

Małgorzata Nossowska

(Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland)

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4754-2400>









e-mail: malgorzata.nossowska@mail.umcs.pl

Alsace Reclaimed¹. French Joys, Hopes, and Problems on the Eve of the Paris Peace Conference (1919)

Alzacja odzyskana. Francuskie radości, nadzieje i problemy u progu konferencji paryskiej (1919)

ABSTRACT

When in 1918 Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France, it was accompanied by a great joy and not only an official optimism, which can be found in the press coverage of that time. Nevertheless, the reintegration of the recovered provinces was associated with

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THE AUTHOR'S ADDRESS: Małgorzata Nossowska, the Institute of History of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, 4A Maria Curie-Skłodowska Square, Lublin 20-031, Poland				
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¹ The lost and then recovered provinces are Alsace and part of Lorraine, but the article discusses the former due to its cultural and national specificity, and the reintegration issues it faced, which, in turn, affected Lorraine only to a small extent as it was much more „French” than Alsace.

a number of problems, the nature and scale of which were not expected by the French side. Already at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 the most important issues emerged; these were primarily all the issues related to respecting, or disrespecting, by the French state all the local cultural and language differences (e.g. in schools and administration), the local laws, recognizing the role of religion, e.g. not introducing the Act from 9 December 1905, respecting the role of the Alsatian dialect, and taking into account the fact that the vast majority of the Alsations could not speak French. During preparations for the Paris conference, the most important issue was to confirm the incorporation of the reclaimed provinces into France without a referendum, the conditions and discussions regarding their nationality in the name of the nations' self-determination. The diplomatic and military steps (taking over the previously lost provinces by the French troops) was accompanied by the creation of a *fait accompli* in the newly seized territories and the intensive propaganda campaign which involved e.g., creating in the press an image of Alsace that was French, joyful and absolutely unwavering in terms of its nationality.

Key words: Alsace, 1918, the Great War 1914–1918, Paris Conference

STRESZCZENIE

Kiedy w 1918 roku Alzacja i Lotaryngia na powrót stały się francuskie, towarzyszyła temu ogromna radość i nie tylko urzędowy optymizm, które widoczne są w relacjach prasowych z tego okresu. Jednak reintegracja odzyskanych prowincji niosła za sobą wiele problemów, których ani charakteru, ani rozmiaru nie spodziewano się po francuskiej stronie. Już na przełomie 1918 i 1919 r. najważniejsze z nich ujawniły się: były to przede wszystkim sprawy związane z poszanowaniem lub nie przez państwo francuskie lokalnych odrębności kulturowych i językowych (m.in. w szkołach i administracji) oraz lokalnego prawa, uwzględnienie roli religii czyli nie wprowadzanie prawa z 9 grudnia 1905 r., poszanowania roli dialektu alzackiego oraz wzięcia pod uwagę faktu nieznamości przez większą część Alzatzyków języka francuskiego. W okresie przygotowań do konferencji paryskiej najważniejszą jednak sprawą było potwierdzenie włączenia odzyskanych prowincji do Francji bez plebiscytu, warunków i dyskusji nad ich narodowościowym charakterem w imię zasady samostanowienia narodów. Akcji dyplomatycznej i militarnej (zajęcie utraconych prowincji przez wojska francuskie) towarzyszyło tworzenie faktów dokonanych na nowoprzejętych ziemiach oraz intensywna akcja propagandowa polegająca m.in. na tworzeniu w prasie obrazu francuskiej, radosnej i absolutnie nie wahającej się jeśli chodzi o jej przynależność państwową Alzacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Alzacja, 1918, Wielka Wojna 1914–1918, konferencja paryska

The war lost to Prussia, and the loss of Alsace and parts of Lorraine as a result of the terms of the treaty of Frankfurt from 10 May 1871 was one of the most traumatic historical experiences for the French. Around 15,000 square kilometers, almost 1,700 towns, 1,6 million of residents, and a great economic potential became part of the Second Reich territories, and their recovery became the French *idée fixe* in numerous aspects of domestic politics² and, for obvious reasons, foreign affairs. The notion

² Even in such surprising aspects as reproductive politics which towards the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century was carried out under the slogan of a rivalry with the population potential of the Second Reich.

of revenge and the eyes turned to the „blue line of the Vosges“ were some of the catchphrases present in the lives of the French between 1871 and 1918³. Over the course of time, there was a lot of ritual and anniversary routine in it, but there is no doubt that reclaiming the lost provinces, even though France did not push for war, was one of the country's main aims once the war did break out.

Therefore, the entry of the French troops into Alsace in November 1918 was particularly important. From the French perspective, it was a completion of historical justice, return to natural, and almost obvious, condition, and restoration of balance⁴. It could be seen in the official and unofficial joy, countless celebrations, thanksgiving masses, marches, parades, and appeals, the list of which would take dozens of pages. However, among this widespread – and not only official – joy, appeared other voices, perhaps not so numerous but significant and important, which indicated various problems and challenges that came along with the recovered provinces.

Some of them were obvious and stemmed from the ongoing, post-war situation (e.g., destruction, migrations of population, and demobilized soldiers), but others were of a deeper, structural nature, and resulted from the cultural distinctiveness of Alsace both before 1871 and after almost fifty years of being part of the Second Reich (issues regarding language, religion, German population living in the area, administration and local organization). Other problems stemmed from the fundamental problem of Alsace's national inclusivity, which was not as obvious as the French wanted it to be. Using their press emanation, I would like to study in detail the sentiments and issues associated with the recovered provinces, which accompanied the French in the first weeks of the peace treaty, in the period of preparations for the peace conference in Paris. It was important in the context of both the decisions which were to take place in Paris and the later, post-war situation, and the unity of France.

The first thing that draws the attention in the then press is a flood of information about all kinds of manifestations of joy related to the return of the lost territories to France, which was considered certain and

³ G.-H. Soutou, *La Grande illusion: Quand la France perdait la paix 1914–1920*, Paris 2015, s. 93; F. Roth, *Alsace-Lorraine: histoire d'un pays perdu de 1870 à nos jours*, Paris 2016, s. 85–88.

⁴ A. Milhaud, *Où nous en sommes ce matin*, „Paris Midi“ [dalej: „PM“] 12, 17 and 20 XI 1918; *Les problèmes du prochain traité. L'Alsace et la Lorraine*, „Le Petit Parisien“ [dalej: „PP“] 16 XI 1918; *Bulletin du jour*, „Le Temps“ [dalej: „T“] 13 XI 1918; E. Boutroux, *Strasbourg*, „Exelsior“ [dalej: „E“] 26 XI 1918; *L'Alsace-Lorraine française*, „L'Écho de Paris“ [dalej: „EP“], 15 XI 1918; *Le Délivrance de l'Alsace-Lorraine*, „Le Journal“ [dalej: „J“] 15 XI 1918; *On achève la mise au point du programme de la Conférence. Ne perdons pas de vue le Droit et la Justice*, „L'Intransigeant“ [dalej: „I“] 16 XI 1918.

obvious. It was a constant celebration which started even before the official ceasefire and reached its peak when the French troops officially and highly ceremoniously entered Strasbourg, Metz, Mulhouse, Colmar and hundreds of smaller centers, and when the recovered territories were visited at the beginning of December by the president, Raymond Poincaré, the prime minister, Georges Clemenceau, delegation of high-rank officials and people particularly closely linked with Alsace, e.g. the sister of Paule Déroulède, Jeanne⁵. Contrary to the judicial status, it was a kind of an official confirmation of taking back the lost provinces by the French state.

The press meticulously reported almost each initiative, from the appeal to the authorities of Strasbourg to the thanksgiving masses in the Colmar and Strasbourg cathedrals, and large rallies in Paris and other French cities⁶. The city council of Paris decided to even provide Strasbourg and Metz with the French flags which were to fly on their city halls⁷. On the other side was the joy of Alsace: ringing bells, enthusiasm at the sight of French aircrafts, which were the first ones to carry the flags over Alsace after nearly fifty years of absence, exceptional traffic in shops, in which orders were made for the French flags, almost scarce commodity⁸.

⁵ *Marche triomphale de nos troupes en Alsace-Lorraine*, „E” 19 XI 1918; *Les Français entrent en Lorraine*, „E” 20 XI 1918; *Bulletin du jour*, „T” 13 XI 1918; *L’Entrée des troupes françaises à Metz et à Strasbourg*, „T” 18 XI 1918; *L’entrée des troupes françaises à Mulhouse*, „T” 19 XI 1918; *L’Entrée à Colmar*, „T” 25 XI 1918; *Gen. de Lacroix, Paris-Metz-Strasbourg*, „T” 25 XI 1918; *Le président de la République en Alsace et en Lorraine*, „T” 9 XII 1918; *La Marche en avant. L’Entrée à Metz*, „Le Figaro” [dalej: „F”] 20 XI 1918; *Visite officielle. Le départ*, „F” 8 XII 1918; *L’Ennemi s’exécute. Les troupes alliées devant Metz*, „PP” 16 XI 1918; *L’Entrée solennelle du maréchal Pétain*, „EP” 26 XI 1918; *Pendant l’armistice. En marche vers l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 15 XI 1918; *Metz occupées aujourd’hui*, „PM” 19 XI 1918; *Le salut de la France à l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 3 XII 1918; *Strasbourg en fête*, „PM” 10 XII 1918.

⁶ *La défilé de la Délivrance*, „T” 15 XI 1918; Th. L., *Les messagers sur Metz et Strasbourg*, „T” 17 XI 1918; *Au Palais-d’Orsay*, „T” 19 XI 1918; *A la Société des gens de lettres*, „T” 18 XI 1918; *La fidélité des Alsaciens et des Lorrains*, „T” 2 XII 1918; *Paris va glorifier aujourd’hui les deux provinces reconquises*, „PP” 17 XI 1918; *En honneur de l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 8 XI 1918; *La Colonisation française*, „PM” 10 XI 1918; *Paris fêtera tantôt l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 17 XI 1918; A. Milhaud, *Où nous en sommes ce matin*, „PM” 18 XI 1918; *Séance historique à la Chambre. Le salut de la France à l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „J” 12 XI 1918; *Les maires d’Alsace à Paris*, „J” 14 XI 1918; *En honneur de l’Alsace-Lorrain*, „E” 14 XI 1918; *En honneur de l’Alsace-Lorrain*, „E” 16 XI 1918; *Paris fête avec ferveur les provinces retrouvées*, „I” 17 XI 1918; L. Bailly, *Celui qui attend*, „I” 17 XI 1918.

⁷ *Le drapeau de Metz et de Strasbourg*, „T” 15 XI 1918.

⁸ *Manifestations françaises en Alsace et en Lorraine*, „T” 15 XI 1918; Th. L., *Les messagers sur Metz et Strasbourg*, „T” 17 XI 1918; *L’entrée des troupes françaises à Metz et à Strasbourg*, „T” 18 XI 1918; *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. La fidélité à la France*, „T” 20 XI 1918; *Les Françaises à la Mulhouse*, „T” 23 XI 1918; *L’entrée solennelle à Strasbourg*, „T” 24 XI 1918; *Adresses et*

It was reported that there was only one department store in Nancy which received an order for an incredible number of flags, 600,000 in total⁹. By contrast, a correspondent from the Swiss newspaper „Basler National Zeitung“ who spent four days in Mulhouse reported that he had never seen such joy, so many fireworks and had never heard *La Marseillaise* sung with so much fire and enthusiasm. The tricolored flags were flying in the windows, people wore bows in French colors, the *Vive la France!* shouts could be heard in the streets¹⁰.

It was emotional to see elderly women taking out their 50-year-old flags from their wardrobes, which were waiting for this moment since 1870, or the resourceful Alsatians who did not have enough flags and produced them by dyeing German cotton bags and coloring cardboard boxes with simple crayons¹¹. It was another amusing curiosity to see cows with their horns decorated with the French colors, which were encountered by one of the correspondents during his travels in Alsace¹². This unusual way of expressing joy reflects its scale, although it did not look peculiar from the Alsatian perspective.

Large street rallies, celebrations in the headquarters of the local authorities, ceremonious masses and ringing bells, flowers, flags, tricolored bows, speeches full of historical connotations given by guests and hosts were not just an expression of enthusiasm and hope. They were to become the evidence of actual, and not only spiritual and sentimental, ties between France and Alsace and Lorraine, and the argument proving, without the need to refer to a referendum, that these were, without any doubts, French territories.

Although the status of the recovered provinces was the most important issue, it was not ultimately defined in spite of the French people's enthusiasm. Under the pressure from France, the ceasefire from 11 November 1918, equated the territories of Luxembourg, Belgium, and France,

félicitations, „T“ 24 XI 1918; *L'Alsace et la Lorraine. Le rattachement „indiscutable et définitif“ à la France*, „T“ 8 XII 1918; *La prochaine entrée dans Metz et Strasbourg*, „PP“ 17 XI 1918; *Les inoubliables fêtes de Strasbourg*, „PP“ 10 XII 1918; *Villes et villages fêtent le chef de l'armée française*, „PP“ 26 XI 1918; *L'enthousiasme en Alsace*, „PM“ 12 XI 1918; *Les grands souvenirs*, „PM“ 14 XI 1918; *Le retour de l'Alsace-Lorraine à la France*, „PM“ 14 XI 1918; *Strasbourg manifeste pour la France*, „J“ 11 XI 1918; *Metz et Strasbourg se préparent. La flotte ennemie va se livrer*, „I“ 17 XI 1918; *La joie du Metz*, „I“ 24 XI 1918.

⁹ *L'entrée des troupes françaises à Metz et à Strasbourg*, „T“ 18 XI 1918.

¹⁰ *La joie à Mulhouse*, „T“ 18 XI 1918.

¹¹ *Les grands souvenirs*, „PM“ 14 XI 1918; *Metz et Strasbourg se préparent. La flotte ennemie va se livrer*, „I“ 17 XI 1918; *Les cœurs fidèles. L'Alsace parle français... vieille images, vieil amour*, „I“ 19 XI 1918; *Les derniers jour de l'occupation allemande à Strasbourg*, „T“ 28 XI 1918.

¹² *Les cœurs fidèles. L'Alsace parle français ... vieille images, vieil amour*, „I“ 19 XI 1918.

attacked in 1914, and the areas of Alsace and Lorraine, which implicitly made them part of France, even though the final decision had to be made by the peace conference¹³. As pointed out by Henry Kissinger in „Diplomacy”¹⁴, the return of the lost provinces was written down in the Wilson’s Fourteen Points in the part which was desired but not obligatory. Apart from that, an opportunity came up of testing Alsace’s self-determination (referendum) which elicited neither the French side’s enthusiasm, nor its trust in the end result¹⁵, even though the French socialists were initially the supporters of this solution, just like – unsurprisingly – the German side and some of the diplomats¹⁶.

According to „Le Temps” from 11 December, which commented on the celebrations of the visit of the Republic’s president and prime minister in Alsace and Lorraine, *le plébiscite est fait*¹⁷. to cite the words spoken on the balcony of the Strasbourg town hall by President Raymond Poincaré. The referendum did take place. The street spoke and it did speak quite loudly, unequivocally, and without any doubts about how „the heart of Alsace was beating in the exact same rhythm as the hearts of all French people”¹⁸. This was also noticed by W.G. Sharp, the ambassador of the United States in France, who accompanied the French president, Poincaré, and emphasized the sentiments of thousands of demonstrators

¹³ G.-H. Soutou, *Le deuil de la puissance (1914–1958)*, w: J.-C. Allain, P. Guillen, G.-H. Soutou, L. Theis, M. Vaïsse, *Histoire de la diplomatie française. De 1815 à nos jours*, Paris 2007, s. 299–300.

¹⁴ H. Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*, Warszawa 2009, s. 239–240; F. Roth, *op. cit.*, s. 141–142.

¹⁵ M. Macmillan, *Paryż 1919. Sześć miesięcy, które zmieniły świat: konferencja pokojowa w Paryżu w 1919 roku i próba zakończenia wojny*, Oświęcim 2018, s. 164–165; F. Roth, *op. cit.*, s. 149–150.

¹⁶ *En Allemagne. L’Alsace-Lorraine*, „F” 20 XI 1918; *Le plébiscite superflu*, „F” 1 I 1919; *Un interview de M. Branting*, „PP” 29 I 1919; *Bulletin du jour. Le plébiscite est fait*, „T” 11 XI 1918; A. Milhaud, *La crise allemande s’accroît*, „PM” 28 XII 1918; *Les socialistes et L’Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 13 XII 1918.

¹⁷ *Bulletin du jour. Le plébiscite est fait*, „T” 11 XII 1918.

¹⁸ *Le salut de l’armée française à l’Alsace*, „La Lanterne” [dalej: „L”] 26 XI 1918; also: *Le plébiscite impopulaire*, „T” 28 XI 1918; *Bulletin du jour. Le plébiscite est fait*, „T” 11 XII 1918; *Les journaux du matin: le plébiscite*, „PM” 27 XI 1918; M. Cachin, *En Alsace-Lorraine. Premières impressions*, „L’Humanité” [dalej: „H”] 13 XII 1918; *Le retour de Strasbourg*, „Le Gaulois” [dalej: „G”] 12 XII 1918; A. Meyer, *Voeux d’avenir*, „G” 1 I 1919; *Le plébiscite*, „L” 27 XI 1918; *Le plébiscite de l’enthousiasme en Alsace-Lorraine délivrée*, „PP” 22 XI 1918; *Le plébiscite des cœurs*, „PM” 26 XI 1918; *A l’Alsace-Lorraine. Le plébiscite continua. Déclaration solennelle*, „F” 7 XII 1918; *Le plébiscite superflu*, „F” 1 I 1919; *L’Alsace-Lorraine. Elle fait son plébiscite*, „I” 11 XI 1918; *La dernière réunion avant la conférence*, „I” 17 I 1919; *La chambre. Séance du vendredi 27 décembre*, „T” 29 XI 1918; E. de Feuquieres, *Les Alsaciens à Strasbourg comme les Lorrains à Metz scellent leur réunion à la France*, „PP” 10 XII 1918; E. Boutroux, *op. cit.*

whom he saw in Strasbourg and Metz¹⁹. Similar words, although spoken from a different point of view, were expressed by one of the residents of Alsace, Doctor Walter, who stated without any doubts that „this country is lost to us, lost forever. The enthusiasm which greeted France was really honest in all its manifestations. We have never understood Alsace and we have never been able to find a way to its soul”²⁰.

The French strategy was to create accomplished facts (organization of French structures), on the one hand, and to display the people’s will, on the other hand. It seems that such a large number of press coverage, including the semi-official „Le Temps”, usually presenting the government’s perspective which emphasized this fact, was not accidental and was one of the elements of a broad propaganda campaign, aimed at proving the „Frenchness” of the reclaimed provinces. The press reports were also an indirect means of pressure on the decision-making groups at the peace conference, a voice of the street, which was to confirm France’s everlasting, inalienable, and irrefutable right to these territories.

The new French administration played a particular role in the process of restoring the reclaimed provinces²¹. The preparations for taking them over had been started in France already at the beginning of the war. A special group of twenty people under the supervision of Louis Barthou²² had been established for this purpose, but only in the Autumn of 1918, the affairs gained momentum. It was decided that the lost provinces would have a temporary status, confirmed by the treaty of Compiègne, an administration subordinate to the prime minister (via a suitable under-secretary of state, Jules Jeanneney)²³; the following were also established: the Supreme Council of Alsace and Lorraine, the General Commissariat of the Republic, and the three commissioners (15 November 1918), and the decree from 26 November ultimately settled all the organizational matters, which was reported by the press in detail. The aim was clear: to incorporate the reclaimed provinces into the structures of the French state, but the means of reaching the goal could be different, and already in the Autumn 1918, two major concepts emerged: a relentless unification or a slow assimilation taking into account the local differences. There

¹⁹ *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Une déclaration de M. Sharp*, „T” 13 XII 1918.

²⁰ *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Un aveu allemand*, „T” 20 I 1919.

²¹ Cf. *Les journaux du matin. Le sujet du jour: l’Alsace-Lorraine française*, „PM” 15 XI 1918; *L’Organisation nouvelle de l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PP” 15 XI 1918; *Pour l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „I” 13 XI 1918.

²² J. Schmauch, *Novembre 1918. L’administration française s’établit en Alsace-Lorraine*, „Revue d’Alsace. L’Alsace et la Grande Guerre” 2013/139, s. 259, <https://doi.org/10.4000/alsace.1951> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

²³ *Ibidem*, s. 261–262.

was a common belief in Barthou's commission and the parliamentary commissions dealing with the affairs of Alsace and Lorraine that some restraint should be shown. The government already had some experience with three cantons occupied at the beginning of the war, but previously belonging to the territories taken away from France in 1871 (Thann, Masevaux, and Dannemarie), which gave some idea about the potential reintegration problems. However, in the Autumn 1918, the decision was made about taking action, which was not very subtle, and incorporating the recovered areas to the French state in an uncompromising way.

Georges Weill, the Reichstag deputy from Metz before 1914 and a great supporter of French Alsace after the outbreak of the war, wrote that „we do not turn a blind eye to problems, but let us not go into details, the issues should be solved one by one, but the aim is one: no legal exceptions for the reclaimed provinces”²⁴. This is excellently illustrated not only by the French government approach to the already existing local institutions²⁵, but also the actions of the Republic's commissioners. The first general commissioner in Strasbourg, Jean Jacques Maringer, was to be supported by two commissioners, Léon Mirman in Metz and Henry Poulet in Colmar. They were provided with extensive civic authority and tools to cooperate with military administration, and were burdened with the mission of making Alsace and Lorraine French again²⁶.

According to a columnist from „Le Temps”, all three commissioners deserved to be trusted as professionals who knew the specificity of the local areas, local needs, traditions, sensitivity to religious issues and family ties associated with the reclaimed provinces. It seems, however, that in the light of the events from the beginning of 1919, „Le Temps” put too much faith in the commissioners' orientation in the local specificities.

The elites in the area of administration, who were to be sent to Alsace from France and emphasize the significance of these territories and the

²⁴ *Ce qu'il faut faire, ce qu'il faut éviter par le capitane Weille, député de Metz*, „PP” 15 XI 1918.

²⁵ The French government did not accept the Landtag elected in 1911; also the local governments and local authorities were immediately replaced by new, provisional solutions so there was no doubts about the loyalty of their members. *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Les Nouvelles municipalités en Lorraine*, „T” 12 XII 1918; *La désannexion*, „F” 1 XII 1918.

²⁶ *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. L'Administration de l'Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 17 XI 1918; *L'Alsace et la Lorraine délivrées*, „T” 3 XII 1918; *Premier contact*, „T” 8 XII 1918; *Les commissaires de la république en Alsace et en Lorraine*, „PP” 16 XI 1918; *Les administrateurs français*, „PP” 17 XI 1918; *Conseil des ministres*, „F” 7 XII; *L'Alsace-Lorraine. L'Organisation*, „I” 16 XI 1918; *La réorganisation de l'Alsace-Lorraine*, „EP” 15 XI 1918; L. Strauss, F. Uberfill, *Maringer Jean Jacques Georges*, w: *Nouveau Dictionnaire de Biographie alsacienne*, version en ligne (NetDBA), <https://www.alsace-histoire.org/netdba/maringer-jean-jacques-georges/> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022]; J. Schmauch, *op. cit.*, s. 259–276.

role of the newly established administration, were to help the commissioners as well²⁷. However, this statement seems to be exaggerated and excessive in the face of issues with recruiting the officials who were to work in Alsace, which stemmed from the lack of knowledge of the local language and/or German language²⁸. The problem was serious: the majority of German officials had left or were leaving Alsace²⁹, the recruitment among the Alsatians faced difficulties because some of the potential candidate did not know French while the intensive admissions to work in France presented the opposite problem: the majority could not speak German, let alone the Alsatian dialect, an obstacle which was difficult to avoid³⁰. For this reason, the idea of an immediate change in the administration into the French language could not be carried out, just like the elimination of differences between the German and French administrative system and the style of their work³¹. It was only possible to establish new French structures.

However, more serious was the problem of the fundamental difference in the image of the place Alsace was to take in the French state between the Paris and Strasbourg concept. For there was a clash between the centralist French tendencies with the autonomous attitudes of the Alsatians. It was Paris, and not Strasbourg, which was to become the decision-making center, which turned out to be displeasing to the Alsatians attached to their distinctness and some autonomy³². Although they could enjoy the rights owned by the rest of the Reich's states (Landtag, local government, separate budget, place in the Bundesrat) only from 1911, these privileges only cemented the already existing sense of separateness. However, the Third Republic entered in November 1918 already with a view to smoothly incorporating Alsace into the already existing, centralized system of the French state. And this, in turn, triggered loudly voiced concerns among the Alsatians that Strasbourg would lose its unique role as a capital of a separate region and would become one of

²⁷ Th. L., *Les messagers sur Metz et Strasburg*, „T” 17 XI 1918; *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. L’Administration de l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 17 XI 1918; *Nouveau maire de Strasbourg*, „T” 3 XII 1918; *Les commissaires de la République en Alsace et en Lorraine*, „PP” 16 XI 1918.

²⁸ *Pour l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „I” 13 XI 1918.

²⁹ Even though there were still more than 25% of all the officials in I 1919. J. Schmauch, *op. cit.*, s. 272.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 268.

³¹ *Le français dans les délibérations municipales*, „T” 25 XII 1918; *La période de transition dans l’administration*, „T” 22 XII 1918; *L’Alsace-Lorraine française*, „PM” 15 XI 1918; *Le Délivrance de l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „J” 15 XI 1918.

³² *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. La question municipale à Strasbourg*, „T” 28 I 1919; J.-B. Durosselle, *Wielka Wojna Francuzów 1914–1918*, Warszawa 2006, s. 31–33.

many capitals in the department, deprived of the vast majority of its prerogatives, which would be transferred to Paris. In addition, it would also lead to a complete, also cultural, unification. Although this issue was not overly exposed, it was reflected in the relations with Alsace³³.

This was one of a few important problems which emerged shortly after the process of reintegration had begun. Its size and significance were also important and already in March 1919 the position of the general commissioner was changed along with the French tactics. The new commissioner, Alexandre Millerand, who mitigated the French activities, was making many concessions to the local separateness, taking into consideration the sentiments of the local residents, tradition, and culture³⁴. Nevertheless, the long-term goals were the same: to make Alsace French again, even though the means of operating were temporarily changed.

The end of 1918 proved that the process of putting back together the recovered provinces with the French state had a set of challenges, the actual size and powerful impact of which became apparent only over the next months. Apart from the administrative and organizational problems, the challenges also included the issues of nationality, language, education, rules governing the functioning of churches and religious associations. Over time, they became the axis, around which the discussion on the reintegration was taking place, and the principles of France's conduct towards the recovered provinces were built³⁵. In the meantime, towards the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, the gravity of these issues was still not fully recognized, as well as their impact on the Alsatians' attitudes towards France and the means in which Alsace was being incorporated into France.

However, from November 1918, the ministries extended their authority, jurisdiction, and activity to the territories of the reclaimed provinces in a consistent way and in a spirit of making Alsace French again. They were gradually intertwined with France by the increasingly more numerous and stronger ties. Railroad, post offices and air mail, commerce, justice system, police, currency, in fact all the areas of life required reorganization, rebuilding, and adaptation to the new conditions, temporary

³³ *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. La question municipale à Strasbourg*, „T” 28 I 1919; *La désannexion*, „F” 1 XII 1918.

³⁴ Cf. A. Millerand, *Le retour de l'Alsace-Lorraine à France*, Paris 1923, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75106z/f1.item> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

³⁵ *L'organisation de l'Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 16 XI 1918; Ch. Debierre, *L'Enseignement en Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 6 I 1919; idem, *L'Enseignement en Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 8 I 1919; *Ce qu'il faut faire, ce qu'il faut éviter par le capitain Weille, député de Metz*, „PP” 15 XI 1918; *L'organisation de l'Alsace-Lorraine par M. Georges Weill député de Metz*, „PP” 26 XI 1918; *La désannexion*, „F” 1 XII 1918.

organization, and work on uniformity³⁶. At the beginning of December 1918, the ban on trade with these regions was lifted, which also included Austria-Hungary and the entire territory of the Second Reich from the beginning of war, putting Alsace and Lorraine on an equal level with other parts of France. All confiscations made by German authorities were also annulled, particularly those that involved private estates, cultural goods, expropriations made in museums, libraries, archives, all fiscal and tax fraud. It was also announced that the Deutschmarks would be exchanged to francs in the ration of 1 to 1.25, and from 15 December all means of payments other than French were cancelled, allowing people to have them exchanged in the designated institutions until 23 December 1918.

Particular attention was paid to the system of justice³⁷. The decision was made that for the transitional period the organizations of the judicial system operating in Alsace and Lorraine should be maintained, similarly to the scope of their qualifications and authority (apart from those which were strictly related to the competence of the administration and jurisdiction of the French military authorities which had control over the reclaimed provinces). At the same time, the judges were suspended until further notice, and works were commenced on including the recovered provinces in the French judicial system, which turned out to be an exceptionally unpleasant task that has not been completed to this day³⁸.

The issue of the lives of the Alsatian Germans, so-called *vieux Allemands*, who stayed in Alsace after 1871, was extraordinarily delicate and very important. This problem concerned Lorraine only to a small extent since the area was definitely more French and with definitely smaller

³⁶ *Les P.T.T en Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 27 XI 1918; *Les relations commerciales avec l’Alsace et la Lorraine*, „T” 29 XI 1918; *Les relations commerciales avec l’Alsace et la Lorraine*, „T” 9 XII 1918; *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées*, „T” 6 XII 1918; *L’organisation provisoire d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, „T” 8 XII 1918; *L’organisation provisoire d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, „T” 13 XII 1918; *La correspondance avec l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 18 XII 1918; *La poste aérienne*, „T” 20 I 1919; *Les chemins de fer Alsaciens-Lorrains rattachés à la compagnie de l’Est*, „PP” 16 XI 1918; *La remise des chemins de fer d’Alsace-Lorraine*, „PP” 17 XI 1918; *La rattachement des voies Ferrer*, „PM” 16 XI 1918.

³⁷ *L’organisation provisoire de L’Alsace et de Lorrain*, „T” 8, 13 XII 1918.

³⁸ The process of unification of the legal systems was never fully completed. The Act from 19 of October 1919 recognised the organisational and legal separateness of Alsace in the transitional period, but the later solutions, particularly the Act from 24 of July 1925 which incorporated Alsace into the French system, simultaneously sanctioned some legal distinctions, which exist in part to this day. In addition, 1/3 of the Alsatian legislation stems from the period of the Second Reich and maintains its separateness from the solutions which are in force in France. See: E. Rhinn, *La formalisation du droit local alsacien-mosellan dans l’ordre juridique français (1914–1925)*, Dissertation, Sciences juridiques, Strasbourg 2018, s. 207–211, <http://www.theses.fr/2018STRAA020> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

number of the German minority. It is estimated that in 1918, Alsace had around 400,000 German residents, 60,000 of whom lived in the region's capital³⁹. A powerful and often enforced exodus of the German population from the territories reclaimed by France began already in November 1918. It lasted for the following weeks, and it soon got an institutionalized form when the authorities took steps to determine the nationality of the Alsace residents, and to establish their status and rights based on it⁴⁰.

The first displacements were arranged in trucks, and people who were leaving could take 40 kilograms of luggage. These barely comfortable conditions of departures and sometimes the aggressive attitude of the local people towards the Germans were reflected in the German press which fueled the hostile sentiments towards France⁴¹. The recorded fact of referring to the displaced people with the term „immigrants”, suggesting their new, foreign, and almost temporary status, in the provinces taken away after 1870, was an interesting and considerable rhetorical method. It is estimated that around 200,000 people left in the period of a few months, although ultimately some of them returned; some of them returned just for a while, searching for their missing family members and putting in order the issues they had abandoned in haste, others returned for good because they had already made their lives in Alsace⁴². In December 1918, the population registration began, which included obtaining information on the date and place of birth, date and place of birth of one's parents, occupation, place of residence from 1 August 1914, nationality, and possible

³⁹ *Dans Strasbourg libérée. Déclaration de M. Maringer*, „T” 26 XI 1918.

⁴⁰ *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. La situation des Allemands immigrés*, „T” 2 XII 1918; *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Le départ des Allemands*, „T” 25 XII 1918; *Les expulsions*, „T” 5 I 1919; *Les expulsions des Allemands immigrés*, „T” 10 I 1919; *Allemands expulsés de Metz*, „T” 20 I 1919; *Les Allemands résidant en Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 21 I 1919; *On se prépare pour la conférence. Les Allemands d'Alsace-Lorraine*, „I” 3 I 1919.

⁴¹ *Le ressentiment allemand*, „T” 24 XI 1918; *L'Alsace et Lorraine libérées. La situation des Allemands immigrés*, „T” 2 XII 1918; *Incident à Metz*, „T” 17 XII 1918; *L'Alsace et Lorraine libérées. Le départ des Allemands*, „T” 25 XII 1918; *Arrestation à Strasbourg*, „T” 18 XII 1918; *Le départ de m. Zorn de Bulach*, „T” 24 XII 1918; *Les départs des Allemands*, „T” 25 XII 1918; *L'expulsion du baron Zorn de Bulach*, „T” 5 I 1919; *Des mesures contre les Allemands en Alsace*, „PP” 24 XII 1918; V. Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923*, Oxford 2016, s. 151–155; F. Grandhomme, *Retrouver la frontière du Rhin en 1918: l'entrée des poilus en Alsace et le retour à la France*, „Revue d'Alsace. L'Alsace et la Grande Guerre” 2013, 139, s. 28–29, <https://doi.org/10.4000/alsace.1757> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

⁴² *Les expulsions*, „T” 5 I 1919; *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Le départ des Allemands*, „T” 25 XII 1918; *Les expulsions d'Allemands immigrés*, „T” 10 I 1919; *Allemands expulsés de Metz*, „T” 20 I 1919; *Mesures bienveillantes du maréchal Foch dans les pays occupés*, „PP” 5 I 1919.

nationality when born, if the situation changed⁴³. Every person who was more than 15 received an identity card of a suitable category:

- a. People born in Alsace and Lorraine from French parents.
- b. People born in Alsace and Lorraine whose parents, or one parent, were not French.
- c. Foreigners.
- d. People of German, Austrian-Hungarian (although in this case one should rather speak of nationality), Turkish, and Bulgarian background.

The identity card given to the father of the family was to include records about children under 15. People who were granted the A category could freely travel around the territories of Alsace and Lorraine except in the special military zone situated near the border with Switzerland and the Rhine, and with the exception of a car or motorcycle as their means of transport. People qualified to categories B and C could move freely, apart from travelling in a car or on a motorcycle, around the region where they lived and the border area. People in category D could move freely (except for going by a car and a motorcycle) around the area of their county (*gmina*). More importantly, the right category either qualified someone to automatically receive the French nationality or made it possible to apply for it on the basis of family or marriage relations, or it gave the right to apply for a residence permit, or it qualified people to a group which was forced to leave the territory of Alsace. Based on various sources from that time and estimating their average, Volkera Protta states that there were 1,082,650 people in category A, i.e. 59% of people, 183,500 (10%) in category B, 55,050 (3%) in category C, and 513,800 (28%) in category D⁴⁴.

The French authorities were aware of the fact that the complex pattern of nationalities, which was overlapped by the political and current affairs, complicating them even more, would be difficult to solve. One of the major issues was the status of the German people, who wanted or should stay in Alsace because of the economy of the region. For what was the right way to treat them? Assimilation was not possible, and this assumption was taken for granted; on the other hand, leaving them with their free national separateness would open up a door, or even a gate, to the German intervention in the future, an intervention which would be carried out in the name of defending the interests of this minority. An idea was strongly pushed forward to force the German government to declare a complete abandonment of their intervention in the affairs, in which this minority could be involved, even though a question mark

⁴³ *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Déclaration de résidence et de séjour*, „T” 18 XII 1918; *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. La pénétration en Alsace-Lorraine*, „T” 1 I 1919.

⁴⁴ V. Protta, *op. cit.*, s. 154.

was placed next to this solution and the realistic way of enforcing it. And while the classification was treated by the French press as purely informative, rising no controversies or doubts, the problem of shortcomings, which were emerging or would emerge after a careful implementation of the displacement plans, did appear among the problems which had to be quickly considered⁴⁵.

The anti-German attitude, so clear in the case of the identity cards, was also strongly reflected in the sphere of rhetoric; the speeches and triumphal addresses were full of words about the German terror and violence, the triumph of force over the law in the past years⁴⁶, but it was primarily visible in almost an instant action of erasing everything that was German. Specific area of this activity took place in the above-mentioned institutions (even though there was a problem of the continuity of their functioning and Alsace's legal status, as well as the French government's right to conduct thorough changes), school, and the sphere of language and symbols.

The symbolic beginning of these activities was the execution carried out on the statue of William I who had previously been decorating the former Impériale square, renamed as the Republic square⁴⁷. William I's statue in Metz was to meet a similar fate, as it was removed from the city center along with his other statues which referred to the German history and, according to the city council resolution, were a „disgrace” to the surrounding space⁴⁸. William I was to be replaced by a monument dedicated to the Great War, and the initial date for its unveiling was planned for 19 November 1919, on the anniversary of the French troops' entry into Metz under the command of General Pétain. In the end, however, the unveiling of the monument dedicated to the Great War and commonly referred to as „Le Poilu Libérateur” took place in 1922⁴⁹.

According to Léon Mirman, the commissioner of the Republic in Metz, it was necessary to remove the „make-up”, under which the German authorities tried to hide the French customs and traditions⁵⁰. Therefore, he gave an order (based on the unanimous permission from the city council) to restore the French names of streets and boulevards, which

⁴⁵ *On se prépare pour la conférence. Les Allemands d'Alsace-Lorraine*, „I” 3 I 1919.

⁴⁶ *L'Alsace et La Lorraine libérées. Proclamation du maire de Metz*, „T” 2 XII 1918; *La désanexion*, „F” 1 XII 1918.

⁴⁷ *L'entrée des troupes français*, „T” 18 XI 1918; *Les derniers jour de l'occupation allemande à Strasbourg*, „T” 28 XI 1918.

⁴⁸ *L'Alsace et La Lorraine libérées. Les statues de Metz*, „T” 24 I 1919.

⁴⁹ In fact, the statue was destroyed by the Germans in 1940 anyway, and then reconstructed in its new version in 1956.

⁵⁰ *L'Alsace et La Lorraine libérées. Rétablissement des inscriptions françaises*, „T” 2 XII 1918.

had existed before 1870, and tomb inscriptions, the language of which was to be chosen by families in the future, and to replace the shop signs with French ones, or at least to translate their content from the already existing German versions; trading or industry companies forced to change their names into German were to return to their original French versions. In addition, the mayors and local authorities were instructed to remove all the emblems, signposts, and generally all the external signs that could remind people of the German domination⁵¹.

From 1 March all the German names were to be completely banned. And thus, there were around 20 names of streets, marketplaces, and boulevards in Metz, the names of which were immediately changed, e.g., Kaiser-Wilhelm-Ring into the Avenue Maréchal-Foch, the already mentioned Kaiserin-Augusta-Ring into the Avenue Maréchal-Joffre, the already mentioned Kaiser-Wilhelm-Platz into the Place de la République, Kaiser-Wilhelmstrasse into the Rue du Maréchal-Pétain, etc. The German names of forts and military buildings also took the hard hit⁵². Similar activities were undertaken also in Strasbourg, appointing a special commission for this purpose. As a result of its work, Strasbourg was to have the Place de la République, the Avenue de la Paix, the Marseillaise Street, the Rouget-de-Lisle's and Victoire, the entire set of names associated with heroes and places important for the Great War (Foch, Pétain, Castelnau, or Verdun and Marne), and the names referring to the geography of Germany were to be replaced by the names referring to the geography of France⁵³.

When it comes to the terms of the nomenclature, it was symbolic to exhort people to stop using the name „L'Alsace-Lorraine“, which initially appeared in the majority of headings and press released, in public speeches, declarations and addresses. The spelling with a hyphen was directly referring to the German name, „Reichsland l'Elsass-Lothringen“. It was postulated to use the spelling that would emphasize the separateness of the two areas annexed in 1870, i.e., „l'Alsace et la Lorraine“⁵⁴, which was soon reflected in the official nomenclature. On 14 August 1920, a directive was issued from the prime minister's office to the commissioner of the Republic in Strasbourg, which banned the use of the name „Alsace-Lorraine“ for the three departments: Moselle, Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Au nom des rues de Metz*, „T“ 9 XII 1918; *La débaptisation des forts et bâtiments militaires de Metz*, „T“ 17 XII 1918.

⁵³ *Les noms des rues de Strasbourg*, „T“ 5 I 1919; *Les rues de Strasbourg*, „T“ 10 I 1919.

⁵⁴ *Les départements récupérés*, „T“ 16 XI 1918; *Nos échos. On dit que...*, „I“ 7 I 1919.

While it was possible to change the signboards or names of streets relatively quickly, it was much more difficult to completely remove the German language from the public space. For the vast majority of the Alsations, it was their natural language which they used daily, along with the Alsatian dialect. According to the German statistics (indirectly confirmed by the later French statistics), before the Great War around 90–95% of the Alsations declared that they used the Alsatian dialect on daily basis and/or knew German, while there were around 10% of people who knew French, 2% of whom declared that they knew this language very well⁵⁵. Still in 1926, only one in five Alsations was able to use the French language daily, but for 79.8% it was a foreign language⁵⁶. This was a result of nearly fifty years of the German presence in Alsace and the active erasure of any French traces. Knowing the language did not overlap with the declarations about the nationality or the background provided at the time of determining the categories of the identity cards, it was believed that it was one of the basic elements of the nationality identification⁵⁷, and a school was a place whereby this identification and identity could be shaped in a special way⁵⁸.

The primary and final rule was: a complete domination of the French language. However, at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, it was rather a general aim than a realistic possibility. It referred to both the usage of French as the official language, what has already been mentioned, and the issue of teaching the language. Already in the first days of the French presence in Alsace, it was assumed that education at school would be in French and in accordance with the French teaching curriculum, and the emerging problems were to be addressed on an ongoing basis.

⁵⁵ M.-N. Denis, *Les politiques linguistiques en Alsace et la régression du dialecte*, w: *Contacts, conflits et créations linguistiques*, red. G. Brun-Trigaud, Paris 2015, tab. 2, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cths.1299> [dostęp: 8 V 2022]; Office pour la langue et les cultures d'Alsace et de Moselle. Le dialecte en chiffres, <https://www.olcalsace.org/fr/observer-et-veiller/le-dialecte-en-chiffres#sources> [dostęp: 12 XI 2021]; D. Huck, *L'école primaire et les questions linguistiques en Alsace entre 1918 et 1940*, w: *L'école française et les langues régionales*, red. H. Lieutard, M.-J. Verny, Montpellier 2007, paragraph 12, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pulm.906> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

⁵⁶ D. Huck, *op. cit.*, paragraph 16; M.-N. Denis, *op. cit.*, tab. 3.

⁵⁷ *L'Enseignement en Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 6 I 1919; P. Barral, *Depuis quand les paysans se sentent-ils français?*, „Ruralia” 1998, 3, paragraph 21–25, <http://journals.openedition.org/ruralia/53> [dostęp: 6 VI 2022].

⁵⁸ Ph. Jian, *L'école en Alsace occupée par l'armée française durant la Grande Guerre: „un des moyens les plus efficaces de propagande”*, „Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps” 2015, 3–4, s. 76–78, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-materiaux-pour-l-histoire-de-notre-temps-2015-3-page-74.htm> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022].

Before 1914, the majority of primary schools had been made up of the German public schools. Out of 3,421 primary schools, 2,910 had been public schools, 60 had been private schools (mostly with teaching in French), and 511 had been private kindergartens. All the types of institutions had been attended by 294,488 students and there had been 6,630 female and male teachers working in them⁵⁹. This great, efficient, and primarily German education „machinery” had to be immediately replaced by the French machinery. The problem was not in the dutifulness of teaching or even in the school structure, but in the language and the lack of personnel who, similarly to the officials in the French administration, should have knowledge of the German language or the Alsatian dialect, but also the fact that the French schools were secular schools, unlike the schools in German Alsace and Lorraine.

These problems were dealt with in many ways. In Sarrebourg, the mayor ordered to include two additional hours a day of studying French for children who did not know the language sufficiently, simultaneously forbidding to teach in German (which preceded the top-down regulations)⁶⁰. However, there were no French textbooks at schools and French books in bookstores. One of the correspondents from „Le Temps”⁶¹ pointed out that it was easier to buy the new releases in Berlin, Dresden, and Munich than in Alsace and Lorraine which were under the „language embargo”. In this situation, the residents of the recovered provinces were not only not *au courant* of the literary novelties, but they suffered from the overall lack of French publications. All kinds of books were required, textbooks and fiction literature, particularly books which could help with studying the language. This help was organized by whoever wanted and could offer it, volunteering flourished, private courses and evening classes multiplied for young people, adults, and children who were not attending schools yet. At the beginning of the 1920s, 1,500 teachers were brought to Alsace, many local teachers were sent to „training internships” in the middle of France, but the Alsatian school was for a long time far from the French ideals from November and December of 1918⁶².

The issue of the functioning of churches was as important as the problem with the language. For the Alsatians, who were Catholics in the vast majority, religion was an important element of their identity, and their attachment to religion was not consistent with the policies of the French

⁵⁹ Ch. Debierre, *L'Enseignement en Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 6 I 1919.

⁶⁰ *L'Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. A Sarrebourg*, „T” 14 XII 1918; Ch. Debierre, *L'Enseignement en Alsace-Lorraine*, „PM” 6 I 1919.

⁶¹ *Les ouvrages français en Alsace et en Lorraine*, „T” 23 XII 1918.

⁶² *Pour l'Alsace-Lorraine*, „I” 13 XI 1918; D. Huck, *op. cit.*, paragraph 29.

government based on the separation Act of 1905. From the first moments, the Alsatians were concerned about the possibility of extending this law to their territories. J. de Narfon in the rather conservative „Le Figaro” asked quite dramatically, whether the loyalty towards France showed by the Alsatians, their joy about being reunited with the fatherland, was to be disturbed by the actions that would hurt their spirituality, their religiosity. Didn’t their needs deserve to be heard by the French government? Particularly in the face of the loyalty declarations put forward by the Alsatian clergy⁶³. In the times of the Second Reich, the issue of separation was used as a deterrent to the Alsatians and the Alsatian clergy, but according to „Le Temps”, there was no reason at the time to doubt its loyalty, and thus it was worth thinking of some form of cooperation instead of escalating the situation with taking the overly radical steps⁶⁴.

Although the target plans of the French government, with a very unambiguous and principled attitude of the prime minister, Clemenceau, offered no provisions for exceptions, it turned out, already at the beginning of 1919, that these principles had to be slightly bent and adjusted to the local expectations and sentiments. This led to the concessions dated back to the autumn of that year and included in the Act from 17 of November, which kept the recovered provinces under the jurisdiction of the concordat from 1801. As it turned out, these concessions eventually received the permanent status in the legal system of the three departments established from the territory of the so-called „lost provinces”. To the present day, the regulations on religious associations in Moselle, Upper Rhine and Lower Rhine are based in their fundamental part on the concordat solutions and not on the Act from 9 of December 1905. This proves the severity of the problem and its significance in the process of a peaceful reintegration, which became clear already towards the end of 1918.

The issue of religion presented in a sharp focus the discrepancies between the ideas and the expectations of both the French side and the Alsatians regarding the process of reintegration. When in the autumn of 1918 Alsace and Lorraine were under French control once again, it resulted in euphoria. The mythical lands, the stuff of legend cultivated by the Republican school and anniversary ceremonies, in which the major role was played by the drama of being torn away from the beloved homeland, German brutality and Germanisation, were returning to their native and

⁶³ J. de Narfon, *Une adresse du clergé d’Alsace au cardinal Amette*, „F” 28 XII 1918; *Les églises protestantes d’Alsace*, „T” 2 XII 1918.

⁶⁴ A.-J. Soulet, *Pensons à l’après-guerre. Le statut de l’Alsace-Lorraine*, „L” 26 XI 1918; *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Les Nouvelles municipalités en Lorraine*, „T” 12 XII 1918.

inherent place⁶⁵. However, apart from this myth, French people did not know Alsace⁶⁶. They looked at it through the eyes of Hansi, an illustrator and author who symbolized the Alsatian loyalty to France⁶⁷, who talked to the French about Alsace, and to the Alsations about France, drawing an idyllic and idealized image in his books („Professor Knatschké“, „L’Histoire d’Alsace racontée aux petits enfants“, „Mon Village“) and the drawings distributed on postcards. Meanwhile, France was getting back the territories which for fifty years had gone through serious transformations. They had changed and they never really looked like Hansi’s drawings. The challenges that France and Alsace faced went far beyond the simple control of the post-war chaos or taking over the administrations and infrastructure. This problem was also not completely unrecognized by the French authorities, which is proven by the requests, made even during the war, to take on some propaganda steps⁶⁸, or the recommendations of the parliamentary commissions, but in general no one expected such deep and troublesome differences.

The image created in the press of the return of „les provinces perdues“ followed the path of the French imagination, emotions, and images stemming from the patriotic, republican school⁶⁹. The press reports became dominated by the descriptions of enthusiasm, parades, the Alsations crying at the sight of the tricolored flags, who were beaming with joy that the time of their captivity came to an end. In fact, there was no information on hesitant attitudes, or those burdened with anxiety about the future course of events and their new life. In densely distributed and usually informative articles, the press was also showing the absolute joy of the French, seen in the thanksgiving speeches, declarations, letters to the authorities, institutions and associations in Alsace made and written by the French organizations and associations, by schools, individual counties

⁶⁵ *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Les Nouvelles municipalités en Lorraine*, „T“ 12 XII 1918; *L’Alsace et la Lorraine libérées. Cinquante-deuxième jour de l’armistice. La germanisation pendant la guerre*, „T“ 2 I 1919; *L’Oppression allemande pendant la guerre*, „T“ 28 I 1919.

⁶⁶ Ph. Jian, „Apprendre la France aux Alsaciens et l’Alsace aux Français“: un gendarme alsacien en propagande dans le département des Vosges à la fin de la Grande guerre, „Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains“ 2015, 2, s. 92, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-guerres-mondiales-et-conflits-contemporains-2015-2-page-91.htm>, <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.258.0091> [dostęp: 12 VI 2022]; F. Roth, *op. cit.*, s. 125–127.

⁶⁷ On how „Le Monde“ titled the article after his death: *Symbole de la fidélité alsacienne L’Oncle Hansi“ est mort*, „Le Monde“ 12 VI 1951, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1951/06/12/symbole-de-la-fidelite-alsacienne-l-oncle-hansi-est-mort_2075355_1819218.html [dostęp: 8 VI 2022].

⁶⁸ Cf. Ph. Jian, „Apprendre“, s. 94–97.

⁶⁹ F. Roth, *op. cit.*, s. 89–90.

and towns, and private people. It was also visible in the popularity of fundraisings started for the provinces which were destroyed during the way and recovered⁷⁰ in order to help them heal their war wounds.

The issues that were difficult appeared rarely, in short excerpts, they were not emphasized. In the later months when the reintegration problems became too troubling and visible to ignore them, they were included in both the personnel decisions (A. Millerand) and legal matters (Act of 17 November 1919). However, towards the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, between the end of the war and the beginning of the peace talks in Paris, the press became a tool, in a more or less conscious way, which was used to help strengthen the position of France before the negotiations; it helped to form the already accomplished facts, also those on the mental level, to create the world in which there was no doubt about where the new border between France and German would fall and what the identity of Alsace was.

(translated by Anna Miączewska)

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NOTA O AUTORZE

Małgorzata Nossowska – adiunkt w Instytucie Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie. Zainteresowania badawcze: stosunki polityczne, społeczne i kulturalne między Polską a Francją w XIX i pierwszej połowie XX w.; kształtowanie się opinii publicznej, budowanie wizerunku i propagandy w prasie, prasa polska i francuska w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX w.; życie codzienne, mentalność i obyczaje w XIX wieku. Autor książek: *Świadectwo i tendencja. Korespondenci prasy warszawskiej o III Republice Francuskiej (1875–1914)* (Lublin 2001) oraz *O Francuzce, która pokochała Polskę. Rosa Bailly i stowarzyszenie Les Amis de la Pologne* (Lublin 2012) oraz publikacje dotyczących prasy francuskiej.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Małgorzata Nossowska – Associate Professor at the Institute of History at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. Research interests: political, social, and cultural relations between Poland and France in the 19th and the first half of the 20th c.; the shaping of public opinion, the building of images and propaganda in the press, Polish and French press in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th c.; everyday life, mentality, and customs in the 19th c. The Author of the following books: *Świadectwo i tendencja. Korespondenci prasy warszawskiej o III Republice Francuskiej (1875–1914)* (Lublin 2001) and *O Francuzce, która pokochała Polskę. Rosa Bailly i stowarzyszenie Les Amis de la Pologne* (Lublin 2012), as well as publications on French press.