

УДК 94(476+477+438)"1918"

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18524/2312-6825.2019.30.189342>

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## **1918 IN THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA, POLAND AND UKRAINE**

### **Summary**

*The article is about one of the most important problem of modern history – proclamation of the independence of Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians. Three nations, Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian, entered to the twentieth century enslaved and divided between the empires. The most prominent representatives of the Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian intellectual elite during the nineteenth century formulated programs regarding national revival and the creation of independent states. But why did the Ukrainians not succeed in expanding their independence in 1918? In the article, the author tried to find the answer to this question.*

**Key words:** Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, independence.

## **1918 РІК В ІСТОРІЇ ЛИТВИ, ПОЛЬЩІ Й УКРАЇНИ**

*У статті йдеться про одну з найважливіших проблем сучасної історії - проголошення незалежності литовців, поляків та українців. Три нації, литовська, польська та українська, увійшли до XX століття поневоленими й розділеними між тогочасними імперіями. Найвизначніші представники литовської, польської та української інтелектуальної еліти протягом дев'ятого століття формулювали програми національного відродження та створення незалежних держав. Але чому українці не змогли розбудувати свою незалежність у 1918 році? У статті автор намагався знайти відповідь на це питання.*

**Ключові слова:** Литва, Польща, Україна, незалежність.

**Formulation of the problem.** Understanding the historical moment is one of the important elements of the process of forming a holistic and logical view of history. Particular importance in understanding the historical process is occupied by the historical moments of the fracture, the changing of periods, because they have the characteristic features of the stage transition. The year 1918 is such a historic moment in the history of Central and Eastern Europe – a symbol of the final transition from the Traditional to the Modern Society and the formation of the system of nation-states in the Post-Imperial region, which at that historic moment became Central and Eastern Europe. In 1918, a number of new independent states, including Lithuania, Poland, etc., appeared on the political map of the world. These states were able to use all their resources to continue their status as independent nations. In contrast, the Ukrainian state, which at times had the best conditions for state formation, was not formed ... What prevented the Ukrainians and prevented Lithuania and Poland from going? We will try to answer these and other questions in this article.

**Analysis of studies.** The events of a hundred years ago still attract the attention of scientists. Scientists are trying to answer any questions related to the challenges posed by European countries after the First World War. 27–29 September 2018 International Scientific Conference "1918 in the history of Central and Eastern Europe:

the 100th anniversary of the UNR and the 100th anniversary of the Polish statehood" took place in Kharkiv. Vladislav Verstyuk (Верстюк, 2019: 7–15), Anatoly Rusnachenko (Русначенко, 2019), Olga Morozova (Морозова, 2018: 163–170), Dariusz Tarasyuk (Тарасюк, 2019: 185–194), Grzegorz Skrukva (Skrukwa, 2019: 228–240), Dmitry Bondarenko (Бондаренко, 2019: 274–280), Oleksandr Sych (Сич, 2019: 301–309) and others devoted their questions to the importance of 1918 in history. Scientists addressed the problems of the role and importance of 1918 for the fate of Central and Eastern Europe, the challenges of the early twentieth century, the collapse of empires and the formation of independent states, the Polish-Ukrainian territorial conflict, the Bolshevik expansion into the Balkans, the civilization choice in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe world war, etc. Despite some of the attention given to the problem of the significance of 1918 in history, there are still many questions that need study. Therefore, addressing the topic is particularly relevant and necessary.

**Purpose of the article.** The purpose of the article is to demonstrate the importance of 1918 in the history of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, including a comparative analysis of state-building processes that took place at the same time in different territories, the isolation of factors that prevented the formation of an independent state in Ukrainian lands.

**Presenting main material.** The year 2018 is special because Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians will celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the proclamations of independence of their respective homelands. Three nations: Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian, entered the twentieth century enslaved and divided between the then Empires. The most prominent representatives of the Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian intellectual elite during the nineteenth century formulated programs regarding national revival and the creation of independent states.

**Lithuania.** The Kingdom of Lithuania was established on the basis of the Lithuanian Independence Act of 16 February 1918 and de facto depended on the German Empire. Taryba – Lithuanian Council – proclaimed the independence of Lithuania with the capital in Vilnius. "This act did not mean the creation of a Lithuanian state, but expressed the will of the Lithuanian people to create such a state" wrote Grzegorz Błaszczak in the book "Modern Lithuania". The proclamation was signed, among others, by Antanas Smetona, later president of Lithuania, Augustinas Voldemaras, later Prime Minister of Lithuania, Stanisław Narutowicz, brother of Gabriel Narutowicz (100 rocznica).

The act of independence of Lithuania was recognized by Germany on 23 March 1918. The act is a justification for the existence of an independent Lithuania in both the interwar period and after 1990. It did

not specify precisely the system of the new Lithuanian state, but ultimately it was decided on a constitutional monarchy. On 4 July, Taryba (Lithuanian Council) voted to propose the crown to the German Prince Wilhelm Karol Florestan Urach, to which he agreed on 11 July.

When it became clear that the Germans would emerge from the conflict as losers, a change was made to the constitution on 4 November, introducing the republican system and dethroning Mindaugas II (which Wilhelm took his name).

The beginning of the rebirth of statehood was the declaration of independence and the transformation of the Kingdom of Lithuania into a republic (2 November 1918), and the end of the occupation (15 June 1940) by the Red Army and annexation by the USSR. Lithuanian independence was threatened by the Communists, who in December 1918 issued a manifesto on the seizure of power in Lithuania, and then proclaimed the uprising of the Lithuanian – Belarusian Soviet Republic. In 1919, the Polish army put an end to its existence. The act of restoring the Lithuanian state from 1990 invoked the act of independence of 16 February 1918 – it was found that it never lost its legal force.

**Poland.** The end of the First World War caused chaos throughout Europe. In the territory of the partitioners, spontaneous disarmament of the withdrawing German troops took place. Of course, the Poles immediately started a political fight amongst themselves. Numerous

Polish centres were established in various cities. Appointment of the Provisional Government of the Polish People's Republic on the night of 6–7 November 1918 resulted in stabilization of the situation. The crucial moment was the arrival of Piłsudski in Warsaw on 10 November 1918. On 11 November, the Regency Council entrusted the commander of the military authority and the command of the Polish Armed Force, and on 14 November – the civil power. Regency Council dissolved itself and established the government of the Chief of State.

16 November Piłsudski sent a telegram to the Western countries to notify them of the creation of an independent Polish state, covering all the liberated lands. 18 November appointed the first government of the Republic of Poland with the Prime Minister Jędrzej Moraczewski as its head.

Finally politicians in the country agreed to exile the Dmowski government and formed a government with Jędrzej Moraczewski. He issued a decree on 22 November, appointing Piłsudski as the Provisional Head of State. Focusing the full power in one hand, it was possible to stabilize the situation in the country. It was a practical achievement of independence (11 listopada). Nearly 20 years later, in 1937, the Polish Sejm decided that Independence Day will be celebrated on November 11 "as the anniversary of the recovery of the Polish nation independent statehood and the day after forever

associated with the great name of Jozef Pilsudski", the victorious leader of the nation in the fight for freedom of the fatherland (Odzyskanie).

**Ukraine.** On 22 January 1918, in Kiev, the Ukrainian Central National Council proclaimed the independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic. A year later, also on 22 January, two Ukrainian states united: the Kiev Ukrainian People's Republic united with the Western-Ukrainian People's Republic proclaimed in L'viv. At the beginning of the 1920s, the struggle for an independent Ukraine was unsuccessful. However, on 22 January, Ukrainian people remained a symbol of striving for a sovereign and united state.

The events of 22 January 1918 and 1919 were of fundamental importance as they gave rise to the presence of Ukraine on the political map of Europe. "For the first time in modern history, Ukraine was able to proclaim its independence and start building the state. But international conditions were such that the Ukrainian state was not able to maintain this. However the very act of proclaiming independence and those few years of building an independent state had far-reaching consequences for the construction of the Ukrainian statehood" (Nieudana walka).

In February 1918, the Reds occupied Kiev, but the independence of Ukraine was saved by Austrians and Germans – the Brest Peace Accord was signed. The German and Austrian armies entered Ukraine, ex-

pelled the Bolsheviks and set up "their man" – Hetman Paweł Skoropadski in Kiev. The governments of the "Hetmanate" lasted until November 1918 and although they are not highly rated today, it was then the Ukrainian state was born, with its own administration, education, courts, and most importantly - its own army. At the end of 1918, the Ukrainian state (all Ukrainian lands, including the autonomous Crimea) had an army of 300,000 soldiers (Nieudana walka).

Unfortunately, the Ukrainians had lost their chance. At the time of the defeat of the Germans supporting the government of Hetman Skoropadski, there was a conspiracy against him. The Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic was established, which almost immediately began a civil war with Hetman's supporters. It lasted over a month – and although it was not bloody – it led to the unraveling of the Ukrainian army. After this victory, the Directory could count on less than twelve thousand soldiers.

Government diplomats in Kiev made mistake after mistake: they hesitated too long to establish relations with the victorious Entente states, did not recognize "White" Russians, which led to a conflict with Poland, and their delegation to the Versailles peace conference consisted of politicians and not specialists. The Ukrainian People's Republic almost ceased to exist.

At the turn of 1919 and 1920, Polish-Ukrainian talks began, ending with the signing of the alliance agree-



ment. The Ukrainians received support from Poland. The Polish Army moved to Kiev and – together with the Ukrainians - liberated the city on 7 May 1920. However they held the city only for a month. Kiev then fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks for the fourth time. The basic reason for the failure was the exhaustion of the Ukrainians after a long-term war.

In October 1920, Poland signed a ceasefire with Bolshevik Russia, but Symon Petlura's army fought on. However, Ukraine did not gain independence. The victory was won by the Red Army and on 21 November 1920, the Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic crossed the border with Poland. Ukraine now became a part of the Soviet Union for the next seventy years. She would finally regain independence again, only on 24 August 1991.

Why did the Ukrainians not succeed in expanding their independence in 1918?

According to the eminent Polish historian, Jan Jacek Bruski, "the ignorance of the Ukrainian issue on the international forum also acted to the disadvantage of the Ukrainians. Ukrainians were long perceived as a part of the great Russian nation, and the Ukrainian issue was considered to be an internal problem of Russia" (Rok 1918).

Some historians and journalists have focused on the lack of a national consciousness amongst Ukrainians. The slogan of building a Ukrainian state did not attract

wide social strata in Ukraine. The historian of the UPR, Professor Władysław Werstiuk, draws attention to the anarchic mentality of the Ukrainian peasant – "a good host, but a political ignoramus" (Rok 1918). The peasantry did not follow the national program of the intelligentsia, some of the Ukrainian society did not grow up in the years 1917–1920 until independence.

Some historians believe that the Ukrainian elite failed their nation. They could not bring the rest of the nation with them, because they were too fascinated by doctrinaire understood socialism, they undertook social experiments, and neglected to build state structures, in particular a strong Ukrainian army.

From the beginning, however, there were considerable differences between politicians from both parts of Ukraine. For Halychan, the main opponent was the Poles, and for the Ukrainians of Dnieper Ukraine – the Russians, all the same: "White" or "Red".

Worldviews were not without significance: Galician activists were definitely more conservative than the leftist UPR leaders. All this made the Ukrainian federation actually a federation on paper only. For Petlura, who at that time became the main figure of the Directory, the membership of L'viv and eastern Galicia to Ukraine was not the most important in the face of the threat to the existence of the Ukrainian state with the capital in Kiev. Similarly, he treated disputes with Poland about Chełmszczyzna and Podlasie. It was abso-

lutely unacceptable for the Galician Ukrainians – they considered the threat of a revival after the period of the partitions of the Republic of Poland as a deadly one.

The UPR leaders had no doubt that it was the Dnieper Ukraine with its demographic potential, economic resources and the capital in Kiev, the historical cradle of Ruthenia, which must be the core of the statehood being built. Galician politicians emphasized that they had already created a bridgehead for the future Ukrainian state and that they were better organized and prepared for its construction than their countrymen from the east, although they had a year more to do so.

The allies had very little time to form a strong army and efficient Ukrainian administration, let alone gain international support for the Kiev expedition, which was, especially by the British, treated as a "Polish row". It should also be remembered that Ukrainians were perceived negatively in the West since the Treaty of Brest, which the Entente countries have considered to be treason. However, there were signals that this could change if the Polish-Ukrainian offensive brought more long lasting successes. The breakthrough could be Odessa's mastering and exporting supplies of Ukrainian grain, which a hungry Europe was waiting for (Rok 1918).

**Conclusions.** Thus, 1918 was a decisive moment for many European countries. After the end of World War I, Central and Eastern Europe emerged, independent states such as Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Czechoslo-

vakia, Latvia, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, etc. emerged, and the process of defining borders leading to inter-ethnic conflicts continued. 1918 marked the beginning of Ukraine's existence on the political map of Europe. However, the international conditions were such that Ukrainian statehood could not be restrained. There were various reasons for this. First, there is a difference in vision of the proclamation of an independent Ukraine and its future by the representatives of the Central Rada, the depletion of resources for struggle, the creation of stable institutions, the fatigue of society from high expectations for future changes, the impossibility of realizing those benefits that Vinnychenko and Shapoval insert in the Fourth Universal, the division of Ukrainian society, etc. The weakening of the Ukrainian army as a result of the fight between the supporters of Hetman P. Skoropadsky and his adversaries was a major reason for the defeat of the national liberation competitions of the Ukrainians. The main cause of the defeat was the depletion of the Ukrainians in the long war. The ignorance of the Ukrainian cause in the international arena played against the Ukrainians. Ukrainians have long been regarded as part of the great Russian people, and the Ukrainian issue was considered to be an internal problem for Russia. Some historians point to the low level of national consciousness of Ukrainians. After all, the slogan of building up the Ukrainian state did not lead to a large public Ukrainian mass. There is also the

opinion that the Ukrainian elites who failed to lead the rest of the people were prevented because they were too fascinated with the ideas of socialism, conducted social experiments, and because of that, the state structure, in particular the formation of a strong army, remained neglected. One can also talk about the difference between the politicians of Western and Naddniprians'ka Ukraine. For the Galicians, the main enemy was the Poles, and for the Dnieper Ukrainians – the Russians. For Petliura, who at this time became the main figure of the Directory, the affiliation of Lviv and eastern Galicia into Ukraine was not a major issue in comparison with the threat of the state with its capital in Kiev. The dispute with Poland about the Kholmshchyna and Podlasie region was interpreted in the same way. Instead, this position was absolutely unacceptable for Galician Ukrainians: they considered the deadly restoration of the Commonwealth. UNR leaders had no doubt that Naddniprians'ka Ukraine, with its demographic potential, business facilities and capital in Kyiv, should form the basis of Ukrainian statehood. Galician politicians emphasized that they had created a bridgehead for the future Ukrainian state, that they were better organized and prepared for its reconstruction than representatives of the east, although the latter had more time. An important point that did not contribute to the formation of the Ukrainian state was the negative perception of Ukrainians in the West, since the last signing of the

Brest Peace. Nevertheless, the very fact of Ukraine's declaration of independence and those few years of building an independent state had far-reaching consequences for building Ukrainian statehood in the future.

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