

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://pw.ipn.gov.pl/pwe/history/3750,The-victory-of-a-just-cause.html>
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The victory of a just cause.

"Marshal Foch, at a single stroke of his pen, caused the frustration of all the ambitious and dangerous German plans with the categorical statement: that's it, no more!" – wrote a journalist from the "Dziennik Poznański" in February 1919. One hundred years ago, the armistice which ended the Greater Poland uprising was signed in Trier.

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The unquestionable success of the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising and the pride accompanying the December victory mean that we sometimes forget about a slightly less spectacular diplomatic struggle which often needed discretion and took place at the same time in secrecy behind closed

doors during political meetings and in the quarters of the secret service. In the case of Greater Poland, this behind-the-scenes confrontation, which is still poorly investigated, began in fact as early as on 11 November 1918, when the territories of the Prussian partition, by virtue of the armistice treaty signed in Compiègne, which ended World War I, were supposed to remain an integral part of Germany at least until the final resolutions of the peace conference. This was, to a great extent, the result of the personal defeat of Marshal F. Foch during the negotiations, who, on the initiative of the leaders of the Polish National Committee, which operated in France, proposed the withdrawal of the defeated German armies in the east behind the line of the first partition of Poland from the year 1772, but this was effectively opposed by his British coalition partners. All this meant that, from the perspective of international law, the nature of the Greater Poland Uprising was that of an intra-German rebellion in the Poznań administrative district, which, in turn, gave rise to extensive action taken by the still perfectly organised German propaganda-disinformation machine. In accordance with the respective combinations prepared in January and February 1919 in Berlin, Germany did not fight with the Poles during the Uprising, it just “protected its own citizens on its own territory [!]”, thus implementing the... arrangements made in Compiègne.

The latter had hardly been signed a month before and by virtue of the separate negotiations between the Entente states and Germany, they

were supposed to be renewed in such a manner. And if in December 1918 and January 1919, the Germans managed to maintain the *status quo* established by the armistice without too many complications, in February, the true battle to cover the German-Greater Poland Front with the provisions of the armistice took place in this aspect. This was due to the military successes of the Greater Poland insurgents which could no longer be disregarded by the western allies. Another factor which strengthened the Polish cause in the international arena was the fact that not only did the Polish National Committee, which remained in direct contact with the Supreme People's Council, lobby for it, but also the new prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of the reborn Poland, accepted in western Europe – Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Last but not least, the attitude of the German authorities who were effectively alienating even the British, who were somewhat reserved towards the fighting Poles, also had an influence on the course of the armistice negotiations planned for February. The straw that broke the camel's back was the German response to a moderate-in-tone note of the British government dated 8 January 1919, in which an appeal was made to Germany to refrain from "any provocations towards the Polish population in East and West Prussia as well as in the Poznań and Silesia region". Having clearly lost a sober overview of the situation, the "unpleasantly surprised" German government wrote to London one week later that it was not going to tolerate a situation in which Polish citizens of the Reich "prepare a rebellion, a crime against their homeland and high treason", and in

the Poznań region per se... "the untamed wantonness of rapacious Polish imperialism[!]" prevails. Thus, the Reich felt forced "just like the English government in Ireland at a certain time - to take military measures, sending great forces to restore peace and quiet". The outright arrogance expressed in the quoted note as well the clear trick of using the marked Irish card expressly betrayed the change in the policy of the Reich in the east, and yet further clear proof of this was the transfer of the Supreme Command of the German army from Kassel to Kołobrzeg.

All these issues described above made the eyes of all of the fighting Greater Poland inhabitants turn towards Trier, where yet another meeting of the Armistice Commission was being held without Polish participation. The tension during the negotiations and its very large stake, i.e. the end of the Uprising in the Poznań region and the "legalisation" of its territorial possessions were all clearly felt in Poznań at that time ("Critical days!" - wrote the "Dziennik" on its first page). The threat of a breakdown in the talks and the very real outbreak of an open conflict between the Entente states and Germany were more probable at that time than ever before.

Ultimately, the German diplomats gave way under the pressure of an ultimatum given to them by the main architect of the allied negotiation strategy - Marshal F. Foch. In fact he threatened to leave Trier on 16 February 1919 in the evening, which, in the face of expiry of the existing armistice on the following day (at 5.00 a.m.) would have meant the resumption of military operations. Finally, the Germans gave up and even on that same day, a

document which prolonged the armistice from Compiègne was signed for an indefinite period of time, including a key paragraph for the fighting Greater Poland insurgents, according to which the Reich was supposed to “abandon immediately all steps against the Poles in the Poznań region”; the forces which were subordinated to it, were not allowed to pass the demarcation line delimited along the German-Greater Poland Front. Essentially, this meant the formal recognition of the result of the Greater Poland Uprising and the exclusion of the Poznań region from German authority, it also opened the road to the Homeland awaited by all Poznań inhabitants.

Piotr Grzelczak

VZwycięstwo słusznej sprawy. Rozejm w Trewirze, „Poznański Informator Kulturalny, Sportowy i Turystyczny IKS” 2019, No. 2, pp. 34-35

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Ten, który wygrał największą w dziejach naszą wojnę.
Głównodowodzący armią Kościuszkowską, marszałek Francji.
General Dąbrowski