 1914–1918*, Kielce 2003.

The news of the outbreak of the war did not cause panic in the society of the Kingdom of Poland, however, the people were commonly concerned and anxious about their fate, fate of their families and property. Civilians reacted to the announced mobilization quite calmly. The men who fell under the mobilization mostly did report to the points of conscription. Obviously, for the most part, the mere fact of being called to the army was a great experience. At the same time, it was painful for the families of the mobilized, especially their wives and children. Russian authorities' satisfaction from the course of mobilization was confirmed in the telegram sent by the commander in chief of the Russian army, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1914,<sup>2</sup> to the Governor-General of Warsaw. The telegram was published in the form of a bilingual leaflet (in Russian and Polish). Among other things it reads: "I am pleased to learn about the great progress of the conscription of the reservists of Warsaw Military District, the exalted, patriotic mood across the entire population of the country, which demonstrates the widespread readiness to stand on my first call in the ranks of the Russian army in defence of Our common homeland against our, and all Slavs', eternal enemies".<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, however, there were incidents of avoiding the conscription, particularly among those who were called in the following months of the conflict. Gradually, more and more often, there were also instances of desertion of those already called into the Russian army.<sup>4</sup> In many cases however, the reason for desertion was not a negative attitude towards the Russian state but a desire to avoid military service and fear for one's life.

As it was mentioned above, in the initial period of the war majority of the public hoped that Russia would win. Such attitude stemmed from the fact that many members of their families served in the Russian army.<sup>5</sup> The reluctance towards the Germans and the fear of their army were also very important. When referring to the Russian army, the people of the Kingdom used terms such as "our", "our troops", and wished them victory. Many were convinced of the military power of Russia, and believed that it was insurmountable. The occupation of some areas by the forces of the Central Powers was regarded as a temporary situation. In early August 1914, in some areas people spontaneously and openly expressed their sympathy for the Russian army. So it was in Warsaw. Artur Śliwiński, a Polish journalist and advocate of "pro-Central Powers orientation", wrote in his memoirs: "A real craze of Russophilia swept through almost all the press, the public and streets. The public in Warsaw cheered «our troops» as they were marching through the city, burst into enthusiasm at the sight of the Moscow uniform,

<sup>2</sup> The dates in the text are given in accordance with the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>3</sup> Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, Kancelaria Gubernatora Warszawskiego, ref. no. 575, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (AN Kraków), Archiwum Naczelnego Komitetu Narodowego (ANKN), ref. no. 100.542, p. 9; Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach, Kancelaria Gubernatora Kieleckiego, ref. no. 2840, passim.

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that about 400–500 thousand soldiers from the Kingdom were called up into the Russian army as a result of the mobilization. This does not include those, who had been called up before the outbreak of war.

and even threw bouquets of flowers and greenery under the hooves of the Cossack horses”.<sup>6</sup> Duchess Maria Lubomirska described the mood prevailing in Warsaw at that time in a similar vein. In her diary, under the date of 4 August, 1914, it is written: “In the evening, numerous [Russian] troops were marching under our windows. Long procession. They were accompanied by an enthusiastic crowd, which was shouting «Hurray! Long live the army!» The whole street was trembling with fervour”.<sup>7</sup> Such scenes could also be observed in the capital of the Polish Kingdom in the following months. Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, similarly to Śliwiński, an opponent of the “pro-Russian orientation”, described Warsaw in October 1914: “Masses of new troops, mostly from Siberia, were marching across the city [...]. Warsaw, as in the first days of the mobilization, was euphoric while welcoming the new saviours, future winners over the hated Germans. Flowers were being pinned to the officers’ uniforms, thrown at the soldiers, fastened to horse bridles and cannon carriages. Spontaneously organized committees of ladies gave away packs of cigarettes and sweets to the passing troops”.<sup>8</sup>

Such attitude was also present in the rural areas. Especially if the forces of the Central Powers were forced out of a particular area, which they had occupied before. The instances of an extremely cordial welcoming of the Russian soldiers were not uncommon. Similarly, the locals used to gregariously meet the troops halfway, and share food with them. Father Marian Pawłowski, Provost of a parish in the vicinity of Przedbórz, described the situation in his area in the late October and November of 1914 in the following way: “After departure of the Germans, residents of the village stopped the Cossacks and welcomed them as liberators; they brought oats and hay for the Cossack horses, and treated the Cossacks with everything they had with tears of joy and emotion in their eyes”.<sup>9</sup> The situation was similar in the vicinity of Sandomierz where, in September 1914, after the appearance of the Cossack and cavalry guards “the peasants and women in the villages welcomed them warmly, kissing their hands”. In some cases the Cossacks “were being carried on the hands”, and the locals even kneeled with emotion at the sight of a Russian patrol.<sup>10</sup>

The proclamation of the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, issued on August 14, 1914, was received quite positively in the Kingdom of Poland. The promises made by him, the announcement of the unification of the Polish lands under the rule of the Tsar of Russia and the promised autonomy, became fertile ground for some circles. The proclamation itself was smoothly popularized both by the press of the time and the local Russian administration. At the time when the vision of a completely independent Poland seemed rather unreal, the words included in the decree must have made a cer-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Śliwiński, *Wspomnienia sprzed 20 lat*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, September 9, 1934, p. 706.

<sup>7</sup> *Pamiętnik księżnej Marii Zdzisławowej Lubomirskiej 1914–1918*, Poznań 1997, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> W. Jędrzejewicz, *POW i Batalion Warszawski, Moja służba 1914–1915*, Warszawa 1939, pp. 68–69.

<sup>9</sup> M. Pawłowski, *Czermno podczas wojny w latach 1914–1918*, “Kronika Diecezji Sandomierskiej”, November 11, 1922, p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> J. Rokoszny, *Diariusz Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1915*, Kielce 1998, pp. 113, 115.

tain impression on the public. It had a particularly positive reception among the supporters of the National Democracy and the conservatives. Obviously, there were also many voices in these circles, especially among those who were more politically experienced, which expressed doubts in the sincerity of the promises.

The proclamation received support among the highest church dignitaries. Aleksander Kakowski, Archbishop of Warsaw, even celebrated a gala mass for the Russian army, which was a form of gratitude for the issuance of the decree. Some Catholic priests, however, were critical of the proclamation. In his written-to-date diary, Father Józef Rokoszny of Sandomierz criticized the Archbishop. Subsequently, Rokoszny commented on the Nicholas Nikolaevich's proclamation again in early September, after he had learned about a telegram of gratitude sent to Nicholas II by a group of several dozen representatives of the political and cultural life of Warsaw. They thanked for the decree and wished the Russian army a speedy victory, as well as confirmed their "servile feelings". Rokoszny reacted quite sharply, stating that they had a right to send the telegram in their name only, not in the name of the whole nation.<sup>11</sup>

Catholic priests were the group which had a quite strong influence on the society. Therefore, we can take a closer look at the attitude of this circle. In the early years of the war, the number of clergy supporting the Russian side (even if they were hesitant), greatly exceeded the number of those who wished success to the Central Powers. Not infrequently, the support for the Russian army was influenced by the belief that their chances of ultimate success were higher. This was true even for the areas from which the Russians had been displaced. The support for Russia, at least in the case of some priests, becomes clearer, if we consider the good relations between the clergy and the Russian administration. This was particularly evident in small and medium towns, less in larger cities. Obviously, it is difficult to determine to what extent these contacts were forced and under some kind of necessity. There are examples which confirm that the official contacts sometimes turned into a close relationship. This was not due to the fact, that the person was an official, who represented the occupier, but rather because of their character, personality and communication skills. According to the above-cited diary by Father Rokoszny, in 1914 in Sandomierz, just before the planned evacuation of the Russians, the Bishop of Sandomierz was visited by Belayev, Governor of the county.<sup>12</sup> As they were preparing to leave, the Russian officials left part of their personal belongings with the clergy, including Father Rokoszny, for safekeeping. Of course, this could have stemmed from the belief that their possessions would be more secure with the priests than elsewhere, rather than from acquaintanceship and previous contacts. Landowners also gave this kind of favours to the Russians at the time. Belyaev left his horses for safekeeping with the Targowski family, the owners of a property in the vicinity of Sandomierz. Governor Belyaev was one of those who

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, pp. 79-80.

<sup>12</sup> In the early days of the war, as Rokoszny noticed, the attitude of the Russians towards the Polish society, both the government officials and ordinary soldiers, improved. The Russians who were departing, paid their overdue bills and tried to be polite. Ibidem, p. 8.

indeed had quite extensive and good relations with the Poles. Father Rokoszny also seemed to have a sympathy for him. It is evidenced in his description of their farewell, when the governor was being evacuated: "Belayev said goodbye to me: I wish you all the best in life. And I, as well, want to thank you for the many courtesies which I have experienced from you". On the following pages of the diary, we find another piece devoted to Belayev: "He was indeed one of those better Russians. He was an official and did what he was supposed to do, but never initiated anything annoying on his own. He'd been here for several years and had never changed. We experienced the tough year 1905 and the present moments. He hadn't arrested or harmed anybody. It seems that he was indeed a humane person. He was humane for the Jews, for the dull peasants and, as far as possible, facilitated matters for them. He only wanted to hear the truth. You could talk to him openly. I've had a few such conversations with him. He once told me: You work for your national cause, and I work for mine. I totally understand you, and you understand me too". However, Rokoszny's opinion of Belayev differed from his opinion about a few other Russian officials.<sup>13</sup>

The attitudes of some Catholic priests after the outbreak of the war, clearly prove their favour for the Russian side. For example, not only did three priests from the parish of Góry near Sandomierz firmly believe in the victory of Russia, but also wanted to support it in a more active way. One of them asked the Bishop for permission to join a detachment of the Russian troops, in which he would serve as a chaplain. The Bishop of Sandomierz did not give his consent.<sup>14</sup>

After the outbreak of the war the Russians took steps to signal a thaw in their attitude towards the Polish language. In March 1915, the Council of Ministers adopted a greater freedom in the use of the Polish language in schools.<sup>15</sup> At one meeting of a charity organization in Radom, the local Russian Governor, Dmitry Zasiadko, even began to speak Polish. Also, Governor of Piotrków, Mikhail Jaczewskij, recalled his Polish origins.<sup>16</sup> However, these were quite exceptional instances.

At the beginning of the war, the Russian forces which operated in the Kingdom of Poland, represented a neutral attitude towards the population and, in most cases, paid for the requisitioned goods and provisions. The impact of the economic factor on the growth of the sympathy for the Russians could be seen in the areas of the Kingdom inhabited by the German colonists. As it was feared that they might have cooperated with the forces of the Central Powers, a large part of them was preventively deported deep into the empire. Lands of the colonists were leased to the Polish peasants. Many

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pp. 10, 11, 19, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, pp. 44, 50.

<sup>15</sup> As Andrzej Drawicz writes, in Russia itself the outbreak of the war brought a wave of "Polonophilia sentiment". A. Drawicz, *Nasze widzenie Rosjan w XX wieku*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", no. 2, 1995, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> W. Grabski, A. Żabko-Potopowicz, *Ratownictwo społeczne w czasie wojny*, [in:] *Polska w czasie wielkiej wojny (1914–1918)*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1932, p. 10; J. Lewandowski, *Królestwo Polskie wobec Austro-Węgier 1914–1918*, Warszawa 1986, p. 39.

of them hoped for a long-term or even permanent lease.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the residents of the Kingdom of Poland quite willingly committed themselves to work organized by the Russian army, such as building trenches and fortifications. This job generated high earnings. Supervision of this type of works was in many cases quite weak, hence the employed sometimes worked only for a few hours, but they were paid for the entire day. In the Lublin region diggers of trenches compared their payment to wages in America.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, however, the situation was different. In some areas people were reluctant to work for the army, and did not appear on the site, sometimes also refusing to provide conveyances for military purposes.

The negative attitude towards the Russians must have been intensified by the robberies and thefts, commonly occurring in the first months of the war and committed by the soldiers of the tsarist army without the knowledge of their commanders.<sup>19</sup> The victims were most often residents of villages and small towns. The lootings, sometimes combined with beatings and rapes, were especially harmful for the peasants and Jews, sometimes landowners. The competent military services sought to discover the perpetrators of such acts, but it was usually quite difficult.

The local Russian administration, particularly in the areas which had suffered during the war, tried to help the civilian population. They sometimes had food and basic industrial goods delivered. Farmers could purchase seeds and horses on favourable terms. They also turned for help to the Russian authorities by themselves. The Russian authorities directed their major financial support to the Central Civil Committee. It was a social organization founded at the beginning of the armed conflict, and its purpose was to support people affected by the war. By the middle of the year 1915, the Committee had received from the government grants worth over 9 million roubles. The organization had also received significant support from the Committee of the Grand Duchess Tatiana and other organizations and institutions in Russia. Sometimes, however, the situation was opposite, and the inhabitants of the Kingdom became voluntary donors of certain goods for the Russian army. The peasants from several villages in the vicinity of Lublin gathered, with the help of the Catholic priests, over 1500 pieces of white sheets, and gave them for the needs of wounded Russian soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

In 1914 and 1915, there were frequent cases of informing the Russian army about the movements of the German and Austrian troops. Also, those who were known for their anti-Russian attitude were reported. The cases of denouncement happened in order to stop those, who were acting against Russia, but also as a result of personal aversion towards the accused. Sometimes the reason (or one of the reasons) for de-

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<sup>17</sup> A large group of colonists came back from Russia to the Kingdom of Poland as early as in the first half of 1918.

<sup>18</sup> AN Kraków, ANKN, ref. no. 528, p. 15; Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie (BUW), Dział Zbiorów Specjalnych (DZS), J. Kożuchowski, *Dziennik z lat 1914-1920*, ref. no. 1732-I, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Sometimes they were also the Poles from the Kingdom. They created their own criminal groups and collaborated with the Russian-speaking soldiers.

<sup>20</sup> BUW, DZS, ref. no. 1732-I, p. 28.

nouncement was the desire to appropriate somebody's property. It was particularly harmful for landowners accused by peasants. After the denouncement, the peasants and Russian soldiers used to cooperate and stole together from their landowners' estates.<sup>21</sup>

Some political parties tried to weaken pro-Russian sympathies in the society. This had been evident even before the year 1914, and intensified particularly in the initial stages of the war. The workers were especially under the influence of the Polish Socialist Party. The Peasant Association and the National Association of Peasants tried to influence the peasants. In addition to verbal agitation, the most common form of influencing these environments was distribution of manifestos with anti-Russian comments, and the texts published in a similar vein in the illegal party press.<sup>22</sup> The fear of reprisals discouraged from other activities until the Russian army left the Kingdom of Poland. Of course, it must be remembered that due to a relatively high level of illiteracy among the peasants and workers, all kinds of printed word would reach only a part of its potential audience. The historical past was the most common argument used in the manifestos in order to discourage the reader from the Russians. In many cases, was used also a religious aspect, and the religious dissimilarity of the Russians was highlighted. The authors of the appeals encouraged to evade conscription, suggested hiding food and other products, which could become the subject of requisition.

The losses and destruction caused by military operations and requisitions also affected the attitude of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland. Some of the losses suffered by the civilian population were a result of the "burned land" tactics used in 1915 by the retreating Russians. In order to impede the progress of the armies of the Central Powers, and to prevent them from acquiring additional supplies, the Russians deprived some of the lands of all stocks. What could not be exported, was burned or destroyed. Also, in many cases, the local civilian population were displaced and had to leave their homes along with their belongings (usually enforced, but sometimes voluntarily).<sup>23</sup> Either on carts or on foot, these people headed east and arrived in the areas further from the front line, where they settled west of the Dvina and Dnieper rivers. Some of the evacuees were sent from the Kingdom to Russia by rail. The evacuation and destruction campaign included rural areas and some cities, especially the industrial ones. In 1915, whole factories with their machines, technical staff and workers, were often evacuated. It mainly concerned the factories which produced for military purposes (e.g. metallurgic plants). Various institutions, especially those of financial nature (e.g. banks), were also evacuated along with the funds they collected, which severely

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<sup>21</sup> AN Kraków, ANKN, ref. no. 100.524, pp. 72-73; E. Fryczowa, *Front nad Nidą*, [in:] *Pamiętnik Kola Kielczan*, vol. 7, Kielce 1937, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> Apart from anti-Russian propaganda, they also tried to create a positive image of the Central Powers and encouraged to support them.

<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that in the first year of the war about 800–900 thousand people departed from the area of the Kingdom of Poland to Russia (the Kingdom had about 13 million inhabitants). A large group of the refugees from the eastern territories of the Kingdom were Orthodox. They left their places of residence voluntarily (usually collectively and together with their priests).

weakened proper functioning of such areas. Due to the pressure of the forces of the Central Powers, the Russians managed to finalize their actions only partially, and softened their approach, according to the decision of the high command. The immediate decisions on the destruction or export of civilian property depended, to a large extent, on the good will of the commanders of the Russian troops operating in a particular area. In some areas they ruthlessly executed the plan of destruction, but sometimes approached the matter more flexibly, and limited themselves to dispose of only those objects, which could be useful for a military purpose.<sup>24</sup> The eastern part of the Kingdom suffered particularly severe losses during withdrawal of the Russians in 1915. Also, the greatest number of people was displaced from these areas to the east.

The tactics used during the withdrawal negatively affected the perception of the Russians. Sometimes, however, even in the destroyed areas the opinion of the public did not change radically.<sup>25</sup> The tragedies which befell on the inhabitants of the Kingdom were regarded by them as a kind of natural disaster, to which they had to adapt. They tried to save what they could from their belongings. The conduct of the Russian army obviously influenced the views and attitudes of the civilian population. However, we do not notice any signs of extreme resistance or attempts to take revenge on the perpetrators of the situation. To some extent, such reaction could have stemmed from the rather harsh behaviour of the Russian authorities in the period before 1914. Part of the public even claimed that the Russians were “at home”, hence even drastic moves, resulting from the ongoing war, were justified. The Russians saw themselves as defenders of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland. The sacrifices made by the population were accepted by them and perceived as obvious.

The people, especially the rural population, often provided assistance to the Russian soldiers, who were cut off from their retreating units or escaped from prisoner-of-war camps. Not only could such situations be observed in the first year of the war, but also after the final departure of the Russians from the Kingdom of Poland (after August 1915). According to the calculations done by Stefan Starzyński, recruiter to the Polish Legions (voluntary military units fighting at the side of the Central Powers), in February 1915 the peasants were hiding about 300 disguised Cossacks and Russian dragoons in the area of Wieluń. He believed, however, that they were offered the refuge mainly out of fear, because they were armed and threatened to kill the inhabitants and burn the village.<sup>26</sup> No doubt the fear of the troops must have played a certain role, nevertheless, usually it was solidarity with the tsarist army, which motivated the peasantry’s behaviour. Providing shelter for the Russian soldiers was threatened with severe sanctions, including a death penalty. The sentences against people who committed such a crime prove that it was much more than just a warning from the German and Austrian au-

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<sup>24</sup> According to the sources, Cossack regiments were the most ruthless in destroying the property of the residents of the Kingdom. Other units of the Russian army distanced themselves from it.

<sup>25</sup> Those who were forced to evacuate were more critical of the Russians.

<sup>26</sup> AN Kraków, ANKN, ref. no. 100.548, p. 28, 32-33.

thorities. In the middle of 1915, in the county of Gostynin, a German firing squad executed ten people (five of them came from Warsaw). The convicts were accused of hiding or informing the Russian soldiers about the movements of the troops of the Central Powers.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of the occupation of the Kingdom of Poland by the armies of the Central Powers, pro-Russian sympathies were still alive among the public. Although they began to gradually weaken as the front line was moving further, there was still a number of instances, proving that many people did not reconcile with the new situation. The peasantry, for example, believed that when the Russians returned, they would compensate them for any losses incurred during the military operations. The increased favour for Russia resulted also from the conduct of the authorities and armies of the Central Powers. Even in the areas affected by the intentional Russian destruction, the critical approach to them was no greater than towards the Germans and Austrians. The aversion to the troops of the Central Powers, and later also to their occupational apparatus, was gradually rising.

Pro-Russian sentiment in the Kingdom of Poland was somewhat supported by the opinions spread by Czech soldiers and gendarmes who served in the Austro-Hungarian army. There is a number of accounts, which prove that the Czechs praised Russia as the saviour of all Slavs in their contacts with civilians. Such cases were reported by the office workers who recruited to the Polish Legions. In the area of Koziernice, as stated by the local recruitment office, Czech soldiers instructed the peasants that “the true protector of the Slavs – Poles, Czechs, etc., is only Russia, while Austria and Germany are the enemies of all Slavs”.<sup>28</sup>

Pro-Russian attitudes were often represented by mayors and municipal secretaries. In September 1915, one of the mayors of the Opoczno county was dismissed from his office by the Austro-Hungarian authorities because, contrary to the previous orders, he tried to hide the municipal stamp in the Russian language. In 1916, mayor of the Boleślaw community in the Olkusz county was arrested for using a stamp in the Polish language with the image of the Tsar's eagle. In the spring of 1915, it was reported from the vicinity of Kalisz that the secretaries of one community carried the official documentation in the Russian language, despite the fact that the Russian army had already been forced out of that area.<sup>29</sup> Among some of the mayors, municipal secretaries, sometimes also village administrators, pro-Russian attitude stemmed from the belief that their function required them to support the tsarist government, despite the withdrawal of the Russians from the territories of the Kingdom. Those who had served in the Russian army represented a similar attitude, and justified it by the oath, which they had taken. Many referred to the oath when the residents of the Kingdom were

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<sup>27</sup> *Rozstrzelani przez Niemców*, “Gazeta Świąteczna”, July 25, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> AN Kraków, ANKN, ref. no. 100.524, p. 53; ref. no. 100.283, p. 216; ref. no. 100.519, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> *Złożenie wójta z urzędu*, “Dziennik urzędowy ces. i król. komendy obwodowej w Opocznie”, 1915, no. 4, p. 53; AN Kraków, ANKN, ref. no. 100.525, p. 5.

being recruited to the Polish Legions, which fought at the side of the Central Powers. The recruiters heard statements such as “we swore to the Ruthenian emperor, so we cannot swear to any other”.<sup>30</sup> However, after the events of the Russian revolution and the abdication of the Tsar, residents of the Kingdom began to say: “now we feel exempt from the oath”.<sup>31</sup>

The celebrations of Polish national anniversaries had a rather negative impact on the perception of the Russians. Since 1915, they could be organized without any major obstacles. As they were often anti-Russian in character, the German and Austrian authorities generally agreed to them. Particularly anti-Russian were the ceremonies held to commemorate the anniversary of the November 1830 and January 1863 uprisings, as well as the 100th anniversary of the death of Tadeusz Kościuszko in 1917.

Much information about the Russians was brought by the people who were returning from Russia in the final stages of the war and immediately after its end. Among them were those who had been displaced or voluntarily departed east in the early stages of the war, and also the Poles who had been soldiers in the Russian army. The image which they had created as a result of spending several years among the Russians, without a doubt was to remain in their memories for a long time. The reports of such people also affected those with whom they contacted after returning to the country.<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, what is worth mentioning, is the attitude of the public of the Kingdom of Poland to the armies and authorities of the Central Powers. In the summer of 1915, after the Russian army had been forced out, the area of the Kingdom was divided into two parts — the larger one, with Warsaw, was taken over by Germany, the smaller one, with Lublin, became part of Austria. The occupation lasted until the end of the war in November 1918.

While entering the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, the armed forces of the Central Powers were given a rather cold reception. The locals feared for their families and possessions. They were particularly wary of the Germans, who were widely accused of brutality and ruthlessness. A variety of stories about their cruelty in the occupied lands circulated among the public. They were often exaggerated, sometimes completely made up. Nonetheless, it intensified the reluctance towards the Germans before they even entered particular lands.

Initially, the attitude towards the Austrians was less negative, mainly due to little knowledge about them. The people of the Kingdom of Poland were afraid of the Germans, but at the same time, in many environments, there were voices of admiration for their organizational skills, determination and consistency in action. In the case of the

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<sup>30</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Warszawie (CAW), Polska Siła Zbrojna (PSZ), ref. no. 121.3.22, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> CAW, PSZ, ref. no. 121.3.8, A political report from Gostynin, April 1917.

<sup>32</sup> The text contains no reflection on the attitude of the population of the Kingdom of Poland towards the revolutionary events in Russia in 1917 and 1918. It is a separate issue. Besides, the public of the Kingdom had little knowledge about the Revolution. More information came with the demobilized soldiers and Polish refugees who were returning from Russia.

Austrians the opinions were often quite different. The aversion to the armies of the Central Powers, and later to the German and Austro-Hungarian occupational forces, was increasing gradually. The brutal treatment of civilians, requisitions and the system of levies, resulted in a steady increase in dissatisfaction. It was happening despite the fact that the occupiers had allowed for a greater freedom than ever before. Polish schools began to develop quickly, Polish political parties worked intensively, and the local government was given a wider competence. In 1917, a substitute of the Polish government was appointed in the Kingdom of Poland, including ministries headed by the prime minister.

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During World War I in the Kingdom of Poland, the attitude of the public towards the Russians underwent changes. Warm feelings towards the Russian troops largely resulted from reluctance towards the Germans, as well as favour for the army, in which served the members of the residents' families. A significant role was played by propaganda of the strongly influential National Democracy, which supported Russia in the initial period of the war. The pre-war conditions and relative economic stability were also important – the situation which was later shattered by the military conflict and the policy pursued by the Germans and Austrians. The people, especially some of the elderly residents of the rural areas, respected the “good emperor”<sup>33</sup> who introduced enfranchisement, and were grateful to him.<sup>34</sup> In the following years of the war, the favour for Russia within the society of the Kingdom of Poland partly weakened, which was undoubtedly influenced by the tsarist army's tactics during their withdrawal from the Kingdom in 1915, as well as the propaganda of the political parties and various social organizations.

Support of the residents of the Kingdom for the Russian soldiers and authorities was particularly strong in the early stages of the war. The advocates of the Central Powers were in the minority. However, it should be noted that there was also a considerably large group of people, who represented a more neutral attitude, and did not stand on either side of the conflict. It should also be emphasized that the attitude towards the warring parties resulted from the calculation which side of the conflict would bring more benefits for “the Polish case”. In the first months of the war it only affected certain groups, especially the political elite. Moreover, the calculations remained only in the planning stage. The chance for their implementation was only theo-

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<sup>33</sup> Also, a number of Polish citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Galicia represented a positive attitude towards their “own” monarch (especially at the beginning of the war).

<sup>34</sup> Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Russian propaganda managed to take advantage of this fact to increase the authority of the monarch. A good opportunity was the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enfranchisement. At that time, a part of the peasant population took part in the campaign for the renovation and erection of memorials and monuments in honour of Alexander II.

retical. Along with the progress of the war, the hope for autonomy became the hope for total independence, which was gradually becoming more and more real.

### Summary

#### **THE SOCIETY'S OF THE KINGDOM OF POLAND ATTITUDE TO THE RUSSIAN ARMY AND AUTHORITIES DURING WORLD WAR I**

In the early years of the war a large part of the public stood on the side of Russia. Such attitudes were presented by both educated people and those less politically aware, as well as, yet having a relatively low national consciousness, peasants and workers. The reasons for the attitudes represented at the time stemmed from various premises. Such attitude was caused by the fact that many members of their families served in the Russian army. The reluctance towards the Germans and the fear of their army were also very important. The perception of the Germans was caused by the strong influence of the National Democracy in the Kingdom of Poland. Many people were convinced of the military power of Russia, and believed that it was insurmountable. The occupation of some areas by the forces of the Central Powers was regarded as a temporary situation. In the following years of the war, favouring Russia within the society of the Kingdom of Poland partly weakened, which was undoubtedly influenced by the tsarist army's tactics during their withdrawal from the Kingdom in 1915, as well as the propaganda of the political parties and various social organizations.

**Keywords:** World War I, the society's of the Kingdom of Poland attitudes

### Streszczenie

#### **STOSUNEK SPOŁECZEŃSTWA KRÓLESTWA POLSKIEGO DO WOJSK I WŁADZ ROSYJSKICH W LATACH I WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ**

W początkowym okresie wojny duża część społeczeństwa swe sympatie lokowała po stronie Rosji. Takie stanowisko zajmowały zarówno osoby wykształcone i bardziej wyrobione politycznie, jak i posiadający jeszcze stosunkowo niską świadomość narodową chłopci i robotnicy. Postawy, które można było wówczas obserwować, wynikały z dość różnorodnych pobudek. Nastawienie prorosyjskie w dużym stopniu btało się z faktu solidaryzowania się z tą armią, w której służyli członkowie własnych rodzin. Bardzo istotna była też zdecydowana niechęć do Niemców i strach przed ich wojskiem. Na taką postawę duży wpływ miało oddziaływanie silnej w Królestwie Polskim Narodowej Demokracji. Wiele osób było też przekonanych o potędze militarnej Rosji, sądzono, że jest ona nie do pokonania. Zajęcie niektórych terenów przez wojska państw centralnych traktowano jako zjawisko przejściowe. Postawy przychylnie Rosji wśród społeczeństwa Królestwa Polskiego w kolejnych latach wojny częściowo osłabły, na co niewątpliwy wpływ miała taktyka wojsk carskich podczas ich wycofywania

się z Królestwa w 1915 r., a także działalność propagandowa partii politycznych i różnych organizacji społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** I wojna światowa, postawy społeczeństwa Królestwa Polskiego

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