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## **THE COMMANDANT'S GENIUS ERA – HISTORICAL ARGUMENT AS AN ELEMENT CONSTITUTING THE POLITICAL IDENTITY OF THE PIŁSUDSKI CAMP**

“The era in which the Commandant's genius flourished did not come to an end along with his death. We are still living in the same epoch”<sup>2</sup> said the prime minister Sławoj Składkowski in the speech which he delivered in the Polish parliament on taking the helm of the government. His words contained some sort of a credo adhered to by Sanacja and could be regarded as synthesizing the views held by the late Marshal adherents on the functioning of the state and the role performed by his camp in the political system of the Polish Republic. To clarify the opinion quoted in the above it needs to be said that it involved three important elements: 1) the belief that political activities which Piłsudski and his subordinates from the Legions and POW (The Polish Military Organization) carried out in the years 1914-1921 deserved a special credit for a key contribution to the rebirth of an independent Poland determining both its territorial shape and political system as well; 2) the conviction that those to whom Poland owed its restored independence were clearly endowed with so extraordinary abilities as to make the best candidates for dealing with all the important problems that confronted the Polish politics.

**Keywords:** Piłsudski's adherents camp, sanacja camp, political thought, political ideas, historical politics.

“The era in which the Commandant's genius flourished did not come to an end along with his death. We are still living in the same epoch”<sup>3</sup> said the prime minister Sławoj Składkowski in the speech which he delivered in the Polish parliament on taking the helm of the government. His words contained some sort of a credo adhered to by Sanacja and could be regarded as synthesizing the views held by the late Marshal adherents on the functioning of the state and the role performed by his camp in the political system of the Polish Republic. To clarify the opinion quoted in the above it needs to be said that it involved three important elements: 1) the belief that political activities which Piłsudski and his subordinates from the Legions and POW (The Polish Military Organization) carried out in the years 1914-1921

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<sup>2</sup> The stenographic report of the Sejm of the Polish Republic of IV term – the Session of the Parliament 26 (April, 6, 1936)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

deserved a special credit for a key contribution to the rebirth of an independent Poland determining both its territorial shape and political system as well; 2) the conviction that those to whom Poland owed its restored independence were clearly endowed with so extraordinary abilities as to make the best candidates for dealing with all the important problems that confronted the Polish politics. This conviction affected the way in which the representatives of the political camp under discussion treated other participants of the political arena. Piłsudski adherents simply refused to cooperate with other political groups on the grounds that the latter espoused during the Great War the policy which – as Piłsudski followers believed – definitely did not benefit the country and its people; 3) a sense of historical responsibility to future generations which Piłsudski managed to inculcate in his adherents. The notion of such a responsibility was often used to justify the efforts made by Piłsudski adherents to stay in power and to prevent the remaining political organizations – those that had failed "the historical test" – from exercising any influence upon public life in Poland<sup>4</sup>.

Following the events of September 1939, the self-image of the representatives of the camp in question was briefly hurt. A defeat in the military campaign gave its political opponents a good pretext for producing a deeply unfavourable picture of the historical role played by the Marshal Piłsudski and his political adherents, "Sanacja" came to be portrayed as a group which – rejecting the cooperation with other political forces – stayed out of tune with the sentiments and beliefs shared by the vast majority of all Poles. The line of action it took was denounced as wrong-headed and directed to no real/genuine interests of the state and its citizens. After 1926 the conduct of the government, it was argued, remained in the hands of men who proved unequal to the task of running the country. To pass their policy under so devastating a review was to strike at the whole historical image of the late Marshal from which the Sanacja regime derived much of its legitimacy. The Sikorski administration (and later that of Mikołajczyk) aimed not only at the political obliteration of the Piłsudski adherents but were also unstinting in their efforts to put an end to the legend which surrounded Piłsudski<sup>5</sup> (and which had been systematically spread since 1923, to become, after 1935, a kind of an official state ideology)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> W. Paruch, *Mysł polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego 1926-1939 (The Political Thought of Piłsudski Camp 1926-1939)*, Lublin 2005, s. 99 i nast.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the problem see P. Cichoracki, *Legenda i polityka. Kształtowanie się wizerunku Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego w świadomości zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1918-1939 (The Development of the Public Image of Marshal Piłsudski in Collective Consciousness of the Polish Society in the Years 1918-1939)*, Kraków 2005, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> The initiative taken by general L. Modelski – which was given much publicity – to abrogate the Act of the Polish Parliament of 7 April 1938 on the Protection of Marshal Piłsudski's Good Name as the First Marshal of the Polish Republic can be seen as an example of the efforts directed against the image of Piłsudski. Modelski tried to justify his initiative by arguing that the act just mentioned rested on some totalitarian ideas which elevated the individual above the nation. There was nothing to be found in both the past and the present that could justify the passage of the act which was an anomaly and for this reason ought to be rescinded. IPN, Rząd Polski na emigracji (MBP), t. 242, *Korespondencja generała do zleceń specjalnych Naczelnego Wodza I. Modelskiego z prezesem Rady Ministrów* (1941). (Institute of National Remembrance, The Polish Government in Exile, MBP, Vol. 242. *Correspondence of I. Modelski – general for special assignments in the Bureau of Commander-in-Chief with the Prime Minister, 1941*).

These efforts, however, were crowned with a very limited success. Admittedly, the conclusion of the Sikorski-Majski treaty led the last representatives of the pre-war ruling elite to retire from the government. On the other hand, however, the incumbent president ranked among the avid adherents of the late Marshal and some "sanators" (the name derived from the word "Sanacja" which denoted the Piłsudski regime and was designed to express the idea of riding a public life of all the corruption it was supposedly infected with.) managed – despite their isolation – to reconstruct party structures and even to go on a political counter-offensive<sup>7</sup>. The offensive consisted in the attempts 1) to give rise to a belief that standing by political ideas the late Marshal was the most ardent proponent was indispensable to protect the Polish interests. On the interpretation Poland was believed to owe both its rebirth in 1918 as well as its modern political system – adopted along with the regaining of an independence – to the Marshals political genius. The conceptions he endorsed were, undoubtedly, congruent with the requirements of the time. 2) to foster the opinion that it was necessary to continue with the policy embarked upon in 1926. To act in defiance of its principles was to act against the most vital interests of the Polish nation. By putting so great an emphasis upon the historical accomplishments of the late Marshal, his adherents drew the interpretation of the past into the orbit of the current political struggle. The result was a mythologized picture of the past – they more or less deliberately produced – that came to be made use of in support of what they regarded as the best possible line of action to be taken under given circumstances.

In the attempts to develop a kind of an "historical policy" which, then, was to be turned into a weapon fought with on the political arena, the Piłsudski adherents focused on 1) presenting the Second Republic as a state that could come into being only by a shrewdness and exceptional perspicacity of the Marshal Piłsudski and which – after his death – could function only by a great determination and devotion of his political successors. 2) endorsing the view that the foreign policy followed by Sanacja prior to the outbreak of the war was based on the right principles that should not be abandoned. 3) disarming – with the aid of an historical argument – all the efforts made with a view to disproving the policy and political ideas advanced once by Piłsudski.

## 1. JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI AND HIS WORK (THE SECOND REPUBLIC)

The articles written by the adherents of the late Marshal and published in the daily press show clearly both the way in which they perceived their former leader and the way in which they wanted him to be perceived in public. In the periodical brought into being in exile under the title of „Letters from London”, its editors declared:

„Józef Piłsudski opened a new era in the Polish history. Steadfast in adversity, he never gave up preaching the imperative to struggle for independence. His deeds never betrayed his principles and ideals. He laid the foundations of a restored country and defeated the enemy that threatened the very existence of an independent Poland. Indeed, he resurrected the Polish state. But his thoughts reached far ahead of his own time. That is where the sources of his temporary setbacks in achieving his ends are to be looked for. There was much discrepancy between the efforts which the nation – exhausted by the long war – was

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<sup>7</sup> For more see: A. Adamczyk, *Piłsudczycy w izolacji 1939-1954. Studium z dziejów struktur i myśli politycznej (Piłsudski adherents in Isolation 1939-1954. The Study of Political Thought and Political Structures)*, Bełchatów 2008, s. 41–84.

prepared to make, and the efforts which had to be made in order to achieve ambitious goals set by the Marshal. Nowadays, his unfulfilled ideas make up the message that he seems to be still sending from beyond the grave, making his presence distinctly felt.

He fought for the cause of his own country without trying to lock it up in a shell of the holy egoism of a single nation or within narrow confines of ethnicity. He contemplated a huge political reconstruction to be carried out in the "inter-sea zone" – between the Baltic and the Black sea – and aimed at the creation of a union of free nations which was to replace the Eastern colossus incurably seized with a constant lust for new conquests. That is why the Marshal made up his mind to march towards Kiev. And in Druskienniki, gazing for long hours at the Niemen river, he must have been dreaming of making a reconciliation with the Lithuanians and forging a new alliance between the two nations. At present, in the new turmoil of war sweeping across the world, the idea of federation is being revived as a hope held out by many nations including the Poles. Piłsudski whose thought penetrated far ahead into the future should still serve as our lodestar<sup>8</sup>.

Comparing the late Marshal to other heroes of the Polish history – those whose considerable services to the country were neither called into doubt nor belittled in any way – became one of the weapons of which his adherents made use in the political struggle. These comparisons were of course calculated to show that historical achievements of Piłsudski were as great and impressive as those made by other personages of the Polish past. Thus, Piłsudski, entering upon the same path as Boleslaus the Brave ten centuries ago, „moulded a tribal chaos into a real nation providing it with a strong state organization; what is more, his daring plans included all the lands of the Western Slavs stretching from the Danube river to the Baltic Sea – with the Lába river envisaged to serve as the resistance line against the German invasion”<sup>9</sup> Like Jagiełło and Stefan Batory, he successfully fought against Poland's two main enemies<sup>10</sup>, or, following the track of the rulers from the Jagiellonian and Vaza dynasties, tried to secure for his country a place among the leading powers of the Old Continent<sup>11</sup>.

The Marshal's adherents claimed that Poland owed its territorial shape and international position to his outstanding political skills. To them Piłsudski's Poland was the only one worth having. Its system of government should still be based on the Constitution adopted by "Sanacja" in April 1935. With the Polish authorities having to act in exile, this constitution had to remain in effect as it was the only tool with which to maintain the continuity of the law of the Polish state. In addition, it was the Marshal's political legacy, which in itself sufficed to justify leaving it intact. All the attempts made by the pre-war opposition which were designed to distort both the spirit and the letter of the Constitution in question in such a way as to weaken the president's prerogatives (the so-called Paris agreement were

<sup>8</sup> 19 marca, „Listy z Londynu” nr 2 (15III 1942) (19, March, „Letters from London” [later LzL] No 2 (15, March, 1942), s. 2. See also: M. Gałęzowski, *Wierni Polsce, t. II, Publicystyka piłsudczykowska w kraju 1940-1946. Wybór tekstów (Faithful to Poland, vol. II, the Writings of Piłsudski Adherents in Poland in the years 1940-1946. The Selection of Texts)*, Warszawa 2007, p. 65–68.

<sup>9</sup> 19 marca (19 March) ... , p. 2. See: M. Gałęzowski, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Realizm i abstrakcja (Realism and Abstraction)*, LzL, No 2 (15, March 1942), p. 3–4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3. As Piłsudski adherents indicated their former leader was well-acquainted with political and war doctrine to which Poland owed its rise – in the times of Jagiellonian dynasty – to the rank of one of the greatest powers in the world, which drove Poland along the path of federation policy, and which allowed Poland to take the lead in promoting the most advanced social arrangements by adopting the Constitution of May the Third.

violently criticised. Such attempts, Piłsudski adherents believed, were likely to have deleterious effect upon the functioning of the state structures denigrating at the same time Piłsudski's historical achievements. Worthy of mention here is the fact that all the efforts undertaken with a view to reinterpreting the constitution seemed to do more harm than good to those who were in power<sup>12</sup>.

In trying to disparage the idea of the changes their political opponents were tempted to introduce in the constitution, Piłsudski adherents exploited the myth of Targowica. They described political arena as having been radically bipolarized. *Us* – that is – Piłsudski adherents and a very small number of the just individuals representing other political camps who – like their noble predecessors from the times of the Great Sejm – embraced the path of legalism and *them* – that is – contemporary followers of Targowica who refused to act in conformity with the reason of state by deciding to endorse the amendments to the Constitution of 1935. Criticising the Constitution of April 1935 as well as that adopted on 3 May, 1791, played into the hands of Poland's enemies anxious to see it sink to a level of secondary importance. In this exchange, the question of Piłsudski's achievements was of course pushed into the background. With the signing of Sikorski-Majki agreement regarded by „Sanators” as highly disadvantageous, actually jeopardizing Poland's sovereignty, there appeared one more reason to liken those in power to traitors of Targowica. The failure of the foreign policy carried out by both Sikorski and Mikołajczyk seemed to give strength to the arguments put forward by Piłsudski adherents.

## 2. POLAND'S PLACE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

Historical arguments were often made use of in the evaluations of changes taking place in the world politics - the evaluations that appeared in pages of the periodicals published by Piłsudski adherents. In raising the issues of the Polish foreign policy, the latter tried either to indicate the situations analogous and similar to those which had once been successfully dealt with by the Marshal Piłsudski or to answer the question of how their former leader would have behaved in the similar circumstances.

The assessment of the decisions once taken by the Marshal Piłsudski and the juxtaposition of the policy carried out by the Polish governments during the Second World War with that carried out during the inter-war period led "Sanators" to arrive at the conclusion that the policy pursued by the late Marshal – unlike the efforts made by Sikorski and his successors – was characterized by 1) realism; 2) advisability; 3) initiative and 4) far-sightedness. With regard to the question of political realism Piłsudski was credited with, his adherents

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<sup>12</sup> Mirosław Dymarski who is an expert on the issues concerning the functioning of the Polish authorities in exile during the Second World War emphasizes the Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski's involvement in fierce disputes over the shape of the Paris agreement and the consequences of his conflict with Piłsudski adherents. Drawing on Dymarski's findings one can arrive at the conclusion that Sikorski's efforts to strengthen his position as against the Head of State actually resulted in weakening both the Prime Minister and the Head of State while augmenting the influence of political parties. This meant that Sikorski and his adherents failed to prevent party struggles from having a harmful effect upon affairs and as a result were liable for making the executive become to great extent subject to the pressure applied by political parties and their leaders. See M. Dymarski, *Stosunki wewnętrzne wśród polskiego wychodźstwa politycznego i wojskowego we Francji i Wielkiej Brytanii 1939-1945 (The Polish Political and Military Exiles in France and Great Britain 1939-1945)*, Wrocław 1999, p. 40 and next.

pointed out that "he was always a sober judge of Poland's situation between two powerful neighbours. He tried to maintain good relations with both of them for as long as he could in order to postpone the outbreak of war and gain time needed to strengthen the state. He was under no illusion that Poland's borderlines – both Western and Eastern – could remain peaceful for a long period of time. That is why – in addition to the attempts aimed at the internal strengthening of the Polish state – he planned to erect the federation system grouping all the smaller countries located between the Baltic and the Black Sea – with Poland performing the role of a leader of the alliance. Today, no one wants to question these truths"<sup>13</sup>.

Looking back on it years later it was obvious that the policy conducted by Piłsudski rested on two pillars: 1) two enemies theory and 2) the necessity to restructure international relations in the Eastern and Central Europe. The first one – though for as long as until the beginning of the Nuremberg trial, Piłsudski adherents could only speculate about the conclusion of Ribbentrop-Molotov pact without being sure that such an agreement had ever been reached - seemed to require no specific justification. All one had to do was to mention the events of 1 and 17 September, 1939. In any case, all the attempts to deny the validity of the theory – especially with regard to the Soviet Union - were viewed in the circle of Piłsudski followers as a clear indication of the lack of political realism. Worthy of mention here is the fact that the signing of Sikorski-Majski agreement was interpreted as amounting to a rejection of the theory in question as it included no clause guaranteeing the return to status quo ante bellum. Piłsudski adherents argued that something which could be referred to as a state doctrine of both the Soviet Union and Germany had already been formulated in 17th century by Peter I, Catherine II and Frederic II. Hitler and Stalin only adjusted it to a new shape of their states, employing new terms but preserving the old content. The events that ensued in the wake of a disclosure of the Katyn affair bore out the accuracy of their views.

Things looked similar when it came to passing a judgement upon the direction in which the policy pursued by the Polish authorities in exile was heading. Sanators were of the opinion that regaining an independent Poland should constitute only a minimal plan to be carried out by the Polish politicians. With the events of the years 1918-1922 serving as a point of reference for judging the present situation, the Marshal adherents indicated that Piłsudski, acting in his capacity as the head of state, never wanted to make do with the sovereignty received "merely as a gift". "Throughout his life – they said – Józef Piłsudski was unstinting in his efforts to create a strong Poland whose position was to rest on the cooperation with nations with whom Poles had for long centuries lived on a peaceful basis within the same Republic"<sup>14</sup>. Piłsudski's attempts to enfeeble Germany and Russia to the greatest possible extent or to elaborate an alternative way of protecting Poland against the

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<sup>13</sup> M. Gałęzowski, *op. cit.*, p. 73–74. Similar opinions were expressed in London: Piłsudski was the last great Polish romantic. He spoke and wrote with an evangelical zeal. At the same time he was an astute observer and a person of sound judgement. When the whole Europe locked itself up in the magic circle of its illusions and unjustified hopes as regards the rise of the Nazi Germany, Piłsudski came up with a plan of preventive war in 1933. He exhorts France to accept the plan. He takes necessary precautions in the East. He seeks rapprochement with the Czech Republic – not to get buried in idle talks about the brotherhood of both nations but to go to war against Germany. The whole world is now paying the price just because their initiative was never understood. See: *19 marca...*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *19 marca...*, p. 2.



aggressive tendencies of her neighbours stemmed from the belief that these two countries' hostility to Poland was constant and timeless. Hence, a string of events such as the uprisings in Silesia and Wielkopolska, the so-called Żeligowski's rebellion or the march on Kiev – each of which took place when Piłsudski served as the head of state – should be regarded as having been bound up with something more than the execution of the plans for a crude territorial expansion.

The latter was never an end in itself. It was just a tool used for depleting economic and demographic reserves of Poland's main enemies. The similar ends the Marshal and his adherents had in view when advocating federation conceptions, the Promethean movement or the idea of the Third Europe – the latter already after the Marshal's death.

The same line of reasoning was adhered to by the Marshal's followers during the Second World War. They refused to endorse the policy that confined itself to regaining a sovereign state assumed to emerge from the war with the same territory it had possessed prior to the outbreak of the war in question – all the more so that the policy pursued by the "Post-September" governments did not inspire one with much confidence that this allegedly realistic goal would ever be achieved.

Quite the contrary, with the question of the Polish borders left unspecified in the Sikorski-Majski treaty<sup>15</sup> and hardly touched upon in the Sikorski-Benes agreement<sup>16</sup>, one remained highly doubtful of the Polish governments' ability to achieve the end it set itself. "Sanators" were of the opinion that Sikorski and his successors made only inept attempts to adjust to changes occurring in the international arena while being unable to take any diplomatic initiative in dealing with the existing problems – which only confirmed the late Marshal's adherents in the belief that the line of action they suggested was the best possible one.

Piłsudski adherents thought that the wartime presented the Poles with a rare opportunity to come up with bold plans the realization of which would have resulted in the improvement on Poland's national security. That the representatives of the political camp under discussion acted on the assumption is clearly seen in all the activities a small number of them was given a chance to participate (the Continental Action – and carried out in its framework the operation "tripod"<sup>17</sup>) as well as in the political conceptions they promoted after 1939 (such as that of „*the Polish Heartland*” formulated in New York by Ignacy Matuszewski<sup>18</sup>, or that of the "*Intersea*"<sup>19</sup> born in London which had its more modest versions known as „*the*

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<sup>15</sup> K. Kumaniecki, *Stosunki Rzeczypospolitej z państwem radzieckim 1918-1943. Wybór dokumentów (Poland's Relations with the Soviet State 1918-1943)*, Warszawa 1991, p. 241.

<sup>16</sup> D. Seges, *Edvard Benes a sprawa polska w kontekście podpisania układu czechosłowacko-sowieckiego z 1943 roku, (Edvard Benes, the Polish Problem and the Czech-Soviet Agreement of 1943)*, „Dzieje Najnowsze” 2006, No 3, p. 21 and next.

<sup>17</sup> Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. Gen. W. Sikorskiego w Londynie, Kol. Jana Szembeka, sygn. 85. *Notatki J. Szembeka z lat 1942-1944*. (The Polish Institute and gen. W. Sikorski's Museum in London, Jan Szembek's collection, sign. 85. *Jan Szembek's notes from the years 1942-1944*).

<sup>18</sup> S. Cenckiewicz, *Ignacy Matuszewski jako geopolityk, (Ignacy Matuszewski as Geopolitical thinker)* „Arcana” 2001, No 2/38, p. 172–189; P. Eberhardt, *Twórcy polskiej geopolityki (The Authors of the Polish Geopolitics)*, Kraków 2006, p. 155–158.

<sup>19</sup> Józef Piłsudski Institute in London, Coll. Exile, Sign. 36, Doc 25, *Piłsudski Adherents' Ideological Declaration in London*.

Issue of the Baltic Sea"<sup>20</sup>, and "the Unification of the Eastern and Central Europe"<sup>21</sup>). Though the conceptions just mentioned differed in scale, none of them admitted of the loss of the Polish territory in the East and in the South<sup>22</sup>. They presupposed the acquisition of new territories at the expense of defeated Germany and the elevation of Poland to a position of a regional power. Hence, it was no accident that searching for historical analogies Piłsudski adherents fell back on the period from before 1918 dividing those who were politically active into "the activists" (that is, Piłsudski adherents and those who supported their program) and "the passivists" – the latter incapable of creating a strong Poland.

### 3. THE IMAGE OF "THE APOSTOLES OF MEANNESS"

It should not be forgotten that so bitter a criticism of political opponents raised by Piłsudski adherents had its roots in the fact that the latter were being gradually ousted from public life, while political conflict in which they were involved assumed an obliterating character<sup>23</sup>. In waging this political battle they found it convenient to centre it around the achievements of Józef Piłsudski. By employing such a strategy they provided themselves with an opportunity to present their political program as a real alternative – the efficacy of which was already attested to in the past – to inept, and even contrary to Poland interests, policy conducted by the government. To handle the conflict just mentioned in the right way it was necessary, they believed, 1) to show a full picture of what Piłsudski and his political camp were able to achieve in the inter-war period. Highlighting the Marshal's outstanding ability in begetting new ideas was to be accompanied by the criticism of the efforts undertaken by Post-September governments which were to blame for squandering all that the Marshal Piłsudski and his men had been able to build; 2) to move away from defining political opponents along the party lines. To maximize chances in pursuing their political ends, Piłsudski adherents found it advisable to desist from viewing political conflicts in terms of

<sup>20</sup> *Zagadnienie Morza Bałtyckiego (The Issue of the Baltic Sea)*, LzL, No 6 (17, May, 1942), p. 1–2.

<sup>21</sup> IJPIL, Kol. Polska w II wojnie światowej, sygn. 38, dok. 23. *Stanowisko Zespołu Piłsudczyków w Londynie wobec spraw Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*. (IJP/L, Col. Poland in the Second World War, sign. 38, doc. 23. Piłsudski Adherents in London towards the problems of Eastern and Central Europe).

<sup>22</sup> M. Gałęzowski, *Wierni Polsce. Ludzie konspiracji piłsudczykowskiej 1939-1947*, (*Loyal to Poland. The Piłsudski Adherents in the Underground Movement 1939-1947*) Warszawa 2005, s. LXVII i nast.

<sup>23</sup> The roles were now reversed. In the interwar period, it needs to be mentioned, it was the Piłsudski camp that fostered obliterating character of political struggle: For more on the problem see W. Paruch, *Konflikty unicestwiający w piłsudczykowskiej myśli politycznej XX w.* [w:] *Oblicza i koncepcje rozwiązywania konfliktów w polskiej myśli politycznej XX wieku (Destructive Character Conflicts in the Political Thought of Piłsudski Adherents in 20<sup>th</sup> century, [w:] The Conceptions of Conflicts Settlement in the Polish Political Thought in 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, ed. A. Wojtas, M. Strzelecki, Bydgoszcz 2000, s. 63–80. Krzysztof Kawalec indicates that it was only at the time of recreating the state that Piłsudski adherents were able to reach a compromise with the representatives of other political movements. In later periods the policy of compromise was replaced with that of confrontation. K. Kawalec, *Spadkobiercy niepokornych. Dzieje polskiej myśli politycznej 1918-1939 (The Heirs of the Indomitable. The History of the Polish Political Thought 1918-1939)*, Wrocław 2000, p. 112. The activities initiated after 1939 were nothing but the continuation of the process set in motion as far back as 1923.



a rivalry between various political groups or various ideologies. Political parties or movements taken as a whole were no longer referred to as the opponents proper to be vied with in the Polish political arena. It was individuals or factions within larger political groups advocating solutions which clashed either with political testament of the Marshal Piłsudski or the value system, adhered to by the political camp in question, that came to be treated as political opponents. The role of the main enemy was automatically played by the government whose activities were thought of as not only doing more harm than good to Polish national aspirations but also putting at risk the very sovereignty of the country; to treat a political struggle as nothing but a vehicle for affecting and shaping the views held by the public opinion. In order to settle the struggle in their favour, Piłsudski adherents focused on 1) criticising the attitudes and competence of the leaders of the opposing political camps; 2) evaluating the policy carried out by the government and its powerbase; 3) judging the conceptions put forward by various political groups with regard to the future shape of Poland and its place in the international environment.

Of course, the views held by their political opponents could not compare favourably with the ideas conceived by Piłsudski and later developed by his successors<sup>24</sup>. The latter found themselves justified in passing a very favourable judgement upon their conduct during the war:

"We have remained uncorrupted. Throughout the war we have never strayed from the noble path of soldiers which was once paved by Józef Piłsudski"<sup>25</sup>, and now, „eight years after his death, entering the fifth year of this great war, we can see better than ever that he was the greatest genius of our times who laid down the principles of our national existence"<sup>26</sup>.

In stark contrast with Piłsudski stood those who, having grown up in his epoch, failed to grasp and absorb his ideas and whose political narrow-mindedness not only made Poland unable to rise to such a place in Europe as it deserved but was also responsible for making it emerge from war deprived of both its sovereignty and a considerable part of its territory. It took the regaining of independence to see the renaissance of "the epoch of the Commandant". All the efforts the Communist authorities put into either expunging a good image of the Marshal Piłsudski from collective memory or disparaging his policy were entirely unsuccessful<sup>27</sup>. Quite naturally, it was only with the advent of independence in 1989 that some of the political ideas developed by Piłsudski and his camp could be taken advantage of in every day political practice. *The epoch of Commandant* – along with 1 and 17 September, denunciation of Yalta and Potsdam, the truth of Katyn Massacre – had become one of the pillars of what has recently been referred to as an historical policy carried out by successive administrations. The decision made by the Polish Sejm as early as on February 21, 1989, establishing the Independence Day on November the 11<sup>th</sup> may be regarded as the first act

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<sup>24</sup> Piłsudski adherents argued that "it is really important for our ancestors to understand the legacy of the late genius... the mediocre characters will try to ignore and downplay it for as long as they can. (M. Gałęzowski, *Wierni Polsce*, vol. II..., p. 69).

<sup>25</sup> *Ku Polsce wyzwolonej (Toward Liberated Poland)*, LzL, No 2 (15, March, 1942), s. 2.

<sup>26</sup> (M. Gałęzowski, *Wierni Polsce*, vol. II..., p. 69).

<sup>27</sup> The efforts made with a view to hurting the image of the Marshal Piłsudski can be exemplified by such books as: S. Arski, *My, pierwsza brygada (We, The First Brigade)*, Warszawa 1963 or K. Lapter, *Pakt Piłsudski-Hitler (Piłsudski-Hitler Pact)*, Warszawa 1962; S. Migdał, *Piłsudczyzna w latach pierwszej wojny światowej. Zarys działalności i ideologii (Piłsudski Adherents during the First World War. The Activities and Ideology)*, Katowice 1961.

in according the legacy of the Second Republic the right place in historical consciousness of the Polish people. The erecting of Piłsudski's statues on so large a scale in Poland, in such a great number of the Polish cities, is another example of attempts to revive a tradition of the inter-war Poland, which goes parallel with a desire to remove from public space all traces of the Communist past. These attempts should be interpreted as stemming from a strong need to manifest national pride, display outer symbols of national memory and draw on the experiences of the most recent history. It is quite obvious that these sentiments had to remain dormant during the Communist era.

In addition to an official recognition of Piłsudski's historical achievements, political parties of today in Poland have also been led to draw upon the ideas that can be linked to Piłsudski and his adherents. Admittedly, the only political party which after 1989 was explicit about following the tradition of Piłsudski's political camp – the Confederacy of the Independent Poland – failed, after its rift, to rebuild party structures to such a degree as to be able to function in the Polish political system. This, however, should not be taken to mean that political projects, once opted for by Piłsudski adherents, have entirely disappeared. It will suffice to mention the idea of moral, economic and political reform, presented in a variety of forms, which remains foundation stone of the majority of political parties that have been present in Poland's political life since the collapse of the Communism. It also stood behind the conception of building the „Fourth Republic of Poland” propagated by the Law and Justice Party.

The same can be said of other aspects of the political thought of Piłsudski camp. Terminology employed by „Sanators”, however, can hardly be met with in political vocabulary of today – but the blame for the fact, it seems, lies with „political correctness”. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the persistence of the „two enemies theory”. The periods in which the relations with both Eastern and Western neighbour have seemed to be quite normal and free of hostilities do not change the fact that historical experiences bound up with the attempts made by both neighbouring states to annihilate the Polish statehood still weigh heavily with the relations between Poland and Russia and between Poland and Germany as well. Things look similar with the efforts undertaken by the Polish Republic with a view to establishing strategic relations with the Baltic States, Ukraine and Belorussia (with the latter, of course, prior to the take-over by Łukaszenka regime) which are nothing but a revival in a modified form of the federational conceptions the purpose of which was to erect a bulwark separating Poland from Russia. Poland's involvement in the workings of V4 resembles the attempts made by Poland before 1939 whose goal was to realize the idea of the „Third Europe”. The organization of the Energetic Summit in Cracow (11 May 2007) with the participation of the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan can also be looked at in terms of an intention to resuscitate Prometeian movement. The integration of Poland into Western Europe, its accession to NATO and European Union, gives voice to the idea – deeply rooted in Piłsudski's political thought – of a strong Poland – a fellow creator of Western civilization and its Antemurale. Contemporary politicians – regardless of their political affiliation – although they wish to pass for successors of Marshal Piłsudski.

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#### **EPOKA GENIUSZU KOMENDANTA. ARGUMENTY HISTORYCZNE JAKO ELEMENTY KONSTITUJĄCE TOŻSAMOŚĆ POLITYCZNĄ OBOZU PIŁSUDCZYKOWSKIEGO**

*Epoka geniuszu Komendanta nie skończyła się wraz z jego śmiercią. Żyjemy dalej w tej epoce...* powiedział w swym exposé sejmowym premier, Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski. Tych kilka słów zawierało w sobie nie tylko *credo* środowiska sanacyjnego, lecz mogło uchodzić również za syntezę poglądów adherentów Marszałka na temat funkcjonowania państwa oraz roli i umiejscowienia obozu w systemie partyjnym i politycznym Rzeczypospolitej. Nakreślone uogólnienie odzwierciedlało wyobrażenie, którego dominującymi elementami były: 1) przekonanie, iż na odrodzenie Rzeczypospolitej i jej kształt terytorialny i ustrojowy największy wpływ wywarły działania Komendanta i jego podkomendnych z Legionów i POW, podjęte w okresie 1914-1921; 2) przeświadczenie, iż ci, których wysiłek przesądził o odzyskaniu i ugruntowaniu niepodległości byli predestynowani do kreowania rozstrzygnięć w kwestiach wewnętrznych i zewnętrznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obóz piłsudczykowski, sanacja, myśl polityczna, idea polityczna, polityka historyczna.

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