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## **Geopolitical position of Poland – from time of Partitions to the independence**

### **Abstract**

To understand contemporary geopolitics, especially Polish geopolitics you have to refer to the history. Polish geopolitical philosophy has flourished in a crucial period in the history of the country. To understand contemporary geopolitics, especially Polish geopolitics, you have to refer to the history. Polish geopolitical philosophy has flourished in a crucial period in the history of the country – the time of the fall of the First Republic and partitions. Sketch of Polish geopolitics is well composed into the broader plan of European thought. This is not just a simple analytical exercise. Article contains the suggestion, that the events, experiences and geopolitical configurations may exhibit amazing repeatability.

**Keywords:** *Geopolitics, Poland, Middle Europe, unification/separation*

International politics always takes place in particular time and in particular space. It means that specified relations between international actors are held under distinctive biophysical and socio-economic conditions. It is undeniable everyone who has an interest in understanding international affairs should identify and justify links between geography and centers of power. It is nothing else but pure geopolitics. When you make an effort you have a chance, based on reliable informations, to express proper diagnosis of political situation. There is no other way to create a vision and strategic concept.

XVIII century was incredibly turbulent for Polish people. Days when Poland was a regional power passed away irrevocably. The main effort was to revive national spirit in order to fight with blood sovereignty and independence. Was Poland an incidental „bastard of the Treaty of Versailles” as once mentioned Joseph Stalin. What conclusions can be drawn from Polish great geopolitics and is contemporary Europe is facing necessity of approach to geographical determinism and its revision. The XXI century focuses on internal European affairs and has no roots in the broader vision of Europe from previous centuries. Historically Europe is a global concept.

Geopolitics is a specific field of knowledge, by some considered as a separate science, another are at variance. Everyone has its arguments. Disagreement lasting for 100 years does not seem to dissolve before long. Like many fields of knowledge geopolitics could have different scope: as a branch of science, a research method, an journalism, a mythology, but also a humbug (Moczulski 2009, p.9).

As a separated field of science has begun its evolution in early XIX century. At first it was other research approach which emphasised far more impact of geographical environment paradigms in international politics. It represented processual approach by which I mean that for geopolitics there is no present, there is only past and future. The real question is: what key processes rules the international sphere of politics. Traces of geopolitics were inferred in german science mostly in works of eminent german geographers: Karl Ritter and Adam Heindrich Dietrich von Bülow. Representatives of geographical determinism perceived origin of nations and countries as a result of different factors from which one of the most important was natural environment. Their ideology includes in statement that the nature of country, its shape of mountains and rivers is also shaping the history of its nation. Later nazi ideology was drawing inspiration from geographical determinism which explained searching for Lebensraum.

Rudolf Kjellén a swedish political scientist used a term of geopolitics for the first time in his article *Studier öfver Sveriges politiska gränser* in 1899. The date now is a birth symbol of geopolitics as a separated academic science. Kjellén regarded that state is

inseparably related to land by which rival with other countries in order to reach favor. Not opting for any geopolitics approaches I let myself to quote Yves Lacoste: „Geopolitics is a skill of thinking in category of space and within carried on conflicts in order to penetrate the mysteries of actual events and act more efficiently” (Lacoste 2006, p. 13). From definition we can distinguish four areas of analysis: Actors with their mission and vision in politics; political and geopolitical structures which determine particular actions of actors; space, which one means land, water, air and cosmos and time (Skrzyp 2010, p.11).

There are stable factors of geopolitics like: space, location, distance, continental or insular character, natural resources, climate and culture. In fact I call in question the nature of „stability” with these elements. The matter is that a proper analysis should always take into account redefinition of terms which have been clear all along. May be the distance from point A to B have not changed, but in the face of new communication possibilities it does not make any difference and disadvantages to us. Scientist should everything casts in doubt. Variable factors are: demography, economy, technology, institutions and control over media.

In Poland origin of geopolitics followed chronology of its global appearance. In 1795 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after the first two partitions disappeared from the map of Europe. Poland lost sovereignty for 123 years. Prussia, Russia and the Habsburg empire staggered Poland three times in 1772, 1793 and 1795. Having been striking out Poland in „irrevocably and decisively way” partitioning powers made an attempt to bring Polish nation and land matter to their internal issues. Europe accepted Polish partitions with a tacit agreement. In fact European countries, so favorable to Poland justified such a situation with necessity of maintain balance of power in Europe. Neighboring states gave a vague explanation of their action, for instead supposedly in Poland would have been existing dangerous for status quo revolutionary movements. Great Britain kept restrained kindness and indeed Edmund Burke was right in when he said: „Poland is in fact treated like a country located in the Moon” (Burke 1816, p. 148). France was that time occupied with their own revolution and involvement of Russia, Prussia and Habsburg empire in Polish territory was beneficial to their case.

Altogether land which fell to Prussia cover 149 mln km<sup>2</sup> with 2,580 mln people. Russian empire took over 462 mln km<sup>2</sup> with over 1,3 mln inhabitants, and Austria looted 130 mln km<sup>2</sup> with 4,15 mln of people. The Prussian Partition was the most developed sector in former Republic of Poland. Despite of it since 1795 in effect of changing

geopolitical structure wealth towns located in the Wielkopolska started to slump because in new order they were nothing more like borderland with slavic inhabitants. Prussians started enter into force a new migration policy focusing on displacement of Polens and the poorest layer of Jews which have never again accured so much in those territories.

Industry was good expanded – in Silesia minig and metallurgy, in Pomerania machine and shipbuilding. Austrian sector was the poorest and underdeveloped which was the consequence of overpopulation, for 1km<sup>2</sup> over 100 people. Russian sector covered 81% of former Polish and Lithuanian territory. In contrast to Prussian sector agriculture was very underdeveloped. Dominated were small farms. Affranchisement was executed at the latest – in 1864. Characteristic was quick growth of working class.

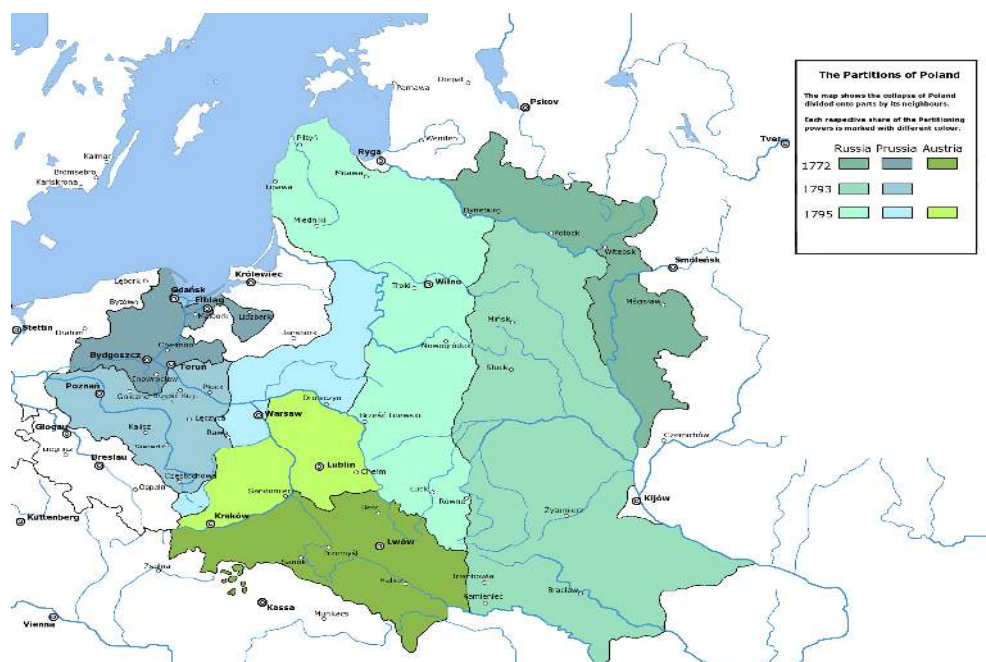
Intellectual disputes were focusing on reasons of state fragility leading at least to national disaster and on geographical character of Polish land and frontiers. In unfavorable geographical location began to be sought the main cause of state failure. For weak state with position between the Russia empire, the Kindom of Prussia and the Austrian empire there was no place for faint, divided against itself polish nobles, townspeople and peasantry.

The most prominent representatives of such a statement are Adolf Pawiński, Tadeusz Korzoń, Władysław Smoleński and Aleksander Rembowski (Sykulski, 2014, p. 96) . The very interesting thesis about transitional character of Polish territory in XVIII century presented Waclaw Nalkowski. Polish geographer and social activist argued that This transition had its manifestation in two meanings: communication and clasification. Poland for him was a territory where culture of West and East civilisation were clashing. It expressed in level of social wealth and in religiosity. Rich Catholics in West and poor Orthodox in East. Poland was a gate from West to East. Polish national structure before partitians was really varied. Together coexisted Polens, Lithuanians, Rusyns, Latvians, Germans and Jews. Reach of Polish territory Nalkowski designated on the Daugava and Dnepr in East up to Odeska bay, and in West up to Oder and Neisse.

The case of Polish land and partitions in XVIII century were object of analysis for Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz. In his most famous work *On war* about military strategy in chapter 6, Vol. 6 he wrote about Poland. Clausewitz by himself belived that in politics there is no bad intentions without true hatred. Hate infects people and in even the most civilised countries is the main factor that imply conflicts. Indeed with deeply hatred he referred to Polish issue as much as to German liberals which doctrine he considered as first step to destroy wealth existency of Prussia. In 1831 in memorial

*Die Verhältnisse Europas seit der Teilung Polens* Clausewitz perceived Alliance between Poland and France as a major threat to Prussians because of unfavorable change in power arrangements. In such a geopolitical situation the natural ally for the Kingdom of Prussia is Russia (Kocój 2011, p. 73). In multinational society Clausewitz also found a weakness in state structure. It would be a misuse stated that this specific ethnic mosaic he regarded as a obtuse social tissue, but he definitely thought in Poland lived belated inhabitants because of their ethnicity (Feldman 1935, p. 17).

**Map 1.** Partitions of Poland in XVII century



**Source:** *Ziemie polskie po III rozbiore*, Wikipedia, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rozbiory\\_Polski#/media/File:Partitions\\_of\\_Poland.png](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rozbiory_Polski#/media/File:Partitions_of_Poland.png).

You can list a few most important reasons of collapse of Polish sovereignty. The proces of gradually debilitation of leadership: ambition of Polish nobility was to mantain the greatest privileges for price of non-interference of foreign powers. The common Polish militray organizations was replaced by the mercenary troops, what efficiently undemined the national identity. There was no new vision for Poland what place and role this

traditional country should have played. In XVI century it was clear that Poland is a natural obstacle for Turkey and Muslims. We have a great deal of evidences in medieval and revival literature about the significant meaning of existence of Poland. Machiavelli wrote in his work *Discorsi*, that Poland was a rampart of Europe defended against Muslims, Erazm fromm Rotterdam in his letters to Polish king Zygmunt August found a special gratitude from Europe to Polish people for their bravery in the face of Tatar invasions. Instead of consolidation of state power, there was nothing to offer to even more stronger Europe. With time the ability to survive was also lost.

Polish *raison d'état* in those times was to take advantage of contradictions between France and partitions powers. Favorable conditions would have served to fight for independence. Efforts to relate Polish and French political interests miscarried. Polish legions formed in Italy, served with French Army. The Treaty of Campo Formio in 1797 once again confirmed irreconcilable differences between Polens and French People. At the beginnig of XIX century prince Adam Czartoryski created a concept about restoring at least a few rights to Polish nation based on Russian Empire. As a friend and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Aleksander I, he truly believed that tsar want to fix the harm done. He proposed receoption Prossian sector, and recoup Austrian sector insted of Silesia, which would been given to Austria. Unfortunately Napoleon posed greater danger to Russia, so it was required to seek likely allies, as always the sames – Prussia and Austria.

Aftermath of Napoleons victory at Friedland, as part of Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 Napoleon created a satlite state in form of the Dutchy of Warsaw. The duchy was held in personal union by one of Napoleon's allies, King Frederick Augustus I of Saxony. Superficially, the Duchy of Warsaw was just one of various states set up during Napoleon's dominance over the European continent, lasting only a few years and passing with his fall.

After The Congres of Vienna in 1814-1815 exept the obvious agenda after Napoleonic War to settle critical issues in Europe, Aleksander I had a plan to expand his dominance over the whole former Poland. He considered The Dutchy of Wars as a proper compensation for Russian loss during the series of Napoleon's battles. In Vienna Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, Klemens Metternich and Robert Stewart Castlereagh demanded restoration of Europe frontiers from 1795. The issue was crucial most of all for Great Britain which was really field with anxiety of sovereign Poland remaining under Russian influence (Feldman 1933, p. 67).

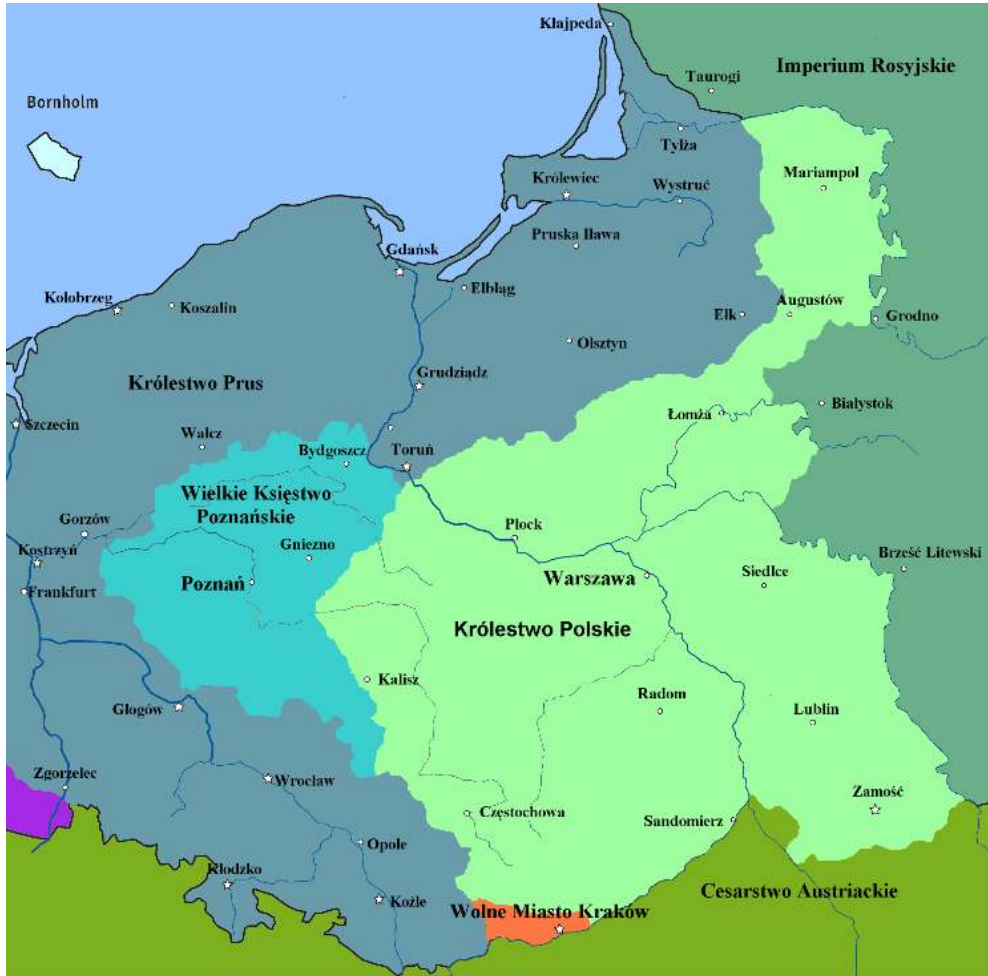
Map 2. The Duches of Warsaw 1807-1815



Source: *Księstwo Warszawskie w latach 1807-1809*, Wikipedia [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ksi%C4%99stwo\\_Warszawskie](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ksi%C4%99stwo_Warszawskie)

After all in 1815 Prussia recouped Wielkopolska, Austria received Ternopil region, Cracov was a free town, from the rest of former The Duches of Warsaw was created Polish Kingdom under Russian influence. Once again Polish land was divided by stranger powers, but in the other hand after 20 years after the third partition. A strong sense of belonging to Polish nation at first made a pressure of partitions states in order to eventually strenght conviction that *Poland has not perished yet*.

**Map 3.** The Polish Kindom 1815-1832



**Source:** Położenie Królestwa Polskiego, Wikipedia, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kr%C3%B3lestwo\\_Polskie\\_\(kongresowe\)#/media/File:Congress\\_Poland\\_in\\_1815.PNG](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kr%C3%B3lestwo_Polskie_(kongresowe)#/media/File:Congress_Poland_in_1815.PNG)

Despite of all maral successes about reinstatement just a fraction of Polish independency, geopolitics was still unfavorable. Russia continued to be the pupil of the European eye. Nobody cared to lead negotiation with this truly proud nation but with no political advantages. Prussia reconed with Russia empire, Austria was occupied with with revolutionary movement in Italy needed backing from Russia. For France and



Grait Britain The November Uprising (Cadet Revolution), was like a periphery action didn't undermine their countries.

What occupied their minds was actually The Belgian Revolution and the Italy issue. Talleyrand said „La Pologne n'est plus une affaire” (Czartoryski 1860 p. 394). As Alexander I used to say to his son Nicholas I: „Never give freedom to Polish people, continue what has been begun and bring to a head hard creation of russification of this country” (Nowak 1998, p. 18).

These days mostly dominated perception of potential instability caused because of Poland. Even in British mansion house Prince Albert convicted by Prussian and Russian ambassadors took the view about dangerous resemblance Polish to Irish People. In 1863 The January Uprising began as a spontaneous protest by young Poles against conscription into the Imperial Russian Army. No one have received sovereignty and independency as a gift. Having fought up with arms it was necessary to propitiate potential allies. In those turbukent days we had to deal with specific „Polish-European war”. On one side there was a struggle for mantain national culture and land, on the other side it was a fight for goodwill in Eurooe for Polish case. Untill 1914 for Russia apprehension of another polish revolution was secondary issue, more important was to gain the Black Sea strait, Constantinople and Galicia.

Father of Polish geopolitics has been recognized in Eugeniusz Romer. One of the most prominent Polish geographers in the early XX century. Already at the beggining of World War I Romer was devoted to land and political issues in Poland. In his diaries in 1988 he wrote: „Had once evid to only phisical geographical problems I completely lost former eagerness to river terraces, glaciers, rains, outfolows of water, because everything was lost in war flames. Every matter should lead to explain, connect to human will in order to act even more far-reaching” (Romer 1985, p.65).

Very interesting is his polemic with geographers which promoted a term of Middle Europe. As he considered this fake apellation has little in common with reality. He refered to great geographers of Renaissance – Botero, Cluverius – which didn't recognise term of Middle Europe. In fact scarcely one heard an idea of Mitteleuropa in german geographers school founded by J.G. Cannabich. Concept of Middle Europe was in his opinion, an useful tool in intentions about german exapansionism. Too many times frontiers of „Middle Europe” was changed in favor of German politics. First territory included only Germany, Switzerland and core Austrian countries. Then covered Holland and Belgium and finally it was also whole Austro-Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rumenia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia.

He completely rejected concept about transitional character of Nalkowski. Is better to state that Romer perceived the cause of Polish integrality in river system as a natural boundary for evolution of Polish nation. According to differences between Polish and Russian tectonic plate which generated quite differing climate, there was no reason in making statement about threat in fluctuation between Polish and East European culture.. Appreciating significance of geographical determinism he found in national spirit everything that could lead to sovereignty and prosperity. Being aware of clear distinction Polish from Russian people he stressed Polish-Ukrainian climate and geographic oneness. In fact he was aware of potential danger of multiethnic structure, but in the other hand his analysis proved that because of attractiveness of Polish culture so many fraternal nations took over most of cultural patterns. The future Poland he recognised as a federal state of nations (Harmasiuk 2002, p. 22).

In the face of permanent, devastating battles between Germany and Russia in World War I, both sides wanted to reap the benefits of Polish recruits. In 1916 chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Stephan Burian made a declaration about creation Polish Army in Polish Kingdom, which will have obtained sovereignty by the end of the war. The Polish armed forces would be created under German control.

Of course Russian empire strongly opposed to such a ridiculous announcement which violated their supervision of Polish territory. Substantially it was the first time in XX<sup>th</sup> century when the idea about independent Poland was examined as a solution for power balance in East Europe. In order to keep up appearances Nicholas II as a one of the goals of war named „restoration of free Poland united to Russian empire.” The issue of independent Poland became a part in discussion about new world order after war in speech of President Woodrow Wilson in American Senate in 1917. Increasingly Polish case occurred in international dialogue. It was realized that independent country between Russia and Germany was vital interest of stability in whole Europe.

In Russia 1917 took place an armed insurrection, commonly referred as a Red October. In those circumstances efforts of West states were doubled in order to stop spreading Bolshevism. Creation of Poland should have been one of the countermeasures. In 1918 in Versailles held a conference of allied states. One of decisions was to create an independent and sovereign state of Poland with an access to the Baltic Sea. Germany agreed to an armistice on 11 November 1918, ending the war in victory for the Allies. At the same time authority in Warsaw passed into Poles. In Paris Peace Conference in 1919 states officially approved II Republic of Poland.

Map 4. II Republic of Poland in comparison to contemporary frontiers



Source: <https://pl-static.z-dn.net/files/d81/8558c2a2c647311574c2468e6e405004.gif>

The main classic book in geopolitics of the period the II Polish Republic was Roman Dmowski's *Germany, Russia and the Polish Cause*, Dmowski pointed that should be abandoned any dream about restoring former shape of territory. In nonviolent means he saw a method to re-establish Polish state.

Map 5. Intermarium concept



Source: <http://sfppr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/>

In the past Poland had been treating as a buffer zone against Russia, but in the moment Russia became an ally for Entente politics changed. Time of II Republic of Poland was mostly dominated by discourse about adverse location between Germany and Russia. Two main geopolitical conceptions then formed are the most representative for state of mind of Polish geopoliticians. First one is concept of so called Intermarium. Plan pursued by First Marshal of Poland – Józef Piłsudski – proposed a federation of Poland, Baltic states, Finland, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Territory stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea was meant to emulate Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Second, also Piłsudski's vision, was Prometheism (Prometheanism). The term „Prometheism” was suggested by the Greek myth of Prometheus, whose gift of fire to mankind, in defiance of Zeus, came to symbolize enlightenment and resistance to despotic authority. The idea concentrated on support for non-Russian people lived within the Russian borders (Sykulski 2014, pp. 118-123).

**Map 6.** Europe before and after World War I



**Source:** <http://mrknights.weebly.com/uploads/1/7/5/1/17517537/1362054795.png>

In Europe after World War I changed not only an appearance of the map, but also an outlook on future European politics. We have to remember that the Russian empire at the beginning of the Great war had the most developed „national project” about resisting empire of the pillars of Russian nation and culture. Undoubtedly Russia acceded to war with strong faith in own strength, but ultimately the empire did not involve, but as a state also did not fall apart after all. Empires collapsed but not the east European nations. Austro-Hungary fell apart between two nations and Turkey was reduced significantly as compared to the Ottoman empire.

New Russia as Soviet Union kept its area of peripheral and ideological supervision. But there was a significant and clear turn in Russian politics. Namely during the Polish partitions we can distinguished a particular process as „collecting the Ruthenian land” and attempt to entry of Russia to European great politics. After the World War I, because of the strong ideological distinction from rest of Europe, Russia tried to convince every one to „only right vision of state.” Moscow was not in the suburbs of Europe but attempted to create an universal model of politics for whole globe. After 1918 German economy was in ruins. The terms of the Treaty of Versailles ordered that Germany had to pay huge sums in reparations to the Allies. In 1921, as Germany could not pay,

French and Belgian troops invaded and occupied the Ruhr to take goods and raw materials. It will not be an exaggeration to state, that after World War I Germany experienced unbelievable humiliation.

Poland suffered huge losses. In 1914 up to 1915 land of the Polish Kingdom and Galicia was the main area of combat activities. Loss of population was estimated for about 900 thousand in total, including 400 of civilians. Statistically every fifth household was utterly destroyed. Also damaged was the market sales of grain. New national borders caused closing of hitherto directions of trade. It is hard to characterize the urban destruction. Cities were razed to the ground. Areas of former Prussian sector were the least affected by the war devastation. Partly it was the reason of separatist trends from the Polish core. It took for about 20 years to rebuild the prewar industrial output. Soon after World War I imminent collapse of resurrected Republic seemed to be inevitable. Geopolitics was unbending. From the East occurred march of the Bolsheviks, from the West even louder were heard signals about revenge of the Versailles humiliation.

Despite the unimaginable socio-economical crisis Poland was successfully consolidated. Clearly country had its problems: areas of poverty on the east side or drastic political disputes. But eventually II Republic of Poland is still symbol of national pride. Decisively Poland proved that strong national identity could not be suppressed even in more than hundred years of enslavement. Nobody can agree with the Stalin's thesis about revival of Polish state as a incidental „bastard of the Treaty of Versailles”.

There are many reasons why just Poland effectively seized the opportunity of liberation. It is certain, that during the centuries Polish society was broken down by corrupted elites and low levels of society, which in most cases did not feel affection to Poland but to the Polish lords, which had vast lands with granges. Very puzzling aspect was temptation of forming autonomous districts only under the nobles authority. In practice every separate grange enjoyed unique legal order, but eventually collectivity of Polish baronages with so very heroic history was decisive. Of course, the ability of popular uprising faded away with an awareness of fake security. Overconfidence was pernicious.

In society evident was lack of middle class, which was aware about the rights and the duties of the citizen. Partitions established aversion to central authorities of foreign nationality. Those historical events was the base for creation a very interesting, but also intractable society of many individuals. Devotion to national interest is not an unknown issue, but for Polish people is easier to bear the greatest sacrifice only in the most dangerous situation, in the face of imminent threat. A little harder is to held every day

labour in the name of prevention from potential risk of security. There is no country where political quarrels lead to constructive solutions.

Another matter is ability of conducting public discourse about strategic interests without any pointless distraction. Education plays extremely important role in political affairs. The issue of the day is to prepare political elites for tomorrow. When civil society, so very familiar to Europe, was consolidated in XVII-XIX century, Poland had to make up and draw bitter lesson from the past. Can not be overestimated the role of religion in former Polish society. Other nations could have the opportunity of natural transition from conservative Christian values to modern civic values. In Poland the main wisdom was derived from doctrine of the Church, which always engaged deeply in state matters. This is quite understandable and justified. Change and evolution of political and voting behaviours proceeded with different intensity and in different time. Permanent reconstruction of polutaion and material losses did not make easier to keep pace with the West nations.

Admirable matter was Polish academic achievements so aptly identifying geopolitical location of Poland. Indeed, arguments of Polish scientists still constitute a collection of interesting information about Polish national interests. Past should not belong just to the past. Past experiences, despite of changing conditionality, are maybe more lasting than we all think. Undoubtedly many concept should be redefine, but truly after all the main cause is survive and thrive. Some states are privileged in view of determinants of geography. Ability to fusion values of interest between grupup of nations, which have their turbulent history, is the principle to build European community who has renounced violence in international affairs. Sometimes is too easy to forget about tenet of false perception of reality. *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.

Perhaps not societies, but aggressive politics takes responsibility for potentially aggressive behaviours relative to weaker states. But on societies lies the responsibility to remember about peaceful values and not undergo impulses of expansion. Polish scientific output is as well precious as German academic research. Giants of German geopolitics like Fridrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer or previously mentioned Carl von Clausewitz, created imperishable rudiments.

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