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The image of the Polish-Czechoslovakian dispute over Cieszyn Silesia reported by the Polish language local press published in the years 1918-1921

(abstract)

The primary purpose of the work is to present the Polish-Czech dispute over Cieszyn Silesia between Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1918-1921. The aim was to show it differently than scholars have done so far, i.e., an effort was made to base mainly on information from Polish-language Silesian newspapers published in the Cieszyn Duchy and publishing news in Polish. Among them were such titles as: *Dziennik Cieszyński*; *Gwiazdka Cieszyńska*; *Głos Ludu Śląskiego*; *Robotnik Śląski*; *Śląskie Wiadomości Wojenne*; *Ślązak* and others. The task was undertaken in the hope of obtaining answers to crucial questions, among them: what image of Cieszyn Silesia and the ongoing dispute over it was created in articles by the editors of local periodicals, did the Silesian press manipulate information when passing it on, or how was the image of the dispute presented that reached the reader? This intention was accompanied by a number of other partial questions about showing the rival states (and options) along with the relationships that influenced their preferences. It became the author's intention to determine to what extent the course of the Czech onslaught influenced the propaganda practiced by the media and the pressure it exerted on the population through the descriptions, reports, and commentaries in local newspapers. Efforts were made to portray individual events and opinions about them, including the Duchy population perception, as well as politicians, diplomats, and leaders from capitals or countries influencing the course and subsequent stages of the dispute. It became important to show what impact the image created by the press had on public sentiment and the course of the conflict, whether its activities were part of the government's propaganda, and whether it was not even a weapon of that propaganda. It became equally important to show the extent of its influence on public sentiment in the Duchy.

The chronological scope of the work was set for the period from the autumn of 1918 (the end of World War I) to the conclusion of the Skirmunt-Beneš Agreement (late autumn of 1921). The chosen timeframe includes a picture of the actions that the two nations took in their efforts to gain rights to Cieszyn Silesia and then shown through the prism of the Silesian press the circumstances of entering the phase of normalization of relations after the arbitration.

The structure of the work is problem-chronological.

The first chapter is an introduction necessary to understand the peculiarities of the region, its distinctiveness and unique character. It shows the entire history of the Duchy of Cieszyn up to the most recent times. A considerable burden rested on reconstructing the general background of the Polish-Czech conflict over the province.

The purpose of chapter two became to show the image, created by the press, of the rights of the nations and national minorities that inhabited the province, together with the presentation of the arguments that guided them in their claims to Cieszyn Silesia. Hence the explicit purpose of the chapter: Whose is or to whom should the province belong in the image portrayed by the journalists? The attempt to find an answer to the question posed in this way makes it possible to show the arguments of other nations and the options involved in the struggle for the province.

The third chapter presents the course of the Czech invasion of Silesia from the perspective of the message constructed by the press to determine to what extent it was complete and objective and to what extent it was part of a propaganda effort aimed not at informing but shaping public opinion. The intention was also to present a picture of the war crimes and rapes that accompanied the invasion of lands controlled by the National Council of the Duchy of Cieszyn. It is also an attempt to convey the image of the Czech soldier (through the prism of the press) and the way he acted during the fighting and in the conquered territories through the prism of his deeds recorded in the newspapers.

The fourth chapter shows how the press reported on concepts related to settling the Cieszyn question in the period from the invasion (February 1919) to the province's division (July 1920). Based on the articles, the projects related to the division of the region and the actions taken by diplomats on this issue were presented. A situation that led to the failure of the negotiations for the Polish-Czechoslovak border has been outlined – within the framework of bilateral talks (through consultations on the Warsaw-Prague line) as through a plebiscite.

The last, fifth chapter of the work presents the situation created after the Duchy's division, which was crossed for the first time in its history by a state border. Based on press publications,

an attempt was made in this part of the work to show the doublespeak that accompanied the campaign undertaken by Polish diplomacy to settle relations with Prague. It was conducted even at the cost of sacrificing those lands of the Duchy, where the Polish element was indisputably dominant and was under Czech control. Drawing on the accounts of Silesian journalists, an attempt was made to confront the official voices of diplomats from Warsaw accompanying the desire to regulate relations with Prague with the opinions of local activists and residents, who presented utterly different views on the issue, which naturally gave rise to misunderstandings.

As a result of the research undertaken, it has been found that the pro-Polish writings clearly emphasized the region's multicultural character. Unlike the Czech press and propaganda, which invoked historical rights to the Duchy, pro-Polish journalists emphasized its ethnically Polish character to include it (as much of it as possible) within the borders of Poland. It was confirmed by articles by journalists of the Silesian press showing Poles' political, military, diplomatic, and cultural activities living in the disputed region. It was established that the press did not always portray events following their course. It was possible to demonstrate that journalists in their publications resorted to manipulation, giving unverified information or creating it according to their conviction and with the strict aim of convincing the reader of the Polishness of Silesia. In doing so, other nations and options were ruthlessly marginalized, showing on the pages of newspapers a region dominated by the Polish element. The issue of fighting for the province's future, not only through armed means but also through propaganda in the ongoing preparations for the plebiscite, in which the press and its direct editors were deeply involved, became an essential issue. Thus, the arbitration and the resulting division of the province were met in the press with great surprise and condemnation from journalists disappointed by its outcome. Similarly, the Silesian press reacted with deep indignation to any attempt to establish cooperation with the Czechoslovak government to settle relations after the demarcation. In the pages of the newspapers, journalists showed their disapproval of any concessions by Warsaw to Prague, prioritizing the region's interests over the idea of creating good neighborly relations with its southern neighbor.

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