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## Stanisław Osiecki's Agenda at Sejm Ustawodawczy (1919–1922)

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## Henryk Cimek

### STANISŁAW OSIECKI'S AGENDA AT SEJM USTAWODAWCZY (1919–1922)

Stanisław Osiecki (1875–1967) was a grandson of a participant in the November uprising, an activist of peasant and independence movements, active in the field of sports and tourism, an editor and publisher of popular press. He was born in Ciechanów in a family of clerks. He studied at the Polytechnical University in Warsaw and at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of the Jagiellonian University, but he did not complete his studies. He began his political life in 1905 in Polski Związek Ludowy [Polish Popular Union], being the editor and publisher of its press organs: „Głos Gromadzki”, „Zagon” and „Życie Gromadzkie”. Since 1908, he was involved in one of the grassroots movements (*ruch zaraniarski*). In December of 1915, he co-founded Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish Peasant Party (PSL)] in Królestwo Polskie (since November 1918 – PSL Wyzwolenie), becoming a member of its General Council. Also, he was a co-founder of „Wyzwolenie”, the press organ of this party. On behalf of PSL, Osiecki became a member of Wydział Wykonawczy [Executive Department] of Centralny Komitet Narodowy [Central National Committee] that was created on 18 December in 1915, and subsequently he acted in Komisja Porozumiewawcza Stronnictw Demokratycznych [Reconciliatory Commission of Democratic Parties] that substituted it in June of 1917. He cooperated with Polska Organizacja Wojskowa [Polish Military Organization] and was a supporter of the unification of peasant parties from Galicja and Królestwo Polskie (see more on this in.: Szaflik 1979: 326–328; Giza 1968: 231 and ff.; entry: *Stanisław Osiecki* [in:] *Słownik biograficzny...* 1989: 301; Molenda 1965: 31 and ff.; Cimek 2008: 79 and ff.; *Twórcy ruchu ludowego...* [b.m.r.]: 4–6; Turowska-Bar 1963: 173; *Władze naczelne...* 1965: 389 and ff.).

As of 26 January 1919, Osiecki was elected a deputy to Sejm Ustawodawczy [Constituent Parliament] from the PSL Wyzwolenie' list

in the 19. constituency (Łuków and Garwolin). He acted in the capacity of deputy chairman of Klub Poselski PSL Wyzwolenie (3–14 February 1919), and as of 14 February 1919, he was a deputy Speaker (Marshal) of Sejm Ustawodawczy. When, following a short-lived unification (October 8, 1919) of the clubs of PSL Wyzwolenie and PSL Piast and the formation of Klub Posłów PSL, Klub Poselski PSL Wyzwolenie was reactivated as of 22 January 1920, Osiecki remained at Klub Posłów PSL that soon started to use the name of Klub Poselski PSL Piast. Since 5 February 1920, he acted in the capacity of a member of the General Council of that party. Osiecki worked for six Sejm committees: constitutional (as its rapporteur), liquidation, industrial-commercial, statutory and on MP immunity, fiscal-budgetary (as its rapporteur, and since 1921 as its deputy chairman) and foreign affairs one (Rzepecki 1920: 145–147; Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 14 II 1919, łam 35; Cimek 2008: 79, 113–115).

At Sejm, Osiecki took the floor 107 times, most often of all peasant deputies. In their majority, those were interventions related to his involvement in the Sejm committees, predominantly the fiscal-budgetary one. Osiecki did not participate in Sejm discussions pertaining the land reform; as regards his involvement in the drafting of the Constitution, he was mainly active at Komisja Konstytucyjna [Constitutional Committee]. During the plenary debate over the Constitution, he spoke only twice, intervening in relation to art. 113 (national minorities). He argued against the Jewish deputies, for example against Abraham Thon, according to whom inscribing rights of national minorities in the Constitution collided with the Treaty of Versailles. According to Osiecki, those rights were „absolutely granted” by art. 112 (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 16 XI 1920, łam 48). Instead, he proposed an amendment to art. 113, postulating that all future legislation should be more flexible regarding the rights of the various nationalities. The amendment was rejected (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 5 II 1921, łam 15). The MPs did not accept another Osiecki's amendment either, who wanted to include an additional article (103<sup>a</sup>) obliging the state to protect and take care of monuments, artwork, natural heritage and landscape. Osiecki quoted similar obligations inscribed in the German Basic Law. He argued that the artwork had been mostly appropriated by the partitioners who had also been destroying some natural heritage, for instance Puszcza Białowieska (the Białowieża primeval forest) and the forests in the Tatra mountain region. During the voting, his proposal was supported by 114 deputies,

while 175 were against it (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 23 XI 1920, łam 34; Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 4 II 1921, łam 51–52).

Much more frequently than about the constitutional matters, did Osiecki speak about the issue of Poland's borderline. He belonged to those MPs who – apart from Jan Dąbski representing PSL Piast and Maciej Rataj representing PSL Wyzwolenie (since 1920 he belonged to PSL Piast) – most knowingly presented views of peasant deputies at Sejm during a debate over the report by the Polish delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (22–23 May 1919). Between 3 and 4 of April in 1919, a debate took place at the Sejm concerning the report by the Committee of Foreign Affairs that pertained, *inter alia*, the issue of „kresy polskie” (Polish eastern borderlands); the report was presented by the Committee's chairman Stanisław Grabski who belonged to Związek Sejmowy Ludowo-Narodowy [Popular-National Parliamentary Union] (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 3 IV 1919, łam 6 i nn.; SU, druk nr 220). Osiecki agreed with Grabski that Poland should be granted a more advantageous borderline in the west than the one that it had had before its First Partition in 1772, that is inclusive, *inter alia*, of Górny Śląsk [Upper Silesia] and part of Prusy Wschodnie [Eastern Prussia]. However, Grabski and Osiecki disagreed as far as the eastern borderline was concerned, since the former was in favour of the incorporation programme, while the latter supported the federative programme<sup>1</sup>. Osiecki criticized Komitet Narodowy Polski [Polish National Committee] among others for the fact that it had not consulted Sejm about its position concerning the shape of Poland's eastern borderline that had been presented at the Peace Conference<sup>2</sup>; to a large degree this position determined Poland's eastern politics. According to Osiecki, it meant that many national minorities would be contained within the Polish borders, especially the Ukrainians. He opposed the division of Belarus into two parts. He supported the establishing of three states that would separate Poland from Russia, that is Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine – closely linked with Poland or remaining with it in friendly relations. He voiced this postulate even though he believed that those nations, especially the Belarusians, were not as yet ready for an „independent state life”.

Osiecki foresaw two main goals for the Polish politics in the East. The first involved a voluntary agreement with Belarusians, Lithuanians

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the programme of incorporation and the federative one, see Grygajtis 2001; Deruga 1969; Dmowski 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See the text of the Polish position in: Dmowski 1988: 315–317.

and Ukrainians, who – in his opinion – were not prepared to maintain their own states. The second was to „move” the Russian border as far away as possible eastwards from the Polish ethnic border. Osiecki did not like Russia, which did not want to give up the borderland, to neighbour Poland. That is why he was in favour of creating those three aforementioned states: Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Belarusian one, respectively. In this manner, a wall could be constructed that would „protect us against Russia not only now but also in the future, and would move that colossus away from the native, ethnographic borders of Poland while simultaneously creating for us allies with whom to fight for independence of ours and of theirs” (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 3 IV 1919, łam 22).

The essential condition for such an agreement with the new states adjacent to the Polish borders was to gain their approval of including into Poland areas inhabited by residents that were „in a large degree Polish”. Among those areas Osiecki listed almost all of the Vilnius province (*gubernia*) and five districts (*powiaty*) of the Grodno province: białostocki, bielski, grodzieński, sokólski i wołkowyski. Also „almost all of Galicja Wschodnia, especially with Lvov and the Boryslaw Mining Basin” were to be part of the Polish state.

Osiecki claimed that the creation of independent Ukraine was most feasible. Much evidence suggested that Lithuania would achieve independence. Poland was to support the creation of sovereign Lithuania under the following conditions: it was to be a state established within its ethnic borders that at the same time guaranteed an equal status to its Polish minority and remained in friendly relations with Poland, which excluded any alliance with Germany or Russia.

Osiecki did not think that Belarusians had much chances of creating their own state especially because of their insufficient national consciousness. However, he objected to dividing the Belarusians into western and eastern ones. He proposed that they should be treated „as one nation and assisted so as they could create such a state organism that the Polish population residing in Belarus would enjoy fully equal rights and that simultaneously this state would declare its strong linkage with the Polish state” (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 3 IV 1919, łam 21). The „unconditional” support for the creation of the Belarusian state was also premised on the condition that it was contained within all-Belarusian territories.

Osiecki disagreed with „Sprawozdanie komisji konstytucyjnej w sprawie przedstawicielstwa sejmowego ludności polskiej z ziem

wschodnich” [Report of the constitutional committee concerning the Sejm representation of the Polish population from the eastern lands] (SU, druk nr 322). This report urged the Government to present by the end of April in 1919 for approval by the Sejm a list of sixteen persons to play the role of temporary Sejm representatives of the Polish population from those areas. This issue was placed on the Sejm agenda as of 8 April 1919. Since the rapporteur representing the majority of the Committee (Witold Kamieniecki) was absent, Osiecki presented the issue on behalf of both the majority and the minority of the Committee. He spoke in favour of selecting the deputies exclusively by means of elections organised according to the electoral law of 28 November 1918; the elections were to be limited to those areas which had been already included in Poland. This is why he believed that the attempt to resolve this problem was premature<sup>3</sup>.

Speaking at Sejm on behalf of the PSL club, Osiecki expressed his satisfaction with the signing of an agreement pertaining preliminary conditions of peace and truce between Poland and Soviet Russia, which took place in Riga as of October 12 in 1920. He spoke favourably about, *inter alia*, the contents of the agreement that determined the border between Poland and Latvia as well as about those premises that could lead in the future to the establishing of independent Belarusian and Ukrainian states (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 22 X 1920, łam 9–10). It should be stressed that Osiecki’s son by his first wife, Tadeusz (born in 1900), lost his life as of 26 September in 1920 in the battle on the Słucza River, which had been fought not even a month before the truce ending the Polish-Soviet war came into force (as of 18 October 1920) (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 5 X 1920, łam 64). Osiecki supported the petition by Związek Sejmowy Ludowo-Narodowy’s MPs to extend to the eastern territories the state administration and normalise the legal-political status quo in the lands that had been included in Poland on the basis of the agreement concerning the preliminary peace conditions and truce of 12 October 1920. Osiecki proposed a few amendments to this bill which was adopted by the Sejm as of 4 February 1921, that is before the Riga Treaty was signed on 18 March in 1921. This was the first

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<sup>3</sup> The petition by the minority of the Committee was signed, apart from Osiecki, by: Irena Kosmowska, Maciej Rataj and Eustachy Rudziński representing PSL Wyzwolenie as well as Ignacy Daszyński, Zygmunt Marek and Mieczysław Niedziałkowski representing Związek Polskich Posłów Socjalistycznych [Union of Polish Socialist Deputies] SU, druk nr 322; Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 8 IV 1919, łam 20–22.

Sejm's act to regulate the legal matters in the eastern territories (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 4 II 1921, łam 1, 3–5).

Osiecki spoke also about the issue of Śląsk Cieszyński, Spisz and Orawa, and especially as regards the latter two areas. This was so among others because their fate had been debated for so long and ultimately determined only at the end of July in 1920. On 21 March in 1919, the Sejm discussed, *inter alia*, a petition by Osiecki that concerned the inclusion in Poland of Spisz, Orawa and the czadecki district (*okręg*) that – in his opinion – leaned towards Poland and were of Polish character. At the same time, Osiecki argued that the creation of an independent Slovak state was Poland's best interest (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 21 III 1919, łam 977–979).

On 3 April in 1919, the Sejm discussed a petition unexpectedly put forward by Osiecki that had been signed by more than 30 deputies representing all clubs. The petition concerned an illegal conscription to the Czechoslovak army in Spisz, Orawa and the czadecki district that had belonged to the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Those areas were divided after World War I between the Slovak and the Polish side according to an ethnic criterion. On 13 January in 1919, Polish military units that had stationed there since 4 November of 1918 were forced – after the invasion of the Czech military units at the end of December in 1918 – to withdraw towards the old borderline between Galicja and Hungary. Osiecki justified the suddenness of his petition with the fact that the Czechs, whom he considered to be invaders, took control of the territories by using „ruse and violence”, and then started to recruit forcibly the local Polish population to their military units. The Sejm unanimously obliged the Government to voice an immediate protest (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 3 IV 1919, łam 52–53).

In May of 1919 Rada Najwyższa [The Supreme Council] recommended that Poles and Czechs should resolve those border controversies on their own, indicating the deadline of August 5 to attain this goal. The negotiations, conducted between 22 and 28 of July in Cracow, ended without any success since the Czechs had rejected the Polish side's proposal to organise a plebiscite. On 27 September in 1919, Rada Najwyższa supported this very proposal. According to Rada's decision, the plebiscite was planned to be held in the territories that had constituted Księstwo Cieszyńskie as of 1 April 1914, as well as in the areas of Spisz and Orawa. The plebiscite was to be carried out within three months at the latest, under the auspices of the International Plebiscitary Commission (Cimek 2008: 228, 251).

On 17 October in 1919, the Sejm debated over the report of Komisja Spraw Zagranicznych regarding the issue of the plebiscite in Śląsk Cieszyński and Spisz and Orawa. Osiecki was its rapporteur, who interpreted the decision taken by Rada Najwyższa as of 27 September as disadvantageous to the Polish side, although he did agree with its underlying principles. The thing was that the plebiscite did not cover the whole of the disputed territory, excluding the czadecki district and the southern part of Spisz (the Poprad River valley – lubomelski and kieszmarski districts). As a result, about 85 000 inhabitants of the area, predominantly Poles, had been deprived of the right to vote. The Committee proposed that the lower chamber should issue a resolution that demanded that the Government should take energetic steps aiming at correcting that error. The petition was approved of unanimously (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 17 XI 1919, łam 11).

Osiecki accused the Polish delegation for the Peace Conference in Paris of being too conciliatory vis-à-vis the Czechs, who had used violence against the Poles, especially in Spisz and Orawa. He drew attention to the fact that the International Plebiscitary Commission working in Śląsk Cieszyński did not operate in Spisz and Orawa. On 18 March in 1920, the Sejm accepted the resolution proposed by Osiecki, in which, among others, the deputies called for introducing coalition military units in that area „in order to protect the population against the Czech violence” (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 18 III 1920, łam 66).

It was also Osiecki who initiated the petition that protested against an administrative directive of the International Plebiscitary Commission in Cieszyn that had been issued as of 19 April in 1920, that was favouring the Czechs. In the petition, the deputies demanded *inter alia* that the Czech district heads (*starostowie*), civilian officers and border guards should be withdrawn and replaced by administration officers selected from among the local Polish people. Also, they demanded that the garrisons of the coalition military units be enlarged and conditions be determined that enabled impartial organization of the plebiscite. The Sejm univocally voted for that urgent petition (Sprawozd. stenogr. ... 14 V 1920, łam 70 i nn.; SU, druk nr 1793), similarly as in the case of a petition pertaining a schooling directive by the International Plebiscitary Commission dated as of 16 April 1920 that changed the organisational charter of administration units responsible for schooling in Księstwo Cieszyńskie without getting an approval from the Polish state. This petition postulated restitution of the previous Polish admin-



istration responsible for schooling in Śląsk Cieszyński for the period of the plebiscite.<sup>4</sup>

However, the plebiscite did not take place on 10 July in 1920. The Polish and Czechoslovak delegations to the conference in Spa had signed a declaration in which they agreed to suspend the plebiscite; the decision concerning the on-going conflict was to be taken by the allied states. On 28 July in 1920, the Council of Ambassadors decided to divide Śląsk Cieszyński. The Czechs got Śląsk Zaolziański with Zagłębie Karwińskie, which was all of the industrial-mining basin, while Cieszyn was divided into two parts. 150 000 Poles were thus left on the Czech side. In Spisz and Orawa, Poland was granted 27 villages counting more than 30 000 people, and Czechoslovakia 44 villages with 40 000 people, in their majority Poles. Neither the will of the population nor the ethnic criterion had been taken into account. This had been so because – the Polish side could not possibly have known this at that time – on 28 September in 1918 France had taken upon itself a written obligation to support the creation of the Czechoslovak state in its historical boundaries, embracing Księstwo Cieszyńskie as well. Poland had recognised this area as part of its own territory mainly because of ethnic reasons. The population census of 1910 demonstrated that Śląsk Cieszyński was inhabited by 54,8% of Poles, 27,1% of Czechs and 18,0% of Germans (see more about it in: Cimek 2008: 225–226; Dąbrowski 1923, 62 and ff.; *Sprawy polskie*: 1967: 87; Pobóg-Malinowski 1956: 278, 284 and ff.).

In his Sejm interventions, Osiecki predominantly dealt with the issue of the future shape of Poland's borderline, especially in the south and in the east, and to a lesser degree with the issue of the state's political regime. It is indicative that he did not take part in the Sejm debate over the land reform even though in later years he was to be, inter alia, the Minister for Land Reforms (between 24 July and 15 December in 1923). Also, he dealt with many other issues: the state budget, the reconstruction of the country after the war destruction, assistance to the population than had suffered during the war, and finally with the problems of sport and tourism. He was one of the most active deputies at Sejm Ustawodawczy, distinguished especially by his work in its committees.

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<sup>4</sup> This problem affected about 13 000 pupils and 240 teachers of Polish nationality. Sprawozd. stenogr. ze 147 pos. ..., łam 70; SU, druk nr 1792.

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