



11.11.1918

11 November: Poland regains independence

The Regency Council was established by the emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary as a provisional authority on the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland. Its members were Zdzisław Lubomirski, Bishop Aleksander Kakowski and Józef Ostrowski. Already in 1917, the regents proclaimed the first government led by Jan Kucharzewski yet each of their decisions still needed approval from the occupying states.



It was only in October 1918 that – invoking 14 points from the address by US President Woodrow Wilson – the Council proclaimed sovereign Poland. On 12 October 1918, it took sovereign authority over the army from the occupying states. On 25 October, the first Polish government after 123 years was formed, not dependent on occupier authorities, and three days later the Regency Council appointed General Tadeusz Rozwadowski Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces.



When on 10 November 1918 Józef Piłsudski came to Warsaw after his release from a German prison in Magdeburg, he was seen as the natural leader of the state enjoying its rebirth. The Regency Council transferred military authority to him, soon to be followed by civil authority, and appointed him Provisional Chief of State.

At that time, various centres of local Polish authority already operated on Polish territory alongside each other: the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland in Lublin headed by Ignacy Daszyński, the Polish Liquidation Committee with Wincenty Witos in Cracow, the Lublin-based Council of Delegates championing revolutionary ideas, and the Supreme People's Council with Wojciech Korfanty in Poznan. Foreign policy was still pursued by the Polish National Committee in Paris, headed by Roman Dmowski, considered by European countries to be the official Polish representation.

The first months of the Second Polish Republic were very difficult as local centres of power were of different political colours. There was also a growing threat from Bolshevik Russia with revolutionary sentiments amongst workers fuelling the hot atmosphere. To create a form of the state and government to be acceptable to all required massive diplomatic efforts and many compromises. Today, the term the 'founding fathers of the Second Polish Republic' is often interpreted to denote representatives of the right and left of the political spectrum alongside each another. Equally important were those who took over power and those who were able to withdraw and not to fight for power in the name of the good of the fatherland. The greatness of the politicians of the day lay in their successful agreement despite political

differences.

Obviously, to reach such an agreement was far from easy as after 123 years the incipient Polish state was radically different from the state lost back in 1795. The former constitutional monarchy was replaced by a democratic parliamentary republic. The first prime minister appointed in November 1918 was Jędrzej Moraczewski from the pro-independence Left. He was soon replaced by Ignacy Paderewski representing the right – and as such also enjoying the support of the centre – with his government recognised by West European countries.

As the revolutionary mood was passing away and the situation stabilising, the first election to the legislative Sejm was held in January 1919. The first legislature had 394 members and the political weight of the right and the left was balanced. Subsequent steps in the process of state-building were the drafting of a constitution and the first presidential election.



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References:

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