

“ŻELIGOWSKI’S MUTINY” AS A POLISH WAY TO SOLVE THE “VILNIUS PROBLEM”

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Abstract: *The article describes the facts and examines the Polish-Lithuanian territorial dispute of 1919-1920, which occurred during the time of the formation of independent states in Central and Eastern Europe following World War I. The parade of the newly proclaimed states of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, each of which had territorial claims against its neighbours, created a precedent for a series of frontier military actions. Hungarian-Czechoslovak, Polish-German, Polish-Czechoslovak, Polish-Lithuanian, and Polish-Ukrainian territorial conflicts persisted until 1923, following the signing of the Armistice in 1918. The issue of a territorial dispute between the Second Polish Republic and the Republic of Lithuania over the city of Wilno (Vilnius) and the Vilnius area is explored through the perspective of those historical events. Military actions, including a Polish-inspired "insurrection," continued as a result of a reluctance to follow political agreements and ignore demarcation lines. The goal was to construct a federal state that would act as a deterrent to Russian imperial ambitions in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Lithuania, on the other hand, was rather cautious of the idea of forming a state made up of the lands of "Poland-Lithuania-Belarus-Ukraine," even if the borders favoured the Second Polish Republic. Anticipating the dangers of assimilation and the refusal to accept Lithuania without Vilnius, the Lithuanian government seemed uncompromising in its dealings with Poles yet cordial with Russians. As a result, the Polish federalist project failed.*

Keywords: Żeligowski, Poland, Lithuania, Wilno (Vilnius), Territorial dispute, Federalist project.

Rezumat: *„Rebeliunea lui Żeligowski” ca soluție poloneză de a rezolva „problema Vilnius”. Articolul descrie faptele și examinează disputa teritorială polono-lituaniană din 1919-1920, izbucnită în perioada de formare a statelor independente în Europa Centrală*

și de Est, consecutivă Primului Război Mondial. Parada nou-proclamatelor state precum Republica Cehoslovacia, Regatul Iugoslaviei, Regatul Ungariei, Republica Populară Vest-Ucraineană – fiecare dintre acestea revendicând teritorii aparținând vecinilor săi – a generat un precedent pentru o serie de acțiuni militare desfășurate la frontiere. Ca urmare a semnării armistițiului din 1918, conflictele teritoriale maghiaro-cehoslovace, polono-germane, polono-cehoslovace, polono-lituaniene și polono-ucrainene au continuat până în 1923. Problematika disputei teritoriale dintre a Doua Republică Poloneză și Republica Lituania asupra orașul Wilno (Vilnius) și a zonei adiacente acestuia este explorată din perspectiva evenimentelor istorice. Reticența de a respecta acordurile politice și ignorarea liniilor de demarcație au condus la diverse acțiuni militare, inclusiv la o „insurecție” de inspirație poloneză. Scopul lor a fost acela de a construi un stat federal care să acționeze ca un factor de descurajare a ambițiilor imperiale rusești în Polonia, Lituania, Belarus și Ucraina. Pe de altă parte, Lituania s-a dovedit a fi destul de prudentă cu privire la ideea unui stat care să cuprindă teritorii din „Polonia-Lituania-Belarus-Ucraina”, în condițiile în care granițele favorizau cea de-a Doua Republică Poloneză. Anticipând pericolele asimilării și refuzând ideea unei Lituanii fără orașul Vilnius, guvernul lituanian părea intransigent în relațiile sale cu polonezii, dar cordial cu rușii. În consecință, proiectul federalist polonez avea să eșueze.

INTRODUCTION

In 1918, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the Western Ukrainian Republic all proclaimed independence: Lithuania on February 16, Poland on October 7, Czechoslovakia on October 28, Hungary on November 1, and the Western Ukrainian Republic on November 1. Each state asserted territorial claims against its neighbours. Following World War I, there were several territorial disputes between Poland and Lithuania. The major point of contention was for control of Vilnius (Wilno). The “Żeligowski’s Mutiny”, an important historical event that ended the Polish-Lithuanian conflict for Wilno in Poland’s favour, is the subject of the research. This event was much different from the twenty-year confrontation between Poland and Lithuania in the interwar period.

The military operation was conceived by Poland’s Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, and named after the Polish General of Armour Lucjan Żeligowski (1865 - 1947). The latter’s life, military, political and public activity in Russia was a subject of study for many Polish historians: Wiesław Marczyk, Wojciech Kicman, Tadeusz Krisky-Karski, Stanisław Żurkowski, Barbara Gumowska, Krzysztof J. Galas, Wiesław Łach etc. Dariusz Fabisz created one of the most significant investigations in his work *General Lucjan Żeligowski 1865 - 1947: Political and*

Military Activities (2007).¹ The authors thought Żeligowski was a gifted military tactician and a great patriot of his homeland, but they could not tolerate his support for the Polish communist regime at his advanced age.

The General himself left behind several works: *The War in 1920: Memories and Reflections* was published in 1930 (the second edition – in 1990)², *On the Slavic Idea* was published in London in 1941³, etc. The most striking feature in the Żeligowski memoirs is his dedication to Marshal Piłsudski, with a generally positive attitude towards his military decisions.⁴ The General is depicted in the London edition of *On the Slavic Idea* as a person fanatically devoted to the idea of forming a new world out of Slavic nations.⁵

Polish historian Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski⁶ in his research of recent Polish and Lithuanian history and Lithuanian historian Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė provided contextual interpretation of the topic.⁷ Articles written by Genadiy Matveev, Daria Lypynska-Nalench, and Tomash Nalench⁸, as well as the book by Russian historian Maria Pavlova⁹ discussed the study of Warsaw and Moscow policy towards Lithuania in 1918 – 1920. The military and diplomatic aspects of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict following World War I, as well as the

¹Dariusz Fabisz, *Generał Lucian Żeligowski (1865–1947). Działalność wojskowa i polityczna* [General Lucian Żeligowski (1865–1947), Military and political activity], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo DiG, 2007.

²Lucian Żeligowski, *Wojna w roku 1920. Wspomnienia i rozważania* [War in 1920. Memories and considerations], Warszawa, Instytut Badania Najnowszej Historji Polski 1990. And others: *Notes from 1920*, as posthumous text, published in London edition, in *Niepodległość: Czasopiśmo poświęcone najnowszym dziejom Polski* in the 3rd volume in 1951; especially important memoirs of the General *May Coup*, published in *Warsaw of the Second Polish Republic 1918 – 1939* in the 4th volume in 1970; *Zapomnienie prawdy* [Forgetting the truth] (London, 1943) etc.

³Lucian Żeligowski, *O idee słowiańskiej* [About Slavic ideas], Londyn, F. Mildner&Sons, HerbalHill, London, E.C.I, 1941.

⁴Lucian Żeligowski, *Wojna w roku 1920...*, p. 158.

⁵Lucian Żeligowski, *O ideę słowiańskiej...*, p. 8.

⁶Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski. 1864 – 1945. Okres 1914 – 1939* [Recent political history of Poland. 1864 – 1945. 1914 – 1939 period], Gdańsk, OGrzf-S.P.K., 1990.

⁷Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė, *Lietuvos istorija* [Lithuanian history], Kaunas, Naudota, 1990.

⁸G. Matveev, D. Lipinskaya-Nalench, T. Nalench, *Nachalo* [Beginning], in *Belye pyatna – chernye pyatna. Slozhnyie voprosyi v rossiysko-polskih otnosheniyah*, Moskva, 2010, p. 15–73.

⁹Maria Pavlova, *Litva v politike Varshavy i Moskvy v 1918 – 1926 godah* [Lithuania in the politics of Warsaw and Moscow in 1918 – 1926], Moskva, Aspekt Press, 2016.

opposing sides' political goals, are mirrored in the studies of Polish scholars Piotr Lossovsky, Grzegorz Łukomski and Rafał E. Stolarski.¹⁰ The monograph of Lithuanian historian Regina Žepkaitė¹¹ plays a significant role in Lithuanian historiography. Lithuanian historians in the USA wrote the first collective monograph devoted to this problem in 1998.¹² A study of the Vilnius issue in the context of other border conflicts Poland had, namely in the Province of the Upper Silesia and Gdansk, was conducted by Zbigniew Cesarz.¹³ Tomasz Gajownik¹⁴ focused on a few elements of the Lithuanian special services' operational activities in Poland after World War I. Michal Römer's views and political activity were the focus of Zbigniew Soliak¹⁵ and Ian Savitsky's research.¹⁶ He was Piłsudski's

¹⁰Piotr Łossowski, *Konflikt polsko-litewski 1918 – 1920* [Polish-Lithuanian conflict 1918 – 1920], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1996, 250 s.; Idem, *Potej i tamtej stronie Niemna. Stosunki polsko-litewskie 1883-1939* [On this and that side of the Neman. Polish-Lithuanian relations 1883-1939], Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1995; Grzegorz Łukomski, *Walka Rzeczypospolitej okresy północno-wschodnie 1918 – 1920. Polityka I działania militarne* [The battle of the Republic of Poland for the north-eastern borderlands in 1918 – 1920. Politics and military actions], Poznań, Wydawn. Nauk. Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 1994; Idem, *Wojna domowa. Z dziejów konfliktu polsko-litewskiego 1918 – 1920* [Civil War. From the history of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict of 1918 – 1920], Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza ADIUTOR, 1997; Grzegorz Łukomski, Rafał F. Stolarski, *Walka o Wilno. Z dziejów Samoobrony Litwy i Białorusi 1918 – 1919* [Fight for Vilnius. From the history of Self-Defense of Lithuania and Belarus 1918 – 1919], Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawn. Adiutor, 1994.

¹¹Regina Žepkaitė, *Lietuva tarptautienu politicos labirintuose 1918 – 1922* [Lithuania in the labyrinths of international politics 1918-1922], Vilnius, Mintis, 1973.

¹²Alfonas Eidintas, Vytautas Žalys, Alfred Erich Senn, Edvardas Tuskenis, *Lithuania in European Politics. The Years of First Republic, 1918 – 1940*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

¹³Zbigniew Cesarz, *Polska a Liga Narodów: kwestie terytorialne w latach 1920 – 1925. Studium prawno-polityczny* [Poland and the League of Nations: territorial issues in 1920 – 1925. Legal and political study], Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993.

¹⁴Tomasz Gajownik, *Metody pracy operacyjnej litewskich służb specjalnych w Polsce po I wojnie światowej. Wybrane aspekty* [Methods of operational work performed by the Lithuanian Secret Services in Poland after the First World War. Selected aspects], w "Dzieje Najnowsze: kwartalnik poświęcony historii XX wieku", 2006, No. 1, p. 19-46.

¹⁵Zbigniew Solak, *Między Polską a Litwą: Życie i działalność Michał Romera (1880 – 1970)* [Between Poland and Lithuania: Life and Activities of Michał Römer (1880 – 1970)], Poznań, Arcana, 1983.

¹⁶Jan Sawicki, *Michał Romer a problemy narodościowena ziemiach byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego* [Römer and national problems on the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania], Toruń, Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1998.

companion in arms in 1919 – 1920. Roman Dmowski, Piłsudski’s long-time political opponent, had a concept of a nation-state that was described by Roman Vapinskiy.¹⁷ Piotr Eberhardt studied the dilemmas of the Polish Eastern border.¹⁸ In her work *Interethnic relations in the Vilnius region in 1920 – 1939*¹⁹, Joanna Januszevska-Jurkiewicz describes the daily life of the local community and relations between nations residing in Vilnius before World War II.

Józef Lewandowski and Aleksy Deruga studied the federalist concept of Piłsudski’s Polish eastern policy in the 1960s²⁰, which justified the need for a Wilno invasion. The authors studied the period until the summer of 1920 when Piłsudski had complete control of the Polish eastern policy and was the most effective in solving the Wilno matter. Włodzimierz Suleja in his monograph *Józef Piłsudski* (2004, Ukrainian edition in 2018²¹) focused on the elitist context of the early-modern national idea of Piłsudski. Bogusław Medzinski in his *Eastern Policy of Piłsudski*²² considered that the main priority of the Eastern policy of the head of the state was to defeat Russia with the help of the allied parties (Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians). In his research *Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Suwałki-Sejny region in 1918 – 1920* (2009), Stanisław Buchowski analyses the socio-political and military Polish-Lithuanian conflict of 1918 – 1920 in the Suwałki-Sejny region in the context of the formation of Polish national self-awareness.²³

¹⁷Roman Wapiński, *Endecka koncepcja granic Polski 1918 – 1921* [The Endecja Concept of Poland’s Borders 1918 – 1921], in “Biuletyn historii pogranicza”, 2008, No. 9, p. 23–33.

¹⁸Piotr Eberhardt, *Wizje i projekty Polskiej Granicy Wschodniej w latach 1914 – 1921*. [Visions and projects of the Polish Eastern Border in 1914 – 1921], in “Przegląd Wschodni”, 1998, No. 5, 2, p. 348–351.

¹⁹Joanna Januszevska-Jurkiewicz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1920 – 1939* [National relations in the Vilnius region in 1920 – 1939], Katowice, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010.

²⁰Janusz Lewandowski, *Federalizm. Litwa i Białoruś w polityce obozu belwederskiego (XI 1918 – IV 1920)* [Lithuania and Belarus in the Politics of the Belweder Camp (November 1918 – April 1920)], Warszawa, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962; Aleksy Deruga, *Polityka wschodnia Polski w obczech Litwy, Białorusi i Ukrainy (1918 – 1919)* [Poland’s Eastern Policy towards the lands of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine (1918 – 1919)], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1969.

²¹Włodzimierz Suleja, *Józef Piłsudski*, Wrocław, Ossolineum, 2004 (Ukrainian edition: Suleja Vl., *Yuzef Pilsudskiy*, Kyiv, Dukh i Litera, 2018).

²²Bogusław Międzyński, *Polityka wschodnia Piłsudskiego* [Piłsudski’s Eastern Policy], in “Zeszyty Historyczne”, 1975, Z. 31, p. 3 – 45.

²³Stanisław Buchowski, *Konflikt polsko-litewski o Ziemię Sejneńsko-Suwalską w latach 1918*

In 2010, Polish and Lithuanian historians discussed Polish-Lithuanian interwar relations in the historiography of the Soviet period. At the conference marking the ninetieth anniversary of the signing of the Suwałki Agreement (October 1920), Polish and Lithuanian participants agreed on the need of preventing the conflict between parties and protecting themselves against a third party – Russia/the USSR.

The authoritative view of American historian Timothy Snyder on how one early-modern national notion based on Polish culture evolved into four contemporary ones – Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian²⁴ – provided conceptual emphasis to the author's argument.

Finally, Tomas Balkelis examines how the Great War and its aftermath impacted the Lithuanian state in his book *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914 – 1923*.²⁵ Violence is seen as an essential part of the formation of the Lithuanian state, nation, and identity. The War, in his opinion, was far more than just a historical event. It transformed people, policies, institutions, and modes of thought in ways that would continue to shape the nation for decades after the conflict subsided.

THE VILNIUS PROBLEM IN LITHUANIAN AND POLISH NATIONAL PROJECTS

At the beginning of the Great War, the city of Wilno was inhabited by Lithuanians, Belarusians, Poles, Jews²⁶ and Russians. Therefore, closer to the end of the war they all wanted to turn the city into their capital and put forward their demands for the city. Lithuanians believed that the city was the birthplace of the Lithuanian nation during the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania.²⁷ Although the Poles did not deny it, they considered the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to be connected with the Polish Crown lands. That is why they could not imagine a future Polish national state without Wilno.

Due to this argumentation, patriot socialists and their representative, Piłsudski, developed the political idea of forming a “federation of all border

– 1920, Sejny, Sejneńskie Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zabytkami, 2009.

²⁴ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2003 (Ukrainian edition 2012).

²⁵ Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923*, Oxford, 2018.

²⁶ Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewsz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie...* [National relations in the Vilnius region in 1920 – 1939] p. 163–177, 191–205, 204–227, 252–256.

²⁷ Tomasz Gajownik, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

republics from Finland to Georgia”²⁸, which is known as the “eastern policy”²⁹ of Piłsudski, according to Norman Davies. While not all political forces supported it, Wilno was regarded as part of Poland by both the right and the left. To compel the Kaunas government to join Poland, Piłsudski used diplomatic, military, and political means. Roman Dmowski, Piłsudski’s major right-wing opponent, believed an invasion of weak Lithuania was simply a matter of time.³⁰ General Żeligowski, who was also involved in the task of annexing Wilno to Poland, pragmatically proved that “annexationist and federalist conceptions should not be fundamentally opposed...”, since “one does not exclude the other.”³¹ Eventually, when all the other parties rejected the idea of federation, Piłsudski was forced to support Dmowski’s policy.

The conflict between Poland and Lithuania arose at the end of 1918 when Piłsudski announced his plans to incorporate Wilno and its surrounding region into Poland.³² The solution was complicated by the Lithuanian leadership’s categorical disagreement with Piłsudski’s plans and the interests of the third party – Soviet Russia.³³

In the winter of 1919 – 1920, Piłsudski believed that Russia could be defeated on the battlefield and that the Wilno matter would then resolve itself. However, the actions of the appointed commander of the Soviet troops, an ideologist of the revolutionary war, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, ruined his plans. At the same

²⁸Norman Davies, *Ievropa. Istoriiia* [Europe. A History], Kyiv, Osnovy, 2000.

²⁹Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białorusini i Ukraińcy w polityce obozu piłsudczykowskiego* [Belorussians and Ukrainians in the politics of the Piłsudski camp], Białystok, Wydawnictwo TransHumana, 2007, p. 26–70, 181–212; Roman Wapiński, *op. cit.*, p. 23–33.

³⁰Piotr Eberhardt, *Wizje i projekty Polskiej Granicy Wschodniej w latach 1914 – 1921* [Visions and projects of the Polish Eastern Border in 1914 – 1921], in “Przegład Wschodni”, 1998, No 5, 2, p. 348–351.

³¹Kazimierz Świtalski, *Diariusz 1914 – 1935* [Diary. 1919 – 1935], Warszawa, Współdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1992, p. 40; Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewsz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie...* [National relations in the Vilnius region in 1920 – 1939], p. 170–184.

³²Roman Wapiński, *Miejsce wschodnich ziem Rzeczypospolitej przedrozbiorowej w polskiej świadomości politycznej lat 1864-1918* [The place of the eastern lands of the pre-partition Commonwealth in the Polish political consciousness in the years 1864-1918], in S. Ciesielski, T. Kulak, K. Matwijowski (red.), *Polska - Kresy - Polacy. Studia historyczne. Prof. Wojciechowi Wrzesińskiemu w 60 rocznicę urodzin uczniowie, współpracownicy, koledzy*, Wrocław 1994, p. 53; Pavlova M., *Litva v politike Varshavy i Moskvy v 1918 – 1926 godah* [Lithuania in the politics of Warsaw and Moscow in 1918 – 1926], p. 6.

³³Norman Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 963.

time, the Entente insisted on the coordination of an armistice line and on solving the Wilno question in favour of Lithuania, which set aside the return of Wilno to Poland and postponed the hope for a renewed Grand Duchy of Lithuania for a while. Despite the political agreement reached in 1920, Piłsudski secretly prepared military operations called "mass protests" in response to political decisions.

UPDATING THE VILNIUS PLAN

The World War and the decline of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century provided a push for the formation of Polish and Lithuanian states on the historical Lithuanian territory. Nevertheless, the process of territorial demarcation between them resulted in a tense local confrontation mainly over the city of Wilno – the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1915, signs of a potential conflict appeared shortly after the Russian Army withdrew from the Vilnius province in the North-western area, which had been seized by the German Army based on the concept of a "Central Europe." Following the Russian retreat, both sides considered the benefits, waiting for explicit statements regarding Lithuania and Poland. The central states wanted to prevent Polish claims to Wilno after endorsing the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland.

The Poles decided to follow the central states under certain conditions, receiving in return the consent to form their government and army.³⁴

Observing German affairs closely at the front, Lithuanian politicians declared Lithuanian independence twice. On 11 December 1917, the Council of Lithuania (Taryba) declared independence in Wilno, at the same time accepting the status of a German protectorate. In February 1918, the Taryba once again declared independence, this time without the pledge of loyalty to Germany. German defeat in the West allowed the Taryba in October 1918 to plot a new course. The Red Army's offensive further complicated the difficult task of legitimizing independence and attempting to raise an army. The Lithuanian government, having failed to raise an army, evacuated exposed Wilno for more westerly Kaunas. On 5 January 1919, the Red Army took Wilno.

For Piłsudski, this was the worst possible outcome. His eastern policy, as Medzinski wrote, was aimed at the complete elimination of the Russian threat.³⁵ Therefore, Piłsudski could agree to give Wilno to the Lithuanians only if Lithuania joined Poland in a federation. However, the Lithuanians sought

³⁴G. Matveev, D. Lipinskaya-Nalench, T. Nalench, *op. cit.*, p. 16–20.

³⁵Bogusław Międzyński, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

complete sovereignty.³⁶

At the beginning of 1919, the Red Army invaded Wilno and mounted an offensive on Grodno. Those who were against Bolshevik domination – Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Kyiv Ukrainians were mobilized to confront the Bolshevik invasion. Piłsudski was preparing to lead an army and command the Vilnius military operation. This was only one aspect of the strategy; there was also a political component. Römer, the head of the state, was in charge of bringing it to completion. Its goal was to recommend that Kaunas politicians join Römer's government and mobilize public opinion to conduct a referendum on the creation of a Lithuanian-Belarusian land connection with Poland.

Piłsudski was able to start implementing the Vilnius plan only after solving the problem of Lviv in April 1919, moving the Red Army to a safe distance from the city. On April 19, Polish troops, violating all the so-called “rules” of war, disguised as Red Army men, got into Wilno by rail and started street fights. On 21 April, the Polish Army under General Stanisław Sheptytsky seized the city.³⁷ A demarcation line between Poland and Lithuania called the “Foch line” was established on the 26th of April. A July agreement left Wilno on the Polish side and, most importantly, proclaimed the defeat of Römer's mission.³⁸ Lithuanian Prime Minister Mykolas Slezevicius declined an offer to join Römer's government due to the unpopularity of this decision among Lithuanian nationalists. This was a huge risk as Slezevicius lost his tactical ally in the person of Piłsudski and his army, but he still had to refuse the Pole's offer and look for new allies. The forcible solution of the issue made it impossible for Warsaw to cooperate with the Lithuanian and Belarusian political elites.³⁹

Piłsudski's well-known *Proclamation to the inhabitants of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania* had no expected influence on Lithuanian society.⁴⁰ The intention to regulate political relations with Lithuanians and Belarusians failed.⁴¹

³⁶Piotr Łossowski, *Potej i tamtejstronie Niemna. Stosunki polsko-litewskie 1883-1939* [On this and that side of the Neman. Polish-Lithuanian relations 1883–1939], Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1995, p. 105.

³⁷G. Matveev, D. Lipinskaya-Nalench, T. Nalench, *Nachalo* [Beginning], p. 32.

³⁸Janusz Lewandowski, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁹G. Matveev, D. Lipinskaya-Nalench, T. Nalench, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴⁰Ivan Homeniuk, *Provisnyky Druhoi svitovoi viiny. Prykordonnii konflikty v Tsentralno-Skhidnii Yevropi vid rozpadu imperii do Hliavitskoi provokatsii* [Predictors of World War II. Border conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe from the collapse of empires to the Gleiwitz incident], Kharkiv, Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2017, p. 192.

⁴¹Piotr Łossowski, *Stosunki polsko-litewskie w latach 1918 – 1920* [Polish-Lithuanian

However, the head of the state showed confidence that the case would be a success. He encouraged the representative of the Kaunas government, Jurgis Saulys, to cooperate. On August 23, the Polish Sejm passed a law that gave inhabitants of the region the right to freely express their nationality. Negotiations were hampered by the conflict over northern Suwałki and the attempt of a pro-Polish coup in Kaunas on August 22. It aimed to overthrow the government of Taryba and seize Kaunas with its surrounding territories. The Polish Military Organization planned the operation, but it was stopped when Lithuanian intelligence arrested people on the night of August 28 - 29. The uprising in Sejny on 23 - 28 August 1919 was another reason. It aimed to perform a *coup d'état* in Lithuania to replace the Lithuanian government with a pro-Polish cabinet. Therefore, Wilno did not become a link between Poland and Lithuania, as the head of the state thought, but, rather, became the subject of an increasingly uncompromising dispute between them. These circumstances "threatened to paralyze the whole Baltic section"⁴², which was the basis of the federation plans of Piłsudski. This failed intention of the First Marshal (the military rank of Piłsudski since March 19, 1919) was announced by Leon Wasilewski at the Helsinki Conference in January 1920, to create a block of Baltic countries with Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, and recorded the diplomatic defeat of Piłsudski at the Baltic section. However, the Marshal's firm conviction that Poland's fate in the near future would be decided in the East, forced him to look for an ally in the person of Symon Petliura, a representative of Dnieper Ukraine. Piłsudski decided to take full advantage of this possibility. However, in 1921, during signing the Treaty of Riga, he would betray his former ally in favour of a militarily superior one.⁴³

The Kyiv Offensive conducted by the Polish Army in a tactical alliance with the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic in April - June turned out to be unsuccessful. After a week of fights, Wilno had to be surrendered. Tukhachevsky's forces were supported by Lithuanian troops, which the commander-in-chief saw as the outbreak of the second war against Poland. After the invasion of Wilno, the Red Army gained a great psychological advantage. Motivated soldiers of the Red Army victoriously attacked.

At the Conference in Spa on July 10th, Prime Minister Władysław Grabski,

relations in the years 1918 - 1920], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1966, p. 80.

⁴²Włodzimierz Suleja, *Yuzef Pilsudskiy*, Kyiv, Dukh i Litera, 2018, p. 279.

⁴³Oleksandr Dotsenko, *Litopys ukrainskoi revoliutsii. Materialy y dokumenty do istorii ukrainskykh revoliutsii* [Chronicle of the Ukrainian revolution. Materials and documents on the history of Ukrainian revolutions], Varshava, 1923, T. 2, Kn. 5 (1917 - 1923), p. 5.

Tadeusz Rozwodowski and, the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, and Stanislaw Patek, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, invited allies to help in the fight against Russia. The Polish government was urgently encouraged to return Wilno to Lithuania. Since the Red Army drove the Poles out of Wilno on July 14th, it was suggested that the Polish delegation acknowledge Lithuania’s right to the city, which was recorded in the Soviet-Lithuanian Peace Treaty on July 12th.⁴⁴

After the July agreement, Lithuanian foreign policy drastically changed. Lithuania needed an alliance against the Poles, and the Soviets wanted to secure their flank in the fights against Poland. Negotiations between Lithuania and Soviet Russia started in Moscow on May 9th and finished with signing the treaty on July 12th. Soviet Russia recognized the sovereignty of Lithuania and paid generous compensation for damage caused on its territory during the war.⁴⁵ According to the treaty, the Vilnius province was divided: Russia was satisfied with Vileysky and Disnensky counties and a part of Lidsky and Oshmyansky counties, which were under Polish Army control during negotiations.⁴⁶ While the Red Army units were rapidly approaching Warsaw on August 6th, Lithuania received Wilno, but in fact, the Red Army units left Wilno on August 25th. On August 26th, Lithuanian units took the city, proclaiming it once again the national capital.⁴⁷ The Lithuanian government believed that a Bolshevik victory would both preserve Lithuanian independence and grant Vilnius to Lithuania. This was surely a mistake.⁴⁸

In August, Polish troops halted the Red Army’s advance on the outskirts of Warsaw and drove it out of Poland. Having cleared Volhynia and Eastern Galicia and having pushed Tukhachevsky’s army back to the Nieman on the north, the Polish army removed all obstacles for a victorious march on the east until the enemy was completely defeated. On August 27th, the National Defence Council (Rada Obrony Narodowej) permitted the Polish Army to cross the Curzon Line and on September 8th, to cross the Lithuanian-Polish demarcation line or the Foch Line.

⁴⁴*Sobranie uzakoneniy i rasporyazheniy pravitelstva za 1920 g. Upravlenie delami Sovnarkoma SSSR* [Collection of laws and orders of the government for 1920. Management of affairs of the Sovnarkom of the USSR], Moskva, 1943, p. 745–754.

⁴⁵Joseph Rothschild, *Skhidno-Tsentralna Yevropa mizh dvoma svitovymi viinamy* [East Central Europe between the two world wars], Kyiv, Mehataip, 2001, p. 447.

⁴⁶*Sobranie uzakoneniy i rasporyazheniy pravitelstva za 1920 g...*, p. 745–754.

⁴⁷Andrzej Ajnenkiel, *Od aktu 5 listopada do traktatu ryskiego. Kilka refleksji dotyczących kształtowania polskiej granicy wschodniej* [From the Act of 5th November to the Treaty of Riga, 25 years after the Treaty of Riga], in *Traktat Ryski 1921 roku po 75 lat*, Toruń, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1998, p. 27.

⁴⁸Timothy Snyder, *Peretvorennia natsii...* [The Reconstruction of Nations...], p. 91.

On September 2nd, hostilities against the Lithuanian Army began. At the end of August, the Lithuanian forces controlled the Suwałki region up to Augustów, and, at the same time, there were cruel battles over Sejny between Polish and Lithuanian armed forces.

However, the situation was not clear. Firstly, on July 10th, the Polish delegation recognized Lithuania's right to Wilno at the Spa Conference. Secondly, Piłsudski was preparing to appeal the decision on the neutral status of the Lithuanian occupied territories of the Suwałki region together with Wilno at the League of Nations. Thirdly, the advance of the Polish Army to the East beyond the limits established by previous treaties raised the prospect of a conflict with the allies. Therefore, when the Polish and Bolshevik sides started peace negotiations in Riga in September 1920, the Entente demanded that Poland and Lithuania reach an understanding. To gain time, Piłsudski started negotiations with the Lithuanian government at the end of August. Without getting any results, he renewed them on September 30th in Suwałki⁴⁹, ordering Polish negotiators to avoid controversial issues. He was already planning a covert operation to return Wilno to Poland at the time. That is why, the agreements reached on October 7, 1920, to cease hostilities and coordinate an armistice that left the Suwałki Region, Augustów and Sejny on the Polish side of the border and the rest of the disputed territory including Wilno on the Lithuanian side, were considered by the head of the state as a tactical move to conceal plans to capture Wilno. The agreement prevented the Polish forces from launching a formal attack on Wilno. Piłsudski violated his obligations and started preparing an operation to conquer Wilno and its surrounding lands, having begun with an "insurrection" by separate units of the Polish Army.

The regrouping of forces in a north-eastern direction evidences the fact that the operation had been prepared long before the signing of the Suwałki Agreement. On August 29th, the High Command ordered the 41st Suwałki Infantry Regiment and the 4th Cavalry Brigade, which were targeted to remove Lithuanian forces from Suwałki, to regroup. The order also indicated the units that were now considered "irregular": the 212th and 211th Regiments of the Uhlans, the Volunteer Division, and the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusian Infantry Division.⁵⁰ The order noted that the division of the units into regular and irregular was due to the political difficulties connected with further military activities outside the state border.⁵¹ The attack force was to be

⁴⁹Tomasz Gajownik, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁵⁰Grzegorz Łukomski, *Wojna domowa...* [Civil War...], p. 130 – 131.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 54.

made up of a unit of regular Polish Army and the 1st and the 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusian Infantry Divisions. These units were created on October 21st, 1919, composed of inhabitants of former Lithuanian and Belarusian provinces of the Russian Empire. Each division contained four infantry regiments in two brigades and an artillery regiment. The 1st Division also included the Grodno Hussar Regiment. These units had considerable combat experience, and other formations of the Polish Army reinforced those that suffered significant losses.

“ŻELIGOWSKI’S MUTINY” AND THE SOLUTION TO THE “VILNIUS QUESTION”

Piłsudski planned to raise an “insurrection” accompanied by a “spontaneous people’s uprising”, which was to convince Western diplomats of the Poles of Wilno’s refusal to live under Lithuanian rule. Meanwhile, the units of Żeligowski were expected to reach Wilno, take the city and the surrounding lands under their control, and declare an independent state – Central Lithuania. General Lucjan Żeligowski, appointed commander of the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusian Infantry Division, was chosen for the role of main “insurgent”.

Lucjan Żeligowski was born in 1865 in a Lithuanian noble family. His parents were deported to Siberia for taking part in the January uprising of 1863. Żeligowski joined the Imperial Russian Army in 1888 and served as a Major General. He was associated with the independence movement as a member of the Union of Active Struggle, which was founded in Lviv in 1908 by Kazimierz Sosnowski and other organizations, in particular the Combat Organization of the Polish Socialist Party founded by Józef Piłsudski. In 1915, he took part in the formation of the Polish Rifle Brigade in Russia⁵², which after the revolution became known as the Haller’s Army. He insisted that his subordinates have an exceptionally hardened spirit and resistance and that they never lose their national identity.⁵³ He participated in the war with Bolshevik Russia as a commander of the Polish 4th Rifle Division, the 10th Infantry Division, the Task Force, etc.⁵⁴

⁵²Barbara Gumowska, *Opowieścogen. Broni Lucianie Żeligowskim, Część 1. Lata 1865 – 1920*, Bydgoszcz, 1994, p. 32.

⁵³Dariusz Fabisz, *op. cit.*, p. 45–46; Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski*. T. 2, cz. 1, (1914 – 1939), [Recent political history of Poland. 1864 – 1945. T. 2, Part 1, 1914 – 1939 period], Warszawa, Krajowa agencja wydawnicza, 1990, p. 83.

⁵⁴Dariusz Fabisz, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Krzysztof Jerzy Galas, *Generał broni Lucjan Żeligowski i jego zasługi dla niepodległej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [General Lucjan Żeligowski and his

When he chose Żeligowski for the role of a rebel, Piłsudski was guided by a sentimental “kinship of their souls.”⁵⁵ Both considered Wilno and the surrounding territories to be Polish lands, and both identified themselves as Lithuanian, apparently emphasizing their affiliation to the Lithuanian gentry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. With Żeligowski, Piłsudski could not only feel confident about the execution of the order but also counted on his devotion and his deep conviction that the planned operation was right.⁵⁶

The military and moral burden of the operation was on the general himself. Żeligowski had great command experience.⁵⁷ He was awarded two orders of the *Virtuti Militari* of the 3rd and 5th Degree for the August offensive, known as the “Miracle on the Vistula.”⁵⁸

Żeligowski received an invitation to a meeting with the commander-in-chief on September 20, but he arrived at the specified location with his adjutant Stanisław Lepkovsky on September 30. He was informed about the plan to raise an uprising in Wilno while being on the train together with Piłsudski on the 1st of October.⁵⁹ For a while, the General pondered over the words of the Marshal. The next day, he managed to convince the commander-in-chief to change the plan. Officers of the highest ranks supported the General. When, on October 7, Żeligowski announced the plan to a wide range of officers, some of them refused to participate. The officers then in agreement with Żeligowski left their units and went to the regular army. The soldiers were simply informed that it was necessary to take Wilno under Polish control and announce the borders of Poland after the operation.

The General informed others that he could not fully control the situation. He could not influence all the participants of the operation and asked to be replaced

service for the independent Polish Republic], in “*Niepodległość i Pamięć*”, 2009, 16/1 (29), p. 197.

⁵⁵Dariusz Fabisz, *Gen. Żeligowski wyruszył na Wilno pod hasłem «wracamy do domu»* [Gen. Żeligowski marched towards Wilno under the slogan “we are returning home”], in <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/dr-dariusz-fabisz-gen-zeligowski-wyruszy-na-wilno-pod-haslem-wracamy-do-domu> (Accessed on 05.04.2019).

⁵⁶Lucian Żeligowski, *Wojna w roku 1920...* [War in 1920...], p. 7–8.

⁵⁷*Niepodległość: Czasopiśmo poświęcone najnowszym dziejom Polski* [Independence: magazine devoted to the recent history of Poland], Londyn, Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1962, T. VII, p. 25.

⁵⁸Krzysztof Jerzy Galas, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁵⁹Władysław Łach, *“Bunt” Żeligowskiego. Kulisy przyłączenia Wileńszczyzny do Polski 1920 – 1922* [Żeligowski’s “Mutiny”. Behind the scenes of joining the Vilnius Region to Poland 1920 – 1922], Warszawa, Bellona, 2014, p. 94.

by someone more reputable. The decision was made to appoint General VI. Sikorsky. The condition of the Suwałki Agreement to leave Wilno on the Lithuania side of the line convinced Żeligowski to act decisively. His order as commander-in-chief of the troops of “Central Lithuania” says: “We cannot agree with that.”⁶⁰ The proclaimed communique stated the protection of the right to self-determination of the inhabitants of the fatherland and the duty of the General to lead the soldiers of those lands. Żeligowski also reported that he had left the service and freed himself from the command of the group and that all commanders and soldiers would now obey only his orders. After the occupation of Wilno, the Polish diplomats were informed that the chief of the headquarters Bobitsky and General Żeligowski had resigned from the Polish Army, but in fact, both officers were officially registered in the army.⁶¹

The attack was announced a few hours after the agreement in Suwaki, on the 8th of October at 6 a.m.⁶² They marched under the slogan “We return home and want Wilno to be a Polish city”.⁶³

They marched in a three-column formation. Żeligowski’s units ranged in size from 14 to 17 thousand men. The Lithuanians, whose troops numbered about 19 thousand combatants⁶⁴, failed to resist the attack effectively. A retreat without a fight was announced, a fire was allowed only to cover the evacuation of the Lithuanian institutions. The representative of the Kaunas government in Wilno, Ignacy Jonynas, passed control of the city to the head of the French Entente mission, which was supposed to stop the Poles. However, because he was acting as an insurgent rather than an official representative of the Polish Army, Żeligowski refused to recognize their authority. He nonetheless met with the representatives of the Entente at the Lithuanian Taryba and claimed that Wilno was occupied to protect the rights of the local Polish population.⁶⁵ The representatives of the Entente, the League of Nations, and 200 deputies of the Lithuanian parliament had to leave Wilno by midnight on the 10th of October. On the 12th of October, Żeligowski proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Central Lithuania with Wilno as its capital.

The Entente, the League of Nations, Germany, and even the Polish government officially condemned the actions of the “insurgents”. On March 15, 1923, the

⁶⁰Ivan Homeniuk, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Tomasz Gajownik, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁶³ Dariusz Fabisz, *Żeligowski wyruszył na Wilno...*

⁶⁴Ivan Homeniuk, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 209.

League of Nations recognized the annexation of the Vilnius region. In January 1923, the Lithuanians conducted a similar action by fostering the Klaipeda uprising. The Republic of Lithuania did not support the decision, however, and gained a new ally—Soviet Russia.

Lucjan Żeligowski died on July 7, 1947, in France, where he had lived since 1939. He was elected Honorary Chairman of the Society of the North-Eastern Lands of the Rzeczpospolita, which brought together emigrants from Lithuania and Belarus. He positioned himself as an opponent to the Sanation policy, and as a result, earned the favour of the anti-Sanation cabinet of Wł. Sikorski. He was a manic Slavophil⁶⁶ and an ardent supporter of communist Poland. For a time, the Slavophilism of Żeligowski seemed to be an eccentricity until, on March 31, 1944, the General published an open letter calling upon S. Mikolajczyk to “give a friendly hand” to the Soviet troops marching to Berlin. In his response, Cat-Matskevich called his recent friend a bandit and that it would have been better had he died before the war in Wilno. Every new day brought “a new distortion and a new moral quagmire” to the General. Finally, after Yalta, the elderly Żeligowski broke off relations with “Polish London” and became a faithful ally of the Moscow Poles. The rulers of communist Poland incited the General to return to his homeland, but on July 7, 1947, he died. His last wish, to be buried in Poland, was fulfilled by General Stanisław Tatar, who brought Żeligowski’s coffin from France to Poland together with a portion of the valuables of the National Defence Fund, including the secret documents of the Polish Army. The General was buried at the expense of the Polish socialist government⁶⁷.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE ŻELIGOWSKI MUTINY: CONCLUSION

Hostilities on the north-eastern part of the front, the occupation of Wilno by staging a “national uprising”, and the creation of “Central Lithuania” all pointed to a high-stakes political game, with Lithuania acting as a centrepiece. Therefore, Piłsudski may have had a specific plan to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, composed of three cantons: ethnic Lithuania with its capital in Kaunas, Central Lithuania with its capital in Wilno, and Belarusian Lithuania with its capital in Minsk.

Piłsudski’s plans for federalization were destroyed after the invasion of Wilno by Żeligowski’s forces. Central Lithuania with its centre in Wilno was the only “independent state” (canton) that was created. Piłsudski failed to unite the

⁶⁶Lucjan Żeligowski, *O idee słowiańskiej...*[About Slavic ideas], p. 8.

⁶⁷Dariusz Fabisz, *Gen. Lucjan Żeligowski...*, p. 333–337; Barbara Gumowska, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Minsk lands of Belarus and create “Eastern Europe”. The Lithuanians defended their independence and Kaunas. Consequently, the Polish state obtained a half-hearted result: an “independent state” with a centre in Wilno and twelve western counties of Belarus without Minsk.⁶⁸ It was only a half success or a “victory for Endecja’s version of Poland.”⁶⁹

In the spring of 1921, Piłsudski hoped for favourable military conditions to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, primarily due to the separation of Kaunas Lithuania from Soviet Russia as a result of the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian troops’ offensive on Ukraine and Belarus. However, this last attempt to force his federalist plans failed. On May 21, the Marshal expressed regret at the Kalisz camp for the UNR Army’s interned soldiers that instead of building their own state, they had become unwitting participants of his eastern policy. Having understood the impracticality of federalism, Piłsudski never accepted nationalism. The beginning of the 20th century was a period of authoritarian leaders such as Aleksandar Stamboliyski, Nikola Pašić, Augustinas Voldemaras, Antanas Smetona, Józef Piłsudski, and others. Stalin killed millions of Ukrainians in the USSR, referring to them as Russians’ “younger brothers”.

Piłsudski cherished the Polish state cult, believing it to be “a paramount force in the East that everyone, including the Entente, would count on and rely on”. His perception of a state differed from reality. He looked suspiciously at his own citizens who could not recognize “corruption and chaos” in the party and at national minorities who were always ready to betray the Polish state. Therefore, the small population of the Vilnius Voivodeship was Polonised and the Belarusian peasants were subjected to assimilation policy. The Polish policy has never prioritized the development of ethnicities that coexisted with Poland within the same state. Piłsudski never made sure that the world consists of nation-states inhabited by people of a certain ethnicity.

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⁶⁸Jan Szumski, *Zachodnia Białoruś 1944 – 1953. Propaganda i edukacja w służbie ideologii*, Kraków, Arkana, 2010, p. 21–28.

⁶⁹Timothy Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

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