



THE EMERGENCE OF NEW STATES IN EASTERN EUROPE AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR: LESSONS FOR ALL OF EUROPE

Gdynia, Seaport. Author - Henryk Poddębski. Image from wikipedia.org

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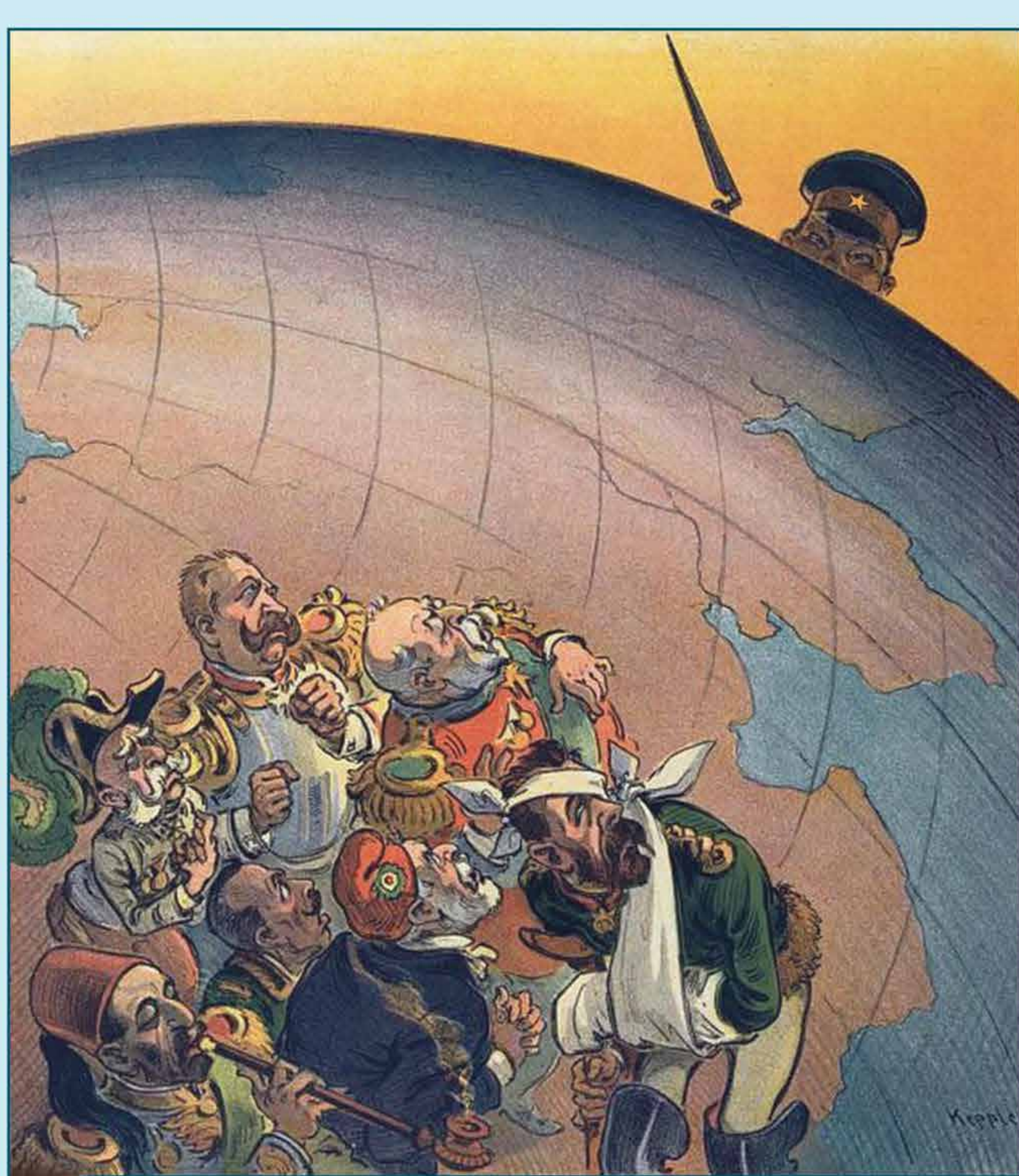
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New Eastern Europe

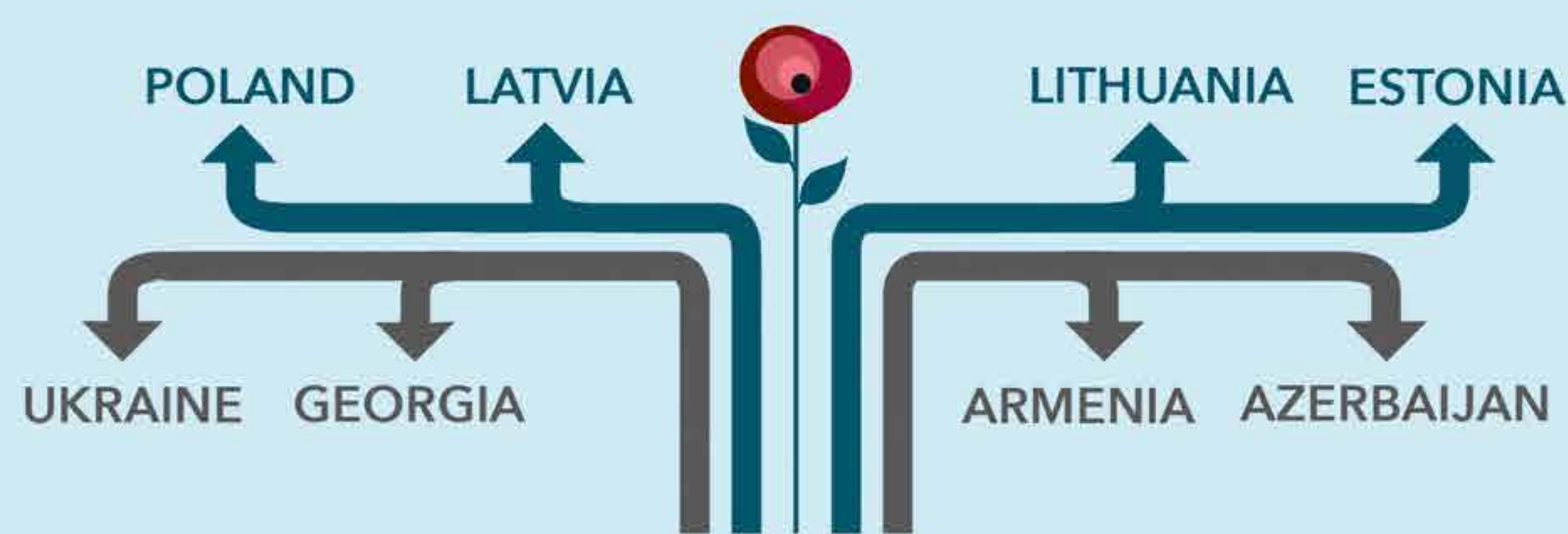


Caricature entitled «When?» from the *Puck* magazine. *Puck* was the first successful humor magazine in the United States of colorful cartoons, caricatures and political satire of the issues of the day. It was founded in 1871 as a German-language publication by Joseph Keppler, an Austrian-born cartoonist.

INTRODUCTION

1918 was a crucial year in the history of Europe. Its importance does not only stem from the end of the First World War, but also from the establishment of new states. Eastern Europe was particularly an arena where many new states emerged after the dissolution of Tsarist Russia. The above-mentioned process was correlated with the outcome of the First World War (the defeat of the Central Powers on the Western Front and their victory on the Eastern Front against Tsarist Russia resulting in their protectorate over Eastern Europe) but simultaneously it was influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution originating from a structural crisis of Russia.

In fact, the process started before the end of the First World War with the declaration of independence of Finland, which was declared in December 1917 and internationally recognized in early 1918. In that year Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland also gained and managed to defend their independence. Unfortunately, other states which announced independent in 1918 gained at least partial international recognition (for instance, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine) were destroyed by the Bolsheviks between 1920 and 1921. Many more short-lived bids for independence or autonomy occurred at that time in former the Russian Empire, but were crushed by the Bolsheviks. All of these states sometimes cooperated closely between themselves against common enemies (mostly the Bolsheviks) but sometimes they fought fiercely against each other.



The legacy of nation-building processes taking place in the period of 1917-21 in the European part of Tsarist Russia – even when the states did not manage to survive – occupies a key role in historical memories of the citizens of these states. The importance of this legacy originates from the fact that these states often constituted the most progressive nation building efforts in the world. The wider context of these developments and the important interlinks existing between them are very often unfamiliar to many Europeans today. Despite that, the state-building attempts undertaken in Eastern Europe between 1917-1921 had a huge impact on the trajectory of European history.



American troops march through Place de Jena and down Avenue du President Wilson in Paris on July 4, 1918. Image from theatlantic.com

A huge crowd gathered outside the Stock Exchange and the Bank of England in London after the announcement of the Armistice. Image from pressfrom.info



RUSSIAN EMPIRE 1721-1917



Map of governorates of the western Russian Empire in 1910. Images from wikipedia.org



NICHOLAS II
Last Emperor

GERMAN EMPIRE 1871-1918

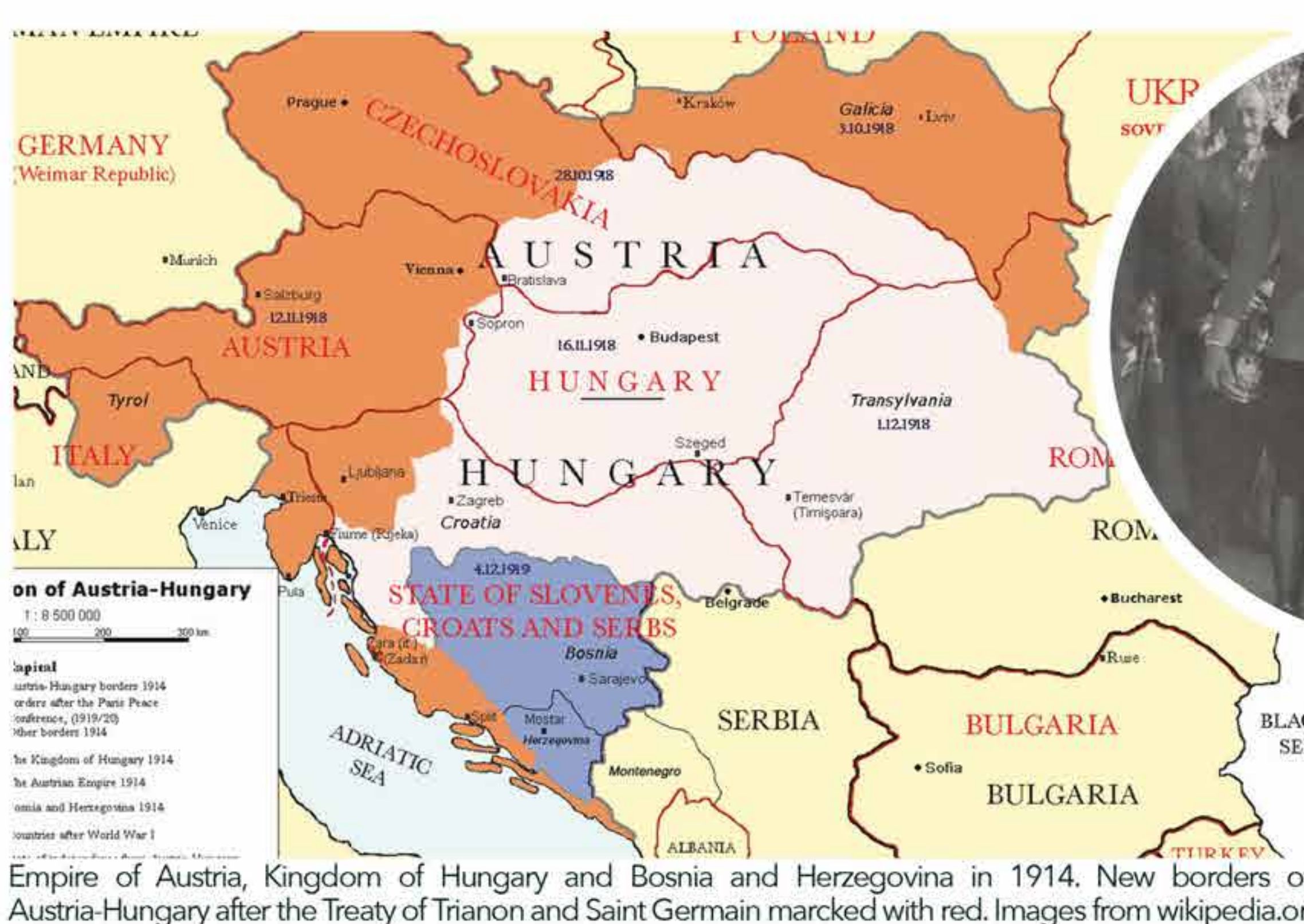


Location of German Reich. Image from wikipedia.org



WILHELM II
Last Emperor

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE 1867-1918

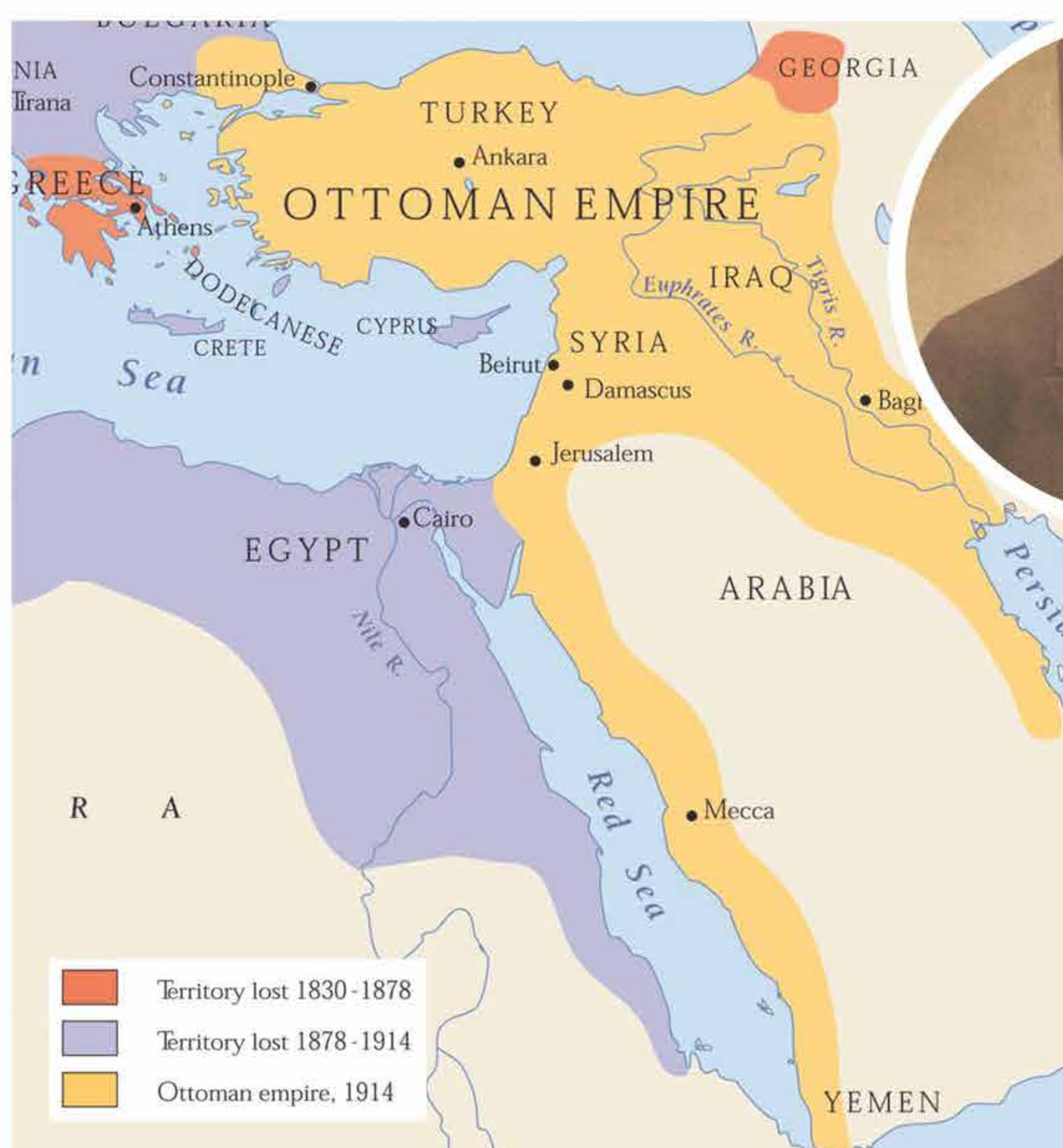


Empire of Austria, Kingdom of Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1914. New borders of Austria-Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon and Saint Germain marked with red. Images from wikipedia.org



CHARLES I
Last Emperor

OTTOMAN EMPIRE 1299-1922/1923



Ottoman Empire in 1914 marked with yellow. Image from kappamapgroup.com



MEHMED VI
Last Sultan



British troops blinded by poison gas during the Battle of Estaires, 1918. Image from wikipedia.org

Children pose for the camera at an orphanage in Brest-Litovsk in what is now the territory of Belarus, 1919. Enormous numbers of children were orphaned by the First World War. Image from icrc.org



EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL CONTEXT OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The establishment of the new modern nation-states in Europe in 1918 is strongly correlated with the outcome of the First World War, which marked the symbolic end of the 19th century and the beginning of the end for European hegemony across the world. While the US gained the status of the leading global superpower, the process of the decline of European powers (mostly the UK and France) had just started. The war also brought a dramatic remodeling of the international order accompanied by the fall of various empires (e.g. Germany, Tsarist Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Ottoman Turkey) and the (re)emergence of new states between Russia and Germany. In line with the argumentation of the American historian, Joshua Sanborn, the demise of empires should be treated as the first stage of the twentieth-century phenomenon of decolonization. Certainly, in post-war Europe a sharp tension emerged between the notion of nation-state and empire. However already before the war, the empires were considerably advanced in nationalizing themselves, and as Pieter M. Judson, a Dutch historian, points out:

"...one could easily change the terms of discussion by redefining the self-styled nation-states simply as little empires."

The nation-states established after 1918 were less multiethnic than the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia or Austria-Hungary, but they were characterized by a huge proportion of national minorities. The high level ethnic heterogeneity in many of the newly created nations soon became a serious challenge for their stability in the 20th century, exploited by external powers. Moreover, the new nation-states struggled to develop a sense of shared identity, even among people who claimed to belong to the same nation.

The First World War also contributed to the October Revolution in Russia and, in consequence, to the creation of the Soviet Union. Immediately after the war, the Bolsheviks managed to reconquer huge parts of Eastern Europe, striving to achieve independence by dividing the continent for the first time. That partition constituted a prequel to the Iron Curtain which divided Europe for almost half a century after the Second World War.

Several international treaties shaped the character of interwar Europe. As such, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 3, 1918) resulted in Russia's loss of Eastern Europe, and whose certain parts were regained by the Bolsheviks between 1918 and 1921. The history of Europe after World War I is seen mainly through the prism of the international order established at a peace conference in Paris in 1919 and subsequently called the "Versailles system." However, in Eastern Europe the interwar order was constructed on the basis of the Treaty of Riga (18th March, 1921), signed between Poland and Bolshevik Russia. According to the Treaty, Moscow finally recognized the independence of Poland, Finland and the Baltic states and the division of Ukraine and Belarus. Therefore, the international order established in Europe during the interwar period should be called the Riga-Versailles one.

France and the United Kingdom were seen as the winners of WWI in Europe and, as a consequence, were supposed to remain the key stakeholders in the continent. They got involved in Eastern Europe in many ways by supporting the White forces that were fighting against the Bolsheviks and state-building processes military, financially or politically. However, the strategies and interests of the French and British in the region often clashed (particularly on the issue of Germany's future) and the outcome of their engagement was, to a large degree, a disappointment for both of them.

The post-war period was unique in history of Europe due to an impressive number of attempts to establish independent states at the time. Some of them achieved independence which received the recognition of the international community, but most of them failed, particularly in the former Tsarist Russia. The nation-building processes were accompanied by wars, uprisings, revolutions, invasions, political coups, the establishment of quasi-states, civil wars, famine, diseases and anarchy. As Jochen Böhrer argues, many of the conflicts were often waged between various ethnic and social groups and their paramilitary formations (militias) than between states and regular armies. The situation gradually stabilized and the borders were clearly demarked, even if they were not always accepted or even recognized by certain states.

The most pressing issue after WWI for Entente was the Bolshevik Revolution and its possible contagion to Europe. This fear was understandable due to the clear objective of the Bolsheviks to initiate a "world revolution" and their support for communist movements abroad (Comintern). As a first step, the Bolsheviks invaded newly independent countries in the former Tsarist Russia and created Soviet Republics in their place. Moreover, the communists in Hungary and in certain parts of Germany managed to gain power for the short period of time. To counter that, Western European nations started to help Central and Eastern Europeans in order to strengthen their independence. As such, these countries formed a "cordon sanitaire" between Bolshevik Russia and Western Europe.

German Johannes Bell signs the Treaty of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors, with various Allied delegations sitting and standing in front of him. Image from wikipedia.org



Lev Kamenev arriving at Brest-Litovsk. Image from wikipedia.org



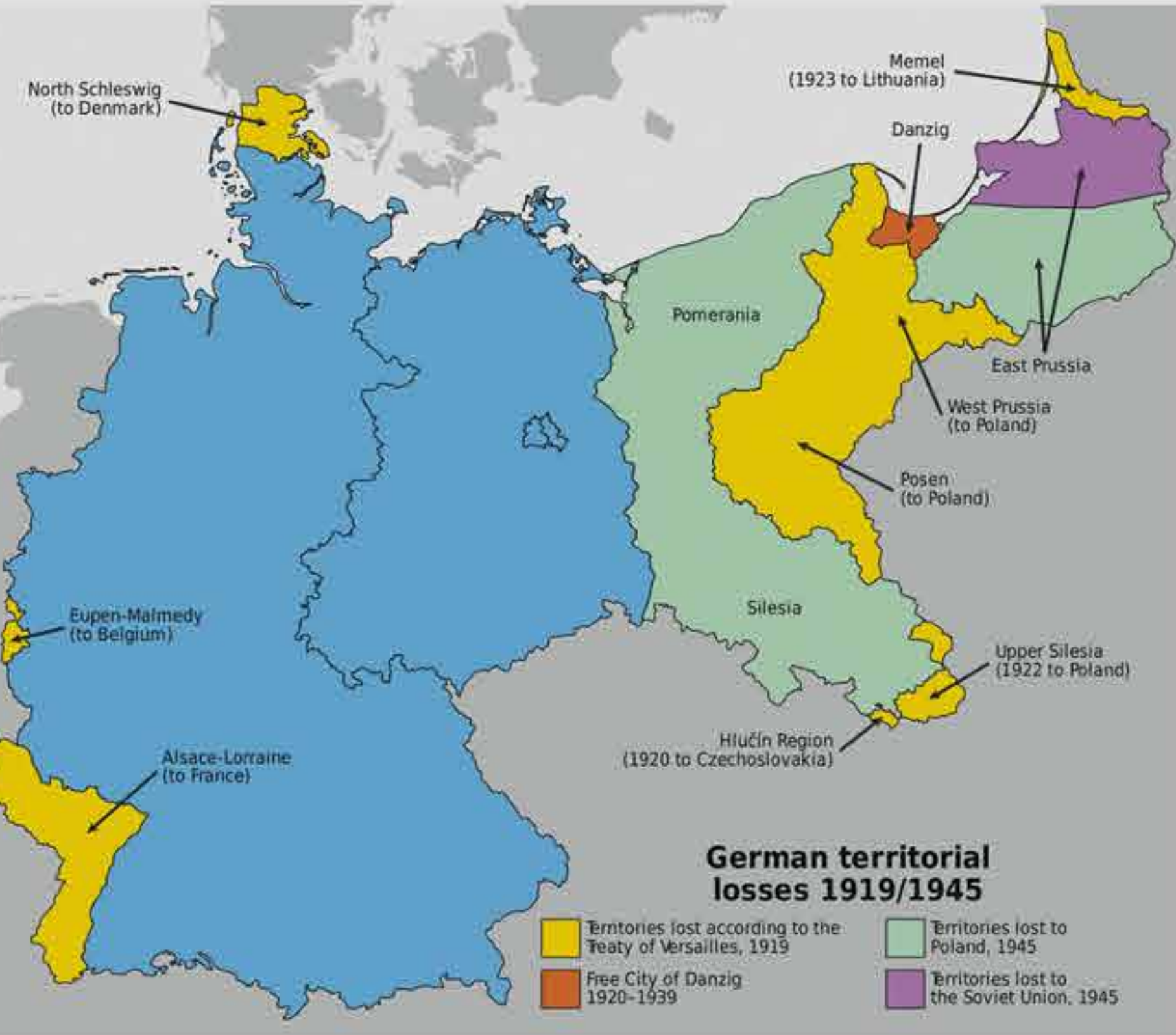
The treaty was annulled by the Armistice of 11 November 1918, when Germany surrendered to the western Allies. Colorized photograph from wikipedia.org



Borders drawn up in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Image from wikipedia.org

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed between the new Bolshevik government of Russia and the Central Powers, that ended Russia's participation in World War I.

03-03-1918



German territorial losses 1919/1945

- Territories lost according to the Treaty of Versailles, 1919
- Territories lost to Poland, 1945
- Territories lost to the Soviet Union, 1945

German territorial losses, 1919–1945. Territories lost according to the Treaty of Versailles marked yellow. Image from wikipedia.org



Wilhelm II was the last German Emperor (Kaiser) and King of Prussia, reigning from 15 June 1888 until his abdication on 9 November 1918.

The Treaty of Versailles was the most important of the peace treaties that brought World War I to an end. Signed between Germany and the Allied Powers.

28-06-1919



Map - break-up of the Kingdom of Hungary. Image from ouceramicshungary.wordpress.com



Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen Coat of arms. Image from wikipedia.org



Signing the Treaty at the Grand Trianon Palace in Versailles, arrival of the two signatories, Ágost Benárd and Alfréd Drasche-Lázár. Image from wikipedia.org

The Treaty of Trianon was signed between most of the Allies and the Kingdom of Hungary and regulated Hungarian borders.

04-06-1920



Dissolution of Austria-Hungary - new borders marked with red. Image from evism.org

The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye was signed between Allies and Austria.

10-09-1919



FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE EASTERN FRONT



Russian troops going to the front. Image from wikipedia.org



Battle of Tannenberg by Hugo Vogel. Image from wikipedia.org



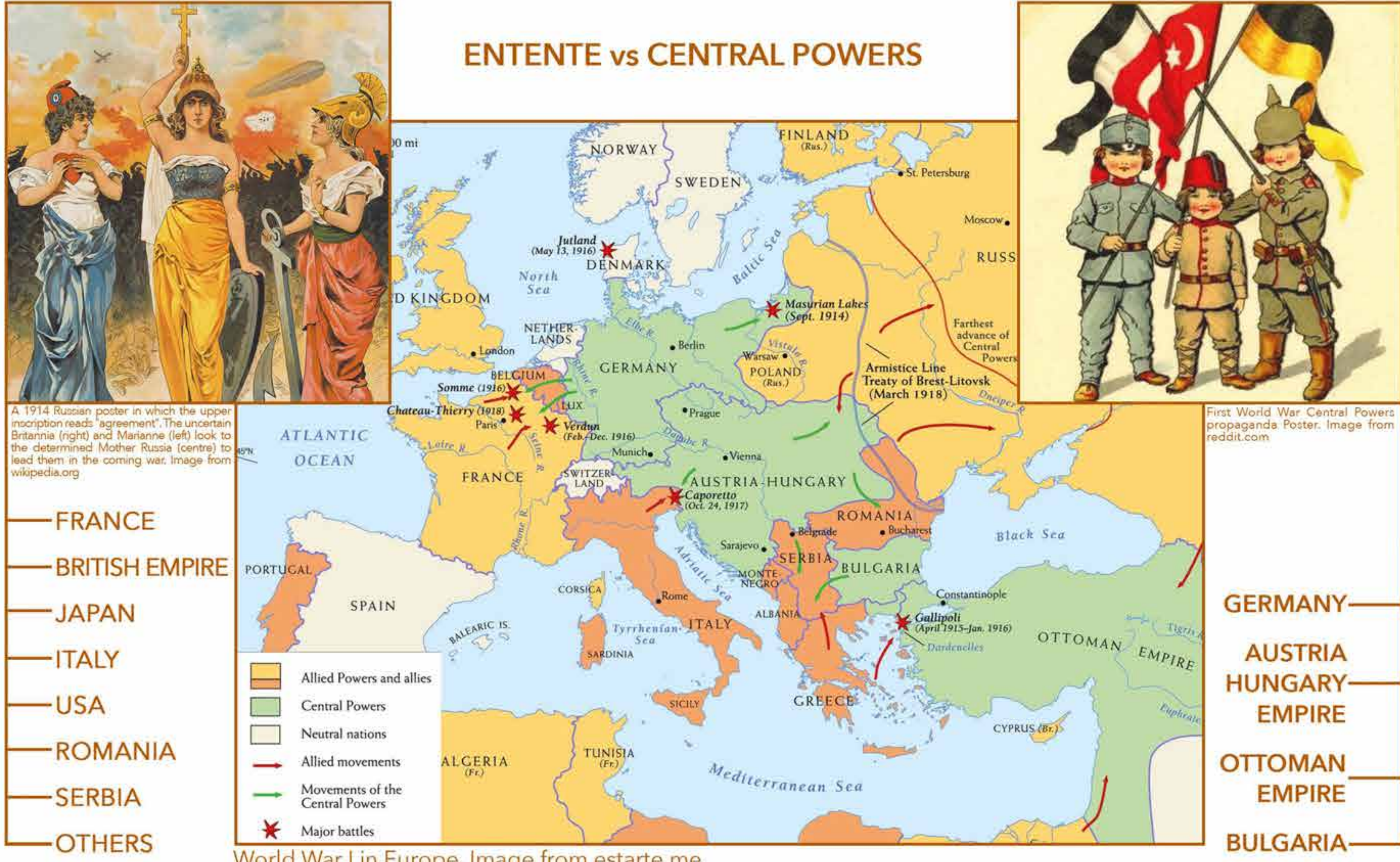
Russian prisoners of war at Tilsit railway station. Image from wikipedia.org

15 to 19

MILLION
DEATH

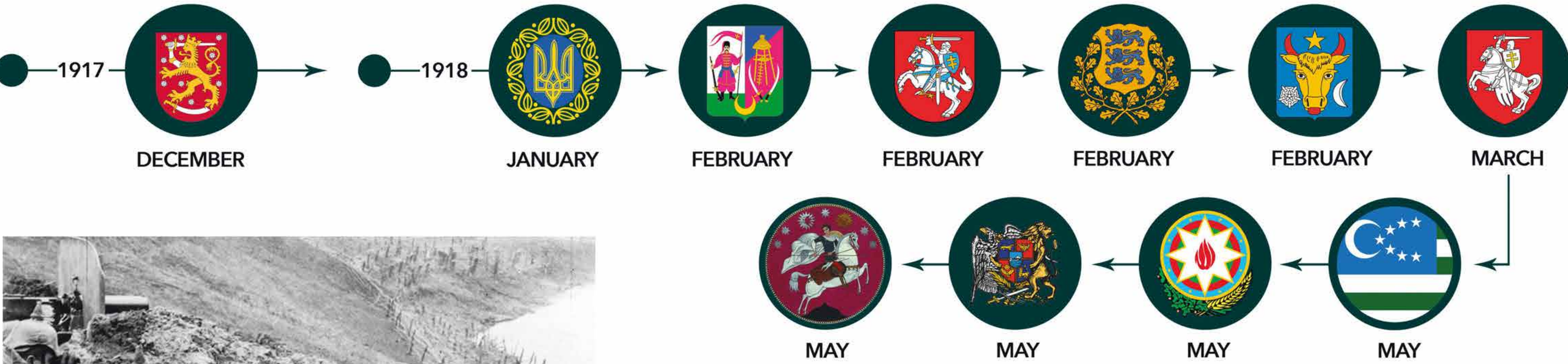
The First World War was the first global conflict in human history. It resulted in the death of between 15 and 19 million people, including casualties indirectly caused by disease.

The war ended with the defeat of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) which fought against the Entente/Allies (France, the British Empire, Japan, Italy, the US, Romania, Serbia and others). It resulted in the dissolution of multiethnic empires, radical changes of borders and the rise of many new states in Central-Eastern Europe, located between the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea. WWI in the Eastern Front had a radically different character than the one on the Western Front. Until the October Revolution, Germany and Austria-Hungary conquered a huge part of Russian Eastern Europe (Poland, Lithuania, parts of Belarus and Latvia, and fragments of Ukraine and Moldova). In 1917, Germany gave clandestine support to the Bolsheviks which orchestrated the October Revolution. After the Revolution, the Central Powers continued their offensive and forced the Bolsheviks to sign the Peace Treaty in Brest-Litovsk on 3rd of March 1918. By the terms of the Treaty, Soviet Russia lost around one-third of its population, one-third of its agricultural land, more than half of its industrial plant, and 90 percent of its coal mines. The Central Powers gained control of territories stretching from the Arctic Sea to the Black Sea, including the South Caucasus, inhabited by 55 million people. The region was turned into Mitteleuropa, the exclusive sphere of influence of the Central Powers under the uncontested leadership of Germany. Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Turkey and Germany foresaw the establishment of new states under their protectorate.



World War I in Europe. Image from estarte.me

On the other hand, Tsarist Russia upon entering the war planned to expand its territory in Central Europe. Germany was supposed to be pushed substantially to the West. Russia claimed that a new border between both countries should run along the Oder. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary were predicted to cede Galicia (currently divided between Poland and Ukraine), Zakarpattia (currently in the Ukraine) and parts of Czech and Slovak lands. Russia intended to gain large parts of Eastern Anatolia (inhabited by large Armenian communities) at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The Bolshevik expansion into Central Europe between 1919 and 1920, besides ideological goals, was also, to a certain degree, an ambition to realize the war plans of Russia from 1914.



German machine guns devastated the masses of Russians rushing at them in attack. Vistula River in Russia, in 1916. Image from theatlantic.com

Russian Expeditionary Force in France. Image from i.pining.com



Russian Troops in Flight. Image from theatlantic.com

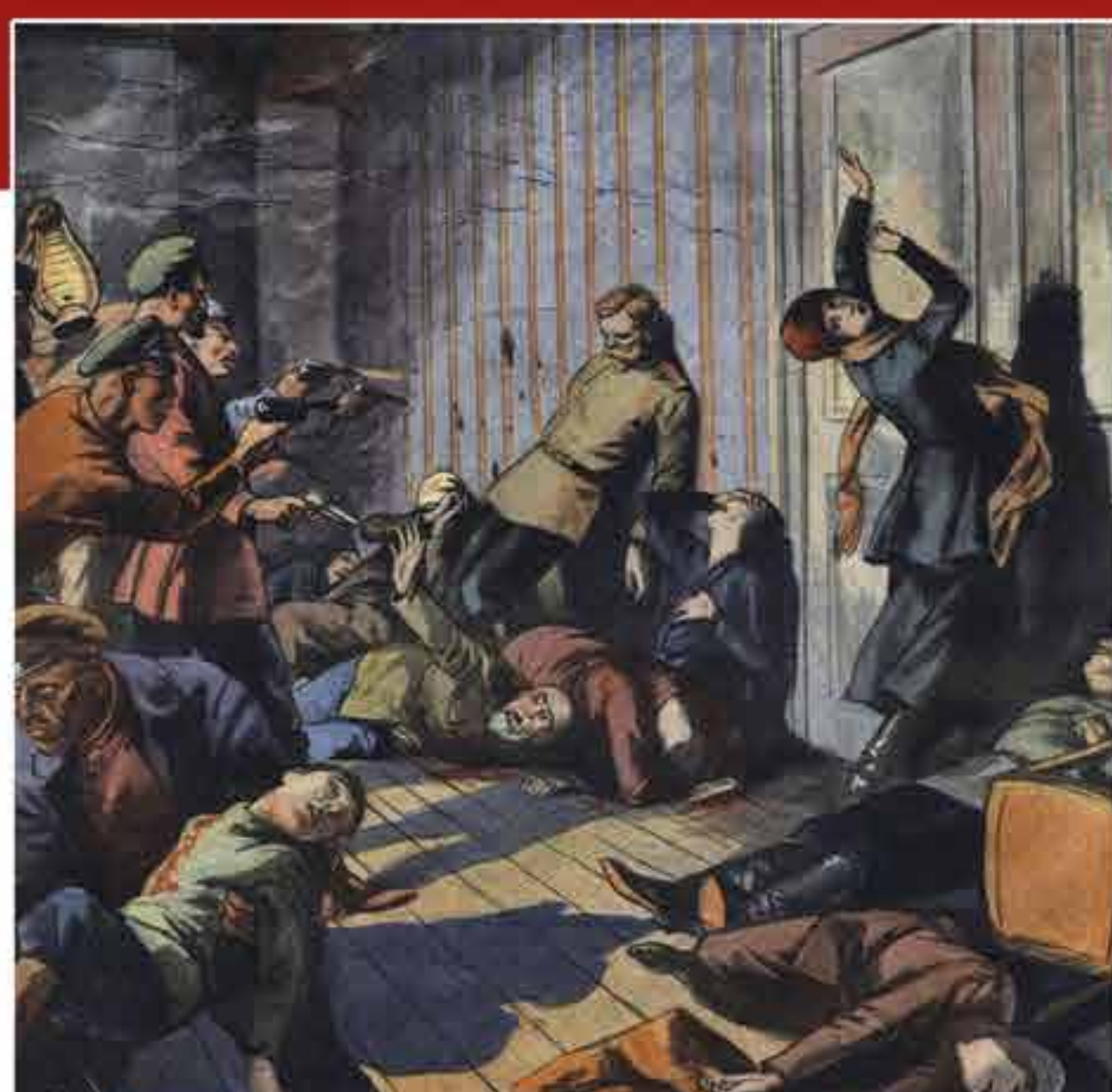


German and Austrian prisoners of war in Russia. A few of the more than 1,800,000 Central Powers forces captured on the Eastern Front during the war. Image from theatlantic.com



An Illustration from Russia in Flames
Boris Kustodiev, "Moscow I: Attack," Zhupel [Bugbear], no. 2 (1905)

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR



The front page of French newspaper Le Petit Journal illustrating the massacre of Tsar Nicolas II of Russia and his family by the Bolsheviks in the half-basement room of the Ipatiev house. Image from history.com

The Russian Revolution constitutes one of the most important events in modern history and it greatly impacted the international order, political life, economic developments and social structures almost everywhere, but especially in Eastern Europe. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Russia experienced serious multidimensional tensions stemming from the very fast transformation of the Russian economy and society, which raised questions of the stability of the Tsarist regime. The national question represented the Achilles' heel of Russia. Ethnic Russians made less than 45 percent of the population of the Empire and their share decreased due to demographic trends and nation-building processes. During WWI, Germany and Austria-Hungary gradually took advantage on the Eastern front over Russia inflicting on it several disastrous defeats. The war effort severely affected the Russian economy and thus provoked social dissatisfaction. This uncomfortable situation led to the February Revolution in 1917.

02-1917 An important strike movement in Petrograd on the basis of public indignation transformed into a Revolution.

It resulted in the fall of Nicholas II and the establishment of the Russian Republic. For the first time in its modern history, Russia became a democracy. Political divisions emerged quickly between the democratic government and the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin who was cooperating with the Socialists-Revolutionaries (Esery, peasant party) concerning the future of the revolution and, notably, the issue of the continuation of the war. The Bolsheviks and Esery promoted a radical transformation of the country and of separate peace with the Central Powers.

25-10-1917 The Bolsheviks and Esery started to gain popularity in a society that was exhausted by the war. On 25th October, 1917 (the old Calendar, 7th of November according to new one), the Bolsheviks started the Revolution by seizing the Winter Palace in Petrograd (Petersburg).



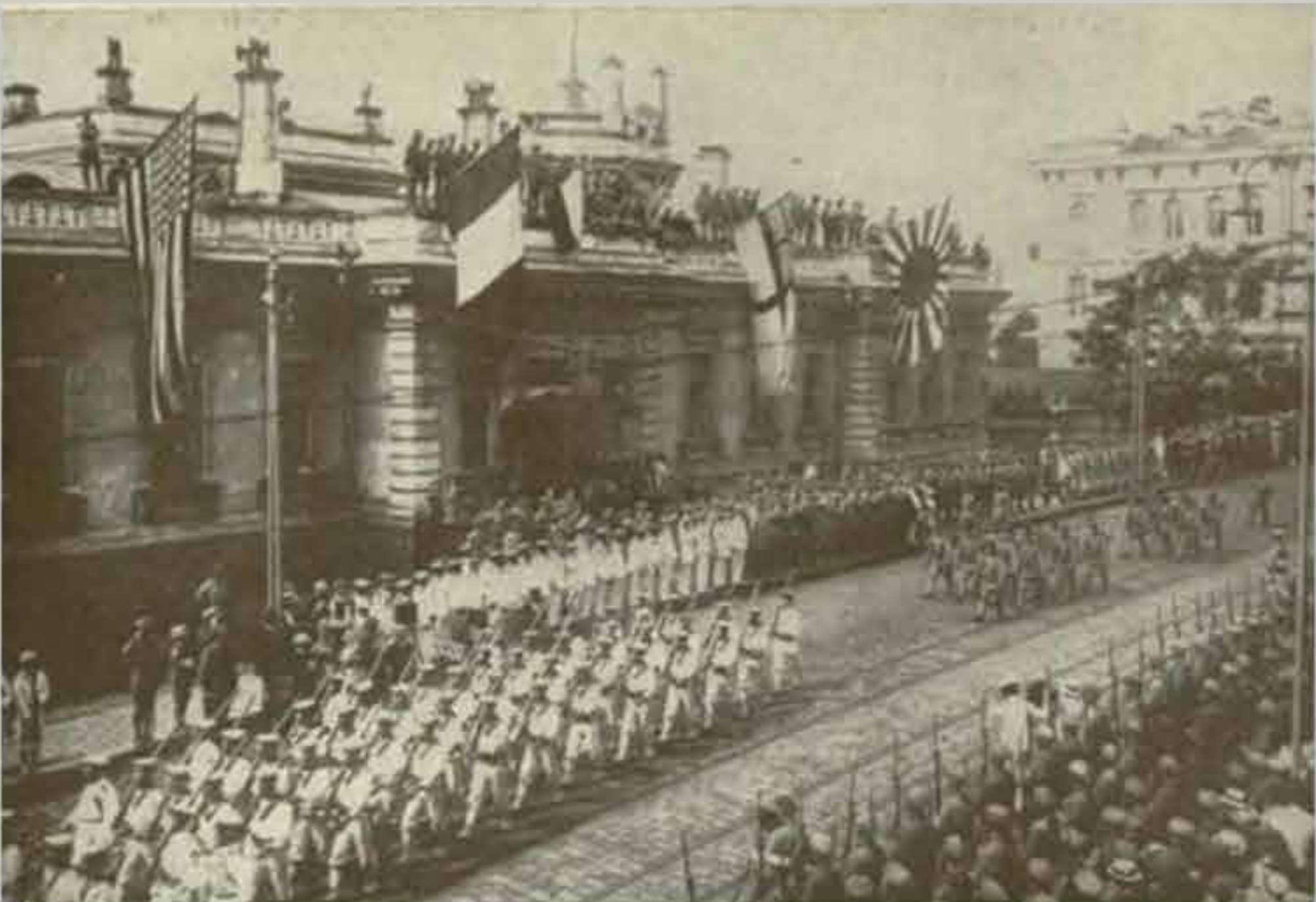
February Revolution. Image from smithsonian.com



Armed soldiers carry a banner reading Communism, Nikolskaya Street, Moscow. Image from wikipedia.org



Kornilov's Shock Detachment (8th Army), later became the Volunteer Army's elite Shock Regiment. Image from wikipedia.org



American, British, and Japanese Troops parade through Vladivostok in armed support to the White Army. Image from wikipedia.org

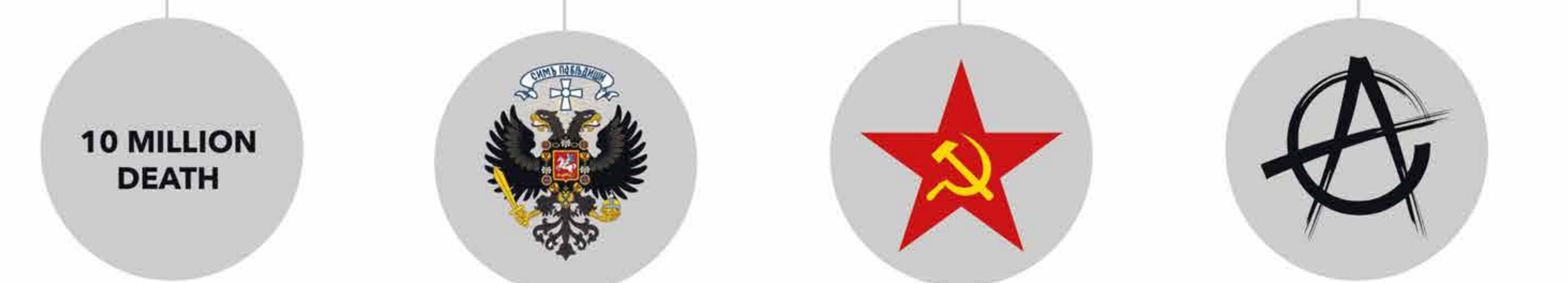


Lenin with his wife and sister in a car after watching a Red Army parade at Khodynka Field in Moscow, May 1918. Image from wikipedia.org



The Petrograd Soviet Assembly meeting in 1917. Image from wikipedia.org

Almost immediately Russia entered a period of bloody civil war. It lasted from 1917 to 1923 and resulted in around 15 million victims (including many deaths from starvation and disease). In fact, the civil war caused a substantially larger death toll in Russia than WWI. The civil war is often simplified as a conflict between the "Reds" (the Bolsheviks) and the "Whites" (supporters of ancient regime). However, the reality was much more complicated. The civil war concerned the entire country - even the smallest Siberian villages - and had certain aspects of generalized anarchy.



On the one side, the "Reds" were fighting for revolution and power. On the other side, the "Whites" - led by the former generals and admirals of the Tsarist armed forces - were eager to remove the Bolsheviks from power and to re-establish the Tsarist autocracy. Besides these two groups, many other formations fought in the civil war. Some of them were fighting against both the Reds and the Whites, respectively - for instance, the "Greens" (Esery) and certain nationalist movements. There were also active regional war lords or anarchist groups, such as Nestor Makhno's forces in Ukraine. Certain republican, liberal and social democratic forces, such as the Mensheviks, also were engaged in the conflict.

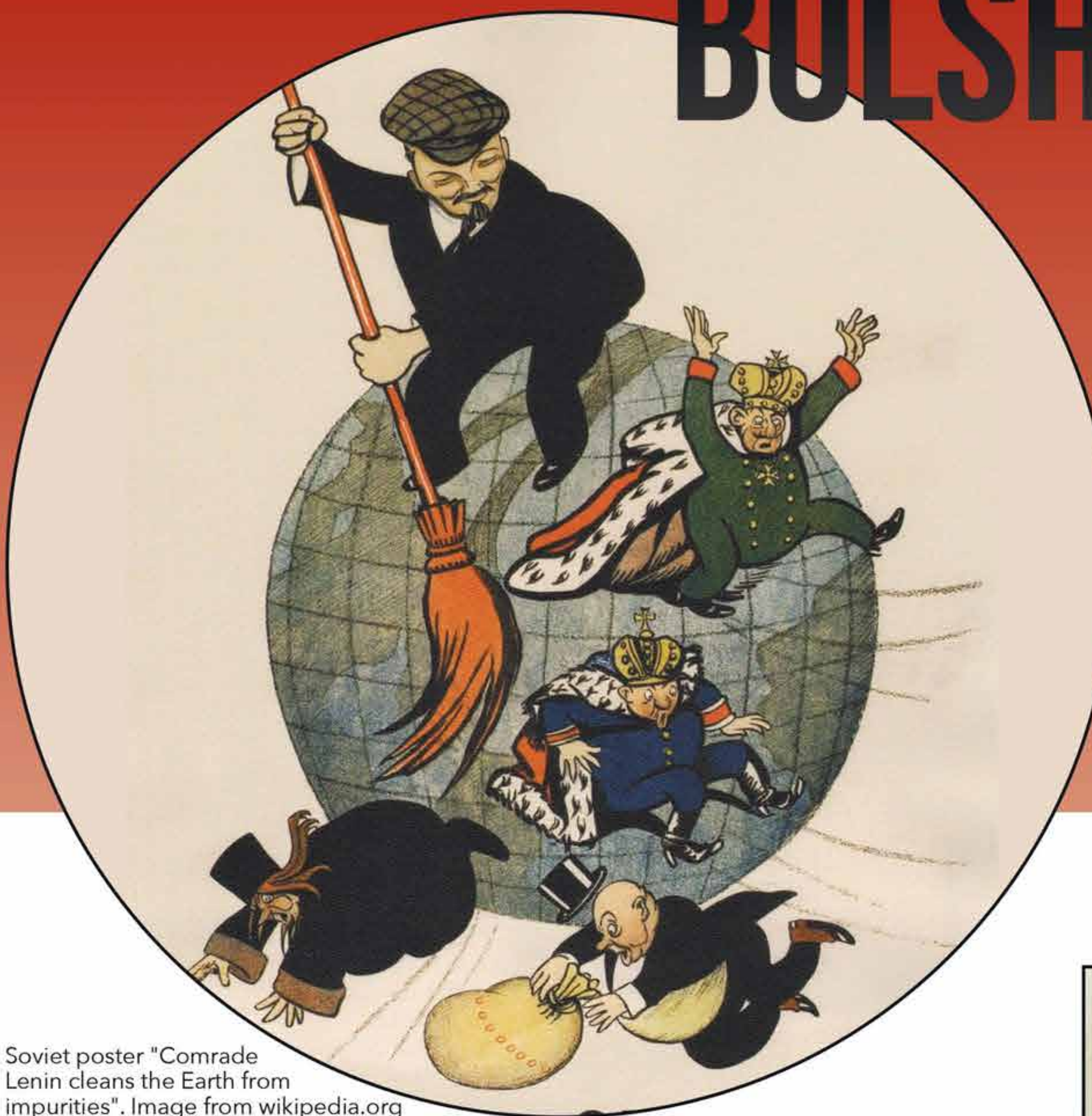


Finally, other countries got considerably involved. The Bolsheviks had to fight soldiers of the Entente from the US, the British Empire, France, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Italy, Japan and other nations. The Bolshevik's policy may be interpreted as a soft version of Tsarist centralism. In fact, Bolshevik elites were, from the very beginning, dominated by Russian-speaking politicians identifying themselves with Russian culture. After the end of WWI, the Bolsheviks strongly supported the territorial integrity of Russia, including territories inhabited mostly by non-Russians. Yet they accepted, to a larger degree, certain levels of autonomy for certain non-Russians. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks fought against many non-Russian independent movements from Siberia to Warsaw, and destroyed dozen of states. Paradoxically, the Baltic states, which survived the Bolshevik's assault, where the first countries to internationally recognize Bolshevik Russia as an independent state (Estonia in February 1920, Lithuania in July 1920, and Latvia in August 1920).

Map - European part of the USSR in the 1920s. Image from wikipedia.org



BOLSHEVIK EASTERN EUROPE



Soviet poster "Comrade Lenin cleans the Earth from impurities". Image from wikipedia.org

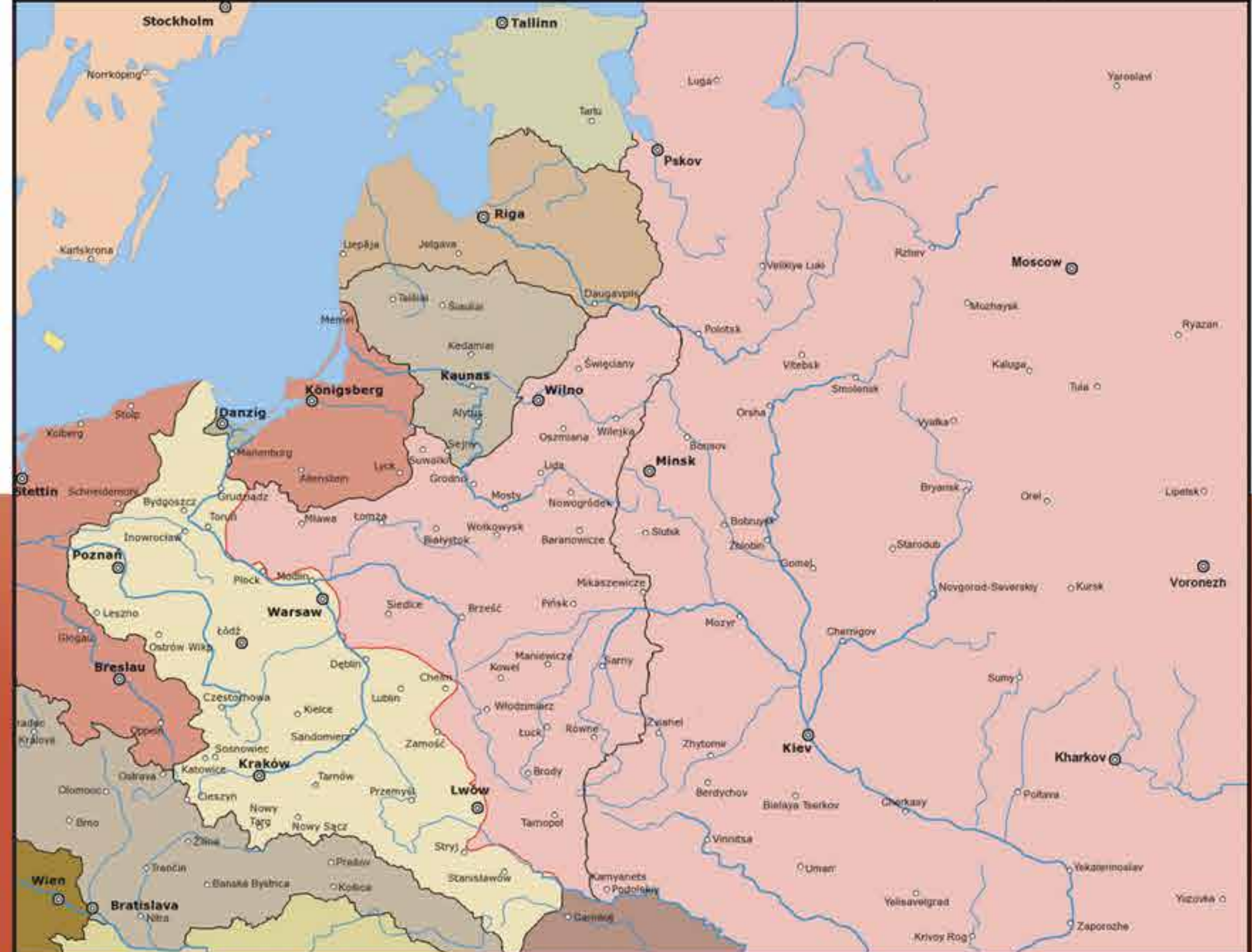
The Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets was the first republic established by the Bolsheviks in December 1917 in Kharkiv (Ukraine). The Bolsheviks then created the Odessa Soviet Republic (January, 1918) and the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic (February, 1918). The following month they merged the two republics into the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, but it ceased to exist after a few weeks as a result of the loss of Ukraine to Germany. It was reestablished as the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic in March 1919 when most of Ukraine was again occupied by the Bolsheviks. The republic survived until 1991. Between November and December 1918, the Bolsheviks established the Commune of the Working People of Estonia, the Socialist Soviet Republic of Byelorussia, the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic. Soviet Lithuania and Belarus were united into the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (Litbel) in February 1919. This state was a sort of communist continuation of Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It existed de facto within the territories of modern day Belarus and eastern Lithuania for approximately five months until the Bolsheviks were expelled from both countries by the Poles and Lithuanians. The exiled Litbel government was disbanded by the Bolsheviks in June 1920 in order to preserve the neutrality of Lithuania which the peace treaty was still being negotiated with. Immediately after the capture of Minsk in July 1920, the Bolsheviks reestablished the Soviet Belarusian Republic, which existed until the end of the Soviet Union. The Galician Soviet Socialist Republic was a declared in July 1920 when the Red Army conquered parts of Eastern Galicia. Although it was short-lived, the republic was the only Soviet state established in Europe after WWI by the Bolsheviks outside of the former Russia. The same month the Bolsheviks also created the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee with the goal of establishing a Polish Soviet Socialist Republic. However, the Bolshevik's defeat in the battle of Warsaw aborted both initiatives.

The Bolshevik's attempt to conquer Poland was of crucial importance because it was the strongest state among the newly established ones and due to its central location. Indeed, General Mikhail Tukhachevsky's order, issued on the first day of great offensive, and launched at the beginning of July 1920, read: "To the West! Over the corpse of White Poland lies the road to worldwide conflagration. March on Vilno, Minsk, Warsaw!"; and "onward to Berlin over the corpse of Poland!" One of Soviet leaders, Nikolay Bukharin, was even more ambitious: he called the Red Army to continue its offensive through Poland "right up to London and Paris". Nevertheless, the battle of Warsaw (August, 1920) ended up in the crucial defeat of the Red Army. The battle is often perceived in Poland as a turning point in the history of Europe, which was saved from communism. Indeed as Lenin latter admitted, "If Poland had become Soviet. The Versailles treaty would have been shattered, and the entire international system built up by the victors would have been destroyed." But Laura Engelstein, an American historian, seems to be right by pointing out that



From the long-range perspective, however, it was perhaps not a failure at all. Had the Reds taken Warsaw and marched toward the German frontier—hoping to incite an international conflagration—they would have been even more overextended than they already were. The move might well have provoked the Western powers into overcoming their reluctance and mobilizing their armies yet again. Polish victory may have saved Europe from Bolshevism; it also saved Bolshevism from Europe.

Frontlines of the Polish-Bolshevik War in August of 1920. The period of the greatest offensive of the Soviet troops. Post-war borders marked with black. Image from wikipedia.org



In Eastern Europe, the Bolsheviks combined the fight for the pre-war Russia's territories with the exportation of communism to Western Europe in order to overthrow the capitalist and democratic system. They invaded the neighboring countries and created Socialist Soviet Republics which received their financial, material and military assistance. The Bolsheviks were met with a variety of reactions among regional populations. Certainly the prominent representatives of the national elites joined them. For instance, Vincas Mickevičius, known under his pen name as Kapsukas, the leader of Soviet Lithuania and Belarus before WWI was an important activist of the Lithuanian National Revival, writing significant articles and editing publications. People originally from Eastern Europe played also an important role in the communist elite circles in Russia. For instance, Jukums Vācietis, a Latvian, was the first commander in chief of the Red Army; meanwhile, Feliks Dzierzynski, a Polish nobleman, established and led the Cheka, a Soviet state security organization, a predecessor of the NKVD and KGB.

FELIKS DZIERZYNSKI



Image from info.wyborcza.pl

JUKUMS VĀCIETIS



Image from wikipedia.org

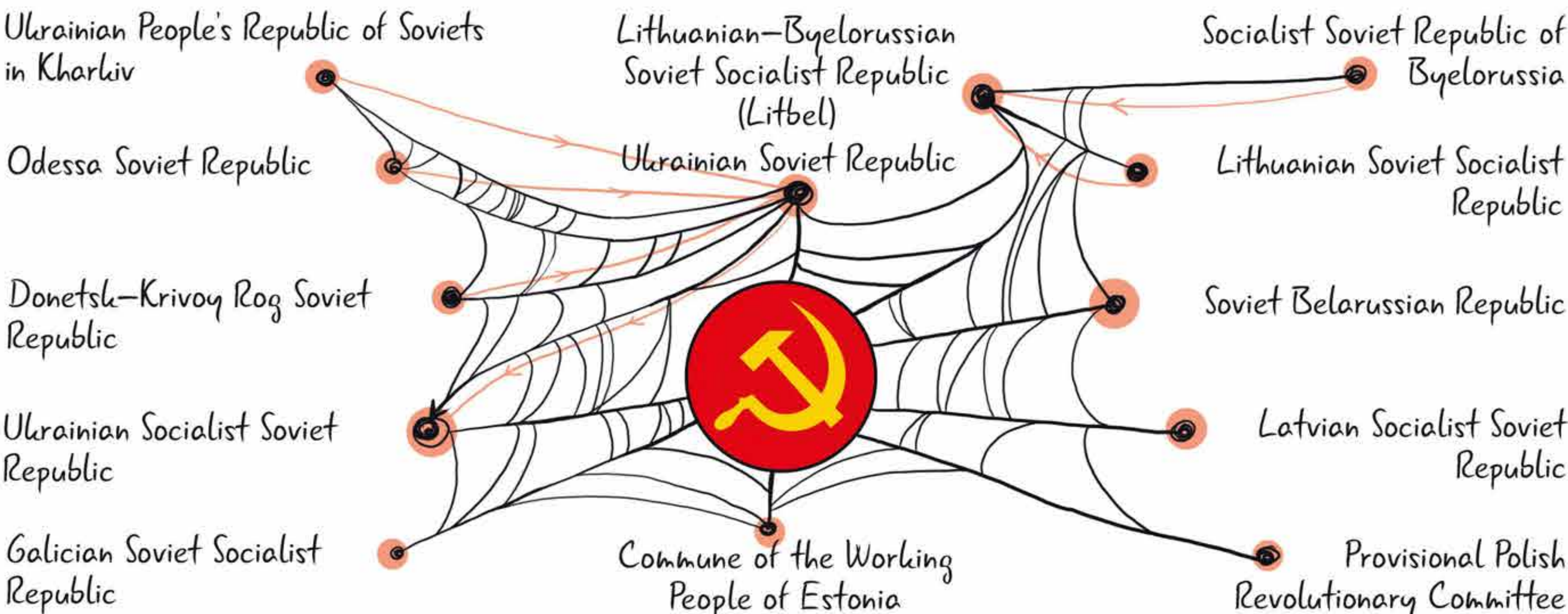
VINCAS MICKEVIČIUS



Image from wikivisually.com



Vladimir Lenin and a group of commanders at the Red Square in Moscow during a troops inspection. May 25, 1919. Image from nation.com



A White Russian anti-Bolshevik propaganda poster, in which Lenin is depicted in a red robe, aiding other Bolsheviks in sacrificing Russia to a statue of Marx. Image from wikipedia.org



ALLIED INTERVENTIONS



A Japanese lithograph showing troops occupying Blagoveschensk. Image from wikipedia.org



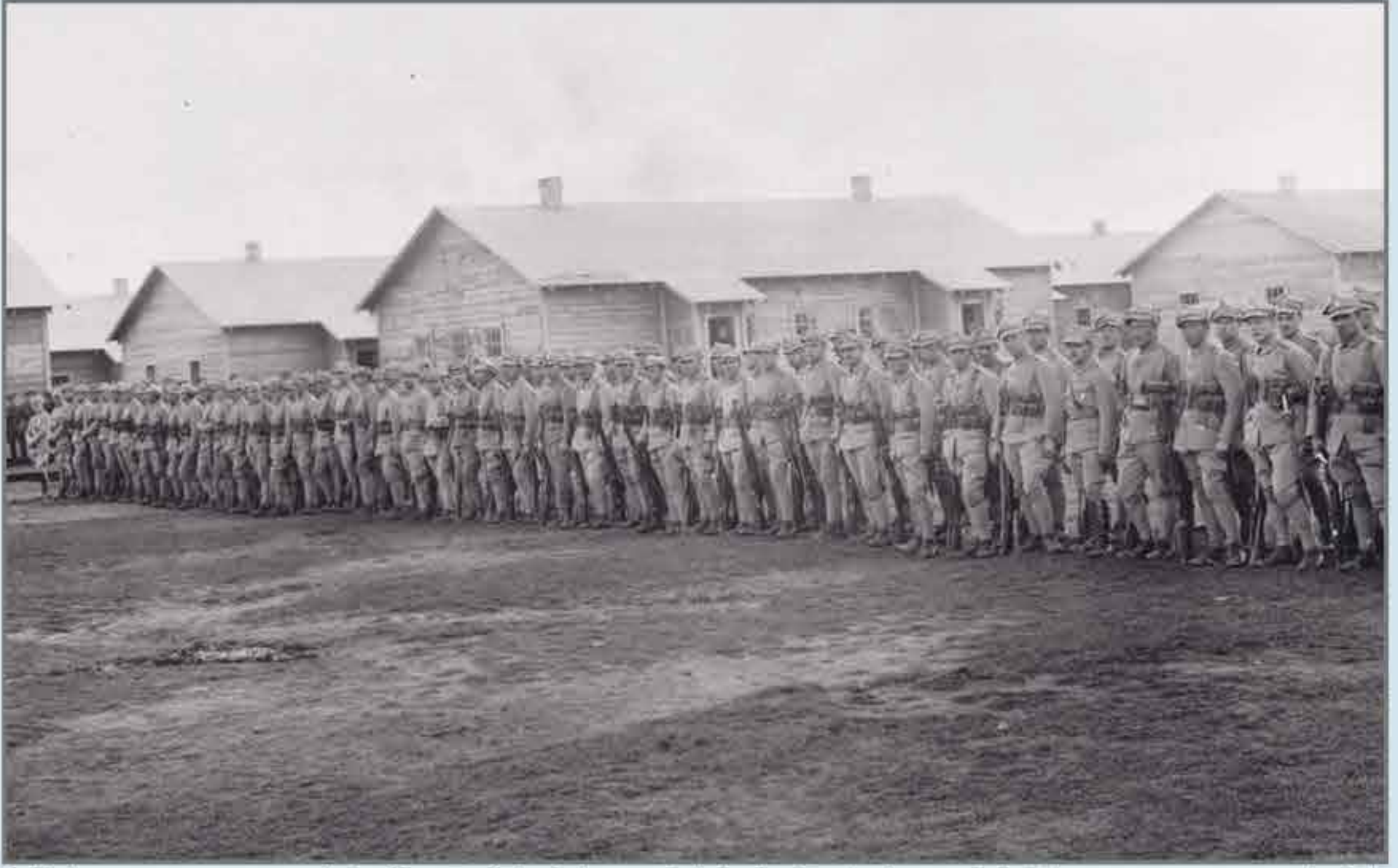
U.S. troops in Vladivostok, August 1918. Image from wikipedia.org



British sailors from HMS SUFFOLK making a landing at YMCA dock in Vladivostok, 1919. Image from iwm.org.uk



Parade of British troops led by band and sailors of HMS SUFFOLK passing before Czechoslovak Legion headquarters to celebrate signing off the Armistice. Vladivostok, 15 November 1918. Image from iwm.org.uk



Polish troops on parade in front of their barrack blocks in Archangelsk. The men are armed with an assortment of firearms, including British P14 rifles. Image from iwm.org.uk



British and French troops lining up in Arkhangelsk in 1919. Image from bbc.com



French colonial troops in Odesa. Image from wikipedia.org

The French fleet evacuating Odesa in April 1919. Image from wikipedia.org



In March 1918 after the Bolsheviks signed the peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Entente, in order to reestablish the Eastern Front and to prevent Russian supplies from reaching Germany, launched a multi-national military intervention in Russia. Allied Powers backed the anti-communist White forces against the Bolsheviks. However, their engagement had a serious impact on the independence movements in Eastern Europe and Caucasus. Allied efforts were hampered by war-weariness from the global conflict lasting already four years, contradictory goals, and insufficient domestic support. The Allies fought against the Bolsheviks in the Far East and Northern Russia (Murmansk and Archangelsk), however their interventions were particularly important for the course of events in Caucasus, the Baltic region and Eastern Europe.

In August 1918 the British troops (Dunsterforce) arrived in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and were invited by anti-Bolshevik forces, an alliance of Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and the Armenian nationalists (Dashnaks). They endured a short bloody siege by the Ottoman-Azeri forces in September 1918 before being forced to withdraw. However, the Ottoman Army, having been defeated in World War I a few weeks later, had to withdraw its forces from Azerbaijan. Immediately after the armistice, Britain established military governorships in Batumi, Baku and a number of strategic regions disputed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The bulk of British soldiers were withdrawn from the region in the late summer of 1919. The town and province of Batumi remained under British control for almost another year. Britain provided Armenia and Georgia with military aid. Perhaps most lastingly, British military authorities in Transcaucasia made several controversial decisions which deepened territorial disputes among the regional nationalities. During the second intervention, the British governorship in Baku preferred to co-operate with the Azerbaijani government. The British, on the issue of disputed territories (Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur), directly supported Azerbaijan. The menace of the invasion of the White Russian army, that threatened the independence of Azerbaijan, was stopped thanks to British diplomatic intervention.



Dunsterforce staff. Image from wikipedia.org

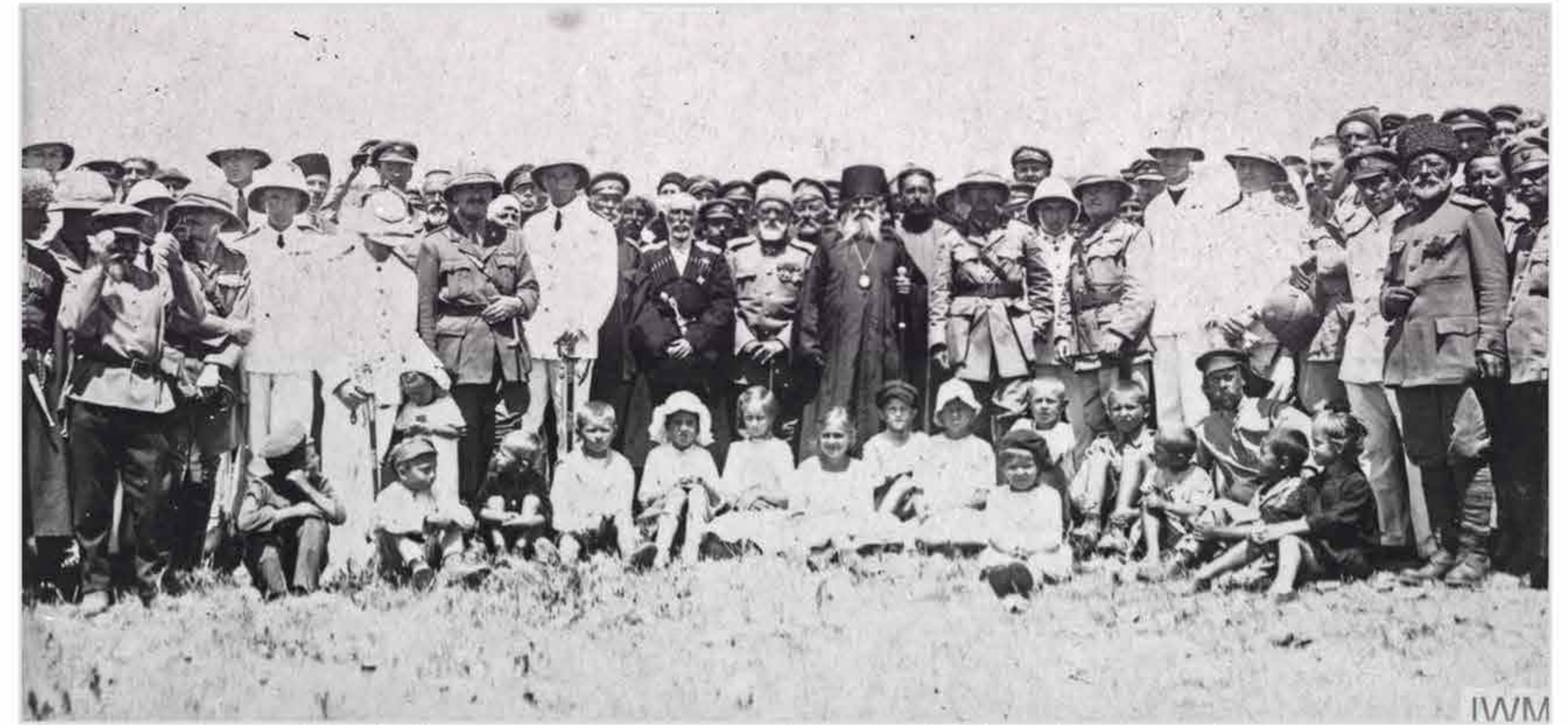
In November 1918 the Royal Navy launched the campaign "Operation Red Trek" in the Baltic Sea. The intervention played a significant role in enabling the establishment of the independent states of Estonia and Latvia. The British fleet operating for one year denied the Bolsheviks and the German militia the ability to move by sea and they bombarded them on the land in support of Estonian and Latvian troops, and provided them with supplies and arms.



British sailors in Liepāja. Image from iwm.org.uk

France focused its attention on Ukraine and Eastern Europe. Its intervention in southern Ukraine began in December 1918, when the French troops occupied Odessa in order to aid and supply General Anton Denikin's White Army forces. The campaign also involved a substantial Greek military deployment which landed in Crimea. However, the Entente forces were too small to change the balance of power on the ground and faced serious divergences with General Denikin concerning military tactics. They were evacuated by the beginning of April 1919, two months before Denikin started crucial offensives against the Bolsheviks and the Ukrainian People's Republic. The failure of the intervention resulted in the French shifting tactics to indirectly aid the Whites and the creation of a cordon sanitaire around Bolshevik Russia by offering support to newly established independent states. In consequence, in April 1919 the Allies sent a 400-strong advisory mission to Poland. It consisted mostly of French officers, among them the future President of France, Charles de Gaulle. During the war with the Bolsheviks, he won Poland's highest military decoration, the Virtuti Militari. In addition to the advisors, Paris also facilitated, between April and June 1919, the transit of the "Blue Army", a Polish well-equipped and experienced military contingent created in France during the latter stages of World War I. In July 1920, at the height of the Bolshevik counteroffensive, the Allied mission was expanded and transformed into the Inter-allied Mission to Poland. Maxime Weygand, chief of staff to Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Supreme Commander of the victorious Entente, was one of the new advisors. More importantly, however, France reinforced the Polish Army with the most advanced weaponry, including planes and Renault FT tanks. In fact, in 1919 Poland had an army with the fourth largest tank force in the world.

Entente also played an important role in diplomacy during the Polish-Soviet conflict. In December 1919 Entente published a map with the proposal of a Polish temporary Eastern border along with an announcement that recognized "Poland's right to organize a regular administration of the territories of the former Russian Empire situated to the West of the line." At the same time, the announcement stated that Entente was not "prejudging the provisions which must in the future define the eastern frontiers of Poland". The border line was mostly based on the criterion of ethnicity with the Polish indisputable majority to the West of the border. The border line went into history, as the Curzon line was named after Lord George Curzon, the then British Foreign Secretary. In July 1920, in the middle of the Soviet offensive, Curzon signed a telegram sent to the Bolshevik government proposing that a ceasefire be established along the above mentioned line. However his proposal differed from the December announcement in two significant ways. The July 1920 note specifically addressed the Polish-Lithuanian dispute over Vilnius by dividing the territory along the railway Grodno-Vilnius, thus leaving the city outside of Poland. It also sorted out the status of Galicia, a former Austrian province endorsing its division in such a way that Lviv would belong to Russia. The proposal lost relevance because of the Polish victory at the Battle of Warsaw.



White Russian refugees with British officers in a camp at Batoum (Batumi), Georgia in 1920. Image from iwm.org.uk

View of the White Russian refugee camp at Batoum (Batumi) in Georgia, 1920. Image from iwm.org.uk



GERMAN FACTOR



German presence in Central and Eastern Europe started in the 12th and 13th century with a phenomenon called Ostsiedlung (German Eastern settlement). Firstly, traders and Christian missionaries initiated a German settlement in regions inhabited by Baltic and Slavic populations. Secondly, the Livonian and Teutonic Knights built their own states. In the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia) German populations managed to remain influential across the centuries, but under the Tsarist Empire, their presence in the region shrank. By the end of the 19th century, for example, they only made up slightly more than 5% of the population of the region. In Russian parts of Poland and Ukraine, their proportion of the population was even smaller. Nevertheless, due to the economic power of Germany, a geopolitical concept called Mitteleuropa was developed (Friedrich Naumann).

MITTELEUROPA — This concept foresaw the leadership of the German Empire in the region, its territorial expansion, and the establishment of client states around it. The First World War provided Berlin with a unique window of opportunity to implement this project in Eastern and Central Europe.

On the Eastern Front, Germany, as soon as the late summer of 1915, was successful in overriding the Russian army which was not able to regain a strategic initiative until the end of the war. In the newly conquered territories, Germany established its own administration, most of the time under the military governorships.

Das Land Ober Ost — An exemplification of this trend was the establishment of the Ober Ost in the Baltic region (Lithuania, parts of Poland, Belarus and Latvia).

On the one hand, the German victory on the Eastern Front provided the nations of the Russian Empire with a window of opportunity to launch their independent movements. On the other hand, Germany gave financial and the technical assistance at the initial stage of the Bolshevik Revolution in order to destroy the Russian Empire from the inside and to stop the war on the Eastern front. In 1918 Germany was one of the first states which recognized the independence of Finland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Georgia, and the Mountainous Republic of Northern Caucasus and the Kuban People's Republic. Berlin often played a role of key patron for these states. For instance, Germany defended Ukraine against Bolshevik aggression in February and March 1918. In April the German Army, together with the Ukrainian and Tatar units, liberated Crimea from the Bolshevik dictatorship. In May 1918, Georgia signed the Treaty of Poti with Germany, and hosted a German expedition, perceiving the Germans as protectors against the Russian Revolution and Ottoman military advances. Indeed, German-Georgian cooperation contributed greatly to the consolidation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in the turbulent year of 1918. Yet Germany refused to recognize the independence of both Estonia and Belarus. Moreover, Berlin supported attempts to establish the United Baltic Duchy, a German client state which was supposed to include Estonia and Latvia. Berlin tried to influence the political life of the newly independent countries by installing the Hetman government in Ukraine and placing German kings on the throne in Finland and Lithuania – both of which ultimately failed. Moreover, Germany also tried to maintain some influence in the region after the war. As such, the Republic of Germany supported – financially, materially and diplomatically – the Freikorps, a German group of irregular fighters. The official objective for these troops was to fight against communist invasions in the newly created Baltic countries. Initially, Rüdiger von der Goltz and his men fought in cooperation with different national forces to repulse the Bolsheviks out of the national borders. After the initial victories, they decided to support a Baltic nobility coup in Latvia and to accomplish the German unofficial objective, which was the creation of a German quasi state in the Baltic region. However, the defeat at the Battle of Cēsis ended this endeavor. A last attempt came with the West Russian Volunteer Army, led by Pavel Bermond-Avalov and composed mostly of remnants of Goltz's army. They were defeated by Latvia and Lithuania and had no choice but complete withdrawal. Germany was not in a position to exercise its military power due to its explosive domestic situation (failed revolutions and putsch, social unrest) and the Allied pressure.

The post-war German engagement in the Baltic region should be placed in the wider context of territorial disputes between Poland and Germany which often turned into military confrontations (1918-1921). The disputes concerned Pomerania, a region located on the Baltic Sea. Germany, ultimately, lost two strategic ports: Gdańsk/Danzig (Free City) and Memel/Klaipėda (Lithuania); and its territory was divided by Pomerania, which was incorporated into Poland.

1918-1919 — Flag of the West Russian Volunteer Army. This armed group was born after the fusion between the von der Goltz's Baltische Landeswehr and the Bermont-Avalov's Russian Special Corps. They engaged battle against the national forces of the newly independent Baltic states but get defeated in 1920 and left the region.

Officers of the Western Volunteer Army with German volunteers. In the center is Bermond-Avalov. Image from wikipedia.org



This map shows the repartition of the ethnically German population through history. Image from archive.org



States of Mitteleuropa (blue) and the larger cultural sphere (outlined). Image from wikipedia.org



Map of the Ober-Ost area from the German propaganda poster from the First World War. Image from wikipedia.org



General Rüdiger von der Goltz, commanded the army of the Baltic Germans. Image from wikipedia.org



The last military parade of the Baltic Landeswehr, March 22, 1920. Image from wikipedia.org

Germania is the personification of the German patriotism/nationalism. Invented during the Romantic era and the period of German nation building, this image had been reused by the German Empire. Image from althistory.wikia.com





POLISH INDEPENDENCE

Poland had a long tradition of statehood and the union with Lithuania that distinguished itself by an ethnic and religious diversity. Most of the elites in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine were assimilated into Polish culture. The country was gradually dominated by the aristocracy, which gained the upper hand over numerous nobility. At the same time, in ethnically mixed regions the correlation between ethnic and religious communities and social class emerged (i.e. Roman Catholic Polish aristocracy, nobility vs. Ukrainian petty gentry, Cossacks and peasants). In large urban areas Jews and, to a lesser degree, Germans were greatly overrepresented. In the 18th century, after several centuries of conflict with Russia over the domination of Eastern Europe, Poland-Lithuania (Commonwealth, namely federation since 1569) turned into a Russian protectorate and was partitioned among its neighbors (Prussia, Russia, Austria). Russia finally gained control of more than 80 percent of the territory of pre-war Poland-Lithuania. However ethnic Poles were divided more evenly among the three empires. More than 55% of them lived in Russia, while the rest, in equal proportion, were divided between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Apart from the Ukrainians, Poles were the largest group in Europe without their own state.

The Poles constituted more than 6% of Russia's population (the third largest nation), almost 10% of Austrian-Hungary (the fourth biggest nation) and around 6% of Germany which was ethnically homogenous (Germans making more than 90% of population) in comparison to Russia and Austria-Hungary. St. Petersburg assigned autonomy to the part of the former Commonwealth. In the 19th century, the Poles launched two unsuccessful uprisings against Russia which resulted in the loss of its autonomy. The organizers of the uprisings wanted to reconstruct the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a federation led by Poles. At the same time, many Poles made careers within the Russian state institutions engaging in contacts with other nations. At the end of the 19th century, the idea of a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was rejected by the National Democrats, headed by Roman Dmowski.

Roman Dmowski was promoting a new ethnic version of Polish nationalism and treating Catholicism as a key foundation of national identity. They were strongly anti-Semitic, anti-German and anti-Ukrainian, while positively perceiving an alliance with Russia.



ROMAN DMOWSKI
1864-1939



The main opponent of Dmowski was Józef Piłsudski, a socialist who perceived Russia as the main enemy. He cultivated notions of civic Polish national identity and the reestablishment of a Polish-Lithuanian federation with a very close alliance with Ukraine. Piłsudski also promoted the idea of Prometheism, namely a common fight for the liberation of non-Russian nations under Polish leadership.

1867-1935
JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI

During WWI, Dmowski strongly undertook a pro-French position. Meanwhile, Piłsudski initially cooperated with Austro-Hungary and Germany. He created the Polish Legions, military units fighting under the command of Central powers, but after the February Revolution in Russia and the entrance of the US into WWI on the side of Entente, he rejected German protection and was arrested. Just before the end of the war, Piłsudski was released from prison, and on 11th November, 1918 officially took power in Warsaw. However, this day was only recognized in Poland as Independence Day in 1937. Poland regained independence thanks to a combination of several favorable factors: an unprecedented situation of military defeat of the three partitioning states which were fighting against each other. The rivalry for Polish support between the three powers resulted in raising the stakes of Polish autonomy, and even some form of statehood. The turning point was the memorandum of the US President Woodrow Wilson, the so called "14-points", issued in February 1918. It stated that "Poland was to become an independent state with access to the sea, including territories inhabited indisputably by the Polish population". Poland was the only country mentioned directly by Wilson as a new independent state. After its reestablishment in November 1918, Poland gained crucial diplomatic and military support from France.



General Józef Haller performs a symbolic act of connecting Pomerania to Poland on the seacoast in Puck. Image from polska1918-89.pl



Between 1918 and 1921 Poland simultaneously ran several wars with almost all of its neighbors, excluding Latvia and Romania. Poland fought with Bolshevik Russia, Lithuania, the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) and the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR) regarding its eastern border. Three Polish uprisings broke out in Silesia and one against Germany in the region of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska). Poland also engaged in a short conflict with Czechoslovakia over Cieszyn Silesia and the demarcation of the border in the Carpathian Mountains. Almost all of them resulted in a Polish victory. Because of so many conflicts, Poland only gained the international recognition of all its borders in 1923.



The "Big Four" at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Wilson is standing next to Georges Clemenceau at right. Image from wikipedia.org

Government of Jędrzej Moraczewski, 1918. Image from polishfreedom.pl



The Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland in 1918. The "Kingdom" was a proposed puppet state of the German Empire during World War I, established to entice Poles to cooperate with the Central Powers.

The Republic of Poland, nationalities. Borders after 1923. Image from wlapolske.pl





Signing a pre-military treaty between Poland and Russia in Riga. Image from dzieje.pl

POLISH-RUSSIAN-BOLSHEVIK WAR 1919-1920

federative Russia. The first military incidents between Polish armed forces marching to the East and the Bolsheviks moving to the West occurred in February 1919 in the South-Western Belarus. In early March 1919, the Polish army started an offensive, crossing the Neman River, advancing steadily to the East. Polish troops recaptured Vilnius on 19 April, driving the Lithuanian-Belarusian Bolshevik government from their proclaimed capital. At the beginning of August, Polish forces took Minsk and two months later Polish soldiers reached the Daugava river. At the same time, the Polish army gained control over most of Volhynia in Ukraine. During that autumn the intensity of the confrontation decreased dramatically. The Bolsheviks operated in a defensive mode because the Red Army was preoccupied with the White forces. The White movement had gained the initiative, and its troops, under the command of Anton Denikin, marched through Ukraine and onto Moscow.

Piłsudski refused to join Deninkin in the attack against the Bolsheviks, ignoring the strong pressure from the Entente. He assumed Poland would be better off with the Bolsheviks, alienated from the Western powers, than with the restored Russian Empire, their former key ally. Piłsudski was accused of saving the Bolshevik government, although a full-scale attack by the Poles in support of Denikin was at that time wishful-thinking. Moreover, Denikin's offence rapidly ran out of steam due to warfare with various guerilla groups which attacked its supply routes in Ukraine.

April 1920 Poland, after signing the alliance with the Ukrainian People's Republic, began its main offensive, Operation Kyiv.

On 7th May the combined Polish-Ukrainian forces entered an abandoned Kyiv, only encountering token resistance. At the end of May, the Polish offensive was met by a successful Bolshevik counterattack. The Polish forces in southern Ukraine were engaged by Semyon Budyonny's famous 1st Cavalry Army. The Army was immortalized by Isaak Babel, a soldier and one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century, in his collection of short stories "Red Cavalry".

The capture of Kyiv by Polish-Ukrainian forces provoked the nationalistic backlash in Russia. On 30 May 1920 General Aleksei Brusilov, the last Tsarist Commander-in-Chief, published in Pravda an appeal - titled "To All Former Officers, Wherever They Might Be" - encouraging them to forgive the Bolshevik's past grievances and to join the Red Army.

General Mikhail Tukhachevsky launched his offensive at the beginning of July, along the Smolensk-Brest-Litovsk axis, putting Polish forces to flight. Soviet forces moved forward at the remarkable rate, more than 30 kilometers a day. The Soviet operation pushed Polish forces back westward all the way to Warsaw. The fall of Warsaw seemed certain but on 15 August, the tide had again turned, as Polish forces counterattacked and achieved victory at the Battle of Warsaw. Polish military intelligence decrypted the Red Army's radio messages, and Tukhachevsky fell into a trap set by Piłsudski. Budyonny's Cavalry Army finally joined the battle but it was also soundly defeated in the Battle of Komarów, known as the last great cavalry battle in history. The Polish-Bolshevik War was a prelude to the Blitzkrieg because, for the first time in history, Poland organized rides composed of tanks and mechanized infantry formations with close air support.

After being repulsed from the outskirts of Warsaw, Tukhachevsky managed to reorganize his forces and established a new defensive line running along the Niemen River. However, the Polish army crossed the Niemen River and outflanked the Red Army, which was finally defeated. Already during the battle, the Bolsheviks sued for peace. Poland exhausted by several years of war accepted their offer. The armistice went into effect on 18th October.

18-03-1921 Poland and the Soviet Union signed the Peace Treaty of Riga which split Belarus and Ukraine between them.

The Polish delegation was dominated by the National Democrats who were against Piłsudski's idea of a federation so they were not eager to press the Soviets to accept a border going along the frontline, which was located considerably to the East (including parts of Belarus and Western Ukraine) in comparison to the final demarcation of the border.



Otaman (supreme commander) Symon Petlura and the chief commander Marshal Józef Piłsudski photographed in a wagon standing in Vinnytsia during the Kyiv expedition in April 1920. Image from wyborcza.pl

General of the Ukrainian National Republic Marko Bezrucho with the Polish allies. Image from uain.press



Polish and Ukrainian troops in Kyiv, 1920. Image from wikipedia.org



May 18, 1920, Castle Square - Marshal Józef Piłsudski on his return from the victorious Kyiv Expedition. Image from fotopolska.eu



Polish defences at Młotna, near Warsaw. Image from wikipedia.org

Parade columns of tanks Renault FT-17 in Poznań. Image from polska-org.pl





CRIMEAN TATARS

On the current territory of Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars undertook attempts to build their own state. At the start of 20th century they represented the largest ethnic community living on the Crimean Peninsula, but their share of the total population slightly exceeded 35%. They lost an absolute majority in the 1860s as a result of voluntary and forced migration. Russians (around one third) and Ukrainians (around 12%) represented the largest non-Tatar communities. The Crimean Tatar community, despite their small size, was the avant-garde of the modernization of Muslim nations in Russia because they achieved the highest levels of literacy, substantially higher than the Ukrainians and the Belarusians. Qurultay (the parliament) of Crimean Tatars established an autonomous Crimean People's Republic in December 1917. The declaration of autonomy stipulated the equality of all nations living within the peninsula.

Nevertheless by the end of January 1918, the Bolsheviks captured the whole of Crimea and dissolved the Qurultay. A mass terror engulfed the peninsula based on class struggle and ethnic cleansing. The Bolsheviks established the Taurida Soviet Socialist Republic on Crimean territory in March 1918 but the area was liberated by German and Ukrainian forces in cooperation with Tatar guerilla. The Germans established the autonomous Crimean Regional Government in June 1918 with Lithuanian-Polish Tatar General Maciej Suleyman Sulkiewicz as prime minister. There were efforts by Ukraine to exert control over Crimea but, with German support, the regional government remained separate from Ukraine; however in September and October, there were advanced talks to effect a federation between the two countries. Crimea was again invaded by the Bolsheviks in April 1919, who established the Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic, but after a few weeks they were expelled by Whites. The Bolsheviks ultimately conquered the Peninsula in November 1920. The conquest was accompanied by mass massacres committed particularly against Tatars and huge outflow of refugees. in consequence, Russians became the largest ethnic community on the Peninsula.

Noman Celebi Cihan - the head of the Directorate of the Crimean Tatar People's Republic, the author of the words of the national anthem of the Crimean Tatars "Ant Etkenmen!" ("I swore!").

1885-1918



Maciej (Suleyman bey) Sulkiewicz - was a lieutenant general of the Russian Empire, Prime Minister of Crimea (1918), and Chief of General Staff of Azerbaijani Armed Forces in 1918-20. Was executed by the Bolsheviks after the invasion of Azerbaijan in 1920.

1865-1920



The Khan's Palace or Hansaray is located in the town of Bakhchysarai, Crimea. It was built in the 16th century and became home to a succession of Crimean Khans. It was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List back in 2003. After the annexation of the Crimea Russia started construction works in the architectural complex. This interference offended the Crimean Tatars. Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimea Tatar People Ilmi Umerov says Ukraine should appeal to international organizations for help in the rescue of the world-renowned Khan's Palace in the occupied Crimea from Russia's so-called 'restoration work,' which destroys its identity. Russia is denying the accusations.

Image from unian.info. Read more on UNIAN: <https://www.unian.info/society/2338197-russia-destroying-16th-century-crimean-tatar-khans-palace-in-occupied-crimea.html>



Participants of the First Qurultay of the Crimean Tatars in the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai. Ninth to the left in the first row is Noman Celebi Cihan. December 1917. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua



COLONEL

Petro Bolbochan - Colonel of the Ukrainian People's Republic Army. In April 1918, as the head of the Crimean military group, liberated the Crimea from the Bolsheviks. On April 22, the Crimean group captured Dzhankoi, and April 24 - Simferopol. After the ultimatum of the German occupation command, and on the order of the War Minister of the UNR, the Colonel's Bolbochan military units left the Crimea.

CRIMEA OPERATION (1918)

Took place in April 1918. As a result the Crimea was cleared of the Bolsheviks by Ukrainian troops and German Army.



Images: Drawing-chart of the campaign of P. Bolbochan's group in Crimea in April 1918; ukrainian warships in the port of Sevastopol, 1918; Colonel Bolbochan military group before the campaign. Images from wikipedia.org

Vegetables sellers. Twentieth century. Image from wikipedia.org



PROMINENT UKRAINIAN STATESMEN

MYKHAILO HRUSHEVSKY
President of the Ukrainian People's Republic

YEVHEN PETRUSHEVYCH
President of the Western Ukrainian National Republic

PAVLO SKOROPADSKY
Hetman of The Ukrainian State

SYMON PETLIURA
Supreme Commander of the Ukrainian Army

VOLODYMYR VYNNYCHENKO
First Prime Minister of Ukraine





UKRAINIAN INDEPENDENCE

Ukraine was the largest nation in Europe without its own state. Ukrainians were the second largest nation of Tsarist Russia (about 20% of its population), but they also inhabited the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in large numbers(about 8% of the population, the fifth biggest nation). The Ukrainian lands distinguished themselves by low literacy rates and numerous non-Ukrainian national communities (Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, others) constituted the majority of population in cities. The majority of ethnic Ukrainians were peasants who were unable to read (the literacy rate was around 20% for ethnic Ukrainians at the end of 19th century).

1917-1921


Ukrainian People's Republic, or Ukrainian National Republic (UNR). On 10-06-1917, the Ukrainian Central Council declared its autonomy as part of the Russian Republic - on 22-01-1918 it proclaimed the full independence of Ukraine.

1918-1919


West Ukrainian People's Republic. Was proclaimed on 01-11-1918 by the Ukrainian National Rada (a council consisting of all Ukrainian representatives from both houses of the Austrian parliament and from the provincial diets in Galicia and Bukovyna).

Bolshevik Russia invaded UNR in December 1917 and conquered the Eastern part of the country, despite the heroic defense of small Ukrainian forces (the Battle of Kruty). On January 22, 1918, in the face of the unlawful dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks and their military invasion, the People's Republic of Ukraine proclaimed full independence under the leadership of Mykhailo Hrushevsky. ZUNR declared its independence on 1st of November 1918. On 22th of January 1919, the UNR and ZUNR united into one state but tensions between them, particularly concerning relations with Poland, persisted. In spring 1918 Ukraine gained the protection of Germany, which defeated the Bolsheviks, but the German authorities forced the change of government into conservative one and the official name of Ukraine, for several months, was switched to the Ukrainian State under Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi. According to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, the UNR gained borders including those besides most of current Ukraine, eastern fragments of current Poland, and a considerable part of southern Belarus, while Crimea and small portions of southern and eastern current Ukraine remained outside. Initially, the ZUNR controlled Eastern Galicia and northern Bukovina and aspired to incorporate Zakarpattia (at that time belonging to Hungary) and fragments of Carpathians (now located in Poland and Slovakia). During the Versailles Peace Conference, the UNR presented even larger territorial claims, including Crimea, Kuban, Budjak (currently an Ukrainian region bordering Moldova and Romania) and eastern parts of current Russia.


22-01-1919



An agreement signed by the Ukrainian People's Republic and the West Ukrainian People's Republic on the St. Sophia Square in Kyiv: «The territory of Ukraine, divided over the centuries, including Galicia, Bukovyna, Carpathian Ruthenia, and Dnipro Ukraine will now become a great united Ukraine».



UNIFICATION ACT
ACT ZLUKY



The UNR elite regained power after the German capitulation but immediately became the victim of the second Bolshevik Russian invasion. The Ukrainians were only able to defend the Western fragments of their territory. It means that the UNR and Ukrainian State were able to control most of the Ukrainian territory with interruptions only for a short time in 1918. Ukrainian statehood, however, was recognized not only by the Central Powers but also by France, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and Finland and other states. The People's Republic of Ukraine, under the leadership of ataman Symon Petlura, was Poland's main ally in the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920, contributing to their victory in the Battle of Warsaw.

The period 1918-1921, in the Ukrainian lands, was generally characterized as a state of permanent bloody civil war with a multitude of warlords and quasi-states (Nestor Machno), several external interventions, massive hunger, diseases and enormous repressions against civilians. In total, around 2-3 million people lost their lives - definitely more than other wars of independence at this time.

During the war, anti-Jewish massive pogroms were perpetrated, mostly by disobedient Ukrainian forces and Whites. At least 50,000 people were killed, and even more people, who were forced to flee, died due to disease, injury, hunger or exhaustion. Paradoxically, however, national minorities, including Jews were largely represented at the level of the ruling elite.

The outcome of the war was the partition of the Ukrainian territories between Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Soviet Union (which occupied most of the former People's Republic of Ukraine). In autumn 1921 the UNR armed forces undertook, from the territory of Poland, the last unsuccessful attempt to push back against the Soviets (the Second Winter Campaign). The main reasons for the failure of the Ukrainian independence project included the following: a lack of significant support for it in urban areas; low literacy rates; the lack of a strong sense of national identity across the country; the loss of the main patron of independence;; the popularity of Russian-Ukrainian identity among certain segments of Ukrainian society; the fragmentation of the political elite; the destruction of the ZUNR (the strongest army and state institutions) by Poland; and the lack of outstanding statesmen who would be able to push through the Ukrainian independence (no Ukrainian Mannenheim).



Ukrainian national currency issued by the the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917 - 100 karbovanets. Signed in three languages: Ukrainian, Polish and Yiddish. Image from wikipedia.org




The front side of the 100 hryvnia's bank note of the Ukrainian People's Republic, which existed in 1918-1921. In the spring of 1918, the Ukrainian government decided to change the name of the money from "karbovanets" on "hryvnia" in order to emphasize the affinity with the traditions of Kievan Rus, which used "hryvnia". Image from wikipedia.org

UKRAINIAN STATE GOVERNMENT FORM TRANSFORMATIONS 1917-21


UKRAINIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

General Secretariat - government headed by Volodymyr Vynnychenko; Central Council - council that united the political, public, cultural and professional organizations; President - Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Declared its autonomy as part of the Russian Republic by its First Universal. By the Fourth Universal, Central Council has broke ties with Russia and proclaimed a sovereign Ukrainian state.




UKRAINIAN STATE

Conservative Government of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky. Established an effective administrative organization, diplomatic ties with many countries, and concluded a peace treaty with Soviet Russia. In a few months, the Hetmanate also printed millions of Ukrainian language textbooks, established many Ukrainian schools, two universities, and the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.



UKRAINIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

The Directorate, or Directory. A provisional collegiate revolutionary state committee of the Ukrainian People's Republic lead mainly by Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petliura This government challenged Ukrainian-Soviet War and Soviet-Polish War of 1920, which Poles and Ukrainians advanced side by side. The existence of UNR ended by failure of The Second Winter Campaign fagainst Bolsheviks.





Overthrowing of the monument to former prime minister Peter Stolypin in Kyiv. March 1917. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua



Proposed borders presented by the Ukrainian delegation at the Paris Conference. Image from wikipedia.org



Meeting of Andrei Sheptytsky at the Lviv train station after his return from Russia in September 1917. Image from jnsn.com.ua



The staff of the Kyiv "Young Theater" in the closing day of the first season, 1918. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua



The commanding staff of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen. Shepetivka, September 1919. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua

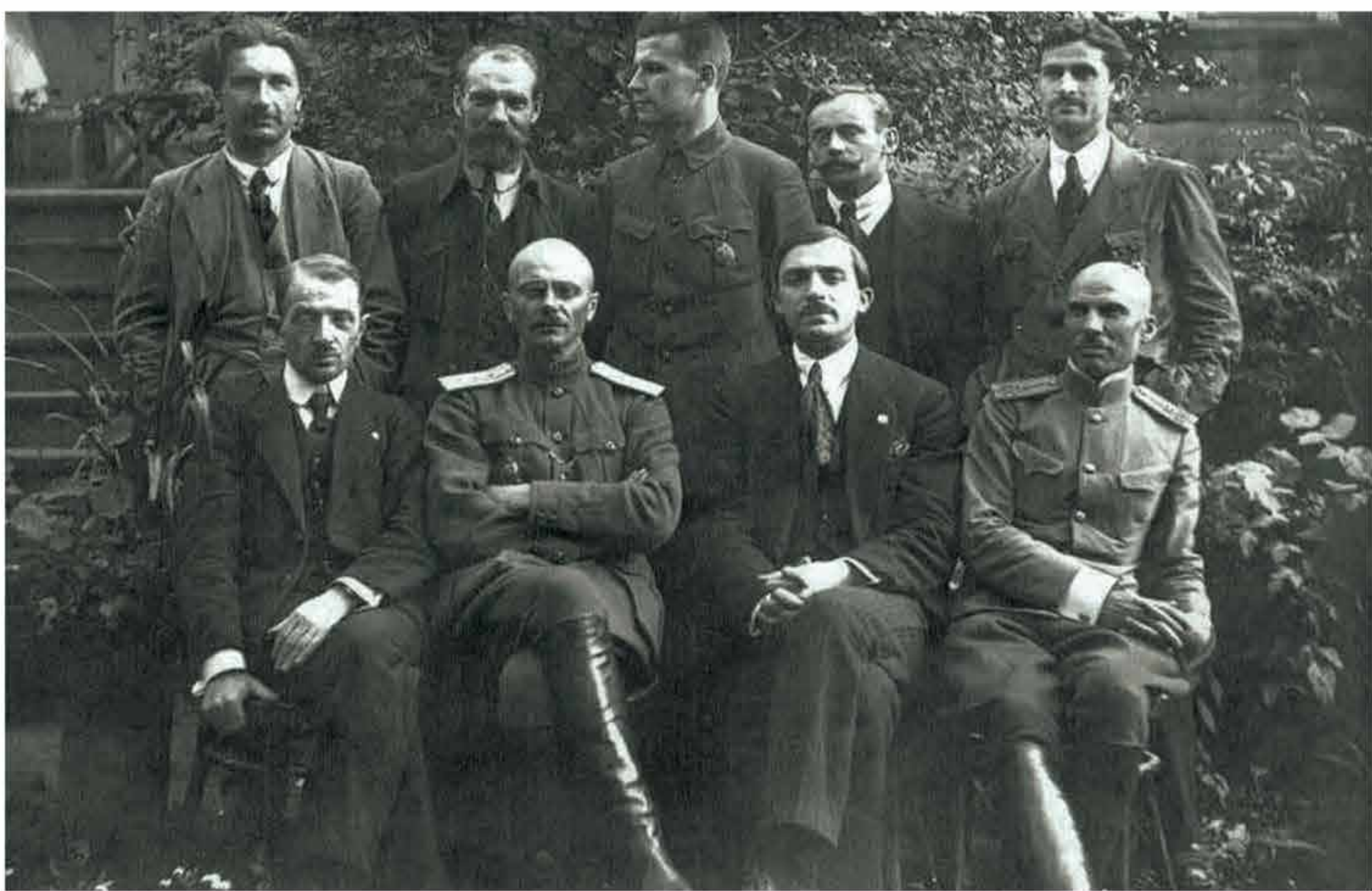


The highest command of the Estonian Army visit to Pskov on May 31st 1919. General Bulak-Balakhovich (left) talks with the commander of the Estonian army Johannes Laidoner.

BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENCE

As a result of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Congress of Vienna, the Belarusian territories passed under the rule of the Russian Empire. The main factor influencing the national processes in Belarus in the 19th century was the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church by the Tsarist regime and the forced transfer of its believers into the Orthodox Church. In consequence, Belarusians were divided between the Orthodox Christian majority (mostly uneducated peasants lacking any notion of national identity and educated classes leaning towards Russian identity) and the Roman Catholic minority (members of the petty gentry and inhabitants of small cities affiliated to Polish culture). This situation that resulted was a very limited number of publications in Belarusian, compared to the numbers published in Ukrainian. Only 20% of ethnic Belarusians were literate by the end of 19th century. The cities were generally small and dominated by other groups (Jews, Poles, and Russians).

The Belarusian national movement, as a political force, started very late (at the beginning of 20th century) when Wacław Łastouski, Ivan and Anton Lutskevich set up the Belarusian Revolutionary and then the Socialist Assembly (Hramada). The national program was very strongly influenced by socialism. Catholics, often with noble backgrounds, were overrepresented in the Belarusian nationalist movement. The nationalists treated the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the premodern Belarusian state, but they had to compete for the right to this state tradition with Poles and Lithuanians. During the First World War, the western part of the territory of modern Belarus from 1915 was under German occupation. Germany established for the first time in history a modern education on a grand scale in the Belarusian language. After the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in March 1918, the entire territory of Belarus was occupied by Germany.



First Government of Belarusian People's Republic. Sitting, left to right: Aliaksandar Burbis, Jan Sierada, Jazep Varonka, Vasil Zacharka. Standing, left to right: Arkadz Smolich, Pyotra Krecheuski, Kastus Jezavitau, Anton Ausianik, Liavon Zayats.

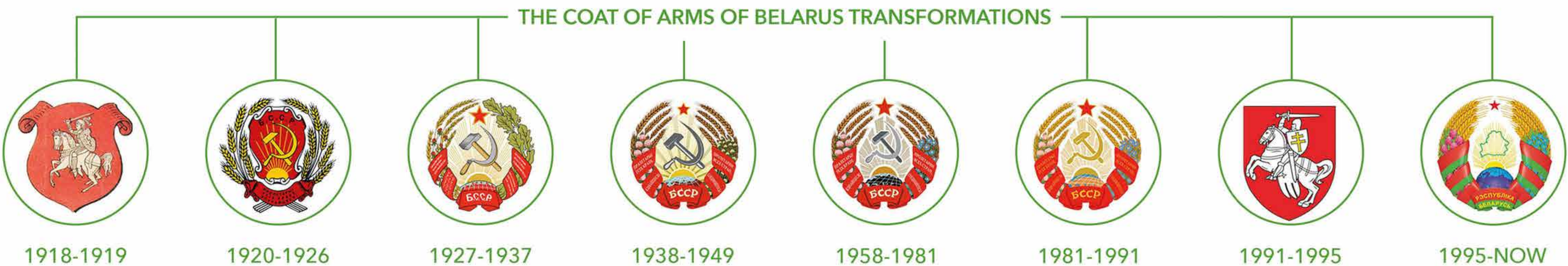
25-03-1918 Belarus formally announced the independent state as the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). A new state raised its territorial claims to the north-eastern parts of current Poland, Smolensk and Bransk in Russia and Vilnius in Lithuania. But the BNR lacked its own army, police, judiciary, finances and, most importantly, international recognition.

In early 1919, the Soviet Red Army occupied most of Belarusian lands. The Belarusian elites divided themselves into three orientations: pro-Russian/Bolshevik, pro-Polish and pro-Lithuanian. In 1919-20 Belarus was an arena of fierce fighting between Poland and Bolshevik Russia. The last attempt to gain independence in the name of BNR was undertaken in autumn 1920 by General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, who created the Slutsk Republic which was destroyed by the Bolsheviks after several weeks. Finally, under the terms of Riga Treaty, the territories of present Belarus were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia.



GENERAL

Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz supported the Government of Belarusian People's Republic and openly positioned his army as a Belarusian national army.



Images from: painting - usolt.livejournal.com; photo - wikipedia.org



Marc Chagall was an early modernist artist of Belarusian Jewish origin. He created his own style of modern art based on his idea of Eastern European Jewish folk culture. He spent the wartime years in Soviet Belarus, becoming one of the country's most distinguished artists and a member of the modernist avant-garde.





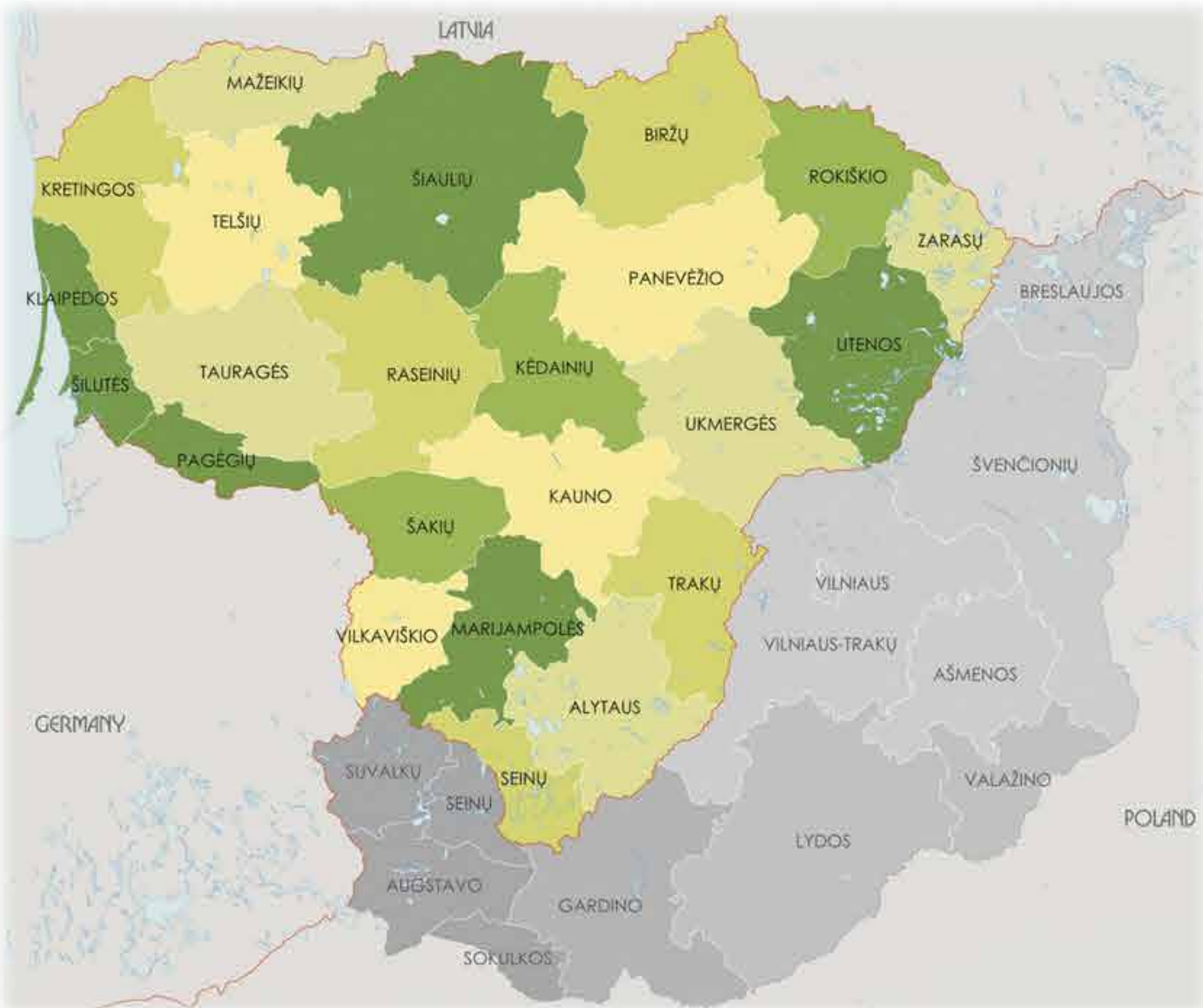
Twenty members of the Council of Lithuania. All the images are from wikipedia.org



LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE

Lithuania, before its annexation into the Russian Empire in 1795, had a long tradition of statehood and independence as the Great Duchy of Lithuania which was in federation with the Kingdom of Poland. In this period, most of elites were gradually Polishised and the Jewish community gained a strong presence in large urban areas. There was also a large group of people, especially among petty gentry, with dual Polish and Lithuanian identity. The Lithuanian ethnic territories constituted a small part of the Great Duchy and they were inhabited by numerous non-Lithuanian minorities. The modern Lithuanian national identity developed in opposition to the state policy of Russification and the Polishisation promoted by the Polish nationalist movement. The peasantry, and to a lesser degree the petty gentry, represented the social base of Lithuanian nationalism. Lithuanian national identity was mostly defined in ethnic terms (i.e. language, folk culture, etc.) but also Catholicism and the medieval tradition of Great Duchy. The free status of many peasants in Samogitia contributed to relatively high literacy levels. Almost half of the Lithuanian population at the end of 19th century was literate – higher than the rate among Poles living in Russia.

Meanwhile, the number of Lithuanians living in urban areas was lower than the number of Latvians and Estonians. Non-Lithuanians dominated main cities in Lithuania. The most contentious issue was the status of Vilnius, the historical capital of Lithuania and its surroundings. It was mostly inhabited by Poles. The city played a role in one of the key cultural centers in Polish history. The Poles living in Vilnius who accepted the status of citizens of a future Lithuania constituted a tiny minority. A political Lithuanian movement was reinforced during the 1905 Revolution and pursued the program of cultural and political autonomy – the reestablishment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in a smaller version. During the First World War, Russia had to retreat from Lithuania, letting the country be occupied by German forces in autumn 1915. In September 1917, Germany authorized the organization of the Vilnius Conference by the Lithuanian nationalist movement which elected the Taryba, a 20-member State Council.



Counties of Lithuania 1920-1939

16-02-1918 Taryba proclaimed the Act of Reinstating Independence of Lithuania.

However, initially, Germany did not recognize the Act. Lithuania, trying to convince the Germans, decided to establish the Kingdom of Lithuania with Prince Wilhelm, son of the King of Württemberg. In July 1918, Mindaugas II was elected King of Lithuania by the Taryba, but he never managed to get crowned as Germany was losing the war. The Kingdom of Lithuania, under German protection, included vast parts of current northern Poland and Belarus, thus making Lithuanians the minority group in the country. On 11th of November 1918, immediately after the signing of the armistice in Compiegne, Lithuania finally elect their own government led by Augustinas Voldemaras. In April 1919, Taryba elected Antanas Smetona the first president of Lithuania. He would become the most important political figure of the Interwar period in Lithuania. He symbolizes the complexity of the Lithuanian-Polish Gordian knot. His wife, Sofija Smetonienė, was the cousin of Piłsudski.

The Bolsheviks invaded Lithuania in autumn 1918. They progressed rapidly and gained control of two-thirds of Lithuania's territory. They captured Vilnius at the start of January 1919. Thanks to the German Freikorps (militia), the Bolshevik's offensive was stopped and the Lithuanian state had an opportunity to build its own military forces. Nevertheless, later Lithuanians had to fight against German irregular forces – the Bermondts' West Russian Volunteers Army – which invaded Lithuania from Latvia in summer 1919. However the Lithuanians defeated them in November 1919 at the Battle of Radviliškis.

16-02-1918 Vilnius became a capital of proclaimed independent Lithuania

05-01-1919 Bolsheviks captured Vilnius

08-10-1920 Żeligowski troops led to the annexation of Vilnius by Poland and it became an official Polish territory in 1922

Vilnius was seized by the Soviet Union

The Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR announced its secession from the Soviet Union and intention to restore an independent Republic of Lithuania with Vilnius as a capital

Finally between 1919 and 1920 Lithuania had to fight the war against Poland. The war broke out because of a dispute over Vilnius and its surroundings, but for the Lithuanians it was also a defense of their independence. Part of the Polish elite wanted to establish a federation with Lithuania, while other parties preferred its incorporation. Lithuania managed to maintain its independence but Vilnius and the territories around it became part of Poland which gained the town through "mutiny" of its armed forces. On January 1923, Lithuania conducted a similar operation in the region of Klaipeda (Memel) which was mostly inhabited by Germans; a substantial part of the region belonged to Germany before the First World War. After the short rebellion the region was annexed by Lithuania.

Lithuanian armoured train Gediminas 3, used in Lithuanian Wars of Independence and Lithuanian soldiers



Augustinas Voldemaras, first prime minister

Antanas Smetona, the first and last president of independent Lithuania during the 1918-1939





Act of Proclamation of the independence of Latvia, November 18, 1918. Photographer - Vilis Ridzenieks.



LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE

Between the 13th century and the 16th century Latvia was under the rule of various German feudal political institutions which partly survived until the end of 18th century in the form the Duchy of Courland, a vassal state of Poland. Latvian lands were conquered gradually by Russia in the 18th century due to the conflict with Sweden and the partition of Poland. Initially under the Tsarist rule, German nobility and bourgeoisie enjoyed a certain political autonomy, whereas Latvians (generally peasants) were considered second class citizens. However due to the very high literacy levels (around 85% by the end of 19th century), the Latvian nationalist movement was able to develop a vibrant national awareness in the second half of the 19th century. (Literacy levels were much lower in Latgale, an Eastern part of the country inhabited mostly by the Catholic community). Moreover, urbanization and industrialization contributed to the emergence of the Latvian bourgeoisie and working class and the change in the ethnic structure of large cities in favor of Latvians, which constituted almost half of the population of Riga, on the eve of the war. Non-Latvians besides Germans, Russians, Jews, and Poles accounted for around 30% of the population.

When the First World War broke out, the ethnic Latvians in order to defend their country against the German offensive organized themselves into the Latvian Riflemen and fought on with the Russians, distinguishing themselves especially during the Christmas Battle (January 1917). However German forces conquered Riga in September and occupied the whole country after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty (March 3, 1918). Meanwhile, in November 1917 Latvian parties established the National Council of Latvia. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the German defeat in November 1918 offered Latvia a window of opportunity to proclaim independence.

18-11-1918

As such, on November 18, 1918, Tautas Padome (the People's Council of Latvia), the successor of the National Council, declared the independence of Latvia; and a Latvian provisional government was then subsequently created. Kārlis Ulmanis was elected the prime minister. He would go on to the president of Latvia during the interwar period.

The invasion of the Bolsheviks on 1st December 1918 showed that Latvian society was polarized. Initially, many Latvians joined the Bolsheviks and established the Latvian Red Riflemen. The initial high support for the Bolsheviks is explained by the fact that a high proportion of the Latvian population was made up of industrial and agricultural workers. Many of them believed that the Bolshevik Revolution would bring also the independence of the country. However the social mood changed rapidly because of the mass terror launched by the Bolsheviks. They gained rapid control of Latvia, occupying Riga in January 1919. The national government maintained a very small portion of territory under its control. It had to transfer itself to Liepāja. The Baltic German minority constituted another challenge to Latvian independence. After initial cooperation with Latvia, Baltisch Landeswehr, a German militia under the command of Rüdiger Von der Goltz, orchestrated a coup against the Latvian government. The coup received the informal support of Germany. German forces took back Riga from the Soviets committing massacres against the local population and continued their advance to the north. Their objective was to conquer Estonia in order to establish a German state in the Baltic region, which was supposed as a modern version of the state of Livonian Order to be ruled by Baltic Germans. However, Baltisch Landeswehr lost the crucial Battle of Cēsis (June 1919) against Estonian and Latvian national forces. Finally, on 3rd of January 1920, Latvian forces, together with the Polish Army, defeated the Socialist Soviet Republic in the final battle of Daugavpils.

11-08-1920

This victory led to the Treaty of Riga (August 11, 1920) in which Bolshevik Russia recognized the independence and the territorial integrity of Latvia.

Good to know. Latvian capital Riga is the city with the highest concentration of Art Nouveau architecture anywhere in the world. Built during a period of rapid economic growth, most of Riga's Art Nouveau buildings date from between 1904 to 1914.

1904-1914

Photos from wikipedia.org



Map beneath is showing an independent Latvia in 1919. Map from The Map House website



Members of the Provisional Government of Latvia and aboard the Saratov ship. July 8, 1919. Photographer - Vilis Ridzenieks.



Bermont army (West Russian Volunteer Army) destroyed houses in Daugavpils. October - November 1919. Photographer - Vilis Ridzenieks. The ruined castle of Riga, destroyed during the Bermont army attack. December 1919. Photographer - Vilis Ridzenieks





Estonian armoured train during the War of Independence. All the images are from wikipedia.org



ESTONIAN INDEPENDENCE

For centuries Estonian lands belonged to various countries (for instance, Denmark and Sweden), but the most important was the legacy of German rule (the Livonian Order). Estonia became part of Russia in the early 18th century after Russia's victory against Sweden in the Third Northern War (1700-1721). In the 19th century the domination of political and economic life by the German nobility and bourgeoisie gradually eroded. The process was facilitated by the fact that, in comparison to Latvia, the Germans constituted a substantially smaller part of Estonia's population. Generally, Estonia was considerably more ethnically homogenous than Latvia. In the second half of the 19th century, the Estonians became a decisive majority in the main cities. At the end of the century Estonians, mostly Lutherans, gained almost full literacy skills. The Estonian nationalist movement, from the very beginning, gained support from autonomous Finland. Some members of the patriotic movement saw Russian central government as a potential ally in their struggle against local German-Baltic overpower. Hoping of Russian protection, a non-negligible minority of Estonians even converted to Orthodox Christianity. Among them was the family of Konstantin Päts, the Founding Father of Estonian independence. Still the hope for help from Russian authorities turned out to be naive. The government's aim was Russification, not the emancipation of the Estonians.



The Estonian Army High Command in 1920. From upper left: General Major Ernst Põdder, Dr. Arthur Lossmann, General Major Aleksander Tõnisson, Colonel Karl Parts, Colonel Viktor Puskar, Colonel Jaan Rink. From bottom left: General Major Andres Larka, General Major Jaan Soots, Commander in chief General Lieutenant Johan Laidoner, Admiral Johan Pitka and Colonel Rudolf Reiman.

The February Revolution in Russia acted as a window of opportunity for the Estonian nationalist movement. At the initial stage, the Estonian political elite aspired to gain autonomy for their region inside the Russian Republic. It was its key political victory when the Russian Provisional Government in April 1917 authorized the creation of Maapäev (Estonian Provincial Assembly) and the unification of the ethnically Estonian territories within one administrative unite. However, after the Bolshevik Revolution, the idea of Estonian autonomy within democratic Russia became obsolete. The Bolsheviks dissolved Maapäev and occupied the country temporarily pushing the pro-independence Estonians underground.

24-02-1918

Using the German offensive in winter 1918 and the retreat of Red Army as a window of opportunity, Maapäev re-established itself and issued the Estonian Declaration of Independence on 24 February 1918. Nevertheless the first period of independence was extremely short-lived with the German forces entering Tallinn the following day and Germany did recognizing Estonia's independence.



Declaration of independence in Pärnu on 23 February 1918

The military victory of the Estonian army against the Bolsheviks allowed Estonia to support the fight for Latvian independence. Finally, Estonia signed the Treaty of Tartu (February 2, 1920) with Russia, which recognized its independence and territorial integrity.

Image below - the first celebration of Estonian Independence Day in Tallinn on 24 February 1919

The departure of German forces in November 1918 allowed the Estonian Provisional Government, led by Konstantin Päts, to regain power for the second time. However a few days afterwards the Bolsheviks, again, invaded Estonia and conquered half the country, eventually stopping at the doors of Tallinn. Estonian national forces, founding themselves at the initial stage of formation, were unable to resist the invasion. Nevertheless thanks to the support of Scandinavian volunteers (mostly Finish but also some Swedish and Danish) and the Royal Navy, Estonian forces orchestrated a successful counter-offensive in January 1919 and were able to push the Bolsheviks out of Estonia in just three weeks. This spectacular victory gave Estonian society the confidence in the project of independence. Estonia repulsed the successive offensives of the Red Army, and the Estonian army even led an offensive into Russian territories, arriving at the doors of St Petersburg in the summer of 1919. This operation, which was strongly encouraged by the Entente, was conducted in cooperation with White Russian forces. However Estonia had an ambivalent attitude towards its Russian allies due to their political program foreseeing the reconstruction of Russia in the pre-war borders. In consequence, the Estonian army refrained from a direct assault of Russian White forces at St Petersburg. The attack ended up in failure.

The Bolsheviks undertook a last attempt to conquer Estonia in autumn 1919 but the Estonians achieved a final victory against the Red Army in the battle of Krivasoo (November-December 1919).

11/12-1919



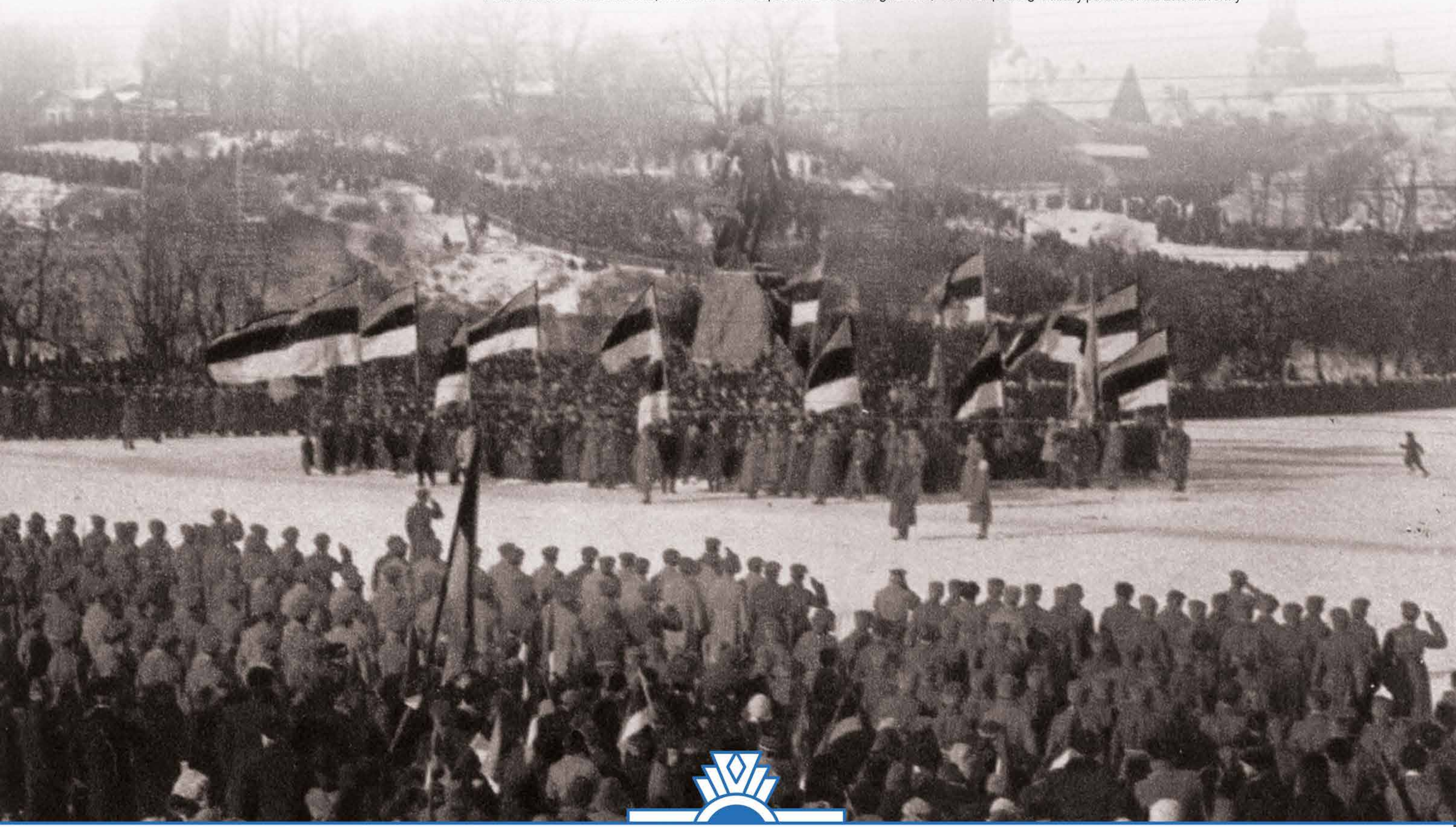
Finnish volunteers arrive in Tallinn, December 1918



Vaps Movement meeting in Pärnu, Artur Sirk speaking



Military parade of the Estonian army



**TAL
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New Eastern Europe







FINNISH INDEPENDENCE

Finland after seven centuries of Swedish rule became a part of the Russian Empire in 1809. The Grand Duchy of Finland enjoyed a special, autonomous status in Russia. It was poor but still one of the richest and most developed regions of the Empire. The political and cultural autonomy helped to create a Finnish national identity as well as gain political experience through elections. Until the end of 19th century Russia did not oppose the autonomous development of the national identity and the stronger status of Finnish language since that was the way for Finland to cut cultural and political ties to Sweden. This development was enthusiastically supported by the Finnish-Swedish elite: the grand figures of Finnish culture and national romantic identity created in the 19th century were from Finnish-Swedish background.

One major factor in the development of Finnish culture was the creation of school system that led to almost universal literacy rate at the end of 19th century, more equality between the language groups, and eventually to decreased domination of the Finnish-Swedish minority in the political, economic and cultural life. In consequence, the legacy of "the time of autonomy" (1809–1917) is perceived mostly positively in the Finnish historical memory, and for example the statue of Alexander II (1918–1881), who was favorable to Finland, is still erect in the a central square in Helsinki. However, the policy of Russification waged by the Tsarist regime from 1899 to 1917 led to strong political tensions between the Finnish national movement and St. Petersburg. This foreign threat permitted a rapprochement between opposite parties of the earlier language dispute (Finnish-Swedish) and development a more inclusive Finnish civic nationalism.

Russification and finally the beginning of WWI in 1914 encouraged different activist groups to unite and seek for separation from Russia. More than 1900 man, mostly young right wing students, travelled to Germany to gain military training and formed the Jäger Movement and military relations with Germany (that later played a key role in the outcome of the civil war). The February Revolution in Russia in 1917 served as a trigger for the preparation of Finnish independence, as the agreement union between Finland and Russia lost its legal base following the abdication of the Tsar. At the time the political field was divided to Social Democrats (who had the majority in the parliament) and to right-wing parties. They both had independence as their goal, but were unable to agree that who should inherit the supreme power in Finland and how should the relations to Russia be organized after the collapse of the Russian Empire.



Ruins of the Battle of Tampere in April 1918. Image from Vapriikki Museum Archive

The October Revolution changed the situation, when Lenin encouraged the working class to take over in Finland and just a few days later the Finnish Trade Union Federation declared a general strike. The political field was split into two camps: the Reds and the Whites. The Reds saw the situation as a possibility for a socialist revolution in Finland and had close ties with the Russian Bolsheviks who supplied the Reds with weapons. The Whites were supported by Germany who had already helped in creating the Jäger Movement and supplied weapons to separatist groups. The Whites were mostly supported by rural populations and elites (including Swedish-speaking minority) mainly from the northern parts of Finland whereas the Socialists relied on working class and urban populations mainly located in the South.

06-12-1917

Right after the October revolution in Russia and the general strike in Finland the right wing Parliament declared the independence on December 6, 1917. Compared to other independent movements in Russia, Finland thanks to its special former status quickly gained the international recognition. Bolshevik Russia, France, Sweden, German Empire and many others recognized its independence in January 1918.

However political internal polarization was escalating, society collapsed and the civil war broke out. On January 27, 1918, the Red Guards seized power in Helsinki and declared the beginning of a revolution, forcing the White government to flee the capital. Until March 1918, the Red Guards were leading the conflict, occupying the industrialized regions of the South. The Whites maintained control of the northern part of the country. They were helped by the arrival of Jäger soldiers, Swedish volunteers and since April 1918 by German troops. Better-organized and better-equipped, the Whites took advantage on the Reds and won the crucial battle of Tampere (March - April 1918).



WHITE GUARD

CIVIL WAR

RED GUARD



After the battle of Tampere German troops led by general Rüdiger von der Goltz took over Helsinki on 14th of April. Von der Goltz practically became a military dictator of the country, and was appreciated by the Whites who wished to establish monarchy. In May 1918 the regency was established and in October 1918 the Finnish parliament elected Friedrich Karl a German prince as the King of Finland. However, after the defeat of Germany in WWI, Von der Goltz fled the country and in July 1919 Finland endorsed the constitution which reintroduced a republican system.

The civil war lasted just 14 weeks but was a very bloody one during which and immediately after its end over 36 500 people died (more than one percent of the population). The great majority of victims (75 percent) was on the side of the Reds and around 11 650 people died from starvation or epidemic diseases in the concentration camps built by the Whites.

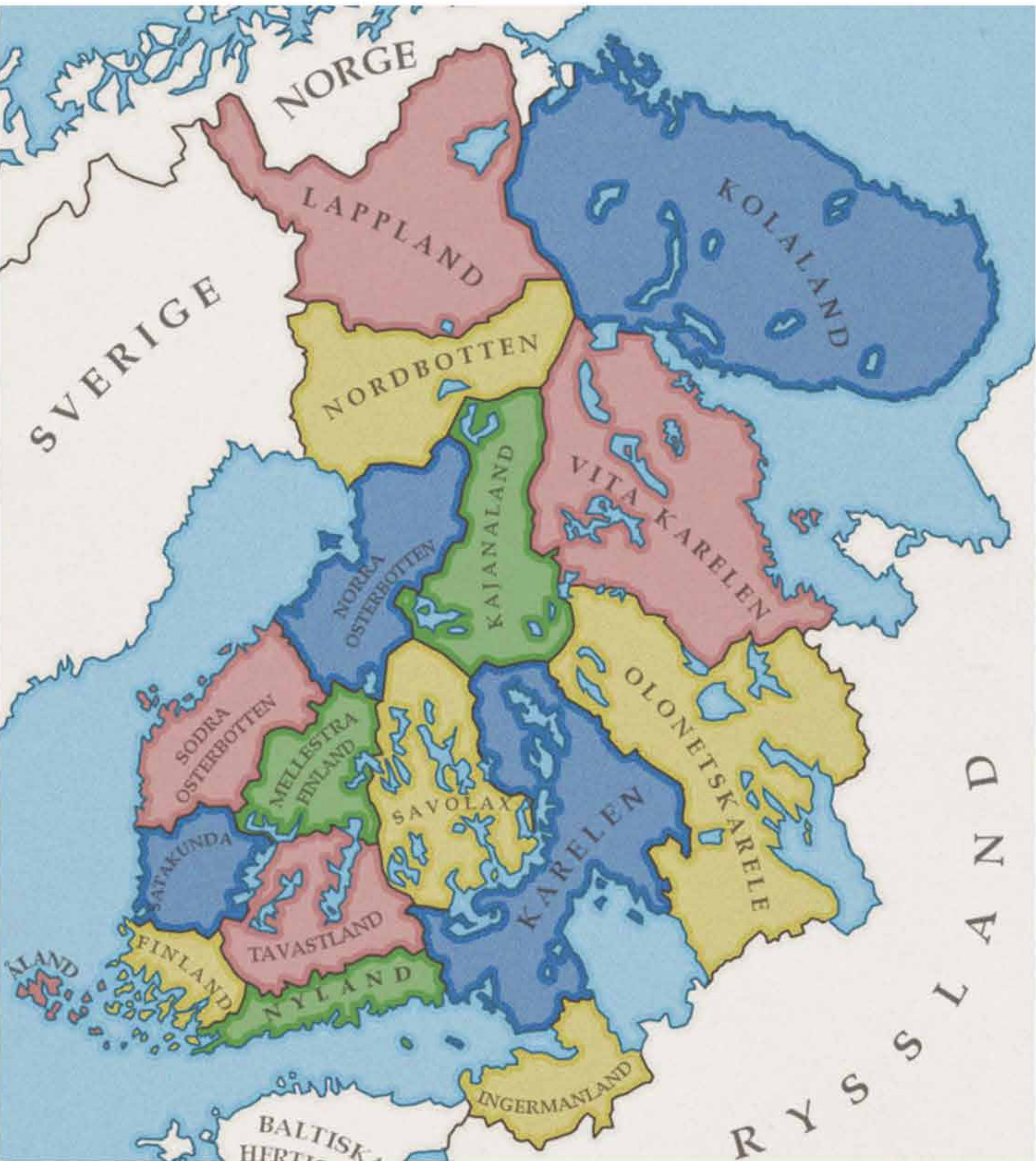
Patients in a hospital of the Red Cross during the Civil War. Images from Vapriikki Museum Archive



Parliament of Finland after the Finnish Civil War. Image from wikipedia.org



GREATER FINLAND & GREATER ROMANIA



Greater Finland (1920). Image from vividmaps.com

Russian Empire was inhabited by many ethnic groups speaking Baltic-Finnic languages. The Grand Duchy of Finland was a region that inhabited the largest amount of these people. In addition there were Estonians, Karelians, Veps, Ingrians, Votes and Livonians that inhabited neighbouring regions. In the beginning of the 20th century around 5 percent of the people speaking Baltic-Finnic languages lived elsewhere in Russia outside the area of autonomous Finland. Karelia occupied an especially important place in the romantic Finnish nationalism because its folklore was the main source of inspiration for the national mythology (Kalevala). Finns as the biggest Baltic-Finnic nation and with the autonomous status in the Russian Empire had the greatest capacity to maintain, study and support the language, culture and identity based on the idea of Baltic-Fennic community. For instance, the national anthem of Estonia is based on the same melody as the Finnish one. The popularity of the idea of Greater Finland (Suur-Suomi) was at its peak during the time of the declaration of independence and soon after that (1917-1920) in the right wing groups that dreamed of expanding the Finnish territory to the East during the unstable situation in Russia. The idea has its roots in the formation process of the national romantic identity in the mid-19th century where "natural borders" of states were searched based on studies of vegetation and geological formations, as well as cultural and linguistic studies. In the second half of 19th century, it represented the territorial and political dimension of Pan-Finnic trends in cultural sphere. Finland was supposed to expand at least into the Three-Isthmus border (the White Isthmus, the Olonets Isthmus and the Karelian one) uniting Finns with Karelians.

Consequently, immediately after the civil war (1918) Finnish right wing volunteers started Heimosodat (Kinship Wars) on Russian territory to unify regions inhabited by Finns and Karelians or to help the Finnic people to gain independence during the Russian civil war (1917-1922). The troops were not officially sent by Finland, but they were approved and supported by the government and the military. As a consequence, Finnish volunteers got involved also in the war of independence in Estonia (1918-1919), East Karelia (1918-1921) and North Ingria (1919). Kinship Wars led to the creation of Finnish and Karelian quasi-states such as the Uhtua Republic in Karelia or the Republic of North Ingria. It is estimated that around 9000 Finnish volunteers participated in the wars. Kinship Wars ended up in failure but the Greater Finland project remained popular among the Finnish right wing until 1944.



KARELIA & KARELIANISM

Karelianism was a late 19th-century cultural phenomenon in the Grand Duchy of Finland, a national romantic hobby for artists, writers, and composers in which Karelian and Karelian-Finnish culture was used as a source of inspiration.

On the right: Karelians in 1928. On the left: an example of Karelianism - The Defense of the Sampo, 1896, by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Both images from wikipedia.org



Finland's territorial concessions to the Soviet Union displayed in red, 1940. Image from wikipedia.org



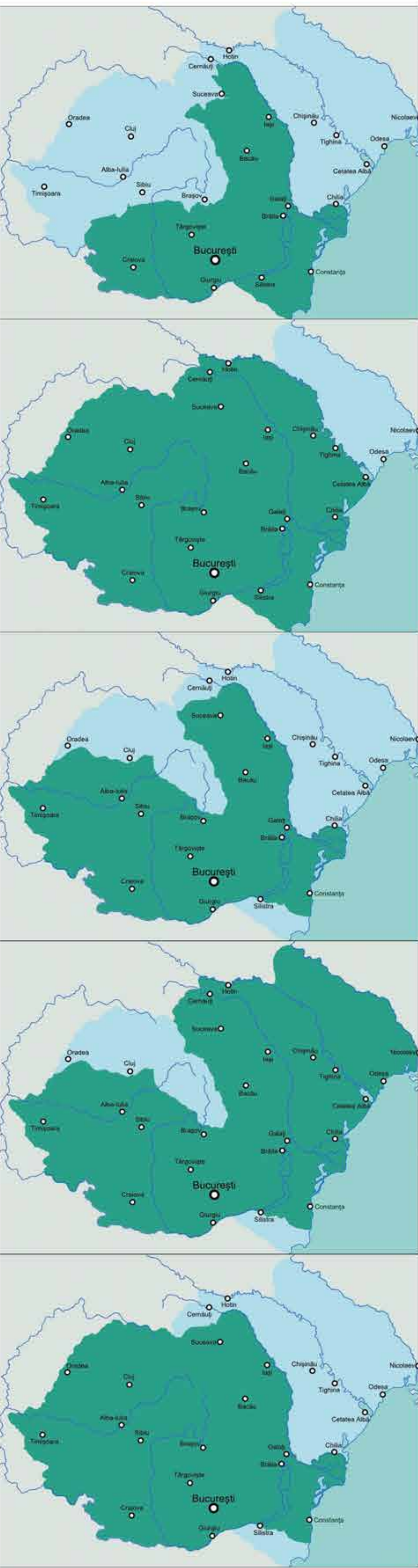
Parts of Karelia, as they are divided today. Image from wikipedia.org



Viipuri Castle at the Finnish Gulf. Viipuri was called the capital of Karelia when it was a part of Finland. Image from wikipedia.org

Romanian principalities (i.e. Moldova and Wallachia) had experienced several centuries of statehood as vassal states of the Ottoman Empire. They united in 1866 and gained independence in 1878; however, many ethnic Romanians remained in surrounding countries (e.g. Austria-Hungary and Russia). In case of Russia, Romanian speaking communities inhabited Bessarabia (currently the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), which belonged to the Principality of Moldova and was annexed in 1812 after the Russian-Turkish War. The ethnic structure of Bessarabia changed dramatically under Russian rule. According to the official Russian census, by the end of 19th century non-Romanian communities (e.g. Ukrainians, Jews, Russians, Bulgarians and others) became the majority in the region, while Romanian speakers (slightly more than 45% of population) were relegated to the bottom of social ladder and experienced the policy of assimilation. They were very poor peasants with a very weak sense of national identity (less than 10% of the Romanian speakers were able to read or write).

After the establishment of independent Romania, the idea of the unification of all Romanian-speaking populations into a Greater Romania (România Mare) gained popularity within the Romanian political elite. WWI offered Bucharest an opportunity to implement the idea. Romania entered war on the side of Entente, obtaining from its allies a promise of recognition of its territorial claims towards Austria-Hungary. Despite a disastrous military defeat, Romania found itself on the winning side at the end of the war and enjoyed the benefits of this position. Moreover, the Bolshevik Revolution allowed Romania to incorporate Bessarabia. Romania, therefore, more than doubled its size and population, and overnight became one of regional powers in Central Europe.



In December 1917, a few weeks after the Bolshevik Revolution, Romanians from Bessarabia established the Moldovan Democratic Republic (MDR) which on 6th of February 1918 declared independence. The MDR was the victim of Bolshevik aggression and survived mostly thanks to Romanian military intervention. After the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, on 9th of April 1918 the MDR voted for the unification of Moldova with Romania. However the Romanians were overrepresented substantially in the National Council; and even among the ethnic Romanians a considerable minority abstained or failed to appear. As a result, slightly more than 55 percent of the members of the Council voted for unification. In the interwar period, the Soviet Union did not recognize Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia - it considered it Romanian-occupied territory.

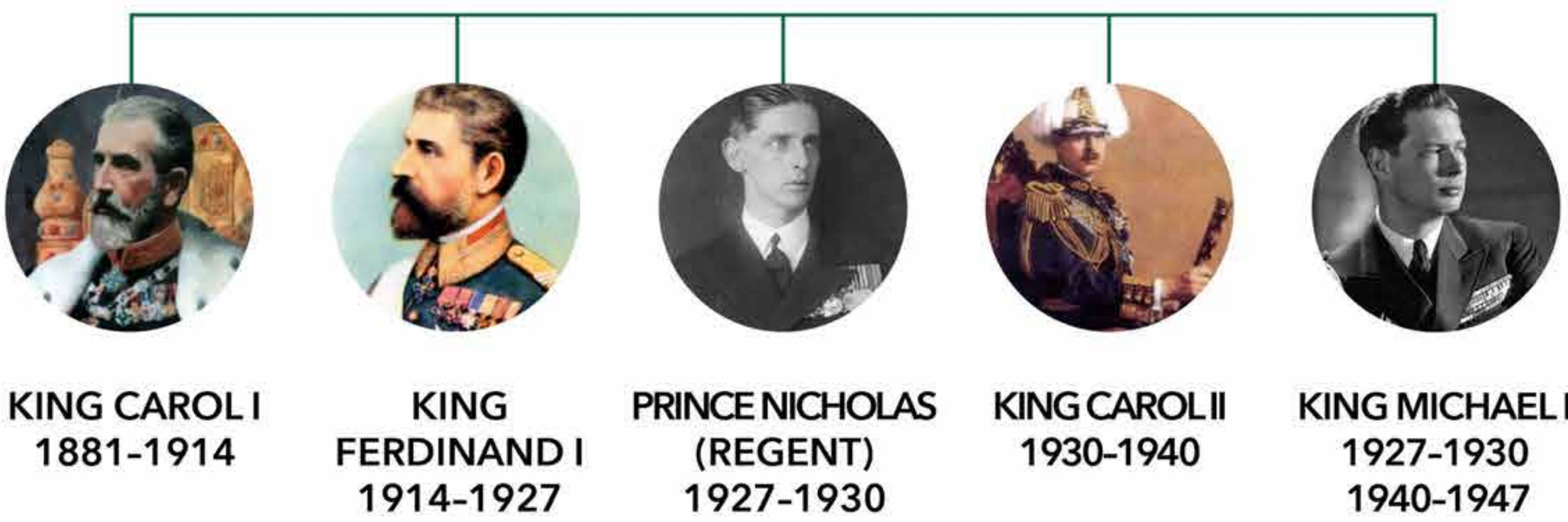


The National Assembly in Alba Iulia (December 1, 1918). Image from wikipedia.org



Prince Nicholas, Prince Carol and Princess Mărioara of Romania in Chişinău, 1918. Image from flickr.com

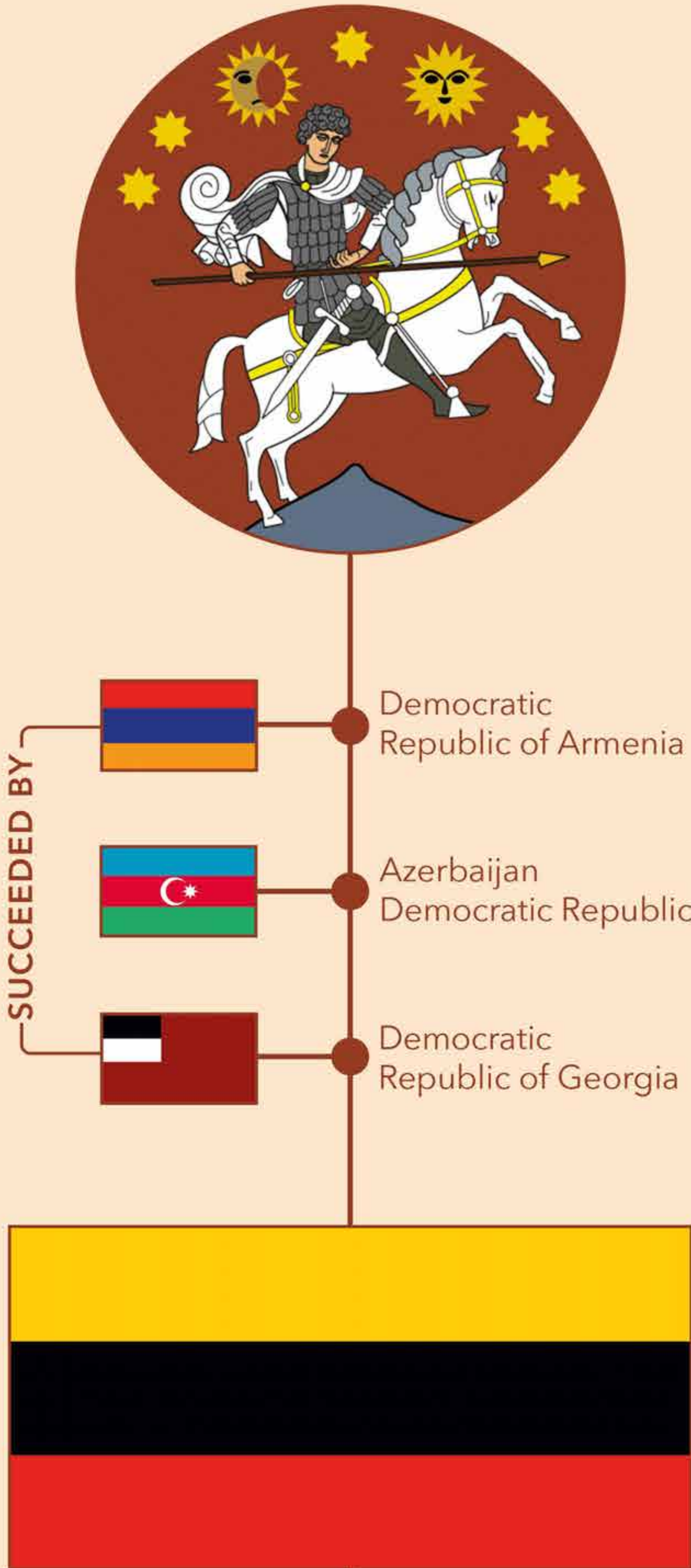
KINGDOM OF ROMANIA 1881-1947



Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu, reading in the Assembly of the People the Act Union of Transylvania to Romania, (December 1st 1918). Image from wikipedia.org



Romanian troops marching in Cluj, Transylvania, 1918. Image from wikipedia.org



TRANSCAUCASIAN DEMOCRATIC
FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC

APRIL 22 - MAY 28, 1918

In 1918 the South Caucasian nations such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia differed deeply between themselves – as far as history, religion, social structure, culture, tradition and language are concerned. Nevertheless they created, though a short-lived, common state, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. Georgians, mostly Orthodox Christians, possessed, from the ancient time to the beginning of 19th century, their own states; for 300 years, they were vassals of the Ottoman Empire and Persia. The states were ruled by dynasties whose powers were constrained by aristocracies prevailing over nobility. The Armenians, mostly Oriental Christians, lost their states in the Middle Ages. The Armenians were definitely more urbanized and, in consequence, better prepared for the challenges of the modern era than other Caucasian communities. However, most of them were peasants, often subordinated to Muslim landowners or clans. The idea of an Armenian nation state – namely ethnically homogenous Greater Armenia – particularly contradicted the ethnic reality. Indeed, the Armenians were among the South Caucasian communities, the most scattered nation living in a territory stretching from Central Anatolia to the Caspian Sea. They were mixed greatly with Turkic people, Kurds and Georgians. The Armenian community also distinguished themselves with diaspora groups dispersed around the world.

The Azerbaijanis were mostly Shia Muslims, like the Iranians, but they spoke a language very similar to the Turkish from Anatolia. The Sunni Azeri minority living in the northern part of Azerbaijan were affiliated with co-religionists inhabiting North Caucasus, especially Dagestan. The Azerbaijanis lived under the Persian suzerainty for centuries and were greatly overrepresented in Persia’s ruling elite. But they were strongly influenced by Iranian culture. In the 18th century the Azeri people achieved autonomy (khanates) under Persian rule. In the first decades of the 19th century the South Caucasus was conquered by Russia. Nevertheless the majority of Azerbaijanis and Armenians, and a considerable number of Muslim Georgians remained in neighboring countries (e.g. the Ottoman Empire and Persia). Under the Tsarist rule, the Caucasian people gained a strong representation in different sectors of the Russian elite. For instance, during WWI numerous Azerbaijanis served as generals in the Russian army. At that time, Muslim generals represented an unique phenomenon in Europe. An oil boom in Baku resulted in the emergence of the Azeri bourgeoisie. Yet the level of literacy among the Azerbaijanis remained extremely low (around 3 percent at the end of 19th century). Literacy rates among Russian Georgians and Armenians at that time were considerably higher (around 20%). Nationalism among the South Caucasus nations developed differently. Armenian nationalism gained a firmly anti-Turkish flavor with a strong revolutionary wing (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation- Dashnaksutyun). The Georgian nationalist movement was dominated by social-democrats (Mensheviks) and was mostly led by petty gentry. Azeri nationalism promoted the modernization of the Azerbaijani people was simultaneously preoccupied with the definition of identity oscillating between Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism and the Iranian world. Indeed, before the WWI Muhammad Amin Rasulzadeh, the future founding father of independent Azerbaijan, was engaged in revolutions in Iran and Ottoman Turkey, respectively. In fact, the name Azerbaijan was only adopted in 1918 for the Russian regions inhabited by Azerbaijanis. It is also worth remembering that the Tsarist Russian authorities officially called them “Tatars”.

Several days after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Caucasian nations established the Transcaucasian Commissariat – a sort of government – and in January 1918, the Transcaucasian parliament convened. It was named Sejm after the Polish premodern assembly that showed the impact of the small but influential Polish minority in the South Caucasus. Under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3rd March, 1918 Bolshevik Russia ceded Kars, Ardahan and Batumi to the Ottoman Empire.

22-04-1918

Sejm proclaimed the independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic.

Through 1918 the Azerbaijanis provided a substantial financial, diplomatic and military assistance to the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus (MRNC). The Azerbaijanis and MRNC proposed to unite the Northern Caucasus with the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. However the ethnic Armenians and Georgians as well as Germany were frightened by the predominance of Muslims in such a pan-Caucasian state; as a consequence, the strengthening of the Ottoman Empire. In effect, the Armenians, Georgians and Germany did not agree with this proposal. Ultimately, differences between the South Caucasian nations turned out to be too serious for the federation to survive, and the Transcaucasian Republic dissolved just after five weeks.

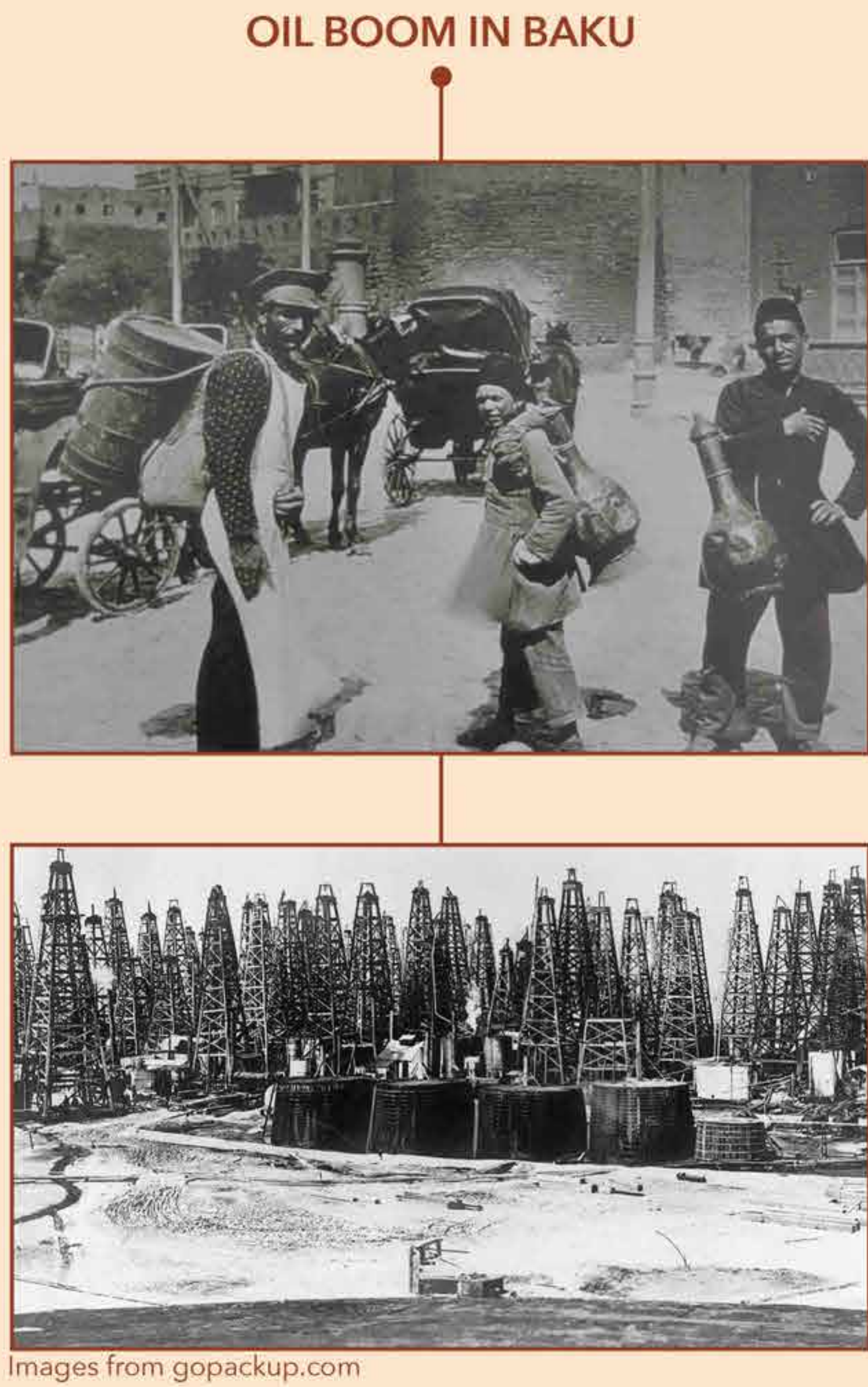


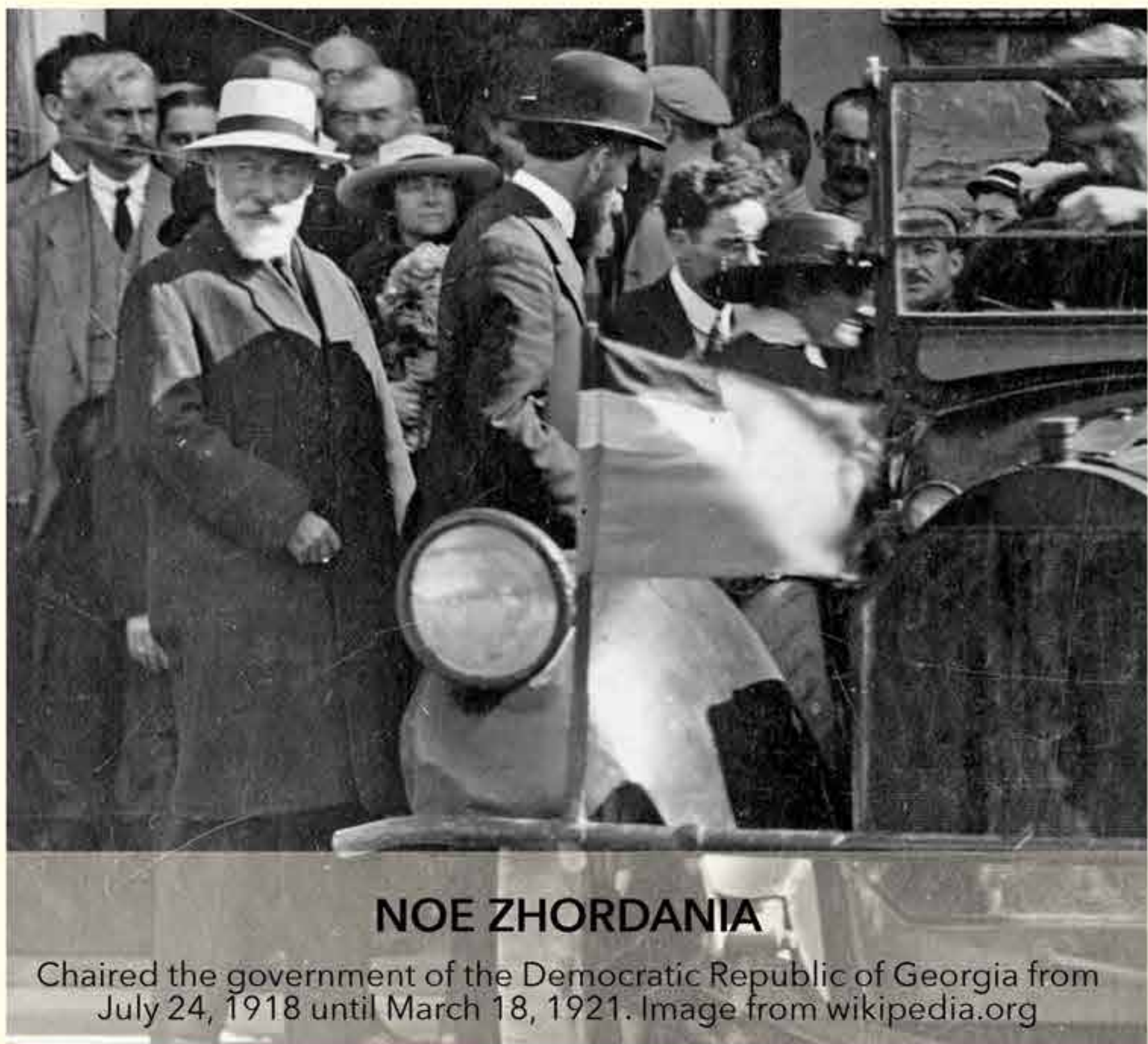
Baku during the Oil Boom. Image from gopackup.com
Astafian street in old Yerevan. Image from barevarmenia.ru



Shia is a branch of Islam which holds that the Islamic prophet Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and the Imam.

The great majority of Azeris are Shia Muslims. The Republic of Azerbaijan has the second highest Shia population percentage in the world after Iran.





NOE ZHORDANIA

Chaired the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia from July 24, 1918 until March 18, 1921. Image from wikipedia.org



MUHAMMAD AMIN RASULZADEH

The first and only president of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. (1918-1920). Image from wikipedia.org



MEMBERS OF THE SECOND CABINET

of the First Republic of Armenia. Left to right: A. Sahakian, Alexander Khatisian, General C. Araratian, Nikol Aghbalian, A. Gulkandarian, S. Araradian. Image from wikipedia.org

ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA

26-05-1918

Georgia stepped out of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic and proclaimed its independence. Two days later, Armenia and Azerbaijan did the same.

The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (ADR), under the leadership of the Musavat party (Equality), survived mostly thanks to assistance from the Ottoman Empire whose military intervention allowed Azerbaijan to reconquer territories lost to Armenia, the Whites and the Reds. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Azerbaijan found itself under the protection (and a partial military occupation) of Great Britain. Sixteen countries established their diplomatic missions in Baku. However as international recognition is concerned, the ADR was generally a de facto state pending de jure recognition. After the withdrawal of British forces in August 1919, the young republic did not receive any international support, and in April 1920 Azerbaijan was smoothly occupied by the Red Army. The invasion coincided with the insurrection staged by the local Azerbaijani Bolsheviks in Baku. A brief and bloody uprising in Ganja at the end of May 1920 was suppressed by the Red Army.

Independent Armenia, under the Dashnak government, from the very beginning had to face an existential threat from the Ottoman Empire. During the First World War, Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire suffered a genocide committed by the Young Turk regime, retaliated with a decisively smaller scale assault against Muslims in Eastern Anatolia. The idea of a union between the Turkic nations (Pan-Turkism), which undermined the idea of independent Armenian state, enjoyed huge support among the Young Turks. At the end of April 1918, the Ottoman army launched an offensive against Armenia. However, its advance was stopped at the Battles of Sardarabad, Bash Abaran and Karakilisa by the Armenian forces under the command of Moses Silikyan and Drastamat Kanayan. The military campaign is collectively known as the "Heroic battles of May" in Armenian historiography. The terms of the Treaty of Batumi (June 1918) that Armenia was forced to accept were excessively harsh - the new republic was left with 10,000 square kilometers. However the Ottoman Empire recognized the independence of Armenia. In fact, it was the first international treaty signed by Armenia. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the WWI allowed Armenia to increase its territory seven times. The Turks tried to oppose the Armenian expansion through the establishment of the South-Western Caucasian Republic, proclaimed in Kars in December 1918. It was fighting with both Georgia and Armenia and was finally occupied by British troops in April 1919.



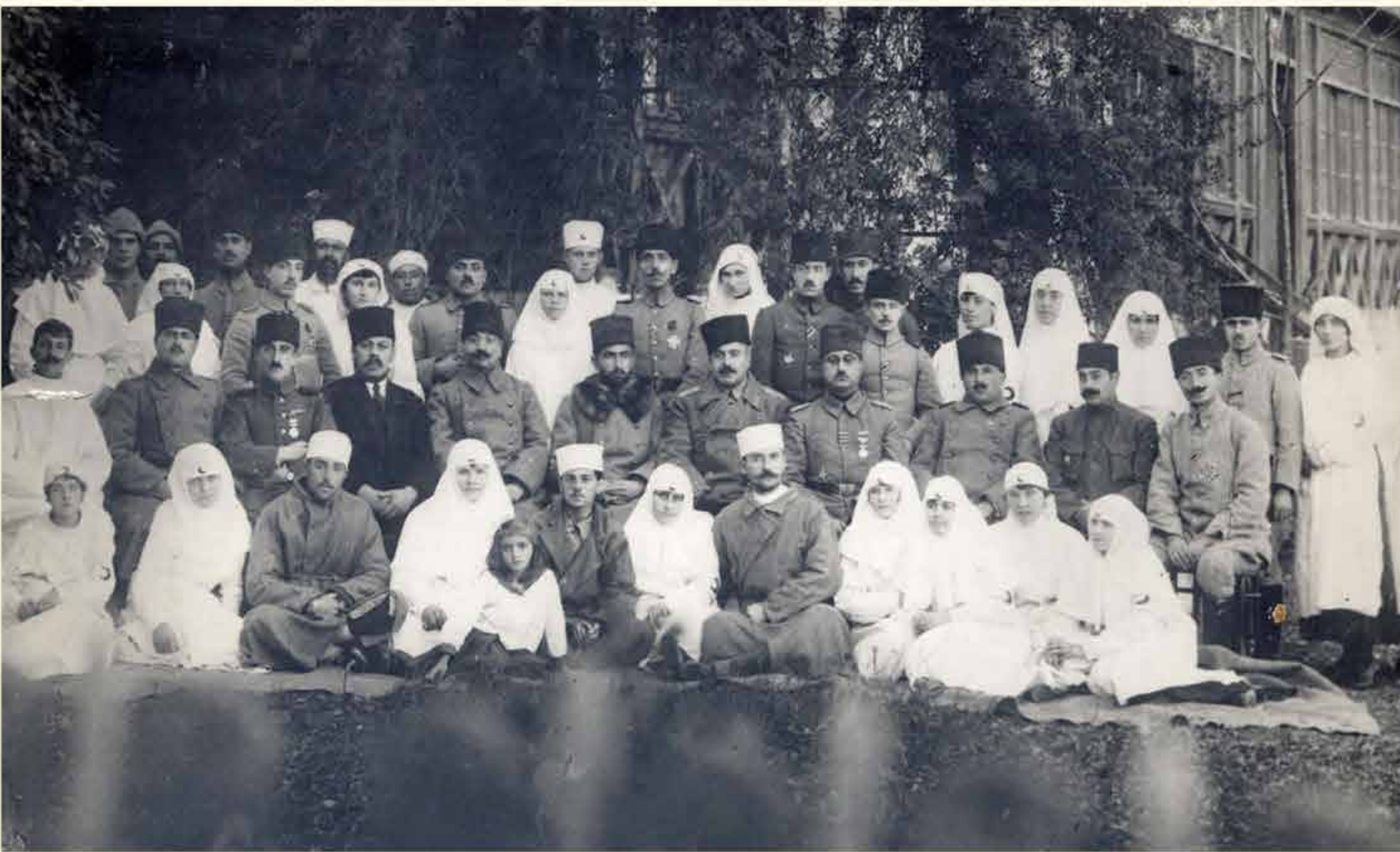
1918-1921
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF GEORGIA



1918-1920
FIRST REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA



1918-1920
AZERBAIJAN
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



Staff officers of the Army of Islam and staff of the Ministry of Health of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in Yelizavetpol (Gence), 1918. Image from wikipedia.org

10-08-1920

The Treaty of Sèvres, signed by the Ottoman government in August 10, 1920, granted Armenia enormous territorial benefits in Eastern Anatolia (additionally more than 100,000 square kilometers). Moreover, Armenia was recognized as an independent state by the signed parties: Great Britain, France and Italy. Nevertheless the Turkish nationalists, under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk, which rebelled against the Ottoman government, rejected the Treaty. In effect, the conflict between the Kemalists and Armenia broke out in September 1920.

The outcome of the war was unequivocally negative for Armenia. According to the provisions of the Gyumri Treaty of 2nd December, 1920, it lost almost half of its land. Moreover at the end of November, the Bolsheviks, cooperating with the Kemalists, invaded and occupied Armenia. In February 1921, Dashnaks launched an anti-Soviet uprising in Yerevan and the surrounding regions which was able to control them for more than 40 days before being defeated by the numerically superior Red Army troops. The leaders of the rebellion retreated into the Syunik region and established The Republic of Mountainous Armenia. After several months of fierce battles with Bolshevik forces, the Republic of Mountainous Armenia capitulated in July 1921. The border between Armenia and Turkey was finally established by the Treaty of Kars (October 1921). Turkey gained Kars, Ardahan, Artvin and Iğdır which before WWI belonged to Tsarist Russia.

During its three years of existence, independent Georgia was ruled by Mensheviks who enjoyed enormous social support and was headed by Noe Zhordania. Georgia achieved the largest de jure international recognition among the South Caucasian states, including the main European powers and Bolshevik Russia, until its invasion in February 1921. When independence was announced, the authorities posed claims to a much larger territory than Georgia now occupies, and was inhabited by many non-Georgians. The area and borders of Georgia changed several times. The border with Ottoman Turkey initially, according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ran similar to the present one (leaving Batumi on the Turkish side), but after the defeat of the Central Powers in November 1918, Georgia took control of Artvin, Ardahan and the Batumi district. Georgia also controlled bordering regions of current Azerbaijan (Zaqatala) and Armenia (Lori). In February 1921, Georgia was attacked by the Red Army. Ten days after the Red Army began its march on Tbilisi, Turkey issued an ultimatum demanding the evacuation of Ardahan and Artvin by Georgia. The Mensheviks, under pressure from both sides, gave up, and the Turkish force occupied the frontier regions. The Soviets quickly mastered the entire country and, in March 1921, the Georgian government left the country and went into exile. Soon after the conquest of the Red Army, Georgia raised up against the Bolshevik occupation in the Kakheti and Khevsureti regions and Svaneti. Both uprisings were brutally crushed by the Soviets.



Georgian National Council meeting, May 26, 1918. Image from wikipedia.org

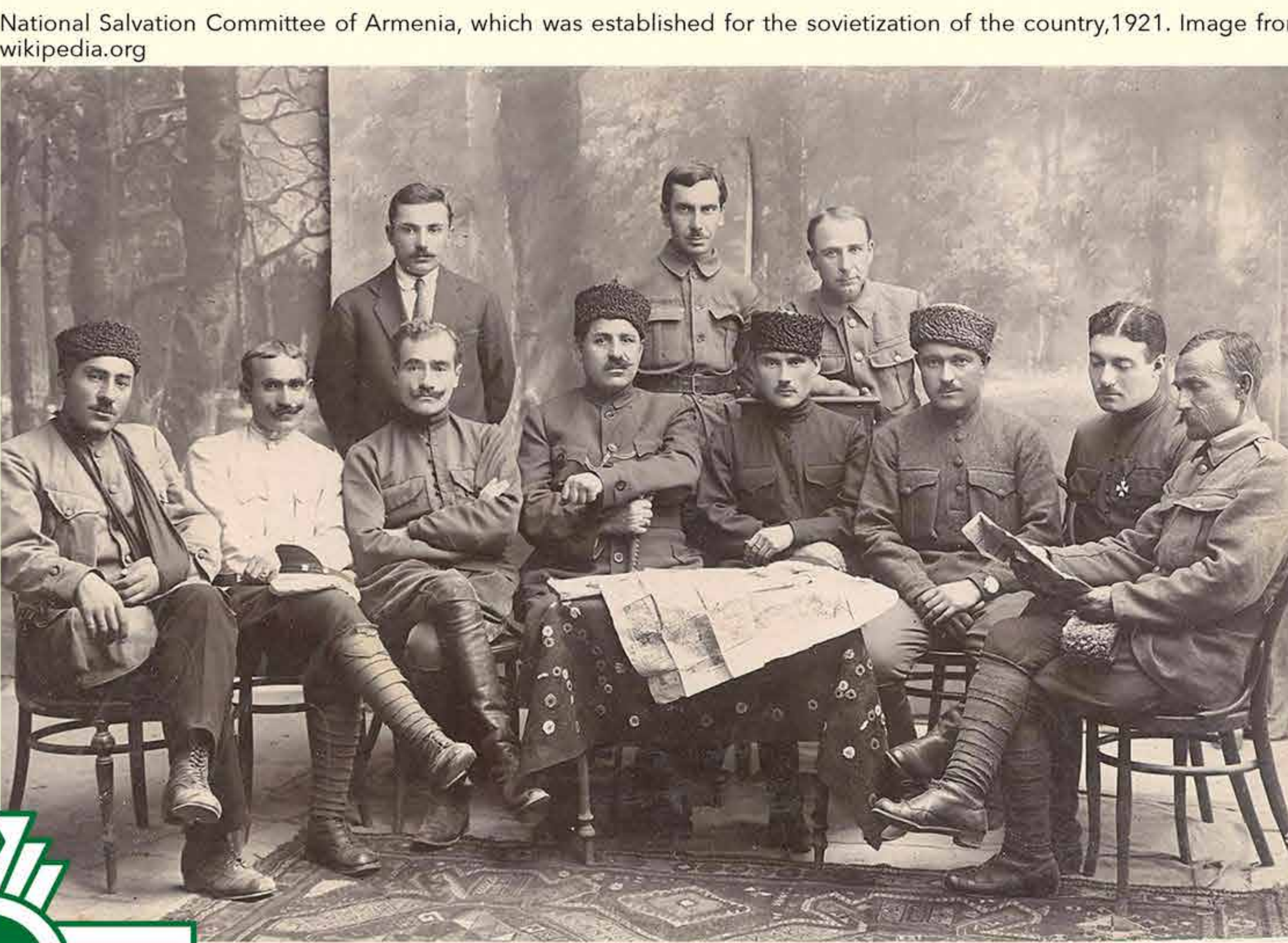
Georgian cavalry in 1918. Image from wikipedia.org



Schoolchildren in Baku Muslim girls school. Early XX century (1900-1918). Image from wikipedia.org



Armenian volunteers receive blessings from the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Gevorg V on the eve of the battle, 1918. Image from wikipedia.org



National Salvation Committee of Armenia, which was established for the sovietization of the country, 1921. Image from wikipedia.org



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EUROPEAN PARTS OF RUSSIA

We often forget that, in geographical terms, around 40 percent of Europe’s territory is located in current Russia. The February Revolution launched an attempt for autonomy and independence in European Russia. The south eastern regions of European Russia distinguished themselves particularly by strong ethnic and regional identities. Many of them were Muslims, Cossacks and Ukrainians. They differed greatly concerning their level of modernization. For instance, at the end of 19th century, Volga Tatars had with literacy rates that were almost as high as ethnic Russians. Meanwhile, illiteracy rates were extremely high among the Muslim communities of North Caucasus. Immediately after the October Revolution, Bashkirs, a Turkic nation living in the Volga region, proclaimed Bashkurdistan an autonomous region. Fighting mostly against the Whites, in March 1919 the Bashkirs concluded an agreement with the Bolsheviks and accepted the status of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the borders of Russia. It was the first ethnic region to be designated an autonomous republic in history of the Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, the Volga Tatars created the Idel-Ural, a short-lived autonomous republic located in Kazan that claimed to unite Volga Tatars, Bashkirs and the Chuvash (another Turkic nation) and aspired to recreate the Khanate of Kazan. The Idel-Ural was proclaimed on March 1, 1918. However, the republic was destroyed by the Red Army in less than one month.

1917-1919

A national-territorial autonomy of Bashkurdistan was proclaimed on November 15 (November 28) 1917 by the Bashkir regional Shuro and approved by the Constituent Congress of Bashkurdistan.



The members of the Bashkir government, 1920. Image from wikipedia.org

Cossacks of Don, Kuban and Terek regions, located in the southern parts of European Russia, already in September 1917 proposed the unification of all European Cossacks, North Caucasus and Kalmyks (the only Buddhist nation in Europe) within a democratic federative autonomous republic). It was supposed to be called the Southeastern Union. Moreover the idea of a separate Cossack nation started to emerge among proponents of the Southeastern Union. However the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Russian civil war, and the considerable support for the Whites among the Cossacks, resulted in the union never materializing. Yet the Kuban People’s Republic was the only Cossack state which declared its independence. It was mostly inhabited by Ukrainians and Russians and it received de jure recognition from Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus. During its brief independence, the elites were divided between a pro-Ukrainian fraction (seeking a federation with the Ukrainian People’s Republic and close cooperation with the North Caucasian nations) and a pro-Russian fraction supporting cooperation with the Whites. Kuban was firstly occupied by the Whites was then conquered by the Bolsheviks in February 1920.

16-02-1918

Kuban People's Republic was an anti-Bolshevik state, which having existed for 21 months. During its independence, republic declared union with the Ukrainian People's Republic until it was occupied by Soviet forces.

The Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus proclaimed independence in May 1918. Its territory covered the entire North Caucasus and surrounding areas. The Mountainous Republic was de jure recognized by the Germany, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Bulgaria and the Kuban People’s Republic. At the beginning of the Russian Civil War, the Mountaineers were engaged in fierce clashes against the invading General Anton Denikin's Volunteer Army. The Republic was defeated in spring 1919. After the fall of the Mountainous Republic of North Caucasus, the North Caucasian Emirate (an Islamic state) was established by local communities. It covered Chechnya and the Western Dagestan, and sought the protection of the Ottoman Empire. It existed from September 1919 to March 1920. Georgia recognized the emirate’s authorities but it fell under the control of the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless in August 1920, the anti-communist uprising flared up and continued until it was suppressed in May 1921.

1917-1920

The "Union of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus" was created in March 1917, and existed till the state was captured by Soviet Russian forces in 1920, who transformed it into the Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

The fight for independence in Russia also had an Asian context. The Kazakhs established the Alash Horde, an autonomous republican government named after the legendary founder of the Kazakh people. It was aligned with the White Army and fought against the Bolsheviks. In 1919, when the White forces were losing, Alash Horde launched negotiations with the Bolsheviks. In 1920 the Bolsheviks defeated the White Russian forces and occupied Kazakhstan.

1917-1918

Alash Autonomy was a Kazakh state that existed between December 1917, and 1918, on, approximately, the territory of the present-day Republic of Kazakhstan. The capital city was Semey, then known as "Alash-gala".

Central Asian Muslims in 1918 organized the Basmachi uprising against the Bolsheviks. Its name derives from the Turkish word "raider" because members of the movement were guerilla fighters. The uprising died out in most parts of Central Asia by 1926. However skirmishes continued until 1934. It was the longest lasting resistance movement against the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union.

However in the Far East, the regions that were settled by Ukrainian colonists in the area of the Amur River and the Pacific Ocean proclaimed the Ukrainian Republic of the Far East in January 1918 and its formal unification with the Ukrainian People’s Republic. However its territory was occupied by Whites and then the Bolsheviks.

24-06-1917

First All-Ukrainian Far Eastern Congress at Nikolsk-Ussuriysky formed the Far Eastern Kray Rada (Land Council). Second Congress at Khabarovsk proclaimed Green Ukraine as part of the Ukrainian State.

Soviet Central Asia in 1922. Image from wikipedia.org



01-03-1918

The Idel-Ural State was short-lived Tatar republic located in Kazan that claimed to unite Tatars, Bashkirs and the Chuvash, proclaimed by a Congress of Muslims from Russia’s interior and Siberia.



Sadri Maksudi Arsal, the president of Idel-Ural State. Image from wikipedia.org

Proclamation of Idel-Ural Republic. Image from wikipedia.org



Kuban Cossacks. Image from carolchanning.net



Leaders of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus. Prime Minister Tapa Ichermoeff is seated front row centre. Image from wikipedia.org



The «Alash» party was a Kazakh national-democratic political party set up at the first All-Kazakh Congress in the former Kazakh capital in Orenburg on 21-26 July 1917. Image from pr-hal.kz



A bureaucrat in Bukhara, ca.1910. Image from wikipedia.org

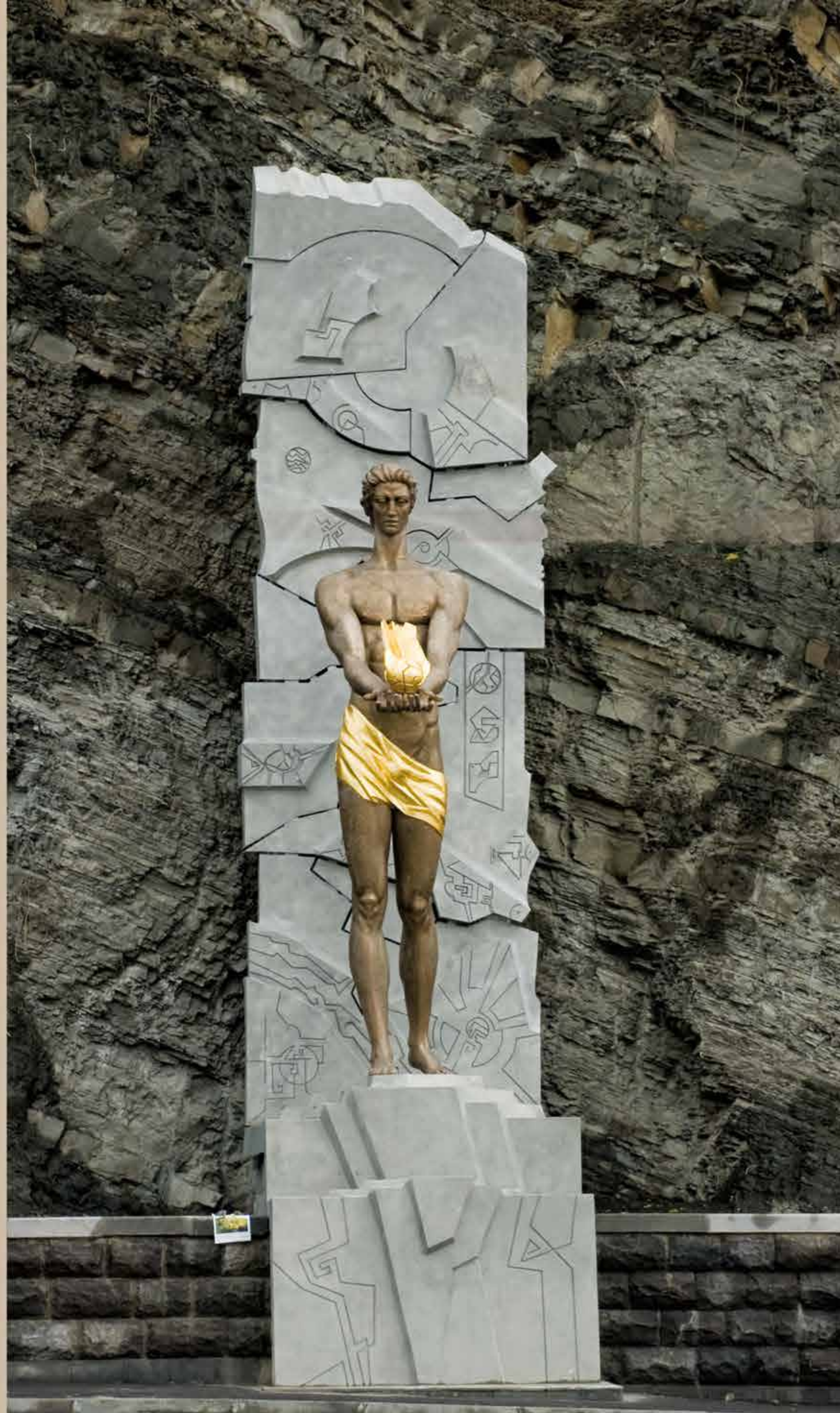
Said Mir Mohammed Alim Khan - last Emir of the Emirate of Bukhara in Central Asia. Image from wikipedia.org

City of Tashkent in 1917. Image from wikipedia.org

Negotiations with Basmachi, Fergana, 1921. Image from wikipedia.org



COOPERATION IN EASTERN EUROPE



Monument to Prometheus in Tbilisi, opened by the Presidents of Poland and Georgia in 2008. Image from wikipedia.org



Polish Prometheus - painting by Horace Vernet, 1831. Image from wikipedia.org



Józef Piłsudski, Edward Smigły-Rydz, Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Stanisław Szepczyński in front of soldiers of Polish Army, Vilnius, Łukiski Square 17.04.1919. Image from wikipedia.org



Józef Piłsudski and Symon Petlura among Polish and Ukrainian officers, August 1920. Image from wikipedia.org



Boris Savinkov in the court. He was tried by The Military Collegium of the Supreme Tribunal of the Soviet Union. Image from wikipedia.org



Graves of Ukrainian soldiers (The Ukrainian People's Republic UNR) in Warsaw. Image from wikipedia.org

Poland conducted an active policy regarding the cooperation of independence movements in Central-Eastern Europe during the post-war period. In Poland's view, the independence of non-Russian people in the Russian Empire was an optimal way to consolidate its own independence. This was the principle which was later coined "Prometheism" and was promoted by the Founding Father of the Polish independence, Marshal Piłsudski. This project aimed to permanently weaken the imperialistic tendencies of Russia (whether Tsarist or Soviet Russia) by offering support to non-Russian independent movements.

Another political project defended by Piłsudski and its supporters was the Miedzymorze (Intermarium). This geopolitical project aimed to create political alliance between countries of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. According to Piłsudski, the revival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (including Poland, Belarus, Lithuania and possibly Latvia) represented a crucial precondition for the realization of both geopolitical concepts. Lithuania was imagined as a successor state of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, divided into at least three cantons: Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian - each canton assuring the rights of all citizens. On 22nd April, 1919 three days after the arrival of the Polish army in Vilnius, Piłsudski issued "The Proclamation to the Inhabitants of the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania". The proclamation was printed in the Lithuanian and Polish languages. It was then translated into Belarusian and Yiddish. Piłsudski pledged to:

...create an opportunity for settling your nationality problems and religious affairs in a manner that you yourself will determine, without any kind of force or pressure from Poland...

However, the federal project was impossible to implement due to Lithuania's fear of Poland's domination (the proportion of Lithuanians to Poles was more than 1:10 in Eastern Europe) and because the Belarusian independent movement was weak.

Piłsudski also assumed that the Polish-Lithuanian federation would help establish a very close alliance with Ukraine and support its fight for independence. The best practical example of this was the military cooperation between Poland and Ukraine within the framework of the Piłsudski-Petlura Agreement, signed on 22th of April 1920. A few days later, the Polish-Ukrainian forces launched the Blitzkrieg offensive against the Bolsheviks which resulted in the liberation of Kyiv on 7th of May 1920. At the beginning of the offensive, Piłsudski, in his "Call to the People of Ukraine", announced that "the Polish army would only stay as long as necessary until a legal Ukrainian government took control over its own territory". However, many Ukrainians being anti-Bolshevik resented the Polish advance. The Ukrainian peasants were particularly angry with the support the Polish army often gave Polish landowners possessing large estates in Central Ukraine. What is even more important, the Polish-Ukrainian success was short-lived because the Bolshevik counteroffensive repulsed the Polish-Ukrainian forces to Warsaw where they were defeated by Piłsudski.

Members of the Promethean movement published two magazines: "Prométhée" (1926-1938) and "La Revue de Prométhée" (1938-1940). An editor in chief of the second one was Oleksander Shulhyn.

Oleksander Shulhyn was a prominent political, public, scientific and cultural figure of Ukraine and the Ukrainian government in exile better known under his French transcription Alexandre Choulguine. In 1917-1918 he served as a secretary of Inter-ethnic (later Foreign) Affairs. Later Shulhyn chaired the Main Emigration Council and served as a chief editor of the magazine "La Revue de Prométhée".

Image from unr.memory.gov.ua

In spring 1920, Poland, within the framework of Promethean foreign policy, sent a special delegation to South Caucasus. The Polish diplomats worked out the Treaty of Alliance with Georgia and started negotiations on a common military support for the Mountaineers from the North Caucasus. Then the delegation went to Azerbaijan, but during their visit the country was conquered by the Bolsheviks who arrested the Polish diplomats. In May 1920, the Crimean Tatars officially submitted an application to the League of Nations asking for the Polish protectorate over Crimea.



The army of the UNR was definitely the largest allied armed forces fighting with Poland in the war with the Bolsheviks. Moreover in 1920 some Belarusians, Russians, Don and Kuban Cossacks, and Russian Muslims fought with Poland against the Bolsheviks. Poland even started to organize the Russian army under the political leadership of Boris Savinkov, a revolutionary socialist (esser). At the beginning of October 1920, more than 40,000 former Tsarist Russian soldiers served alongside the Polish army, including almost 30,000 Ukrainians. However these military commitments did not bring about the expected result. Poland, by signing the Treaty of Riga with Russia, violated the terms of the military alliance with the UNR, which had explicitly prohibited a separate peace with Moscow. Ukrainian allies of Poland were interned by the Polish authorities. Piłsudski called the Treaty of Riga an "act of cowardice". He apologized to the Ukrainian soldiers and recognized the bankruptcy of the federal project. According to him, it was also the biggest failure in his entire political life.

From the left Gen. Aleksander Listowski, Symon Petlura, Col. Volodymyr Salskyi, Col. Marko Bezručko, April 1920. Image from wikipedia.org





COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC REGION



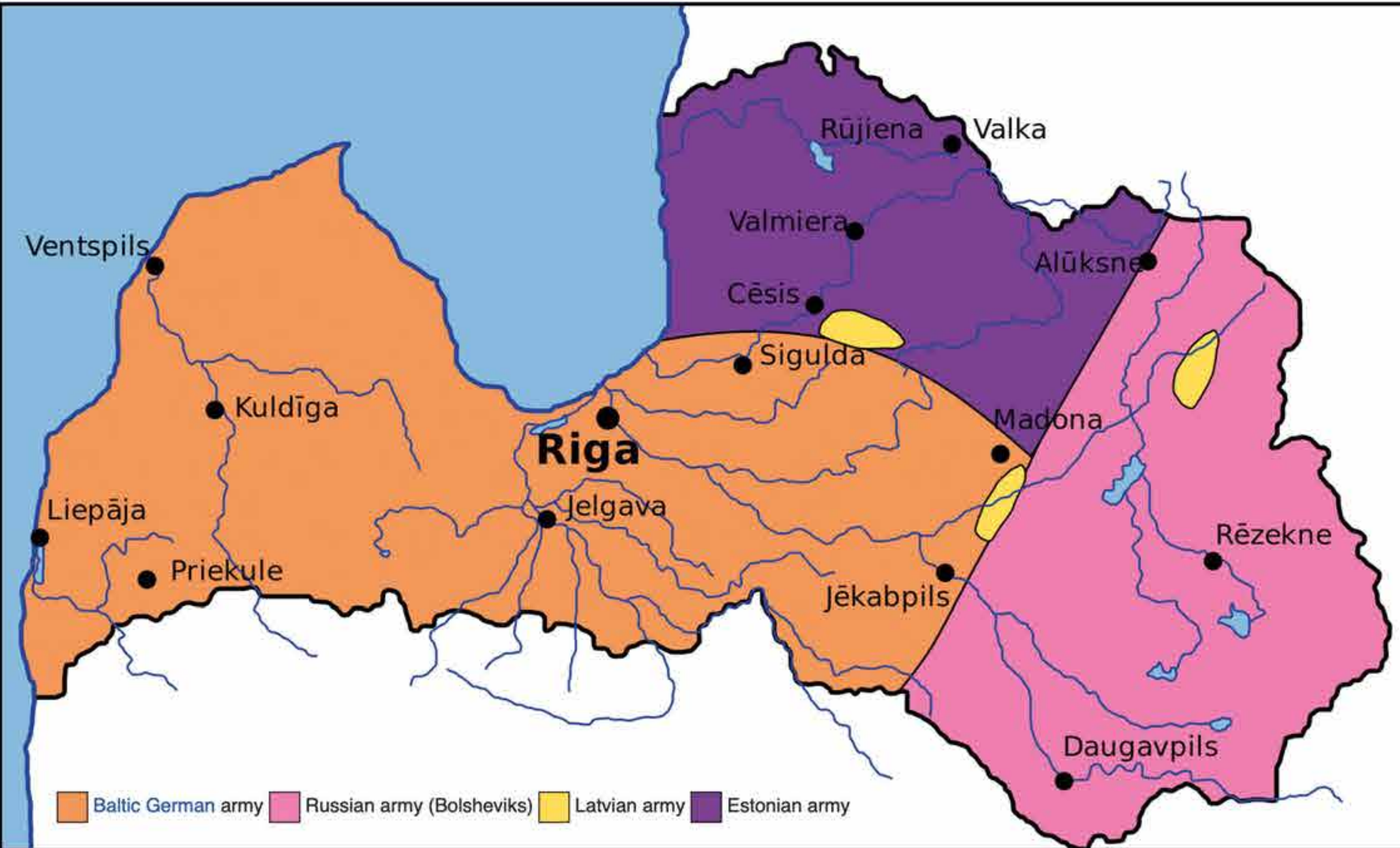
The Baltic region was an arena of close cooperation between nations in the fight for independence. In 1918 during the Finish Civil War, the Swedish Brigade and the Polish Legion (established on the basis of Polish soldiers serving in the Tsarist Army) fought against the Reds. Hundreds of Estonian volunteers crossed the Gulf of Finland and joined the White forces.

In response around 3,500 Finnish volunteers contributed greatly to the Estonian victory in 1919. They consisted of two groups: the Finnish Volunteer Corps and the Boys from the North. Yet Baltic-German, Russian, Ingrian, Swedish, and Danish voluntary units (regiments, battalions and independent companies) participated in the War of Independence under the Estonian command. Moreover, one Latvian brigade fought on the territory of Estonia. The Estonians trained and equipped Latvian military units and sent them reinforcements in order to stop the offensive of German Freikorps.

The Estonians fought on the Latvian side in the Battle of Cēsis in 1919, which was symbolic evidence of the solidarity of the Baltic people. More than 15,000 Estonian soldiers took part in the fight for Latvia's independence; they constituted almost 20% of all troops. Five Estonian armored trains, in particular, increased the offensive potential of the Baltic allies. The Lithuanian troops in alliance with the Latvian troops liberated Lithuania from the Red Army in autumn 1919.

● June 1919

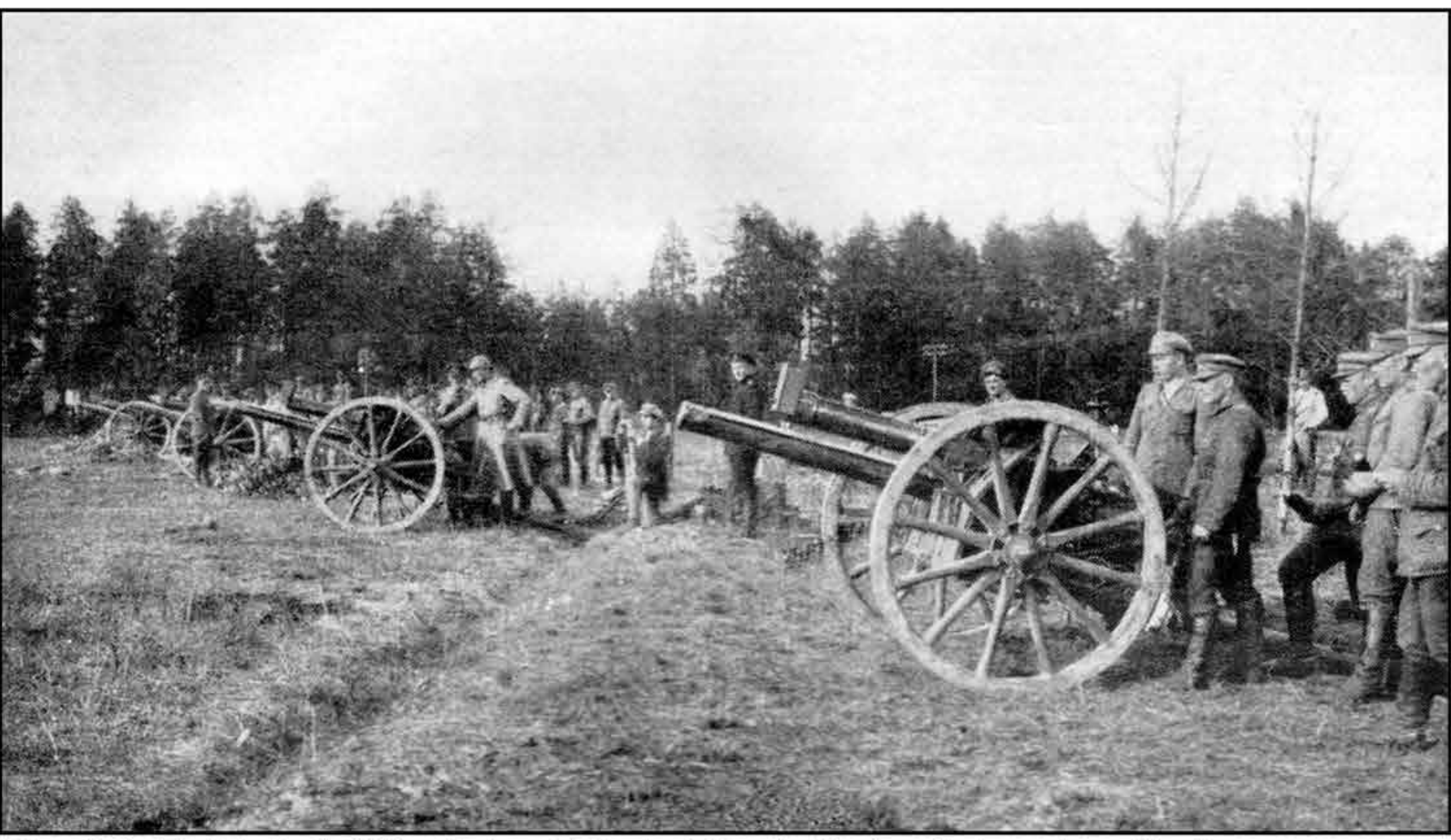
The Battle of Cēsis was a decisive battle in the Estonian War of Independence and the Latvian War of Independence. After heavy fighting an Estonian force supplemented by Latvian units, repelled Baltic German attacks and went on counter-attack.



Battle of Cēsis, Latvia. Image from wikipedia.org



1st Infantry Brigade Artillery Battalion - is an artillery battalion of the Estonian Defence Forces, participated in the War of Independence and in Cēsis battle in Latvia.



Battery No 1 of the Estonian 1st Artillery Regiment during the fight against Landeswehr. Image from wikipedia.org

Meanwhile, Poland intervened in favor of Latvia in Latgale where the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic maintained its positions until 1920. Latvia needed external help to liberate this part of its territory. The common Polish-Latvian operation led to the liberation of the region in January 1920. The operation was commanded by Edward Rydz Śmigły - the further Marshal of Poland.

● January 1920

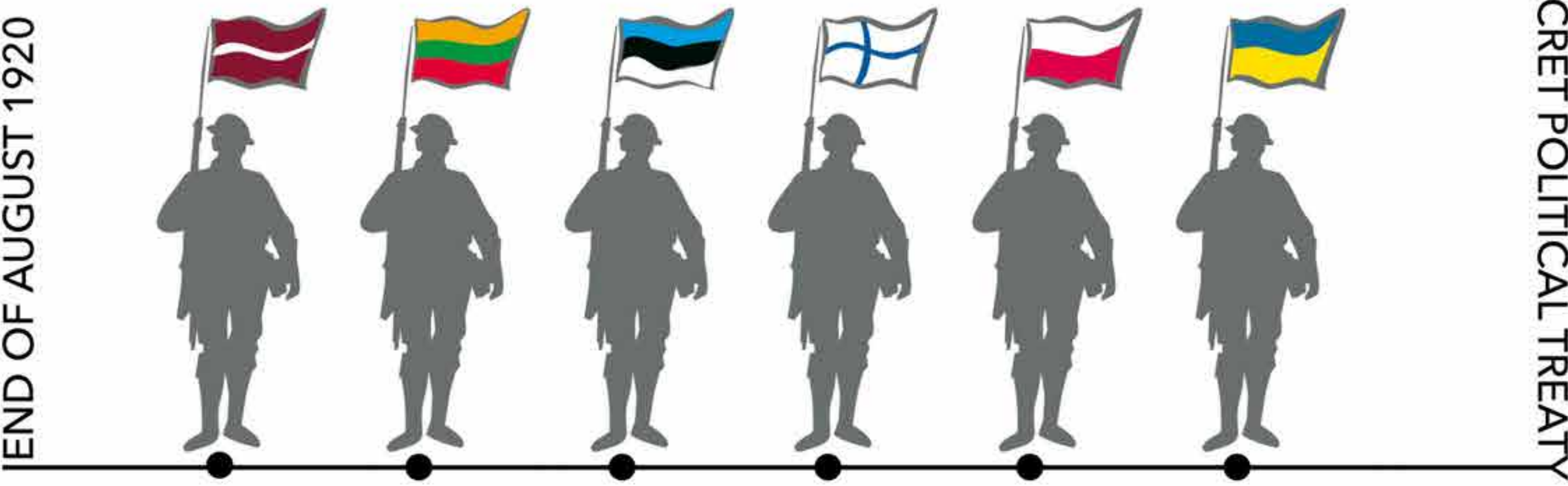
Battle of Daugavpils was the final battle of Latvian War of Independence. A joint Polish and Latvian force, operating under Polish Staff orders known as "Operation Winter", defeated the Red Army.

In November 1918 Belarusian politicians agreed with Lithuanians to cooperate. Belarusian politicians joined Taryba (State Council). Lithuania also established the ministry for Belarusian affairs and nominated Jazep Varonka, the former prime minister of the BNR, to this post. One of Belarusian politicians joined the Lithuanian delegation participating in the Versailles Peace conference. Various separated Belarusian military units (regiment, battalion, squadron, company) operated at different times within the Lithuanian army fighting against the Bolsheviks and Poles. In late 1920 as a result of conflict with Poland Lithuania invited to Kaunas government of Belarusian People's Republic in exile headed by Vaclau Lastouski.



Polish and Latvian soldiers after the Battle of Daugavpils, 1920. Image from wikipedia.org

Between 1919 and 1920 Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania met several times to coordinate foreign policy and discuss the issue of a regional union. In 1920, Poland joined these meetings, followed by delegations from Belarus and Ukraine and Romania. Regional integration was at its highest point during a conference in Riga at the end of August 1920 when a secret political treaty was agreed upon between Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. According to the treaty, the participating states "bind themselves to adjust entirely by peaceful means frontier disputes [...] not to protect in any way, nor to permit on their territories, activities or undertakings which may be directed against one of the participating states" The states also obliged that they would not conclude "with another state any agreement directed against a state represented at the conference." They also agreed to draw up, without delay, a defensive military convention. In addition, they guaranteed minority rights to the citizens of the contracting states. However because of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict and the conquest of Ukraine by Bolsheviks the Treaty had never entered into force.



Swedish Brigade in Finland. Image from digitalmuseum.se





General Żeligowski surrounded by staff during a field mass in front of the Vilnius cathedral. Image from biogramy.pl



President of Lithuania Antanas Smetona inspects the Lithuanian Armed Forces soldiers during the interwar period. Image from idomu.lt

CONFLICTS IN EASTERN EUROPE

The fight for independence sometimes turned into military conflicts and interethnic clashes between the new states. Most occurred between Poland and its eastern neighbors, and in the South Caucasus. Poland fought against the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), which announced its independence on 1st of November 1918. The ZUNR claimed all the territories inhabited by the Ukrainian majority in the former Austria-Hungary (Zakarpattia, Northern Bukovina, and parts of Carpathians on the Polish-Slovak border) and especially in Eastern Galicia. This region was inhabited mostly by Ukrainians (more than 60%), while Poles accounted for around one-quarter of the population. On 22nd of January 1919, the ZUNR united with the Ukraine People's Republic (ZUNR), formally transforming the war into a fully-fledged conflict between Poland and Ukraine. Entente submitted two proposals for the division of Eastern Galicia between the Poles and Ukrainians (the Barthelemy Line and the Botha Line). The first proposal was rejected by Galician Ukrainians and the second one by the Poles. In July 1919, Poland, thanks to the deployment of the Blue Army in Eastern Galicia, and contrary to the agreement with France (the Blue Army was supposed to fight the Bolsheviks), won its conflict with the ZUNR and took control of the entire region. In November 1918, war broke out between Poland and the UNR which differed from the conflict in Galicia, which had a substantially lower level of intensity. The UNR forces engaged simultaneously in a war against the Bolsheviks and were forced to withdraw under the pressure of the Polish offensive and to accept the loss of Western Volhynia, where Poles accounted for just 10% of population and Ukrainians made more than 70%.



OLENA STEPANIV

Female Officer of the Ukrainian Galician Army, one of the organizers of the November Action.

She was an outstanding Ukrainian historian, geographer, educator, social activist, soldier of the Legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, Doctor of Philosophy (1921), Associate Professor of the University of Lviv (1944). Long-term (1949-1956) prisoner of the Gulag Camp.

Poland waged the war against Lithuania over Vilnius and its surroundings where Poles made up slightly more than half of the inhabitants. The conflict started in spring 1919 when the Polish Army entered the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and took control of Vilnius. Poles and Lithuanians also clashed during the Peace Versailles Conference. The head of Polish delegation, Roman Dmowski, proposed the annexation of Lithuania, while ethnic Lithuanians raised claims to the territories that were mostly inhabited by Polish and Belarusian settlers. In July 1919, Entente presented the demarcation between Poland and Lithuania (proposed by Marshal of France Ferdinand Foch) which left Vilnius on the side of Poland, but both sides (especially Lithuania) were not fully satisfied with the demarcation. In August 1919 Lithuania aborted the Polish coup planned by Piłsudski which aimed to replace the Lithuanian government with a pro-Polish cabinet that would accept the federation with Poland. The Polish Army prolonged its offensive actions until spring 1920, crossing the Foch line.

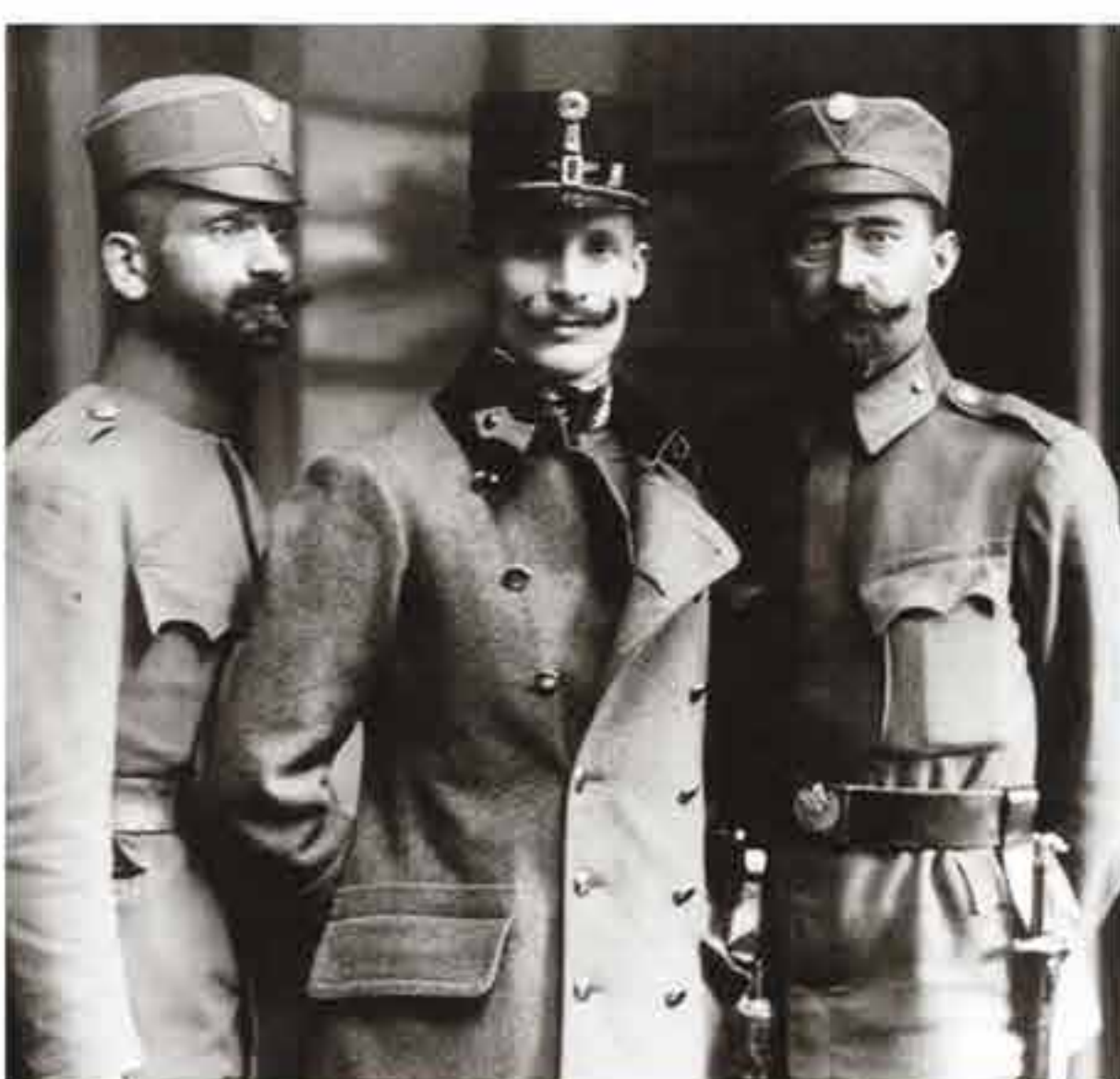


The Beit Hasidim Synagogue in Lviv, burned by Poles during an anti-Jewish pogrom. Most of Eastern Galician Jews remained neutral during the Polish-Ukrainian war, but more often they fought on the Ukrainian side. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua



Polish (left) and Lithuanian (right) delegates at the negotiation table during the Suwałki Conference - called to solve territorial disputes in the Suwałki and Vilnius Regions. Image from wikipedia.org

Polish military celebrates the incorporation of Vilnius Region in Poland, 1922. Image from wikipedia.org



Ukrainian Galician Army chiefs Ivan Bobersky, Mykhailo Voloshin and Longin Tsehelsky, 1918.

POLISH-UKRAINIAN WAR

Was held between the Second Polish Republic and Ukrainian forces (both West Ukrainian People's Republic and Ukrainian People's Republic).



Polish defenders of Chyrow (modern Khyriv), with the Jesuit college in the background, 1919.

1918-1919



Commanders of the II Corps of the Ukrainian Galician Army. Stryl, 1919. Image from unr.memory.gov.ua

During the Bolshevik offensive in 1920, Lithuania negotiated the Treaty of Moscow (July 12) which granted a free passage for the Red Army, as well as Bolshevik Russia's recognition of Lithuanian independence and its territorial claim over Vilnius and its surrounding area. However in case of the Bolshevik victory against Poland, Lithuania would have lost its independence. The successful Polish counteroffensive dramatically altered the balance of power. Under the mediation of League of Nations, both sides signed the Suwałki Agreement on 7th October 1920 which suggested that Vilnius would be left with Lithuania. However the next day the Polish general, Stanisław Żeligowski, started a mutiny.

LUCJAN ŻELIGOWSKI

A Polish general, Leader of the Republic of Central Lithuania

Also a politician, military commander and veteran of World War I, the Polish-Soviet War and World War II. Żeligowski was chosen to command the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusian Infantry Division, composed mainly of volunteers and partisans from the territory of modern Belarus and Lithuania. After the military operation called "Żeligowski's Mutiny" he proclaimed independence of the Republic of Central Lithuania, with Wilno as its capital.

Image from wikipedia.org



Poland officially wanted Żeligowski to be a deserter, and provided his forces with logistical support and reinforcement. Żeligowski captured Vilnius and proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Central Lithuania. He continued to advance towards Kaunas, entering the ethnically Lithuanian territories and treating the survival of independent Lithuania. His offensive was met with strong Lithuanian resistance (battles at Sirvintos and Giedraiciai), and under the pressure of League of Nations he agreed to sign the armistice at the end of November 1920. In 1922, Central Lithuania voted for its incorporation into Poland. Ultimately, the border between Poland and Lithuania was very similar to the Foch Line.



Ukrainian demonstration against Polish control of Eastern Galicia held in the New York City, 1922. Image from dt.ua



Celebrating the second (up) and the twentieth (down) anniversaries of the victory over the Ukrainians. Images from dt.ua

REPUBLIC OF CENTRAL LITHUANIA (1920-1922)

The republic was a Poland-dependent puppet state. In 1931 an international court in The Hague issued the statement that the Polish seizure of the Vilnius city had been a violation of international law, but without any political aftermath. The Polish-Lithuanian borders in the interwar period were not recognized by Republic of Lithuania until the Polish ultimatum of 1938.



Images from wikipedia.org





CONFLICTS IN SOUTH CAUCASUS

Between 1918 and 1920 the South Caucasus faced three main interethnic conflicts between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians, the Georgians and the Armenians and between the Georgians and the Ossetians. The war between the Azeris and the Armenians was often waged between guerilla forces committing massacres and ethnic cleansing. Indeed, the conflict took place in a very ethnically mixed environment. The regions of Syunik/Zangezur and Nakhichevan were inhabited by the Azeri people (who were a slight majority) along with a Armenians (who were a sizable minority); the Armenian communities were divided from the rest of the Azeri territories by Karabakh whose population was mostly composed of Armenians, but with a significant Azeri minority. Meanwhile, the population of the Kazakh-Shamshadin region, located north of Karabakh, was equally split between both nations.



Before WWI, Baku was the largest Azeri city, but at the same it was the second largest Armenian city in Caucasus after Tbilisi. The Azeri-Armenian conflict started in Baku with the March Days event.

March 1918

The massacre of thousands Azerbaijanis in Baku conducted by Armenian nationalists in cooperation with the Bolsheviks. In September 1918, the Ottoman army and its Azerbaijani allies, which occupied the city, retaliated with the massacre of Armenians in the city.

BRITISH FORCES
on the road to Baku
1918

Image from wikipedia.org

In December 1918, in response to a border proposal presented by the British mission, which favoured Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis living in Nakhichevan, declared the Republic of Aras. It was essentially subordinate to Azerbaijan and had to fight from the very beginning with the Armenian army. At the time, a low intensity guerilla confrontation between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians erupted in Karabakh, Syunik/Zangezur and Kazakh-Shamshadin. In early March 1920, regular troops of Azerbaijan attempted to suppress the Armenian-controlled enclaves in Karabakh. That triggered the outbreak of fully fledged Azeri-Armenian war all over the Caucasus. In the middle of March, Armenian troops launched a counteroffensive in all of the disputed areas with Azerbaijan. Syunik/Zangezur and Nakhichevan were very quickly put under stable Armenian control. Armenian forces in Kazakh-Shamshadin reached the outskirts of Ganja, the second largest city in Azerbaijan. During the war both sides reportedly committed numerous crimes and performed ethnic cleansing in areas with mixed populations. The massacres and ethnic cleansing resulted in dramatic changes of national structure. The death toll, in absolute numbers, was considerably larger among the Azerbaijanis, but proportionally to the size of the population, the Armenians suffered more deaths.

The Georgian-Ossetian conflict (1918-1920) comprised of three uprisings, which took place in the Ossetian-inhabited areas of Georgia (South Ossetia), claimed thousands of lives. In 1919 and 1920 the uprisings were supported by the Russian Bolsheviks. The Ossetians demanded a degree of autonomy comparable to what was granted to the Abkhazians and Muslim Georgians in Adjara. Tbilisi rejected that demand because of the cooperation between the Ossetians and the Bolsheviks. The uprisings were violently crushed by the Georgian armed forces.



Georgia waged also a brief war with Armenia. Governmental circles in Armenia claimed the Lore-Borchalo, Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki districts, which are located in current southern Georgia, and mostly inhabited by Armenian settlers. On 9th December, 1918 Armenia's armed forces invaded the Borchalo district. The Georgian army regained the district in a short time and restored the status quo ante bellum. Following the diplomatic intervention of the Allies, the hostilities ceased after three weeks and an agreement on the borders was signed by both sides. Armenia officially dropped their claim over the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki districts, while Georgia agreed to the condominium over the Lori canton of the Borchalo district. While ending the war, the agreement left Erevan and Tbilisi unsatisfied, and resulted in a permanent strain between the two countries. The conflict was short and bloody. There were more than 1,000 victims on both sides.





Group portrait of the students in the Hebrew school in Simnas Lithuania (1927-1935). Image from collections.ushmm.org

INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS AND MODERNITY

The fight for independence in the former Tsarist Russia at the end of WWI was often intertwined with the program of the progressive modernization of society pursued by national elites. For instance, the first government of independent Poland established an eight-hour working day, guaranteed the legitimacy of trade unions and the right to strike, introduced labor inspections, sickness insurance and the protection of tenants. Independent Lithuania provided Jews with an unprecedented level of political and cultural autonomy. It was the longest lasting arrangement in interwar Europe. The widespread participation of Jews in Lithuanian political life during the post-war period generated a brief and exceptional efflorescence of Jewish national modern identity.

Five Georgian female members of parliament

Minadora Orjonikidze-Toroshelidze

Eleonora Ter-Parsegova-Makhviladze

Kristine Sharashidze
Member of The Constitutional Committee

Liza Elisabed Nakashidze-Bokvache

Ana Sologashvili

Images from (left to right): jam-news.net, gendermediator.ge, 1tv.ge, soundcloud.com and batumelebi.netgazeti.ge

In fact, certain national movements, even before the war, were the avant-garde of modernity. Finland was the first country in Europe (at that time an autonomous duchy) and one of the first in the world where women gained universal voting rights (in 1907). After the 1917 February Revolution the new regime endorsed the women’s suffrage. Finland reconfirmed it immediately after announcing its independence in December 1917. Between 1918 and 1919, Finland was followed by independent Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Belarus. By comparison, women gained the right to vote in Spain in 1931 and France and Italy in 1946. The socially progressive independent movements allowed the unprecedented inclusion of women into political life in the newly established countries. For the first time, women started to occupy high political posts. It was very symbolic that Gabrielè Petkevičaitė, pen name Bitė (Bee), a Lithuanian writer and educator chaired the first session of the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania in 1920 and was elected to office during the first free elections in the history of the country. Five women were elected to the Georgian Constituent Assembly, making up almost 5% of its members. It was one of the highest proportions of women in any parliament in the world. One elected Georgian woman, Kristine Sharashidze, joined the Presidium of Constituent Assembly which composed of six people who were responsible for the preparation of drafting legislation in one of the most modern constitution in the world. For instance, Georgia (with the exception of San Marino) was the first country in Europe to abolish the death penalty. At that time, capital punishment was abolished only in few Latin American countries.

The progressivism of the Georgian political elite was not accidental. In fact, Georgia was the first country in the history of the world to be ruled by a social democratic government and it was seen as a fascinating experiment and a positive alternative to the Soviet totalitarian Revolution. The future prime minister of Great Britain, Ramsay MacDonald, who visited Georgia in 1920, wrote:

I familiarized myself with its constitution, its social and economic reconstruction and what I saw there, I wish I could see in my country too.

Karl Kautsky, a prominent Czech-Austrian Marxist philosopher and principal critic of the Bolsheviks, assessed that:

In comparison with the hell which Soviet Russia represents, Georgia appears as a paradise.

The modernization efforts of Eastern European Muslims in the post-war period constituted a particularly significant phenomenon. In 1917 the Crimean Tatar Qurultay (parliament) established the secular Crimean People’s Republic - though it was mostly inhabited by non-Muslims - and granted the women’s suffrage as the first political entity in the history of the Muslim world. The crucial role of nation-building in Crimea played the Lithuanian-Polish Tatars which accepted many elements of Western culture but remained Muslims. Therefore before the war, Ismail Gaspirali, the most important ideologue of the modernization of the Turkic nations, recognized the Lithuanian-Polish Tatars as the main source of inspiration for all Turkic nations. The prime minister of Crimea, General Maciej Sulejman Sulkiewicz, a Lithuanian-Polish Tatar, became the commander of general staff in the Azeri army. Other prominent members of Sulkiewicz’s family were Aleksander, the general secretary of Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and best friend of Piłsudski and his closest collaborator until the death on the battle field in 1916, and Maryam, the director of the first secular Muslim high school in the world. In the building of the school, designed by Józef Gosławski, a Polish chief architect of the city of Baku, the parliament of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was gathering for two years. At the time, Azerbaijan represented the first secular democratic independent republic inhabited by a Muslim majority and that granted voting rights to women.

ŞEFİQA GASPIRALI

The leader of the Crimean Tatar movement "The Executive Committee of the Muslim Women of Crimea" ("Qadınlar Günü"), which existed in the Crimea in the early twentieth century. Her name is associated with such a unique phenomenon for Islam at the time as the female Muslim movement. She was a daughter of the famous Crimean Tatar ideologue Ismail Gaspirali and a wife of the statesman and major political figure in Azerbaijan Democratic Republic Nasib Yusif oglu Yusifbeyli.

Image from wikipedia.org

The progressive policies of the newly established states were, to a certain degree, a response to the social radicalism of communist Russia. The Bolsheviks initiated the social revolution in Russia by appointing Alexandra Kollontai in 1917 (of Finnish-Russian origin) as the first woman in the world to become a government (the Commissar for Social Welfare). In addition, in Bolshevik Ukraine, Yevgenia Bosch, an Ukrainian German, is considered to be the first woman to become leader of a national government, she occupied the positions of Minister of Interior and acting leader of the Provisional Ukrainian Soviet Government (1917-1918).

International Socialist Congress, Copenhagen 1910. Alexandra Kollontaj (on the left) holds Clara Zetkin’s hand. Behind them is Rosa Luxemburg. Image from wikipedia.org



First Female Parliamentarians in the world in Finland in 1907. Image from wikipedia.org



Ana Sologhashvili, member of the constituent assembly. In 1937, she was arrested and shot by decision of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs-NKVD. Image from www.26may.ge



On the left - Ismail Gaspirali; on the right - Maciej (Suleyman bey) Sulkiewicz. Images from wikipedia.org

The first Turkic-Muslim women’s magazine in the world. The magazine began to be published in the Crimean Tatar language using the Arabic alphabet in Crimea in 1906-1912. The editor was Şefiqa Gaspirali. Image from islam.in.ua





Famous German race drivers Hans Stuck and Rudolf Caracciola in Tallinn. 1930 Monte Carlo rallye had first time its start also from Tallinn, Estonia. Image from carakoom.com



Warsaw Uprising: On August 28 Prudential building was hit by 2-ton mortar shell from Mörser Karl. View from roof of a house at ul. Kopernika 28. Image from wikipedia.org

LEGACY OF THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE 1918-1921:

20TH CENTURY

If Communist Russia had destroyed all of the Eastern European states it would have been able to divide Europe with the Iron Curtain Europe 30 years earlier. It should not be excluded that in consequence of further expansion, the Soviets would have gained the control of larger territories in Europe. The successful defense of independence allowed Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, in the interwar period, to finalize their nation building processes and created modern political, social and cultural institutions. After the Second World War, this legacy played an enormous positive role helping the Baltic nations and Poland to maintain social cohesion under communism and successfully re-establish their states as independent (Baltic states), sovereign (Poland) and democratic after the fall of the Soviet Union.



Meanwhile the interwar period gave Finland the opportunity to undertake a spectacular civilizational leap to become one of the most modern nations in the world during the second half of the 20th century. Indeed, the Finnish GDP per capita increased 2.5 times between 1918 and 1939. The Finnish economy achieved one of the fastest rates of growth during this period. In the interwar period, the newly established states continued to be the avant-garde of European modernity. Miina Sillanpää a key figure in the Finnish workers' movement, became the Minister of Social Affairs in 1926. She was the world's second female minister in an internationally recognized government.

In 1932, a new Polish Penal Code legalized the most liberal abortion laws in Europe, excluding the Soviet Union. The same year Poland became one of the first countries in Europe to decriminalize homosexuality. Latvia, during the democratic period until 1934, distinguished itself with an impressive number of ministers - almost fifteen - representing national minorities. The percentage of female students (40%) placed Latvia on first place in Europe. According to Andres Kasekamp, a professor of politics at the University of Toronto:

...one of the greatest achievements in inter-war Europe for the protection of national minorities was the 1925 Estonian cultural autonomy law, recognized at the time as one of the most progressive in the world. Its key innovation was the idea that autonomy should be based on the individual, rather than on territory.

It was not accidental that the Soviets tried to erase the legacy of interwar independence of the above-mentioned states. For instance, Konstantin Päts was arrested and forcefully sent for treatment to psychoneurotic hospitals where he died after 13 years of imprisonment. Almost all the ministers who were part of the last interwar Latvian government, including prime minister Karlis Ulmanis, died or were killed in Soviet prisons. However the interwar period should not be idealized. Only Finland remained a democracy between the wars. Lithuania and Poland in 1926 and Latvia and Estonia in 1934 experienced coups d'état which resulted in the establishment of authoritarian regimes. It is the cruel paradox of history that the founding fathers (Pilsudski, Smetona, Ulmanis, Päts) of independence and democracy, achieved between 1918-1921, overthrew democracy. Yet all of them firmly rejected anti-Semitism and fascism which gained widespread popularity at that time.



Interwar period was the forerunner of the Cold War by dividing for the first time the continent. The nations which failed during the post-war period (1918-1921) to create their own states, and were left behind the first Iron Curtain, were subjects of massive repression and even genocide in the interwar Soviet Union. For instance, in the 1930s many Ukrainians suffered terrible losses due to a genocidal man-made famine (Holodomor) that was orchestrated by the Stalinist regime which mixed Bolshevism with Russian xenophobic nationalism. Close to four million Ukrainians lost their lives within a few years. In absolute numbers, and taking into account both world wars and the Russian Civil War, no other European nation suffered as terribly as Ukrainian in the 20th century. Polish and Finnish minorities, who remained in the Soviet Union after 1921, were accused by the Soviet authorities of being the fifth column. In consequence, they experienced genocide (executions, repressions and deportations) that brought the death-toll proportionally higher than in the Ukraine.

The armed conflict between Poland and Lithuania over Vilnius (1919-20) was prolonged as the "Cold War" between the two states lasted until 1938. They did not establish diplomatic relations. Lithuania officially defined Vilnius as its capital and refused any action that would recognize Poland's control it. The Polish-Lithuanian dispute gravely hampered the development of regional cooperation in the Baltic region. However cooperation between the independent movements in the period 1918-1921 had sometimes a positive impact on regional ties. In 1921 Poland created a close alliance with Romania, aiming at defense against Soviet revisionism.

12-09-1934 The Baltic Entente was established between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The idea of Prometheism remained highly popular in the interwar period. Many leaders of the nations conquered by the Soviets found a shelter in Europe, especially in Poland, Finland, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Turkey (until the beginning of 30s) and even Japan.



Delegates and observers of the Bulduri Conference. The meeting is chaired by the Latvian Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis. The conference began on 4 August 1920 and brought together delegates from five Baltic states - Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Image from wikipedia.org



Many of the territorial conflicts that took place between 1918 and 1921 re-emerged during World War II. For instance, the eastern parts of Poland transformed into arena of bloody confrontation between Poland and their neighbors, particularly the Ukrainian. The bitter legacy which resulted in ethnic cleansing and even genocide - decisively carried out more often by the Ukrainian nationalists - still overshadows Polish-Ukrainian relations. The idea of Greater Finland did not lose its appeal in many segments of Finnish society during the interwar period. Between 1941-44 Helsinki, taking part in the war against the Soviet Union on the German side, undertook the last unsuccessful attempt to fulfil this romantic dream. Romania also regained Bessarabia from the Soviets for just three years before it was lost again in 1944.

The Soviet regime perceived the German aggression to a large degree as a repeat of German and Allied interventions of 1918-1921 which provided autonomous and independent movements of non-Russian nations with assistance. Indeed, in 1941 many nations of the Soviet Union and their elites perceived Germany as liberators, hoping they would behave as the Kaiser of Germany did in 1917 and support their autonomy and perhaps even independence. In fact, many representatives of the elites had cooperated with Germans in 1917-1918, but they experienced enormous disappointment. Nazi Germany was a very different state from the Kaiser Germany. The Nazis perceived the majority of inhabitants in Eastern Europe as sub-human and established, in most regions, an occupation regime that was even worse than the Soviet one. Nevertheless the Soviets treated many minorities as fifth column: they accused them of collaborating with the Nazis and their allies on the basis of collective responsibility, and deported them to Central Asia or Siberia in a very brutal way provoking enormous casualties. The main victims of these genocidal policies were the Romanians from Moldova (1941 and 1944-53), the Lithuanians, the Latvians, the Estonians (1941 and 1945-1949), the Crimean Tatars, the Crimean Greeks (1944) and the Kalmyks, the Balkars, the Karachays, the Meskhetian Turks, the Chechens and the Ingushs (1944).



The "Big Three" at the Yalta Conference, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin. Image from wikipedia.org

European military alliances. Image from wikipedia.org





LEGACY OF THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE (1918-1921):

100TH ANNIVERSARY

A century since the wars of independence (1918-1921), the division between the countries which succeeded in the fight and those that failed, is still noticeable. After the fall of Soviet Union, the only countries which managed to defend their independence between 1918 and 1921 became members of the EU. And even if certain efforts failed in this period, they left a positive imprint. As the Canadian-Polish historian Jerzy Borzęcki pointed out, even though the federalist program promoted – particularly by Poland – did not prevail, it forced Moscow to maintain the illusion of Belarusian and Ukrainian independence. As a result, it contributed to the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922 as a federation of republics, which was composed of the four republics of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republic (which was made up of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). The federal structure of the Soviet Union, though often only nominally, was different from the centralized system of Tsarist Russia. And in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR, it became the foundation for the creation of over a dozen newly independent states. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, accompanied by the change in political systems (1989-1991), looks, at a first glance, similar to the events of 1917-1921. However, Yeltsin and Gorbachev behaved in a definitely more self-constrained way towards non-Russian nations than Lenin and Denikin did. Nevertheless Russia, under president Putin, became a genuine successor of White and Red Russia, attacking Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. The Russian aggressions represented a reaction to revolutions (the Rose Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity and the Euromaidan) in both countries. In fact, many observers perceive the revolutions as a continuation of the nation and state building processes of the Ukrainian and Georgia that started in 1918 and that were interrupted by the Soviet conquest.

UNRECOGNISED FORMATIONS



"Little green men" and lorries after the seizure of Perevalne military base, 9 March 2014

All images are from wikipedia.org

Moreover, many of the conflicts that erupted after the dissolution of the Soviet Union – for instance, South Ossetia, Karabakh and the uprisings in Chechnya – were often instrumentally presented by the participants as a return to the post-war period (1918-1921). For the pro-Russian separatists, the heritage of the Bolshevik in Eastern Europe has remained a significant source of inspiration. During the Russian aggression against Ukraine that began in 2014, the legacy of the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic, established in 1918 by the Soviets against the Ukrainian People's Republic was revived. In February 2015, "legislature" of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), supported by Russia, adopted a resolution declaring the DNR to be the legal successor to the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic. The authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic claimed – falsely – that its flag was based on the flag of the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic. Moreover the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan in 1920 (a local self-proclaimed revolutionary committee launches "riots" and requested intervention from the Red Army) may be treated as a source of inspiration for Russia's current hybrid war against Ukraine based on little green men. In fact, a few decades ago the scheme served as a blueprint during the Soviet invasions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968).

However anti-Bolshevik liberation ideas, such as Prometheism and Intermarium (Between the Seas), formulated in the post-war period (1918-1921) were cultivated in the interwar period, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union they came back into the public discourse in Eastern Europe, and are now present in foreign policies of regional states. Moreover the alliances established between the nations during the wars of independence (1918-1921) re-emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Baltic Assembly (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the Nord-Baltic Eight (a regional co-operation format that includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden) constitute the best exemplifications of this phenomenon. These initiatives are solidly rooted in the cooperation between Baltic and Nordic states in the wars of independence (1918-1921). This period served as a key point of reference for the nations who fought for their independence after the First World War, particularly when they celebrated its 100th anniversary. But the legacy has a wider European context. Describing the legacy of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the long-standing Federal Foreign Affairs Minister of Germany, rightly pointed out:



At that time it (the 1921 Georgian constitution) already advocated such values as liberty, democracy and rule of law, which the modern Europe is based on currently.



In fact, historical memory about the period 1918-21 even possessed a global dimension. The fight for independence in this period was closely intertwined with the modernization projects which perceived Western Europe as a paradigm. The efforts of Russian Muslims to build secular democratic republics inspired many Muslim reformers in the 20th century (for instance, Kemal Atatürk). As Alikhan Bokeikhanov, the leader of the Kazakh Alash Horde stated:

The culture of our Russia is low [...]. Culture is in Western Europe: in France, England, Belgium and Germany.



Today, the reinvigoration of that approach to Europe in the Muslim world would be more than welcome.

