

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The Grand Duchy of Poznań: The Poles, the Germans and Prussian policy in the years 1815-1914

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The Grand Duchy of Poznań emerged from the

debates of the Vienna Congress which introduced a new order in Europe after years of revolutionary and Napoleonic turmoil. In the case of the Polish territories, the problem that was most heatedly discussed in Vienna was the territory of the Duchy of Warsaw, which came into being in the year 1807 and was made up of the territories of the second and third Prussian partition and expanded in the year 1809 with territorial acquisitions obtained at the expense of Austria as part of the third partition. Although the simplest solution would have been to restore the rule of Prussia and Austria, the interests of the Russian empire got in the way. After all, these were the Russians who had occupied the territory of the Kingdom of Warsaw at the beginning of 1813, driving out the remnants of the Great Army, devastated within their own territory to the west. For some reason, the Russians were not too eager to return this territory to their German allies and rivals, skilfully playing with the Polish card. However, ultimately, a compromise was reached and, on 3 May 1815, Prussia, Russia and Austria signed treaties with each other organising the political order on the Polish territories, including the return of the western departments of the Kingdom of Warsaw back under the sceptre of the Hohenzollerns. On this basis, on 15 May, Frederick William III issued a patent which proclaimed the establishment of a new province from most of them, which was supposed to bear the name of the Grand Duchy of Poznań. At the end of May, the Russians, who had so far been stationed in the new Duchy, withdrew and were again replaced by Prussians; on Sunday, on 28 May 1815, General Heinrich Ludwig von Thümen

(1757-1826) entered Poznań at the head of some hussars and an infantry unit, taking over the territories granted to Prussia in the name of the Prussian king. A few days later, a representative of the civil authority, the “Royal-Prussian Supreme President of the Grand Duchy of Poznań”, Joseph Zerboni di Sposetti (1766-1831) arrived in the city, and on Thursday, 8 June, he took power over the province. The Polish eagles in the town hall and the seat of the prefecture located in the post-Jesuit building at Gołębia Street were replaced by the coats of arms of the Grand Duchy of Poznań which presented a black Prussian eagle with a Polish emblem on its chest against a red background. Both parties, i.e. the Poles and the Germans, were anxious about the good atmosphere in which the new/old authority could be inaugurated. During a solemn parade, General Thümen and Zerboni di Sposetti were led, among others, by Senator Voivode Józef Wybicki, the main promotor of the Napoleonic option in the previous years, and during the banquet organised on that occasion, the supreme president proposed toasts in Polish in honour of the Prussian king.

The Grand Duchy of Poznań was kind of an experiment of the Prussian authorities, which was anticipating the arrangements of the final act of the Vienna Congress signed on 9 June 1815, and which guaranteed the preservation of the national identity of the Poles, leaving the determination of the scope of Polish rights to the monarchs of the partitioning countries. The national reality was certainly taken into account in the solutions worked out in Berlin, because as many as 65.7%

of the inhabitants of the Kingdom out of the total number of 776000 were Poles, 27.7% were Germans and 6.4% were Jews. Another important issue was the awareness of the failure of the previous Prussian policy on these territories, incorporated into the Hohenzollerns' state as a result of the second partition in the year 1793. At that time Berlin had used the simplest integrating solution - the newly annexed Polish territories were referred to as the South Prussia province, which was quite a cheeky act of historical policy, also, the Prussian administrative and legal system was introduced and lessons started to be conducted in German. The prevalence of Prussian officials and soldiers met with resistance not only from the Poles but also the Jews and even the local German population. No wonder then that the arrival of the French in Autumn 1806 was welcomed with genuine enthusiasm, which must have been a great shock for the Prussian authorities. From the point of view of Berlin, the Poles demonstrated a complete lack of loyalty towards their monarch and state; what is even more, their aristocratic elites, such noble families as the Niegolewskis and Chłapowskis shed blood for Napoleon - a child of revolution and a Corsican usurper - instead of defending Prussia.

Despite all the resentments, the state pragmatism resulted in corrections of the previous policy in 1815, as exemplified by the call for reconciliation announced, *expressis verbis*, in the appeal of King Frederick William III attached to the patent dated 15 May. The Prussian monarch declared respect for the identity and religion of his Polish subjects, adding generously, in quite sloppy Polish: "My

genuine will is to let the past be completely forgotten. My exclusive care is a matter of the future". In accordance with these declarations, the Grand Duchy of Poznań was supposed to be a part of the Prussian state, being at the same time provided with a number of elements which ensured its legal separateness, and above all, the recognition of the full equality of the Polish language in the public sphere, offices, courts and schools. From the administrative point of view, the Duchy was formed in the same way as other Prussian provinces, the provincial authorities were led by the supreme president residing in Poznań, and two administrative districts - Poznań and Bydgoszcz were lower level units. However, as well as the supreme president who exercised administrative power, the office of governor of the Grand Duchy of Poznań was also established, and this was an important institutional indication of its separateness. Despite the name, in addition to representative functions, the governor also held the position of representative of the Prussian king for contacts with his Polish subjects, holding the right to suspend any regulations of the supreme president which would affect the interests of the Polish community and to submit them for final settlement to the king. The status of the office of the governor was also lifted by the person who held it, Duke Antoni Radziwiłł, an aristocrat who had family ties with the House of Hohenzollerns through his wife, Duchess Luiza, the niece of Frederick the Great and the aunt of the ruling king of Prussia.

The Polish elites approached these solutions with caution, still trying to rely on Warsaw and hoping

that this belonging to Prussia was only of a temporary nature and that sooner or later the Duchy would be integrated with the Kingdom of Poland. The Prussians did not overly demonstrate their enthusiasm, many of them looked down on the Poles, however, a more important issue was that from the point of view of the bureaucratic apparatus, the Polish language and the existing legal specificities of the Duchy were an additional complication that made the management of the new province more difficult. Therefore, a natural objective was a gradually progressing integration with the rest of the monarchy and the first step which led to this was the introduction of the Prussian law and judiciary system in 1817, which was followed by a progressive Germanisation of the administrative apparatus, motivated by practical reasons - the legal educational background and the command of language. Attempts were also made to extend the scope of teaching German in gymnasiums and municipal secondary schools, which, in the end, from the point of view of the Polish youth who were then able to receive an education at excellent Prussian universities - was not a circumstance which should only be evaluated in a negative light. As an element of the actual limitation of the rights granted to Poles, this, however, was strongly opposed by the Polish elites, just like the inflow of a greater and greater number of German officials, teachers and soldiers to the Duchy. It is also necessary to pay attention to the fact that the Prussian rule brought a number of decisions which entailed far-reaching consequences. In 1821, under the influence of Berlin, the Holy See raised the status of the Poznań diocese to

archdiocese, this was more aimed at lowering the status of the primate of Gniezno, however, *nolens volens* subordinated the entire Poznań region to the authority of a single archbishop, making him the natural representative of the Polish, mostly Catholic, community. One act with significant consequences was the introduction of school duty in 1825, which, in the future, was to make the Duchy (and in general, the entire Prussian partition), an area with the highest level of alphabetisation that would stand in clear contrast with the other partitions. The difficult financial situation of the Polish landowners was improved by the establishment of the Land Credit Society in 1821, whose initial capital was provided by the state, however, the management - just as was the case with other Prussian provinces, remained in the hands of landowners. This, in turn, caused this institution to remain under Polish management for many years. On the other hand, the Regulation Act, that is, the Enfranchisement Act of 1823, was welcomed by the landed gentry with much less enthusiasm, though the introduced solutions, inspired by the Prussian legislation adopted sixteen years before, were much more advantageous for large private properties. Only large peasant farms were subject to enfranchisement, and the process itself was spread over many years, while the form and amount of compensation provided to a landowner for the loss of the free serfdom were to be an outcome of bilateral arrangements between the landowner and his peasants. The role of the state was to supervise the process of proper implementation of the regulations and their legal legitimisation. As a consequence of this,

enfranchisement created a healthy and effective agricultural system in the Poznań region, maintaining the strong position of the landed gentry and economically viable peasant farms, which, as opposed to other partitions, would not be subject to divisions resulting from successions. It is worth emphasising that enfranchisement in Galicia was proclaimed twenty five years later, after the regulatory edict, and in the Kingdom of Poland forty years later.

The enfranchisement was - so to speak - a historic necessity which gave rise to the formation of modern society, however, from the point of view of Berlin, it was also of significant political importance. Poles were perceived with distrust, and this was demonstrated by the initiation of the construction of a fortress in Poznań in the year 1828. The motivation for this was the geopolitical location and the resulting willingness to secure the eastern borders of Prussia and counteract potential Polish rebellions. From the Prussian perspective, the fundamental problem was the aristocracy which took charge of the Polish society and received support from the clergy; it was the main carrier of Polish national awareness. Peasants, who were the majority of the society, were perceived as a passive mob dependent on their lords and priests, which could have significant political consequences. This called the attention of Karl von Roeder, the commanding general of the 5th Army Corps which was based in Poznań during the November uprising. He claimed in his report that although the Polish peasant is completely passive and his attitude towards the authorities is slightly

favourable, if the Polish armies entered the territory of the Poznań region from behind the cordon, it would have to be necessary to take into account hostile mutinies of peasants against the German population and authorities. In Roeder's opinion, the reason for this was the peasants' historical hatred towards the Germans, which could easily be used by the representatives of the Polish movement. Roeder's concerns regarding the attitude of the Poles were not groundless; after the outbreak of the uprising in Warsaw in 1830, about 3000 Poznań residents including about 200 representatives of the most prominent Polish landed-gentry families rushed behind the Prosna River, just to mention for instance, Dezydery Chłapowski, Tytus Działyński, Seweryn and Maciej Mielżyński and Gustaw Potworowski. Although the uprising was against Russia, Berlin considered it a demonstration of their lack of loyalty, all the more that even at the very beginning of the Polish revolution the Prussian authorities had imposed an unequivocal ban on their subjects from going to the Kingdom. After the defeat of the uprising, its participants returned to the Duchy and had to face various prosecutions and repressions; some of them were imprisoned for some time in the fortress and their properties were sequestered, though they were returned to their owners after some time.

However, the general change in attitude towards the Poles was most important at that time, and the embodiment of this was the new supreme president, Eduard von Flottwell, who took his office in autumn 1830. At the same time, Governor Radziwiłł was dismissed and a couple of

years later this position was liquidated. Flottwell did not intend to continue the experiment of seeking agreement with Poles, discredited in his eyes by their participation in the November rebellion. The actions taken by him had all the traits of a conscious Germanisation policy, therefore, at the end of the 19th century, he would become a favourite figure of German nationalists. As well as the various forms of repression targeted at the participants of the uprising, Flottwell reorganised the judiciary and administration systems, increasing the number of German officials and removing the last Polish officials, i.e. poviats starostes. This gave rise to the practice of filling offices in the Duchy with Germans only, and resulted in a failure to develop the class of Polish public officials, which was the most numerous part of the intelligentsia forming in other partitions. In the spirit of the Prussian Protestant Enlightenment, Flottwell contributed to the ultimate liquidation of Catholic orders, and after the outbreak of the so called dispute regarding mixed marriages, he did not hesitate to arrest Archbishop Marcin Dunin in 1839, who was thereafter imprisoned in the Kołobrzeg fortress. These activities were accompanied by significant modernisation projects in the 1830s. The process of the enfranchisement of the peasants, inspired by the state, clearly gained momentum. This resulted in the occurrence of various tensions and conflicts which divided the gentry and the peasantry, which according to the intentions of the authorities was supposed to loosen the ties binding Polish peasants to noblemen and to provide grounds for the building of their new Prussian loyalty. The foundation of elementary

schools was significantly accelerated and the construction of a network of modern roads was started, which obviously had its military significance too. The effects of Flottwell's politics were rather ambivalent. The conflict with the Church wiped out, to a great extent, any expected positive effects of the enfranchisement for the authorities as it boosted the anti-governmental sentiments among the folks strongly attached to Catholicism. On the other hand, for the Polish elites, such a policy was a clear signal that passivity will lead to the integration of the Poznań region with Prussia and the marginalisation of the Polish community. This became an impulse for the first initiatives to which we refer as organicist, such as the "Kasyno" in Gostyń, the Poznań Bazar or the Scientific Help Society, the latter established on the initiative of a leading figure of the Polish movement, Karol Marcinkowski. It was also an absolute disgrace for Flotwell to establish a fund that would acquire Polish land property and sell it exclusively to Germans. Even for the Prussian officials in Berlin this turned out to be a gross infringement of the rule of law and of the principles of equality of all Prussian subjects. This coincided with a change on the Prussian throne, as Frederick William III who died in 1840 was replaced by his son Frederick William IV, who was a harbinger of a new, more liberal policy adopted towards the Poles. Its end was brought by the detection of a great conspiracy of the Poznań Centralizacja in 1846, which caused the mass arrests of the most active representatives of the Polish elites, and the dissolution of the majority of Polish organisations. An event that was urgently followed by the whole of Europe was

the great trial of conspirators in 1847, whose effects were swept away by the wave of Revolutions related to the Spring of the Nations, which reached Berlin, Prussia and consequently also the Grand Duchy of Poznań in March the following year.

The Revolutions of 1848 opened a short, but extremely intense episode when new solutions were looked for as regards the status of the Poznań region. After all, for a short period of time, the world, so to say, seemed to turn upside down. Polish conspirators, who were sentenced to death, were freed from the prison in Moabit and transported through the streets of the Prussian capital city. Polish students formed – as was the case with the November uprising – an academic legion which enjoying the sympathy of the Berlin residents. This legion kept guard in front of Prussian official buildings, armed with broadswords provided by the local president of the police who was ... Julius von Minutoli, the same man who had uncovered the Polish conspiracy in Poznań two years previously. In the capital city of the Duchy itself, the outburst of enthusiasm around this liberty movement made the National Committee, which had been established here on 20 March, demand the renouncement of the Polish territories by Prussia, however, the delegation sent to Berlin only limited itself to the more realistic postulate of providing broad autonomy to the Grand Duchy of Poznań (the so called national reorganisation). In that revolutionary atmosphere king Friedrich William IV not only gave his preliminary consent to this but also allowed for the formation of Polish

military troops in the Poznań region, whose task was to counteract the expected Russian intervention together with the Prussian army, though the commander of those troops, Ludwik Mierosławski, saw them as the foundation of the Polish army which would liberate all Polish territories and lead to the rebirth of the independent Polish state. The Polish movement was divided into those who wished to follow the reorganisation programme and the maximalists who sought a way to transfer the source of conflict to the Kingdom of Poland and trigger an independence uprising. However the expected Russian intervention did not take place, the evaluation of the significance of freedom forces in Germany turned out to be exaggerated and in addition to this, the resistance of the local Germans and Jews against the reorganisation project started to manifest itself more and more strongly. They did not agree to being treated as a minority in a province administered by Poles. After some time the king began to backtrack from his promise of the national reorganisation of the Grand Duchy of Poznań, making a proposal of its division into a Polish and a German part, while the direct aim of the army stationed in the Poznań region was to eliminate the Polish movement. The pretext for this was the issue of Polish military camps; the Prussians attacked the camp in Książ, massacring its defenders, and despite consolation victories near Miłosław and Sokołów, the Poles had to lay down their arms. Those who were taken into captivity had to face various humiliations and prosecutions, also from the German inhabitants of towns, through which the Polish prisoners were led, and some of them were

imprisoned for some time in the fortress.

The turbulent events of the year 1848 and the suppression of the Polish movement marked a new phase of Prussian policy in the Duchy, and a symbol of this was an official regulation which ordered the exclusive use of the name Poznań province (Provinz Posen), though the name of the Grand Duchy of Poznań was still present in the titulary of Prussian kings, and then also German emperors until the abdication of William II. The Poles, in fact, used this name ostentatiously, emphasising the separateness of the Poznań region in relation to other parts of the Hohenzollerns monarchy. Though the civic rights of the Polish subjects were also confirmed in the Prussian constitution from the year 1848, and then in 1850, the provincial authorities still used all legal measures possible to limit Polish activity. In 1850, a special act on the ban on the activities of organisations of a supra-local character brought an end to the Polish League established two years before, whose objective had been to gather together all of the Polish social and political activities. The official withdrawal of postal rights contributed to the collapse of the dynamically developing Polish press. However, the hostile attitude of the Prussian administration was not the only problem. The events of the Revolutions of 1848 quashed the democratic myth that the Polish cause in Prussia boiled down to a conflict between Polish society and the authorities with their bureaucratic apparatus. Meanwhile, the aforementioned hostile actions taken by a certain part of the German and Jewish populations against the Poles started to gain the

attributes of a nationality-based conflict in the Poznań region, in which the anti-Polish acts of the authorities could count on social support. The political motion of the German liberal circles, which had traditionally expressed their support for the Polish independence aspirations until the times of the November uprising, was of great importance. This revealed itself fully during the assemblies of the German-wide parliament in Frankfurt-am-Main, when the new formula of the German Confederation, which was to lead to the unification of the politically disintegrated Germany was discussed. At that time, a Polish parliament member, Priest Jan Janiszewski made an appeal that, as a historically Polish territory, the Poznań region should not be incorporated into the Confederation, affirming at the same time the right of Germany to unification. In a vote on 27 July, the Polish position was only supported by a very few representatives of the radical left wing (31) and some Catholic parliament members, it was rejected by a majority of 342 parliament members, who not only included conservatives, but also most of the liberals who questioned the historical argument, highlighting the fact that Germany had acquired the right to these territories as a consequence of civilisational work that had lasted half a century. During the "Polish debate" ("Polendebatte") Ernst Moritz Arndt classified the German friends of Poland as "ignorants, clowns or scoundrels", and another liberal parliament member Wilhelm Jordan, dotted his I's claiming that Germany should "wake up from the daydreaming self-oblivion" to pursue "healthy national selfishness".

This declaration was to define Prussian policy towards the Duchy and the Poles to a greater and greater extent. These, however, gained a new platform for national activity, that is, the establishment of the Prussian parliament (Sejm). Although this was just the legislative body of a partitioning country, the Polish parliament members, elected by the votes of the Polish electorate, became the natural representatives of their communities, which removed the odium of collaboration with the partitioning authorities from their activities in Berlin, which were in opposition to the ethos of an honest Pole. One body which represented Polish aspirations was the Polish Circle set up in 1849. In 1871, a similar circle would join it in the newly established parliament of the united Reich. It spoke with a consistent voice only in matters related to Polish rights, did not enter any deals with German parties and was the voice of the Polish community that demonstrated its aspirations and defended its rights. Although frequently this was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, sometimes the Polish Circle managed to achieve certain real effects, as was the case in 1859, when, owing to the loud inquiries of the Polish parliament members, it was possible to overcome the resistance of the provincial administration and bring about the unveiling of the first monument of Adam Mickiewicz on Polish territories, who had died just four years previously.

The turn of the 1850s and 1860s meant the reactivation of the Polish movement, and the first effect of this was the establishment of the Society of the Friends of Arts and Sciences in Poznań in

1857. A significant, national impulse was given to it by the events which took place in the Kingdom of Poland, especially the so called moral revolution which was initiated by the tragic events of 27 January 1861, when five Polish patriots were killed by Russians during a demonstration in Warsaw. The national-religious demonstrations also spread over the Poznań region, and what is even more, these patriotic emotions were also expressed at an organisational level, just to mention, for example, the Central Economic Society established in Poznań in the year 1861, an equivalent of the Warsaw-based Agricultural Society, which was to remain the main form of activity of the Polish landed gentry in the following decades. After the outbreak of the uprising, Poznań residents again rushed to the Kingdom; during its first months, the Poznań region was also an important base for the insurgent movement, though this was a subject of a heated dispute that divided the local elites. Some of the elites were against the uprising, which, in their opinion, never had a chance to succeed. As it turned out, they were right; the ruthless suppression of the January Uprising by the Russians, the greatest Polish defeat in the 19th century was a huge blow for Poznań residents too. As "Dziennik Poznański" wrote: "We are in the position of a farmer whose granary was destroyed by fire, crops were affected by hail and livestock was taken away by disease" (No. 230, 8.10.1865). However, it was actually in the middle of the 1860s that the previous organic work movement was reborn and intensified. This was demonstrated by the establishment of a number of organisations such

as earning associations, industrial societies and agricultural circles, which were to play a key role in Polish national activity in the following decades.

In the same period however, the Poles had to face yet another dangerous foe who would become a symbol of the anti-Polish policy of the Prussian state in the second half of the 19th century. This was one of the greatest European politicians of his time, the main architect of the unification of Germany - Otto von Bismarck, who was appointed prime minister of the Prussian state in 1862.

Bismarck, who, for a long time, was regarded as an unpredictable politician and therefore was not treated too seriously, had unambiguously expressed his negative stance towards the Polish cause even at the dawn of his career, in the year 1848. As a nobleman through and through, he treated the previous support of the burgher liberals for the Poles with unfeigned contempt, regarding this as a symptom of their political stupidity. With iron realism, he pointed out that the rebirth of the Polish state must cause Poles to claim not just the territories which were in the possession of Prussia and were an important geopolitical component of integrity of the Prussian state, but even East Prussia and Pomerania. Therefore, he considered the establishment of independent Poland to be in a structural conflict with Prussian/German state interests. As prime minister he was very concerned about the development of the situation in the Kingdom of Poland, especially the reforms of Aleksander Wielopolski, perceiving them as a significant threat. Therefore he was relieved by

the outbreak of the January uprising and immediately - on 8 February 1863 - he brought about the signing of the so called Alvensleben Convention with Russia directed against the Polish movement. It is worth paying attention to the fact that the situation in the Russian partition was of utmost importance for the Polish policy of Berlin; the strengthening of the position of the Poles in the Russian state made the adoption of a more severe approach towards their comrades in Prussia impossible because it would reinforce their aspirations and throw them in the arms of Russia. In this situation, the brutal suppression of the uprising and the adoption of a definitely anti-Polish course by Saint Petersburg was a green light for Berlin which allowed them to take measures aimed at the marginalisation of the Polish community. Representative of Bismarck's political manifesto regarding the Polish cause was the speech delivered on 18 March 1867 - as a response to the voice of the Polish parliament member, Kazimierz Kantak - in parliament, regarding the North-German Union established after the victory over Austria in 1866. Here, again, the dispute concerned the membership of the Poznań region in this Union, against which Kantak traditionally protested. Bismarck questioned the right of the Poznań parliament member to speak on behalf of the Poles, emphasising that he had been elected to the German parliamentary body by Prussian subjects. Above all, however, he deconstructed the notion of the Polish nation, which Kantak understood as 17 million people living in the territory of the Republic of Poland from the year 1772. Bismarck pointed out that the entire territory of the former

eastern Poland was inhabited, for the most part, by Orthodox Ruthenian population, which had more in common with the Russian authorities than with the Polish nobleman, who in his opinion was - "one of the most reactive creatures that God called into existence". This effectively reduced the number of ethnic Poles to 6500000 people, whereby the majority were peasants who just like their Ruthenian comrades, hated the Polish noblemen and were loyal to the authorities. Evidence of this was the bloody Galician slaughter in the year 1846 and the events of the Spring of Nations in Greater Poland, when - in Bismarck's opinion - the Polish movement was supported only by agricultural workers while peasant-owners preferred to stay away from it. An important argument was also the loyal attitude of the Polish soldiers of peasant origin (for the most part) during the wars waged by Prussia against Denmark and Austria. The Polish problem was thus reduced to a small group of aristocratic troublemakers and clergy that supported them, negatively affecting the essentially loyal masses of Polish peasants that were satisfied with the Prussian rule. These distinctive views, representative as it seems for the Prussian elites, were reflected in the successive phases of Prussian policy towards the Poles during the following decades.

Its first stage was the Kulturkampf policy initiated after the unification of the Reich, directed against the Catholic Church and political Catholicism in Germany, but also having a tangible Polish accent. The first step was the so called "pulpit paragraph", which allowed for the punishment of

clergymen for sermons regarded by the authorities as hostile to the legal order. On the other hand, the so called May laws of 1873 made the education of clerics subject to state supervision and the authorities were also to have the final say in the assignment of posts to clergy, including parish priests. This was followed by legal acts which eliminated the Polish language from secondary education in the Duchy, including religious education, and which introduced German as the language of instruction in public schools that were subjected to state supervision, thus removing this latter prerogative from the Church. Such developments were strongly opposed by the Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań, Mieczysław Ledóchowski, who was imprisoned in February 1874 and expelled from Prussia after two years. Also many clergymen who did not subordinate to the regulations of the authorities and who participated in the secret administration of archdioceses and illegal pastoral activities went to prison. Here the particular involvement of a conspiratorial group of young priests calling themselves friars must be mentioned.

In the middle of the 1880s, it was noticeable that Bismarck's policy of Kulturkampf had failed and had not led to the subordination of the Church to the state or a reduction in the influences of the Catholic party, called Centrum [Centre], which made the chancellor of the Reich withdraw stealthily from his main objectives and seek consensus with the Holy See. One of the elements which were to distract attention from this issue was the commencement of a new phase of the

Germanisation policy, which - with a short interlude for the rule of Chancellor Leo Caprivi in the years 1890-1894 - was to be implemented consequently until World War I. Its beginning, in the year 1885, was marked by the Prussian expulsions, that is, the expulsion of about 30000 people living in the Prussian state without citizenship. Two thirds of these people were Poles, and others included Jews, Russians and Austrians. This was the first step in a policy aimed at inhibition of the phenomena present in the eastern territories of Germany, which from the point of view of Berlin were disadvantageous. More and more Germans and Jews left these areas to settle in the west of Germany ("Ostflucht" - "escape from the east"), while the percentage of the Polish population increased. If Poles constituted 61% of the inhabitants of the province in the year 1871, then in the year 1910, there were as many as 65% of them in the total number of 2100000 people living in the Poznań region. On top of this, and contrary to the loud assertions of Prussian politicians regarding the attachment of the Polish folks to the Hohenzollern's monarchy, the Poles did not Prussify themselves and lose their national identity. The establishment of the Royal Settlement Commission (Königlich Preußische Ansiedlungskommission für Westpreußen und Posen) in 1886 was intended to counteract this. This was a state authority with its seat in Poznań, operating in the areas of the Poznań province and the West Prussia province, which approximately covered the territory of the present Gdańsk Pomerania. Owing to large state subsidies, which by the end of 1912 amounted to almost

800000000 marks, the Commission's task was to buy out the land estates, especially Polish ones, in order to support the settlement of big integrated groups of German settlers on them. It is worth paying attention to the fact that for the first time, the Prussian legislation applied the principle of supporting only Germans from the budgetary funds, which was an overtly discriminatory practice and contradicted the rule of law as the funds were also obtained from taxes paid by Poles. What was important was the reasoning behind this state of affairs, namely, the backwardness of the eastern provinces in relation to other parts of the Prussian state was reportedly related to the Polish demographic advantage in these regions (at least in the Duchy itself) and this could only be changed by the settlement of Germans, the natural carriers of higher civilisation. This "Hebungspolitik" - the policy of the "elevation" of the eastern provinces was reflected in the transformation of Poznań, the capital of the province, into the emperor's residential city, in which a representative emperor's district was built, with a monumental castle as the seat of William III dominating over it. One of the buildings erected there was designed for the Settlement Commission, a symbol of the new policy towards the eastern provinces. Despite millions of marks falling into the bottomless money pit which the budget of the Settlement Commission turned out to be, its activity was not satisfactory and this resulted in subsequent legal regulations. In 1904, an amendment of the Act on the Settlement Commission gave the right to the administrative authorities to issue authorisations for the building

of houses on the newly acquired land; the refusal which happened to peasant Michał Drzymała forced him live in a circus caravan, which became a demonstration of dissent to the discriminatory Prussian policy, known throughout Europe. On the other hand, in 1908, the Enfranchisement Act, which allowed for the purchasing of the declining Polish estates by the Prussian state, was adopted. This was widely condemned as a breach of the right to property, one of the foundations of modern civilisation. In addition to the fight for land, the German state strived for the further elimination of the Polish language from the public space. In 1901, the liquidation of the last enclave of Polish in schools, prayer in the Polish language, led to the strike of children in Września, which consequently spread throughout the Duchy; the next wave of school strikes took place in 1906. In 1908, on the other hand, the so called "Muzzle Act" was introduced. With the exception of election rallies, the Act prohibited the use of the Polish language at meetings of Polish organisations in communes where the percentage of Polish inhabitants did not exceed 60%. This was also compounded by limitations and administrative harassments to which Polish activity was subject in almost every field; when it turned out that a Polish professor of the newly established Auguste Victoria Gymnasium kept his savings in a Polish bank, this was regarded as incompatible with the attitude of a Prussian official and a demand was made to transfer the savings to a German bank. Thus, Berlin's policy led to a sort of privatisation of the Polish identity, ousted completely from the public space and closed inside a Polish reservation on which all

kinds of limitations were imposed. Support for these activities was granted by the German Eastern Marches Society (Deutscher Ostmarkenverein) founded in 1894 and called H-K-T based on the names of its three founders. It was a nationalist organisation which mobilised the German community to fight against the Polish danger while at the same time, disseminating the stereotypes of the Polish losers, their cultural inferiority, drunken peasantry, clergy practicing politics from pulpits and aristocracy losing their estates through gambling. When, on 28 January 1886, Bismarck, justifying the need for the adoption of an Act on the Settlement Commission, said maliciously that the German state will allow the Polish noblemen to free themselves from their tiresome duties and move to Monaco, where - in the local casinos - they feel the best, the Polish response was the headline on the first page of "Dziennik Poznański" - "Nie pójdziemy do Monaco" [We are not going to Monaco] (No. 28, 5.02.1886).

And indeed, the Poles coped really well in a situation which was more and more oppressive to them. They also tested various options after the dismissal of the Iron Chancellor in 1890; some conservative politicians even made an attempt at coming to an agreement with the Prussian state, obtaining certain concessions in return, however, ultimately, it all ended in a fiasco. The Prussians clearly ignored the changes that had occurred in Polish society. The leadership role in the Polish community started to be taken by quite a small, but at the same time, very active class of Polish intelligentsia which replaced the aristocracy,

whose material status and social position had become systematically weaker and weaker. An important role was played by the clergy which had a leading position in a number of Polish national enterprises, including, e.g. the Union of Earning Associations which was fundamental for the building of the economic position of Poles. Its first patron was Priest Augustyn Szamarzewski, and then the congenial economic genius, Priest Piotr Wawrzyniak. In addition to this, an important role in the modernisation of the Polish community was played by exiles in the industrial district of western Germany, in the Westphalia and Ruhr regions, who supplied the Poznań region with capital they earned there. This was one of the reasons why it turned out, in 1914, that all in all the Poles were able to win in competition with the Settlement Commission, which was subsidised by the government, by buying over 100000ha of land more than the above-mentioned Commission. Also, the Polish presence was increasingly marked in cities, especially the smaller ones, where they competed with their German and Jewish neighbours more and more effectively. If only one quarter of the trade enterprises were owned by Poles in 1882, then their percentage in 1907 increased to over 43%. The Polish activity and effectiveness in counteracting the policies of the most powerful state in Europe started to be noticed by, and aroused the reflection, not only of politicians, but also the German scientific circles. Therefore, at the beginning of the 20th century, several economic-social analyses of this phenomenon were produced. The author of one of them was Ludwig Bernhard, briefly employed in the Royal

Academy founded in Poznań in 1903. He was the author of a paper, published in 1907, under the title: "Polish organisational life in the Poznań province. The Polish cause" ("Das polnische Gemeinwesen im der Provinz Posen. Die Polenfrage"). Despite the clear reluctance, Bernhard's work was an explicit praising of the Polish organisational activity, it pointed to the key significance of the Polish clergy in the management of the organisational system and to the cleverness of the leadership circles in taking advantage of Prussian law to accomplish Polish objectives. As an antidote, Bernhard proposed the intensification of German settlement which was to change the national relations in the Duchy. Different conclusions were drawn, on the other hand, by Moritz Jaffe, the author of the history of Poznań under Prussian rule, published in 1909, ("Die Stadt Posen unter preussischer Herrschaft"), whose attitude towards the rural settlement was sceptical and who pointed out that the battle for the Poznań region will be fought in the cities, which the Poles had started to enter more and more boldly. Thus, there was no unity in diagnoses of the situation, even in German discourse, and the loud statements repeated in official situations regarding the immemorial Germanness of these lands roused serious doubts. This was voiced in 1911 by Gotthold Schulz-Labischin who worked in the Royal Library in the capital of the province. In a poetic vision of the German Poznań, he quoted a legend about Polish knights sleeping "deep under the cathedral and the [Bishop's] castle" and waiting for a signal to fight for victory. Seven years later, the signal was given.

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