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Data: 12/09/2026 01:37:06

DOI:10.17951/sb.2019.13.417-422
Studia Białorutenistyczne 13/2019 Reports

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International Scientific Conference. Eastern European Nations' Pathways to Independence 1914–1921. Ciechanowiec, 2018

On 6–7 June 2018, the Revd Krzysztof Kluk Museum of Agriculture in Ciechanowiec hosted the *Eastern European Nations' Pathways to Independence 1914–1921* international research conference. The event was co-organised by the Revd Krzysztof Kluk Museum of Agriculture in Ciechanowiec, the Department of Culture and National Heritage of the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship in Białystok, the Central Board of the Polish Historical Society, the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius, and the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun.

The conference was held as part of a research programme launched by the Podlaskie Voivodeship authorities in order to undertake wide-ranging research into the history of contemporary Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Latvia. As a result of the five conferences held between the years 2013 and 2017, we have broadened our knowledge of the history of the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania borderland from the early Middle Ages to the present day.

This year's symposium focused on the efforts of the Eastern European nations towards independence at their peak, following the outbreak of World War I and the fall of the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov Monarchies in its aftermath. The complicated ethnic mosaic of this part of the continent, coupled with rising nationalism, provoked and exacerbated conflicts arising from the incompatible aspirations of the newly created political organisms. Another major factor was the Russian Revolution and its considerable impact on the attitudes of the Eastern European nations.

Over the two days of the conference, Polish, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Russian and Georgian historians presented twenty papers in an attempt to illuminate the complex ethnic situation in the eastern part of our continent. With the speakers hailing from multiple countries, the conference provided an opportunity to contemplate the subject from a variety of angles.

On 6 June, the conference was divided into two sections, moderated by prof. dr hab. Andrzej Zakrzewski and dr hab. Oleg Łatyszonek. The first part pertained to the

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ethnic issues underlying the rise of Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia as independent political entities. Discussions in the other part of the conference revolved around Poland's independence struggles and Jewish efforts towards equal ethnic rights for Jews.

Prof. dr hab. Mariusz Wołos from the Pedagogical University of Kraków was the first speaker. In his speech regarding 'The Phenomenon of Polish Independence in 1918. A Lucky Coincidence or the Outcome of Poles' Effective Struggles to Reclaim Their State?', he examined the shift in Polish public's and international community's attitudes towards the idea of an independent state during the Great War.

Michał Klimecki from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun was next to take the floor. Speaking about 'The Internal and External Factors Behind Ukraine's Independence in 1918–1921', he emphasised that Ukraine's national liberation struggles were inherently flawed due to the existence of several state-formation centres and the external threats from its aggressive neighbours.

Professor dr hab. Dorota Michaluk from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun presented a paper on 'The Belarusian People's Republic in 1918–1920 – Why the Attempts to Build an Independent State Failed'. She highlighted the process of Belarus 'breaking away' from the Russian state, as well as the evolution of Belarusian concepts of statehood.

Dr Tomasz Błaszczak from the Vytautas Magnus University returned to the topic of the Eastern European nations' attempts at 'rising to independence' with a paper on 'The Internal and External Determinants of Lithuanian Independence in 1917–1921'.

Dr Tamaz Putharadze from the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University spoke on the 'Polish Contributions to Consolidating Georgia's Independence and Developing its Culture', discussing the Polish-Georgian relations at a time when both nations were in the course of becoming independent states.

Professor Yevgeniya Nazareva from the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow took the floor next, providing an interesting perspective on 'The Ethnic Question as the Factor Underlying the Downfall of the Russian Empire. Latvia and Estonia on Their Way to independence (1914–1917)'.

Prof. dr hab. Grzegorz Zackiewicz from the University of Białystok discussed 'Russian-related Topics in the Propaganda Leaflets Published by Pro-independence Socialists in 1914–1921'. He noted that the leaflets served as the main propaganda vehicle against the Tsarist and, later, Soviet Russia, pointing out that their circulation varied depending on the situation at the front.

Dr hab. Janusz Mierzwa from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków presented a paper on 'Galicia's Contribution to Polish Independence', in which he discussed Poland's independence efforts in the Austrian Partition, and Galicia's contribution to building the Second Polish Republic.

Dr Alicja Nowak from the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw spoke on the 'Polish Society in Austro-Hungarian Intelligence Reports in 1915–1918'.

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She provided a picture of how the occupation authorities perceived the people of the Kingdom of Poland.

The last speaker was Anna Wardzińska from the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, presenting a paper on 'Struggling for Equal Rights. The Jewish Question in Teofil Merunowicz's Journalism (up to 1919)'. She gave a biographical sketch of the controversial journalist and his views on the issue of assimilation and the coexistence of Poles and Jews.

The discussion centred around the question of why some Eastern European nations managed to rise to independence and establish their own nation states after the downfall of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and German empires, while others did not.

Consideration was also given to diplomatic negotiations on state boundaries. In this context, considerable attention was devoted to the issue of defining the Zbruch River as Poland's boundary, and to Ukraine's reactions in this regard. Issues around Ukrainian-Belarusian and Belarusian-Lithuanian borders were touched upon as well. When discussing the subject, panellists mentioned Germany's role in the independence and state-formation efforts of these nations.

In reference to Professor Mariusz Wołos's speech, Dr Rimantas Miknys addressed the interesting and fairly controversial question of which point in time marked the emergence of the new Polish national identity among the broader public, and how this compared with other European nations. In their attempts to answer the question, the panel stressed the unique – as opposed to other religions – role of the Catholic Church in bringing about national solidarity.

Issues around the Austro-Hungarian partition were the primary subject of the second discussion panel at the end of day one. Among other subjects, panellists discussed how the sentiments in Galicia contributed to increased tensions between Poles, Jews and Ukrainians in the Second Polish Republic after 1918. Furthermore, they examined the role of Galicia in Ukraine's independence and state-formation efforts. A large part of the discussion revolved around Galician officials, who were commonly discountenanced by Polish and Belarusian diarists and journalists living in today's Belarus. Next, staying on topic, the panel discussed the attitudes of the so-called Galileos on the territories of the Kingdom of Poland and Greater Poland.

Professor Andrzej Zakrzewski questioned the validity of the expression 'rebirth of the Polish state', noting that the Second Polish Republic was a completely new political entity, differing from the First Polish Republic in systemic, legal and territorial terms. While admitting that some of the ideas and concepts in 1918 were inspired by those espoused during pre-partition times, he stressed that the new Polish state, which emerged after World War I, drew on the legacy of occupying states in many respects. These influences could be seen in the legal and administrative system, the military structures, and even in the mentality of the people in the emerging Second Polish Republic. Professor Zakrzewski observed that the same was true for 'the rebirth of the Lithuanian state'.

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The conference programme also included a study visit to Drohiczyn, allowing participants to see the key landmarks of the Podlaskie Voivodeship's first capital city. The tour was guided by the Diocese Museum and Archive Director Revd Dr Zenon Czurnaj and Drohiczyn Saint Nicholas Orthodox Parish Curate Revd Eugeniusz Zabrocki, who gave an interesting walkthrough of the city's history and its historic sacral buildings.

On 7 June, similarly to the first day of the conference, the subjects were divided into two sections, moderated by Dr Rimantas Miknys and prof. dr hab. Antonina Kozyrska. The first section focused on Belarusian efforts towards independence, while the other explored issues regarding Lithuania and Ukraine.

Dr hab. Piotr Cichoracki from the University of Wrocław took the floor first and presented an interesting paper on 'The Polish Military and Civilians in the Hinterland of the Northern Section of the Eastern Front in 1919–1920'.

Next, Valentina Myatlitska from the Francisk Skorina Gomel State University spoke on 'The Involvement of the Gomel Region in the Belarusian National Movement in 1917–1918'. However, she extended her discussion beyond the titular period to illuminate facts prior to and after it, up to World War II, during which the national liberation efforts in the city were effectively suppressed.

The next speaker was Dr Andrey Bucha from the International Humanities and Economics Institute in Minsk, who spoke on 'Dreams of Recognition – Cooperation Between the Belarusian People's Republic and Czechoslovakia in 1918–1921'. One particularly interesting issue he touched upon pertained to the territorial conflicts between the two states and Poland, providing the Czechs and Belarusians with a strong impetus for cooperation.

Prof. dr hab. Dariusz Tarasiuk from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin presented the findings of his research in a paper entitled 'National Issues in the 'Białoruski Szlach' newspaper in 1918'. He illuminated the problem of the conflicting independence aspirations in Eastern Europe from the Belarusian perspective.

Dr Andrei Charniakevich from the Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw addressed the subject of Belarusian diplomacy in his paper entitled 'The Structure and Functioning of the Diplomatic Courier Institution in the Belarusian People's Republic (1918–1922)'.

Dr hab. Mikołaj Miazha from the Francisk Skorina Gomel State University continued to explore Belarus-related subjects in his paper on 'The Question of Belarusian Statehood in Soviet Russian Policies During the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1920'.

Unlike the speakers before him, Dr Rimantas Miknys from the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius focused on Lithuanian statehood. In his paper on 'The Issue of Lithuania's Independence in the Context of the Russian Revolution in 1917', he drew attention to the immense significance of World War I and the overthrow of the Tsarist government as well as the eventual seizure of power by Bolsheviks for Baltic nations' state-formation efforts.

The Ukraine-focused section began with a paper by prof. dr hab. Roman Wysocki from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, entitled 'The Great War

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and the Nation. Ukrainians on their Way to Proclaiming Independence in 1918'. He discussed the evolution of the process – from claims for autonomy to efforts towards Ukraine's independence.

Prof. dr hab. Siarhy Troyan from the National Aviation University in Kiev presented a paper on 'The Implementation of Polish and Ukrainian Statehood Projects in 1918–1923: a comparative perspective based on Stanisław Łoś's concept'. He attempted to provide a picture of both nations' efforts to reach an understanding as viewed by Łoś.

The next speaker was dr hab. Maciej Krotofil from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, presenting a paper on 'The Organisation of Polish and Ukrainian Armed Forces in 1917–1921 – Similarities and Differences Looking Back a Hundred Years'. He went on to further discuss the military issues addressed by Professor Wysocki.

Prof. dr hab. Mariusz Korzeniowski from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin closed the conference with a paper on 'Ukraine's Independence in the "Dziennik Kijowski"' Daily, focusing on the paper's articles on ethnic issues following the overthrow of the Tsarist government.

The first panel on day two of the conference explored multiple topics, including the presence of Greater Polish (Wielkopolska) troops in the Eastern Borderlands (Kresy) of the Second Polish Republic during the Polish-Soviet war. Particular consideration was given to how these troops treated the local population, highlighting their mentality, often marked by a sense of superiority to the people of Kresy (who were different from them in respect of ethnicity and religion).

Another question which came to the fore pertained to the map of the Belarusian People's Republic and 'Białoruski Szlach' articles on the demands related to BPR's boundaries. Dr hab. Dariusz Tarasiuk noted that none of the paper's issues he analysed described what the territory of the planned state would look like. Instead, the journalists of 'Białoruski Szlach' focused more on polemically undermining other nations' claims to the territories they considered to be Belarusian. In this context, he pointed out that the territorial aspirations of the Belarusian People's Republic were incompatible with other nations' interests. This was discussed in greater detail using the example of Germany's relinquishing Brest to Ukraine. The first panel finished with a debate on the role of émigré circles in the Belarusian state-formation efforts.

As part of the conference's closing panel, Professor Adam Dobroński underscored the significance of the Russian Revolution of 1905 for future independence struggles, highlighting how difficult it was for individual nations aspiring for independence to form their armed forces. The former subject was then discussed in the Ukrainian context. Panellists observed that ideas of autonomy or an independent state entity were uncommon among the Ukrainian nation's intelligentsia. Adding to the problem was the fact that Ukraine lagged behind in these efforts compared to Poland.

As regards military issues, panellists discussed the combat capabilities, resources and size of the Hetmanate's army, noting that the military in question was still largely at the design stage. As at 1918, the planned corps were considered reserves, with only a handful of units actually having the combat capability. Next, staying on military-

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-related topics, panellists looked into Polish nationals' service in the Ukrainian armed forces, and *vice versa*, during struggles for territory. A distinction between officers and soldiers was drawn for the purposes of the discussion, with the caveat that such inquiries would involve certain difficulties, especially with regard to privates.

Furthermore, the panel addressed the plans to define Ukraine's eastern boundaries in Caucasia, and the related role of ethnographic studies. When discussing this subject, panellists raised the issue of the multiple territorial concepts which started to emerge in the spring of 1918 in conjunction with the Ukrainian-Russian negotiations. The panel did not fail to look at the concept of 'the struggle for cities' and the efforts to reinforce the Ukrainian element in these struggles to oppose other ethnic groups.

In summary, it could be concluded that the papers presented and the discussions held at the conference shed new light on the state-formation processes in the Eastern European nations. Conference participants noted that the subjects raised were multifaceted and perceived differently by Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Russian and Georgian historiographies. The panels proved a valuable addition to the papers, allowing participants to expand on subjects that could not be treated with sufficient detail due to time constraints. All of the above-mentioned papers were published in the Conference Proceedings, edited by Professor Dorota Michaluk.

Translated into English by Marek Robak-Sobolewski