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Fights for the borders of the Second Polish Republic



Although western countries declared that it was necessary to establish independent Poland, it very much seemed that, busy setting up the new order, the countries of the Triple Entente had no intention to intervene as regarded the Polish borders. They realised that they needed to act fast and in the spirit of solidarity so that the country could regain a shape similar to that from the Partitions.

In December 1918, an uprising against the Germans broke out in Poznań Province. After six weeks of bloody fighting, the fighters defeated the Germans driving them out of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska). The Polish troops were recognised as allied with the Entente and the Polish borders were to be delineated by the conference of Versailles.



Under the peace treaty, Poland was granted Greater Poland and East Pomerania. Gdańsk was proclaimed a free city administered by the League of Nations. Popular plebiscites were envisaged in areas inhabited by Polish and German populations, i.e. Upper Silesia, Varmia and Masuria, to decide whether they should belong to Poland or Germany.

Disappointed by the treaty, the Polish inhabitants of Upper Silesia staged a revolt in August 1919, later called the First Silesian Uprising. The military action was soon discontinued yet the relations between the Poles and Germans remained very tense. Despite the presence of some troops of the Entente supposed to oversee the execution of the plebiscite, new fights ensued, known as the Second Silesian Uprising. Between 19 and 28 August 1920, victorious fights took place as a result of which the status of Poles in Silesia was much improved. Ultimately, the plebiscite took place on 20 March 1921. Poland was supported by 40.4 percent of the voters, with 59.5 percent favouring Germany. However, the divisions proposed by the plebiscite commission were highly unfavourable since a different system was used to count the votes, a breach of the peace treaty, which led to the outbreak of the Third Silesian Uprising. It lasted from 2 May to 5 July 1921 and was led by Wojciech Korfanty. Finally, once the ceasefire was signed, the border was delineated by the League of Nations. Poland received around a third of the area covered by the referendum, yet with coalmines which were of strategic importance for industry.

The plebiscite in Varmia and Masuria coincided with the key stage of the war with the Bolshevics, which is why the Poles were not able to be involved in the information and promotion campaign. Although many Poles lived there, the contested areas became part of Germany.

The eastern border was defined as a consequence of the war won against the Bolsheviks. Ultimately, the border ran much more to the east than the Curzon Line proposed during the Versailles conference. The final shape of the border was described in the treaty signed in Riga on 18 March 1921.



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References:

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