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**ROMAN DMOWSKI'S VIEWS ON THE ROLE
OF GERMANY IN THE RESOLUTION
OF THE POLISH ISSUE AFTER 1907**

Roman Dmowski was one of the most eminent Polish politicians of the end of XIX and beginning of XX centuries. His political views are part of the Polish national heritage. His figure cannot be fully presented since, admittedly, he belonged to most versatile and controversial individuals. He created and headed the Polish nationalist camp, initially called Liga Polska [Polish League], subsequently known as Liga Narodowa [National League], Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe [Democratic – National Party], and finally Obóz Wielkiej Polski [Great Poland Camp] and Stronnictwo Narodowe [National Party]. In addition, in the years 1895–1905, Dmowski edited „Przegląd Wszechpolski” [All-Polish Review]; in 1922 the second series of the paper was started to be published. The paper became the hotbed of a new political ideology, within which independence and the good of the Polish nation were ranked first. Dmowski was president of Koło Polskie [Polish Circle] in the Russian State *Duma*, being also involved in neo-Slavonic movement. One of his most important contributions was to participate in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and to sign the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty ended one and initiated another era in the history. Moreover, the Peace Conference in Paris changed the political map of Europe. Poland's participation as a subject and not as an object in the Conference was possible due to consistent, realistic and forward-looking politics pursued by Roman Dmowski.

In his views on the role of Germany in the resolution of the Polish issue after 1907, Dmowski saw Germany as the most dangerous enemy of Poland. His political ideas diverged from the traditional orientation

of the Polish political thought which recognized Russia as the main enemy. The leader of the national camp stipulated that the attitude of Poles towards the Russian state was much more complex than the attitude towards Germany or Austria. Dmowski believed that there were no foreseeable chances to break away from Russia since the major „trunk of the nation” belonged to Russia¹. Dmowski’s opinions about Germany resulted from his geo-politics. He wanted Poland to be allied with tsarist Russia assuming simultaneously that it was Germany which wanted to destroy the Polish state. Admittedly, Polish history was shaped by struggles with Russia while the Polish political thought concentrated on fighting with the East. Only at the beginning of XX century, there was a change. The breakthrough in the Polish political thought was also influenced by Dmowski’s views presented in the book entitled *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska* [Germany, Russia and the Polish issue], published in 1908². Only very rarely does it occur in the history of political thought a publication in which such revalorization of centuries-long sacred values takes place, while a statesman such as Dmowski was, in his foresight reaches so far into the future. The book had both political and practical aims, it was to present to the Polish nation and the Russian governing spheres the Narodowa Demokracja [National Democracy’s] political principles and assumptions. National Democrats recognized freeing Polish politics from all the external influences, making it autonomous as their task. Roman Dmowski’s views concerning the German, Russian and Jewish nations were extremely interesting. The national camp stated that the attitude of Poles towards the Russian state was much more complex than the attitude towards Germany or Austria. They claimed that the Prussian and Austrian partitions were only big provinces detached from Poland while the main territory of the country, the main trunk of the nation belonged to Russia. Moreover, our country stood no quick chances of freeing itself from the Tsars’ state³. The main ide-

¹ R. Dmowski, *Państwa rozbiornicze jako teren polityki polskiej*, „Przegląd Wszepolki” I 1904, no 1, p. 9.

² The book *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska* appeared in the bookstore of A. Attenberg. Its French edition, entitled „La question polonaise” was published in Paris in 1909, while in Russia it was entitled *Rossija, Germanija i polskij wopros*.

³ R. Dmowski, *Państwa rozbiornicze jako teren polityki polskiej...*, p. 1 and ff. The attitude of the Polish society to the partitioning powers was of vital importance to Poland. It did not preempted the Polish politics though, which had more widespread arenas to cover. The national politics began to work from scratch, that is from building

ologue of the Polish nationalism – Dmowski was never a Russofile, Russia made him shudder. Dmowski claimed in turn that he did not hate Germans. He was even impressed by their organizational skills, laboriousness and he wanted to transfer the good traits on to Poles. In turn, he attacked Jews vehemently, speaking against the nation in most vivid manner.

Dmowski perceived the German expansionism as a threat. Therefore he outlined two aims: to defend the Polish nation in all of the three partitions but particularly in the German one and to do everything not to let the German-Russian alliance happen again. The alliance, targeted against Poland, was the most dangerous means to keep the nation enslaved. The Wszepolacy [All-Poles] maintained that the appearance of the national camp on the political stage and the fact that it became influential changed national politics. „Pro-Moscow” propaganda had been suppressed then as well as the political movement growing on the perception of the German threat to Poland which promoted solidarity among Slavs and wanted to get Russian support. The national camp acknowledged that the German threat was undoubtedly bigger than the society had imagined and the fate of the Polish population in the Prussian partition was extraordinarily endangered⁴. Dmowski was ready to create principles of politics which should make the fragmented nation unite, eventually leading to its regaining independence. He assumed that Germany was the main enemy. He claimed that Prussia was built out of our harm and violation⁵. The eminent politician dedicated a lot of attention to national vices, seeing the gravest one in passivity. In addition, he came to the conclusion that we were not active enough, lacked initiative, were lazy and „drifters”⁶. Germany mustered its forces against Poland, Prussian authorities prosecuted Polishness, seemingly only respecting existent law. Hence, „Germanophobia” was to be per-

awareness and arranging national forces, creating the army. The new national current was manifest in the turn towards the people, towards enlightening the people.

⁴ R. Dmowski, *Nasze stanowisko wobec Niemiec i Rosji*, „Przegląd Wszepolski” VII 1903, no 7, p. 481 and ff. „Przegląd Wszepolski” stated in its publications that because of intense struggling for survival and because of the impact of the German culture, the society in the Prussian province became highly prone to material values. It was devoted to material side of life, wherein national differences play no role. A typical representative of Polishness in the Prussian partition was a man who differed from a German only by the fact of speaking Polish alongside German.

⁵ R. Dmowski, *Pisma*, t. I: *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*, Warszawa 1988, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

ceived as a good thing, expressive of the national instinct of survival. „Germanophobia” entailed „Moscow-philía”. The national camp claimed that propaganda spread by the moderate, reconciliatory press, which was infected with „Moscow-philía”, was born to make Poland dependent on Russian interests, to involve the country in the Russian state affairs. National Democrats strived to resuscitate the national life in the whole territory of the country, they wanted to „raise the morale of the whole nation, increase its internal resilience and lead the nation on the road to expansion”. The national forces in the Prussian partition were thus to be reinforced as well⁷.

Incisive analyses of both countries shaped Dmowski’s attitude to Germany and Russia. Writing many of his works during the period of intense Germanization, Dmowski quickly identified the German threat. Hence the main opponent of the German option in our country noticed that „our enemies, wanting to make us extinct, began a process of intense extermination”. In the Prussian province, the Polish society was forced to fight in defense of its native language, its faith, its land and even its bread. Life in the Prussian province was extremely difficult because Poles were competing against the Prussian population which was technologically more advanced, better organized and more entrepreneurial⁸. The *Wszechpolacy* linked regaining independence to changes in the international arena which was to be caused by wars between the partitioning powers. They supposed that Russia would be defeated in the future war, which would make it possible to rebuild the Polish national sovereignty. Dmowski claimed that the partitioning powers were opposing the rebirth of Poland; besides it was difficult to define what exactly was to be considered as the Polish state in XIX and XX centuries.

Dmowski’s territorial project entailed establishing, between Germany and Russia, a state capable of independent existence. The NDs believed that Russia was not interested in Russification of the Polish Kingdom to the same degree as Germany was interested in Germanization of the Prussian province. They thought that Russia would sooner agree than Prussia to carry out a policy more advantageous for the Polish state. Besides, the Tsars’ state was perceived as a country whose interests in Asia were more important than Russification of the King-

⁷ R. Dmowski, *Nasze stanowisko wobec Niemiec i Rosji...*, p. 484 and ff.

⁸ Idem, *Pisma*, vol. I, p. 37.

dom⁹. In an essay of 1905, entitled *Walka polityczna narodu* [Political struggle of the nation], Dmowski made his attitude towards Germany more explicit. For a long time he was inclined to see the anti-German orientation as the major one. Experience of the revolution of 1905 might have played a decisive role here. In the quoted essay, Dmowski wrote that „Germany is our uncompromising enemy; between them and us there is no compromise, we have to defend ourselves against them”¹⁰. Dmowski believed that not an uprising but „political struggle against the partitioning power” was a way to improve the fate of the nation. Political struggle means struggling every day to „defend every single acre of land, every national institution with resilience, to defend every Polish soul against moral debauchery, which retrieves step by step what the enemy had already taken from us”¹¹.

In his book, *Germany, Russia and the Polish issue*, Dmowski demonstrated the fearful picture of anti-Polish, imperialistic German politics. The publication aimed directly at defending his own political argument, presenting the ND party favourably at the Russian *Duma* and beating the criticism pointing out his conciliatory position vis-à-vis Tsarist Russia. The book resonated well with the Polish population in the Prussian partition for this was where the German threat was felt most strongly. The NDs in the Prussian partition liked Dmowski's conciliatory attitude towards Russia and his clearly anti-German political orientation. The Democratic League in the Prussian territory grew visibly in numbers. Dmowski, as the spokesperson of the anti-German option, stated that the United Germany developed a two-track policy. The first track aimed at continuation of the Prussian tendency to expand the sphere of German influence and the German rule, including reinforcing the Prussian prevalence in the German world. The other track consisted in a new discipline of extra-European politics – *Weltpolitik* – motivated by German frustration with the state's position and a desire to look for new capture all the time. This was what made Germany prone to conquest and playing in Europe the role of the medieval Roman Empire. Dmowski was convinced that the power of Prussia was bred by the collapse of Poland, while in the German press there were voices stating

⁹ Idem, *Nasze stanowisko wobec Niemiec i Rosji*, p. 488–489.

¹⁰ Idem, *Pisma*, vol. IV: *Upadek myśli konserwatywnej w Polsce*, Częstochowa 1938, p. 219.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

that „Germans fight not only Poles in their own country but also the whole Polish nation; Poles are an enemy whose absolute extinction is proclaimed”¹². Dmowski’s conception made the Polish issue a key to solve the problem of European security although it was not without weaknesses. It broke away from the traditional orientation of the Polish political thought which saw the main Polish enemy in Russia. The implementation of Dmowski’s programme was however dependent not on himself but also on Russia’s action. Unfortunately Russia was not in favour of Poles, the territory of the Russian partition underwent further Russification. The leader of National Democrats recognized this and as a result in his book *Germany, Russia and the Polish issue* he had not spelled out the aim of the Polish politics. The book did not contain any declaration related to the wish to rebuild the state. Dmowski was then accused of having surrendered independence. In reality, the book, because of the circumstances in which it had been written, i.e. the period of occupation, could not contain such conclusions. However, it contained premises to present the Polish case in terms of striving to rebuild the Polish state with the support of powers allied against Germany. The reader of Dmowski’s book had to understand the author’s idea that the Polish issue was fundamental in his views and not an addition to the Russian issue. While the tsarist censorship operated, the reader knew he was expected to read between the lines and hence that Dmowski had not surrendered struggling for independence but pushed it to the background. The clearly spelled out thesis of the book said that Prussia and not Russia was the Polish nation’s main enemy. Other conclusions were related to the main thesis. They professed that it was better to unite the Polish territory even under the Russian rule than to keep it partitioned. They also stated that in case of war, Poles should declare their support for Russia¹³. However, „wanting to wrench the Polish case out of German hands, it needs to be wrenched out of the Russian hands as well”¹⁴. The break-out of war was a shock to Germany, which was reflected in its attitude to the Polish issue. During the first weeks of war, the German press demanded that Poland should be reinstated as a wall protecting Germany against the East. Berlin’s policy was initially chaotic;

¹² R. Dmowski, *Pisma*, vol. II: *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska*, Warszawa 1991, p. 84 and ff.

¹³ J. Pajewski, *Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1914–1918*, Warszawa 1978, p. 41.

¹⁴ A. Micewski, *Roman Dmowski*, Warszawa 1971, p. 254.

German plans to annexe other territories crystallized only at the turn of 1915 and 1916¹⁵. So called Act of 5 November was signed in 1916 on behalf of and commanded by the emperors of Germany, Vilhelm II and of Austria, Franz Joseph, general governors of Warsaw, General Hans Hartwig von Beseler and Austro-Hungarian General Karl von Kuk. It transferred the Polish issue to the international arena, although opportunities it offered to Poland were very little. The Polish state was called into existence, totally dependent on Germany, both in political and military terms, deprived of large parts of its territory. According to Dmowski, the document marked a turn in German politics. Russians took its announcement peacefully¹⁶. The act was received positively only by activists; no one was persuaded in favour of the German case in Poland. The majority of the population saw in it a renewed sanctioning of Poland's partitioning. The act made a good impact on the West, however, where it was finally understood (following the January uprising) that the Polish issue must be dealt with.

The period between 11 November 1918 and June 1919 constituted a breakthrough in the history of Europe and the world. In the period the most important issues related to WW I, which ended with an armistice signed with Germany at Compiègne in November 1919, were regulated¹⁷. Poland welcomed the end of the war as the beginning of its independence. However, many problems had not been solved. Georges Clemenceau referred to the situation in a brilliant though deeply pessimistic manner saying that the drama of war ended while the drama of peace started. The peace did not begun for our country on the memorable 11 November 1919, the struggle only just began. It was an internal, political struggle concerning the shape of the society and the political regime and a military struggle concerning the borders of the state. Following 123 years of occupation, Poland returned onto the map of Europe; the statehood gradually started to be recreated. Dmowski dedicat-

¹⁵ More: T. Cieślak, *Przeciw pruskiej przemocy: walka o ziemię na Pomorzu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1959; L. Grosfeld, *Polityka państw centralnych wobec sprawy polskiej w latach pierwszej wojny światowej*, Warszawa 1962; J. Knebel, *Rząd pruski wobec sprawy polskiej w latach 1914–1917*, Warszawa 1961.

¹⁶ R. Dmowski, *Pisma*, vol. V, p. 323–324.

¹⁷ More exactly, the armistice with Germany, ending WWI, was signed in Rethondes near Compiègne. On 10 November 1918, following a revolution, new government intercepted power; the following day, the German delegation signed the armistice.

ed all of his extraordinary talents and knowledge to creating a territorial programme for Poland. The programme was not accepted as a whole but the Polish state owed to it the basis of its further development and implementation of its aims. The Polish issue was resolved in accordance with the Polish proposals; the country destroyed more than a hundred years ago was rebuilt within the borders which made it possible to continue the Polish Republic from the period of its flourishing and power. The Treaty of Versailles signified that the independence of Poland was recognized internationally. Poland was granted back much of the former Prussian partition although many of the resolutions were not advantageous for Poland. A plebiscite was to be held in Śląsk [Silesia], Mazury [Masuria], Warmia and Powiśle while Gdańsk [Danzig] remained a Free City. The Polish-German border problems resulted from the erroneous resolutions of the Treaty of Versailles. They brought about ethnic conflicts; the inhabitants of the disputed territories developed a feeling of harm, distrust, tinged with mutual hatred. At the conference, some proposed that the pre-partition border should be reinstated but the victorious powers decided otherwise; the decisions were disadvantageous for Poland. Only to a certain degree did they mend the injustice wrought on the country by Germany. Over the whole interwar period, Germany voiced slogans related to revisioning of the border and made preparations to take revenge. The disadvantageous decisions notwithstanding, Poland was deeply interested in the Treaty's implementation and enforcement of its resolutions. They formed a political basis for all of the subsequent Polish cabinets which defended the resolutions. They defended the so called Versailles system, integrity of the territorial solutions related to our country¹⁸.

The German problem was profusely presented in Roman Dmowski's press publications. Since the beginning of his political career, the eminent diplomat and statesman stressed that Germany was the main Polish enemy. He stated thus simultaneously that the key to solve the Polish problem is to be found in Russia. Further, Dmowski claimed that Poland and Russia had a common enemy, that is the German state. Germany seemed a threat to Dmowski not only during the partition

¹⁸ A. Ajnenkiel, *Od rządów ludowych do przewrotu majowego. Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1918–1926*, Warszawa 1978, p. 148.

period and during the WW I but also after Poland regained its independence. Throughout his career he expressed the anti-German attitude. He created in Poland a national ideology which took our country to the rooms of the Versailles Palace in 1919. He was also the main supporter of the anti-German option. He was motivated by the good of Poland first of all for, as he wrote, „Poland is not built for myself nor for my own party not even for my own generation. She belongs to the unending procession of generations who had built it and will build it, who constitute the nation. At great, breakthrough moments only those will find the proper way who have the feeling of being responsible for so defined a nation”¹⁹.

¹⁹ R. Dmowski, *Pisma*, vol. V, p. 167.